Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis or dissertation as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis or dissertation in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known, including display on the world wide web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis or dissertation. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis or dissertation. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis or dissertation.

Signature:

_____ _____

Elizabeth Bishop Date

"In the midst of Life, we are in Death:" Melancholia and Ecology in British Romantic Poetry

By
Elizabeth Briande Bishop
Doctor of Philosophy
English

_____
Deborah Elise White
Advisor

_____
Walter Reed

Committee Member

_____
Jill Robbins
Committee Member

Accepted:

_____
Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph.D.
Dean of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies

_____
Date

"In the midst of Life, we are in Death:" Melancholia and Ecology in British Romantic Poetry

By

Elizabeth Briande Bishop
SUNY Oswego, B.A., 2008

Advisor: Deborah Elise White

An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in English
2014

Abstract
"In the midst of Life, we are in Death:" Melancholia and Ecology in British Romantic Poetry

By Elizabeth Briande Bishop

This dissertation explores subjectivity at the intersection of ecology and melancholia in British Romantic poetry. I argue that a discernible ethics arises when melancholia is understood through the lens of ecology and I examine the emergence of that ethics in poems by John Clare, Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats. In their work, the speaker's exploration of nature troubles his conceptions of subjectivity in ways that are at times disturbing and transformative. Drawing on the theoretical work of Timothy Morton, Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno I contend that through an attention to ecology the subject of these poems learns how to approach nature but also the alterity inherent to him/herself. Chapter one elaborates the theoretical stakes of the dissertation through Morton's theory of dark ecology. He proposes a reconceptualization of nature which rejects subject-immersion in nature for the recognition of distance *between* the subject and nature. I extend this to read a burgeoning psychosis in Clare's apocalyptic lyrics. Chapter two presents a revisionist reading of Shelley's *Adonais* which positions the elegy in terms of suicidal ideation. I demonstrate how influential scholarship obscures the text's suicidal elements and explore work which positions the suicidal gesture as central to the speaker's embrace of eternity. Chapter three charts Keats's turn away from aesthetic ideology while forging a new poetic mission based on an embrace of melancholia as a productive literary force through "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles," "Epistle to Hamilton" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn." Chapter four elaborates Keats' new poetics of transience and potentiality through two models of ecological insight. "Ode to a Nightingale" recognizes the fundamental importance of the subject's distance from alterity through an exercise in failure. The second model, in "Isabella; or The Pot of Basil" and "Ode on Melancholy," presents an effacement of subjectivity, through reading the body as a vessel for organic vitality which influences other vegetal forms, even past death. The juxtaposition with "Isabella" enables a dynamic re-reading of "Ode on Melancholy" in which the poet-speaker exuberantly embraces the outcome of his finite existence. By locating melancholia at the center of subjectivity, I present readings of British romantic poems which produce a discernable ethics to guide interactions with ecology.

"In the midst of Life, we are in Death:" Melancholia and Ecology in British Romantic Poetry

By

Elizabeth Briande Bishop
B.A., SUNY Oswego

Advisor: Deborah Elise White, PhD

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English
2014

Acknowledgements

"…what is forgotten seems to us laden with all the lived life it promises us"

Walter Benjamin *(Berlin Childhood around 1900*, *SW3* 395)

This dissertation is merely the externalization of the years of advice, encouragement and hard truth Deborah Elise White has always generously shared with me. From the moment we met she took me and my intellectual development seriously before I was ever her student or it occurred to me to study romanticism. Through my coursework with her, Walt Reed and Jill Robbins I not only gained the knowledge and insights necessary to produce this project, but experienced models of pedagogy that enhanced my own teaching.

I was delivered into the hands of Emory's faculty by an equally important figure, my adviser at the State University of New York at Oswego—Bennet Schaber. Simultaneously a witness and a guide in all things holy and profane, tragic and banal, he challenged me to truly embrace literature as transformative presence in my life, which truly "obliterates all consideration" on the way to Beauty and Truth, long before I understood who Keats was, or what that idea meant (109).

Other faculty I would like to acknowledge, whose actions large and small brought me to this place are Frank Byrne, who saw the gold in the chaff; Mary McCune, whose insights into interdisciplinary studies remain prescient; and Mary Wren Bivins, who is still among us, just not quite in the same way…

Table of Contents

"'In the midst of life, we are in death:' Melancholia and Ecology in British Romantic Poetry"

[1]

Introduction

> Nur wer die eigene Vergangenheit als Ausgeburt des Zwanges und der Not zu betrachten wüßte, der wäre fähig, sie in jeder Gegenwart aufs höchste für sich wert zu machen. Denn was einer lebte, ist bestenfalls der schönen Figur vergleichbar, der auf Transporten alle Glieder abgeschlagen wurden, und die nun nichts als den kostbaren Block abgibt, aus dem er das Bild seiner Zukunft zu hauen hat (46).
>
> "Torso," *Einbahnstraße* Walter Benjamin

> Only he who can view his own past as *an abortion* sprung from compulsion and need can use it to full advantage in the present. For what one has lived is at best comparable to a beautiful statue which has had all its limbs knocked off in transit, and now yields nothing but the precious block out of which the image of one's future must be hewn.[2]

This dissertation explores the intersection of ecology and melancholia in British Romantic poetry. It argues that a discernible ethics, based on the relationship between the subject and nature, can be read in the poetry of John Clare, Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats. Within these texts I analyze scenes in which we see a speaker who struggles with melancholia doubt some element of his philosophical foundation. He gains insight into this crisis through interaction with nature which operates as a source of contemplation. While each speaker's crisis has different features and outcomes, these texts have in common a turn

to (a conception of) nature that is being explored and tested, and which troubles their conceptions of subjectivity in ways that are both disturbing and reassuring to the speaker of the text and the reader. As these melancholic expressions and performances are confronted by what they call nature, that confrontation in turn facilitates the speaker's comprehension of the deeper philosophical issues from which his melancholia originated. What I am referring to here with the term melancholia are expressions of loss, trauma, failure, depression and ambivalence which appear in these texts. While these affects should by no means be conflated, they all do bear the mark of melancholia even when, as in the case of Shelley, melancholia also doubles as mourning in the text. Nature communicates this deeper comprehension to the speaker because, as Timothy Morton argues, the speaker's relationship to himself—melancholia—is identical to the subject's relationship to nature. This relationship, this ecology, teaches the subject not only how to approach nature but also how to approach the alterity inherent to himself.

While themes of ecology and melancholia run through many romantic writers, Clare, Shelley and Keats stand out, both because of their dominant places in the canon and in spite of it. While Clare is the most recent inclusion into the canon, his position is largely due to the rise of ecocriticism which I explore below. Despite his reputation as the writer of naturalist, pastoral lyrics, the poems I read here are disarming in their unceremonious dismantling of subjectivity and the earth it resides in. The lack of scholarly attention to this aspect of his oeuvre in addition to its apocalyptic language allow for more important and often neglected insights into the eco-critical project that only Timothy Morton's work on "dark ecology" has begun to explore in depth. While neither Keats nor Shelley suffer from a lack of scholarship specific issues in the scholarship propelled their inclusion in my project—in particular what I judge to be insufficient emphasis on the seriousness of their

melancholic crises and refusal to resolve them even through the offices of art. *Adonais* is the longest text discussed here, and the lack of scholarship on the feature that I read as the most prominent in the poem—the speaker's suicidal ideation—forced me to bypass many of the incumbent difficulties of the text in order to discuss it. Keats, it is often said by scholars, was the least educated of the Romantics, and with some competition from Shelley, the most tragic. His work, has not then by extension invested with the same philosophical weight Shelley, Coleridge or Wordsworth's was. I not only wanted to remedy this, but also extend eco-critical readings of romantic poetry—and here, too, in particular Morton's reading of dark ecology—to provide a framework by which to comprehend, not minimize or dismiss his melancholia. My reading engages this larger project through an exploration of the space that arises at the intersection of nature and melancholy in these romantic texts.

This dissertation is deeply indebted to the paradigm shift ecocriticism has forged within literary criticism. Ecocriticism is a dynamic revisionist theory which seeks to reconceptualize scenes of human-nonhuman interaction in order to promote ecological insights about literature, culture and philosophy. While it today approaches a broad range of texts and historical periods, it is no accident that ecocriticism partly originated in the scholarship of British romanticism. Scholars have recognized nature as an essential presence in romantic poetry since its origin. Whether affirmed or elided, the position of nature in romanticism has always existed within a contested space. How one values this has often determined the poet's reputation throughout the 20th century. Two scholars who exemplify such trends best are M.H. Abrams and Geoffrey Hartmann, who along with Harold Bloom and Earl Wasserman initiated the postwar reappraisal of British romanticism. I single out Abrams and Hartman out here because they represent the opposing ways of reading that exist within romanticism today, and which we see recur in ecocriticism. While I am not

suggesting a neat mapping of one critique upon another, interesting parallels do arise, which we would do well to make note of.

In *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953) and *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971), Abrams presents a narrative of romanticism that reads it as a break from the principles of neoclassicism through a series of inventions such as 'biodicy,' a term he draws from theodicy (*NS* 95). His use of the term 'biodicy' which espouses the mechanics of a theological narrative, exemplifies Abram's approach by seeking to produce a body of knowledge based on an affirmative, transcendental understanding of humanity (Kirschner 195). Geoffrey Hartman's argues through his readings of William Wordsworth in *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* and elsewhere for the presence of a dialectic in which the poet negotiates between nature and imagination to forge his vision (Fry 541-2). Hartman employs the terms apocalypse and *akedah* to clarify this negotiation. While scenes of apocalypse draw the poet towards transcendence, scenes of *akedah* "bind" the poet to nature (225). Barth reminds the reader in his account of Hartman's work that the poet continually posits scenes of apocalypse as *akedah* in order to "maintain his hold on the natural world" (Hartman 225; Barth 27). While Abrams' reading presents a secularized narrative of Christian transcendence in which the dialectic of nature serves an affirmation of human consciousness, Hartman's articulation of apocalypse and *akedah* not only accounts for nature's dual powers of creation and destruction but posits a powerful ambivalence that paralyzes the poet. While these scholars may seem to have little to do with the insights of ecocriticism, they do in fact draw the map by which contemporary scholars find themselves. Like Abrams, Bate bases his criticism on an adherence to an affirmative aesthetic ideology, while Hartman's recognition of the poet's ambivalence looks forward to Morton's work.

While Jonathan Bate and James McKusick by no means invented ecocriticism, nor would claim to, the publication of their books, *Song of the Earth* and *Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology*, (both published in 2000) represent for many scholars ecocriticism's entrance into mainstream academic thought. While Wordsworth had again suffered a devaluation of sorts at the hands of new historicism, ecocriticism positioned the poet's relationship to nature as central to romanticism and crucial to our contemporary condition. Bate and McKusick accomplish this by putting forward readings of Wordsworth, as well as of Clare and others, which emphasize the poet's interest, desire, and need for communion with nature. The below passages, both of which critique the picturesque observation of nature-as-art in favor of immersion in nature, exemplify their approaches.

Bate writes

> Nature is made capable of feeling. The 'I' is written out, or rather absorbed into the scene….Wordsworthian 'deep seclusion' means dissolution of the self from perceiving eye into ecologically connected organism. The vocabulary is not confined to the language of the eye, the stock in trade of the picturesque gazer…The key word—emphasized through Wordsworth's favourite metrical trick of suspension at the line-ending—is 'connect'. Where the picturesque looks, the ecopoetic connects. (145)

Bate argues against readings of Wordsworth as a picturesque poet of the 'eye' which thus implied a foregrounding of the text conveying the visual viewpoint of the poet and often conventionalized framing of the natural world according to the canons of art. Bate contrasts the poet who sees with the (educated) eye to the poet immersed in nature who abandons the rhetoric of the picturesque for a "dissolution of the self" (145).

McKusick's ecocriticism takes Clare as exemplary and approaches Clare from a historicist perspective, contextualizing his poetry according to the political, economic and scientific events of the period. But he similarly distinguishes Clare's poetry from the tradition of the picturesque, presenting Clare as absolutely original, "unprecedented in the English-speaking world" (82). He writes

> While Clare rejoices in the beauty of the Earth, he does not primarily see it as existing for human purposes, and he resists its appropriation for economic use or even aesthetic contemplation. The natural world is not comprised of "resources," or "scenery"; Clare regards himself as a normal participant in the living world around him, just another inquisitive mammal going about its daily activities. As a result, his poems rarely "set the scene" in the approved picturesque manner; he provides an accumulation of close-up details rather than sweeping perspectives. (81)

Both Bate and McKusick present readings which elide the speaker's subjectivity to promote scenes of blissful immersion or direct engagement in nature. While these are in some ways appealing readings of subject-object cohesion, questions arise immediately. In "Green to the Very Door?" Paul Fry criticizes Bate for forwarding an "anthropocentric hubris" that suffers from a metaphysical view of nature (545). This dependence upon a metaphysical framework for understanding nature is what leads me to compare this first-wave of ecocriticism to Abram's humanist paradigms. Both depend upon a metaphysical framework which does indeed demand an "anthropocentric hubris" through which to read the world around it (545). Ecocritical readings that rely on a positive logic of human immersion in nature do not fail because they are written from the poet's viewpoint—that is all s/he can do, in a way—but because they refuse to account for nature's alterity, which creates an insurmountable divide between the poet-speaker and nature. We can first intuit accounts of this distance in

the work of Hartman whose articulations of the poet's negotiations between vision and nature parallel Morton's account of the subject's paralysis when confronted with the ethical demand. Hartman's account of Wordsworth looks forward to Morton's, not because it is preoccupied with questions of ecology, but because it openly accounts for the ambivalence of the poet in his negotiation between apocalypse and *akedah*, transcendence and nature.

Timothy Morton presents his critique of Bate and McKusick's brand of ecocriticism in his 2007 book *Ecology without Nature* and his 2008 essay "John Clare's Dark Ecology." While Morton's reading of John Clare's poem Lines: "I AM" is a small part of his book, the choice of lyric is not accidental. While Bate reads Clare through the work of Gaston Bachelard in *Song of the Earth,* he promotes the same revisionary reading of Clare as McKusick, the combined influence of their work effectively guaranteeing the inclusion of Clare in the Romantic canon.[3] Morton draws a stark contrast to the Clare of McKusick and Bate by reading a lyric which lacks an affirming pastoral frame within which the speaker is easily subsumed, and instead experiences ambivalence and doubt when confronted with the natural world. Morton argues that a poem which thinks ecologically is not one that creates a false sense of communion, but instead tarries with the ambivalence the desire for action creates while questioning the metaphysical category of nature. His work thus marks a clear break from the work of Bate and McKusick. Morton even extends this stripping away of metaphysics to include the category of nature itself. He argues that scholars must stop using the term Nature as a metaphysical concept because environmental theory must move away from a hierarchy of essences to conceiving of the world as a dynamic egalitarian network of relations, an ever more expansive ecosystem ("Dark" 179).

Morton's reassessment of nature shares company with the work of fellow romanticist Alan Liu. Liu defines nature as a political concept, which lacks any metaphysical

or organic qualities. He writes, "There is no nature except as it is constituted by acts of political definition made possible by particular forms of government" (104). In spite of Liu's radically political definition clearly rooted in new historicism, he shares with Morton the desire to obliterate any ideology that would prefer to constrain the organic dynamism of ecology in favor of the essentialist category of nature. They effectively argue that we can only preserve the "natural" world by destroying the concept of nature rhetorically (*EWN* 185). While I agree with Morton's anti-essentialist reading of nature, which would effectively dismantle our metaphysical binaries, I do not believe that it necessitates an abandonment of the very term "nature" which I continue to use throughout this dissertation. Replacing one term in favor of another, even of another set of terms, hardly resolves a metaphysical quandary.

