

READING ROMANTICISM:
KEATS, EMBODIED COGNITION, AND THE WORK OF AFFECT

By
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Abstract

My dissertation argues that Romantic writers conceived of reading as an embodied social practice, understanding literary affect as a physiological connection between writer and reader. These writers turned the phenomenon of “feeling” into one of “feeling with.” My project traces the lasting influence of Enlightenment thinkers such as David Hume and Adam Smith on Romantic writers as they, in turn, shaped the literary culture that dominated the nineteenth century. Examining the moral philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment alongside eighteenth-century medical knowledge, I argue that Romantic writers theorize the circulation of affect as a physiological phenomenon. Moreover, I situate this argument among the historical demands of the literary marketplace, as the emergence of genres like the novel and modes like the Gothic change the nature of aesthetic experience and, in turn, force writers to re-negotiate relationships between reader and writer, reader and text, writer and text.

John Keats was a particularly important transitional figure. His reading and medical training were based in eighteenth-century moral philosophy and science; as a poet-physician, Keats’s thinking about embodied reading and social cognition led to poems that assume physiological changes occur as cognition happens in and across the mind, body, and the text. The sociability of Keats’s writing and reading, the various ways his poetry represents, genders and embodies the experience of reading, bring into focus the literary culture of social affect that takes shape throughout the long eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the introduction and four chapters of my dissertation, I put Keats’s model of reading as embodied social practice into conversation with a range of other writers: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Percy Shelley, Barbauld, and Leigh Hunt.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One. Wordsworth, Keats, and Cognitive Spaces of Empathy in <i>Endymion</i>	12
Chapter Two. “Wormy Circumstance,” Theory of Mind, and Storytelling Circles in Coleridge and Keats.....	44
Chapter Three. “Unfit for Ladies”: The Ethics of Negatively Capable Reading in Barbauld and Keats.....	76
Chapter Four. Life-Writing and Re-Animation: Reading Remains as Cognitive Artifacts.....	113
Works Cited.....	148

Introduction

Challenging a longstanding critical tradition that envisions the Romantic writer as a solitary genius and the work of art as an end in itself, Keatsians such as Nicholas Roe and Jeffrey Cox return John Keats to the social and intellectual milieu in which he composed, redirecting the scholarly conversation to Keats's political associations, his friendship with the liberal journalist Leigh Hunt and participation in the so-called "Cockney School" of poetry that Hunt headed. Roe, Cox, and others have shown how second generation Romantic writers in and around the Hunt circle theorized "sociability" as political practice in their poetry and prose. Nevertheless, very little scholarship attends to sociability beyond the production of the poetry itself in social contexts. This dissertation posits that Romantic writers conceived of reading as an embodied social practice, understanding literary affect as a physiological connection between writer and reader that turns the phenomenon of "feeling" into the phenomenon of "feeling with." Imagining a sociable afterlife for poetry required Romantic writers to think about the expression and movement of affect in and through poetry. Armed with eighteenth-century moral philosophy and theories of mind from the likes of Immanuel Kant, David Hume, and Adam Smith, Romantic writers extended the enlightenment models available to them to explore through acts of reading and writing the radical connections between mind, body, and world.

Medical science and moral philosophy converged in eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century debates over embodied reading experiences. While my dissertation studies a variety of Romantic poets spanning from Anna Laetitia Barbauld to Percy Shelley, I take a particular interest in John Keats as a key representative of the Romantics' interdisciplinary approach to writing. Keats's reading and medical training were solidly based in eighteenth-century moral philosophy and science, and, as a poet-physician, his thinking about embodied reading and social cognition led to poems that assume physiological changes occur as cognition

happens in and across the mind, body, and the text. The sociability of Keats's writing and reading, the various ways his poetry represents, genders and embodies the experience of reading and the reader's body, bring into focus the literary culture of social affect that takes shape throughout the long eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In a letter to his brother George, John Keats proposes a sociable reading session: they will pour over the same passage at the same time, and thus be together, despite the geographic distance. George immigrated to the United States with his wife Georgiana in the summer of 1818, and the distance must have at times felt unbearable to brothers who had so rarely been apart. John writes, "[I will] read a passage of Shakspeare [sic] every Sunday at ten o Clock-- you read one at the same time and we shall be as near each other as blind bodies can be in the same room" (*Letters* II. 5). We see Keats imagining two people separated by distance and time as communing together in the same room through the act of reading. This imagined reunion grants the comfort of shared experience to brothers separated for many months by thousands of miles. In another attempt to conjure sociability with George, John Keats describes his body's position as he composes:

the candles are burnt down and I am using the wax taper--which has a long snuff on it--the fire is at its last click--I am sitting with my back to it with one foot rather askew upon the rug and the other with the heel a little elevated from the carpet--I am writing this on the Maid's Tragedy which I have read since tea with Great pleasure---Besides this volume of Beaumont & Fletcher--there are on the table two volumes of chaucer [sic] and a new work of Tom Moores [sic]. (*Letters* I. 223-24)

He sets the scene for his brother to imagine. George will know exactly how John sat when thinking of him. The detailed description of his physical situation facilitates the imagined communion with his brother. John continues, “These are trifles--but I require nothing so much of you as that you will give me a like description of yourselves, however it may be when you are writing me.” Keats thinks of himself as an embodied writer and reader and wishes to imagine his reader’s body. Imagining George’s aesthetic experience of reading and writing, he can experience in his own body a replication of the physical presence of his brother’s body, his sensations, his feelings, his position in the world. This is key to how Romantic writers think of the physiological connections between the bodies engaged in acts of reading. Romantic poets theorized the purpose of literature to connect bodies and minds through shared feeling.

Sympathy and Literature’s Psychic Influence

To understand how Romantic writers thought of reading, we have to acknowledge a shift that occurred in reading practices and, consequently, in literary criticism between the early nineteenth-century and now. Karen Littau explains how historically reading was a bodily experience, and, as late as 1799, it was thought of as cardiovascular exercise that sets the blood in motion¹ (2). She writes that the “dispassionate, disinterested pleasure we now take in art is far removed from those passionate encounters which for centuries justified aesthetic theory and practices.” She regrets the way contemporary literary theorists largely forget that “for their predecessors, drama, poetry, and prose-fiction offered ‘occasions of feeling’²” (3). Rather than reading as a physiological experience that activates our bodies into healthy function, reading became an occasion for interpretation. In this way, Littau notes by the twentieth-century, “the

¹ Littau cites as a source for this claim Bergk 1966 [1799]: 69.

² Littau cites Jane Tompkins 1980: 206 for this quotation.

artwork stands by itself, an object we reflect upon and not an object which acts upon us” (93).

Thus, the Romantic views of reading as an embodied practice have transitioned into our modern understandings of reading as an intellectual pursuit.

The second major change in the history of reading, which informs my argument, is an Enlightenment-era shift in literature’s larger cultural role and the work literature was assumed to perform. Jane Tompkins and Mary Poovey, scholars of literary history and the marketplace, trace a new understanding of aesthetic value that became most apparent in the eighteenth century as literary culture began valuing literature based upon its private influence on the individual. Tompkins argues that molding the psychic life of the reader becomes more important than shaping the public actions he or she will take. The shift in how literature’s purpose is understood is closely tied to the explosion of the literary market in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The proliferation of print and the consequent proliferation of feelings made available through print texts necessarily changed the sense of what literature is and what work it performs. Poovey notes that Literature with a capital “L” finds itself competing with a growing number of other types of writing like economic, scientific, or political writing. Writers of Literature define what qualifies their writing as uniquely valuable to distinguish themselves from the varying types of reading material now available in this crowded marketplace. Indeed, genres of written texts come to be not only defined but also placed into a hierarchy. The concept of popular literature emerges and, in opposition to it, that of “high art” also emerges. Literary high art is not to be confused with cheap entertainment on the one hand or civic instruction on the other. Literary high art performs a cultural work that Literature alone can perform as a function of affect. Instead of seeking to reform the moral character of a reader, Literature provides an experience of individual feelings, an emotional experience.

Romantic writers understood reading to be an embodied experience and the function of literature to be a psychic work on the emotions of the reader. However, writers and readers of this period do not understand the feelings experienced in acts of reading to be contained within their individual bodies, but rather they believe these feelings are shared. We see from Keats's letter to George quoted above, and through the poetry studied in this dissertation, that writers of the Romantic era believed literature was the experience of shared feeling, even as it was an embodied practice. Through the notion of physiological sympathy, they explored how shared feeling dissolves the boundaries between the bodies engaged in acts of reading. As an important point of juncture for medical science, moral philosophy, and literature of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the concept of sympathy traverses the internal and external, the voluntary and involuntary. Sympathy takes what is individual and makes it communal. Both Adam Smith and Edmund Burke, the two major British theorists of sympathy, categorize it as a "social" feeling and emphasize its capacity for heightening social unity. Indeed, the proliferation of print and the proliferation of feelings print texts engender occurs at a time of revolutionary shift in medical thinking. The individual, psychic work Poovey and Tompkins argue is the new purpose of literature is only half the project of Romantic writers, as the shared feelings literature fosters lead to moral improvement, social sympathy, and civic action.

Advances in eighteenth-century medical science changed the way people understood the relationship of their bodies to the outside world. Until late in the century, anatomists believed the circulatory system to provide the primary life force of the body; however, William Cullen's *Treatise of the Materia Medica* (1789) introduced the nervous system as the dominant organ complex, claiming the brain and its web of nerves as paramount to the heart and veins. The importance of such a shift extends beyond the medical community as the emphasis on the

nervous system opens the body to the influence of the outside world. The preeminence of sensory input in this new understanding of human anatomy means the function of an individual body takes cues from objects and bodies external to itself. Moreover, the individual body absorbs traces of other bodies' chemistry. The skin is not a barrier but a channel. The individual body is at once self and other. Sympathetically engaged with the environment, we are social in our very material makeup. Studying the awareness of bodily permeability in nineteenth-century American life and reading practices, Gillian Silverman writes

Readers described individual authors and their fellow readers in intimate and exclusive terms; they likened the experience of engaging a common text to Holy Communion, involving both shared consciousness and bodily merger. This fantasy of consubstantiality challenges psychological conceptions of discrete subjectivity along with the very notion of corporeal integrity--the idea that we are detached, skin-bound, autonomously functioning entities. It forces us to envision the reader not as a liberal subject--pursuing reading as a means toward privacy, interiority, and individuation--but rather as being in self-diffusing touch with objects in her psychic and phenomenal world. (x-xi)

Silverman challenges the paradigm that sees reading as an individual and individuating practice. Readers of nineteenth-century America and, as I show, the Romantic era of British history, imagine a social and physiological intimacy with the other bodies engaged in acts of reading, an intimacy with the author and other readers. Rather reinforcing the notion of a self bound within our own skin, these writers understand the act of reading to be a vehicle for the dispersal of the self into the space of another, and vice versa. More than simply engaging a transportation of feeling or an imagined feeling "as if" in the place of another, Romantic poetry shows how the

senses write the feelings of others on the body and so inspire a radical loss of self, where a new narrative emerges from the bodily interconnection. To feel with another person in this way is a revolutionary abdication of the self and a radical openness to the influence of external world. The individual body becomes the body politic through acts of reading.

Such thinking anticipates the latest findings of cognitive science and the philosophy of mind from the last twenty years. Cognitive literary scholar Lisa Zunshine writes in her book *Why We Read Fiction*: “The cognitive rewards of reading fiction might thus be aligned with the cognitive rewards of pretend play through a shared capacity to stimulate and develop the imagination. It may mean that our enjoyment of fiction is predicated--at least in part--upon our awareness of our ‘trying on’ mental states potentially available to us but at a given moment differing from our own” (17). Reading fiction engages the evolved cognitive mechanism scientists call Theory of Mind (ToM) or “mind-reading.” When mind-reading, we see the behaviors and read the dialogue of characters and attribute states of mind to them almost automatically. This mechanism evolved to help humans navigate complex social structures, and reading fiction satisfies a cognitive craving we have for utilizing these structures, even as it further hones our evolved social skills and the brain architecture underlying them. Zunshine asks: “Is it possible that literary narrative builds on our capacity for mind-reading but also tries its limits? How do different cultural-historical milieus encourage different literary explorations of this capacity? How do different genres?” (27). As she notes, these are poignant questions for literary studies in light of the most recent findings in the field cognitive science, and my dissertation takes many of them into consideration. Over the course of four chapters, I examine such topics as enacted spaces of empathy in *Endymion*, Theory of Mind and the disruption of immersive reading in “Kubla Khan” and *Isabella; or the Pot of Basil*, the autonomy of affect and

negative capability in “An Inventory of the Furniture in Dr. Priestley's Study” and the *Hyperion* poems, and the cognitive artifacts of bodily and literary remains for the collective composition of posthumous life-writing. As I examine the cognitive and affective underpinnings of Romantic works, themes of embodiment, the text, and patterns of transference for affect and meaning emerge as crucial factors in the way Romantic poets develop a literary culture of social affect.

Points of Inquiry

Questions of embodiment spring from the embodied nature of reading itself and the materiality of the text. The text as a material object is a focus of my third chapter, as I look to Barbauld, in particular. However, the text as a site for the interaction of bodies through shared feeling and sensation is the focus of all my chapters. The text is where communion between writer and reader occurs, where cognition is enacted, where meaning is created in the moment of reading, even where the author is revived through the replication of his feelings in another body. The text is an affective tool that becomes an extension of the bodies and minds interacting with it. In this way, Romantic writers demonstrate that the mind is not confined by one form of physicality but exists among and between the bodies of writers, readers, and the texts they share. As I study embodiment with a lens of sympathy, my inquiry turns toward how Romantic writers understood bodies to communicate. Though I study a few scenes of reading as they are portrayed by Barbauld, Keats, and Shelley, the primary objectives for my study of reading are to understand the experience of a contemporary and a modern reader processing the poem, how the author designs that experience and to what purpose. In order to learn this, I trace patterns of transference, by which I mean the paths of phenomenological communication of affect. As I show with “Kubla Khan” and *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* in Chapter 2, Romantic writers

believe meaning is created in the act of communication, which is both affective and intellectual, as the writer and reader meet at the site of the text.

Nevertheless, given the assumption that literature works on the body and the emotions, the proliferation of print in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries engendered anxiety over the types of literature being consumed and their influence over the reading public.

Enlightenment and Romantic era thinkers feared the reading public would lose self-control and individual agency in the face the powerful, transformative, and proliferating medium of books and their inevitable proliferation of feeling. As I discuss in Chapter 2, the novel emerged at this time as a recognizable genre and not only presented competition in the market for poetry and nonfiction prose, but also forced writers to define proper reading practices and thereby regulate the circulation of affect through texts. Many poets like Wordsworth and Coleridge often rated the novel as senseless entertainment meant for mindless consumption by a public whose sensibilities were dull and unrefined. Andrew Bennett cites Coleridge on the Romantics' dissatisfaction with the passive novel reader. In Book II of *The Friend*, Coleridge writes that absorption in the plot and sensory experience of the tale – taking pleasure from “mere excitement of curiosity and sensibility” – “dwarf[s]” the understanding faculties (2:151). According to Coleridge, passive reading (absorption in a text without intellectual and imaginative contribution) inhibits the physiological development of a reader’s brain.

As genres of reading material are hierarchized to privilege a feelings-based aesthetic experience, reading practice comes to be placed in a hierarchy as well, with immersive versus distanced reactions to texts emerging as a key opposition defining aesthetic experience. Writers dictate proper reading form in processes that apply to fiction and poetry alike. In the first chapter, I show how Wordsworth’s model for reading and writing engages the reader in such a way that

he maintains authority over them and the material (both the affect and content) being transferred. Whereas Wordsworth postures the writer-reader dynamic as that of a teacher-student relationship, poets of the Hunt Circle in particular believe their poetry should foster the experience of social intimacy. Their contract with readers assumes an emotional bond between friends and equals. For instance, the design of poems like Keats's *Isabella; or the Pot of Basil* seeks to create a space that simulates a joint act of reading where the author and reader proceed through a tale together. Moreover, the interconnectedness of his characters allows for their joint composition of a new narrative or even a new reality, as we see in the case of *Endymion*'s dreams. Finally, my third chapter sees how through the abdication of the self, Keats's feminine poetics of shared feeling project the writer and reader outward from material conditions of gender-based and class-based dispossession into realms of perpetual formation and transformation. Ever-changing and ever-growing, the negatively capable poet and reader in this model expand their embodied experience and alter their brain chemistry and brain composition. In turn, these physiological changes encourage social action that fulfills the moral imperatives of literature as Keats and the Hunt Circle saw them, the imperatives of brotherly love and charity.

Ultimately, in this dissertation, I posit that through strategically transforming the psychic life of their audience and by molding sympathetic readers, Romantic writers seek to alter the course of public action as well. In acts of reading, the text itself becomes a site of hope and promise for political and social reform as the writer and reader engage in a sympathetic communion of body and mind to form meaning. To engage in this communion requires of each a radical abdication of the self, an openness to the influence of the outside world. Here in the unknown, the space of "uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts" (*Letters* II. 213), Romantic writers seek to shape their readers, to teach them to recognize a deep, material and affective connection with

their human and natural environments, and to fashion them into better citizens. This is revolutionary power of reading poetry: its ability through the phenomenological registry of affect to extend the bodies and minds of writers and readers beyond the bounds of physicality into new spaces of connection through shared feeling.

Chapter 1

Wordsworth, Keats, and Cognitive Spaces of Empathy in *Endymion*

Historians of science and literary critics alike trace the overlap in mental science and literature of the Romantic period. Scientists like J. G. von Herder and Erasmus Darwin theorized the brain in poems, and poets read, critiqued, and revised theories on associationism, memory, dualism, and materialism. Indeed, Coleridge and Wordsworth read and revised mental scientists like Hartley, Darwin, Franz Gall, and Scottish physicians, and John Keats was himself a trained physician with a working knowledge of the latest theories on bodily sensation and brain function. Alan Richardson writes of the blended disciplinary interests of the period,

It was a time when poets (like Coleridge) consorted with laboratory scientists and when philosophical doctors (like Darwin) gave point to their scientific theories in verse, when phrenology and mesmerism gained adherents across the medical community, when Bell could work out his physiological psychology in a series of lectures to London artists, scientists could perform as showmen, and Galvani's experiments with 'animal electricity' could be replicated by an eager public 'wherever frogs were to be found' (7).

Late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century brain science favored an anti-dualistic psychological model, which anticipates what we now call embodied cognition. Embodied cognition maintains that cognition is dependent upon the body beyond the brain, that characteristics of the body play a formative role in cognitive processing, and that cognition is distributed throughout the body by neural and non-neural structures. The understanding of the mechanics of cognitive processing as distributed through the body and even beyond the body coincided with a trend in moral philosophy that saw potential revolutionary power in the passions. Traveling from external stimuli through the senses and to the brain, passions appeared

contagious. But philosophers, scientists, and poets alike found evidence that affect was not unidirectional: feelings seem not only to circulate but to exist transsubjectively, across and between bodies, objects, and experiences.

The particular interest of Romantic poets in materialism and physiological psychology can be theorized as an epistemological transition into modernity, paralleling the political and economic shifts that also define its onset. New understandings of embodiment revolutionized the way people understood the self. Advances in eighteenth-century medical science changed the way people understood the relationship of their bodies to the outside world. As mentioned in the Introduction, William Cullen's *Materia Medica* (1789) names the nervous system as the dominant organ complex, claiming the brain and its web of nerves as paramount to the heart and veins. The importance of such a shift extends beyond the medical community as the emphasis on the nervous system opens the body to the influence of the outside world. The preeminence of sensory input in this new understanding of human anatomy means the function of an individual body takes cues from objects and bodies external to itself. The skin is not a barrier but a channel. The individual body is at once self and other. Such a revolutionary shift in thinking about our relationship to the outside world inspired contrasting sentiments between those who celebrate the possibility for radical interconnectedness and those who fear the threat of a penetrable self.

Paralleling these advances in anatomical knowledge, the eighteenth century tradition of aesthetics assumed bodily and emotional registers in one's experience of an art object. Moreover, the concept of sympathy showed how literature and art work on the body and on the emotions for a larger civic good. Romantic writers of both the Lake School and the Hunt Circle believed the mind and body work together in varying degrees to form aesthetic consciousness. The much-discussed culture wars between the Lake School and Hunt Circle Romantics not only featured

debates on definitions of Literature, but also on how art should accomplish its goal of psychic reform in the reader. According to Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, approximating social interaction molds sympathetic readers by activating the imagination, and the Hunt Circle seems to develop their own moral philosophy along the same cognitive and behavioral model. For instance, Shelley and William Hazlitt maintain that pleasure teaches morality and ethical behavior through an expansion of the imagination (physiological, psychic change). Hazlitt explains how this happens, and how the aesthetic experience of art hinges on affect. Of a "dramatic exhibition of passion" or "impassioned poetry" he writes:

In proportion as it sharpens the edge of calamity and disappointment, it strengthens the desire of good. It enhances our consciousness of the blessing, by making us sensible of the magnitude of the loss... [it] is an emanation of the moral and intellectual part of our nature, as well as of the sensitive, □□ of the desire to know, the will to act, and the power to feel. (*Misc. Works* 5)

Expanding the imaginative faculties occurs through a movement of affect from the stage or the poem to its audience. The intellectual and the sensitive (or sensual) work together to create psychic change (the desire to know, the power to feel) and also civic change (the will to act). The imagination enables an experience of sympathy with others and with the universe as a whole, as the reader comes to recognize his or her social position in the wider world and consequent obligations to fellow creatures.

The transformative power of aesthetic experience generated much critical debate about the proper means for writers to engage readers' minds and, by extension, their bodies. Because of their awareness of the body's role in aesthetic, social and cognitive experience, the Romantic poets also register fear of a total immersion in the sensory experience of a poem. In moments of

intense aesthetic experience, were reader's bodies, emotions, and minds at the mercy of the text? In this chapter, I look at how two Romantic era writers experimented with poetic form to find how best to manage a reader's engagement with the text and thereby shape their psychic development. Examining acts of reading and dreaming in Keats's *Endymion*, I apply Giovanna Colombetti's work on enacted spaces of empathy to show how Keats's theory of feeling contrasts with Wordsworth's and goes beyond the Enlightenment models available to them to envision a more revolutionary model of social cognition.

Wordsworth's Mental Science and Disinterested Reading

Wordsworth's model for engagement with the text takes cues from contemporary mental science as well as moral philosophy, yet, he seeks to delineate the body's role in the formation of poetic meaning from the mind's work in the process. Wordsworth's knowledge of contemporary scientific study has received a significant amount of scholarly interest, with many investigating his and Coleridge's use of Hartleyan associationism in the 1790s³. As the father of associationism, David Hartley's proto-physiological psychology revolutionized mental science, and Coleridge was a devoted follower for many years before ultimately dismissing Hartley as too mechanistic in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817). Hartley explained that a process of vibrations along the brain formed the foundation of associated ideas (Richardson 9-10). Jackson explains that Wordsworth himself demonstrates a "partially materialist orientation towards questions of human thought and feeling" and many of his works "sought to systematize a model of individual poetic consciousness closely if ambivalently tied to bodily feeling" (8). Hints of his own play

³ Coleridge was such a devoted disciple of David Hartley during the 1790s that he named his first son after the mental scientist.

with Hartleyan associationism and Galvanic animal magnetism⁴ can be seen in often-quoted lines from “Tintern Abbey” (1798):

These beauteous forms...
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 sensations perceived from external stimuli (beauteous forms of the River Wye and the Abbey) travel through his blood, along his heart, and into his mind. Here the felt movement or vibrations produce memories that recall to the city-bound Wordsworth pleasanter moments of immersion in Nature. As we see from the insistence upon memory in this selection, Wordsworth imagines a writer (and reader) removed from the immediacy of sensual absorption inherent in the aesthetic experience of nature.

For Wordsworth, preventing his reader from direct and immediate sensation serves to protect the integrity of a reader’s independent, thinking self. Richardson posits that Wordsworth’s poetic sensibility is “organic” as the poet’s sensations are gathered from external stimuli but also produced by emotional awareness. Quoting the 1799 *Prelude*, he writes, “A genuine poetic sensibility, for Wordsworth, is one that continues to register the permeation of thought with feeling and remains in touch with the sensational, bodily, and emotive origins of

⁴ In 1830 John F. W. Herschel writes of Galvani’s theory: the “principle once established, that there exists in the animal economy a power of determining the development of electric excitement, capable of being transmitted *along the nerves*...it became an easy step after that to refer the origin of muscular motion in the living brain to a similar cause; and look to the brain, a wonderfully constituted organ, for which no mode of action possessing the least plausibility had ever been devised, as the source of the required electrical power” (qtd. in Richardson p. 7, emphasis added). While Wordsworth obviously did not read Herschel, we can see based upon the common language evidence for a shared cultural knowledge of the contemporary scientific hypotheses.

mind, the ‘lovely forms/And sweet sensations’ and the ‘passions’ that ‘build up our human soul’ (*Prelude*, I. 134, 461-62)” (Richardson 71). This dynamic model of the poetic mind acquires a temporal element as Wordsworth proceeds to define poetry later in the *Preface*: “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: [poetry] takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility,” (*Preface* 273). Importantly for Wordsworth, this synthetic process is first at work for the artist who must distance himself or herself from the immediacy of sensory event in order to “read” his own experience properly. This auto-read model establishes a self-reflective stance for a poet’s engagement with an art object, and Wordsworth believes the reflection to improve upon the initial sensory experience. Then, the reflective poetry (often lyric in form) guides the reader’s own intellectualization of the sensual experience of reading the poem. After this multi-phase act of writing and reading, Wordsworth’s ideal poetry reconciles bodily sensation and intellectual processing through memory and reflective distance. In the first book of the 1805 *Prelude*, Wordsworth explains the process:

Thus often in those fits of vulgar joy
Which through all seasons on a child’s pursuits
Are prompt attendants, ‘mid that giddy bliss
Which like a tempest works along the blood
And is forgotten, even then I felt
Gleams like the flashing of a shield. The earth
And common face of Nature spake to me
Rememberable things; sometimes, ‘tis true,
By chance collisions and quaint accidents...
Not profitless, if haply they impressed

Collateral objects and appearances,
Albeit lifeless then, and doomed to sleep
Until mature seasons called them forth
To impregnate and to elevate the mind. (I. 610-624)

The first phase of Wordsworth's scheme is the event itself. Often taking place in Nature during his childhood, this "spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling" is pre-reflective and seemingly a pure-bodily experience of sensation traveling along the veins on its way to the brain. He calls these experiences of affect "fits of vulgar joy," dismissing them as ephemeral and low. He describes the moments via a seemingly Hartleyan materialism as, "that giddy bliss/ Which like a tempest works along the blood" (1805 I. 612-613). This overflow of powerful emotion takes over the body, working its way in a rush of sensation through the blood. Yet, they as mere sensation, the feeling evoked by these moments is fleeting. However, the event is stored as unconscious memory for later use. In a later time of tranquility, where the poet's mind takes precedence over the original bodily experience, the moment in nature can be recalled. Once the environment and condition of the mind is right (the poet is not immersed in nature and/or the poet has had long enough to be able to rationally and productively reflect upon the event), the poet employ his fancy in imagining the scene and its associated affect. Therefore, poetry, the product of this third phase of recollection and imagination, improves upon the original sensory experience. In the end, the reader's aesthetic experience is thoroughly insulated from the original sensation. Much like Kant's disinterested reader, Wordsworth's ideal reader (and writer) is never without the power of reasoning, never consumed or absorbed in the sensual effects of aesthetic experience and their consequent emotional upheaval.

Young Romantic writers of the 1810s believed that Wordsworth's mode of intellectualizing his sense experience in his lyric poems prohibits this type of sympathetic identification. By "explaining in too much detail, by patronizing and lecturing his reader" over the significance of the sublime moment, Wordsworth prevents his reader from actually feeling the sublimity (*Keats, Narrative, and Audience* 29). According to the Hunt Circle, Wordsworth does not seek to feel with the reader so much as he wishes to pass down his feelings or knowledge to the reader. In a letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, Keats famously complained that Wordsworth's poetry had "a palpable design upon us" (*Letters* I: 271). Keats believed the insertion of the poet's mental processing of embodied experience disrupts the reader's sensory experience of and pleasure in the poem. The later Romantics understood that a too visible authorial hand seems to generate resistance from the reader, but a more egalitarian and sociable approach to feelings, where author and reader occupy the same position as beholder of a scene or object, allows for ready sympathetic identification between the parties.

Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Medicine and Moral Philosophy

While in the 1790s Wordsworth read and theorized the cognitive pathways of affect circulating throughout the body with the aid of Coleridge's favorite mental scientists, Keats's medical training from 1814-1816 gave him an updated vision of anatomical knowledge that informed his own attempt to trace the mechanics of cognitive distribution through narrative. Contained in his *Anatomical and Physiological Notebook*, Keats's lecture notes from his years at Guy's Hospital are full of contemporary scientific thought on the brain and nervous system from the foremost surgeons and anatomists such as Astley Cooper, John Abernethy, and Henry Cline, under whom the poet studied. In fact, the majority of his anatomy notes are on the brain and

nervous system, and even the discussions of muscles and bones appear secondary to related points on sensation and movement. In notes from the tenth lecture, Keats uses the term “grand sympathetic,” in reference to the sympathetic nerve, which tracks down from the external base of the skull through the pterygoid foramen. According to the notebook, the sympathetic nervous system, discovered by the French anatomist Jacques Benigne Winslow in the eighteenth century, has two main functions: sensation and volition. Keats learned that sensation begins at the extremities and tracks to the brain through the network of nerves. His notes read: “Volition is the contrary of Sensation it proceeds from the internal to external parts. It does not reside entirely in the Brain but partly in spinal Marrow which is seen in the Behaviour of a Frog after having been guilloteened” (Lecture 10; ninth page). Volition, then, as Keats understood it, is distributed beyond the brain through the spine. More strikingly, Keats records, “Volition is sometimes present while sensation is destroyed. In a Gentleman who had lost sensation and yet had powers of Volition it was observed that he could grasp and hold a substance which his whole attention was directed thereto, but on his turning to a fresh occupation the substance dropped” (Lecture 10; ninth page). Not only did early nineteenth-century medical science understand volition to be distributed along the sympathetic nervous system, these notes indicate a belief that volition can replace sensation. In the absence of sensation, concentrated attention can perform motor tasks thought to require input from external stimuli.

From his *Anatomical and Physiological Notebook*, we see the way Keats’s medical training informed his development of a cognitive model of reading that anticipated current models of distributed cognition; however, his notebooks also point to an anatomical understanding of sympathy that aligns with the moral philosophy of this period. Exploration of how sympathy was understood and theorized further elucidates the way Keats imagines affect to

circulate among and join bodies to create a shared aesthetic experience. As an important point of juncture for medical science, moral philosophy, and literature of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the concept of sympathy traverses the internal and external, the voluntary and involuntary. Sympathy takes what is individual and makes it communal. For example, in accordance with the physiological basis of eighteenth century moral philosophy, medical practice employed the term “sympathy” to denote the correspondence of multiple organs working toward a single action (Keats gives the example of a sneeze), and he notes that sympathy is an involuntary cognitive power, one that does not incorporate conscious appraisal. Though no physician, David Hume traces the cognitive pathways of ideas and impressions (corresponding, I argue, to volition and sensation with their respective internal origins and external origins) and shows how sympathy can replicate the sensations felt by another. Impressions become ideas as they lose the original force with which they entered the mind. The act of smelling honeysuckle conveys the impression of the smell through the cognitive pathways of the body, processing it into the abstract idea of sweetness. This process is unidirectional except where sympathy is at play. Sympathy reverses the trajectory, acting as the vehicle by which sensation can be replicated, making ideas into impressions. Sympathy conveys an idea that increases in intensity until it approximates the original impression held by the object of sympathy. We read about the sweet smell of honeysuckle growing along the road, and, by imagining ourselves in the space described, we activate the cognitive pathways that translate the idea of the sweetness into the smell of honeysuckle. We experience on our own bodies the sensations we read and witness through sympathy.

Continuing to study sympathy's mechanics two decades after Hume, Adam Smith theorized "fellow-feeling," as an act upon the body through the senses, and involving the imagination. He writes in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759):

This is the source of our fellow-feeling for the misery of others, that it is by changing places in fancy with the sufferer, that we come either to conceive or to be affected by what he feels, may be demonstrated by many obvious observations, if it should not be thought sufficiently evident of itself. When we see a stroke aimed and just ready to fall upon the leg or arm of another person, we naturally shrink and draw back our own leg or our own arm; and when it does fall, we feel it in some measure, and are hurt by it as well as the sufferer. The mob, when they are gazing at a dancer on the slack rope, naturally writhe and twist and balance their own bodies, as they see him do, and as they feel that they themselves must do if in his situation. (I. i. 3)

Here the senses take cues from what they perceive *and* imagine, joining what is external to what is internal. The spectator sees an action or sees the promise of an action (the stroke ready to fall), and his or her body registers the sensation. According to Smith, the fancy makes the necessary connection between visual object and sympathetic subject by enabling him or her to enter the "place" of the sufferer.

Contemporary cognitive science and distributed cognition theories uphold the eighteenth-century theory of the physiological manifestation of affect. In her 2013 book *Feeling Beauty*, Gabrielle Starr explains how magnetic resonance imaging of intense aesthetic experiences in subjects shows the joint activity of sensual perception and the default mode network. Since the default mode network is responsible for the cognitive functions of memory and imagination, its

activity during moments of perception, specifically during intense aesthetic experience is surprising. An intense aesthetic experience would seem to overwhelm the internal with the external, but Starr explains how the brain architecture is, in fact, at work in these moments:

In general anatomical terms, neural activation moves from sensory cortex forward toward the basal ganglia (reward process) and toward the hippocampus and amygdalae (memory and emotion--though these functions are not exclusively carried out in these structures). Activation in the orbitofrontal cortex follows, but there are interactive loops that reach between these frontal areas and the basal ganglia so that higher-order, complex processes of cognition, and emotional and reward processes, may continually feed one another (24).

As Smith posited in the eighteenth century, the imagination is active in moments of visual intake. Even more, modern cognitive science suggests that the imagination and associated emotions supplement the sensory registry to create the image seen, and that, therefore, in the act of seeing, the imagination is always already at work. Ultimately, here where the imagination and perception interweave, volition and sensation (the internal and the external) join together to create a space of collaboration. The boundary of self and outside world becomes fluid and penetrable, and what is of my mind and what is beyond the boundary of my skin lose distinction.

Distributed cognition theorist Giovanna Colombetti presents a phenomenological approach to empathy that agrees with Starr's empirical findings. Her work on the direct realism of feeling proposes an enacted space of empathy where the translation of feeling between bodies is virtually uninhibited. Colombetti challenges Theory Theory⁵ and Simulation Theory⁶, which

⁵ Theory Theory (TT) is a hypothesis aligned with Theory of Mind, which I explore in Chapter 2. Theory of Mind maintains that we attribute mental states to behaviors or other outward cues. Theory Theory derives from Piaget's developmental psychology and represents the earliest stages of mind-reading, a "naive" theory of mind that we use as "little scientists" when first

both see a stage of mediation between perceiving and feeling the emotions of another. She says, while these approaches “make[...] the minds of others never directly experientially accessible,” phenomenological understandings of empathy believe in a direct realism between the mental states of the observer and observed. Seeing a balled up fist, for example, I “live” the tenseness of the fist (Colombetti 130). Therefore, a work of art such as literature that engages the imagination to replicate smell, sound, taste, or movement writes feelings in the brain and on the body of its reader. Starr explains that similar pathways activate in mental imagery (the creation of an image in the mind, as one must do when an object is described verbally) as in the experience of perception (when the object is present). Someone’s suffering when read about in a text (or heard about from a witness) must be imagined by the reader; however, this mediation of a real life sensory experience into an imagined sensory experience does not hamper the translation of feeling. Brain activity during imagined sensory experience correlates most closely to that of active perception when a text evokes multisensory or motor imagery (Starr 75). Eighteenth-century philosophers believed this to be true, as well. Adela Pinch writes of Hume’s theory, “whether one is responding to a person or to a representation of a person suffering seems, in many cases, ultimately not to make any difference to the emotional experience itself” (45). This direct translation of phenomenological experience, the realism between the observed feeling and

forming the cognitive architecture and knowledge of how to interact with the world. The term “Theory Theory” derives from the notion that this process is represented in the mind and is structured like a scientific inquiry.

⁶ Simulation Theory (ST) is another hypothesis on the precise function of Theory of Mind. Shanton and Goldman (2010) explain the differences between ST and TT: “Rejecting the TT emphasis on theoretical inference, ST (in its original form) says that people employ imagination, mental pretense, or perspective taking (‘putting oneself in the other person’s shoes’) to determine others’ mental states. A mentalizer simulates another person by first creating pretend states (e.g., pretend desires and beliefs) in her own mind that correspond to those of the target. She then inputs these pretend states into a suitable cognitive mechanism, which operates on the inputs and generates a new output (e.g., a decision). This new state is taken ‘off line’ and attributed or assigned to the target” (1).

that which registers on the body of the observer, further disintegrates the self/other boundaries that could inhibit the free circulation of affect and sympathy, thus allowing for the ideal interconnectedness of writer and audience during acts of reading.

Keats's understanding of sympathy as a model for the writer-reader relationship exceeds the Smith model and its modern counterparts. Much like Hume who sees feeling as existing between bodies, Keats imagines feeling to be jointly created rather than transferred. Pinch explains that for Hume, "feelings are transsubjective entities that pass between persons; that our feelings are always really someone else's; that it is passion that allows us to be persons, rather than the other way around" (19). Sympathy is the vehicle through which feelings circulate between bodies in a distributed cognition of embodied emotion. Passion allows us to be persons because, for Hume, the self only comes into being through association with others' feelings. Therefore the self is fundamentally social by nature. Keats's writing style embraces this bodily, affective and transsubjective model of feeling in *Endymion*. Whereas Wordsworth presents the writer-reader dynamic as that of a teacher to his student, Keats's contract with readers assumes a social and emotional bond between friends. Rather than transferring feeling from writer to reader (a model that doesn't seem to require the sympathy or the imagination of the reader⁷), Keats's poem seeks to demonstrate and allow the free circulation of feelings between the writer, reader, and text. In scenes of reading, Keats's audience witnesses moments of sympathetic engagement,

⁷ Adam Smith runs up against the tension of self-interest and a communal outlook when he addresses Dr. Mandeville's claim that private vices can be public benefits (*Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Ch. IV). Whereas Mandeville reads self-interest in all acts that serve a public good in so far as they gain the beneficent citizen social esteem, Smith argues such self-interest can be seen as virtuous when the outcomes benefit the larger community. This perhaps complicates my reading of Wordsworth's self-reflective poetics. Wordsworth's self-interest lies in his efforts to protect and fortify the integrity of his identity or *cogito* through his auto-read practices. However, as Adam Smith would argue, Wordsworth also seeks to protect the integrity of his reader's thinking self by insulating their aesthetic experience. His motivation is not self-seeking, after all, though other Romantic writers, as I show, believe his methods to limit the public benefits literature can perform.

marking how these experiences manifest physiologically in the characters. The interconnectedness of the characters in these moments mirrors the type of enacted empathic environments Colombetti theorizes. The interconnectedness of his characters allows for their joint creation of a new narrative or even a new reality, as we shall see, for example, in the case of Endymion's dreams. Thus the radical openness of the distributed cognition model and the physiological sympathy imagined by eighteenth century moral philosophers, Romantic poets like Keats, and contemporary cognitive scientists, offers a hope for societal change through the bond of shared feeling and the creative activity it inspires.

Sympathetic Reading in *Endymion*

Keats famously opens his epic attempt with the declaration, "A Thing of beauty is a joy for ever" (I. 1). By the end of his inaugural stanza, Keats narrows his scope from "a thing of beauty" to the art of storytelling in particular. He writes, "All lovely tales that we have heard or read:/An endless fountain of immortal drink,/ Pour[...] unto us from the heaven's brink" (I. 22-23). Literature itself is immortal and in hearing it and reading it, we taste immortality.

Importantly, Keats employs the plural pronoun to create a sense of community between the bodies involved in aesthetic experience. "We" read and are poured unto. "We" receive the quiet bower, health, and sweet dreams from the immortal fount of Literature. Moreover, the source of beauty is all one, a single "endless fountain" pouring from "*the* heaven" (emphasis mine).

Fluidity and movement circulate feelings as they ebb and flow. By the way it engages the mind and the senses, literature taps a deep interconnectedness of being and from this creates community across mortality and immortality, earth and heaven.

Endymion's second stanza imagines a symbiotic relationship between beautiful "essences" (25) and our souls. We are intrinsically intertwined with cosmic entities, essences

such as, “the moon,/The passion poesy, glories infinite” (28-29), and the relationship is such that if one party were to pass into nothingness, the other too would perish. This cosmic vision, this pretty piece of paganism, as Wordsworth commented upon Keats’s recitation of “The Hymn to Pan,” declares communion is necessary to mortal and immortal existence. In fact, Pan is the source of “universal knowledge” (I. 289), and, as Cox notes, etymologically his name means “all” (Cox 155), so that the pagan festival in Latmos that opens the poem joins all bodies in worship of shared truth. But Keats takes this radical interconnectedness a step further by claiming that beautiful things cannot exist without human community and love:

What I know not: but who, of men, can tell
That flowers would bloom, or that green fruit would swell
To melting pulp, that fish would have bright mail,
The earth its dower of river, wood, and vale,
The meadows runnels, runnels pebble-stones,
The seed its harvest, or the lute its tones,
Tones ravishment, or ravishment its sweet,
If human souls did never kiss and greet?” (I. 835-842)

Interconnectedness is enacted in the very form of this passage. Keats repeats grammatical objects as subjects in their subsequent clauses, “the meadows runnels, runnels pebble-stones.” The poem famously uses the uncontrolled “Cockney” couplets that overrun their prescribed bounds. The enjambment in the first three quoted lines demonstrates the unconventional openness of the Cockney couplets, how they expand into the line that follows, pushing into the space of the next thought and fusing together the items in Keats’s catalogue of imagery. Indeed, the Cockney couplets themselves effectively mirror the model of distributed minds as they reach outward,

beyond the bounds of individual bodies to participate in a transsubjective system of shared feeling. While in this quoted passage, we have some control exerted with the primarily end stopped lines, ultimately the passage is a teeming list of natural beauty. The rhyming pairs and the repetition create an echoing effect that seems to carry beyond the concluding question mark. While Keats's message is clear (we are all interconnected), he makes a bold claim for the lynchpin of this interconnected existence. Human community is the necessary prerequisite for universal harmony. The beautiful essences that connect with our souls require human fellowship in order to manifest as beautiful objects in nature and even in art. In the "Pleasure Thermometer" section, Keats says richer entanglements than even "Eolian magic" (a key Romantic symbol for poetry), the enthrallments forged by love and friendship, are the crown of humanity (I. 786). Keats concludes, "melting into its radiance, we blend,/ Mingle, and so become a part of it" (I. 810-11) and from this the world "benefits unknowingly" (I. 827).

The Keatsian model of radical cognitive and emotional interconnectedness that forms the philosophical foundation of *Endymion* anticipates the exchange of feelings that distributed cognition theorists imagine happens between sympathetically engaged bodies. In a phenomenon she calls, "feeling close," Giovanna Colombetti cites and revises Edith Stein. Stein describes a system of shared feeling that unites two subjects in an experience of a common object or event. Elaborating on Stein, Colombetti summarizes the empathy experienced in these situations:

awareness of sharing a feeling leads to "a subject of a higher level" (17), a "higher unity" (122) between self and other. I do not just experience the other via basic empathy; I am also aware that the other and I feel the same, and this awareness induces a stronger experience of connectedness. It is as if the others' feelings, which I usually experience as nonprimordial (i.e., as belonging to them and not to

me), have lost their nonprimordial character and become “live to me” like my own feelings. (Colombetti 135)

The shared feeling and the awareness of the shared feeling creates a compounded intimacy that represents a new level of connectivity between sympathetic bodies. Feeling close is, then, a new space of shared cognition. However, both Stein and Colombetti believe that the self/other boundary remains within this new space: “I neither ‘lose myself’ in the others nor incorporate the others’ experience into mine in a sort of extended awareness of myself” (Colombetti 134-135). Keats, on the other hand, describes love and friendship as “self-destroying” (I. 799-801), dissolving the ego to allow the interpenetration of our essence with others in the grand cosmos of love and fellow-feeling. He sees human fellowship as individually and societally transformative and points to reading literature as critical in promoting this change. The world benefits from this loss of “self,” this radical interconnectedness that goes beyond “feeling close” and even the “fellow-feeling” of sympathy or basic empathy to imagine the self as entirely within and made up of a larger cosmic, cognitive community.

Throughout *Endymion*, Keats shows his radical sense of sympathy at work when a character hears (or reads) the tale of another. Let us take for instance our reintroduction to the poor wanderer Endymion in Book II. The “brain-sick shepherd prince” (II. 42) has stopped at a spring, weary with his quest and “old grief” (II. 46). A rose bud “snares his fancy” (II. 56). He plucks it, dips its stem into the water, and watches it bloom. From the now blossomed bud, a golden butterfly is released. Endymion’s “wide eye” (II. 62) is captivated by the butterfly whose wings “must be surely character’d strange things” (II. 61). His imagination activated by “reading” nature, he becomes physiologically sympathetic to the butterfly who flies lightly away. Endymion himself feels emotionally lighter and his own seemingly weightless movements

mirror that of the butterfly. Endymion rises and follows it. "From languor's sullen bands/ His limbs are loos'd, and eager, on he hies/ Dazzled to trace it in the sunny skies./ It seem'd he flew, the way so easy was" (II. 65-69). Similarly, in Book III, Keats introduces Glaucus as a text telling a story:

A cloak of blue wrapp'd up his aged bones,
O'erwrought with symbols by the deepest groans
Of ambitious magic: every ocean-form
Was woven in with black distinctness; storm
And calm, and whispering, and hideous roar,
Quicksand and whirlpool, and deserted shore
Were emblem'd in the woof... (III. 197-203)

Glaucus's cloak is full of characters and marks, depicting the ocean and its mythologies. He pours over a book open on his lap. His forehead is margined by wrinkles. Though initially repulsed by Glaucus (Endymion believes Glaucus a wretched sorcerer who will burn him, freeze him, tear him to pieces to feed his army of fish, etc), he sees the old man weeping and recognizes his humanity. Keats writes,

...Lo! his heart 'gan warm
With pity for the grey hair'd creature wept.
Had he then wrong'd a heart where sorrow kept?
Had he, though blindly contumelious, brought
Rheum to kind eyes, a sting to human thought,
Convulsion to a mouth of many years?
He had in truth; and he was ripe for tears.

The penitent shower fell, as down he knelt
Before that care-worn sage... (III. 282-90)

Tracing the circulation of affect, we first note that Endymion has a physiological change as his heart warms with emotion, pity. Endymion then appraises the old man's embodied emotions. The tears indicate pain, a sting to a human being who must feel as he does, not to a cruel, otherworldly sorcerer. The "human thought" here further suggests that self-consciousness and perhaps sympathy is the marker of humanity. I say sympathy because as Cox notes the fair copy of this line read, "humane thought"(Cox 200). Endymion then weeps, too, catching the feelings of another being through sympathy and the recognition of common humanity. Glaucus's reaction to Endymion's shared emotion recapitulates the circulating affect. He declares: "I know thine inmost bosom, and I feel/ A very brother's yearning for thee steal/ Into mine own" (III. 292-94). Endymion feels Glaucus's pain, and Glaucus own body conveys the sympathetic reaction, and reciprocates with a familial bond. They are brothers in shared feeling and reading.

The cognitive process represented in the Glaucus scene requires further scrutiny, however. Keats portrays the mechanics of circulating affect in a level of detail that begs the question of whether his cognitive model engages in the same reflective practices for which Wordsworth is so infamous. As he reads the emotions on Glaucus's face, Endymion recognizes their common humanity. This is cognitive appraisal, and, ultimately, Endymion reflects upon his hasty judgment. Or rather, we infer through the slippage of a third-person limited narrator (the speaker of the poem who enters the space of the hero's mind) that Endymion processes the reading experience in this way. However, this reading experience is arguably one of distributed cognition, distinctly different from the auto-read practices of Wordsworth. Even though, as readers, we see into the mind of the hero and the ways he processes an experience, the narrator

poses questions that encourage the reader's own cognitive processing alongside the Endymion's. The narrator asks "Had he then wrong'd a heart where sorrow kept?" (III. 283). The third-person grammatical construction asks the question simultaneously from the perspectives of the narrator as well as the reader. Indeed, Endymion himself might be asking the question in a moment of existential self-reflection. In this way, Keats foregoes the use of a Wordsworthian "guiding hand" that would philosophize the experience for his readers. We witness the scene as a tableaux of sympathetic engagement, a story of human compassion unfolding before us in the present, in which we are invited to participate and learn.

Dreams as Enacted Spaces of Empathy

Even as he wanders from scene to scene, from person to person on his journey, Endymion falls prey to feelings of loneliness and melancholy. Solitude by definition cannot be a shared feeling, but even in moments of isolation Endymion escapes solitude through sleep. Sleep is where Cynthia (also referred to as Phoebe or the moon) joins our hero. He feels lonely on his journey, finds himself in a bower, and falls asleep. Then, his goddess lover appears, or she sends him to visit another suffering lover. Thus, dreams are particularly interesting sites to study cognition and fellow-feeling in this poem. In the article, "Romantic Poetry and the Idea of the Dream," Grevel Lindop introduces two primary ways of understanding dreams in early nineteenth-century Britain. The first way Romantic writers would have understood dreams emerges from the biblical tradition that sees dreams as "caused by spiritual agency: God, angels, good or evil spirits intervening in the sleeper's consciousness to give messages which might be either helpful or misleading." The second lens through which many understood dreams was medical. Many believed "dreams were caused by bodily factors - in particular the food you had eaten before sleeping, but also the position of the body, temperature, breathing, one's general

state of health, and so on” (Lindop 20). Keats draws upon both of these traditions in *Endymion*. The protagonist’s dreams are often visions or challenges imposed by Phoebe, as she trains him in the ways of compassion and prepares him for ascension to immortality. However, Keats also shows how external experiences and imagined experience pass through the body and confuse the border between waking and sleeping. Both of these historical understandings of dream space constitute enactive approaches to distributed cognition, where the narrative of the dream is co-created through the interactions of the dreamer, his body, and his environment.

The dreams act as narrative texts for Endymion as he participates in the dreams in ways that mirror immersive reading. Keats believes texts join people across time and space through shared feeling, and dreams do the same type of work. Both experiences necessitate the lapse of the conscious actor. A dreamer must be open to the activity of the dream (including the feelings that coincide) much in the way readers suspend disbelief in order to immerse themselves in narrative action or a character’s perspective. Even as the reader is at the mercy of the text, the dreamer’s experience is often organized by sensual perception. A dreamer’s body will take cues from her surroundings, a conversation from the next room, her quilt’s texture, the smell of breakfast on the stove. Each of these can translate into the dream. At the same time the dream is a product of the dreamer’s cognition. She fills in the action to create a scene from the sensual details perceived. These dreams are pieced together from bits of memory, anxieties, desires, etc. All of this coincides nicely with Keats’s medical knowledge. As we have seen from Keats’s *Anatomical and Physiological Notebook*, he was taught that volition and sensation are opposite forces, respectively internal production and externally received information. These can supplement each other and combine to perform tasks or create experience. Therefore, in its confusion of the internal and external, the dream spaces in *Endymion* present empathic spaces of

lapsed selfhood, where, through affective communion with other characters and environmental entities, the hero can usher into existence an ideal reality.

Dreaming may not be easily understood as a social phenomenon: the dream experience will differ between sleepers based upon their unique embodied existences, store of memories, individual desires, etc. However, the dream acts in the same way a text does to necessitate the abdication of a reasoning self, laying one open to the intervention of sensations. In fact, dreams may do so on a more literalized level, being unmediated by a text. There is no translation from the sign to the imagination, except in the cases of external sensations seeping into the dream. Even in such cases, the sensation can be considered more original because it occurs in the body and in real time. It is not “just imagined.” In this way, the sensual perception and volition in dreaming works backward, transitioning from actual to imagined. Instead of the imagined becoming an actual feeling as in Humean sympathetic identification with another person, the actual becomes part of the narrative, and the mind does not distinguish between the two until the dreamer awakes and the *cogito* resumes control. I argue this is social in so far as the same mechanisms for self-erasure and sympathetic embodied feeling are at work in dreaming as in reading. Aside from this physiological realism, Keats’s hero Endymion dreams social existence into reality to cure his solitude.

For Keats, lived experience emerges from the dream experience. Here, I must attend to the famous Adam’s Dream passage from his November 22, 1817, letter to Benjamin Bailey. I quote at length:

The imagination may be compared to Adam's dream, - he awoke and found it truth. I am more zealous in this affair because I have never yet been able to perceive how anything can be known for truth by consecutive reasoning - and yet

it must be. Can it be that even the greatest philosopher ever arrived at his goal without putting aside numerous objections? However it may be, O for a life of sensation rather than of thoughts! It is a 'Vision in the form of Youth,' a shadow of reality to come. And this consideration has further convinced me, - for it has come as auxiliary to another favorite speculation of mine, - that we shall enjoy ourselves hereafter by having what we called happiness on earth repeated in a finer tone and so repeated. And yet such a fate can only befall those who delight in sensation, rather than hunger as you do after truth. Adam's dream will do here, and seems to be a conviction that imagination and its empyreal reflection is the same as human life and its spiritual repetition. (*Letters I*. 184-85)

The visionary becomes the empirical truth. Yet, Keats calls the visionary, “sensation.” Strangely he is not speaking of the phenomenological sensual perception, here. Instead, he is using sensation to describe “happiness on earth.” Delighting in sensation is set in opposition to hungering after truth, consecutive reasoning. Happiness and its eternal, immortal replication comes only to those who revel in the moment. Keats believes that striving for “truth” rather than letting it come through immersive sensual experience is isolating. Importantly, Adam’s dream is of a companion, and he awakes to find Eve. He dreams of communion, and he awakes to the reality of social existence. It is not good that the man should be alone. Endymion is drowning in grief over his lost immortal lover, his dream. He did not awake to find his lover true. Not in the first book of the poem, at least.

Throughout the poem, Endymion enters spaces of communion by dreaming. Peona finds Endymion in a restless trance as he sits with old men and an aged priest. They talk of crossing the bar into eternity and reuniting with their friends, family, and fellow huntsmen in immortality.

Peona takes him away to her favorite bower on a little island. He falls into a sleep, which heals and “renovates” his mind:

O magic sleep! O comfortable bird
That broodest o'er the troubled sea of the mind
Till it is hush'd and smooth! O unconfin'd
Restraint! imprisoned liberty! great key
To golden palaces, strange minstrelsy,
Fountains grotesque, new trees, bespangled caves,
Echoing grottos, full of tumbling waves
And moonlight; aye, to all the mazy world
Of silvery enchantment!--who, upfurl'd
Beneath thy drowsy wing a triple hour,
But renovates and lives?--Thus, in the bower,
Endymion was calm'd to life again.

Opening his eyelids with a healthier brain... (I. 453-466)

He celebrates sleep as the paradoxes of “unconfin'd/Restraint! imprisoned liberty!” The structure of these exclamations further interlocks and frees the very words as the adjectives and nouns reverse sentiment: a freeing confinement becomes a confining freedom. Yet the play between the structures grants its own kind of liberty. Sleep is a bounded space like a book, a poem, or even an enacted empathetic space of communion. Moreover, Sleep and Endymion are very intimate, as lovers or family. He lies curled within Sleep's wing. Sleep as a bird brooding over a troubled sea of the mind echoes the Genesis creation story that envisions the Holy Spirit brooding over the earth's waters before the creation of light and darkness, day and night. Sleep here is the dominant

force between waking and sleeping, the arbiter of each state, perhaps. What we can say more definitively, however, is Sleep settles the mind through creation. The golden palaces, strange minstrelsy, and host of other fantastic visions of fountains and grottoes resemble the dreamscape of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Kubla Khan," which concludes with the image of an entranced poet with "flashing eyes and floating hair," who must have three circles woven round him (a triple hour is needed to calm Endymion's troubled mind). Sleep provides a site for fantastic creations and coincident renovation of the brain.