Morton's work functions as an important intervention into contemporary ecocriticism which remains dominated by a positive logic of subject immersion in, or union with, nature. He argues that the traditional valuation of interconnectedness with nature as an ideal is an "ideological fantasy" that in fact impedes our understanding of the environment ("Dark" 190). This fantasy inhibits the subject from realizing that while s/he is forever organically interconnected to nature, s/he will never have the kind of psychic symbiosis naturalists and activists often laud as ideal. Morton argues that ecological insight will not occur through immersion, but a more counterintuitive move—through (or in the experience of) melancholia. His reading of Clare is exemplary for the larger argument. He reads in the Clare text a subjectivity that undermines the ideology of immersion by displaying a severe despondency or as Morton terms it, dark ecology, instead. Melancholia epitomizes the subject-object relationship because of the subject's divestment from his/her own life. Melancholia acts as a sort of half-death of subjectivity, or a paralysis. Unable to be

authentically present with herself or with nature, the melancholic is thus wounded by both. Dark ecology reforms the subject's relation to nature, and herself. Melancholy is the quintessential model of alterity around which one's identity narrates itself making it the performance of ecology on the level of subjectivity.

While the theoretical approach of my dissertation as it informs my readings, with their teeming discussions of birds and basil, can be accurately described as ecocriticism, it is important to elaborate this claim. As I state throughout this dissertation, the ecological theory that Timothy Morton elaborates in Ecology without Nature presents a stark contrast to the work of those critics to whom we give credit for establishing ecocriticism as crucial to romantic studies. While we are by now familiar with Morton's opposition to subject-object immersion, which mimics the construction of the subject's identity, he goes a step farther by challenging his readers to apply the logic of ecology to the concept of identity and subjectivity in themselves. Like 'nature,' the subject is just a construction, a metaphysical category which bears no resemblance to the actions of a person ("John Clare" 175). Morton redefines the subject as a "potentially infinite series of alterities" that fragment and unravel infinitely (EWN 175). The subject, then, is merely a vessel upon or through which a series of performances have taken place and then, qua author, draws on to generate a narrative that delineates its boundaries as the supposed coherent underpinning of those boundaries. Like nature, subjectivity is an ideological fantasy, imagined and yet always absent. While not altogether obvious when applied to nature, Morton's portrait of the subject shares more in common with psychoanalysis than ecocriticism. While he argues that the subject is always already a "potentially infinite series of alterities" he is also describing a traumatized subject, whose splintered identity is so shattered by events that s/he is unable to maintain a coherent narrative. "Wherever we look for the self we will not find it" (EWN 175,176; Žižek 180-1).

I underline the destructive nuances in Morton's account of subjectivity in order to contrast them to David Eng and David Kazanjian's accounting of loss in the preface to the collection of essays they edited together entitled Loss: The Politics of Mourning. Describing a series of photographs entitled In Between Days (Without You) by Dean Sameshina, they write

> 'In Between Days (Without You)' thus offers a counterintuitive understanding of lost bodies, spaces, and ideals by configuring absence as a potential presence. *Loss* as a whole embraces this counterintuitive perspective. Instead of imputing to loss a purely negative quality, the essays in this collection apprehend it as productive rather than pathological, abundant rather than lacking, social rather than solipsistic, militant rather than reactionary…They insist that, if loss is known only by what remains of it, then the politics and ethics of mourning lie in the interpretation of what remains—how remains are produced and animated, how they are read and sustained. (ix)

While Morton disfigures the concept of the subject by deterritorializing it, Eng and Kazanjian's definition liberates the category of loss by imbuing it with the possibility of political and ethical transformation. Without invoking the word, the authors are here seeking a redemption of the loss that comes to engulf what remains of the subject. The longing which produces melancholy and all of its innumerable affects can be recuperated in some fashion. The lost object cannot be mimicked or reproduced, but there is an element of potential within this space of loss which can forge meaning. Eng and Kazanjian do not accept grief and loss as a series of symptoms to be overcome on the road to banality, but envision it as a way-of-being, an ethical and political act that can form the foundation of a life-philosophy.

While both Morton on the one hand and Eng and Kazanjian on the other posit origins in the activity of tarrying with loss, they approach the problem from opposing directions, each account highlighting what in the other's account is problematic. While Morton would perhaps be wary of any attempts at recuperating a positive meaning from melancholy, Eng and Kazanjian's insistence on narrative interpretation makes plain what Morton refuses to account for: s/he who admits to being "a potentially infinite series of alterities" is in fact already psychotic (175). But Eng and Kazanjian emphasize the production of meaning in a way very different from Morton. It may be, however their conscientious attention to loss and grief presents parallels to Morton's dark ecology. In some ways, despite their differences these accounts are the other's dialectical equivalent. While Eng and Kazanjian seek to mitigate the effects of trauma on vulnerable populations Morton's work is directed at the gaze of the master, who is responsible for both human and ecological devastation. He seeks the reconnoitering of subjectivity in service of an ethical demand not unrelated to the ethico-political questions raised by Eng and Kazanjian.

Because of Clare's centrality to the dissertation's argument, I take up his poetry and Morton's reading of it in my first chapter, "From Her(e) to Eternity: Tracing Alterity through the Poetry of John Clare."[4] This chapter sets up the theoretical stakes of the dissertation through the discussion of Morton's theory of dark ecology, which he develops through his reading of John Clare's poem "Lines: 'I AM.'" He proposes a reconceptualization of nature, which rejects narratives of immersion "in" nature for a recognition of distance *between* the subject and nature. This unbreachable distance exemplifies the melancholia which, Morton argues, is fundamental to subjectivity and its relationship to a wider ecology of being.

Morton contrasts his reading of melancholy to Freud's which defines it as a pathological illness, an over-extended and yet incomplete mourning. He argues that this incompleteness is essential to the melancholic however, as it mirrors the ambivalence the subject feels in witnessing nature. For Morton, the absence the melancholic feels is fundamental to his/her subjectivity, "an irreducible component of subjectivity" (EWN 186, "Dark Ecology" 189). In making this argument, he draws on Lacan's account of the Cartesian cogito, arguing that the stake of the cogito is less about a given mind-body duality and more of a cleavage between the psyche and the organic material that houses it. It is not an irrevocable separation of mind from body, but a recognition of the distance and absence that structures the relation of the subject and the environment in a way that informs each of the two terms. The psyche is thus a subject always-already in limbo. Affirming the distance or "gap" between subject and nature is not an act of or metaphysical dualism or willful ignorance but produces a "greater fidelity" to the breach that opens the subject's relation to alterity (EWN 142). It recognizes our shared fragility and vulnerabilities, creating the strong ethical impulse that animates dark ecology. It produces an empathy which is not based on false identification but upon our inherent mutual fragility (EWN 168-9).

After laying out the theoretical stakes of dark ecology, I extend Morton's reading of "Lines: I AM," to read Clare's later lyrics. Although Clare's *oeuvre* is decidedly pastoral, there are also texts which bear significant apocalyptic elements. I argue that the emergence of this parallels the dissolution of the speaker's immersion fantasies, which results in the fragmenting of his identity as he envisions apocalyptic scenes. I trace this narrative through: "Lines: I AM," the Sonnet: "I AM," "A Vision," "An Invite to Eternity," "To Mary," "Stanzas," and "Song Last Day." This is where my reading diverges from Morton's work. While I produce a reading of Clare's lyrics following the insights of dark ecology, Morton's

own reading of "Lines" does not adequately attend to the figures of ambivalence and destruction which Clare employs in his representations of nature in the other lyrics. I propose that the melancholia we see in "Lines," which is anchored by the speaker's ambivalence, and finds comfort in nature, is less and less apparent over the course of the seven texts. His melancholia is displaced by a burgeoning psychosis which chooses instead to destroy the earth through a series of apocalyptic scenes in "A Vision," "An Invite to Eternity," and "Song Last Day." As these readings and the remaining chapters of my dissertation demonstrate, dark ecology is a broad paradigm by which one can interpret lyrical responses to ecology and extend its implications.

In my second chapter "'Love is the Plan, The Plan is Death:' Suicidal Ideation in Shelley's *Adonais*,"[5] I demonstrate that the scholarship which remains influential today in the pedagogy and literary criticism of *Adonais* obscures or minimizes the presence of suicidal elements in the text, causing it to be misread as an elegy that finally embraces life. I argue that an alternate set of criticism exists which in fact positions suicidal ideation as central to the text and which is, finally, more convincing than the tradition of criticism that has proven the more influential. I also draw on the recent work of R. Clifton Spargo, alongside Eng, and Kazanjian, to show why this line of Shelley criticism, one that takes the impress of melancholia seriously, is important to an understanding of the stakes of his poetry.

I posit that in the effort to resuscitate the literary reputation of Percy Shelley in the late 1950's, a reading of *Adonais* emerged, most notably by Earl Wasserman in *The Subtler Language* and *Shelley: A Critical Reading,* which, perhaps due to past accusations that Shelley was 'effeminate'—Arnold's "ineffectual angel"—tends to 'overcorrect' by presenting readings which are heteronormative and hyper-masculine. While this chapter could be accused of paying a lavish amount of attention to critics whose scholarship is less than

recent, I chose to engage with this criticism because it still sets the tone of the readings of Shelley that have followed in its wake. The same year Wasserman published *The Subtler Language,* Harold Bloom remarked in his first book, *Shelley's Mythmaking,* that the speaker of *Adonais* is in fact suicidal (*SM* 246). In the fifty-five years since, other critics have pursued readings of this theme but few use the word suicidal, instead couching the poet's intentions in a language of despair or mourning. Ross Woodman (*The Apocalyptic Vision in the Poetry of Shelley,* 1964), Peter Sacks (*The English Elegy*, 1987) and William Ulmer ("Adonais and the Death of Poetry," 1993) are all exceptions that I engage with in my reading of the poem. The poet's movement towards death is not a momentary gesture. He systematically narrates a literary evolution which culminates in an embrace of eternity, not a return to the earth.

More particularly, I work through the ethical stakes of the poet's preference for death through R. Clifton Spargo's 2004 book *Ethics of Mourning: Grief and Responsibility in Elegiac Literature*. His work represents an important paradigm shift in literary criticism of the last twenty years. Influenced by the philosophical underpinnings of trauma studies, his work belongs to a growing group of scholarship on mental illness which has moved away from psychoanalysis towards a more synthetic approach informed by the fields of ethics and ecology. Spargo positions ethics as central to an understanding of grief through readings of Levinas and Bernard Williams (6). Drawing on his work, I argue that the poet's suicidal ideation forges an ethics based on grief and desire. While the poet is mourning the loss of his friend, the grief he displays precedes this event. The speaker attributes the death of Adonais to a negative review which reveals his own deep-seated feelings of failure and longing. His turn to suicide is a response to the realization that he can no longer follow the ideological paradigm he espoused previous to the death of his fellow poet. His mourning becomes a contemplation of alterity as his melancholic fidelity to the world transfers into a desire for

union with the Eternal beyond the world and the preservation of his literary project. This preservation is essential to understanding the poet's suicidal ideation: he does not conceive of his death as a destruction; it is an act of preservation in a narrative of melancholic resistance. The poet imagines his death not as an absence, but as a space of potential being. Reluctance by critics to account for the speaker's suicidal ideation completely disfigures the text, eliding the elegy's ethical valence. Readings of *Adonais* are at their best when they attend to the desire and the melancholy which operate at the heart of the text.

The third chapter, "'Dark Secrets Look for Light' or Fragments Making Knowledge in the Poetry of Keats" is the first of two in which I explore the role of melancholia in the poetry of John Keats.[6] I have structured the chapters around two key insights of the poet: his turn away from aesthetic ideology and his recognition of his melancholia as productive. In this first chapter I chart the poet's struggle to understand the origins of his melancholia and its perpetuation through three texts: "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles," "Epistle to John Reynolds," and "Ode on a Grecian Urn." While the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is generally read by scholars through the frame of the other 1819 Odes, I situate it here to emphasize the poet's dependence upon, then liberation from, aesthetic ideology. I further argue that the poet perceives his melancholia as caused by this ideology and his inability to succeed at his literary calling—poetry.

While I cite the work of Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin throughout my dissertation, it is important to distinguish this work from my reading of aesthetic ideology in Keats' poetry, which, as Kaufman notes, is often conflated with the work of Adorno and the Frankfurt School in general. My critique of aesthetic ideology adheres to the features Kaufman defines in the following way:

> The critique of aesthetic ideology holds that high romantic poetics and Kantian aesthetics--building on eighteenth-century advances in bourgeois sociopolitical power—establish an essentialist or transcendental theory of cultural value. This is said to be an ideological theory whose function, enacted practically through literary/aesthetic experience and form, is to serve bourgeois hegemony by rerouting attention, interest, and energy from the sociopolitical to the artistic-cultural realm. (354)[7]

Thus, aesthetic ideology operates as a social control which seeks to repress the transformative power inherent in aesthetic experience by delimiting it too narrowly. I deploy this concept in order to elaborate how Keats the poet is adversely influenced by the essentialist cultural mores which seek to minimize his divergent aesthetic experiences in the Elgin Marbles sonnet, the "Epistle to John Hamilton Reynolds," and "Ode on a Grecian Urn."

I open the chapter with a reading of "Torso" from Walter Benjamin's book *One-Way Street* as a way to frame the Keats' attempt to move beyond aesthetic ideology through poetry. Benjamin compares a damaged fragment of a sculpture to the fragmentary nature of subjectivity, memory and history. Benjamin suggests a paradoxical construction: only by assuming that one's past is an artificial figure without meaning, may s/he find the ability to "use it to full advantage in the present" and seek redemption (*EBS* 46). The image of the damaged torso is a powerful figure for Keats' own struggle in these lyrics to overcome the narrative artifice of the ideologies which burden him. In witnessing the mutilated bodies of the Elgin Marbles, the poet is confronted with a reminder of his own finite powers in the face of an artistic perfection at which he seems doomed to fail. The "Elgin" lyric communicates two lines of inquiry, neither of which the poet can resolve satisfactorily—the

failure to succeed and the underlying existential condition that promotes it (his melancholia). Viewing these imperfect statues causes the poet to reflect on his own desire and the finitude incumbent upon it. Facing these statues, artifacts from another time, brings to the fore the poet's inability to resolve his own competing needs. I read "Epistle to John Hamilton Reynolds" as a liminal text between the "Elgin Marbles" sonnet and "Ode on a Grecian Urn." Despite the poem's narrative and rhetorical incongruities, it explores themes of fragmented vision and opacity that are central to the images of the "Elgin Marbles" and ultimately seek resolution in "Ode on a Grecian Urn." I argue that "Urn" represents a formative moment in the poet's literary development. By the close of the poem the poet has been disabused of his fantasies about the urn. It has revealed itself, through scenes of lust, sacrifice and stasis to be the enemy of man not its companion or protector. By fantasizing about immersion in the Urn the poet is able to recognize the violent death a perfect stasis would bring, wrenching him out of temporality and the passions of life. No longer identifying with the Urn, the poet is able to separate himself from this powerful ideology and turn his focus to forging a new poetics that can embrace transience and potentiality.

In my final chapter, "'All fires have to burn alive to live;' or Keats' Melancholy Science,"

I demonstrate the ways in which the poet comes to terms with his melancholia, no longer searching for its termination, but embracing its position as central to his questioning mind which I define through his conceptualization of negative capability.[8] This embrace presents itself in two ways, which I demonstrate through scenes of ecological—and thus ethical—insight in "Ode to a Nightingale," "Isabella; or The Pot of Basil," and "Ode on Melancholy." These insights provide what I would tentatively term an "antidote" to the poet's melancholia. I say tentatively, because this antidote is not a resolution of melancholia but in

fact a refusal to be healed—it is an embrace of transience and finitude. This embrace refuses the false comfort of a Grecian marble or urn, drained of its life to preserve its perfection, but prefers the messy decay of the organic, which "Isabella" and "Melancholy" exemplify.

While many scholars read both the "Urn" and the "Nightingale" as "symbol[s] of permanence" (Ou 158) it is important not to conflate their positions, for the poet accomplishes very different goals in each text. While the poet is lured into the embrace of the urn, being confronted by its abyssal stasis horrifies him into a violent recoil. He still seeks an empathic relation to buffer his melancholia, however, which leads him to the literary tradition's ultimate figure of melancholia—the nightingale. While the speaker may desire to treat the bird like an object, he cannot master her 'wildness' thus leading to his failure to consummate a union with her, as he is unable to objectify her. I use the awkward and somewhat traditional term 'wildness' in order to highlight the unaccountable alterity of the Other, which the bird in nature represents. This alterity forces the text to speak against itself, breaking the scene of fantasy through the recognition of its own language ("Forlorn! the very word is like a bell/To toll me back from thee to my sole self!" 71-2). This insertion of language causes the poet to recoil from the bird and thus fail at immersion. However, this failure reveals the more startling insight that the inability to breach the distance surrounding the object is in fact necessary for the poet to understand his ecological position within nature. Recognizing that alterity is an essential feature of his life, the poet can begin to structure his life around this absence. Despite the speaker's attempts to cloak the nightingale in a rhetoric of infinity her alterity defines her as a symbol of transience. While the urn operates as a hyper-object that entraps the poet with a *mise en abyme*, the bird compels the poet to embrace the transience his organic life already conforms to.