When Endymion awakes to talk with Peona, she plays a "mournful strange" lay, which induces another sort of trancelike intoxication in her brother. She stops playing and asks about his deeper knowledge of things immortal that "weigh down" his nature. He explains that he has had a dream. A vision of mounting to the stars upon wings, seeing them disappear and the moon rise from the horizon. His "dazzled soul/ Commingl[es] with her argent spheres," and when she disappears, he seeks "to commune" again with the stars. He has a vision of the deities. Then he describes Phoebe's beauty (he doesn't use her name; she is only "the moon," here), and she takes his hand and they fly. He is so overcome that he nearly faints a couple of times, and he goes into a madness, kissing her arms and face, until she lays him down in another bower/nest (I. 594-95). From here he loses the dream as he falls into a deeper sleep, a "stupid sleep" (I. 678).

The parallel between the dream experience and what Endymion undergoes while in his trance and asleep is too apparent to ignore. Endymion's dreamed journey mirrors the actual goings on of the scene. His vision of the deities from Mt. Olympus is reminiscent of the circle of old men talking of eternity. Being escorted to a bower by Peona and falling out of the trance into deeper sleep further mirror his physical movements while unconscious. Though he does not

awake to find his dream lover true, his dream takes cues from the external goings on his body perceives while asleep.

In the exchange that follows from this first sleep episode, Keats explores the distinction he draws in his letter to Bailey between a life of sensations and hungering after truth. Peona listens to her brother's lament over his lost opportunity for transcendence. Having heard enough, she chastises him and pokes fun at his sentimentalism. Instead of sighing, he should, "be rather in the trumpet's mouth, --anon/Among the winds at large--that all may hearken!" (l. 737-738). Rather than floundering in his emotions, he should be taking action. He should be more ambitious, a leader to whom all listen. She says of dreaming:

'--would I so tease
My pleasant days, because I could not mount
Into those regions? The Morphean fount
Of that fine element that visions, dreams
And fitful whims of sleep are made of, streams
Into its airy channels with so subtle,
So thin a breathing, not the spider's shuttle,
Circled a million times within the space
Of a swallow's nest-door, could delay a trace,
A tinting of its quality: how light
Must dreams themselves be; seeing they're more slight
Than the mere nothing that engenders them!
Then wherefore sully the entrusted gem
Of high and noble life with thoughts so sick?

Why pierce high-fronted honour to the quick

For nothing but a dream?' (I. 745-760).

Rather than seeing sleep as curative, she believes Endymion's sickness to derive from the dream, more specifically, from the dream's failure to materialize into reality. She knows she cannot ascend to the realms she dreams of, and so she will not waste time trying. For Peona, dreams emerge from nothing and are even "more slight/Than the mere nothing that engenders them!" They bear no relation to reality and, therefore, should have no significance to the dreamer. To his sister's upbraiding, Endymion responds:

No, no, I'm sure,

My restless spirit never could endure

To brood so long upon one luxury,

Unless it did though fearfully, espy

A hope beyond the shadow of a dream.

My sayings will the less obscured seem,

When I have told thee how my waking sight

Has made me scruple whether that same night

Was pass'd in dreaming. (I. 854-861)

Though Peona recognizes that he "know[s] of things mysterious,/ Immortal, starry," she has missed the point, here. Endymion understands that dreams extend beyond the moments of sleep, but not in the way Peona thinks, as a lingering sense of loss, a pointless pining after phantoms. Instead, the dreams point to a future reality, a 'hope beyond the shadow of a dream.' The shadow of a dream is a melancholic trace of the dream, and Endymion admits to a fearful attention to the shadow. However, the dream obscures the imagined and the lived, and this offers his a glimpse

of hope beyond his fear. Lindop claims that Keats is most interested in “a congruence between imagination and reality,” notions of “dreaming what is” (32). He writes, “In *Endymion*, the protagonist's dream of the moon- goddess Phoebe is the inspiration that sends him on a quest through the elements for real union with the goddess. When he eventually finds her, in her earthly incarnation as the Indian maid, he falls asleep with her, dreams that he is in heaven with her and on waking, we are told, 'beheld his very dream' [IV: 436].” From this Lindop concludes that Endymion’s quest is “to make dream and reality coincide” (32). And yet, Endymion cannot be sure that his experience is waking or dreamt. Endymion wonders, do I wake or sleep? And does the answer matter when he wakes to find the dream true? Indeed, dreaming of his lover’s voice, Endymion awakes to find both his sister and his goddess-lover calling to him. Dreams are strange spaces where abandoning the reasoning self allows a sympathetic co-creation of narrative. Volition and sensation blend and confuse self and other, imagination and perception. The experience of the dream is written on the body and becomes truth in a process that mirrors the way a text circulates affectively through the bodies engaged in acts of reading. For Keats, these moments of sympathetic engagement, these sites of interconnections, create cooperative compositions more true than what can be gather in trumpet calls and consecutive reasoning.

Conclusion

To conclude, let me return to the culture wars between the Hunt Circle and the Lake School Romantics as they rise to an early head around the much-anticipated publication of Wordsworth’s epic *The Excursion* in 1814. Wordsworth’s poem answers the dejection and disillusionment following the violent turn in the French Revolution with solitude, the individual’s communion with nature rather than with social man, where love of Nature rather

than love of man in society is the route to Love of God. In response to *The Excursion*, Percy Shelley presents what he feels is the true result of solitude in nature: self-centered seclusion, the inability to connect with the actual, and, most importantly, a fruitless life of idealizations rather than productive contention with realities. In his “Preface” to *Alastor*, Shelley recapitulates these dangers: “Among those who attempt to exist without human sympathy, the pure and tender-hearted perish through the intensity and passion of their search after its communities, when the vacancy of their spirit suddenly makes itself felt...those who love not their fellow-beings live unfruitful lives, and prepare for their old age a miserable grave” (5). A life, or rather a life’s work, produced within isolation proves sterile. Shelley even goes so far as to call these unsympathetic solitaries “morally dead.”

Shelley’s wanderer, like Wordsworth himself starts in alienation and continues farther into “a wide waste and tangled wilderness” (78). Though bearing company with “savage men,” boarding and eating among them, partaking of their hospitality, he does not connect with them (80). In fact, the Arab maiden, an image of the Hunt Circle’s ideal of self-sacrifice, generosity, love, and Truth, gives him her portions of food and bedding, yet he apparently fails to engage with her, substituting in her stead his own idealized vision of a beautiful maiden. Indeed, this ideal maiden proves little more than a reflection of the wanderer’s own philosophical vision. Shelley writes, “her voice was like the voice of his own soul” (153). When she vanishes from his dreams, we hear echoes of the *ubi sunt* plaints of “Intimations Ode”— the speaker cries, “Whither have fled the hues of heaven that canopied his bower yesternight?” (196-198). Most significantly, the poet recognizes his failure when looking upon a swan pair, and mourns how he “wast[es] his surpassing powers/ In the deaf air, to the blind earth and heaven/ That echoes not my thoughts?” while the swan shares his voice with a beloved. In fact, Shelley turns “Intimations

Ode” on its head in the last lines of *Alastor*, proclaiming:

It is a woe too “deep for tears,” when all
Is reft at once, when some surpassing Spirit,
Whose light adorned the world around it, leaves
Those who remain behind, not sobs or groans,
The passionate tumult of clinging hope;
But pale despair and cold tranquility. (713-8)

The affective response, the pleasure, that once proved effective in cultivating sympathy and hope disintegrates. Moreover, Shelley seems to suggest that the cause of the pale despair and cold tranquility is Wordsworth’s own solipsism. Like Shelley’s wanderer and Wordsworth’s before him, Endymion and Keats simultaneously seek communion with immortality. Shelley’s character Alastor and his real-life model Wordsworth fail to learn that immortality can only be achieved through tests of human compassion.

In spite of having passed his medical exams with ease the previous summer, Keats abandoned his medical career, in December 1816. Hosting a Saturnalia dinner for his brothers and close friends, the young poet announced his intentions to devote himself fully to a literary career. *Endymion* was Keats’s personal test of ability, his self-appointed and self-designed apprenticeship in his new career of poetry. Setting for himself the task of composing the poem in a year’s time, Keats declared it, “a test, a trial of my Powers of Imagination and chiefly my invention which is a rare thing indeed--by which I must make 4000 Lines of one bare circumstance and fill them with Poetry...a test of Invention... [is] the Polar Star of Poetry, as Fancy is the Sails, and Imagination the Rudder...” (*Letters* I. 169-170). Even as his hero must prove himself, Keats views the epic attempt of *Endymion* as his own entrance exam to the

everlasting community of poets he read and adored. Keats's *Endymion* would grant him immortality, like his hero who ascends to the heavens in the poem's end. Unlike the religiously conservative, older Wordsworth of *The Excursion*, Keats had no attachment to orthodox religion. His poem substitutes Christian faith for "paganism" and classical mythology. Nevertheless, Keats did believe in a form of immortality, one that connects those who seek it through the act of reading and feeling. *Endymion* engages the reader's body and mind in an affective economy of sympathy, teaching the reader compassion even as the hero and the author learn it themselves. In a direct realism of phenomenological experience, the act of reading Keats's epic attempt becomes a simultaneous journey of hero, author, and reader from which a new reality of radical unity promises hope beyond the shadow of a dream, beyond the narrative text. Keats famously opens *Endymion* with a declaration of art's hedonic value: "A Thing of beauty is a joy for ever:/ Its loveliness increases; it will never/ Pass into nothingness" (I. 1-3). Beautiful tales unite readers in shared feeling, "for ever" across time and across space. As he writes, despite despondence, the reality of the inhuman darkness and "gloomy days" (9) at hand, a beautiful thing "bind[s] us to the earth" (5), even to the tombs of "the mighty dead" (21), all while replenishing us with "sweet dreams" (5) of immortality.

Chapter 2

“Wormy Circumstance,” Theory of Mind, and Storytelling Circles in Coleridge and Keats

Unlike his shorter poems that position him as a reflective reader of Chapman’s Homer or *King Lear*, Keats’s *Isabella; or the Pot of Basil* positions the writer as a self-conscious translator of narrative. Reading or re-reading Homer and *Lear* are formative experiences for Keats: they offer a space for self-reflection, as the poet develops his sense of artistic identity. His longer poem, however, positions Keats as translator of Boccaccio, and through his act of reading Boccaccio, Keats becomes the vehicle for another’s (trans)formative aesthetic experience. Keats’s self-conscious awareness of this task peeks through the text as he notoriously digresses from the narrative to offer apologies for the liberties he takes with his source tale. Begging the forgiveness of Boccaccio and lamenting the disappearance of the Old Romance tradition Boccaccio comes to represent, these interruptions of the tale betray Keats’s awareness of his debt to literary tradition and the potential ramifications of experimenting with classic tales and forms. The digressions are not, however, evidence of his youth and immaturity as a poet, as they have often been described: rather these authorial interludes have a deliberate function, serving to position Keats alongside the readers of popular genres like Romance and the Gothic, *en masse*.

Given the Romantic period’s assumption that literature works on the body and the emotions, the proliferation of print in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Britain engendered anxiety over the types of literature being consumed and their influence on the reading public. As I mention in the Introduction, a major change in literary culture forced writers to define and defend their work: at this time, the novel emerged as a recognizable genre and not only presented competition in the market for poetry and nonfiction prose, but also presented what cultural critics deemed a threat to the intellectual and moral development of the public. Seeking to privilege their own literary work and ensure their own security against popular novels in the literary

marketplace, many Romantic era poets such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge rated the novel as senseless entertainment meant for mindless consumption by a public whose sensibilities were dull and unrefined. Wordsworth and Coleridge believed an epidemic of novel readers meant sensational stories sold best because these tales are what can excite dulled sensibilities. How could literature perform transformative work on the psyche of a reader who was unable to sense and feel, to engage the affect of the text? In his book *Keats, Narrative, and Audience*, Andrew Bennett cites Coleridge on the Romantics' dissatisfaction with the passive novel reader. In Book II of *The Friend*, Coleridge writes: "The habit of receiving pleasure without any exertion of thought, by the mere excitement of curiosity and sensibility, may be justly ranked among the worst effects of habitual novel reading" (2:151). One paramount fear critics voiced was that novel readers read for sensational events and incidents rather than expressions of genuine sentiment. Indeed, Coleridge goes on to say that absorption in the plot and sensory experience of the tale – taking pleasure from “mere excitement of curiosity and sensibility” – “dwarf[s]” cognitive capacity (2:151). According to Coleridge, passive reading (absorption without intellectual and imaginative contribution) inhibits the physiological development of a reader’s brain.

However, there is a sound cognitive basis for the passivity that Coleridge and Wordsworth fear. By looking at the effortlessness with which we engage what cognitive scientists call Theory of Mind, we can see how the passive stance often adopted in acts of reading can be attributed to the evolution of human cognitive architecture. Cognitive psychologists link the benefits of reading fiction to the cognitive rewards of pretend play, as they both demonstrate “a shared capacity to stimulate and develop the imagination” (17). We see the behaviors and read the dialogue of characters and attribute states of mind to them almost

automatically. Cognitive scientists call the phenomenon of attributing mental states to behaviors or other outward cues Theory of Mind (ToM) or mind-reading. In *Why We Read Fiction*, Lisa Zunshine gives the example of how we associate tears with emotion. This seems so obvious, but, in fact, connecting outward signs to inward states is an evolved skill. Furthermore, the associations we make are contextualized. For instance, a college student waves her hand in class, and her classmates immediately associate the behavior with a desire to speak. However, if this scenario happened in a grade school classroom, the waving hand might signal the student's desire for permission to use the restroom (Zunshine 15-16).

Zunshine writes that when we engage fiction using Theory of Mind we do so in the same way we engage social situations in the real world:

the cognitive mechanisms that evolved to process information about thoughts and feelings of human beings are constantly on the alert, checking out their environment for cues that fit their input conditions. On some level, then, works of fiction manage to “cheat” these mechanisms into “believing” that they are in the presence of material that they were “designed” to process, that is, that they are in the presence of agents endowed with a potential for a rich array of intentional stances. (10)

We practice ToM as we read narrative, ascribing complicated internal systems of memory, emotion, and motivation to fictional characters. This works because our minds are cheated into the same kind of cognitive processing of fiction as they perform of reality. Paul Hernadi says of the ease with which our minds confuse the two, “there is no clear division between literary and nonliterary signification [...] Literary experience is not triggered in a cognitive or emotive vacuum: modern readers, listeners, and spectators mentally process the virtual comings and

goings of imagined characters as if they were analogous to remembered actual events” (60, 62). This mental slippage between fiction and reality seems to validate the fears held by eighteenth and early nineteenth-century writers for the passive novel reader’s grasp on reality and his subsequent vulnerability should he be caught up in a dreamworld. Given the effortless translation between literary and nonliterary signification, we know the reverse of Hernadi’s phenomenon is equally probable: we mentally process actual events as if they were analogous to the virtual comings and goings of imagined characters. Indeed, this possibility inspires the anxiety surrounding literature’s influence on an unthinking readership. Zunshine explains,

It seems to me that our unease on this occasion stems from our intuitive realization that on some level our evolved cognitive architecture indeed does not fully distinguish between real and fictional people. Faced with Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy, our Theory of Mind jumps at the opportunity (so to speak) to speculate about their past, present, and future states of mind, even as we realize that these ‘airy forms [and] phantoms of imagination’ do not deserve such treatment. The pleasure of being ‘tested’ by a fictional text--the pleasure of being aware, that is, that we are actively engaging our apparently well-functioning Theory of Mind--is thus never completely free from the danger of allowing the ‘phantoms of imagination’ too strong a foothold in our view of our social world (18-19).

If we are passive readers of fiction (especially, irresponsibly written novels that present overwrought sentiment or sensational events), we allow the phantoms of imagination to infiltrate our everyday interactions. We see from Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*, as it parodies the genre and its readers, how this is the perceived danger of reading too many Gothic novels.

Though Theory of Mind points to the easy mental translation between fiction and reality, I explore in Chapters 1 and 3 how mind-reading gets challenged by phenomenologically-oriented cognitive theorists on its inattention to the body's role in this process. And indeed, while ToM maintains a representational mediation between our minds and the minds of others so that other minds are never directly accessible to us, the effortlessness of the translation between fiction and reality might be usefully paired with the phenomenological sympathy that theorists like Giovanna Colombetti espouse to better understand why the slippage is anxiety-producing. The replication of sensory experience forms a sympathetic (or empathetic) communion between bodies engaged in acts of reading. Witnessed affect in social situations as well as in acts of reading registers sensations on the body of a perceiver or reader. The perceiver/reader lives the mental state of the other person or character. Supplementing ToM with an understanding of phenomenological sympathy gives a clearer picture of why immersive reading engenders such anxiety. Immersive or passive reading is realized on the body, making the distinction between reality and fiction doubly challenging. Indeed, our minds *and* bodies "cheat" us when we read fiction.

Though historically we have ascribed a failure to distinguish between fiction and reality to the lost control over one's rational mind, the most recent findings of cognitive psychology and cognitive anthropology find that the mind evolved in ways that make the mental confluence of fiction and reality healthful. Zunshine examines ways in which readers become aware of their cognitive processing in the reading experience. She concludes that the pleasure derived from reading fiction is satisfaction in recognizing our cognitive mastery of the material, our ability to mind-read or operate Theory of Mind. The pleasure that Zunshine theorizes is a self-awareness or a self-consciousness. Fiction is a space where we can experience an automatic (though

advanced) activity of the mind, but the pleasure derived is from seeing ourselves being immersed, being automatic. Through fiction, our minds work and are made aware of that working. Zunshine writes, “It is possible [...] that certain cultural artifacts, such as novels, test the functioning of our cognitive adaptations for mind-reading while keeping us pleasantly aware that the ‘test’ is proceeding quite smoothly” (18). Therefore, as readers we hold two contrasting states of mind: we are performing a cognitive task automatically, and we are aware of that automaticity. Indeed, we are not entirely passive readers; we are aware of our own “passivity” on some level. While immersive reading experiences celebrated by Keats and the Hunt circle facilitate the movement between the imagined and the real, Romantic writers do not seem to trust the ability of an audience to emerge from the automaticity to recognize it. Moreover, the goal of Romantic writers is not pleasure in this recognition, but rather they seek to cultivate a proper reading experience that can shape the reader’s engagement with the text and in turn his engagement with the outside world.

As a reader of Old Romance, Keats knows the temptation of passive reading, of sentimentalism, and of surface-level engagement with the text. Using his digressions to destabilize the reading experience, Keats is able to dismantle the experience of reading a popular genre by calling attention to the passive posture so often assumed when reading popular forms like the Gothic and Romance. Familiarity with genre conventions can engender a false sense of engagement with the text. We sleepwalk through the material because we know what is to come. Dorrit Cohn argues that in narrative “norms have a way of remaining uninteresting, often even invisible, until and unless we find that they have been broken-- or want to show that they have been broken” (43). The unengaged reading experience disrupts the balance of cooperative composition through shared feeling that I have argued happens at the site of the text, but, if the

author can call attention to the reading experience itself, the cognitive processes happening invisibly, they can foster psychic development and intellectual growth in the reader. And yet, though he attempts to dismantle the tired tendencies of predictable conventions, Keats's relationship to the genre of romance, and the practice of reading more generally, is not so easily demystified. As he carves out a space for writer-reader communion in his transformed tale, he engages in the excess of sensation that encourages immersive reading in the first place.

Immersive Reading and Material Sublimity

Eighteenth and early nineteenth-century writers saw the slippage between fiction and reality happening as reading habits changed with the proliferation of popular fiction. Wordsworth sought to direct his reader's aesthetic experience, to teach them how to maintain distance between the emotional and the rational. If Wordsworth's mode is, as Keats said, the egotistical sublime, a defensive position that distances a reader from immediate sensation in order to maintain the integrity of the thinking self, Keats's material sublime offers a counter-model to the Wordsworthian poet: the material sublime embraces the overflow of powerful emotion in the moments of aesthetic experience. The idea of the "material sublime" emerges in a poem to John Hamilton Reynolds ("To J.H. Reynolds, Esq.") written on 25 March 1818 in the midst of *Isabella*'s composition:

O that our dreamings all, of sleep or wake,
Would all their colours from the sunset take,
From something of material sublime,
Rather than shadow our own soul's daytime
In the dark void of night. (67-71)

Notably this exaltation longs for an interpenetration of perception with volition, the passive openness to sensory input and the active play of the mind's store. While the wish for a dreaming state may appear passive, initially, the forceful action "take" stressed at the end of line 68 contrasts with the weaker feminine meter of the opposing verb "shadow." Dreaming, whether in sleep or in a waking dream, is a joint act of sensual imprint and imaginative projection, while shadowing is a flat, colorless reiteration of the self, the shadow of "our own soul's daytime." And while a familiar daytime shadow may provide comfort in "the dark void of night," Keats's ideal poet relishes "uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason" (*Letters* II. 213). For Keats, a poet is capable of existing in negative space, the space of not knowing, because it is the only space that fosters growth. In a passage of *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge, too, laments the unpoetic mind that "bewilders himself in the pursuit of notional phantoms, the mere refractions from unseen and distant truths through the distorting medium of his own unenlivened and stagnant understanding!" Like Keats's "dark void of night" in which one might choose to embrace the material sublime, Coleridge's "notional phantoms" evoke a gothic scene of mystery that offers two alternatives--a turn inward toward the self or, in contrast, an openness to "the common ethereal element of being" which might offer an echo from "the heart of a fellow being" (*Biographia Literaria* Ch. XII). Both writers here disparage the solipsistic turn to the familiar, arguing that the poetic mind requires openness to the threat and benefit of the unfamiliar.

In "Kubla Khan" and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," Coleridge establishes a poet figure both in the narrative itself and in the bibliographic material that frames and contextualizes the narrative. Coleridge advocates for sensory immersion and complete abandon. For example, in "Kubla Khan," the poet is overtaken by his muse while in an unconscious dream state. Here,

Coleridge imagines himself as the vehicle for a larger message, a truth that differs in effect from Wordsworthian self-reflection in the egotistical sublime. Where the egotistical sublime positions the poet prominently as the interpreter and philosopher, always in control of the emotions and message being transferred, the Coleridgean poet dissolves into an ether of feelings and impressions. The feelings and impressions cohere to form ideas. The body of the poet takes precedence over his or her mind. The poem passes through the poet's body rather than being produced out of his mind, and in this way, the poem's existence precedes the intellectual work of the poet and can alter and adapt outside of the poet's mind. This Coleridgean vision of the poet can be read as a model for Keats's idea of the material sublime, and I argue Keats uses this Coleridgean poet in his own gothic romance "Isabella; or the Pot of Basil." Nevertheless, a sensually immersive poetic state is fraught with difficulties. As seen from "Kubla Khan," the poet is an imperfect medium for the dream vision because of his existence in the modern world. At any moment, the poet may be woken from his trance state into his conscious reality. Coleridge is brought back to a self-consciousness where the *cogito* resumes control over sensory experience and the boundary between self and outside, the literary and the nonliterary, is reasserted. The knock at the door calls one to business, to industry, to an economy of "fact & reason" diametrically opposed to that of the senses. Further complicating the process, the trance state in itself engenders anxiety, just as the abandonment of self in favor of the sensual excess of aesthetic experience remains a contentious model. Must the wild hair, the flashing eyes, be tamed? Or is the danger the interruption of this wild yet productive state? Ultimately, the structure Coleridge and Keats utilize disrupts the fictional mechanism, disallowing the analogous slippage between fiction and reality. Immersive reading employs physiological sympathy through the replication of affect, but by reasserting the authorial voice, in a seeming

Wordsworthian move, these authors call attention to the cognitive processes and the narrative devices that have allowed for the immersive experience in the first place. Coleridge and Keats alike vacillate between abandonment and control, testing the boundaries of artistic decorum, but in doing so, they establish reading experiences that foster intellectual and moral growth through sympathetic engagement.

Coleridge's "Kubla Khan: A Vision in a Dream" immerses its reader in a sublimity of movement and sensation, until like the poet himself, she awakes to remember that this is a constructed experience. "Kubla Khan" seeks a balance between sensation and sensibility by creating a safe space for the free movement of affect within the poem or dream and then calling attention to this designed space of immersive reading. The movement through Coleridge's poem takes the reader down the river Arve, deeper and deeper into the dream space until we reach a vision of a poet at the center of a chasm--his flashing eyes and floating hair suggest an otherworldly trance. He is caught up in the sublimity of ice caves, geysers, incense, and ancient forests. The reader and dreamer alike are smothered in sensual imagery, absorbed in the sexual arc of the narrative, until the poem reaches a climactic threat of eruption and war. Here, the speaker halts the narrative action (traveling down the River Arve) to anticipate an audience's reaction. Outside of the narrative and its sensual excess, the speaker shifts his focus from the sublime scene he was transcribing to a desire to build his own sunny domes in air. This is canonically read as a desire to compose his own poetry ("Kubla Khan" 37-54). However, the speaker doesn't compose his own fantasy tale at this point, but rather speculates on the audience's reaction to his poetic process. Coleridge writes:

And all who heard should see them there,

And all should cry, Beware! Beware!

His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise. (“Kubla Khan” 48-54)

The repeated exclamation, “Beware! Beware!” and the repetition of “And all” indicate the poet’s anxiety over how he will be received. He will be misunderstood by all who encounter his poems. The audience will believe he has lost control over his poem and himself. These repeated phrases, just like the circles to be woven round him, contain the poet like a straight-jacket wrapping him up for the safety of himself and his readers. This is the danger inherent in being absorbed in aesthetic experience: losing control of your emotions (flashing eyes) and your body (floating hair). We do not know if he is truly out of control. He seems to have been overtaken by the material excess of sensation, but most interestingly, what we know for sure and what we must keep in mind, is Coleridge’s sensual excess results from the act of reading “Purchas’s Pilgrimage.” Becoming the vehicle to a dream vision, the poet has invited the material and textual into his body and has consequently abdicated control to the text. The literary and the nonliterary become confused for the entranced poet/reader.

As a way of containing the space for immersive reading, Coleridge imposes multiple circles (or frames) of storytelling as context for the poem’s composition. These storytelling circles spread outward from the visionary poet of the narrative to include multiple levels of authorship. Closest to the vision, of course, is the speaker of the poem, presumably the sleeping Coleridge, though his identity is only established in the prefatory note. In fact, the speaker is

only given a first-person pronoun at the end of the fragment when he steps outside of the narrative motion and action.

A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw:
It was an Abyssinian maid
And on her dulcimer she played,
Singing of Mount Abora.
Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song,
To such a deep delight 'twould win me,
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! those caves of ice! ("Kubla Khan" 37-47)

Here the invisible cognitive processes involved in this act of reading are brought to the surface of the text for inspection. The sudden appearance of a first person speaker calls attention to the poem as a material object, constructed by an author. The reader is confronted with her own act of reading and the fact of her subconscious immersion in the poem's atmosphere up to this point. She has been like a seasoned driver, traveling unthinkingly to her destination until she comes upon an unexpected sight. A train causes her to pause at a railroad crossing, and she wonders how she arrived there safely when she put so little thought into driving. Absorbed in the sensual immediacy and the movement of the poem, the reader does not realize the poem is composed in tranquility, as a recollection. The poem seems to have been composed organically, in real time as the reader travels along the Arve. However, outside of the text itself, we see that the woken poet

Coleridge writes from a future time of reflection upon his interrupted dream state. He attempts (but fails) to recall the complete poem that was composed in full during his dream. The poem is a constructed space and its multiple layers of authorship further complicate its history. In a prefatory note titled “Of the Fragment of Kubla Khan,” as *The Longman Anthology of British Literature* notes, Coleridge attributes his subject matter to falling asleep while reading about Kubla Khan’s palace and gardens in “Purchas’s Pilgrimage,” “a collection of fantastical accounts of foreign lands by Samuel Purchas (1613),” thus adding another layer of authorship to this composite dream production (614). Finally, outside of the author and his source tale, we get a second poet called upon to validate the worth of this fragment. Lord Byron, “a poet of great and deserved celebrity,” and his publisher John Murray are named as patrons of “Kubla Khan”⁸.

Coleridge’s imposition of these multiple layers of authorship attempts to control “Kubla Khan’s” reception, to ensure the narrative gets understood in a particular way that protects the poet and his unconventional model of poetic production from scrutiny. He showcases a model that counters the imperatives to rationality and composure characteristic of post-Enlightenment culture. The abandon modeled in Coleridge’s dream vision goes against the reigning model of poetry, exemplified by Wordsworth. The levels of authority that encircle the poet figure in “Kubla Khan” depict a poet actively engaging a literary tradition through reading Purchas and associating with Lord Byron. In this way, Coleridge offloads responsibility for the poem to his environment and his friends. However, these protective layers do more than preempt critique. The layers of context impose boundaries for the reading experience: they establish a socially (and professionally) acceptable environment where sensation and perception can enjoy a free play of sorts. The poet is entranced for the composition of the poem, and thus without the

⁸ Though written in 1797, it was not published until 1816 when it appeared alongside *Christabel* and *The Pains of Sleep*, at the behest of Lord Byron. Coleridge had recited the poem one morning while visiting Byron in Piccadilly (Holmes 426).

direction of his conscious mind. He is a reader, engaging in the same sort of cognitive processes as his own readers. He, too, finds himself immersed in seductive tales that take him out of reality. Though he criticizes passive reading in *The Friend* and elsewhere, here Coleridge embraces the physiological and cognitive openness that is characteristic of reading a sensual and sensational text. In Coleridge's model the poet's body takes precedence over the mind. However, Coleridge imposes a balance between sensation and sensibility by creating a space for the free movement of affect within the poem or dream and by calling attention to this constructed space of immersive reading. By halting the forward movement of the poem and imposing structures to contextualize the composition of "Kubla Khan" as a history of reading, Coleridge ensures that his audience recognizes the cognitive mechanisms at work in this ideal interaction with the text. Rather than disallowing a phenomenological experience of the fiction as Wordsworth's egotistical sublime does, Coleridge's poem facilitates sensual absorption for its readers. In fact, the prefatory note to "Kubla Khan" mourns the failure of the poet to transcribe the poem in full. He regrets the interruption of his literary space by a nonliterary reality, but, in replicating this interruption for his readers, Coleridge forces them to evaluate the way their bodies and minds have been at work and learn from it, as he shows he has done himself.

Digressing from Boccaccio: *Isabella's* Modern Setting

Keats's *Isabella; or the Pot of Basil* experiments with structural abnormalities similar to those employed by Coleridge as the poem disrupts the sensual experience of Gothic Romance to bring together writer and reader in joint acts of reading and feeling. Scholars have traditionally argued for a division of labor seen in the opposing forces of the brothers and the lovers in this romance. While the brothers represent the inescapable reality of a modern capitalist economy, a

world “where every maw/The greater on the less feeds evermore” (“Epistle to John Hamilton Reynolds” 94-95), the couple aligns with a world of the romantic imagination endangered by the ever present surveillance of economic and historical reality. In examining this romance through the lens of the Coleridgean poetic model, I seek to move beyond the traditional economic readings done by Kelvin Everest and William Crisman to study the literary market and the writer-reader relationship represented in the various levels of authorship embedded in the text. As “Kubla Khan” relies on multiple frames, “Isabella” also protects the revolutionary power of poetic production in concentric circles of storytelling. The totemic presence of Lorenzo and Isabella’s relationship is framed by the brothers as they peek into the couple’s safe space to read the narrative (their love story) being produced there. Encircling the brother’s acts of reading are the gossips of Florence who echo the lovers’ tragic tale at the poem’s end. Beyond the city walls of Florence and the tale itself, we have Boccaccio’s *Decameron* and its storytelling premise, and beyond Boccaccio we have the poet Keats who interprets Boccaccio for his modern reader.

In *Isabella*, Keats famously digresses from the narrative action to apostrophize Boccaccio and offer justification for his tale to the audience. These interludes have traditionally been read as signs of lingering immaturity as Keats moves from his earliest works (1816-1817) into his *annus mirabilis*, 1819. However, in 1981, Jack Stillinger provided a watershed reading of “Isabella” as anti-romance. Stillinger reads the digressions as Keats’s attempt to modernize the genre of Old Romance with the addition of realism, and his account notes tension within the poem between Keats’s translation and the original tale. Objecting to the way Stillinger reads the text as “divided against itself,” Susan Wolfson proposes an interpretation that “sees Keats taking advantage of his ambivalence [to the values of ‘old Romance’] to devise a genre of tale-telling whose designs are both narrative and deconstructive.” For Wolfson, creating an immersive

reading experience and interrogating the structure of that experience are not necessarily competing objectives within the poem. She writes, “Keats is concerned[...]to reform the way we read romance, even as he entertains us with a romance of sorts” (“Keats’s ‘Isabella’” 251). My own interpretation perhaps can reconcile Stillinger and Wolfson, as I see the realism in Keats’s revisions working to disrupt the reader’s experience of the sensational narrative. By transporting the reader out of the text when the narrative becomes most gripping, Keats calls attention to the invisible cognitive mechanisms that allow for absorption in the narrative. Indeed, as with Coleridge’s interruption of the narrative arc in “Kubla Khan,” Keats’s interjections call attention to the constructedness of the tale and complicate moments of composition and reading, ultimately bringing together the writer and his readers into joint efforts of literary critique and creation.

Through his digressions, Keats aligns himself with his modern reader, a contemporary reader of romance who approaches the text with expectations for the genre. A reader of romance, especially gothic romance, in early nineteenth century England, might expect to be transported into a foreign land, an earlier period, and an aristocratic family. The reader might expect such plot conventions as forbidden love, murder, and the appearance of ghosts. All of these conventions entertain by their exoticism, their fulfillment of fantasy, through the escape from reality and the realm of possibility they offer. As I will show, the digressions in “Isabella” occur at moments of excess sensation, when Lorenzo and Isabella cry into their pillows in longing for each other, when Keats describes the tortuous conditions to which Isabella’s brothers submit their workers, when Isabella exhumes Lorenzo’s corpse from his shallow grave. Keats’s interruptions call attention to genre conventions of the grotesque and indecorous by stepping outside of the text at the moments where sensation verges on the sensational. Ostensibly

censoring the text, Keats adopts a seemingly Wordsworthian mode with his interruptions. He stops the forward movement of the narrative and extricates the reader from their absorption in the text, transporting him or her back to the present moment and encouraging a more reflective reading experience. These interruptions call attention to the storytelling circles at work in the poem and to Keats himself as the creator of the tale. In a way, this serves to police the boundary between the literary and nonliterary, ensuring the reader acknowledge the text is fictional and confined to the space of the page. Nevertheless, Keats's Wordsworthian move becomes a tool for a more egalitarian and sympathetic relationship between the poet and reader. The circles framing this rendition of Boccaccio show the poet as a reader himself. The digressions give the tale a specific history as a reincarnation of Boccaccio's original, and they point to a larger literary tradition of Old Romance that precedes and transcends the historical specificity of Boccaccio. The digressions implicate Keats in the very sentimentalism he calls out. However, this self-implication opens channels of sympathy between the author and reader, so that Keats is safe in his judgment of the reader's sentimentality because he too is prone to lose himself in a compelling, sensational tale. And so, through his digressions, Keats establishes *Isabella* as a joint act of reading Old Romance.

Studying the digressions, I track two distinct voices: first and most obviously, we have the self-conscious reader of Boccaccio. As noted, many scholars have labeled these digressions youthful inconsistencies in Keats's poetic persona; however, these deserve more serious examination in light of other digressions that punctuate the tale. In addition to the apologetic interludes, Keats interrupts stanzas using a prophetic, universalizing voice that waxes upon the larger tradition of the romance genre and its correspondent readership. To begin a careful

examination of the authorial interludes, I will address the apologetic digressions, the first of which we see in Stanzas XIX and XX.

XIX.

O eloquent and famed Boccaccio!
Of thee we now should ask forgiving boon,
And of thy spicy myrtles as they blow,
And of thy roses amorous of the moon,
And of thy lilies, that do paler grow
Now they can no more hear thy ghittern's tune,
For venturing syllables that ill beseem
The quiet glooms of such a piteous theme.

XX.

Grant thou a pardon here, and then the tale
Shall move on soberly, as it is meet;
There is no other crime, no mad assail
To make old prose in modern rhyme more sweet:
But it is done--succeed the verse or fail--
To honour thee, and thy gone spirit greet;
To stead thee as a verse in English tongue,
An echo of thee in the north-wind sung. (145-160)

Keats asks forgiveness of Boccaccio and mourns the passing away of Boccaccio's Italy, the edenic surroundings that first inspired and then listened dutifully to his song. Flattering the author in a move that reads like the epic convention of invoking his muse, Keats declares he is

not making the original tale “more sweet,”⁹ but rather only wishes to honor and preserve the writer and his legacy. Indeed, he wishes to “greet” the “gone spirit” through his own song, thus imagining a social introduction to the author. Yet, he fears he has overstepped the social and literary decorum required of his task. By setting up this pastoral context for the source tale, Keats implies the unnaturalness of his sensational additions to the original. The “glooms” portrayed in Keats’s version of the tale are far from “quiet,” and being so are seemingly ill-suited for a representation of Boccaccio’s theme. Keats here admits that he is working in extremes rather than moderation, but he promises to proceed more “soberly.”¹⁰

Despite acknowledging his failed decorum, Keats defends his intent in a way that reveals exactly how he understands literary heritage. Keats claims that the reinvention and circulation of an old tale is not an improvement upon the original but a continuation of tradition. In rewriting Boccaccio, he honors and preserves a world that is all but lost behind the syllables of a new literary tradition, a new storytelling mode. Yet Keats makes significant changes to the source tale in order to adapt it for his own context. If we look back to the main clause of the stanza, we see the poet uses the plural pronoun “we” instead of taking sole responsibility for any wrongs committed. Keats’s use of “we” extends blame beyond himself and his translation to suggest some greater crime. The betrayal of Boccaccio is not only individual and literary, perhaps, but cultural and historical. And Keats’s revisions introduce some of the most atrocious historical misdeeds that have made Boccaccio’s song, and all it represents of the idyllic in nature and culture, something long forgotten in nineteenth century England.

⁹ Whereas, Reynolds describes his own Decameron reinvention as a “Provence tale...tamed into Northern verse” (qtd. in “Keats’s ‘Isabella’” 156).

¹⁰ This is a false promise, however. In fact, Keats becomes more extreme and grotesque in his treatment of the “piteous theme” and again must defend the even greater liberties he takes with his depiction of the original tale. See the discussion of Stanza XLIX below, beginning “Oh, wherefore all this wormy circumstance.”

Keats's emphasis on institutionalized capitalism is a wholly new addition to the original tale. The brothers' exploits have long intrigued Romanticism scholars: their rather abrupt entrance into the poem and the consequent tonal shift from sentimental romance to bitter critique draw much attention. Though mysterious in nature, the brothers' moneymaking schemes are violent and dehumanizing:

And for them many a weary hand did swelt
In torchèd mines and noisy factories,
And many once proud-quivered loins did melt
In blood from stinging whip—with hollow eyes
Many all day in dazzling river stood,
To take the rich-ored driftings of the flood.
For them the Ceylon diver held his breath,
And went all naked to the hungry shark;
For them his ears gushed blood... (107-115).

Isabella's brothers fragment their workers into functional parts, and such objectification figures synecdochically in the poem: the employees are represented as little more than hands, ears, eyes, and loins. As their employers perceive them, the workers' body parts make up the industrial machine; the brothers can take what they need of these employees and discard the fact of their humanity. The famous "Why were they proud?" interjection (Stanza XVI) follows this series of modern tortures and introduces a nineteenth century critique of the socio-economic system these brother's represent. Keats continues his list of the brother's wrongs punctuating it with the repeated question, "Why were they proud?" There is no answer from Boccaccio, nor is there any anticipated answer from his modern reader. The atrocities multiply and the momentum builds,

but Keats breaks the stanza's rhythm with another grasp at communal identity. He cries, "and again *we* ask aloud,/ Why in the name of Glory were they proud?" (128, my emphasis). This interjection performs two critical tasks. Like the other apologetic digressions, this passage, and Keats's use of the plural pronoun in particular, suggests that the author and reader together object to the liberties taken with the source tale. Reading the narrative together and then stepping outside of the fiction to examine it at work, the author and reader critique the way emotion has gotten the better of the author. He has lost his decorum in the passion of his disgust and outrage. The second and more important task this interjection performs is to show that the author and reader alike object to the abuse of a corrupt socio-economic system. Though "we" are responsible for the loss of Boccaccio's pastoral paradise, "we" are equally able to recognize the horrors of our modern moment.

Keats has inserted a bold critique of the modern setting that informs his own tale, and returning to the apologetic Stanzas XIX and XX, we must note the self-consciousness of "succeed the verse or fail," in light of this audacious revision. Conspicuously set off from the main clause with dashes and located in the middle of Stanza XX, this aside is reminiscent of Coleridge's self-conscious speaker who anticipates his own reception at the end of "Kubla Khan." But Keats's audience is as multi-faceted as his layers of authorship. The address to Boccaccio contextualizes his anxiety as a fear of failing the master or muse; however, we must also acknowledge the pressure of the literary market implicit in "succeed [...] or fail." This poem is widely held to be inspired by Hazlitt's lecture on February 3, 1818, in which he declared that a rewriting of *The Decameron* "could not fail to succeed in the present day" (Hazlitt qtd in Heinzelman 168). Moreover, Keats hails this poem as his "new Romance," following from *Endymion*, which he hastily shrugs off in its Preface. Penned the month before he began

“Isabella,” the “Preface” to *Endymion* characterizes the epic as a “feverish attempt, rather than a deed accomplished.” The poet even calls the effort a “failure.” Thus, Keats’s digression here in *Isabella* registers fear that resurrecting the past for the present literary market will fail as he believes his most recent publication to have done. He fears for its success in the modern market because the grotesque and titillating are what sell. Popular texts sell because of their ability to provide mindless entertainment. As noted above, texts like gothic novels and sensational romances encourage a passive reading posture that does nothing to improve the condition of the modern mind or the modern society more generally. Moreover, because of this hierarchized view of Literature, being a popular writer carries a stigma, the assumption that what one writes is disposable, trash literature. In navigating the practical need for success in the modern literary market, Keats plays at a balancing act where he must at once titillate and educate. He must weigh the moments where the slippage between fiction and reality is productive, as when it teaches us to recognize corruption and abuse of power, against the moments when the slippage makes the passive reader vulnerable to that corruption and abuse. This seems a crucial threshold to the reading (and writing) experience being created in *Isabella*.

Sentimentality, Sensationalism, and the Return of Sensibility

Keats’s experiments with sentimentality and sensationalism in his portrayal of young lovers to show the dangers awaiting those readers who are too caught up in a dreamworld. He begins with an exaggerated depiction of the Old Romance tradition in the relationship of Lorenzo and Isabella. Like Romeo and Juliet, the central players of this tale are introduced as star-crossed young lovers who are as unthinking as they are all-feeling. Critics often label the first stanzas of “Isabella” mawkish and sentimental as the young couple endures the agonies of love-sickness.

These preliminary stages of their love appear in terms of physical illness: their love is a “malady,” a “sick longing,” a “sad plight,” and a “misery” (Stanzas I-VII). Isabella “fell sick” and “fell thin.” Meanwhile, Lorenzo is “fevered” and “anguishèd,” and “his heart beat awfully against his side” (Stanzas V- VI). In such excruciating agony, the two border on suicidal as they cry into their pillows, begging “never to see another night” if the next day they cannot confess their love. Not until Lorenzo’s complexion approaches death does Isabella “[lisp] tenderly” her lover’s name (53-54). All this embellishment, the hyperbolic progression of youthful love-sickness to near-death, would certainly appear mawkish and sentimental if it did not function to undercut any uncritical acceptance of romance over reality. The text does not merely romanticize a love story because doing so might endanger a gullible reader who loses herself in transports of emotion. As Everest notes, the tone of these early stanzas is “not at all sentimental or coyly posed”; rather, this passage establishes “limitations in the characters” (“Isabella in the market-place” 119). Ultimately, he writes, the couple’s self-absorption (or more accurately, absorption in each other and in their romance narrative) leaves them vulnerable, “easy prey” for “the harshly pragmatic, unloving, and profit-seeking world of the brothers.” He argues that Keats extends this vulnerability of the young lovers to indicate a more pervasive vulnerability: “the limitations inherent in the character of the dream world” (“Isabella in the market-place” 120). Ever treading the line between fiction and reality, Keats and his readers must awake from the dream of Boccaccio’s Old Romance to arrive at a sophisticated engagement with the modern world.

Once they have declared their love, the couple becomes representative of poetic production, but their affair continues to be characteristic of a conventional sentimental romance, not the sophisticated sensibility of a poetic master. The two are “Twin roses” enjoying each other’s “inward fragrance” whenever they meet (*Isabella* 75-6). Their first kiss is figured in

terms of poetry: his lips “poesied with hers in dewy rhyme” (70). Isabella and Lorenzo are embowered amongst hyacinth and musk, and their affair happens in “the amorous dark” (85, 206). The floral imagery evokes the natural harmony of Boccaccio’s Italy, but, as we have seen, Keats’s translation of Boccaccio “ill-beseem[s]” this idyllic tradition. Disengaging the fictional from reality, he sets up the conventions of Old Romance, the poetic tradition his readers expect, in order to show that this fiction is untenable in the modern world. Keats continues his description of the couple’s affair by noting they were “unknown of any, free from whispering tale” (86). The strange emphasis here on local gossip introduces the competing motifs of secrecy and storytelling. The couple does not want their love story read or told. The line reinforces Keats’s controlling interest in how romances become translated for good or bad in various acts of retelling. Even more simply, this line foreshadows the “many a jealous conference” Isabella’s brothers hold as they plot what to do about the disagreeable affair (169). Foreshadowing the brothers’ conspiracy introduces the most important nuance of this secrecy: the couple’s vulnerability. They are vulnerable perhaps because they turn inward, because they become all-consumed in their romance. While, the couple’s romance is protected against a misreading by the local gossips who might perpetuate an undesirable translation of their story, their romance narrative is read and badly received by Isabella’s brothers. Their objectionable tale is then interrupted by the brothers’ economy of violence and destruction.

When Lorenzo’s ghost visits Isabella, he is described in terms very similar to Coleridge’s mariner. His bright eyes and strange voice captivate. Like the poet from “Kubla Khan,” Coleridge’s ancient mariner is another vehicle for a prophetic message. He is doomed to wander the margins of society alone, distanced from humanity, and forced to perpetuate his tale. Entranced and entrancing, the mariner circulates his narrative by holding his audience with a

hypnotic eye, compelling the audience to listen until the tale his complete¹¹. Another life-in-death figure, Lorenzo's eyes, too, are "wild" and he is "upon the skirts of human-nature dwelling," while Isabella is "distant in Humanity" (*Isabella* 289, 306, 312). He "chant[s] alone the holy mass," cut off from community but obeying the demands of a higher power to pay heed to truth. Now a ghost, Lorenzo is referred to as "it." He is no longer human, but rather he is an echo of humanity. And like the ancient mariner, Lorenzo's act of storytelling leaves his auditor "a sadder and a wiser" person for having heard the tale (*Rime* 625). Describing the ghost's strange voice, Keats writes it was like a "palsied Druid's harp unstrung," and his tale "did unthread the horrid woof/Of the late darken'd time" (*Isabella* 286, 292-93). The negating prefix in each of these lines suggests the work Lorenzo's tale performs: it repeals the magic of Old Romance and uncovers the disturbing reality that frames their love story. When questioned about Lorenzo's disappearance, the brothers spin a yarn, weave a tale, but Lorenzo "unthread[s]" these lies. Like the brothers who interrupt the poetry of their love affair, Lorenzo disrupts and unweaves the fiction the brother's perpetuate, calling attention to the mechanisms that lie invisible underneath.

As in Coleridge's *Rime*, what is most interesting in the scene with Lorenzo's ghost is not the message itself, but rather the pattern of transference, the way in which the tale moves between the bodies engaged in its telling and its transformative effect after the moment of its telling. What is most interesting is the way both the mariner and Lorenzo's ghost interrupt and disrupt, creating stories from stories, reality from fiction. Katey Castellano writes,

Whether through the longing for epic wholeness or the longing for romance,
Keats explores the moment when the fantasies that allow for the coherence of a

¹¹ Importantly, the mariner interrupts a love story to convey his truth. His audience is a wedding guest who is wrenched out of his own narrative trajectory, walking to the chapel.

civilized society break down; then in response to this breakdown he proposes a responsible fidelity to the necessarily fragmentary nature of the illusions rather than their hasty rebuilding. In other words, Keats's [...] *Isabella* reveal[s] the inverse of Keats's famous statement that '[t]he imagination may be compared to Adam's dream--he awoke and found it truth': his poetry also exposes the delusive fantasies that create our reality" (Castellano 36).

The concentric circles of storytelling act as containment fields for the gothic sensationalism and the mawkishness of young love that at once show the fragility of the writer's talent (his susceptibility to critique, his precarious position in the literary marketplace) and the potential for sentimentalism in a naive readership that gets caught up in the sensory overload of romance. Nevertheless, these moments of containment become markers themselves of the gothic sensationalism Keats attempts to control. They uncover what is supposed to remain hidden--the authorial hand that is constructing the tale, piecing together like Dr. Frankenstein the fragments of narrative bodies to approximate a narrative whole.

In *Isabella* and *Rime*, the integrity of the tale itself doesn't seem to be fragile, rather the moment of its transference is endangered. If we look again to Coleridge's bibliographic layers, he seems almost as anxious as Wordsworth to ensure the tale itself be received in a certain way. Coleridge's marginal glosses added to the poem in 1817 seek to direct the interpretation of his poem and add a moral and philosophical explanation for the otherworldly, mythological events of the mariner's tale. Yet, these marginal glosses occur outside of the act of storytelling within the poem. These glosses are not aides for the wedding guest's lesson, but rather they are aides for a modern audience's understanding of the tale itself (as it has been translated by the speaker who witnesses its transmission in one particular instance), the moral imperative to circulate the tale,

and its circulation within the text. The glosses and the reception anxiety they imply, then, suggest that the tale's meaning is very much constructed in the moment of transfer from writer to reader. Success and failure are not determined by the soundness of the text itself or even the poet's maturity and talent. Success and failure are measurements of the co-creation that happens in acts of reading, when the reader and writer work together in the space of the text (and even beyond) to create meaning. Indeed the anxiety represented in "Kubla Khan" and *Rime* studied together suggests that the very composition of the poem actually takes place at its moment of transfer, the meeting of the writer and his reader. When the poet is distracted from the transcription of his vision, the composition fails, and its communication will always be incomplete. If we can say that composition fails here, then for *Rime*, a poem in which the anxiety is ostensibly located after the point of composition, in the moment of the tale's circulation, we might conclude that in fact, the tale is complete from the very beginning, that it comes to the poet and the reader and the text at the same moment. That it pre-exists what would traditionally be called its composition, the moment pen hits the page.

Like the stories circulated by the ancient mariner and Lorenzo's ghost, the act of reading, for Keats, stages an uncanny re-emergence of thoughts repressed, hidden, and seemingly lost. Keats writes in an 1818 letter to his publisher John Taylor, "Poetry should surprise by a fine excess and not by Singularity—it should strike the Reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a Remembrance" (*Letters* I. 238). Poetry should seem an extension or an uncovering of the reader's own thoughts. This formula imagines poetry as a form of simulation rather than an actual transmission of the author's thoughts in the reader's own mind. Reading, therefore, acts as an elusive sleight of hand working in such a way that the text seems at once to convey both the writer's and reader's thoughts. This phenomenon of paralleled minds is

an illusion: the poetry should “appear almost a Remembrance.” However, as we have seen in Chapter 1, for Keats, illusion is reality to the perceiver as long as the same affective state has been activated. If the perceiver’s (or reader’s) body registers the affect witnessed from the text, imagining and experiencing (sleeping and waking, fiction and reality) are indistinguishable. This letter also positions reading as an experience of recovery of high thoughts forgotten. The thoughts are like the reader’s, though they seem to have been lost in the cobwebbed corners of the mind. With this brief formula in mind, reading for Keats seems always necessarily a gothic experience, an uncanny re-emergence of thoughts always already in existence. They are at once of the reader and not of the reader, unfamiliar but coming upon Isabella and the wedding guest in a surprising excess of strange familiarity. These thoughts disrupt the narrative and they disrupt the everyday life of the characters. They prevent the wedding guest from attending the ceremony. They teach their readers or listeners a nightmarish truth. They call attention to the cognitive mechanisms under which the reader has been operating, the state of sleepwalking in which the reader has existed and can no longer exist. To see how this plays out in Keats’s gothic romance, let us turn to the most sensational moment in the poem.

 Laboring for three hours with a nurse by her side, Isabella appears to be a woman giving birth, a point that would not have been lost on Keats, the trained physician. Moreover, Isabella carefully tends the basil plant as though it is her child. Having exhumed his body, Isabella decapitates Lorenzo. She carries his head home, combs its hair, straightens its eyelashes, and wraps it in a perfumed silk scarf, all the while kissing it and crying over it (Stanzas L-LII). Finally, she entombs the head in a garden pot and plants basil over top of it. All day and night, she tends the plant with a “continual shower” of tears “from her dead eyes” (452-3). Isabella’s tears fertilize Lorenzo’s head, and, from this the two lovers, produce a lush plant.

While understanding this as a symbolic childbirth is compelling and valuable, Isabella's exhumation of Lorenzo's body can also be understood as an act of reading and writing. Isabella fills the old skull and dead bones with life to resurrect their old romance. Keats interrupts her labor at the grave with a rhetorical question for all readers of romance:

XLV

Who hath not loiter'd in a green church-yard,
And let his spirit, like a demon-mole,
Work through the clayey soil and gravel hard,
To see scull, coffin'd bones, and funeral stole;
Pitying each form that hungry Death hath marr'd,
And filling it once more with human soul?
Ah! this is holiday to what was felt
When Isabella by Lorenzo knelt. (353-360).

Reading gothic romance (or even reading tombstones in an actual church-yard) is here figured as resurrection from the grave. A reader revitalizes the corpse with his imagination. Sending forth his spirit to dig through clayey soil and gravel hard, the reader immerses himself in the material sublime of the grave. He uncovers the emptied body of a text to fill it again with imagined life. He joins the negative with capability, marries sensation and volition.

At the very least, the pot represents a continuation of that poetic production illustrated by the couple's first kiss. As she cries over the pot, the basil, a product of her sensibility and his sensibility (his head is the foundation for the plant, after all), thrives. Her emotional response to Lorenzo's murder is all-consuming and destructive. Indeed crying over the relic of her dead lover is the most sentimental image in the entire poem. She is so overwhelmed with her

sentiment that she becomes insensible to her surroundings. Keats records how Isabella “forgot the stars, the moon, and sun,/And she forgot the dells where waters run,/And she forgot the chilly autumn breeze” (417-20). She has no awareness of life outside of her replacement romance. She is again out of sync with nature, having “no knowledge when the day was done,” and not knowing when the new day began (421-22). Having again lost herself in a flood of emotion, Isabella is vulnerable to the outside disruption. But, why does the plant which represents the couple’s poetic romance flourish in the midst of her excess sentimentality? Can we critique this scene as mawkish given that the plant thrives? Or to bring this line of inquiry back to the literary marketplace, is a poem automatically a literary failure if it bears the mark of sensationalism or sentimentalism?

Perhaps the most famous of Keats’s interjections occurs at Lorenzo’s graveside. Keats halts the narrative during the disentanglement to justify his obsessive attention to the grotesque scene. He exclaims, “Ah! wherefore all this wormy circumstance?/ Why linger at the yawning tomb so long?/ O for the gentleness of old Romance,/The simple plaining of a minstrel’s song!” (385-89). Once again, this digression anticipates his audience’s objection to overt sensationalism. Importantly, the audience he anticipates here must be a literary one, for as I have shown, a reader of modern romance would not likely question these common conventions of popular gothic narratives. Yet this digression serves a dual purpose in calling attention to the sensationalism for the common reader’s benefit, and justifying his choices to a skeptical literary peer. With his predictable nostalgia, Keats waxes upon the traditional form of Old Romance which modern literature has outgrown. But a closer examination shows that this passage goes beyond mere lament to marry his double purposes of education and justification. Old Romance is the simple plaining of a minstrel’s song. The word “simple” here echoes the “simple misery” that was

Isabella's love-sickness before learning of Lorenzo's murder. The pleasure in Old Romance, like the pleasure in the simple plaining of a simple misery, is the unconscious experience of too much sensation, a fully embodied experience of the emotion without the addition of a philosophical mind. Keats criticizes those who would experience the emotional upheaval of love found and love lost without questioning the context for the aesthetic experience, without seeking a rational reflection for the experience other than the moment of feeling itself. If then simple misery is all sensation and sentiment without sensibility, Keats's digressions offer the necessary space for sensibility to return.