Keats forges a radical extension of his other melancholic narratives in "Isabella." While other works pursue the fantasy (even if a failed fantasy) that the speaker's consciousness can be maintained through immersion whether in the beauties of art or nature, the speaker of "Isabella" shows awareness that the only immersion one can hope for is through a process decomposition. I argue that this turn to a more materialist understanding of the body is facilitated by insights from science upon which the poet draws, such as John Hunter's theories of the vitality of the blood, which was the subject of active debate in Romantic medicine and held particular significance for the poet (Almeida 87-110). While her reading of "Isabella" differs from mine considerably, I draw here on the work of Hermione de Almeida, whose tireless documentation of Keats' medical career opens up many productive streams of thought that had not previously been given attention.

In "Isabella" we see the poet conceive of the body as a vessel of vitalities which can influence other organic forms and exchange energies, even past death. Natural objects are no longer passive substances, but vital agents which can influence and act upon the poet-subject just as s/he would upon nature. The subject-other relationship is no longer a one way street. This recognition is the crux of understanding "Isabella." Keats narrates a worldview in which ecological relations take on a near pagan belief in the power and agency of the natural world. While previous lyrics represent aging, disease and death as final, "Isabella" refuses to acknowledge this. Yes, human life terminates, but its "vivifying potency" does not (Almeida 165). The organic energy of the human body persists beyond consciousness. While imagining the genius of the mind giving way to a lush basil plant may not provoke universal ease, this is the insight the poet delivers repeatedly throughout "Isabella." By conceiving of all of nature, himself included, as vessels of vitality which operate through degrees of reciprocity, and yet remain constantly in a process of decomposition, he is able to side step

the delusive fantasies of immersion which demand a subject-object relation. A decomposing reciprocity is radically egalitarian in its refusal to privilege one kind of organic body over another.

Through insights related to "Isabella" the poet elaborates a complete effacement of subjectivity in "Ode on Melancholy." "Melancholy" contrasts to the subject-centered melancholia of "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles," "Epistle" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn." He no longer describes his death as a violent sacrifice or apocalypse, but a matter of organic decomposition. The agency of vegetal vitality and its reciprocity presents a dynamic re-reading of "Ode on Melancholy" as the poet engages with a variety of *pharmaka* in order to confront his own long-standing disease—melancholia. The poet-speaker addresses himself on how to endure the anxieties of life while enveloping himself in the corrosive and healing properties of various botanical substances. As the basil feeds on the energy of Isabel, the speaker of "Melancholia" hopes to draw upon the healing energy of these plants before his own vitality is drawn upon in the final stanza. The poet demarcates drugs that are corrosive, which will prey upon the body (like the basil) and those that can lead to genuine insight and succor. He encourages his addressee to avoid drugs that will sedate the body and instead favor those that allow the mind to remain active. The speaker encourages his addressee to embrace life, even at its most painful in order to fully experience both the pleasure and pain of living. As with the other lyrics explored here and in the previous chapter, Keats deploys a precise rhetoric when cultivating a lyrical vision. This rhetoric entails the lyric being described as a dream or vision, being accompanied by *pharmaka*, and being inclusive of fantasies about communion with an idealized Other who is outside the speaker's society. While "Melancholy" adheres to these features, it does not seek communion with the idealized Other, but instead turns inward to address the speaker's own struggles with

melancholia. The ode is largely instructive, criticizing and recommending *pharmakon* that will help the speaker manage his unwieldy set of emotions. The speaker is matter of fact: he embraces death as the ultimate expression of life, which cannot be outmaneuvered or overcome. "Melancholy" thus argues for the fullest possible consumption of all of life, joy and sorrow. He closes the poem understanding that death is inevitable, but one can choose whether to approach it in anxiety or exuberance. His melancholia is no longer a source of unrest but a space of creative intuition through which to approach the world.

While I pursue an ecocritical reading of texts in Keats' oeuvre which feature representations of vitality in this chapter, these texts also bear another image which speaks to the ambivalent melancholy of the poet, his refusal at any time *simply* to embrace life: the figure of embalming. I read the scenes in which the figure is directly referenced—Endymion, "Nightingale," "Sonnet—To Sleep," and "Isabella"—then connect it to other lyrics which evoke the figure without referencing it. The presence of this figure is significant for these texts because it acts for the poet as the paradoxical apotheosis of his melancholia. To embalm a body is to preserve it from decay through the use of spices, aromatic oils and more recently, chemical preparations all of which are substances which have their origin in the earth. The embalmed body is thus "impregnated" with botanically-derived ointments in order to temporarily suspend its decomposition, and preserve a semblance of its previous vitality ("embalm"). In Keats' hands this figure bears a disruptive duality, evoking both positive and negative images, as we see in *Endymion* and "Isabella." I attend to moments which evoke entombment in order to explore the poet's anxieties about the loss of his own vitality as he is cut off from the thing he most desires communion with—nature. By reading gestures of entombment in the figure of embalming we perceive that the act of embalming, while claiming to preserve the vitality of the body, only separates and distances it from the

nature to which it is now given over. The figure thus stands in for the poet's own frustrated desires. Through the draining of vitalities and the language of preservation and entombment, we see the poet explore his own ambivalence as he struggles to understand the persistence of nature in the light of his own decay. By reconceptualizing his relationship to nature in term of vitalities however, as I argue, decay and eternity are no longer opposing forces, but companion features of nature.

Through these four chapters I explore different accounts and expressions of melancholia in the work of John Clare, Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats. Within each melancholic narrative the reader confronts a speaker who either longs for the past or believes he will fail to achieve his future. As I chart each of the displays of melancholia in each text I attend to themes of ecology and ethics, which frame the concerns of the poet in relation to subjectivity and nature. Without, finally, eliding the profound negativity and even the suicidal ideation of melancholia, each poet embraces melancholia not as an illness but as a way of being in the world and as the cornerstone to his literary effort.

Chapter One: From Her(e) to Eternity: Tracing Alterity through the Poetry of John Clare[9]

> …a movement of his consciousness passing beyond the deceptive constancy of a world of correspondences into a world in which our mind knows itself to be in an endlessly precarious state of suspension: above an earth, the stability of which it cannot participate in, and beneath a heaven that has rejected it.
>
> (Paul de Man, *Rhetoric of Romanticism,* 54)

Nature is a dominant figure throughout John Clare's poetic career. The detailed lyrics of wildlife that populate his first book of poetry and continue to appear throughout his work established his reputation as a rural poet with the eye of a naturalist that persists to this day. This perception, along with the rise of ecocriticism, is responsible for his recent rehabilitation into the Romantic canon. Nature is indeed a formative influence on his identity and poetics; it provides a meaningful contrast to the cosmopolitan society that delegitimized his way of life.[10] Many of his poems prize simple, rural life and discrete, intimate moments with nature. However, to characterize the whole of his work in this manner would be false. As the poet's career matures, a turn away from nature *qua* rural life becomes apparent. [11] He begins to characterize nature as a transcendental power and a metaphysical entity.[12] The metaphysical valence increasingly undermines his previously established narrative of immersion in nature, the foundational belief of his youth. I will argue throughout this chapter that the metaphysical valence occurs because the poet's value system is thrown into disarray as immersion in nature (which I will also refer to as an immersion

ethic) ceases to provide a meaningful philosophical basis for his poetry.[13] The result is a poetry of apocalypse in which we read the poet move from immersive exaltation and unity with nature to existential loss and splintered subjectivity.[14] Contemporary critics such as James McKusick and Jonathan Bate pay little attention to Clare's apocalyptic texts, instead focusing on those that perform the poet's seemingly more straightforward relation to nature. Indeed it might well have been significantly more difficult for Clare to gain entrance into today's Romantic canon, with its gaze affixed upon ecology, if the above critics had instead emphasized the apocalyptic tenor of his work. This chapter corrects that emphasis while also complicating the ecology heretofore ascribed to Clare's poetry.

The trajectory of Clare's relationship with nature is in a way very similar to the Romantic canon's relationship to Clare. Clare's recuperation began with historicist studies by John Barrell and Johanne Clare but his ultimate assimilation depended on Romantic scholarship's turn to ecocriticism in the 1990's.[15] Jonathan Bate and James McKusick dominated the field with their readings of Wordsworth as a naturalist par excellence who placed nature at the center of his work. Bate led the charge to include Clare in the canon based on his reading of Clare as sharing Wordsworth's naturalism (*RE* 107). As new waves of critics reassess this characterization, Clare also becomes vulnerable to criticism for what were previous asserted as values. Oftentimes ecocriticism becomes little more than a game of detecting what writer can be justified as more or less ecological than another writer.[16] This is complicated by debate over whether immersion in nature is positive or affirmative. In response to these kinds of problems and debates in ecocriticism, Paul H. Fry (who is also critical of Bate in "Green") somewhat famously asks if Wordsworth's poetry is green so much as gray (548). Timothy Morton extends this question to ask if subjectivity is also gray,

opening up a space of reassessment that synthesizes the imaginative and the ecological, something scholars have been struggling to do with Wordsworth for decades.

Morton argues that traditional ecocriticism (such as Bate's or McKusick's work) has overlooked a vital issue. He argues that the traditional valuation of interconnectedness with nature following the assumption of a positive life, "full of love and light" as the ideal subject-object relation is "an ideological fantasy that impedes rather than aids our advocacy for the natural world" ("Dark" 190).[17] He writes that "The dreamy quality of immersion in nature is what keeps us separate from it" (202, *EWN*). It is our reliance on the idea of being immersed in nature that prohibits us from realizing that while we are forever organically interconnected, we will never have the kind of psychic symbiosis naturalists and activists would lead us to believe is ideal or plausible. Morton, far from an opponent of ecocriticism, argues that the persistence of this environmental ideology has dominated and stymied environmentalism and ecocriticism. He makes these criticisms and proposes his alternative in the essay "John Clare's Dark Ecology" (2008) and his recent book *Ecology without Nature* (2009).[18]

Essential to Morton's argument throughout these texts (and as the title of his book announces) is the claim that scholars must eliminate their reliance on the metaphysical concept of Nature in favor of the term ecology.[19] His argument for a shift to the term ecology is not merely a rhetorical one. He argues forcefully that discourse must move away from a hierarchy of essences to conceiving of the world as a dynamic egalitarian network of relations that becomes an ever more intense and expansive ecosystem. Playing against the essentialism of the deep ecology movement, he describes his argument as a "depthless ecology" that lays waste to the concept of "a solid metaphysical bedrock (Nature or Life, for instance) beneath which thinking should not delve" ("Dark" 180). Ecology is not an

ideology of preservation, but an interplay of organic life, our "artificial" world and those systems in which the two are synthesized—the movement of human and non-human life. Morton presents a compelling case for an anti-essentialist reading of nature that would effectively dismantle our metaphysical binaries although I do not believe that this necessitates an abandonment of the very term, nature. Replacing one term in favor of another hardly resolves our metaphysical quandary. As Adorno advises in the introduction to *Negative Dialectics* every act of conceptualization taints the idea it is trying to capture. [20] Even as we remain dependent on the conceptual operation to create knowledge in the world we must recognize the shortcomings inherent to it (Introduction 4-6; "Dark" 179). No term or concept will fully encompass an idea. Every attempt at knowledge is its own failure, even if it appears to succeed.

Morton finds deep resonance in Clare's melancholic experience of the earth and reads it as a literary analogue to contemporary environmentalism. Through Clare's poem "Lines: I AM" Morton formulates "dark ecology" a theory that reacts against traditional, often historicist-driven ecocriticism. He draws on Freud's seminal essay "Mourning and Melancholia" and Lacan's gloss of Descartes' cogito in "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud."[21] Morton finds a resonance between Freud, Lacan and Clare that enables him to forge a paradigm based on melancholy for a productive response to the rhetoric of environmental disaster. While Freud pathologizes melancholy as a stunted or ineffective form of mourning, Morton recuperates it as essential to our understanding of ecology since it positions alterity as fundamental to subjectivity, as he argues Clare performs in "Lines." Morton argues that the poet's melancholic response to nature proves the ambivalent alterity we all experience when faced with nature. Morton guides us through this reading highlighting the poet's choice of analogies and his psyche's

response—melancholy— to the machinations of the natural world he witnesses. [22] It is important to emphasize that in contrast to classic psychoanalysis, in dark ecology melancholy is not an illness to be overcome but essential to the configuration of an ethical space Morton configures. Melancholy is the quintessential model of alterity around which one's identity narrates itself making it is the performance of ecology on the level of subjectivity. It is for this reason that melancholy is "an irreducible component of subjectivity" (*EWN* 186, "Dark Ecology" 189).

For Morton, therefore, in the context of today's environmental impasse, melancholy is the only responsible position for the subject. As Freud would have it, successful mourning involves divesting the beloved object of one's attachments, either through consumption or eradication, either way eliding the responsibility of the subject to the beloved as s/he chooses a new object to cathect. Morton rejects mourning, arguing instead that in melancholia the object stays "stuck in the throat" of the subject. The object paralyzes the subject who is desperate to act yet ignorant as to how. Mourning is the divestment of responsibility while in melancholy the subject accepts the infinite guilt that is our self-made ecological disaster.

Perhaps unexpectedly, Morton finds a recuperation of the ecological in Lacan's explication of Descartes and the Cartesian cogito. For Lacan, in Morton's account, the cogito is less a mind-body split, more a cleavage between the psyche and the organic material that houses it. It is not an irrevocable splitting of mind from body, but a recognition of the distance and absence, that exists between the subject and the environment that houses it. All discussions of ecocriticism must thus issue from a theory of subjectivity. While this may lead some thinkers to double down on a model of identity-immersion with nature, the psyche is a subject always-already in limbo. It is *in*, and yet more than the body, never able to "forget"

itself; forever present and a creation of, yet alien and absent from her organic earth. Morton writes, "Rather than seeking some false oneness, acknowledging the gap is a paradoxical way of having some greater fidelity to things" (*EWN* 142). The gap that constitutes the cogito is what makes it so essential to Morton's reading. He is not trying to re-litigate the by now ancient mind-body divide, but to rethink it in a way that honors our organic origins, continuances, and final return. This "greater fidelity" to what the subject simultaneously is and is not, is essential to the future preservation of the environment—and subjectivity. It accepts the distance between the two (subject and environment) as necessary and productive but also as a version of the distance of the subject from itself.

In being faithful to the 'otherness' of the other, Morton notes that we recognize our shared fragility and vulnerabilities.[23] Faithfulness to alterity creates the strong ethical impulse that animates dark ecology. Empathy is not based on false identification (identity politics) but on understanding our inherent mutual fragility (*EWN* 168-9). Morton refers to dark ecology as a "melancholic ethics" because it encapsulates how the subject struggles with his/her guilt and responsibility towards the earth. S/he struggles to understand how to honor the other, while resisting full comprehension. His turn towards Cartesian subjectivity does not negate the desire to act on behalf of the other, but re-appropriates it to envision a new value system around the gap between self/other and the subject's distress at his/her failure. Infinite guilt is not a meaningless self-flagellation but an attempt to forge a new paradigm for advocacy that can replace what Morton discerns as the easy activism of contemporary popular environmentalism. Crucial to his argument is the subject's assumption of guilt and even paralysis. He argues that the subject must assume complete responsibility and guilt for the state of the earth today.[24] The relative role of any particular subject in the

environment is irrelevant, one must act as though s/he has in fact caused the problem and wholly accept the debt associated with it.

In conjunction with the acceptance of infinite guilt, one must refuse the false comfort of immersion narratives. For Morton it is crucial that the ethical encounter with the other be as a paralysis, that the subject be torn between the desire to act (advocacy) and frozen by uncertainty or anxiety about the best way to proceed on behalf of the other. "The intensity and constraint" that arises as a result is a "politicized version of deconstructive hesitation or aporia" (*EWN* 189). Melancholic responsibility is "precisely the point at which the self is separated from, and forever connected to, the mother and the body of the earth" (189, "Dark Ecology").[25] Melancholia epitomizes the subject-object relationship because of the subject's divestment from his/her own life. Melancholia acts as a sort of half-death of subjectivity, or a paralysis. Unable to be authentically present with herself or with nature, the melancholic is thus wounded by both. Dark ecology reforms the subject's relation to nature, and herself. Morton insists that if there is no pure, distant metaphysical "Nature," only a network of interactions between different species and beings we call ecology, then there is no pure subject either. He asks pointedly, "How about basing ecological poetics and politics on no-self (and no-nature)?" ("John Clare" 175). Morton challenges his readers to apply the logic of ecology to the subject even as he urges them to abandon the essentialism that is also embedded in many conceptualizations of subjectivity. While Morton does not replace the term subject with another one, he effectively redefines it: "Wherever I look for myself I only encounter a potentially infinite series of alterities…" (*EWN* 175). The "potentially infinite series of alterities" is a network of actions with which the subject *qua* author draws on to weave his/her many episodes of performance into a narrative that coincides with the boundaries of the subject's comprehension. Like nature, subjectivity is an ideological fantasy;

"wherever we look for the self we will not find it" (*EWN* 175-176). Goodbye nature, goodbye subjectivity.

Morton's account of dark ecology provides a framework for better understanding just what kind of an ecological poet John Clare is. Emphasizing the shift from Clare's more celebratory or immersive nature lyrics to his more apocalyptic texts may seem to remove his work from the ecological tradition in which he is usually read. But as Morton's work suggests, that is not necessarily the case. On the contrary, insofar as Clare becomes uneasy with his own immersive ethic, he arrives at a melancholic relation to nature that may help us to think a different kind of ethical – which is also to say, ecological – relationality.

To provide a fuller contrast to Clare's later movement as a poet, I will first read his sonnet "Poets love nature and themselves are love" which is an excellent example of the poet's immersive positioning vis-à-vis nature:

Poets love nature and themselves are love,
The scorn of fools and mock of idle pride.
The vile in nature worthless deeds approve,
They court the vile and spurn all good beside.
Poets love nature like the calm of heaven,
Her gifts like heaven's love spread far and wide,
In all her works there are no signs of leaven,
Sorrow abashes from her simple pride,
Her flowers like pleasures have their season's birth
And bloom through region here below,
They are her very scriptures upon earth
And teach us simple mirth where'er we go.

Even in prison they can solace me

For where they bloom God is, and I am free. (*I AM: Selected Poetry of John Clare* 275)

Here the poet declares all poets' love of nature, and thus their being as love. They suffer scorn and mock for it however, by those who "court the vile and spurn all good" (4). Poets love nature "like the calm of heaven" establishing a proximity of affection between the poet's love of nature and God (5). He then performs the traditional personification of nature as feminine by describing "her gifts" which "like heaven's love" are "spread far and wide" (6). Here Nature mimics the Creator, disseminating 'gifts' and 'works' throughout the world (6-7). Despite having a wide reception, the poet insists that her works are not "leaven," a Biblical metaphor for impurity. Not even Sorrow personified can effect Nature, but in fact is abashed in her presence (8). Returning to Nature's gifts, the poet writes that Nature's flowers, like pleasure, "have their season's birth/and bloom" (9-10). While it is not uncommon to state the evanescence of pleasure and happiness (a very Keatsian sentiment) the commonplace itself alludes to a sacred text endowed with the qualities of the eternal. His description of the flowers as "her very scriptures upon earth" furthers the idiom of nature as a language and writing only the poet finds legible (11). Nature's brevity of life teaches the poet "simple mirth" that comforts him even while imprisoned, "For where they bloom God is, and I am free" (13-14).

The similes "like the calm of heaven" and "like heaven's love" express Nature's proximity to God, but the poet adjusts his position from nearness, to essence in the final line: "For where they bloom God is, and I am free" (5, 6, 14). This positioning mirrors the first line of the poem in which the poet engages in the activity of love while claiming it is also essential to his character. The poem thus typifies Clare's immersive approach to nature,

characterizing it as feminine, spiritual, inspirational and unappreciated by the world at large. He possesses a special relationship to nature that he believes is unique to the poet. The text exemplifies what traditional ecocriticism likes best in Clare—a simple, straightforward appreciation of a nature that inspires the poet with its beauty and certainty that the poet can derive meaning from it and carry it within him/her. While certainly a sympathetic text to traditional ecocriticism, the poet's attention to alterity is also always present in metaphors that create dissonance in his narrative such as describing flowers as Nature's "very scriptures upon the earth" (11), for the trope of nature as a communicative system recurs in Clare's opus as he come to terms with his occupation as a poet.

From the sonnet, one turns to the darker Clare of Lines: "I AM" a text which is key to Morton's reading:

I am: yet what I am none cares or knows,
My friends forsake me like a memory lost;
I am the self-consumer of my woes,
They rise and vanish in oblivious host,
Like shades in love and death's oblivion lost;
And yet I am, and live with shadows tost

Into the nothingness of scorn and noise,
Into the living sea of waking dreams,
Where there is neither sense of life nor joys,
But the vast shipwreck of my life's esteems;
And e'en the dearest — that I loved the best —
Are strange — nay, rather stranger than the rest.

I long for scenes where man has never trod,
    A place where woman never smiled or wept;
There to abide with my creator, God,
    And sleep as I in childhood sweetly slept:
Untroubling and untroubled where I lie,
The grass below — above the vaulted sky. (*SP* 282)

"Lines: I AM" at first glance reads as a confirmation of identity in spite of attacks external to the poet. Alienated from his social network of friends and family he believes he is the only person concerned about his troubles, the "self consumer of my own woes" (3). He compares his failures to environmental movements of shadows and vapors "tossed…into the living sea of waking dreams" (6-8). His goals for his life are a "shipwreck" and the more he loves a person, the more strange that person appears to him (10-12). He yearns for a natural spot "where man hath never trod" and "woman never smiled or wept" to "abide with my Creator" (13-15). He turns to nature for succor, to "sleep as I in childhood sweetly slept" (16). His final position is ambiguous; it is unclear if he is lying in the grass or viewing it from the sky. In either position, his desire "to abide" with his Creator is paramount. While a more immersive reading may argue that the poet only desires a meditation in nature—a field or forest for example—his desire for a place "where man has never trod" to sleep, can only be interpreted as a desire for death. Whether he lies in the grass, as though a body already buried, or from the sky as one who had already died, and been received by heaven, presumably, is unimportant.

Morton argues that Clare's poem "Lines: I AM" exemplifies the values of dark ecology. He reads the poem (despite the title) not as an affirmation of identity but as a witness to the radical doubt and alterity that accompanies subjectivity. Morton transforms the poet's depression into an ecological ethics by which the poet recognizes the crimp of alterity in the tapestry of subjectivity, in and beyond its boundaries. For Morton, subjectivity *is* ecology—a network of relations that yearns outward as it weaves into other moving systems of signifiers. Clare's depression is not tangential to this process but "…essential to it. They [the poems] stage the idea of *being here* in its most profound, formal way" ("Dark" 188). Clare's depression is the weight that keeps him inextricably implicated in what we call nature. The doubt, the unknowing, that his depression generates is not a deficit but a "hard-won moment of actual subjectivity" ("Dark" 192). Morton reads depression and recognition in the final two lines of the poem, as the poet is confronted by the dual forces of presence and alterity—vying for the absence of the sky while immersed in the presence of nature (17-18; "Dark Ecology" 190, 193). While Morton argues that it is this "…yearning and impossibility that is precisely the most ecological thing about the poem" perhaps the "most ecological thing" in the poem is not the poet's paralysis but his drive to return to what the creator stands in for—death. ("Dark" 189). Ecology should not be allowed to elide that the poet's subjectivity only leaves behind something provisional and shifting. Morton recognizes that the poet's new position in ecological order "is perceived as intrinsic to the self, at a terrible cost" but he does not define what this "terrible cost" is (191). The poet's subjectivity in dissolution is not a cost that can be managed. By engaging the alterity of ecology, the poet recognizes that his identity is fragile with a porous boundary between himself and alterity. De Man describes in "The Rhetoric of Temporality," a "casual bit of play" by which before

long "the entire texture of the self is unraveled" (215). He describes this practice as a transgressive movement only leads to madness:

> It may start as a casual bit of play with a stray loose end of the fabric, but before long the entire texture of the self is unraveled and comes apart…Irony is unrelieved *vertige*, dizziness to the point of madness. Sanity can exist only because we are willing to function within the conventions of duplicity and dissimulation… (215-216)

These "conventions of duplicity and dissimulation" are the narrating processes in play during subject-formation. While melancholia reveals a sublime ecology between all things we still need these "conventions" to feign sanity through narration. While Morton reads "Lines" as the poet liberated by his new-found acceptance of alterity he does not account for the tacit claim of the text, which is "to abide with my Creator, God" (15). The poet *is* searching for a kind of immersion with nature, but not one with a life-affirming result. His melancholy drives him from what remains of his subjectivity to desire death, which he conceptualizes as an envelopment into his creator. This is the beginning of the poet's journey towards death and the fundamental difference between traditional ecology and dark ecology perhaps in a slightly different sense than Morton acknowledges. Traditional ecology maintains a subjectivity that revels in a new age pleasure of the earth while the immersion Clare seeks can only be fulfilled by death, and each performance approximates death.

While Morton successfully argues that traditional ecocriticism is insufficient for today's critical needs, he does not account fully for the consequence of his own theory. His reading is accurate despite itself—Clare's melancholy is the primary function of his poetry, but performs differently than Morton theorizes. Dark ecology is an immensely productive point of departure because it brings the poet's melancholy to the fore of an ethical understanding of subject-object relations in ecocriticism. Through this paradigm I will chart

the poet's movement which begins with his loss of memory and identity then leads to his visions of destruction in his two "I AM" poems, "An Invite to Eternity," "A Vision," "To Mary," "Stanzas," and "Song Last Day." [26]

Enter John Clare

Sonnet: "I AM"

I feel I am—I only know I am
And plod upon the earth, as dull and void:
Earth's prison chilled my body with its dram
Of dullness, and my soaring thoughts destroyed,
I fled to solitudes from passions dream,
But strife pursued—I only know I am,
I was a being created in the race
Of men disdaining bounds of place and time—
A spirit that could travel o'er the space
Of earth and heaven, - like a thought sublime,
Tracing creation, like my maker, free—
A soul unshackled—like eternity,
Spurning earth's vain and soul debasing thrall.
But now I only know I am—that's all. (*SP* 283)

The unraveling of narration that may be intuited in "Poets love Nature" and has a "casual play" in "Lines" comes to the fore in the Sonnet: "I AM." The poet who idealizes, praises and seeks nature has disappeared. He no longer turns to nature for succor, but views it as "dull and void" (2). It is a prison that "chilled my body with its dram/ Of dullness and my soaring thoughts destroyed," (3-4). He narrates nature's failure to keep his anxieties at bay in the lines, "I fled to solitudes from passion's dream /But strife pursued" (5-6). The poet no longer identifies nature as a refuge and abandons his fantasy of immersion. He reconstitutes himself as a supernatural being that "was a being created in the race/Of men disdaining bounds of place and time—" (7-8). He compares his artistic powers with those of his maker; he is "A spirit that could travel o'er the space…Tracing creation, like my maker, free—/" (9-12). He presents himself as an entity similar to his creator, not one to be enveloped into him. While the poet of "Lines" still searches for a refuge, the poet of "Sonnet" rebels against earthly constraints. He spurns the boundaries of the earth, which now impinge on his agency. He is "A soul unshackled—like eternity,/ Spurning earth's vain and soul-debasing thrall" (12-13).

This conceptual shift creates a rhetorical one as well, no longer referring to his environment as 'nature' but the 'earth,' now emphasizing its passivity, not its animation with an added accusatory tone. The sonnet introduces a poet with access to the violent powers of his creator. Gone is the desire to abide with his Creator. He compares the ability to travel through space to the act of imagination, "A spirit that could travel o'er the space…like a thought sublime" (9-10). Clare turns to metaphors of language again and again to communicate his need for transcendence. His occupation as a poet becomes more and more central to his identity, even if it is a fragile and porous one. While there is no manifest destruction in this text, his desire to move beyond the earth is a major evolution. It signals a

falling away of investments with the earth, a prelude to the apocalyptic destruction of "An Invite to Eternity"

Wilt thou go with me, sweet maid
Say, maiden, wilt thou go with me
Through the valley-depths of shade
Of night and dark obscurity
Where the path has lost its way
Where the sun forgets the day
Where there's nor life nor light to see
Sweet maiden, wilt thou go with me

Where stones will turn to flooding streams
Where plains will rise like ocean waves
Where life will fade like visioned dreams
And mountains darken into caves
Say, maiden, wilt thou go with me
Through this sad non-identity
Where parents live and are forgot
And sisters live and know us not

Say, maiden; wilt thou go with me
In this strange death of life to be
To live in death and be the same
Without this life or home or name

At once to be and not to be
That was and is not—yet to see
Things pass like shadows, and the sky
Above, below, around us lie

The land of shadows wilt thou trace
And look—nor know each others face
The present mixed with reasons gone
And past, and present all as one
Say maiden can thy life be led
To join the living with the dead
Then trace thy footsteps on with me
We're wed to one eternity (*SP* 276)

In "An Invite" the poet engages the feminine in his journey towards eternity. The poet directs his sentiments into an invitation to a feminine addressee to accompany him through life to eternity. He issues this invitation repeatedly throughout the text, describing the present in the future tense, for example, "in this strange death of life to be" (18). This adds to the prophetic tone of the text, which we will see develop in the next poem as well. He describes the journey through life as, "Through the valley depths of shade/Of night and dark obscurity" (3-4). Like the world of the "Lines" and "Sonnet," his encounter is dark and troubled—the refuge he seeks is not in nature, but beyond it, in eternity. The poet openly embraces apocalypse here, imagining the earth's destruction and transformation as a modern day deluge:

Where stones will turn to flooding streams

Where plains will rise like ocean waves

Where life will fade like visioned dreams

And mountains darken into caves (9-12)

Darkness and forgetfulness develops into a destruction of the earth as "The sun forgets the day" and "parents live and are forgot/And sisters live and know us not" (6, 15-16). With a complete dissolution of the natural order, the poet is no longer describing a corruption limited to culture but spread to earth as well.

The poet develops a melancholic rhetoric that co-opts a contemporary (1830's) scientific term for his own purposes. In stanza two, Clare re-imagines 'nonidentity' for his own poetic purposes.[27] With this uncanny word, he communicates his isolation with the devastating and beautiful lines: "Say, maiden, wilt thou go with me/ Through this sad non-identity" (13-14). While in "Lines" alterity overwhelms the poet, here he embraces it as a part of the journey to eternity which in turn reanimates his agency and subjectivity. The result is an exuberant suicidal ideation, as this destruction would surely end him, but the imagining of it nonetheless invigorates him. He proudly dispenses with the material and familial relations he previously clung to, the parents and siblings he mourned the loss in "Lines". The network of shadows and simulations ("land of shadows," "Things pass like shadows" 23, 25) he tries to limit in "Lines" are now embraced and define his operating reality. Nature no longer provides a place to hide, but dissolves before him. The poem performs a macabre voyeurism on the way to eternity.

Like Shelley's *Adonais* (but without the mythological apparatus) the poet is driven from his earthly life and comes to consider it as merely a passageway to eternity. The poet

lives in a space of non-presence and contradiction, "to be, and not to be" (21). He now sees time and thus his existence, from the viewpoint of the infinite as he imagines existence simultaneously beyond and throughout all history (21). As he spells out his disengagement from temporality the poet's focus becomes unity with eternity through death. "Invite" recalls nature's enveloping of the poet in "Lines" ("Untroubling and untroubled where I lie,/The grass below—above, the vaulted sky" 17-18) when he writes, "and the sky/Above, below, around us lie"(23-24). But while the poet's position in "Lines" is ambiguous, the poet is now beyond the earth. He has not just recognized alterity's influence on his subjectivity but now chooses the logical extent of it—death.