Awaking the morning after her vision, Isabella gives her only speech in the entire poem:

XLII

'Ha! ha!' said she, 'I knew not this hard life,

I thought the worst was simple misery;

I thought some Fate with pleasure or with strife

Portioned us –happy days, or else to die;

But there is crime—a brother's bloody knife!

Sweet Spirit, thou hast schooled my infancy.' (329-34)

Here, Lorenzo's ghost has called Isabella out of her absorption in their romance to educate her in the reality of the world's corruption. Until now, she naively believed "misery"—the term used for their love-sickness earlier in the poem—to be the worst experience in life, but learning of Lorenzo's murder, she understands there is crime, betrayal and, worse yet, having to live on after waking to this knowledge.

Pushing the envelope of artistic decorum is the means for producing sensibility.

Presenting sensation seemingly without restraint, the real and gritty, "the very tale" moves us

beyond the immaturity of Old Romance to arrive at a state of awareness that can inspire action and change (*Isabella* 391). “New romance” takes on a particular meaning; more than just a fresh start for Keats after *Endymion*, it is reinventing the way tales are told and read. The richness of new romance, narrative synthesized with reality, engenders a reading experience that extends sensation to connect to the real world. His digressions do not insulate the narrative, protecting the space for this poetic model as we see in Coleridge, but rather they offer a rich critique of the outside from a space where the inside and outside combine in the text of the poem¹².

Castellano reminds us, “The Chamber of Maiden Thought, which arises from a world ‘full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression,’ [...] opens doors towards an ultimate unknown--not only to physical death, but to an acknowledgement of death that engenders creative and ethical potential” (Castellano 35). Realities such as the pressures of the literary market and the oppressive modern environment of poverty and disease in which Keats composes must come to bear on the ideal of Old Romance and social cohesion, of a material sublime that fosters sympathy and social change. By weaving together these opposites, by punctuating the material sublime with reminders that this productive state is cultivated artifice, Keats creates a paradoxical reading experience where immersion is both allowed and disallowed, where the paradise of Boccaccio’s Old Romance is lost and found.

¹² Before leaving Stanza XLIX: I should note how “it doth not well belong/ To speak” is further evidence of Keats’s self consciousness as a reader and writer. He is essentially calling out his digression, saying it does not belong to this poetic form. Here he speaks, then, to say he will be silent and let the tale itself speak. However, this appears like reverse psychology. Keats will let his readers see for themselves what they will find in this Old Romance, but only after he has told them what they will find there.

Chapter 3

“Unfit for Ladies”: The Ethics of Negatively Capable Reading in Barbauld and Keats

Scholars have long followed a critical narrative with its roots in the Lockhart reviews of Keats’s 1817 volume as they debate whether the young poet overcomes the bad influences of sensuality and political interest that entrap and class him. Indeed, this question of whether he transcends his circumstances to enter a realm of the ideal has a twentieth-century heritage from Lionel Trilling and Aileen Ward to more recent investigation from Marjorie Levinson. Ronald Tetreault explains, “A concomitant of this body of criticism is the belief that Keats developed as a poet precisely to the extent that he was able to outgrow mere sensation and surmount it by reaching for a higher kind of truth intuited by the imagination” (Tetreault 59). The tensions between mind and body at the center of eighteenth century moral philosophy and Romantic poetry percolate under the surface of an ascension story driven by the question: can the poet overcome the entrapments of his bodily circumstances to find the freedom of imaginative play in a higher, abstracted plane of intellectual and spiritual existence?

Negative capability is Keats’s vehicle through which a life of sensations, immersion in materiality, leads to a transcendence of the self, or *cogito*. Rather than a transcendence in the traditional, spiritual sense, negative capability is a movement beyond the self through a dispersion of identity outward into other bodies. This openness to the identities of others is a moral imperative for the poet. As discussed in Chapter 1, Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* shows how approximating social interaction molds sympathetic readers by activating the imagination, and the writers of the Leigh Hunt Circle, including Keats, developed their own moral philosophy along a similar cognitive and behavioral model. These writers believed that affective aesthetic experiences such as reading poetry or attending a play led to physiological effects in the body and brain, expanding the imaginative faculties of a reader by replicating the

phenomenological experiences she witnessed in others on her own body. As William Hazlitt understood, “impassioned poetry,” enhances consciousness and the “moral and intellectual part of our nature,” ultimately sharpening the “will to act” (*Misc. Works* 5). Such biological changes worked to inspire outward behavior in the forms of charitable deeds.

As a reader of Smith and a follower of Hazlitt, Keats envisions a mind unbounded by the individual body as a means to social improvement through fellow-feeling and sympathetic engagement. Indeed, Keats believes the poet was to be a physician to the people, that he could do more public good as an artist than as a medical professional. As a poet, his purpose is to offer a panacea of sorts to an ailing public, and Keats’s ideal poetical character offers the most effective means to achieve the social goals of poetry. Cognition and social affect bring into focus a vision of hope at the core of Keats’s negative capability. Refusing to crystallize the poetic identity in a single body or a single experience, the model of negative capability substitutes fact with imagination, certainty with curiosity. Ever-changing and ever-growing, the negatively capable poet and reader expand their embodied experience and alter their brain chemistry and its composition. In turn, these physiological changes encourage social action that fulfills the moral imperatives of literature as Keats and the Hunt Circle saw them, the imperatives of brotherly love and charity.

In this chapter, I will explore the physiological mechanics of negative capability that enables a shared embodied experience through what distributed cognitive philosophy calls direct realism. I argue that Keats believed such a direct translation of phenomenology was the most effective means to teach the social sympathy and generate civic action. While male characters like Iago and Achilles frequently stand in for the illustrations of negative capability in Keats letters, the female body and mind become the primary vehicle for negative capability in his

poems. Indeed, the fluidity of identity that marks Keats's poetic model is itself culturally coded feminine, and by studying Keats's mechanics against techniques of women writers such as Anna Laetitia Barbauld, I conclude that Keats's own reading of women writers influences the way he imagines affect to circulate in moments of shared cognition. Finally, I explore ways in which Keats's connection to women and women writers leads him to resist their influence, becoming defensive of his identity. Such resistance seems to disrupt the openness characteristic of his poetic model. Therefore, I bring the problem of Keats's misogyny to bear on his cognitive poetics model to judge the ethics of a permeable, sympathetic self that can enter the space of another, especially a feminine other, while often refusing to be similarly penetrated.

Negative Capability and "The Autonomy of Affect"

The aesthetic experience facilitated through negatively capable reading comes through a deep immersion into sensation and materiality; however, the sensations and materiality experienced originate at the site of other bodies. What is created from the interpenetration of experiences is fluidity and uncertainty of self, where the identities of others continually press upon and merge into one's own. Negative capability dissolves the ego boundaries¹³ of individual lived experience in such a way that goes beyond a sympathetic identification that is merely imagined, for a merely imagined sympathetic identification maintains the disconnect inherent in representation. Imagined sympathetic identification says, I feel "as if" I am singing with full-throated ease. Negative capability broaches a direct realism of shared feeling and cooperative cognition. In her book, *The Feeling Body*, distributed cognition theorist Giovanna Colombetti

¹³ I use the term "ego" not as part of Freud's map of the human psyche but as it was in use in the Romantic period. The *OED* defines "ego" as, "that which is symbolized by the pronoun I; the conscious thinking subject, as opposed to the *non-ego* or object," citing usage entries from William Cowper's *Let* (1789) and the *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. 50 (1829). In fact, the *Edinburgh Review* entry reads, "In every act of consciousness we distinguish a self or ego."

presents a phenomenological approach to empathy called “direct realism,” which I discuss in Chapter 1. Colombetti challenges Theory Theory¹⁴ and Simulation Theory¹⁵, which both see a stage of mediation between perceiving and feeling the emotions of another. She says, while these approaches “make[...] the minds of others never directly experientially accessible,” phenomenological understandings of empathy believe in a direct realism between the mental states of the observer and observed. Seeing a balled up fist, for example, I “live” the tenseness of the fist (Colombetti 130). Therefore, a work of art such as literature that engages the imagination to replicate smell, sound, taste, or movement writes feelings in the brain and on the body of its reader. It produces a joint aesthetic experience, blurring subject and object, author and reader, through shared sensation and the correspondent formation and transformation of cognition. By studying the way negative capability occurs on and through the bodies involved in the sympathetic exchange, we see how Keats and other Romantic writers imagined the aesthetic experience of reading to dissolve the boundaries of individual lived experiences and to collapse the gap otherwise endemic to representation – to overcome the “as if.” The physiological mapping of negative capability demonstrates that through negatively capable reading, the mind is

¹⁴ Theory Theory (TT) is a hypothesis aligned with Theory of Mind, which I explore in Chapter 2. Theory of Mind maintains that we attribute mental states to behaviors or other outward cues. Theory Theory derives from Piaget’s developmental psychology and represents the earliest stages of mind-reading, a “naive” theory of mind that we use as “little scientists” when first forming the cognitive architecture and knowledge of how to interact with the world. The term “Theory Theory” derives from the notion that this process is represented in the mind and is structured like a scientific inquiry.

¹⁵ Simulation Theory (ST) is another hypothesis on the precise function of Theory of Mind. Shanton and Goldman (2010) explain the differences between ST and TT: “Rejecting the TT emphasis on theoretical inference, ST (in its original form) says that people employ imagination, mental pretense, or perspective taking (‘putting oneself in the other person’s shoes’) to determine others’ mental states. A mentalizer simulates another person by first creating pretend states (e.g., pretend desires and beliefs) in her own mind that correspond to those of the target. She then inputs these pretend states into a suitable cognitive mechanism, which operates on the inputs and generates a new output (e.g., a decision). This new state is taken ‘off line’ and attributed or assigned to the target” (1).

not confined by one form of physicality but exists among and between the bodies of writers, readers, and the texts they share.

Keats first mentions negative capability in a letter to his brothers dating December 1817. He briefly links the characteristic to Shakespeare, attributing the great English playwright's success to this quality. Keats declares, "several things dovetailed in my mind, & at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason" (*Letters* II. 213). Negative capability is the ability to exist in negative space, the mental spaces of uncertainty and indeterminacy, the temporal spaces of pre-expression. Most notably, the negatively capable person is not "irritably" reaching for resolution, for a way out of the indefinite. The qualification "irritably" indicates that one can maintain negative capability while pursuing fact and reason depending upon the intensity of that search. Perhaps for a poet-physician less than a year removed from the operating theater, fact and reason still bear consequence, but when such a search dominates the attention, capability dwindles into finitude. Irritable reaching would seem a symptom of this type of mind¹⁶.

A key trait of living in uncertainties is a fluid identity. In later reprisals of Shakespeare's *je ne sais quoi*, Keats describes the "camelion poet," who is "continually in for - and filling some other Body":

As to the poetical Character itself (I mean that sort of which, if I am any thing

¹⁶ Interestingly, while he designates this ideal poetic characteristic a capability, thereby suggesting a degree of control in cultivating it, Keats does not claim agency in the piecing together of ideas to form this theory. He did not reach after this theory. The notion coalesces for him from a stockpile of thoughts (facts and reason, we might assume) in his mind.

[sic], I am a Member; that sort distinguished from the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone) it is not itself - it has no self - it is every thing [sic] and nothing - It has no character - it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated - It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher, delights the camelion Poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things any more than from its taste for the bright one; because they both end in speculation. (*Letters I. 157*)

Keats defines the Wordsworthian or egotistical sublime as “a thing per se” that “stands alone.” A Wordsworth, as opposed to a Shakespeare, is individuated, a virtuous philosopher not reliant upon other bodies, but one who is static and certain. The ideal poetical character, on the other hand, is paradoxically, unpoetical because of its lack of identity-- if it has an identity, it is one of mystery, doubt, uncertainty: one of capability-- the potential to become and never simply be. “High or low, rich or poor,” Iago or Imogen, the poet lives in the space between identities, between selves. Keats employs a catalogue of opposites to make his point that the poet exists in nonexistence, the between space of becoming, the space of movement, the space between people, where experience and feeling move and are shared.

In a description that approaches Keats’s existing in uncertainties, Sonia Hofkosh writes, “affect theory is less interested in the fixed identity of the individual subject (the particular body) than in ‘the doings of bodies’ as an ongoing condition of subjectivity *per se*; in such ‘doings’ or movements, even in the ‘slightest, most literal displacement,’ the body ‘feels itself moving’ and thus, as Brian Massumi contends, glimpses the potential of its own (trans)formation” (85).

Indeed, Massumi's essay "The Autonomy of Affect" (2003)¹⁷ theorizes affect as virtual, as an excess, an intensity that happens in the lost half-second of transmission between sensation and consciousness, body and mind, signification and sign. Massumi says virtuality as such changes the way we understand the body. He defines his idea:

The body is as immediately virtual as it is actual. The virtual, the pressing crowd of incipencies and tendencies, is a realm of potential. In potential is where futurity combines, unmediated, with pastness, where outsides are infolded, and sadness is happy (happy because the press to action and expression is life). The virtual is a lived paradox where what are normally opposites coexist, coalesce, and connect; where what cannot be experienced cannot but be felt[...] Since the virtual is unliveable even as it happens, it can be thought of as a form of superlinear abstraction that does not obey the law of the excluded middle, that is organized differently but is inseparable from the concrete activity and expressivity of the body. The body is as immediately abstract as it is concrete; its activity and expressivity extend, as on their underside, into an incorporeal, yet perfectly real, dimension of pressing potential. (Massumi 9)

Massumi's virtual (affect) is generative in a way that perpetuates, translates, and reconfigures. Always in the act of becoming, in the moments of formation and transformation, the virtual functions as a process of imagination much like negative capability.

Like aesthetic experiences, the phenomenon of virtuality thrives on sensation and evades the neatness of signification. The neat philosophy, the explaining in too much detail of Wordsworth's egotistical sublime, can be compared to the way affect becomes emotion through

¹⁷ Published as a standalone essay on Massumi's website, "The Autonomy of Affect" also appears as the first chapter in his 2003 book *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*.

the application of language. Massumi explains that the insertion of language into an image narrative changes the nature of the affective feedback loops. This effectively translates affect into emotion, moving potential into existence, specifically social existence:

Language doubles the flow of images, on another level, on a different track. There is a redundancy of resonance that plays up or amplifies (feeds back disconnection, enabling a different connectivity), and a redundancy of signification that plays out or linearizes (jumps the feedback loop between vital function and meaning into lines of socially valorized action and reaction) (Massumi 4)

The resonance that happens when language is applied to phenomenological experience is a sort of static intensity. There is a reverberation because, as Massumi cleverly notes, the “skin is faster than the word” (4). Autonomic response occurs and then there is a repetition or redundancy, a re-registry of the experience or event on another level, for better, for worse, or for nothing.

Massumi defines this reverberation as the autonomy of affect, an excess that eludes delimitation in language or even embodiment. I quote his definition here at length:

The autonomy of affect is its participation in the virtual. Its autonomy is its openness. Affect is autonomous to the degree to which it escapes confinement in the particular body whose vitality, or potential for interaction, it is. Formed, qualified, situated perceptions and cognitions fulfilling functions of actual connection or blockage, are the capture and closure of affect. Emotion is the intensest (most contracted) expression of that capture – and of the fact that something has always and again escaped. Something remains unactualized,

inseparable from but unassimilable to any particular, functionally anchored perspective. (14-15).

Most importantly, we must note from both of these explanations that emotion is the socially accepted form of affect, the delimited categorization of the passions' overflow. This is the imposition of a structure, a narrative. For Keats's negative capability allows for reiteration and reverberation through open ends and enigmas of embodied experience left un-intellectualized, and this is a revolutionary declaration of openness and interconnection that leads to the moral sentiment of sympathy.

Keats's Effeminacy of Style; Barbauld's Feminine Poetics

This new way of understanding negative capability as a physiological poetics of fellow-feeling must be contextualized within the dominant discourse of poetic style and purpose among early nineteenth century writers. The emphasis on sensuality and embodied experience that marks Keats's poetry and facilitates the shared cognitive experiences of negative capability is coded feminine by Keats's contemporaries and modern readers alike. For this reason, I take Keats reading of and writing about women as an occasion for my chapter. Keats's negative capability has been praised by Adrienne Rich and others as patently feminine, and Anne Mellor writes that the sexual and gender ambiguity of Keats's poetry, what she calls his "ideological cross-dressing," illustrates his experimentation with feminine Romanticism (171). Nevertheless, the gordian knot of Keats's self-proclaimed "not a right feeling towards Women" has yet to be untangled in Romantic scholarship. In many instances, misogyny inhibits the poet's negative capability as he seems to reassert his ego boundaries, prohibiting a penetration of the self or a dispersal of his cognition into the space of a woman. Heightened by a perceived lack of power,

the poet's misogyny inhibits penetration of the self or dispersal of his cognition into the physical and intellectual space of a woman. Indeed, experimenting with a poetic model that is culturally coded feminine appears to cause him anxiety, and he frequently falls into defensive stance. However, such failings are not necessarily an abdication of his negative capability. Rather, Keats's defensive response appears a symptom of it, as the poet reacts to feelings of social dispossession and disadvantage much like the women poets with whom he has connected.

In his 1822 essay "On Effeminacy of Character," William Hazlitt refers specifically to Keats's poetry as an example of the sensual excess characteristic of effeminacy. Of the quality Hazlitt says,

Effeminacy of character arises from a prevalence of the sensibility over the will; or it consists in a want of fortitude to bear pain or to undergo fatigue, however urgent the occasion [...] They live in the present moment, are the creatures of the present impulse (whatever it may be)—and beyond that, the universe is nothing to them [...] They lie on beds of roses, and spread their gauze wings to the sun and summer gale, and cannot bear to put their tender feet to the ground, much less to encounter the thorns and briers of the world. (*Table-talk* 346)

Hazlitt determines the quality of a person's character according to how he or she attends to sensation. In this model, he develops a standard based upon how much sensation and what kind of sensation is tolerable to a person. There is never too much sensation or even the wrong kind of sensation if the will of the individual is firm enough to withstand it, and a will that can withstand pain and fatigue is evidence of a manly character. Hazlitt writes of Keats in this same essay: "I cannot help thinking that the fault of Mr. Keats's poems was a deficiency in masculine energy of style," and "there is a want of action, of character, and so far of imagination, but there is

exquisite fancy. All is soft and fleshy, without bone or muscle. We see in him the youth without the manhood of poetry” (*Table-talk* 355, 356). Hazlitt deconstructs the poet’s anatomy to remove the possibility for action from his sensation. As he stands accused here, Keats is all soft flesh and no muscular motion. To Hazlitt, Keats’s style is feminine, without the strength of will necessary for his sensibility to field the world’s briers and thorns. Damned as ineffective, Keats sinks like Saturn, his composing hand, “nerveless, listless, dead,/ Unsceptred” (I. 505).

Much of Hazlitt’s gendering of sensibility echoes Smith’s discussion of judgment and conduct in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Smith employs the metaphor of a “man in the breast” to explore the limitations of sensibility, to ask how much feeling is too much. Ultimately, he seeks to find the optimal balance between susceptibility to external feelings and internal resilience against influences. The man in the breast is an “impartial spectator,” enabling a person to judge a situation and act according to what will promote the greatest good. Smith declares:

The man who feels the full distress of the calamity which has befallen him, who feels the whole baseness of the injustice which has been done to him, but who feels still more strongly what the dignity of his own character requires; who does not abandon himself to the guidance of the undisciplined passions which his situation might naturally inspire; but who governs his whole behaviour and conduct according to those restrained and corrected emotions which the great inmate, the great demi-god within the breast prescribes and approves of; is alone the real man of virtue, the only real and proper object of love, respect, and admiration. (VI. iii. 18)

For Smith, and perhaps Hazlitt as well, the key to the ideal moral character is the “restrained and corrected emotions.” When under the command of the will, feeling can inform behavior by

providing wisdom through sympathy and also judgment. Smith further explains fellow-feeling and the action it must inspire,

Our sensibility, however, both to our own injuries and to our own misfortunes, though generally too strong, may likewise be too weak. The man who feels little for his own misfortunes must always feel less for those of other people, and be less disposed to relieve them. The man who has little resentment for the injuries which are done to himself, must always have less for those which are done to other people, and be less disposed either to protect or to avenge them. (VI. iii. 18)

The eighteenth century model of sympathy and judgment, the man in the breast, presumes the necessity of a ruling *cogito*, a character that can step outside of the immediacy of the feeling body to assess rationally the body in interaction with other bodies, and, in doing so, choose the course of action that will bring the most good to the most number of people. The character Hazlitt describes and Smith theorized before him seems quite the opposite of Keats's poetics. Hazlitt and Smith¹⁸ see action as most effective when there is a controlling will to inform and guide the passions. Keats's feminine poetics sees potential in the relatively free movement of the feeling between bodies. Affect theory offers insight into the contrast between Hazlitt's theory of action or motion and Keats's. If we remember that, according to Massumi, emotion is the socially coded form of affect, we can look back to Smith and Hazlitt to see a preference for emotion, for a command over the pressing potential of affect, or "undisciplined passions," that threaten to overwhelm. For Smith and Hazlitt unchecked sensibility leads to self-absorption, when the proper use of the emotions is to turn the individual's attention to the needs of his

¹⁸ My conservative reading of Smith's sympathy sees that, even as he theorizes the movement of affect between bodies in terms of sympathy, Smith is containing and constraining affect – turning it into emotion and representation, thereby keeping the boundaries between selves intact. This reading runs counter to an influential account of Smith's sympathy by David Marshall in *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy* (1988).

brothers and sisters. However, for Massumi and the pressing identities of Keats's negative capability that anticipate Massumi's theories, the lack of a controlling will leaves room for perpetual motion and action, for self-dispersal rather than self-absorption. Labeling affect as emotion is what limits the potential of affect to proliferate and disperse into a variety of bodies. Such proliferation and movement is what inspires sympathy and in turn change.

Keats relied upon women writers as sources for his own technique and content. Most famously, he admired Mary Tighe's Spenserian verses and imitated much of the lavish imagery in his own poetics as late as the 1820 volume. Keats's own letters recognize a debt to "mother Radcliffe," and he has also been linked to Mary Wollstonecraft in an intriguing close reading of *Lamia* against *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* by Maneck Daruwala. The reading experience cultivated by Keats's poetics of sensibility enacts the shared and embodied affect that teaches sympathy, but this sensibility began with women poets like Anna Laetitia Barbauld, whose writing places the self as a feeling body in tangible space. In his essay "Romantic Poetry: The I Altered," Stuart Curran recovers the women poets of the late eighteenth century and their fundamental contributions to the Romantic literary movement. He argues that the poetry of sensibility arising from these women writers, the cult of sensibility, and the bluestocking coterie is "at base a literature of psychological exploration, and it is the foundation on which Romanticism was reared" (Curran 196). Rather than Hazlitt's effeminate poet, who "cannot bear to put their tender feet to the ground, much less to encounter the thorns and briers of the world," women's writing demonstrates an "uncompromising materiality" (Curran 200). According to Hazlitt, an unchecked sensibility is a character flaw that inhibits participation in the world, but the uncompromising materiality of feminine poetics cannot help but encounter the various pains and pleasures of lived experience.

Feminine poetics, as Curran defines it here, enacts Massumi's affective virtuality. A montage of physicality, the quotidian focus of women's writing sees things as things, without reaching toward a symbolic meaning. In this way the women's poetry of this era evades a totalizing narrative in preference of atmosphere or ambiance. The quotidian and the catalogue place the reader in a position between sense and full cognitive registry by evading the same kind of "masculine" poetic verve and consensus that marks Wordsworth's philosophical neatness. Like asserting the reiterative and enigmatic, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," this evasion precludes the stasis of a neatly philosophized lyric with its bones and muscle perfectly contained inside a boundary of flesh. Curran writes, "the void at the center of sensibility should alert us to a profound awareness among these poets of being themselves dispossessed, figured through details they do not control, uniting an unstructurable longing of sensibility with the hard-earned sense of thingness. That the threat of a collapse into this void is generally averted is, however, as significant as its presence" (Curran 205). Dispossession is the reality with which women writers and their feminine poetics engage, the fact of their presence in a social system that denies them full subjectivity domestically and publically. And yet, the very act of writing and reading defies that social existence that would dispossess and deny the women writers. Curran writes that the quotidian details in women's writing are details "they do not control"; however, the acts of writing and reading are acts of agency over these details. In writing, these women refuse collapse, the kind of the stagnation and inactivity predicted by Hazlitt. Indeed, by insisting on a material presence for themselves and their poems, women writers project the details of their phenomenological experiences forward. Their poems engage readers in a social affect that extends their consciousness and their sympathy through the texts, beyond the bounds of their

particular conditions into that of the reader to see a potential outside of their immediate, historical dispossession.

Anna Laetitia Barbauld lends herself as a prime candidate for a study of a feminine poetics that foregrounds embodiment as a means to sympathetic engagement. There is a lack of scholarship connecting Barbauld to Keats, yet a case can be made for his familiarity with her work. She was read by poets he admired, including Robert Burns and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Moreover, as a Dissenter writing about childhood education in last decades of the 1700s, Barbauld was very likely among the volumes in the library at Enfield School, the Dissenting institution where Keats's was educated as a child. In fact, Keats's schoolmaster and friend Charles Cowden Clarke copied Mrs. Barbauld's works into his commonplace book. Kept during the years of the poet's private literary studies with Clarke after entering his physician's apprenticeship with Hammond, the commonplace book is a key artifact of the Keats archive. John Barnard claims the commonplace book "gives the pattern of beliefs and allegiances, poetic and political, which governed Keats throughout his writing career" (*Keats and History* 84). Finally, Barbauld's ties with the science community through her acquaintance with Dr. Joseph Priestley might also have recommended her work to the young Keats. In fact, her occasional poems to Dr. Joseph Priestley shift points of view, allowing the reader to experience multiple material perspectives. Her popularity among his circle, her dissenting background, and her scientific interests lend credibility to a belief that Barbauld's poetics are part of the literary field that informed Keats's thinking and development.

In "An Inventory of the Furniture in Dr. Priestley's Study," Barbauld's reader enters into the space of the poet, the poem's subject, and even the poem itself as a scrap of paper on a desk. Through these shifts in perspective, the reader is made physiologically and cognitively

sympathetic to a variety of bodies engaged in the acts of reading and writing the poem. Barbauld anticipates the reader's action within and beyond the act of reading. Dr. Joseph Priestley was a personal and family friend of Barbauld. He served as a tutor at her family's Dissenting college, Warrington Academy, where Barbauld was herself as student, and he became the subject and recipient for many of her poems. In "An Inventory of the Furniture in Dr. Priestley's Study," we stand in the position of Barbauld at the center of her friend's private work space, glancing over our shoulders at the volumes lining the bookcases, naming the royals in the portraits, counting the bottles and vials on one shelf, mentally organizing the papers strewn across his desk. Curran says of women poets, heralding Barbauld as first among them, that their "fine eyes are occupied continually in discriminating minute objects or assembling a world out of its disjointed particulars" (189). Arguably, this is already a world assembled, or mostly so, but as our eyes pass to the unbound writings, we as Barbauld imagine what they can become. In a strange vision of scientific reproduction, the writings become sundry monstrous assemblages:

—"How can a man his anger hold in?"—

Forgotten rimes, and college themes,
Worm-eaten plans, and embryo schemes;—
A mass of heterogenous matter,
A chaos dark, nor land nor water;—
New books, like new-born infants, stand,
Waiting the printer's clothing hand;—
Others, a motley ragged brood,
Their limbs unfashioned all, and rude,
Like Cadmus' half-formed men appear;

One rears a helm, one lifts a spear,
And feet were lopped and fingers torn
Before their fellow limbs were born;
A leg began to kick and sprawl
Before the head was seen at all,
Which quiet as a mushroom lay
Till crumbling hillocks gave it way;
And all, like controversial writing,
Were born with teeth, and sprung up fighting. (“Inventory” 36-54)

Worm-eaten and half-dead ideas join with the embryos of new ventures in a chaos of creation. Each of the works in progress have agency, kicking and sprawling, standing and charging. Without an attentive guiding will, these productions almost seem born of themselves rather than emerging from the brain of a man. Their potential for production and reproduction is evident in the grotesque and beautiful ways they animate and regenerate, always pressing towards a new creation. The final products are left undifferentiated, imperfectly assembled. We do not name them, and we do not organize them into a neat narrative. They are left with their limbs and teeth to produce and reproduce in new ways. This openness without the imposition of a narrative, what Curran calls their “unstructurable longing of sensibility,” allows for the surplus or the excess that is material existence. The catalogue enacts this affective excess, and we feel the same pressing potential that reaches forward and outward into other minds and bodies. Here the reader is suspended somewhere between Barbauld’s cognition and Dr. Priestley’s. We witness the potentiality of the virtual here in a familiar scenario of the written word combining and recombining in uncompromising materiality that is at once of our bodies and independent of us.