The poems gathered here formulate the guiding query of dark ecology (how do we realign our lives with the alterity inherent to it) in existential terms: how does the poet construct a meaningful life when constantly imperiled by death, the ultimate alterity. The answer, in Clare, seems to draw on an ethical witnessing of the self. Thinking of Wordsworth, de Man describes

> …a movement of his consciousness passing beyond the deceptive constancy of a world of correspondences into a world in which our mind knows itself to be in an endlessly precarious state of suspension: above an earth, the stability of which it cannot participate in, and beneath a heaven that has rejected it.
>
> (*Rhetoric of Romanticism,* 54)

Here de Man describes the anxiety and loneliness that the poet experiences, alienated from the "world of correspondences" he so willingly engaged before. The suspension weighs on the poet, and the poet tarries in an unknowing, no longer liberated by nature, but bound to an earth that ceases to hold value. De Man perfectly describes the loneliness of dark ecology that follows the paralysis of the subject who becomes a witness to its own alterity. The poet

cannot be one with nature and perhaps this, the essential Cartesian insight, is why we are then infinitely responsible to nature. It means admitting our difference from (and therefore of our responsibility to) the natural world. The poet vacillates between describing an opacity that cannot be known, the rhetoric of shadows he uses continually throughout all of the poems examined here, and escaping it for eternity. The epitome of this suspension is the act of writing. To embrace immersion would mean to cease writing, the human *techne* par excellence.[28] By writing the poet confirms his separation from nature, and his continuing investment, not in the land of men, but in the language of imagination, the "world of correspondences" that facilitates and stymies his work. The very means by which Clare documents his conflict belies his attempts to resolve it.

In the fourth and final stanza he continues narrating the future journey to his female addressee. She will not passively follow him but also engages in the activity of 'tracing.' The verb 'trace' (also in "Stanzas") appears twice in the poem in the same stanza:

> The land of shadows wilt thou trace
> And look—nor know each others face
> The present mixed with reasons gone
> And past, and present all as one
> Say maiden can thy life be led
> To join the living with the dead
> Then trace thy footsteps on with me
> We're wed to one eternity (*Major Works* 352)

They will "trace/And look" but learn nothing in this "land of shadows" (25-26). The act of tracing becomes synonymous with the non-recognition of the other's face as their journeying

leads them closer to eternity but farther from each other. He then asks her to "trace thy footsteps on with me" (31). Tracing here takes on the characteristics of writing as her footsteps follow his. The activity of tracing gains larger significance as the reader realizes that for the poet, tracing is also a means of knowledge gathering. This is not a full scale conceptualization, but, like Clare's account of his subjectivity, it is one shot through with alterity, creating a negative knowledge. Negativity grows so that death is no longer an organic condition, but the ultimate alterity, the extreme ecology which can only become a life philosophy, "this strange death of life to be/To live in death and be the same" (18-19). As he invites his addressee once more in the closing lines, he asks whether she can "join the living with the dead" (32). Can she live with the day to day knowledge of alterity as it erodes meaning from their lives? This is the question that remains with him. Unlike "Lines," the poet accepts that they will lose familiarity as they progress towards eternity. The poet gladly exchanges familial relations for this negative knowledge, a kind of gnosis, which drives him towards eternity. He examines this opacity even as he acknowledges it is fundamentally unknowable. The poet's recognition of opacity, like Keats' negative capability, speaks to Adorno's insistence in *Negative Dialectics* on an open-ended understanding of the concept.[29] The subject arrives at the knowledge not through some kind of pseudo-enlightenment method but through a conscientious witnessing of the play of the known and unknown together inside of the concept.

The poet's use of the word "trace" promotes a kind of knowledge-gathering that mimics writing. His tracing of the "the land of shadows" is an attempt to make sense of an experience without asserting authority—the ultimate ecological act (25). "Trace" signifies the activity of provisional knowledge gathering in this newly discovered apocalyptic world. The trace is ecological and discursive; it operates as a metaphor for the poet's literary occupation

as well as the evanescent state of knowledge which he has moved into. It indeed can *only* trace, that is, it cannot provide details or conceptualize but only provide the broad strokes of an impenetrable opacity. This is not the documentary impulse of a poetic naturalist. That has fallen away. This poet is journeying through the dark into the opacity of the eternal, tracing his fingers in the sky as he goes.

In "A Vision" one finds the same opacity as the poet enumerates his losses which catalyze a reaffirmation of his calling towards eternity

I lost the love of heaven above;
I spurned the lust of earth below;
I felt the sweets of fancied love,—
And hell itself my only foe.

I lost earth's joys but felt the glow,
Of heaven's flame abound in me:
Till loveliness and I did grow,
The bard of immortality.

I loved but woman fell away;
I hid me from her faded fame:
I snatched the sun's eternal ray,—
And wrote till earth was but a name.

In every language upon earth,
On every shore, o'er every sea;

I give my name immortal birth,

And kept my spirit with the free. (*SP* 274)

The poem is an enumeration of all the poet's losses—heaven, his woman. Continuing the trajectory of the sonnet and "An Invite" the poet no longer locates his freedom in creation but in the power to create. He loses "the love of heaven above" and "spurned the lust of earth below" (1-2). While he may have been previously suspended between the earth and the sky, he rejects both here. He describes the need to protect himself from the feminine, a woman's "faded fame" (10). The poet also hides himself from his memories, a theme he will mine deeper in "Stanzas." "A Vision" describes his experiences with the lover as negative and earthly, while he instead "felt the glow,/Of heaven's flame abound in me:" (5-6). He has completely divested from the social and organic worlds of the earth, which now facilitates his true calling as the "bard of immortality" (8). His focus on eternity continues as he figures the sun as a stylus with which to write. By focusing on eternity he has gained a new power--"I snatch'd the sun's eternal ray,--/And wrote 'till earth was but a name" (11-12). His use of the word 'name' here also reiterates its use in "Stanzas." In the latter he writes "I try to trace thy memory now/And only find thy name ;"(9-10). In both poems the name is emptied of meaning, an empty register. The poet takes the symbol of identity, the name, and through the act of writing, instead of inscribing it with meaning, empties it. The act of writing does not produce knowledge, but effaces it. The name is a signifier with no content to signify to—names, faces, relationships, are all dead letters to the poet, absent and foreign.

The final stanza closes the poem with the poet afforded supernatural abilities to write,

In every language upon earth

On every shore, o'er every sea;

I gave my name immortal birth,

And kep't my spirit with the free (13-16).

While he devalued the name in the previous lines, here he associates its ability to be reborn into other languages and therefore universal with helping him to maintain his spirit's liberty. While more transcendent than destructive his alienation from the earth still remains evident. "A Vision" describes the call of eternity in the warm and enlightening terms of glow, light, the sun and rays. He is not pursuing obliteration or destruction, but "kep't my spirit with the free" (16). He assumes the supernatural quality of moving through space and time, like his Creator. He asserts this power through the powers of imagination, his capabilities accessed through the act of writing. Clare the poet, may have always been a poet, but here he fully conceptualizes himself as one, weaving the act of writing into his philosophy of poetry.

There is a troubled specter of femininity throughout these poems that parallels the poet's treatment of nature as he vacillates between nostalgia and repression for what is lost but remains so present and obsessive in his mind. The poet has proven himself willing to destroy the natural world as he knows it, but is less willing to do the same violence to the specter of the feminine that haunts him. It is helpful here to contrast the previous poems with "To Mary" (of the Epping Forest/Northampton Period) which is exemplary for its performance of the poet's struggle to master his desire, negativity and nature:[30]

"To Mary"

I sleep with thee, and wake with thee,

And yet thou art not there;

I fill my arms with thoughts of thee,

And press the common air.

Thy eyes are gazing upon mine,

When thou art out of sight;

My lips are always touching thine,

At morning, noon, and night.

I think and speak of other things

To keep my mind at rest:

But still to thee my memory clings

Like love in woman's breast.

I hide it from the world's wide eye,

And think and speak contrary;

But soft the wind comes from the sky,

And whispers tales of Mary.

The night wind whispers in my ear,

The moons shines in my face;

A burden still of chilling fear

I find in every place.

The breeze is whispering in the bush,

And the dews fall from the tree,

All sighing on, and will not hush,

Some pleasant tales of thee. (*SP* 273)

The poet here collapses his feminine ideal into nature only to have her seek her revenge, as the discourse slides out of his control. While Clare previously succeeds at transcending nature and the feminine, here he struggles to do so. The poet openly yearns for Mary as he fails to compartmentalize the effects of losing her. What Clare's 'love' poems here emphasize, is that the poet is not merely mooning over some sweetheart—the loss of the feminine is equally as deforming as his divestment from nature. Each poem thus operates as a formal commemoration of his loss.

The poem opens with the poet in the midst of a pleasant if bittersweet remembrance of Mary, which overtakes the more concrete and material surroundings of his life. The memory of her dominates his mind; he writes, "I fill my arms with thoughts of thee" (3). The description provokes an image of the poet struggling to wrap his arms (and mind) around an ever-growing string of sentences, all of which add up to her unbearable absence. As this discourse unfolds, however, the poet loses control of this artifice. The tone quickly turns from sentimental to malevolent in nature. Nature is no longer the mute, inanimate backdrop of the poet's drama but takes a hand in it. It reanimates Mary's specter to haunt the poet. She is transformed from a bittersweet memory to a "burden" that "will not hush" (19, 23). Nature, through Mary, hounds and harasses Clare by communicating her through the wind, moon, breeze and dew. Clare is accosted by an alterity that is decidedly *not* passive.

Clare's dilemma in "To Mary" follows Morton's description of the melancholic subject in the face of nature. The specter of Mary *is* ecology—she is an indelible yet incomprehensible traumatic component of the poet. The subject is unable to abandon the object, as mourning would dictate, but is paralyzed, desiring to act, yet uncertain how. "To Mary" performs the significant anxiety and ambivalence that surrounds the activity of

remembrance we also see in "Stanzas" where Clare's imagination takes on multiple machinations of remembrance that operate against each other to communicate his desires:

Black absence hides upon the past,
I quite forget thy face;
And memory like the angry blast
Will love's last smile erase.
I try to think of what has been,
But all is blank to me;
And other faces pass between
My early love and thee.

I try to trace thy memory now
And only find thy name;
Those inky lashes on thy brow,
Black hair and eyes the same;
Thy round pale face of snowy dyes,
There's nothing paints thee there.
A darkness comes before my eyes
For nothing seems so fair.

I knew thy name so sweet and young;
'Twas music to my ears,
A silent word upon my tongue,
A hidden thought for years.

Dark hair and lashes swarthy too,
Arched on thy forehead pale—
All else is vanished from my view
Like voices on the gale. (*SP* 272)

"Stanzas" is a complex exploration of memory and language in the Clare oeuvre. While the tacit subject of the poem is the poet's memory of a lover, it also explores his relationship to language and its influence on the representation of memory. This occurs through the poet's examination of his ability to remember the visage of a past lover. Much like nature in "To Mary," language here veils and propels certain features of the lover the poet then loses control over.

The opening line establishes the tropological logic of the rest of the poem: "Black absence hides upon the past" (1). The poet here struggles between the desire to banish a traumatizing experience and the compulsion to document it. He places the image of "black absence" at the center of this ambivalent text. While one typically reads absence as lack, emptiness or disappearance, in these eloquent opening lines, Clare modifies absence as black, which traditionally signifies opacity and mystery. Now opaque, absence operates as a presence, which "hides upon the past," veiling it from the poet. It is unclear to the reader if this past is still legible with this veiling or also disfigured by the act. In the poet's logic, the black absence keeps painful memories hidden from him. It operates as a veil or an inkblot that covers the past; being black, it remains an image of opacity due to its darkness which implies illegibility and inscrutability. "Black absence" is a figure that stands in for the poet's ambivalence and vacillation between alterity and presence. In his discussion of "Lines" Morton writes "it is precisely the 'lack of content' that gives the poem its opacity" and so it

is for "Stanzas" ("Dark Ecology" 190). So opaque, the poem can only signify uncertainty and mystery.

The theme of memory runs throughout all the poems read here, but in "Stanzas" it does not function as a source of preservation but as a destructive force, "like an angry blast" that will "love's last smile erase" (3-4). He is not upset by this, but grateful for it. The poet vacillates between recollection and forgetfulness during this process: "I try to think of what has been/But all is blank to me" (5-6). The blank mimics the black absence's opacity but with a difference. While the latter disfigures due to its darkness, the blank is an empty space, communicating nothing.

The first stanza introduces the language that defines the poet's discussion of his lover's visage. She is in turns legible and illegible to the poet as his memories overtake the rest of the poem. Even as he examines her beauty a darkness overwhelms him. He writes, "A darkness comes before my eyes/ For nothing seems so fair" (15-16). Her beauty appears too great to comprehend. While here he claims to be unable to recall her face, he will go on to examine it in detail for the remainder of the poem. The poet seems determined to limit his representations in this poem to a linguistic process that can box out unwelcome, unwieldy images. Images of the feminine disrupt his linguistic frame and come into conflict with his narrative while also operating independently from it. This creates a cleavage in the text between the insistence of images and the evanescent nature of language and recollection. Like memory, language is a network of signifiers, all dependent upon the correct recollection of each other to retain previous meanings and signification. The poet seems to acknowledge the instability through his abundant references to language throughout: "think"(5), "trace" (9), "name" (10, 17), "word" "tongue" (19), "thought" (20) and the more complicated imagery of writing on the forehead, explored below. The poet is

no longer able to repress the images that his language has attempted to elide. They float to the surface despite his attempts to keep them as a "black absence." The images claim their own remembrance as they harass the poet's memory. While the poet may be ambivalent about this "black absence" he hopes it will eliminate the images that linger in his mind and upset him (3-4). Black absence ultimately fails as the memorializing network of images persist, leading the poet back to the visage of his lover.

The second stanza repeats the logic of "A Vision" in which he "wrote 'till earth was but a name" (12). Instead of the name operating as full of meaning, it is an empty shell, drained of significance. The devaluation of the name ascribes a destructive force to writing, which eliminates meaning instead of preserving it. In "Stanzas" Clare's apocalypse becomes still more self-reflexive, reacting not only against his failed investment in nature, but also his artistic occupation—writing: "I try to trace thy memory now,/And only find thy name;" (9-10). Having initiated the destruction of memory in the first stanza, he now searches for a cipher of his addressee, but only finds her proper name, an emptied sign. However, as he traces this cipher it leads to her visage. He describes her in a palette of black and white, negative and positive, absence and presence. These grow stronger as the poem builds strength, moving to contrast the light and dark as he describes her face.

Her black hair and eyes mirror the opacity of black absence while her "pale face of snowy dyes," a blank page, reiterates the first stanza's claim that "all is blank to me" (13, 6). The intense negativity that moves through the poem culminates in his claim, "There's nothing paints thee there" (15). Bracketing the grammatical uncertainty "There" plays in the sentence, he seems to be indicating that "nothing" or absence paints her there, one opacity spawning another. Black and white become two sides of the same page, as both come to signal opacity. Not until line sixteen however is the opacity internalized as a blindness that

"comes before my eyes" to protect him from her beauty—"for nothing seems so fair" (15-16). It is no longer the past that is veiled by the black absence, but his eyes, affecting his sight in general.

The third stanza returns to the poet's knowledge of her name ("I knew thy name so sweet and young" (17) and provides three figures for it: "music to my ears" (18), "A silent word upon my tongue" (19), and "A hidden thought for years" (20). While comparing the name to music gives it the façade of an external force, he then possesses it. The modifiers "silent" and "hidden" re-assert the opacity of blankness and blackness. As in the second stanza, his discussion of her name collapses into her visage. After describing her name he writes:

> Dark hair and lashes swarthy too
> Arched on thy forehead pale—
> All else is vanished from my view
> Like voices on the gale. (21-24)

While he prioritizes language over image in the previous stanzas, in these lines he gives the poem over to his recollection of the image of his lover. However, this image only conceals more writing as he describes her black hair "arched" across her white forehead. Her face, the image of his past, is subsumed into a blank page on which he can continue to write. The poet forfeits his memories for a past that becomes a blank page on which to write.