And Barbauld makes another perspectival shift to manifest other possibilities for shared cognition, like the unending possibilities of the experimental writings that lay about the study we observe.

With an insistence on the materiality of her writing on paper in the space of the study, Barbauld shifts the poem from its stated purpose of inventory to confront the reader in a gesture of affective intimacy:

"But what is this," I hear you cry,
"Which saucily provokes my eye?"—
A thing unknown, without a name,
Born of the air, and doomed to flame. ("Inventory" 55-58)

With the word "this," Barbauld arrests the catalogue, its observer, and Dr. Priestley. Sonia Hofkosh points out that the "this" at the end of Barbauld's poem "Washing Day" creates a haptic immediacy, which calls the reader's attention to the materiality of the poem in hand, thereby creating an affective relationship between poem and reader (87). Barbauld concludes the poem, "Earth, air, and sky, and ocean hath its bubbles,/ And verse is one of them — this most of all." (II. 85-86). The "this" refers to "verse" in the general sense, but the presence of the medial dash adds the pressure of a second meaning. "This" is also the poem in hand. At the end of in "An Inventory of the Furniture in Dr. Priestley's Study" our perspective shifts from that of Barbauld to that of the poem itself, spotted by Dr. Priestley. "This" halts the production and reproduction imagined for the half-finished writing and points us toward another piece of ostensibly ad hoc writing, baring its teeth from Dr. Priestley's desk. Indeed, the change in perspective calls into question whether we were indeed Barbauld or the poem this whole time. The poet and poem have become indistinguishable as the elements Priestley combines to ignite his various chemical

reactions¹⁹. From the overlapping perspectives of the poem and poet, we imagine Dr. Priestley reading the slip of paper in a reflexive construction that Hofkosh likens to looking at two mirrors reflecting each other *ad infinitum* (87). However, the end of “An Inventory” also invites us to take on a third perspective. The quotation marks setting off Dr. Priestley’s speech in this last stanza call attention to Dr. Priestley as an object in our purview as the poem/poet, but they also invite us as readers of the poem to speak aloud his words and thereby assume his embodied perspective, spotting and possibly touching the paper. We are the poem and the one who sees the poem. We are inside the poem, we are the poem, and we are outside of the poem studying it. Moreover, when the quotation marks close, we return to the strange blended consciousness of poem/poet in order to predict our fiery fate. Nevertheless, the dramatic irony that registers as we realize the prediction’s failure calls us back to our original position as reader in the present. We recognize that this piece of controversial writing, Barbauld’s poem with its teeth and verve, survived the elements and continues to circulate in its varying published forms today.

As an example of the feminine poetics that enact affective virtuality, Barbauld’s uncompromising materiality insists upon a space for herself and her poetry. The quotidian details and perspective shifts of “An Inventory of the Furniture in Dr. Priestley’s Study” encourage her reader’s physiological and cognitive sympathy with the bodies engaged in acts of reading both inside and outside the text. Through affective excesses of these perspectival shifts and an overflowing inventory of books, papers, bottles, and vials, she develops a space of pressing potential, where the identities of reader, poet, poem, and poetic subject combine and recombine. Her poetics offer a model of proliferation and free movement fundamental to Keats’s own vision of cognitive poetics in negative capability.

¹⁹ Most notably, Joseph Priestley discovered oxygen in 1774.

Shared Cognition and Feeling Dispossession in the *Hyperion* Poems

The narrative Keats imagines for his development as poet is contingent upon a woman muse, a foundation of women writers, a female readership, and a precedent of embodiment that is culturally gendered effeminate. The poet's deep interest in women as subjects and as partners in his work could be attributed their shared affinity for embodiment. As a trained physician and as a man acutely attuned to his own physical state of health and disease, Keats might feel that the material consciousness permeating women's writing represents a genuine and natural translation of the human experience. Moreover, the same material presence represented in their writing lends itself to the direct realism of shared consciousness he imagines in his poetic ideal of negative capability. Women poets are attuned to the materiality of existence and situation, and their gendered embodiment works symbolically and literally as sites of creativity, generation, and production. All of these factors might be said to capture Keats's interest in women as subjects and as muses for his poetry. However, Keats also shares with women writers the sense of dispossession Curran notes at the center of their writing. Like these women, his circumstances and his environment define him in the public eye. The details of his class, his financial hardships, his physical health, his tempestuous love life, etc. determine the ways he can move and act in the world. For instance, *Endymion* received notoriously bad reviews, where the poet was classed alongside footmen and governesses who foolishly take up poetry as their hobby. In response to these attacks on his right to the status of poet, Keats internalizes the cultural gender bias and polices access to his work, privileging his own experience and demeaning that of others, especially women, in efforts to bolster his reputation. A foremost example of the way Keats dismisses women's experience appears in an often-cited letter to George and Georgiana Keats from the winter of 1818-1819. In this letter, Keats calls women of all classes "smokeable": "This

same inadequacy is discovered...in Women with few exceptions--the Dress Maker, the blue Stocking and the most charming sentimentalist differ but in a Slight degree, and are equally smokeable” (*Letters* II: 18-19). “Smokeable” seems here to evoke a flimsiness and insubstantiaity, something of an amateur. The term’s usage suggests the way Keats has internalized cultural biases against women’s writing and even applied the biases as a lens through which to critique his own progress as a writer. Keats uses the term “smokeable” again in reference to his poem *Isabella; or the Pot of Basil*. After *Endymion*’s reception, Keats anticipated further ridicule from his critics and predicted the poem would be considered “weak-sided.” He calls the poem “too smokeable,” and believed that, instead of being understood as mock sentimentality, the lovers would simply be considered mawkish, effeminate (*Letters* II. 174). Much like Hazlitt who connects effeminacy to a fault in style, especially the structural vigor of a poem, a weak-sided or smokeable poem is without the masculine energy needed to make it viable to a critical readership.

Indeed, experimenting with a poetic model that is culturally coded feminine causes Keats anxiety. He fears for his literary reputation, but, even more pressing, the success or failure of his poetry in the literary marketplace determines the material conditions in which he lives, whether he returns to his “pills, plasters, and ointment boxes”²⁰ or ascends to the heights of Mt. Olympus. Keats falls into a defensive stance that outwardly aligns him with the dominant masculine culture. However, this is ultimately not an abdication of his negative capability. Rather, this response appears a symptom of it. The poet reacts to feelings of social dispossession and disadvantage much like the women poets with whom he has connected. Indeed, the shared sense

²⁰ In their fourth “Cockney School of Poetry” review (1818), *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* recommends that Keats abandon poetry and return to his occupation as apothecary: “It is a better and a wiser thing to be a starved apothecary than a starved poet; so back to the shop Mr John, back to 'plasters, pills, and ointment boxes,' &c.”

of dispossession that Keats and the women writers he reads experience encourages the sympathetic engagement and revolutionary social action that Keats believes is poetry's purpose. Perhaps for this reason above all, women become the vehicle for his negatively capable readings of the dispossessed in his poetry.

As the epitome of the poet's bildungsroman, the *Hyperion* fragments capitalize on the intersection of women writers, feminine poetics, and negative capability to theorize the poet's role in cultivating social affect and effecting psychic and civic change among present and future readers. Like the faery lady of "La Belle Dame sans Merci," who is at once lover and muse to the hero, Moneta holds a power over the poet's mortal and immortal existence: his body, mind, and soul. Margaret Homans observes, "Moneta is the form Keats gives to his view that Fanny (and perhaps to a lesser degree other women readers) holds over him the power of life and death" (Homans 356). Yet more importantly, Moneta holds power over his ability to become the poet physician Keats imagines to be his purpose.

The poet's agony as he ascends the stairs to the temple of Saturn has been compared to a dying into life of Apollo at the end of *Hyperion*. Both scenes enact negative capability as the speaker enters the memories of a goddess and emerges from the woman's experience as a proper poet. In the final canto of *Hyperion*, Apollo calls out to Mnemosyne from a voice and words seemingly not his own:

Thy name is on my tongue, I know not how;
Why should I tell thee what thou so well seest?
Why should I strive to show what from thy lips
Would come no mystery? For me, dark, dark
And painful vile oblivion seals my eyes:

I strive to search wherefore I am so sad,
Until a melancholy numbs my limbs;
And then upon the grass I sit, and moan,
Like one who once had wings. (III. 82-91)

Whose memories are these? Whose melancholy does he experience? Apollo recognizes that the sensations he is having are not uniquely his, that Mnemosyne sees and feels as he does in this moment. A melancholy not originally his own works its way through his limbs, rendering his body indolent in the grass. And this same melancholy infuses his interrogation of the goddess, as he asks, why he should speak, why he should strive. In the darkness of his increasingly insensate body, Apollo searches for answers in the surrounding world. His body becomes numb in order to replicate the physiological experience of a fallen god. In a direct realism of cognition and affect, the removal of sensation registers as absence on his body, like a phantom limb.

Apollo continues to “rave” about these experiences at once his own and foreign, while the goddess Mnemosyne remains “mute.” Unable to see on his own, Apollo is given a vision of the memories housed in the goddesses mind. Though he does not understand the phenomenon, he “can read/ A wondrous lesson in [her] silent face”: “Names, deeds, gray legends, dire events, rebellions/ Majesties, sovran voices, agonies,/ Creations and destroyings” (III. 111-112, 115-117). This catalogue of sympathetic knowledge fills the vacancies of his brain. His previously “gloomless eyes” now learn the pains of the world for the first time as he sees what Mnemosyne has seen and experiences on his body what she and her fellow gods have experienced. Such an education in the world’s thorns and briers are prerequisite to his deification to follow. Apollo’s acquired knowledge can only become truth through the affective registry of pain and suffering on his body, through the direct realism of this negatively capable reading experience. In his letters,

Keats writes of aesthetic experience, we may read fine things, the “epic passions” of Wordsworth, for example, but “axioms in philosophy are not axioms until they are proved upon our pulses” (*Letters* I. 279). The intellectual registry of the world’s pains gets imprinted on the body as Apollo dies into life, convulsing and then bursting forth from the agony, “Celestial.”

Apollo’s ascension and transformation gets reimagined as the poet’s climb in the opening canto of *The Fall of Hyperion*. Taking the stairs to Saturn’s Temple one step at a time, the poet nearly suffocates under the bitter cold of numbness. Like Apollo before him, he is emptied of sensation so that he can be filled with the phenomenological experiences of the goddess Moneta. He cannot feel his limbs. His hands, like the ghostly form reaching to the reader in “This Living Hand,” feel nothing, until his foot touches the first step and sensation pours into his toes. Only then can he mount up and address the goddess. In an echo of William Blake who would have the doors of perception cleansed so we can see the infinite, Keats’s poet asks Moneta to “purge off/ Benign, if so it please thee, my mind’s film” (I. 146). To which she replies, “None can usurp this height[...]/But those to whom the miseries of the world/Are misery, and will not let them rest” (I. 147-49). Like Endymion before him, tests of human compassion, sympathy with the miseries of others, form the entrance exam into a higher plane of existence. Moneta seems to echo Adam Smith, for she believes to be truly a poet one must cultivate sympathy by accessing the feelings of others. For Moneta, sympathy and a will to act, or rather a restlessness that insists on action, dominate the character of a poet. It is important to note the number change in her statement: she declares the “miseries of the world” are “misery” to the would-be poet. The plural becomes singular as the multiple sorrows get absorbed into the pluralized identity of the sympathizer. The individual body has become the body politic. Here individual feelings of dispossession connect with a communal identity of the dispossessed. He doesn’t feel *as if* he suffers, but rather in a

direct realism of phenomenological translation, the miseries *are* the poet's misery. And from here the poet takes action because such misery "will not let [him] rest."

Much like Apollo's exchange with Mnemosyne in the final canto of *Hyperion*, the would-be poet of *The Fall of Hyperion*, is given a strange vision of the fallen Titans through accessing Moneta's memory. She sets the conditions for their interchange:

My power, which to me is still a curse,
Shall be to thee a wonder; for the scenes
Still swooning vivid through my globed brain
With an electral changing misery
Thou shalt with those dull mortal eyes behold,
Free from all pain, if wonder pain thee not. (I. 243-48)

The physiological language of this passage reminds us of Keats's medical training, of the images of the brain and nervous system he must have in mind as he composes this exchange. Moneta's memories, vivid to her still, are yet altering "electral" as they take color from her emotions. Here she draws a distinction between her experience of the scene and that which the speaker will undergo. He will not endure the same physical or emotional pain of the goddess. He gets to marvel in the experience of negative capability, in the mechanics of their joined cognition, while the power of remembering remains a curse to her. The discrepancy seems to arise from her immortality and his yet-filmed mortal perception. Could he but cleanse the doors of perception, perhaps he could feel, as she does, the weight of the scene before him. However, his response to her cautious invitation is to see her as a mother, comforting though still stern, even terrifying. Likewise, in granting him access to her memories, she holds the power over his experience. She says she will be kind to him for his "good will." Whether it arises from gender, mortality, or

agency, this is a very poignant discrepancy in their shared cognition; however, minimizing the physical pain he undergoes as he joins her in this shared, embodied memory enables the poet to experience the sheer “wonder,” Moneta says, of negative capability as a cognitive phenomenon of the poetic character.

In a scene of reading further down the passage, Keats’s speaker sees Moneta’s face for the first time under her parted veils, and he studies the strange characters of tragedy inscribed there. He describes her eyes, “half closed, and visionless entire they seem’d/ Of all external things--they saw me not,/ But in blank splendour beam’d like the mild moon.” Not perceiving, only projecting--she is absent sensation, though not absent feelings. She reads like a book, a record of human history to be examined and interpreted. Mesmerized by her mysterious visage, the speaker imagines what indeed is inside that globed brain:

I ached to see what things the hollow brain
Behind enwombed: what high tragedy
In the dark secret chambers of her skull
Was acting, that could give so dread a stress
To her cold lips, and fill with such a light
Her planetary eyes; and touch her voice
With such a sorrow. (I. 276-82)

The would-be poet’s desire to know her experience is a physiological pang: he writes the mysteries made his “heart too small to hold its blood” (I. 254). He aches for Moneta’s knowledge because he reads a cosmic and mythological history written on her face. He interprets the tragedy in terms of affect: the dread on her cold lips and the sorrow in her voice. What is more, Moneta’s knowledge is specifically gendered here, “enwombed” in her brain. As expressed in this

language, access to her mind translates as access to her female physiology, her ability to reproduce and nurture. We have already seen how she appears motherly in her power over the poet, the way she will protect his experience of their shared vision. Now we see part of that experience will be to share the very embodied female talents of care and generation with the male poet. Furthermore, a woman's ability to reproduce is in itself a shared physiological experience. She is at once herself and other, negatively capable in a biological confusion of mother and developing child. Entering into the womb of her brain by accessing her memory, the speaker becomes part of the joint identities of woman/child, goddess/subject, muse/poet.

To enter this shared cognitive state, Moneta and the poem's speaker stand side by side, and she grants him access to her memories. From here he witnesses the tragedies of the fall firsthand, inhabiting her mind and body. The speaker's words here recall the "Chamber of Maiden Thought," the dark passages of the mind he is on the verge of entering. In this second chamber of the human experience, the intellectual and spiritual growth of the individual, the person's "vision into the heart and nature of Man" is sharpened. The effect is "of convincing ones nerves that the World is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression--." The doors at the end of the chamber are opened into dark and misty passages. In a letter to his friend Reynolds, Keats writes, "we see not the ballance [sic] of good and evil. We are in a Mist--*We are now in that state--We feel the 'burden of the Mystery' (Letters I. 280-81).* Keats emphasizes the plural pronoun, the shared experience here at the entrance of the next chambers, the shared physiological experience. He mentions convincing the "nerves," proving upon the pulses their knowledge of the world's miseries, and feeling the burden of the Mystery, as Wordsworth has done before them.

The speaker's entrance into shared cognition with Moneta in *The Fall of Hyperion* can be seen in the punctuation that precedes his vision. He quotes Moneta one last time, her voice "came brief upon [his] ear" (l. 300):

-- "So Saturn sat
When he had lost his realms."--Whereon there grew
A power within me of enormous ken
To see as a god sees, and take the depth
Of things as nimbly as the outward eye
Can size and shape pervade. The lofty theme
At those few words hung vast before my mind,
With half unravell'd web. I set myself
Upon an eagle's watch, that I might see,
And seeing ne'er forget" (l. 301-10)

Dashes set off the quotation marks, and then the quotation marks disappear. No longer does the speaker hear Moneta's narration of events: he simply sees her memories as his own. He assumes the position of a god, viewing the scene as if from Mount Olympus, or a peak of Darien. The echo of his earlier sonnet "On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer" cannot be ignored. The speaker, now god-like with an enormous ken of power, is a stout Cortez, looking out upon a new realm through eagle eyes that have been sharpened by the experience of reading through a new translator, Moneta. Yet, the realms of gold presented here are in ruin, and Moneta's silence, unlike the silence of Cortez's explorers, marks a stinging grief that proves almost too much for the yet-mortal speaker.

The speaker reads a magnificent tableaux of sorrow, as he sees Thea and Saturn, frozen “like sculpture” before him (I. 383). Doubled over on her knees with her forehead to the ground, Thea waters the earth with her tears, and her hair spreads before her, “a soft and silken mat for Saturn’s feet” (I. 381). With the quotation marks gone, we as readers of Keats’s poem assume there is no mediation between the goddess’s experience and the speaker’s. The speaker seems to endure the full measure of the goddess’s emotional and physical pain in witnessing the tragedy from her perspective, though she professed she would spare him. As Moneta feels, so does he. “The load of this eternal quietude,” weighs on him, “ponderous on his senses” for a whole month (I. 390, 392). He describes his “burning brain” and how he grew “more gaunt and ghostly” as he measured the changing moon to mark the passing time (I. 393, 396). His senses are ponderous with their physical pain. The word “ponderous” simultaneously enacts the cognitive work and the work of sensation, as he registers the weight of the fall represented by the emotional scene before him. His brain burns with the lessons learned and his body wastes away like the pale kings and princes of “La Belle Dame sans Merci” who similarly know what it is to have found and to have lost a paradise of power. Weary of the shared pain of this dispossession, the speaker says he would often pray for death, an escape from the “vale/ And all its burthens” (I. 397-398). But this is the very vale of soul-making in action. The world of pains that schools an intelligence and makes it a soul through lived experience, through a test upon the pulses.

Fanny Brawne, *Lamia*, and the Ethics of Negative Capability

Charles Cowden Clarke said of Keats, “He devoured rather than read” (qtd in Tetreault 61). As women come to symbolize his very poetic ideal, his personal and professional lives become as inextricably connected as the mind and body in his cognitive poetics. Moreover, as Tetreault writes of his ravenous and entangled appetites for women and words, Keats’s lines

“express more than a desire to have the woman physically: they disclose an impulse to take possession of her soul, her ‘self,’ a drive to swallow up her very identity” (65-66). We see this pattern of possession and consumption in the Romances of his 1820 volume, as Lamia’s identity is subsumed into a legally binding marriage to a mortal, as the Belle Dame’s identity and narrative gets composed and circulated by the men who label her “sans Merci.” Women possess a poetic power at once familiar and foreign, material and divine, and, perhaps most dangerously for Keats as well as his women characters, their poetic power is also desirable and accessible. Even as he employs negative capability to enter the space of the woman writer, a suffering woman character, or his beloved Fanny Brawne, Keats’s anxiety bursts through the surface of his experience to reassert control. Indeed, Mellor insists that despite his “ideological cross-dressing,” Keats “anxiously tries to establish a space between the male poet and the female object of desire where the poet can preserve a recognizable masculinity” (176). In Keats’s obsession with the gordian knot of his dual Muses, women and words, he will often compromise his poetic ideal of living in uncertainties to preserve himself against absorption into the siren’s song. While his cognitive poetics seem to take cues from women’s lived experience and related writing techniques such as the quotidian register and affective reverberation, the negative capability Keats enjoys by entering the space of a female other is not always reciprocal. The ethics of self-dissolution become muddied when the impulse for shared cognition becomes possessive and appropriative. No longer an egalitarian circulation of experience, negative capability enacts a privilege of access that perpetuates a subject/object hierarchy. The camelion poet does not set out with this intention, but, as he perceives a threat to his own body and mind either from a critical reviewer or a woman lover like Fanny Brawne, Keats polices his jurisdiction to prevent a complete lapse of control.

As in many Keats poems, the love of interest “La Belle Dame sans Merci” appears threatening to the mental and physical health of the male hero/poet. Formerly within her sphere of influence but now seemingly outside of her power, the pale kings and princes are “death pale” with “starved lips.” Their minds have deteriorated as well. The knight-at-arms echoes the interlocutor’s questions back to him, and the ballad form emphasizes the echo. As one of her many victims, he exists seemingly to relive the horror of their misfortune and to warn other men of the abuse and abandonment inevitable at the hands of “La Belle Dame sans Merci.” While with the faery woman, the poem’s hero attempts to gain control over their relationship. He binds her by circling her with a fragrant zone, places her on his steed, and shuts her wild eyes. But he eventually finds himself subjugated to her, as the other kings and princes did before him. Finally, the poet himself may be at the mercy of the belle dame. Her song and the visionary quality of her wild eyes suggest that she is symbolic of poetry or the poetic muse. The pale kings and princes are literary royalty among whom the knight-at-arms desires to belong. Despite the multiple masculine attempts to encircle and contain the feminine excess in “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” through physical restraint and the circulating narrative of her demonic powers, the poetic energy of the ballad arises from the female’s ability to evade these attempts. She is never present except through storytelling, and the vacancy offered by her physical absence, the mystery offered by her elusiveness (who is she really?), hollow out the masculine narrative and dislocate the males from the realm of healthy production.

Arguably the closest Keats comes to the type of assimilation he fears possible from shared, embodied cognition is in his relationship to Fanny. Representing to Keats the flirtation of the muse and the damnation of distraction from his vocation, Fanny was at once a threat to his independence and a necessary source of physical and emotional support. In a letter to her, dated

October 13, 1819, Keats writes that she has absorbed his thoughts, and he must jot off a few lines to her if he is to clear his mind and get any work done that day.

I cannot exist without you--I am forgetful of everything but seeing you again-- my
Life seems to stop there-- I see no further. You have absorb'd me. I have a
sensation at the present moment as though I was dissolving[...] You have ravish'd
me away by a Power I cannot resist, and yet I could resist till I saw you, and even
since I have seen you I have endeavoured often 'to reason against the reasons of
my Love.' I can do that no more. The pain would be too great. My Love is selfish.
I cannot breathe without you. (*Letters* II: 223-224)

Dissolving into her being, his mind is entirely hers. But from this state of shared cognition, he finds himself unable to do or think of anything but her. Implied here and stated explicitly elsewhere, she is figured as a threat to his career, his ability to write and support himself. Therefore, under threat of dispossession, he reasserts the ego boundary between himself and Fanny. Keats attempts to cognitively overpower Fanny, to reason against his affect, his love for her. But this brings on more physiological symptoms of pain. He is suffocating without her, unable to breathe, a condition all too familiar for the poet. He needs her presence or essence as his air. Like the living hand needs a blood transfusion to compose poetry, to reach out and touch the world, he needs her breath of life for his own existence beyond this moment. Tetreault writes of Keats's relationship to Fanny, "She exercised a power over him, a power to dominate his complete attention and absorb his total being, a power that threatened the power he sought to exercise over her. At such moments as he acknowledges it, he is the one to feel as if he were being swallowed up" (Tetreault 67). Yet the letter quoted above is rife with the first-person pronoun "I," to the point that we are unsure if the focus of the passage is really Fanny or Keats.

Ultimately, he is the one making demands upon her. From the context, we can conclude Fanny has asked if he would not be happier without her. He perceives this question as a threat, and it terrifies him. She is the air to be breathed in. He can only exist in a state of joint embodiment with her.

Of all Keats's romances, *Lamia* presents the most sympathetic engagement with a dispossessed but powerful woman. Unlike the *Hyperion* fragments where Mnemosyne and Moneta serve as protectors, mentors, and mothers to the poet figure, in *Lamia* Keats most fully engages in a shared physiological and cognitive state with a woman character who is at once a representative of creative potential and a definitive threat to man's societal status. The titular character of the poem seems at once muse to Lycius and poet outright. Ultimately, determining Keats's identification with Lamia or Lycius is a flawed pursuit, and the more interesting approach would be to see the poet as more fluidly inhabiting both identities as he seeks to explore the difficulties that arise at the intersections of love, poetry, and social existence. Taking on both characters' perspectives, Keats must confront anxieties over his cognitive and affective proximity to women while simultaneously feeling the woman's dispossession.

Exceeding the bounds of gender and even humanness itself, Lamia cannot be contained in any rigid categorization of snake, woman, or wife. Lamia's material excesses are innumerable: life force, sexuality, and imaginative production are only a few. The primary conflict of the poem (and arguably Lamia's pathos) arises from the multiple attempts to contain her overflowing nature. However, these attempted containments are not wholly motivated by fear of her transgressive nature; much like the poet's own dismissal of women, they are also inspired by male desire, envy, and ambition. Though distinctly feminine and desirable, Lamia has a record of ideological cross-dressing. She transgresses gender-roles most often by taking a dominant, active

role in her relationship with Lycius. She trades a nymph under her protection to Hermes for access to Lycius. She is the pursuer and provider in their relationship, while Lycius remains in a benumbed, indolent state of mindless sensual consumption throughout the first book. Nevertheless, Lycius eventually awakens from this reverie when a trumpet sounds and ignites his violent and competitive impulses. With renewed ambition, he wishes to “trammel up and snare” his lover, and to “let [his] foes choke” on their jealousy of his fortune (II. 52, 62). And though Lamia is both female and animal, while in human form, Lycius attempts to “labyrinth” Lamia in the static social categorization of wife (II. 53).

Dressed like a queen for her wedding feast, Lamia walks about silently, appearing an object with no voice, no subjectivity. She masks her discontent, and produces a feast that includes material splendor and excess such as a “glowing banquet-room,” “fresh carved cedar, mimicking a glade of palm and plantain,” “a stream of lamps,” “an untasted feast, teeming with odours,” “jasper panels,” a host of “small intricacies.” The catalogue of images here not only piles on the opulence of the banquet she provides, “each nook and niche” is “burst[ing]” with sensual detail and “fretted splendour” (II. 121-141), but the very style of the passage evokes the catalogue of feminine poetics. The quotidian focus (if I can use the term to describe the exotic materiality of the scene) lets things be things, and here Lamia is a feeling body at the center of an environment that she created but ultimately cannot control. The uncompromising materiality of her snake-woman embodiment and her powers of generation add up to an affective excess that is too much for the rational eye. Porsche Fermanis explains that the Apollonian philosophical tradition “taught[...]that pleasure and happiness were subject to rational limitations” (156). Thus, Apollonius, and even Lycius his former student, see a necessary end to the excess

of sensual pleasure offered in Lamia's palace. Indeed, placing a limit upon the palace episode seems the masculine, rational response to imaginative excess, effeminacy of style.

In denying Lamia her boundless existence as snake-woman or "masculine" female (a woman with agency over a man), Apollonius obscures the affective poetry of life and nature, its virtuality. Keats portrays Apollonius as a penetrating rationalist. Desiring cognitive mastery over all things, he inevitably obscures the truth of nature by applying static labels and forcing classification upon figures of Otherness that he cannot comprehend. The old philosopher does not enter the banquet hall starry-eyed and overcome by wonder like the other guests; instead he enters laughing "as though some knotty problem, that had daft/ His patient thought, had now begun to thaw, / And solve and melt:—'twas just as he foresaw" (II. 160-63). A clever allusion to Lamia's gordian shape, the knotty problem has troubled Apollonius all this time, and the old philosopher has seemingly already determined some resolution for it, since he laughs as though pleased with his predictions coming true. He has not teased out the problem of this Other figure, for the problem is only now beginning to thaw for him; thus Apollonius seems to have made a precipitate classification of the problem's nature and is now fitting the Other into his preconceived category. Using phallic imagery for Apollonius's piercing gaze, Keats writes "The sophist's eye, / Like a sharp spear, went through her utterly, / Keen, cruel, perceant, stinging" (II. 299-301). As it penetrates and deconstructs Lamia, Apollonius's gaze halts the production of her magnificently illusory banquet hall. The music "no more breathes," the flowers and greenery grow sick, and eventually all pleasure dies (II. 263-65). Lamia's life force, her very blood flow seems to stop. A single word sends Lycius to his tomb and Lamia back to her former beastly existence. Apollonius declares Lamia "A Serpent!" By placing her in a clear-cut, rigid category,

Apollonius attempts to contain Lamia's excess and uncertainty in a single designation of monstrosity, but her excess rejects this containment and she vanishes with a scream.