The poet vacillates between denying and recalling her face, the figure of his memory, the site of a trauma. He compulsively returns to it but cannot coherently narrate and therefore mourn for it. This vacillation is a consumptive melancholy, her image is certainly "stuck in the throat" to be consumed and regurgitated repeatedly. While the poet's desires

are as illegible as his memories, he never fails to communicate the overwhelming sadness of his position which continues to erode the boundaries of his subjectivity. This erosion is the fundamental fuel of his move to transcendence, which meets its apocalyptic moment in "Song Last Day:"

There is a day a dreadfull day
Still following the past
When sun and moon are past away
And mingle with the blast
There is a vision in my eye
A vacuum o'er my mind
Sometimes as on the sea I lye
Mid roaring waves and wind

When valleys rise to mountain waves
And mountains sink to seas
When towns and cities temples graves
All vanish like a breeze
The skyes that was are past and o'er
That almanack of days
Year chronicles are kept no more
Oblivions ruin pays

Pays in destruction shades and hell
Sin goes in darkness down

And therein sulphurs shadows dwell

Worth wins and wears the crown

The very shore if shore I see

All shrivelled to a scroll

The Heaven's rend away from me

And thunders sulphurs roll

Black as the deadly thunder cloud

The stars shall turn to dun

And heaven by that darkness bowed

Shall make days light be done

When stars and skys shall all decay

And earth no more shall be

When heaven itself shall pass away

Then thou'lt remember me (*MW* 330)

"Song Last Day" is the poet at his most visionary and prophetic. The poet ventriloquizes a Biblical discourse to narrate a coming judgment day. He claims that he sees it as "a vision in my eye" from the perspective of lying on the waves of a "roaring" sea (5, 8). Stanza two repeats the flooding imagery of "A Vision" which also recalls the Great Deluge of the Book of Genesis. As "towns and cities temples graves/All vanish like a breeze" (11-12) and the almanacs that secured the future and the chronicles that preserved the past "are kept no more" (15). The poet predicts the abandonment of these books when society is faced with of the ultimate destruction. The third stanza invokes imagery of the Christian hell

concluding that shadows and sulfur will overtake the sky. Restating his position from the middle of the sea he compares the shore to a "shriveled…scroll" (22). The shore and the heavens recoil as the thunder and sulfur overtakes the environment, rewriting it. This darkness comes outside heaven, destroying it and eliminating the daylight (27-28). Heaven "bows" under the weight of darkness. As a result of this darkening "stars and sky shall all decay/And earth no more shall be" (29-30). Heaven also will "pass away." The poem's logic seems to demand that extermination occurs with the loss of light. It is the decay of the stars that propels the earth's demise. Only in the final line do we see the poem has a direct addressee who despite the poem's narrative survives this apocalypse, at least long enough to remember the poet. The poet communicates vindication here, as though the prophesy of destruction was meant solely for the unknown addressee.

"Song Last Day" is self-consciously textual in its engagement of books inside the frame of the poem. It narrates the destruction of chronicles and almanacs and replacing them with a text that erases the history they write—an apocalyptic prophetic poem. The choice of texts to erase is not coincidental—they are historical texts. The almanac is not merely a reference guide for farmers but a book of futures. It forecasts the weather, planetary cycles, and other natural occurrences that pertain to working with the land throughout the year. This and the chronicle position their reader within a historical and temporal frame the poet predicts the eradication of.[31]

As in "A Vision" the poet perfects his prophetic voice in "Song." While the previous poems were content to destroy the earth, the poet broadens his lens to end outer space as well:

Black as the deadly thunder cloud

The stars shall turn to dun

And heaven by that darkness bowed
Shall make days light be done
When stars and skys shall all decay
And earth no more shall be
When heaven itself shall pass away
Then thou'lt remember me (25-32)

The stars "turn to dun" (dark) and decay (26, 29). This is the apocalyptic poet at his most unbridled, but not until the close of the poem does the reader get a hint as to why. Only when the prediction of ruination is complete does the motivation appear—remembrance, "When heaven itself shall pass away/Then thou'lt remember me" (30-31). Despite the poem's devastation, the poet addresses himself to another, who survives the destruction at least momentarily. As the poet vacillates over his own memories and lost companions, he seeks to make permanent in another's mind the memory of himself. He seeks immortality not through transcendence but through an impossible guarantee—the memory of another. Like his lover's face, the poet may favor a performance of annihilation, but a cipher of the other will always remain as the addressee of the poem on the page.

The poetry of John Clare is far more than an ecstatic immersion with nature as earlier ecocriticism characterized it. Timothy Morton's conceptualization of dark ecology opens up a critical space in which we are able to decipher an approach of reconciliation between melancholia and ethics that traditional ecocriticism is blind to. As Morton argues in his reading of "Lines," the poet is aware of the presence of alterity in the movement of his identity making it a more meaningful, ecological encounter than that of traditional subjectivity. While this is an excellent paradigm, Morton's reading of Clare does not

adequately explain the dimensions of ambivalence and destruction that populate much of Clare's work. The alterity Morton so persuasively argues to be as a fundamental element of our subjectivity also wrenches away the narrative coherence necessary for the poet's psychic maintenance. While Morton finds a poet who embraces melancholia, this is ultimately unsustainable for the poet. Madness and melancholia cannot produce a theory of 'no-self' which Morton likens to ecology, but only a dispersed self. The poet's subjectivity and melancholia ebb and flow together, mirroring and mimicking each other throughout his texts. How better to describe Clare's apocalyptic arc, than as "a dizziness to the point of madness" by which he loses his boundaries and his temporal grounding (De Man, 216). This unraveling is always possible in dark ecology as the subject courts alterity. It is essential to self-understanding but it also threatens any attempts at coherence. It is perhaps impossible to know which ideological narratives are essential to subjectivity until they have been transgressed and begin to unravel.

While scholar's readings of single poems often make for the most striking criticism they often do quite a bit of violence to the poet's canon as a whole. By reading several of Clare's poems here I have strived to broaden the dialogue in ecocriticism on ethics, subjectivity and melancholy in a meaningful and sustainable way. Throughout this chapter I have argued that Clare's relationship with alterity must be read not only through nature, but also memory and language which mirror alterity. The writing of poetry facilitates this. His poetic occupation insists on an endless cathexis that Clare willingly trades nature and the universe in to fulfill. Melancholy provides an opportunity to contemplate a more ethical future, but with its own particular difficulties. The poet strives for interconnection while struggling with a dizzying vacillation that only leads to madness through an obsession with the eternal. As the reader considers Clare, s/he must ask, is melancholia a state of emergency

or a practice of living? Morton argues that tarrying with the destruction humans have wrought upon nature is necessary to thinking through ecology today, but for how long?

Clare guides his readers to accept, struggle but accept, that subjectivity is something one can only gain provisionally from moment to moment as the poet's desire for life ebbs and flows. As many poets illustrate, Clare struggles with his poetry as it remains simultaneously a destruction and a persistence of writing and memory.[32] The poet uses figures of destruction not only to question immersion ethics but to work through a destruction of language within the frame of poetry.

Chapter Two: Love is the Plan, The Plan is Death: Suicidal Ideation in Shelley's *Adonais*[33]

> Language can only begin with the void; no fullness, no certainty can ever speak; something essential is lacking in anyone who expresses himself. Negation is tied to language. When I first begin, I do not speak in order to say something, rather a nothing demands to speak, nothing speaks, nothing finds its being in speech and the being of speech is nothing.
>
> "Literature and the Right to Death" Maurice Blanchot (43)

Adonais is Percy Shelley's expansive and moving elegy to fellow poet John Keats. While several of Shelley's previous poems (most notably "Julian and Maddalo" and *Epipsychidion*) explore melancholia and dejection these feelings find their fullest voice in *Adonais*. *Adonais* follows many of the conventions of the elegy, but it is not a poem interested only in mourning. Shelley reimagines Keats' final months as a mythopoetic narrative that culminates in an idealized Neoplatonic postmortal existence. The resulting text is more than just a moving tribute to Keats. It is a reassessment of Shelley's career and a defense of suicide. In this chapter I will argue that the poet of *Adonais* in fact pursues suicide, not out of some overwhelming sorrow but in the pursuit of an ethics of mourning that I will discuss below.

It is traditionally understood that an elegy mourns the death of another. Shelley is indeed mourning for Keats, but the poem also reveals his own long standing melancholia. In a text with so many moving parts, the poet winds a delicate thread between the two, but the poet's melancholia overtakes it as he connects Keats' death to his own unhappiness. He is

no longer a mourner seeking consolation, but one who defies it in search of redemption for himself and Keats. R. Clifton Spargo argues that the poem is in fact an anti-elegy because the poet refuses to resolve his grief according to the formal conventions of the elegy (128-129). He instead tarries with his melancholia to create an ethics based on absence and grief. Central to this ethics is an abandonment of his previous ideological investments, an act that operates as a symbolic death. Through the poet's suicidal ideation he is able to establish an ethics of mourning that redeems his and another poet's work for the future. I use the term 'suicidal ideation' in its psychiatric sense: it describes a subject who has reoccurring thoughts of suicide or a preoccupation with it. While this is a sign of serious illness, it does not necessarily indicate that one has a plan to commit suicide or will actually do so—which is precisely the feature which attracted me to this description.[34]

Among the readings that claim that *Adonais* ends on a "low" note, critics diverge over whether the gesture is indeed suicidal or merely self-destructive. Readings that have gained the most traction, typified by Earl Wasserman's scholarship (*The Subtler Language,* 1959; *Shelley: A Critical Reading*, 1977), interpret the gesture as self-destructive, recognizing the presence of an urge for self-directed violence but less dangerous or direct than suicide. The same year Wasserman published *The Subtler Language,* Harold Bloom proposed a contrary reading in his first book *Shelley's Mythmaking*. He argues that the poet of *Adonais* is in fact suicidal (*SM* 246). In the fifty-five years since, other critics have pursued readings of this theme but few use the words suicidal, instead deciding to couch the poet's intentions in a language of despair or mourning. Among the most notable are: Ross Woodman (*The Apocalyptic Vision in the Poetry of Shelley, 1964),* Peter Sacks (*The English Elegy*, 1987) and William Ulmer ("Adonais and the Death of Poetry," 1993).[35] Of these only Woodman presents an argument which fundamentally recognizes the presence of suicide in the poet's

aspirations. Critics' reluctance to recognize or fully acknowledge the poet's suicidal ideation in *Adonais* leads them to ignore the ethical underpinnings of the project. The poet does not seek suicide out of grief, but as a response to his increasing inability to live by the principles he espoused. The death of Keats catalyzes the poet's melancholia, which occurs in an ethical space through which he can embrace alterity.

Perhaps this chapter could be accused of paying a lavish amount of attention to critics whose scholarship is less than recent. I chose to engage these classic older readings of Shelley because they still set the tone of the readings of Shelley that have followed in their wake.[36] Indeed my chapter's argument continues to be urgent because Wasserman's influence is so pervasive. And has deflected and minimized the effect of readings that give full weight to the suicidal element in Shelley's poem. Before I trace the threads of relevant criticism below, it is worth stating that a certain temptation arises to theorize the reasons why the Wasserman reading, which aggressively defends against the presence of a suicidal drive has gained such scholarly authority. One wonders if the need to justify Shelley's presence in the literary canon led to a moral white-washing of his oeuvre. As fascinating a query as this is, it is perhaps best served by an intellectual-historical study, which is decidedly outside the purview of this chapter. The problem is related to the broader subject of the politics of suicide in literature and society; it is fraught with complications and attracts much attention. For these reasons, I want to state clearly that the argument of this chapter should not be mistaken for a defense of suicide, even as it is an attempt to take its ethical claims seriously.

To this day romanticism is dogged by disruptive stereotypes that paint a multi-faceted literature as hedonistic and self-destructive. Even work that tries to confront romantic melancholia in a more substantive and medically informed way is often sidetracked

from the crucial issues the poetry tries to confront. One particularly influential example is Kay Redfield Jamison's study *Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament*. As the title relays, Jamison presents a study of artists who suffered from manic-depression, also known as bipolar disorder. Tacitly a recuperation of this often misunderstood mental illness, it in fact falls into many of the same traps she warns against in the introduction. She claims to avoid the "excesses of psychobiography…especially those of a highly speculative and interpretive nature" but in fact produces a study which is just that (5). She perpetuates the dangerous stereotype that an artist's talents often originate in the self-destructive behavior that accompanies mental illness. Through portraits of George Gordon Lord Byron, Henry James' family and other artists she strives "to make a literary, biographical, and scientific argument for a compelling association…between two temperaments—the artistic and the manic-depressive—and their relationship to the rhythms and cycles, or temperament, of the natural world" (5). In the case of Lord Byron, Jamison gathers anecdotal accounts of the poet's family to argue for the presence of mental illness in the family. It reads like a case study, even including a genealogical chart (155-169). This is certainly interesting on some level, but lacks any literary dimension. Jamison does not examine Byron's poetry, but only uses the presence of his work as a reason to explore his family's history. Jamison *has* done important work, both clinically and culturally to destigmatize mental illness.[37] Her thesis, that "the importance of moods in igniting thought, changing perceptions, creating chaos, forcing order upon that chaos, and enabling transformation" valorizes the productivity that can occur from mental illness (5). While *Touched with Fire* suffers from certain scholarly limitations and is not a viable model for my own work, it has contributed to the sea change we are now experiencing in perceptions and representations of mental illness in the arts and society.

Approaching *Adonais* with these issues in mind complicates the two dominant frames within which *Adonais* is usually read—philosophical or generic. Percy Bysshe Shelley's rich intellectual life led him to hold a variety of philosophical positions. What beliefs are more or less authentically 'Shelleyan' is an active argument in Shelley scholarship? There are many examples of readings of *Adonais* that explicate the influence of idealism or skepticism on the text then play them off each other. This formula has at times been used to great effect but often minimizes the role of the poet's grief in the text.[38] Shelley's philosophical life is central to his work, but generating combative doctrinaire readings only creates distance between the reader and the text. That said, it is the argument of this chapter that Shelley relies on Neoplatonism to create an ethical space by which to approach Adonais. As Wasserman points out, Neoplatonism is essential to understanding the logic of the poem. Shelley's turn to Neoplatonism marks his abandonment of the historical and political ventures of the past. He does not do this because he ceases to care—paradoxically it is because he cares too much, he must break away in order to not go mad. By embracing a Neoplatonism narrative Shelley's political belief evolve into ethical ones that find their subject in the death of Keats/Adonais.

The other method that accounts for much of the critical approach to *Adonais* is to read the poem through the lens of its genre—in the case of *Adonais*, the elegy. While the best examples deepen our understanding of the literary and historical poets that fed into the poet's choices for his contribution to the genre, they, too, often obscure attention to the poem's expression of grief.[39] Peter Sacks interprets the poem psychoanalytically to establish an economy of mourning through which the poem functions. Unlike Wasserman, as we will see below, Sacks admits, "*Adonais* surely concludes on a suicidal note" although the admission does not alter the more positive valence of his reading (163). That is, for Sacks,

the poem still ultimately works towards the overcoming of loss: "Shelley completes the work of mourning by a powerful detachment from the natural man and the natural world and a subsequent reattachment to a transcendent ideal instead" (158). Sacks' avoidance of the darker implications of the suicidal tonality that he himself registers mirrors Wasserman's own dispassionate dispatch of the poet's grief. More recently, Spargo's *Ethics of Mourning* has provided a new lens on *Adonais*. His emphasis on the ethics of Shelley's empathic position is an important re-reading of the text that I discuss further below.

By viewing the poet's loss as productive and central to the text, we can discern an ethics of mourning that re-frames his ideological commitments. Because my primary concern in this essay, is the ethics of suicidal ideation, I have avoided engaging with the divergent scholarship on the poet's political investments, but want to make it clear that while *Adonais* is not a traditionally political text, such as *Queen Mab*, or *Prometheus Unbound* there is a politics that can be discerned, if outside the modest purview of this essay. The poet is no longer concerned with a transformation of society, but with creating an ethical way to deal with the world as it is, a world he will die in. This realization, which the death of Keats catalyzes, is from the perspective of loss and is essential to *Adonais*. Shelley's existential turn inward, which the suicidal ideation signifies, is what so many critics have overlooked. I employ the psychiatric term here to create a third space that communicates the poet's fantasy and desire without predicting an outcome of it. Just as a subject's suicidal ideation cannot predict a suicide attempt in the future, at the close of *Adonais* the reader does not know where the poet-speaker will end up—only what he is reaching for. The language of suicidal ideation expresses both the poet's desire and the ambivalence at the heart of the poem. But suicidal ideation should not be confused with self-destruction. The poet chooses death as a means to preserve his life's work, not destroy it. The destruction of the body is a symbol for

the poet's life work, a theme that is decidedly absent from *Adonais*. If the poet was self-destructive he would not be protecting his legacy. Only by denying the logic of Shelley's neoplatonic narrative could the text be misread otherwise.