In his review of *Lamia*, Leigh Hunt writes that Keats, "would see fair play to the serpent, and makes the power of the philosopher an ill-natured and disturbing thing. *Lamia* though liable to be turned into painful shapes had a soul of humanity; and the poet does not see why she should not have her pleasures accordingly" (qtd in Daruwala 112). Though a threatening presence that renders Lycius indolent, *Lamia* is sympathetic because she is dispossessed by an act of *unsympathetic* reading. Yet in the end, *Lamia* survives, escaping the confines of the Apollonian philosophical definition. Like Barbauld's poem that escapes Dr. Priestley's fire, *Lamia* lives on and, we presume, continues to inhabit various bodies as woman and snake, creating new palaces fretted with splendor. Apollonius's villainy arises from an act of misreading for which his ego is at fault. He was too sure of his definition, unwilling to live in the mystery.

Ultimately the ethics of negative capability lie in the very mechanics of it: the abdication of the self and an acceptance of uncertainties. These qualities create the space for sympathetic engagement and the charitable action that follows. With the uncompromising materiality of women writers like Anna Laetitia Barbauld as inspiration, Keats developed a model of sympathetic engagement that saw a direct realism of embodied experience as the pathway to the social affect and civic reform imagined by his friends and peers in the Hunt Circle. Like the women writers of the eighteenth century, Keats's feminine poetics of shared phenomenology project the writer and reader outward from material conditions of dispossession into realms of perpetual formation and transformation. In this way, negative capability imagines a revolutionary

potential in the free circulation of affect between the bodies involved in sympathetic acts of reading.

Chapter 4

Life-Writing and Re-Animation: Reading Remains as Cognitive Artifacts

In a project that seeks to demonstrate how Romantic poets, Keats especially, understood the act of reading and composing poetry to connect bodies physiologically and cognitively across time and space, one must examine the cognitive and physiological after-lives of poetry that the writers imagined and even participated in creating. In order to do this, I bring the extended mind hypothesis of distributed cognition philosophy to bear on the literary scholarship of life-writing and mythmaking following Keats's death. I will examine the ways that, because of his illness and reputation for sensual excess, imaginative figurations of Keats's feeling body become the cultural artifact for a dialogic and dynamic cognitive system of memory and mourning. Filled with collective memory, posthumous life-writing about Keats is at once of the poet and of his readers.

Life-writing texts such as biography, memoir, autobiography, etc. have a rhetorical purpose beyond recording the historical account of lived experiences. Collecting scraps of literary material, bodily material²¹, and memories of the person, posthumous life-writing in particular seeks to reconstruct the life through remains. Indeed, the process of life-writing is as much about the living as the dead, the past as the present, and the future of the past. Drawing on personal memory as well as other artifacts to piece together a record, biography and autobiography enact the very sociable cognitive poetics that Keats and other romantic poets imagine. Rather than an individual task where one's self, one's friend, or admirer sets out to document a deserving life, a piece of life-writing is necessarily a social composition with a

²¹ Samantha Matthews traces the fascination with literary remains and literal remains of authors, showing how grave sites, in particular, become sites of literary tourism. She also notes one edition of Shelley's biography "The Last Days of Percy Bysshe Shelley," held at the British Library (BL MS Ashley 5022), that contains remnants of his skull preserved in the back cover (Matthews 152-53).

chiasmic structure that crosses and connects the subject and the community. Recording the life through this social process serves the dual purpose of historical record for future generations of admirers and psychological comfort to those left behind after death. Life-writing such as a posthumous biography may seek sympathy with the dead in so far as the text expresses feelings of pain and melancholy for the absent subject. But because sympathy is feeling with another being, by reviving the memory of a person through narrative, such texts extend the affective lives of their subjects to form spaces of connection through shared feeling.

We can see the idea of shared feeling between the living and dead in the moral philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment. Adam Smith aptly notes that sympathy for the dead is really about confronting our own immanent dissolution. He writes of our reaction to witnessing death:

The tribute of our fellow-feeling seems doubly due to them now, when they are in danger of being forgot by every body; and, by the vain honours which we pay to their memory, we endeavour, for our own misery, artificially to keep alive our melancholy remembrance of their misfortune. That our sympathy can afford them no consolation seems to be an addition to their calamity; and to think that all we can do is unavailing, and that, what alleviates all other distress, the regret, the love, and the lamentations of their friends, can yield no comfort to them, serves only to exasperate our sense of their misery. (I. i. 1. 13)

When we witness death, the dissolution of another's body as Smith describes, we feel obligated to sympathize with the dead, though such fellow-feelings are of no use to them. As we imagine, the debt owed the dead is our memory of their plight, a sort of record keeping that will keep their "calamity" from being forgotten. Smith uses language of reanimation. He describes how our

sympathy “artificially” keeps “alive” the remembrance. However these acts of reanimation are not a comfort to the dead or living, at least not in a traditional sense. Rather, sympathy with the dead feeds the living’s misery. Any pleasure is of the melancholic variety. Sympathy with the dead takes on a particularly macabre tone as Smith describes the imagined translation of our living self into the corpse:

The idea of that dreary and endless melancholy, which the fancy naturally ascribes to their condition, arises altogether from our joining to the change which has been produced upon them, our own consciousness of that change, from our putting ourselves in their situation, and from our lodging, if I may be allowed to say so, our own living souls in their inanimated bodies, and thence conceiving what would be our emotions in this case. It is from this very illusion of the imagination, that the foresight of our own dissolution is so terrible to us, and that the idea of those circumstances, which undoubtedly can give us no pain when we are dead, makes us miserable while we are alive. (I. i. 1. 13)

We imagine ourselves in the place of the remains, in the grave. Here we feel as if we are the corpse itself, but the corpse is presented as a feeling corpse, reanimated by the inhabitation of living souls. Our consciousness joins with what we imagine to be left behind in the grave to create something “undead” or “after life,” the animated corpse. Our knowledge of what has happened combines with theirs to write the full story of death from the perspective of the living and the passed.

Smith’s idea of a conjoined consciousness with the dead can be supplemented by extended mind theory to provide a unique view of how life-writing is a cooperative composition between the living and the dead, a shared space in which the two can commune in perpetuity.

Extended mind theory is a branch of distributed cognition that sees the possibility for cognitive systems to stretch beyond the boundary of an individual body to include objects and things, called “cognitive artifacts.” Andy Clark and David Chalmers established the “parity principle” in 1998 to define what constitutes a cognitive artifact: “an artefact is part of a cognitive process if it performs a function which would thus count as cognitive, if done in the head” (Sutton 40). Therefore, extended mind hypothesis sees complex cognitive ecologies of minds engaging and integrating objects, including other minds, in mental processing. The mechanics of memory are of particular interest to extended mind theorists, as artifacts are seen often as a location for memory to be stored or an object to trigger memory. A simple example of this type of cognitive artifact is a grocery list. However, the extended mind hypothesis views its artifacts as more than just a store or trigger for memory, positing instead a reciprocal, heterogeneous, and constitutive relationship between the mind/object(s) or mind/mind(s) interfaces. Indeed, this model of memory function insists on situation within cultural and historical contexts as cognitive artifacts are necessarily embedded in and elemental to their cultural matrices. John Sutton summarizes Merlin Donald’s 1998 work²² on memory and extended cognition with regard to the interdependence of cultural artifacts and the cognitive systems in which they participate:

Donald confirms that his term ‘external symbolic storage’ was not ‘meant to exhaust all the functions of external symbols’ and that ‘the “storage” function of symbols can neither be isolated from their other functions nor from the minds that use them’: further, he sees cognitive artifacts in use as ‘drawn into a maelstrom of shared cognitive activity in any culture’ and argues that ‘their functions in the larger cultural matrix go well beyond mere storage, because they are in dynamic interaction with the entire cognitive-cultural system’. (Sutton 42)

²² (Donald, 1998b:184)

Fundamentally social, the model of extended cognition presented here demonstrates how memory gets collectively composed historically through a cognitive life of things external to the individual mind and body but integral to them.

To demonstrate the concept of cognitive artifacts and the extended mind, I will give the relevant example of a poem. Language itself, as a system of symbols that facilitate thinking, is an obvious cognitive artifact. Our brains interact with the signs on the page to create meaning, and we learn and remember in this way. The cognitive system is reciprocal, as we create language and proliferate it, forming complex feedback loops that are informed by the inscriptions other linguistic cognitive artifacts have made on our brains. As I write this chapter, my brain is engaging with the letters that appear on my computer screen to both create thought and record thought. Unlike Samuel Taylor Coleridge who supposedly composed the whole of “Kubla Khan” in his dream state, I do not compose sentences first in my head and then transcribe them onto the digital page. Rather, I compose as I type, as I see the words appear and disappear before me. I produce words that are familiar to me because I learned them. Through years of formal education and reading experiences, they are inscribed on my brain in my memory. Moreover, the syntactical patterns I produce echo those I have read and absorbed, the academic tone of articles and monographs particular to my fields of study. This is a very basic way of understanding an extended mind in action and the words on a computer screen as cognitive artifacts in the modern (and digital) age of composition.

In addition to the fact of its linguistic inscription, poetry offers unique sensual features as a cognitive artifact. The sound devices of poetry, its rhyme and rhythm, affect a reader’s aural and tactile sensibilities. Sensible imagery of sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch further awakens the reader’s bodily connection to the artifact. Finally, the materiality of the object in hand, the

book itself, engages sensory and affective registers. The smell of the aged paper, the tear of the leather cover, and the marginal note struck out evoke feelings of nostalgia, or melancholy, or passion. Beyond mechanical cognitive processing, the affective resonances of poetic forms and the materiality of the book itself create extended cognitive systems by engaging the senses. As I explored in the Introduction, Keats was highly aware of his embodiment as a reader and writer, and he engages bodily with correspondents in his letters to create extended cognitive experiences of shared feeling and thinking across time and space. In an attempt to conjure communion with George who immigrated to America in the summer of 1818, John proposed the brothers share a reading session: they will pour over the same passage at the same time, and thus be together, despite the geographic distance. John writes, “[I will] read a passage of Shakspeare [sic] every Sunday at ten o Clock-- you read one at the same time and we shall be as near each other as blind bodies can be in the same room” (*Letters* II. 5). By experiencing the same cognitive artifact, the same passage of Shakespeare, at the same time, John and George will be joined in a system of shared feeling. They create a new space of community by using the cognitive artifact as their point of jointure, and this imagined community grants comfort to brothers separated for many months by thousands of miles.

When we come to understand the cultural artifacts of a poet’s life and works, his posthumous bodies, as stores of memory as well as creations of memory, we see how life-writing can be at once autobiographical, biographical, and cultural, at once of the past, present, and future. Life writing is a ghoulish scene of reanimation and textual creation. We see the very process of interplay between mind and cognitive artifact occurring with the imagined corpse in Adam Smith’s scenario quoted above. Smith describes how in preserving the memory of the dead, we “join[...] to the change which has been produced upon them, our own consciousness of

that change, from our putting ourselves in their situation, and from our lodging, if I may be allowed to say so, our own living souls in their inanimated bodies” (I. i. 1. 13). Through this act, we revive the body of the dead in the grave, and we create a new textual experience that joins both the living and dead in a cognitive system of composition. In a similar way, Paul de Man’s seminal work on autobiography suggests that the act of life-writing itself is constitutive of the life. He asks,

We assume that life produces the autobiography as an act produces its consequences, but can we not suggest, with equal justice, that the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life [?...] Does the referent determine the figure, or is it the other way round: is the illusion of reference not a correlation of the structure of the figure, that is to say no longer clearly and simply a referent at all but something more akin to a fiction which then, however, in its own turn, acquires a degree of referential productivity? (de Man 69).

The biography or autobiography both stand in for the material body and (re)constitute it from historical and cultural memories with all their circumstantial investments and motives. The subject’s body is therefore revived, a cognitive artifact brought to posthumous life in the acts of writing and reading biography. In addition to material artifacts such as letters, paintings, newspaper clippings, diaries, etc., immaterial forces serve critical functions at every level of life-writing. Indeed, affect becomes a determining force within the composition for much life-writing and its circulation²³. Moreover, unlike the private, domestic documentation of a diary or journal, life-writing has a public audience in mind and often bears a theme, narrative structure, and

²³ In the case of Keats’s own biography, affect stalls composition. Stanley Plumley attributes the failure of the Keats circle to produce a timely full-length biography to overwhelming emotion, infighting, etc. (Plumley 69-77)

purpose beyond mere historical record. The matter of accuracy then must contend with the demands of context, emotion, and narrative form.

To show the social and cognitive composition of the author's posthumous body, I will first study a piece of Keats's own life-writing "Ode to a Nightingale" to examine his notion of a posthumous life. This particular poem bears a unique reception history, being so frequently read and mythologized as death-writing, an ode in which the poet processes his young but inevitable passing. I follow this with the reactions of the Hunt Circle to news of their friend's death in Rome. Shelley's *Adonais; an Elegy on the Death of John Keats* meditates on the ways that pieces of life-writing are necessarily heteroglot texts, made up of the bodies and breath of their subjects as well as those who gather round them to relive their stories. Later life-writings related to Keats, such as Leigh Hunt's *Lord Byron and some of his contemporaries*, attempt likenesses to the man that predicate a material life and physical presence at once impossible and affectively real to readers.

Posthumous Existence: "Ode to a Nightingale" as Life-Writing

Though he often expresses how illness and the anticipation of death feel alienating, Keats also foresees a posthumous existence of his body and mind through poetic affect. Examining "Ode to a Nightingale" as life-writing, or rather death-writing, brings to light a cognitive system that spreads from the poet's dying body into his future as reanimated textual body, or "life." Andrew Bennett presents what I call life-writing as part of the Romantic project of writing for posterity. He explains his own terminology and definition for the kind of posthumous productions of the life that my chapter examines:

Literature after life, or what I have elsewhere termed the 'posthumous life of writing', is writing which in various ways, inscribes itself as a manual practice

occurring, necessarily, in a time after its own, in after years, after the death of the writer. And this thanatological event of inscription concerns such questions as (auto-)biography, or more precisely, ‘autobiothanatographical writing’ as well as questions of posterity or living on” (*Culture of Posterity* 13).

The autobiothanatographical trajectory of literature projects the writing into a future state, inscribing itself with the death of the author. This type of life-writing carries with it a certain deathliness, but, what is more, this life-writing carries with it an afterlife, specifically a posthumous existence for the author him or herself. Death as a specifically embodied experience shapes the poetic process of Keats as well as those reading his works after his death. I have already explored the paradox of embodiment as a mechanism for the poet’s transcendence of the individual self into a dispersed, social identity. Death, too, for Keats is not necessarily an individuating or isolating experience. Rather than an ascension of the spirit out of the diseased body, Keats’s posthumous poetics insist upon an extension of bodily existence into the corporeal presence of others.

“Ode To a Nightingale” has a long history of being read through Keats’s death. Its compositional origins are mythologized by friends like Hunt and Charles Brown. While Hunt maintained that “Ode to a Nightingale” was written in the height of the poet’s illness, during a bout of sleeplessness, the origin of the poem is shrouded in mystery and Romantic legend. A vital part of Keats’s remains, the poem serves as a cognitive artifact around which narratives of Keats’s death and life get imagined and written. Even the Keats House immortalizes the poem on site for literary tourists. When I first visited the house in October 2007, a manuscript copy of the poem was on display in a cabinet on the Brawne family’s side of the house. Even more striking,

a small plum tree in the front garden was designated with a placard that told Charles Brown's version of the poem's origin story. The placard read:

THIS PLUM TREE
REPLACES THE ONE BENEATH WHICH
JOHN KEATS WROTE
ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE

“In the spring of 1819 a nightingale had built her nest near my house. Keats felt a tranquil and continual joy in her song: and one morning he took his chair from the breakfast table to the grass plot under a plum-tree where he sat for two or three hours. When he comes into the house, I perceived he had some scraps of paper in his hand and these he was quietly thrusting behind the books”

CHARLES ARMITAGE BROWN to LORD HOUGHTON

While he does not mention the poet's illness, by noting the tranquility and joy the nightingale's song offers Keats, Brown highlights their opposite: the fever and fret mentioned by the poem. With this anecdote, he presents a reading of the poem that sees the nightingale as an escape from everyday reality, a two- to three-hour space of joyful flight from home. The Keats House finds this life story compelling and seeks to memorialize the associated remains to perpetuate the poem and poet, even as it promotes its own significance of place. The first plum tree died, but the Keats House replaced it and made a placard to connect the new tree to Keats story. The act of Keats's composition of “Ode to a Nightingale” is further mythologized in the handwritten manuscript. The manuscript on display is a memorial, encased and juxtaposed beside other Keatsiana, rather than catalogued and tucked away in a library archive²⁴.

²⁴ When I returned to the Keats house in May of 2014, both the manuscript and the tree with its placard were gone, and they remain absent from the house as of June 2016, I am told by a colleague who recently visited with a study abroad group. However, the Keats House advertised on social media in July 2016 that they now sell plush nightingales in the gift shop.

In her article “The Strange Time of Reading,” Karen Swann points out that acts of remembrance performed by the immediate circles of Keats and Shelley inflect our contemporary readings of their texts with a strange posthumousness, such that we almost necessarily read their works through their deaths. Indeed, Hunt and Brown, and possibly even the Keats House curators, seem to insist that we read the “Ode To a Nightingale” through Keats’s illness and death, and, admittedly, biographical knowledge of the poet intercedes in my own reading of the poem. This particular poem, however, insists upon an intimacy with mortality, specifically the materiality of the tubercular body, which seems to validate the strange posthumousness felt upon reading.

Despite its function as cognitive artifact for a biographical narrative of Keats that emphasizes his illness and unrest, “Ode To a Nightingale” presents itself as a poem about forgetting, not remembering. Whereas life-writing is an attempt to remember and memorialize, this poem is ostensibly death-writing, an attempt to forget through whatever means possible. The speaker attempts a bodily forgetting, a numbness of the senses through ingesting an opiate or wine. Because knowledge is written on the body, the poet must dull his perception in order to erase his knowledge and his existence. He must “dissolve” bodily in order to dissolve consciously. Therefore, the appeal of the nightingale is her innocence, her lack of knowledge. Like Isabella before Lorenzo’s ghost appears to her, the nightingale has “never known/ the weariness, the fever, and the fret” (21-23). She flies above the material burden, the often brutal reality of human existence.

The poem opens with the heart, brain, and senses in physical turmoil. The poet’s heart aches. His powers of sensory perception are numb. His dull brain perplexes and retards. He is slowing down, losing energy and vitality, even as he seeks to follow the bird into flight. Indeed,

his physical state is reminiscent of ensuing rigor mortis, yet much of the poem's attention to bodily breakdown can be read as disease specific. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the contemporary understanding of consumption as "abnormality or loss of humours, resulting in wasting (extreme weight loss) of the body," so in stanza 3, when the poet laments the common reality of youth that "grows pale and spectre-thin, and dies," we can read the shrinking body as specifically tubercular. Employing a disease-specific lens to a reading of "Ode to a Nightingale" shows the violence inherent in Keats's death-writing. The embodied emphasis on breath and breathing draws a stark contrast between his sole-self on earth and the ethereal bird with whom he wishes to commune. His brother Tom's labored breathing (or the poet's own) and Keats's own cough, developed on the Scottish hiking trip in summer 1818, are evoked in the strophe, as the poet imagines drinking, swallowing, tasting. Indeed, the "cool'd" draught of vintage or the warm, sunburnt Provençal wine would glide down and soothe his sore throat. Rather than emaciation through a lengthy consumption, the strophe imagines dissolution through bodily immersion, wasting away through a placid sensual experience of the wine, or hemlock, into a accompaniment with the bird. Here, a Keats overwhelmed by his own mortality, seems to seek an uncharacteristic escape from his body. Here, Keats seeks to transcend his material existence to become something seemingly less tangible, the bird's song. And yet, as we will find, the song is itself material. Even though it is of air, it is not ethereal but inscribes the body through affect to become text.

Sung with "full-throated ease," the bird's song is one of myth and a long history. The song is later echoed in the imagined "easeful death" with its "quiet breath," and indeed such an end would be to cease bodily existence "on the midnight with no pain," without the labored breathing and the violent hemorrhages that would later make the poet feel as if he were

drowning. But to cease bodily existence would not be an end for the poet. The breath presented in the ode extends and perpetuates the poet's remains (body and literary) by affectively engaging the lives of others, readers and singers of the nightingale's song. Even in its melancholy, his poetry relishes the sensuality of physical presence. Keats invokes physicalities that mirror his own as he describes the weariness of life on earth, "Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies" (26). Here Tom Keats's ghost haunts the poem, proleptic of the John's own enervated body and immanent death, forming a shared identity between the brothers. Indeed, citing Erasmus Darwin's *Zoonomia*, the *OED* acknowledges that the early nineteenth-century medical community understood consumption to be hereditary. The Keatses bore a history of tuberculosis: of just the immediate family, the disease killed John in 1821, Tom in 1818, and their mother, whom John nursed as a child of 14. Even George would die of consumption in America at the age of 44. In spring 1819, the physicality of the disease was all too fresh to the poet-physician, returning over and over in cruel afterlives of reincarnation that connect him to his family, to the past and the future. In dissolving bodily into the song of the nightingale, Keats will forget "the weariness, the fever, and the fret²⁵/ Here, where men sit and hear each other groan" (23-24). Ostensibly, these lines read as a universal comment on the human condition: the weariness, the fever, and the groans found a heteroglot history of phenomenological human existence. They are the self-same song of Ruth, of kings and emperors, and of Coleridge's eolian music upon magic casements. However, when followed immediately by images of death, especially the figure of the dying youth, these lines evoke Keats's attendance at the deathbeds of his tubercular mother and brother. The troubled breathing of their groans becomes the particular song of the terminally ill,

²⁵ In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the word "fret" held its modern meaning as an agitated state of mind, but the term also had a more specific medical definition. Similar to the "wasting away" of consumption, "fret" is a "a gnawing or wearing away, erosion," especially in reference to the skin (*OED*).

the song he has heard too much of in his short life. As Keats imagined the act of reading in tandem with George to connect the brothers, so he imagines the act of breathing to connect him to his family and to a history of diseased bodies. The breath that belongs to the poet, the breath he imagines passing into and out of his body with varying degrees of ease, like the nightingale's song, seems a material and textual inheritance that will pass through him and onward as it has other bodies before. In this way, the poem creates a parallel physical legacy between the song of the bird and the troubled, consumptive breathing of the poet.

After having left England for Italy, Keats famously writes to Charles Brown, "I have an habitual feeling of my real life having passed, and that I am leading a posthumous existence" (*Letters* II. 359). Keats describes the feeling that his remaining months on earth are a posthumous existence as "habitual." The thought visits and revisits him, haunting him with a ghostly presence. His real life has ended, and now he rehearses a death in life. But according to friends looking back upon the poet years after his passing in Rome, Keats's posthumous existence took hold long before he sailed south aboard the *Maria Crowther*. In 1828, seven years after Keats's death, Leigh Hunt wrote a short chapter about his friend and mentee in the volume *Lord Byron and some of his contemporaries*. Hunt writes, "Mr. Keats had felt that his disease was mortal for two or three years before he died. He had a constitutional tendency to consumption; a close attendance to the death-bed of a beloved brother, when he ought to have been nursing himself in bed, gave it a blow which he felt for months" (439). Keats's friends felt the poet had an oppressive sense of mortality, that posthumousness infused his life and poetry. Mortality as such is not death itself but a feeling toward death, or a deathliness. Mortality is the condition of the living, the imagined sympathy with the dead that Smith describes because of a shared materiality that presupposes breakdown and dissolution. However, materiality is both the

root of our mortality, and, for the Romantics, it is the vehicle for a secular immortality through a social affect of reading experiences, through the text. As we see in “Ode to a Nightingale,” Keats’s posthumous poetics take up the inevitable dissolution of his body and the text itself as a material entity. The poem imagines the dispersal of the self into other bodies and into futurity through verse. A twenty-first century reader of the ode, forming the words with her mouth, inhaling and exhaling sounds from her lungs and throat, breathes the song of the nightingale, even as the poet breathes them. The song whose path connects Keats’s family history to Coleridge’s magic casements to Ruth’s sad heart to emperors and clowns tolls the speaker of the poem back to an earthly reality of physical existence. As the nightingale’s song dissolves into the air, over the hills, it is “buried deep” (77). Though “dead,” this heteroglot song of long history becomes like Smith’s imagined corpse, revived into posthumous existence through the reading of the poem.

Death and the Living

Keats’s poetry insisted upon physical presence that I have been identifying as the bodily imperative of a posthumous poetics, or a poetics toward dissolution and death because of poetry’s inherent materiality. His contemporaries were keenly aware of Keats’s heightened sensibility to physicality. Hunt writes of Keats’s “epic eye” in beholding the sublime scenes of the Scottish Highlands, of his “daring” lines of verse in *Isabella*, and how “Mr. Keats is no half-painter, who has only distinct ideas occasionally, and fills up the rest with commonplaces. He feels all as he goes. In his best pieces, every bit is precious; and he knew it, and laid it on as carefully as Titian or Giorgione” (429). Over and over in his biographical tribute to Keats, Hunt praises the young poet’s sensibility, how he feels intensely and instinctively, and how he infuses every line of verse with the same fiery animation with which he sees the world. He celebrates

how well Keats reads Chapman's Homer and the "gigantic grandeur" of his own epic attempt *Hyperion* (411-12, 419). Keats's attention to material detail and sensation illustrates his insistence on a direct realism of style that could write the aesthetic experience on the body of his reader. However, this same transference of affect enacts an extension of the poet's own materiality as well. As Brendan Corcoran notes, "Keats is not merely concerned with endowing his writing with a resolute materiality; he seeks to be *present* in, to be an absolute part of, the writing that stages his very peculiar *danse macabre*" (348). Indeed, physical presence becomes a veritable theme in the life-writing that emerges from the Keats circle in reaction to his death. In attempts to honor their friend, guided by Keats's own poetry, writers like Hunt and Shelley reanimate the body of the dead poet, using his physical presence as a cognitive artifact for a collective memory that seeks to elevate the young poet to the ranks of England's greatest writers.

Hunt's chapter on Keats, opens with a concrete description of the man. Focusing specifically on his face, Hunt describes how the poet's disposition marries the opposites of power and sensibility: "he had a face, in which energy and sensibility were remarkably mixed up, an eager power checked and made patient by ill health" (Hunt 407). We are called to gather around the physical Keats, around the body of the poet. Attention to disease suffuses the chapter and further demonstrates the ways in which Keats's physical reality and insistence upon that materiality spread through his social networks and the consequent narratives of his posthumous existence. In fact, in writing of the poet's death, Hunt exclaims upon Keats's bodily and mental resilience, noting how "The physicians expressed their astonishment that he had held out so long, the lungs turning out, on inspection, to have been almost obliterated. They said he must have lived upon the mere strength of spirit within him" (442). The grotesque allusion to Keats's organs, ravaged by disease and on the point of annihilation, breaches decorum. "Manly and

gentle to the last,” Keats’s fortitude becomes the re-animating breath through which this biographer composes his “life” of the poet. Hunt continues his description:

The chin was bold, the cheeks sunken; the eyes mellow and glowing; large, dark and sensitive. At the recital of a noble action, or a beautiful thought, they would suffuse with tears, and his mouth trembled. In this, there was ill health as well as imagination for he did not like these betrayals of emotion; and he had great personal as well as moral courage. (Hunt 408)

Scholars often present this passage in accounts of how Keats’s friends insisted upon his manliness in response to the narrative of “poor Keats” killed by a critic. As discussed in Chapter 3, accusations of Keats’s effeminacy or excess sensitivity in his poetry and in his death seek to dispossess him from rights to a poetic career and a social influence. Hunt’s insistence on Keats’s fortitude may be the imposition of a manly character to save his friend’s reputation; however, it also serves to counter the signs of ill health in his face. A strong chin gives way sunken cheeks, perhaps emaciated from consumption. His eyes show a balance of calm and liveliness, an awareness of hardship and an aesthetic sensitivity. He is noble and courageous, a man of feeling, who closely guards his emotions because of a keen awareness of an unfeeling environment.