As suggested above, that misreading can be related to larger questions attendant on Shelley's reputation. Unlike William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, whose poetry and personalities have remained the anchors of the bulk of the commentary on British Romanticism since its initial conceptualization, Shelley (along with Blake) has suffered a disputed place in the romantic canon. The work of Wasserman and Bloom helped to neutralize the doubt inserted into academia by a generation of essayists led by T. S. Eliot who dismissed Shelley as a second-rate poet.[40] Arditi very adroitly notes that, "The narrative Eliot imposed on Shelley's poetic development tells us as much about Eliot and the culture in which he came of age as it does about Shelley" ("Triumph,"127).[41] Bloom and Wasserman wrenched open the space within which the academic rehabilitation of Shelley occurred, but if what Arditi writes of Eliot is true, all scholars are implicated in his point. At its best, every piece of criticism is both a document of history and a wish for the future of literature that bares the specter of the author. All scholars must be sensitive to the prejudices and propensities we unknowingly bring into our work.

Bloom is perhaps the earliest critic to recognize the productive loss at the heart of *Adonais*. In *Visionary Company* he argues that critics often mistake the "triumph of rhetoric," the power and mastery of the text as an affirmation of life.[42] He writes that "[w]e mistake this triumph of rhetoric if we read it as other than a triumph of human despair…*Adonais* is an imperishable poem, but it is also the sepulcher of a humanist and heroic quest" (*VC* 341). *Adonais* is a complete break from Shelley's previous oeuvre, his "humanist and heroic quest." In *Shelley's Mythmaking*, Bloom correctly links *Adonais* to "Triumph of Life," Shelley's final,

unfinished poem and the only one in his oeuvre to which it bears a sustained similarity. Bloom argues that the two share the same sentiment of a "voluntary martyrdom" (246-247). Later in the book, in his reading of "Triumph of Life" Bloom describes the "sacred few" who preserve their sacredness by voluntary martyrdom: "Literally, they chose to die" (246). Shelley's triumphalism is not for life, but the postmortal futurity he envisions for himself and the poetic tradition.

While Bloom highlights the poet's turn towards death, he also reads into *Adonais* a philosophical embrace of Keats. Bloom argues that in choosing death over life, "[a] known is yielding to an unknown, and a vision collapses into mystery" (341). Evocative of Keats' December 17th 1817 letter to his brothers George and Thomas on negative capability, Bloom's preference for mystery over knowledge misreads Shelley's intentions. The postmortality Shelley vies for is not unknown or a mystery to him. He explicates its movement throughout the text. The eternal is like a homecoming for the poet as he embraces postmortality. While Shelley figures Adonais as Keats transfigured, the figuration envelops them both, becoming poetry personified. This is not quite the same thing as Bloom's claim that "Shelley chooses the fate of Keats for himself" in the poem's "dialectical resolution" (*VC* 341). Shelley does indeed chose death, but not "the fate of Keats." The project of *Adonais* is not to mimic Keats' death but to redeem them both, thus avoiding what he does fear is Keats' (and his) fate—obscurity. Securing the afterlife of their poetry is the only political aim left for Shelley. While much of Shelley's work idealizes certain political outcomes, as these become more remote, the poet's access to his agency also becomes more evanescent. Only by turning away from the political and synthesizing his idealistic mythopoeia to Neoplatonism can he recuperate his past failures in a meaningful way while securing his future.

While Bloom misreads certain sections of *Adonais,* he opens the way for later critics to interpret the centrality of death as part of the larger project of *Adonais*. Accommodating the poem's negativity into Shelley's oeuvre has caused other critics difficulty, most notably (as already mentioned above) Earl Wasserman. In *The Subtler Language* (1959) and the later *Shelley: Critical Readings* (1971) Wasserman reestablishes Shelley's reputation as a master-poet by laying out a powerful reading of *Adonais* that draws on his knowledge of Greco-Roman mythology, traditional elegiac literature, and Neoplatonism. However, his reading systematically dismisses the centrality of Shelley's grief to the movement of the poem and employs a language to elide the poet's grief that strikes one as insensitive to the drives of the text. I will first assess Wasserman's treatment of Shelley's grief, then turn to the issue of Wasserman's rhetoric.

Wasserman argues that the final stanzas of *Adonais* can only be interpreted as grief-stricken if each stanza is read discretely, not cumulatively: "Only then, if the stanzas are read in isolation and not as operative elements in the total poem are they open to the charge of bathetic self-pity" (*SCR* 502). Wasserman argues that this "bathetic self-pity" is only acceptable if it is made productive, or as Spargo notes, is "only made tolerable when it becomes functional" (146). While Sacks and Spargo present viable psychoanalytic readings of the functionality and reciprocity of the poet's grief, Wasserman does not pursue these possibilities. Wasserman cannot recognize the poet's abandonment of the mourning ritual in his 'excessive' grief because that would lead away from Wasserman's purpose—presenting a poet who is not self-destructive or suicidal, but life-affirming and positive.

Wasserman further dismisses claims of grief by arguing that the natural imagery in Shelley's self-portrait (stanzas XXXI-XXXIV) that may be initially read as dark, is in fact not. He argues that the imagery instead generates an empathetic relation between himself

and the already dead Adonais through a philosophical inquiry into the mortality that defines all of humanity: "As Keats is physically dead, so Shelley, like every mortal, is physically dying" (502). The critic presumes that this interpretation limits the effects of the text by generalizing it, but recognizing the mortality that defines all of life in fact delimits it, and works towards the reading he is trying to suppress.

Stanza XXXII concludes with the lines:

> Is it not broken? On the withering flower
> The killing sun smiles brightly: on a cheek
> The life can burn in blood, even while the heart may break. (286-8)

Wasserman writes that the phrase "'smiles brightly' carries strong overtones opposing those of 'withering flower' and 'killing sun' and thereby set up a discord that presses for a resolution" (502). These images do indeed yearn for a resolution, but Wasserman's interpretation here strains. Instead of recognizing the poet's ambivalence as the crux of his melancholia, he argues for a dialectics that leads to resolution. Even if one chose to employ Wasserman's characterization, the resolution the poet drives towards is not that of life. This does not mean the call of death is immediate, but the specter of the 'killing sun' sets the poet on the trajectory of suicidal ideation that the final stanzas exemplify.

The poet's power indeed lies in his masterful ambivalence. The above stanza can be interpreted multiple ways, while the final line, 288, resonates with an exacting violence: "The life can burn in blood, even while the heart may break." I read this line as the very crux of the poem's deep melancholia. A Cartesian mind-body cleavage is reframed by the poet's grief as he is torn between the organic and the transcendent. The vitality of his own body alienates the poet's spirit violating him with an almost mocking persistence. Even as the body and the spirit strive to depart from each other, they remain ineluctably intertwined. Timothy Morton

theorizes the implications of this cleavage, between the psyche and the organic material that houses it, in his 2007 book *Ecology without Nature* (142, 181-201). I extend his analysis in my chapter on John Clare which also bears on Shelley here. Morton argues that melancholia allows the subject to exist in a liminal state, a position of yearning for alterity but also being sunken into the self. The poet of *Adonais* displays this condition in painful detail.

Wasserman's refuses to recognize the doubt and ambivalence that is overwhelmingly present in the text. Critics can and have argued back and forth to adjudicate the meaning of these lines, but what is patently obvious is that the poet here meditates on death. He contextualizes his reading through the matrix of "The Lament for Bion," the Actaeon myth, Milton's "Lycidas," and other associated myths. His attendant exegesis on the intertextuality of *Adonais* is fascinating and informative, but also closets what is original in Shelley's writing. Moments like this proliferate throughout his reading: "The Acteon myth, then is only a slightly distorted version of the poem's final revelation and reflects the poet's momentarily mistaking spiritual revelation for physical destruction" (501). Wasserman's intertextual analysis almost seems inhibited from recognizing *Adonais* on its own terms. Shelley proves throughout his career to be adept at creating intertextual moments, but we cannot let the authors 'sources' undermine his vision. Intertextual analysis is necessary, but should not overwhelm the reader from recognizing the poet's distinctive project.

The language Wasserman employs to describe the poet's affect is perhaps symptomatic of a larger issues in Shelley scholarship and, more particularly, its resistance to fully engaging Shelley's suicidal ideation. As discussed above, Wasserman characterizes the poet's grief as "bathetic self-pity" (502). He also writes, "Shelley's so-called self-portrait (stanzas 31-34) has almost always proved unpleasant reading because it seems sadly marred by extravagant self-pity and unmanliness" (*SCR*, 499; *SL,* 356). To characterize a poet's grief

as unmanly suggests a highly gendered conception of grief and one that leads one to misunderstand the affective burden of the text. Wasserman appears only interested in defending a poet who conforms to traditional hetero-normative gender binaries that eschew depression and suicide as "unmanly" (*SL*, 356). The language is conspicuously moralizing in its tone and forces the reader to infer that only the "unmanly" succumb to depression, let alone suicidal tendencies. Obviously, this language has not aged well. Out of deference for his work however, one feels compelled to search for explanations why such a nuanced scholar would employ such problematic characterizations. Certainly Wasserman was writing in a context in which the dominant view in academia in the 1950's, expounded by critics such as Eliot and Leavis, was to view Shelley as a minor, "effeminate" poet.[43] Matthew Arnold's characterization of Shelley remained a favorite of critics such as Eliot and Leavis: "a beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain" (252). While Wasserman rejects Arnold, his language reflects a critic on the defensive and his dismissal suggests the continuing impact of Arnoldian-type views of Shelley on his own criticism. Issues of gendered language are outside the purview of this study but Wasserman's problematic language compounds his refusal to recognize the centrality of mourning to the poem. While it is unfortunate that he takes this tact, he remains a stalwart champion of Shelley and is responsible with Harold Bloom for Shelley's now permanent position in the literary canon.

In *The Apocalyptic Vision in the Poetry of Shelley (1964)* Ross Woodman presents a counter-narrative to Wasserman's philosophical interpretation of Shelley's opus. Like Wasserman, he reads *Adonais* as a complete break from Shelley's previous work. He agrees that Shelley's engagement with Neoplatonism catalyzes the break. However, Woodman arrives a radically different conclusion concerning the poet's embrace of Neoplatonism.

Identifying Shelley as an Orphic poet Woodman reads a revulsion at life that can only culminate in death (158). Woodman links the poet's grief to the Orphic need to resolve the evil in the life of the poet. He argues that Shelley envisions an Orphic apocalypse which "is intended to free man from the relentless revolutions of the wheel of life by releasing the buried divinity within him" (158). To release that 'buried divinity' and resolve the problem of evil in the world from a Neoplatonic perspective means to reject life (180). Woodman describes the poet's defense of this decision as "a metaphysical defense of suicide" (172). Woodman is perhaps the first Shelley scholar not only to attend to the suicidal in the poem, but to recognize the philosophical framework within which it operates. Woodman incorporates the poet's suicidal ideation into an apocalyptic constellation that also does the work of separating the affective stigma associated with suicide by positioning it as a part of the poet's philosophical assessment of the world. Woodman rejects readings of the poet as self-destructive or as showing "bathetic self-pity". As Woodman writes:

> Shelley is describing the suicidal moment seen, not as defeat, but as victory. Death is an awakening to life, to that ultimate self-knowledge which is the goal of Eros and the purpose of the Orphic purification rites. In his own moral defense, Shelley could argue that in his apocalyptic vision he reveals his own 'metaphysical anatomy.' (180)

While Woodman's language may also suggest a final triumphant note in the poem that one may be wary of, he nonetheless grasps the importance of taking the suicidal impulse seriously. Moreover, by recontextualizing *Adonais* in a proto-ethical manner Woodman effectively lays the groundwork for a discussion of ethics that occurs in Spargo's study.

An analysis of Urania also reveals the poet's rejection of the earth, as Woodman argues in his later work.[44] He extends Wasserman's reading of Urania to argue that Shelley's

depiction of her in the poem performs the fundamental shift in the poet's attitudes towards the earth. Shelley leaves aside the traditional depiction of feminine presence in the Adonis myth as his lover Venus and instead transforms her into a demon-mother more akin to the Jewish mythological figure of Lilith ("Shelley's Urania" 63; *SL* 324). The Urania of *Adonais* stands in stark contrast to the spirit of imagination the poet seeks affirmation from in "Ode to the West Wind" and "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty." Shelley's portrait of Urania here negates his previous work and the literary tradition's archetype of nature as a maternal, generative energy. By ironizing Urania's role as a mourner in the death of her son he implicates her in his rejection of the earth. He presents her as a mother who refuses to accept the liberation of her son into the Eternal and desires to keep him bound to her dominion, the earth. While she at first appears as a grief-stricken mourner, Shelley criticizes her for her inability to liberate her son. By the second half of the text, the poet is no longer merely criticizing mourning rituals, but demonstrates a fully formed alienation. This point in the narrative is important because it defines where the poet will go with the rest of the poem. As the death of Adonais cannot be undone by Urania, neither can the poet's flight from earth. Urania's failure to protect her son stands in for the failure of the earth to sustain the poet. Urania—nature—suffers from a powerless immortality by which she can only witness man's mortal coil. Woodman argues that the poet-speaker's recognition of Urania's shortcomings necessitates his movement towards suicide. He writes that "Urania's futile attempt to revive her dead son…brings into sharp focus the radical separation which Shelley effects in the last movement of *Adonais* between the poet and nature" (66). Describing Urania's home as a prison reveals her demonic qualities. She does not try to revive Adonais in stanzas 25-26 for his benefit, but her own. She becomes a symbol of destruction whose "womb of time" only produces an "illusory world" from which Shelley liberates himself to

see it for what it truly is—a prison (63, 173). The feminine spirit of imagination which "Ode to the West Wind" epitomizes no longer leads the poet back to earth but beyond it. What was previously a source of comfort—the eternality of nature—now burdens the poet, and being born into the world is nothing more than a curse (480-1).

Following Woodman, one can see that the poem has a disarming revelation: real freedom lies in the transcendence of death, not a life bound by nature. As the poet's previous literary philosophy falls away, he engages with Neoplatonism to define his need for transcendence. He embraces the Eternal in order to provide a postmortal resting place for the poets he admires, those famous and unknown. Placing Adonais here, the postmortal resting place becomes the focus of the poet's energies. He adamantly embraces death, proclaiming in stanza LIII, "No more let Life divide what Death can join together" (477). The poem closes with the poet alighting from the earth to meet Adonais closing with the lines, "The soul of Adonais, like a star,/Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are" (494-495).

The poet's figuration of Adonais also evolves throughout the poem. As the poet's portrait of Urania remains benevolent in the first third of the poem, so Adonais remains imbricated in, and a part of the natural world. As the poet ascends from earth to transcendence in stanzas XLI through XLIII, Adonais takes on elemental properties that the poet argues can only exist as an abstracted form:

XLI

> He lives, he wakes—'tis Death is dead, not he;
> Mourn not for Adonais. Thou young Dawn,
> Turn all thy dew to splendour, for from thee
> The spirit thou lamentest is not gone;

Ye caverns and ye forests, cease to moan!
Cease, ye faint flowers and fountains, and thou Air,
Which like a mourning veil thy scarf hadst thrown
O'er the abandon'd Earth, now leave it bare
Even to the joyous stars which smile on its despair!

XLII

He is made one with Nature: there is heard
His voice in all her music, from the moan
Of thunder, to the song of night's sweet bird;
He is a presence to be felt and known
In darkness and in light, from herb and stone,
Spreading itself where'er that Power may move
Which has withdrawn his being to its own;
Which wields the world with never-wearied love,
Sustains it from beneath, and kindles it above.