Hunt’s description remembers the details of the face in action, in movement: the trembling mouth, the glowing eyes. He attempts here to revive the man, but all descriptions must fall short. Paul de Man’s work on epitaph and prosopopeia offers insight into the necessary disjunction between life-writing and the life now gone:

As soon as we understand the rhetorical function of prosopopeia as positing voice or face by means of language, we also understand that what we are deprived of is not life but the shape and the sense of a world accessible only in the privative way

of understanding. Death is a displaced name for a linguistic predicament, and the restoration of mortality by autobiography (the prosopopeia of the voice and the name) deprives and disfigures to the precise extent that it restores. (de Man 80-81)

De Man describes death as a linguistic predicament that forecloses the life with the life-writing because the act of utterance makes finite the lived experience. Upon the death of a friend, we, the living, are “deprived” of the dead’s individual sense of the world. The mortality restored to the corpse through life-writing necessarily disfigures because it falls short of the actual embodied experience. Like the placard that calls attention to the plum tree replacing the original plum tree in the garden of the Keats House, life-writing brings to light absence even as it insists upon presence. Indeed, since mortality is deathliness, a condition of the living that is a feeling toward death, “the restoration of mortality” that de Man outlines is not a restoration of the life but a restoration of the living’s sympathy with the dead. The living feel an imperative to capture what remains of their relationship to the dead. The remnants of memory, then, are collected into fragmentary physical descriptions, scraps that come closest to the once-lived truth. What Hunt creates in his physical descriptions of the poet, then, is not the poet but the undead figure – Smith’s corpse animated by the imagination of Hunt – a hybrid figure, part Keats, part Hunt.

The imagined figurations of Keats’s body in his poetry, his letters, and his memory thus act as cognitive artifacts for the construction of a dynamic narrative of memory and mourning; however, his poetic remains also create an affective excess that can seem to overwhelm those left behind with the oppressive weight of disease and mortality. Many of Keats’s friends respond affectively to the prospect of writing his life, and their feelings saturate the collective memory of the poet. Hunt expresses regret for having not taken “a more active part” in supporting Keats against the Scottish reviewers who supposedly dealt a fatal blow to his frail constitution. In a

poignantly ironic lament, Hunt writes, “an injury, in every point of view was done to a young and sensitive nature, to which I ought to have been more alive [...] I was in the habit, though a public man, of living in a world of abstractions of my own” (Hunt 425). Hunt is abstracted from the living; therefore, he is dead to the world’s cares and to his friend in need. This guilt perhaps shapes Hunt’s insistent desire in the chapter to recall the presence of his friend and the sociality they enjoyed in Hampstead. He describes how Hampstead infuses the 1817 volume:

the poem with which it begins, was suggested to him by a delightful summer-day, as he stood beside the gate that leads from the Battery on Hampstead Heath into a field by Caen Wood; and the last poem, the on ‘On Sleep and Poetry,’ was occasioned by his sleeping in one of the cottages in the Vale of Health, the first one that fronts the valley, beginning from the same quarter. I mention these things, which now look trivial, because his readers will not think them so twenty years hence. It was in the beautiful lane, running from the road between Hampstead and Highgate to the foot of Highgate Hill, that meeting me one day, he first gave me the volume. If the admirer of Mr. Keats’s poetry does not know the lane in question, he ought to become acquainted with it, both on its own. (413)

Hunt talks of a cottage Keats frequented in the Vale of Health, specifying its location down to the very plot of land, and, though he does not claim the home as his own, he is invoking Keats’s physical body and placing it in the specific settings where he wrote, read, and lived. Moreover, Hunt later quotes from “Sleep and Poetry,” praising the attention to detail describing Hunt’s parlor in which Keats wrote the poem. In marking these biographical moments, Hunt betrays an overwhelming desire to bring revive the friendship he enjoyed with the young Keats in the days when they were closest. More than this, he anticipates the same desire within Keats’s readers to

conjure a relationship with the man. He believes that twenty years hence readers will want to engage sympathetically with Keats by placing themselves physically in the spaces that he walked, lived, and wrote²⁶. Through such sympathetic engagement with the dead, Keats the man and the poet will be reanimated in bodies of his friends and readers.

Like Hunt before him, Charles Brown struggled with a sense of Keats's physical presence as he attempted to write the life of his lost friend. Brown successfully composed a short biography for presentation as a lecture at the Plymouth Athenaeum on 27 December 1836; however, he was unable to expand the presentation into a full-length "life" as he intended and eventually sent his material to Richard Monckton Milnes in March 1841 where it became the foundation for the first full-length biography of Keats. In a letter to Milnes, Brown writes of one obstacle to his completion of the life:

‘As soon as I begin to be occupied with his poems, or with the Life I have written, it forcibly seems to me, against all reason (that is out of the question) that he is sitting by my side, his eyes seriously wandering from me to the papers by turns, and watching my doings. Call it nervousness if you will; but with this nervous impression I am unable to do justice to his fame. Could he speak I would abide by his decision.’ (qtd. in Herford 334)

As we have seen in Hunt's re-animating life-writing of Keats, the poet becomes an active physical presence in the process of biography. And here, through Brown's nervousness, the weight of the task takes on the face of Keats's himself. The poet sits beside his friend, as he did many days before, and studies the material remnants of his own life laid out on the desk. Keats's poems, letters, and life bring him into a posthumous existence that is too affectively real for the

²⁶ For an important discussion of such literary tourism in nineteenth century Britain, see *The Literary Tourist: Readers and Place in Romantic and Victorian Britain* by Nicola J. Watson (2006).

living. And yet, the virtual poet cannot speak. Swann reads Brown's paralysis through Derrida's idea of the image that interrupts and imposes the dead into our moment of reading (279). She argues that this interruption arrests and refuses work. However, reading this moment through distributed cognition acknowledges that Keats's body and remains will intercede in the process of life-writing. Reading the extension of Keats's body in this way offers the hope for renewed spaces of communion for the two friends. The body of the poet gets reanimated and reimagined in new narratives that are at once of the author and of his readers. Brown's realization that Keats will not speak, then, is ultimately why Brown cannot proceed. The ghostly figure of Keats here makes explicit that the life, the Keats that Brown is writing is an artifact, a made thing, a joint product, half Keats, half Brown. Brown seems unable to acknowledge that. He cannot come to terms with the extension of his friend's mind and body into posterity when that extension is founded upon himself, the living, even though this social composition of a new, heteroglot Keats narrative is the hope offered by literature after life.

I have been arguing that Keats's body becomes a cognitive artifact to aid the composition of a collective memory represented in a host of life-writing about the man. Studying life-writing in this way begs the question: to whom does death actually happen? In its re-animation of the dead, life-writing as a social composition is truly the story of the living. If death is ultimately an ineffable, material existence like de Man's "linguistic predicament" that cannot capture the exact individual sense of the world, life-writing seems to make death a shared event. Mark Sandy's recent book *Romanticism, Memory, and Mourning* looks at Derrida to explain the significance of utterance for memory:

Derrida's reflections on the work of mourning go some way towards explaining

the self-awareness possessed by forms of eulogy or elegy and their ability to recognise in the moment of their utterance the very impossibility of making such an utterance when faced with the inevitable, but incomprehensible, occurrence of death. Through conventional codes and rites, mourning commemorates the unique, singular, and irreplaceable moment of death, and according to Derrida, simultaneously obliterates the singularity of death by repeating and reiterating the event itself. (3-4)

While Keats's posthumous poetics shows that death is not a singular experience insofar as the dying body extends forward and backward as an affective text, utterance takes what seems uniquely individual, because it is pre-linguistic, and makes it signify in a way that closely approximates lived experience. In her own Derridean reading of memorial, Tilottama Rajan remarks that "mourning is a form of affirmation and a kind of cultural memory and that memory is the return of the past as future" (xvi). As a form of cultural memory, a consensus of sorts, life-writing is a cooperative composition of the dead by the living. It is a likeness, a fiction rather than matter of fact, but, in this way, the poet becomes more negatively capable in death than in life. In death he dissolves more easily into the ever-changing social narrative, offering more freely his own body and mind by taking on those of his biographers and their contexts.

Reanimating Keats: Cognition in *Adonais*

While biographers emotionally closer to Keats himself sometimes struggled to pen a life years after his death because of the affective proximity of the man, Percy Shelley's ability to write an elegy to the late poet within months of his passing was predicated on a decided distance from the details surrounding the poet's death and an overall lack of intimacy with Keats. Shelley requested information regarding Keats's death in an 8 June 1821 letter to his publisher, Charles

Ollier, where he announces his intention for *Adonais* with its theme of poor Keats, snuffed out by a cruel reviewer (*Keats and History* 23). This popular mythology of Keats's death, also circulated by Byron and Hunt, maintained that Keats suffered acutely from the bad reception of *Endymion*. Attacks of the poem in *The Quarterly Review* and one written by John Gibson Lockhart under the alias of "Z" in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* supposedly caused Keats much emotional and physical distress, resulting in a hemorrhage of the lungs that eventually lead to his death. After completing the elegy, Shelley received the information he requested, the details of Keats's hemorrhage and his violent struggle with disease in his final days. All of this information came filtered from the firsthand witness Joseph Severn through Robert Finch, then John Gisbourne (*Keats and History* 24); however, despite these many degrees of separation, Shelley tells Gisbourne, "I do not think that if I had seen [Finch's letter]...I could have composed my poem[...]the enthusiasm of the imagination would have been overpowered by sentiment" (qtd. in *Keats and History* 25). Even as an acquaintance who was more rival than friend to the late Keats, Shelley sought distance from the body of the man. The brute suffering of the body in his final days would have proved too affectively overwhelming for him to compose the Keats Shelley imagined. Indeed, Susan Wolfson classes Shelley's elegy as a "pathetic sublime" that "depended on distance from Keats himself" (*Keats and History* 25) but I would qualify her statement to emphasize that the distance Shelley required was distance from Keats's *body*. *Adonais* seeks transcendence for Keats and his biographer by attempting to abstract the man from the circumstances of his death, from his overly sensual, diseased body. In this way, Shelley seems to be rejecting the extended cognitive model that Keats's material poetics insists upon. Yet, we will see, even as he attempts to project Keats into a literary afterlife removed from the materiality of disease and the prejudice of a partisan readership, Shelley engages in the same

Smithian sympathetic reanimation that ultimately revives and extends the body of Keats as a text for posterity.

In a letter dated 10 May 1817, Keats asks Hunt, “Does Shelley go on telling strange Stories of the Death of kings? Tell him there are strange Stories of the death of Poets--some have died before they were conceived” (*Letters* I. 139-40). Keats’s anxiety over his future claim to fame is well noted by his contemporaries, especially as part of the “poor Keats” narrative that sees the reviewer’s pen as the sword that dealt his fatal blow. However, here we might read something more in line with Keats’s embodied, posthumous poetics. How very strange for a poet to be conceived post-mortem, in the life-writing (or the afterlife of writing) that echoes his voice, that re-animates his body in health and disease, and perpetuates his name into futurity. Yet, the functions of the extended mind are at play as Shelley draws upon multiple cognitive and cultural artifacts to create a collective elegy of the poet through his mourners. Merlin Donald sees, “cognitive artefacts in use as ‘drawn into a maelstrom of shared cognitive activity in any culture’ and argues that ‘their functions in the larger cultural matrix go well beyond mere storage, because they are in dynamic interaction with the entire cognitive-cultural system’ (Donald, 1998b:184)” (Sutton 42). We see this at work in *Adonais*, as the figurations of both the poet’s bodily remains and literary remains serve as a centripetal artifacts to the poem, constituent of the life-writing. Keats’s canon echoes in traces of “Ode to a Nightingale,” *Isabella*, and the *Hyperion* fragment. However, other cultural artifacts converge in the narrative to form a new textual body, a new life of Keats, at once the man, his poetry, and those left to read him. The poem is a heteroglot text, full of allusions to Keats’s own poetry, especially from the 1820 volume, biblical allusions linking Keats to Christ, as well as allusions to the writers among

whom Shelley wishes to elevate Keats--Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, etc. This composite life foregrounds the poem as a communal elegy and the death of the poet as a communal death.

In his construction of Keats as Adonais, Shelley is highly motivated to show the inhumanity of Keats's critics, to elevate the poet and himself. The mourners of Shelley's poem imagine themselves in the body of Keats, feeling pain as they imagine he must have felt, yet the reviewers of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and *The Quarterly Review* are unsympathetic and cruel. Shelley is also motivated to portray Keats in a very particular way, as frail and ephemeral: not made for this world, he is to be redeemed in another, through apotheosis. This method for redemption contradicts Keats's posthumous poetics, seeking other means for immortality than the radical extension of Keats's material body and mind. Perhaps Shelley believed materiality is what caused Keats's downfall. The circumstances of Keats's lived experience, his disease and his middle-class social status, led to his demise and cut his career short. Nonetheless, Shelley's attempt to abstract the poet from the physical man can only circle back into the material body of Keats, into representations of his corpse and echoes of his language.

To ensure he and his subject find homes among the celebrated dead and therefore achieve fame in posterity, Shelley uses his multi-voiced strain to blur the distinctions between the mourners and the mourned, the living and the dead. Written in Spenserian stanzas, mirroring Keats's own "Eve of St. Agnes" and Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, the elegy is a pageant of mourning, a parade of those who loved and lost Adonais. Each attendant seeks to revive him through memory and affection. *Adonais* opens with the speaker, Shelley, declaring he weeps for Adonais, broadening his personal grief into a call for a communal mourning, "O, weep for Adonais," the elegy's refrain. He commands,

... rouse thy obscure compeers,
And teach them thine own sorrow, say: "With me
Died Adonais; till the Future dares
Forget the Past, his fate and fame shall be
An echo and a light unto eternity!" (I)

Recalling Adam Smith's sympathy with the dead, we must ask: what will weeping do for Adonais? What does a public show of sympathy and mourning do for the dead? What does this utterance accomplish? As lead mourner, Shelley invokes a communal death in the loss of his friend. He calls upon "sad Hour," one of the Seasons goddesses, to organize the mourning party and declare "with me, died Adonais." Locating Adonais's death in a particular moment in time and then immediately revoking the finitude of that moment reopens the life to future possibility. Through Hour, Shelley predicts an afterlife echoing into eternity, a light for the future. The poetry created in this act of mourning, then, becomes a means for survival, a vivification of both the dead and living.

As a central mourner in the poem, Urania ostensibly serves as the vehicle for Keats's apotheosis. Kelvin Everest explains Shelley's choice of Urania: "Shelley's Urania is the widow of Milton and bereaved mother of Adonais/Keats [...] In the first half of the poem Urania's identity as the mother of English poets is central to the coherence of the 'action', and is particularly significant in the poem's powerfully reflexive effect" ("Shelley's *Adonais*" 239). As mother of English poets and central mourner, she validates the elegy and Shelley's appraisal of Keats. Urania stands as guarantor of Keats's ascension to the status of great English poet. However, much like Hunt and Brown who express feelings of guilt and nervousness when confronted with the cognitive artifacts of the poet's remains, Urania too must face the material

consequences of her indifference to Keats's miseries. Shelley calls on her to acknowledge the attack on her son. Accusing her of neglect, he says, she did not look beyond the veil of his "soft enamoured breath" to know his suffering in life, but rather, she listened to its echoes from the safety of her paradise. Far from Keats's belabored breathing that is his embodied experience expressed in poems like "Ode to a Nightingale," the "soft enamoured breath" projected here calls into question Shelley's own veiled eyes as a reader of Keats. Shelley himself seems to betray guilt for having missed the sounds of anguish under the dulcet tunes of the poet's verse. Nevertheless, Urania will bring together those she has mourned before – Milton, Dante, and Homer – uniting Keats (and presumably Shelley) in an alliance with others unjustly dismissed for their politics (Behrendt 280, note 18 to the text of *Adonais*). Shelley concludes from this legacy of prejudice that such opposition is but a thorny road one must pass along to reach Fame (V).

Despite its efforts to abstract the life from the physical body that holds it to the earth in the present, Shelley's poem has as its center a representation of the bodily remains of Keats. We first see the corpse in Stanza VII:

To that high Capital, where kingly Death
Keeps his pale court in beauty and decay,
He came; and bought, with price of purest breath,
A grave among the eternal. (VII)

These lines are constructed from two forms of Keatsian remains: the cognitive artifacts of Keats's body of work and Keats's imagined corpse. At once evoking Keats's death place in Rome and the pale kings' cold hillside in "La Belle Dame sans Merci," the passage confounds past and present while projecting a future among those whose fame is eternal. We see for the first

time in *Adonais* a reminder of Keats's diseased body in all its beauty and decay. Again, Shelley zeroes in on the poet's breath, or the absence of breath. The beauty and decay are both the cemetery and his body/mind. Breath here is at once Keats's literal breathing while alive, corrupted by blood and phlegm, and also his words, the eolian inspiration and expiration that will infuse the elegy and make his name among the bards. Paying for his own apotheosis at the price of purest breath, Keats sacrifices his health for his future fame. He pays for fame with a hemorrhage brought on by bad reviews, as Shelley's myth would have it. Shelley concludes this stanza with a Keatsian echo that asks whether death is a kind of waking dream after all:

while still

He lies, as if in dewy sleep he lay;

Awake him not! Surely he takes his fill

Of deep and liquid rest, forgetful of all ill. (VII)

Does *Adonais* wake or sleep? Is he living or dead? In a beautiful paradox of immaterial materiality, we look upon the corpse but the man is gone. As *Adonais*, Keats achieves the forgetfulness that his "Ode to a Nightingale" desired.

We stand over *Adonais*'s corpse again, as the late poet's "quick dreams": "All he had loved, and moulded into thought,/ From shape, and hue, and odour, and sweet sound,/ Lamented *Adonais*" (XIV). Starting in Stanza IX, Shelley imagines Keats's "dreams," as post-mortem, lively, pastoral dreams, reminiscent of *Endymion*, emerging from the late poet now in his grave²⁷. In the stanzas that follow, Keats's brain is laid bare before the corpse. Rather than entering the brain of the man, we study his brain outside of the body as his mind is ushered forth, a cognitive artifact that will join the pageant of mourners.

²⁷ These dreams are often read as Keats's poems written and not yet written. See Everest's article "Shelley's *Adonais*" 239.

Oh, weep for Adonais!--The quick Dreams,
The passion-winged Ministers of thought,
Who were his flocks, whom near the living the streams
Of his young spirit he fed, and whom he taught
The love which was its music, wander not,--
Wander no more, from kindling brain to brain,
But droop there, whence they sprung; and mourn their lot
Round the cold heart, where, after their sweet pain,
They ne'er will gather strength, or find a home again. (IX)

Shelley, who would deny the material extension of Keats's posthumous poetics, who seeks to abstract him from the physical reality that was his downfall, here describes distributed cognition. The poet's dreams pass like kindling from brain to brain to spark anew and have a fresh life of fire. The elegized subject has become trifold here: as Adonais, Keats, and Endymion – simultaneously the past, present, and future – commune in the space of this verse. In life, Adonais/Keats/Endymion tended his thoughts as a loving shepherd. Devoted to their father, his “quick dreams,” his living dreams will not leave his side in death. Outside of his body, but unwilling to circulate and kindle other brains, they “droop” over the corpse, aching to re-enter their first home, to re-animate the body. We see Keats's model for how the ideas and affect (the mind and body) of the poet circulate between bodies, but Shelley declares the model dead with the death of Keats himself. Nevertheless, Shelley's text performs the very work of distributed cognition and posthumous poetics that he disavows.

Independent of Adonais's body, his dreams continue their attempts at reanimation. One of Keats's dreams clasps his cold head with trembling hands,

And fans him with her moonlight wings, and cries,
"Our love, our hope, our sorrow, is not dead;
See, on the silken fringe of his faint eyes,
Like dew upon a sleeping flower, there lies
A tear some Dream has loosen'd from his brain."
Lost Angel of a ruin'd Paradise!
She knew not 'twas her own; as with no stain
She faded, like a cloud which had outwept its rain. (X)

The dreams themselves seem to wrest the poems from his now dormant brain. Here and elsewhere, Shelley reanimates scenes from Keats's literary remains into a new life for his narrative of mourning. Keats's poem *Isabella* features prominently here. Lorenzo's severed head as the analogue for Adonais's corpse becomes a cognitive and creative artifact in this stanza. The bereaved woman holds the head of her beloved, straightening his eyelashes, crying over his dirt-streaked face. Desperate to find her love revived, she mistakes her own tear for that of the man. Stepping outside of the allusion to *Isabella* to remember the text of the elegy, we see how the body of the poet present in these lines is also a text, Keats's own poetry. Therefore this scene enacts a model of reading and writing, where the Dream mourner's tears become the reader's tears, or even Shelley's tears.

Shared tears are a common Keatsian trope, as they form material connections that cement sympathy between two bodies, linking them through affect as one. Shifting from the tactility of tears to the essence of breath opens the potential for the communal moment of mourning to incorporate the man himself more fully. Indeed, through breath and breathing, Keats's physical body is imagined to be re-animated and made constitutive of the communal song of mourning.

Through the elegy's close attention to respiration, Keats's breath becomes linked with his activism and strength of character. In order to breathe life back into the poet's body, his dreams, or poems, flush his body with life by re-entering through the point at which they left him, his lips.

Another Splendour on his mouth alit,
That mouth, whence it was wont to draw the breath
Which gave it strength to pierce the guarded wit,
And pass into the panting heart beneath
With lightning and with music: the damp death
Quench'd its caress upon his icy lips;
And, as a dying meteor stains a wreath
Of moonlight vapour, which the cold night clips,
It flush'd through his pale limbs, and pass'd to its eclipse. (XII)

Keats's death begins with a poem on his lips, reentering as his breath, flushing his body with one last light before eclipsing through pale limbs. *Hyperion*, evoked in the image of surging life, is the literary remnant reanimated as Shelley constructs Keats as a fallen Apollo. In a strange, almost synaesthetic formulation, "panting heart" confuses respiration and cardiovascular activity, so that Keats's breath, however strained in actuality, becomes the lightning and strength of his fighting, rebel heart, and Keats dies into life. In Shelley's narrative of poetic justice, Keats's words were the first to pierce in that fatal duel with his reviewers. The battle imagery continues to animate the late poet's body as the speaker imagines his diseased corpse transforming into flowery fragrance. Death is but a metamorphosis through breath.

The leprous corpse, touch'd by this spirit tender,

Exhales itself in flowers of gentle breath;
Like incarnations of the stars, when splendour
Is chang'd to fragrance, they illumine death
And mock the merry worm that wakes beneath;
Nought we know, dies. Shall that alone which knows
Be as a sword consum'd before the sheath
By sightless lightning?—the intense atom glows
A moment, then is quench'd in a most cold repose. (XX)

The trajectory has shifted here. Keats's body is no longer a passive entity taking in breath, taking in sickness and insults. The imagined body, an actively decaying corpse, breathes out, and this breath is contagious as it breeds flowers whose fragrance eventually reaches all the way to the stars. Here, instead of Keats dreams collapsing over the corpse of the man, his breath, his poetry as we have seen elsewhere, spreads outward and upward into other forms. We see Shelley engaging in the distributed cognition model that imagines a dispersal of the poet's mind into other bodies as it transforms and becomes new life and new life-writing.

From a close inspection of the diseased body, Shelley hones in on the poet's brain in the second half of this stanza. "That alone which knows," or the brain, will be as a sword burnt up, consumed. Here is the first appearance of the word, "consum'd," which gets employed twice more to describe the condition of the mourners living on after Adonais's death. This is the only instance, then, where the elegy seems to indicate Keats's tuberculosis, his physical reality in life. However, Shelley does not present Keats wasting away, emaciated by a long struggle with the disease. Instead, the consumption is a quick strike, a snap of the fingers, and evaporation. Keats's brain is a sword unsheathed and on the attack when it, and the poet by extension, is burnt up in

an instant. Again, Shelley re-animates the corpse with an energy that intensifies before eclipsing. *Hyperion*-esque, the light surges through the limbs before fading out.

In a negatively capable act of sympathy with the dead, Shelley travels through the diseased body, its corrupted lungs and feverish brain, to understand that death is the condition of the living. In one last *Hyperion*-like moment of brightness and eclipse, Death re-animates the corpse of Adonais. “Blush’d to annihilation,” the breath returns to his lips and light to his limbs (XXV). A life in death meets Urania’s caress, and she asks it to stay, to kiss her, to give her a moment of physical memory with her son:

Stay yet awhile! speak to me once again;
Kiss me, so long but as a kiss may live;
And in my heartless breast and burning brain
That word, that kiss, shall all thoughts else survive,
With food of saddest memory kept alive,
Now thou art dead, as if it were a part
Of thee, my Adonais! (XXVI)

In a scene that very well could be the illustration for Smith’s sympathy with the dead, we see Urania seeking to remember the dead through an imagined physiological intimacy. Her heartless breast and burning brain manifest her grief on the body. She longs for his voice, his breath. She aches for his kiss, like Isabella for her Lorenzo. As a sharing of breath, the kiss and the words will enter her breast and brain, fueling Adonais’s memory. This act of sympathy with the dead keeps his memory alive for herself and the other mourners, though it is a simulacrum of the actual man. The language here is deliberately evasive. A kiss and a word from the life in death stands in “as if” a part of Adonais. The mourners strain after the real but all that is left are

remains. The literary remains that get reanimated and in turn reanimate the imagined corpse-- they are "as if," they are not the man. Nevertheless, they contain snatches of the man himself and as they circulate through the reading and writing experiences of the living, Keats lives a posthumous life.

Keats's breath concludes the elegy, perpetuating his material immateriality into the very bodies of those left behind. Adonais's voice lingers through nature, "He is made one with Nature: there is heard/His voice in all her music[...]/He is a presence to be felt and known [...]/Spreading itself where'er that Power may move/Which has withdrawn his being to its own" (XLII). Truly negatively capable in death, the poet is a presence felt affectively, known on the pulses because he is absorbed into a Power that suffuses all. In the next stanza, Shelley declares, "He is a portion of the loveliness/Which once he made more lovely" (XLIII). In the past, he composed loveliness with his voice, and now, with his breath, he is at once constituting and constitutive of the loveliness. He is, then, a cognitive artifact for nature and for poets, friends, and generations living on after him. And so, we learn along with Shelley, that to eclipse is not to extinguish.

The splendours of the firmament of time
May be eclips'd, but are extinguish'd not;
Like stars to their appointed height they climb,
And death is a low mist which cannot blot
The brightness it may veil. (XLIV)

After Urania's lament over Adonais, mountain shepherds gather round the corpse. Like the shepherd invoked early in the elegy, these men are poets, Adonais's contemporaries. Byron, Shelley, and Leigh Hunt mourn their lost colleague, compatriot, and friend. Byron, a famed

pilgrim, with his own piercing tongue arrives. Shelley stands companionless and exiled for having seen the naked truth of the world. Leigh Hunt appears as a Dionysian Christ, mourning his young follower (XXXII-XXXV). All of these men leaning over the corpse in an imagined tableaux of grief cooperate to tell Keats's life, and the future of his life as text. At various points in the years that follow, each will write a variation of the same mythology: Byron's nod to Keats's death in *Don Juan*, Shelley's elegy here, Hunt's chapter in *Lord Byron and some of his contemporaries*. All of these, however, are necessarily a likeness of the man, a fiction composed using his body as a cognitive artifact for a collective memory. In this way, life-writing shows us that death is the condition of the living. Keats's posthumous poetics extends his physical body and his mind backward and forward into the past and the future, into the material presence of his friends and readers. As his early biographers found, the poet's sensuality of style and materiality of person makes his physical presence inescapable even post-mortem, forming new spaces of communion with the dead, though sometimes these uncanny moments can feel overwhelming to a biographer. Nevertheless, the posthumous life-writing about Keats forms a dialogic and dynamic system of memory and mourning that in reviving his bodily and literary remains as cognitive artifacts accepts and objects to, but ultimately cannot escape, the resolute materiality of the poet's lived experience.

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