XLIII

He is a portion of the loveliness
Which once he made more lovely: he doth bear
His part, while the one Spirit's plastic stress
Sweeps through the dull dense world, compelling there
All new successions to the forms they wear;
Torturing th' unwilling dross that checks its flight

To its own likeness, as each mass may bear;

And bursting in its beauty and its might

From trees and beasts and men into the Heaven's light. (361-387)

As the poet ascends to the stars, he no longer defines himself by the natural objects that surround him. The poet chides the caverns, forests, flowers and mountains that weep for Adonais in stanza XLI for two reasons: his departure from the earth is not to be mourned and these natural objects are no longer the appropriate vessels for the poet's emotion. These metaphors undermine his movement to the Eternal, which he must thus disabuse of their mourning. Stanza XLI introduces his commitment to Adonais and himself as essences of the Eternal, as opposed to discrete object with finite boundaries. We see this in stanzas XLII and XLIII. Adonais is "made one with Nature" using metaphors of sound and sensation (370). The poet hears Adonais' "voice in all her music," the "moan of thunder" and the song of the nightingale (371-2). As a "presence" his qualities follow those of Coleridge's *natura naturans*, nature in its creative capacity, rather than nature as created objects, *natura naturata*. Adonais has joined the elemental forces that propel the universe through a transcendent power. In stanza XLIII Adonais, as "a portion of the loveliness/Which once he made more lovely," witnesses the Spirit who "[s]weeps through the dull dense world" transforming those who remain on earth (379-80). "Torturing th' unwilling dross" reads as a violent, liberating image. We can read the Spirit as liberating subjects from the "unwilling dross" that hangs about them, but the inclusion of the word "torturing" leads us to question if this liberation is consensual. While in the line "Torturing th' unwilling dross that checks its flight" the Spirit is "torturing" the "unwilling dross," which seeks to imprison the subject and prevent its "flight" the word also acts as a sign by

which we can continue to read the poet's own ambivalence in the text. This ambivalence is a more concealed instance of the poet's melancholia. The poet is tortured as he tries to liberate himself from the "dull dense world" and join Adonais in the Eternal (380).

While Shelley is clearly referring to Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" with the phrase "the song of night's sweet bird" in stanza XLII, I read his and Keats' projects as very different (372). While Shelley indeed seeks a death Keats/Adonais has already achieved, this was not Keats' chosen aim. While "Ode to a Nightingale," and the other Odes of 1820 do romanticize death, the creation of poetry tolls the poet back to his "sole self" (72).[45]

In *Adonais* the poet's movement towards death is not a momentary gesture. The poet systematically narrates a literary evolution that has parallel consequences for the characters of his poem, all of which culminate in an embrace of eternity, not a return to the earth. Thinking through the stakes of the poet's preference for death can be clarified through R. Clifton Spargo's 2004 book *Ethics of Mourning: Grief and Responsibility in Elegiac Literature*. His work represents an important paradigm shift in literary criticism of the last twenty years. Influenced by the philosophical underpinnings of trauma studies, his work reflects ways recent scholarship has moved away from a strictly psychoanalytic approach to a more synthetic one informed by debates coming out of ethics and ecology. Morton makes a similar point in "The Ecology of Elegy:" "This is the urgency and political insistence that inhabits ecocriticism today. We are not paralyzed by our melancholies but turn it into a source of meaning" (254). David Eng and David Kazanjian introduce this new direction best in the preface to the collection of essays they edited together entitled *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*. Describing a series of photographs entitled *In Between Days (Without You)* by Dean Sameshina, they write:

> *In Between Days (Without You)* thus offers a counterintuitive understanding of lost bodies, spaces, and ideals by configuring absence as a potential presence. *Loss* as a whole embraces this counterintuitive perspective. Instead of imputing to loss a purely negative quality, the essays in this collection apprehend it as productive rather than pathological, abundant rather than lacking, social rather than solipsistic, militant rather than reactionary…They insist that, if loss is known only by what remains of it, then the politics and ethics of mourning lie in the interpretation of what remains—how remains are produced and animated, how they are read and sustained (ix).

Defining loss as productive, abundant, social and militant, it breaks from traditional psychoanalysis. Eng and Kajanjian do not accept grief and loss as a series of symptoms to be overcome on the road to banal sadness but envision it as a way-of-being, a life-philosophy. Without invoking the word, the authors are here seeking a redemption of the loss that comes to engulf what remains of the subject. It is my argument that *Adonais* encompasses all of these virtues of grief as the poet invests in transcendence. Spargo exemplifies Eng and Kazanjian's approach by producing an ethics of mourning influenced by the work of Emmanuel Levinas and Bernard Williams (6). Spargo writes that "Levinas has done perhaps more than any other contemporary figure to develop the connotation of ethics as relationship given over already to the meanings of alterity or, more specifically, to the particular of alterity that the other always signifies" (7). Spargo extends the work of Levinas to produce readings of elegiac literature. He explores Levinas' repositioning of the Other as central to our conception of ethics in its signification of alterity. It is impossible even to conceive of an ethics of mourning or an ecocritical understanding of melancholia without the contributions of Levinas. These theoretical paradigms would not only be impoverished, but impossible without him.

Spargo argues that *Adonais* is not in fact an elegy, but an anti-elegy, which refuses to complete the work of mourning (128-129).[46] This refusal creates "an elegiac ethics of reciprocity, which in responding to the crisis posed by the lost other, seeks to protect and contain the connotations of alterity brought to light by the other's death" (128). Spargo breaks from both Wasserman and Sacks' critical models, which depend upon the logic of a 'productive' mourning to explain the text. *Adonais* does indeed open with a mourning ritual, but Spargo asks the reader to disabuse herself of the notion that the poet is performing anything more than a simulation of it. The poet-speaker's reluctant performance, along with his criticism of Urania, has long been read as an attack on ineffective mourning rituals, but Spargo broadens this critique to oppose the work of mourning in general.[47] By refusing to consume/destroy the lost object the subject instead tarries with loss in a way that engenders the figure of alterity towards which he strives to create an ethical relation. Spargo writes of *Adonais* that "Though the primary form of its ethical argument is negative, a resistant and incomplete mourning stands for an ethical acknowledgement of—or perhaps ceding to—the radical alterity of the other whom one mourns" (13). Because the poet cannot master the alterity of the other, he cannot properly mourn for it. Thus it prohibits the effective resolution that the narrative of mourning demands. The poet transitions out of mourning into melancholia, from which he can contemplate alterity and transcendence with no expectations of mastery or resolution.

Timothy Morton has written extensively on the re-conceptualization of melancholy which he describes as a 'dark ecology' (*Ecology* 142). In his recent essay "The Ecology of Elegy" he defines the elegy as "the genre of mourning the radical inability to know, to be intimate with this other mind" ("The Ecology" 257). *Adonais* exemplifies this delicate trembling. Because melancholia is both an alienation from the self and a desire for the

presence of the other, it is precisely the position needed to "embrace" alterity which "involves a frightening excessive openness towards the opacity of other beings" (257). From this painful striving comes an ethics of alterity that can grieve for loss, contemplate absence but also vie for redemption.[48] Our melancholies "turn it into a source of meaning" (254). For Spargo, *Adonais* produces an elegiac ethics that has two tasks: to understand the interconnectedness of lives which produces a communitarian ethics while also honoring Keats/Adonais' alterity which seeks an appropriate mourning. This is the cleavage that any attempt at an ecological ethics must face. The poet must strive for a comprehension of the other, while simultaneously accepting that there will, and must always be, distance—an irresolvable alterity—between the self and the other.

While Spargo reads an ethical rapprochement in the text, others have read Shelley's investment in Keats otherwise. William Ulmer describes *Adonais* as "auto-elegiac" extending this to mean that Shelley's true motivation is narcissism, not ethics (438). Spargo disagrees arguing that the "ethical distinctiveness of his mourning resides also in this ability to perceive a threat to one's own identity in the other's fate" (151). The poet's ability to envision his fate in Keats' is therefore not an act of narcissism but one of inter-subjectivity based on a concept of reciprocity that does not elide Keats's otherness. An asymmetrical reciprocity can be dangerous however, as it draws the poet towards death: "[t]he melancholic identification of mourning…becomes a vulnerable receptivity to the other" (161). "Vulnerable receptivity" blurs boundaries between the self and other and leads to the poet's "death wish" (161, 162). The poet chooses death with Adonais rather than honoring him in life. Choosing to join Adonais in death also brings to the fore the poet's guilt. The poet's judgment of Urania and society are ultimately also judgments of himself, whose collaboration with the regime for so long stands as an event of his own failure. The poet's guilt, not only for the Adonais' death,

but for his treatment in life also drives him to seek death, as if sharing in Adonais' fate will ameliorate his own part in it. As Spargo formulates the problem:

> …the other who is perceived in the ethical encounter is characterized by the fact that our responsibility for him can never be completed or fulfilled, so that his obligatory alterity also predicts a failure in the moral subject's definitive capabilities. (18)

The poet is infinitely in debt to the Other. He feels responsible for Keats' mistreatment and tries to rectify the situation by generating a transcendent mythology (160-161). However, even as the poet narrates triumphalism he must always accept the necessary failure of his actions. The ethical debt can never be resolved, forestalling any permanent resolution of mourning. This inadequacy dogs the poet as he enters the final cycle of the *Adonais*.

The poet inaugurates the final section by asking one last time "Who mourns for Adonais?" (415). He commands this mourner, whom we understand to be himself, either to "dart thy spirit's light/Beyond all worlds" or go to Rome, the city where Keats (and his own infant son) died (418-19). He describes Rome as a sepulcher, a symbol of time's decay, a grave, where "fragrant copses dress/ The bones of Desolation's nakedness," and "Time feeds" on gray walls which "moulder" (424, 431,434, 436-7,442-3). These descriptions are not limited to Rome, but operate as a synecdoche for the earth as a whole. In giving the mourner two last options, then condemning the city to a graveyard, the poet leaves only one option left—to join the Eternal. He is eager to resolve his ambivalence in these remaining stanzas. He does this, finally, by subverting classical metaphors of permanence to favor death over life.

LIII

Why linger, why turn back, why shrink, my Heart?

Thy hopes are gone before: from all things here

They have departed; thou shouldst now depart!

A light is pass'd from the revolving year,

And man, and woman; and what still is dear

Attracts to crush, repels to make thee wither.

The soft sky smiles, the low wind whispers near:

'Tis Adonais calls! oh, hasten thither,

No more let Life divide what Death can join together. (469-477)

Stanza LIII opens with the poet speaking directly to his heart, concluding the poet's approach in philosophical terms as he switches to a more personal, emotive tone. He encourages it no longer to delay its union with the Eternal. His ambivalence is at the fore here, but he quickly subverts the basis of his fears by reminding himself that nothing redemptive remains on earth for him. He has lost his hopes with the death of Adonais and writes, "They have departed; thou shouldst now depart!" (471). That which does remain—"What still is dear/Attracts to crush, repels to make thee wither"—is a false attractor. Those who were perhaps once intimate, are now duplicitous, seducing the poet so as to destroy him (474-473). As the poet nears a resolution, he hears Adonais in "the low wind" that "whispers near" (474-475). In his strongest subversion of the poem Shelley exclaims, "No more let Life divide what Death can join together" (476), a statement that acts as the poet's final word on his ambivalence. With the close of this stanza any remaining concerns have evaporated, and he fully believes that life has only acted as an impediment to his union with Adonais and the Eternal.

LIV

That Light whose smile kindles the Universe,

That Beauty in which all things work and move,

That Benediction which the eclipsing Curse
Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love
Which through the web of being blindly wove
By man and beast and earth and air and sea,
Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of
The fire for which all thirst; now beams on me,
Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality. (478-86)

These two closing stanzas finalize the poet's commitment to the Eternal as he makes his final preparations to follow Adonais. He speaks of the virtues of the Eternal in Stanza LIV, abstractly—a contrast to the emotive stanzas before and after it. It has the effect of a philosophical statement, the thoughtful last words of a poet about to exit the stage.

Shelley's description of the Eternal throughout the poem is framed by the death of Keats/Adonais and the elegiac form, but in this stanza the poet makes explicit his belief that the Eternal does not only operate in that realm. It generates life as well, "That Light whose smile kindles the Universe" (478). I, along with other scholars read this as a reference to the Spirit of "Ode to the West Wind" and the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty." Curran reads this spirit specifically in the final line of the first stanza of the "Ode" (176):[49] "Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere/Destroyer and Preserver; hear, O hear!" (13-14). Curran notes "There is neither preservation nor creation without destruction. It is not merely the world that exacts its cost; the mind microcosmically destroys itself in order to create anew" (177). In this penultimate stanza, the poet not only recalls the powerful muse that runs through his earlier poetry, but reminds the reader, present and future, that he is not only courting death now, it is courting us. The work of imagination, like all things, is an act of destruction and

genesis. The birth that cursed him will now be another's burden as the "fire for which all thirst…Consume the last clouds of cold mortality" of the poet (485-6).

With the final stanza, the poet ends in a register that starkly contrasts with the previous stanza:

LV

The breath whose might I have invok'd in song
Descends on me; my spirit's bark is driven,
Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng
Whose sails were never to the tempest given;
The massy earth and sphered skies are riven!
I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar;
Whilst, burning through the inmost veil of Heaven,
The soul of Adonais, like a star,
Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are. (487-95)

While the poet often ventriloquizes Adonais throughout the poem, Adonais now approaches him, Adonais' possession of the poet precipitating the close of the poem (487). This "descent" of Adonais completes the transition from the poet speaking for the dead to being overtaken by him. The poet is now a vessel for the Eternal, and eager to unite his spirit with it. He describes this movement as a sea voyage, "bark" being an allusion to Canto II of Dante's *Paradiso* (Reiman and Fraistat, 427). He sets himself up as an exception, contrasted against the "the trembling throng" whose "sails were never to the tempest given" (489). The poet seeks to point out once more that experience of a poet is a solitary one, marked by a pursuit of violence, in contrast with the rest of the earth. The violence of the tempest in the

line above is matched with "The massy earth and sphered skies" being "riven" with the poet's ascent (491). The poet does not only divest from the earth, as we have seen before, but the earth and the sky are torn asunder, as though this is what the poet must do to escape from that "dome of many-colour'd glass" (462).[50] The poet ascends out from the earth in a violent reckoning that leaves behind an earth left in shambles. As the poet travels towards Adonais, he reaches down towards the poet, "burning through the inmost veil of Heaven" (493). Naming Adonais a beacon is a strong image that implies both a guide and a sign. The poet emphasizes Adonais' function as a guide, but the reader also thinks of the length of the journey the poet must undertake to reach the heavens. Reading Adonais as an eager guide certainly causes us to assume that poet will reach him shortly, but we should read the beacon as also a sign or portent to warn both the poet and the reader to remain steadfast for the journey is treacherous. Adonais waits for the poet, and ultimately the reader to arrive even as that arrival is suspended, never to be accomplished in the melancholy tarrying of the poem.

While some scholars, as previously discussed above, attempt to blunt the effect of the poet's melancholia by labelling it as at worst self-destructive (as opposed to suicidal), others simply conflate its suicidal ideation with a self-destructive drive in a way that elides the problem of suicide whether or not they finally read the poet as genuinely self-destructive. While self-destruction and suicidal ideation are two separate models of behavior and are often comorbid, they are not in and of themselves linked.[51] Scholars sidestep a critical analysis of the poet's dejection by mis-locating it in self-destruction, which is clearly inaccurate, then rejecting the reading out of hand, without providing a full accounting of where the poet's dejection leads. Critics are correct to note that the poet is not self-destructive. However, he *is* moving towards death, even if in an attempt to preserve his and other poets' life-work. The poet's suicidal ideation is not a performance of self-destruction

but an act of preservation in his narrative of paradoxically melancholic redemption. Readings of *Adonais* are at their best when they recognize and embrace the uneasiness and deep ambivalence of the text, which is why I have found the psychiatric concept of suicidal ideation so disarmingly appropriate. The poet does not kill himself on the page, but instead manages his dejection by creating a scene of suicide that can affect the legacy of both the living and the dead.

Adonais is only partially understood if read as an elegy for the dead Keats, or even of the poet himself. The poem's psychic drama of grief, rejection, consolation, or even retribution allows the reader a deeper perspective on loss. This loss, always insufficiently explained, defies narrative completion, as will any communication of it. The death of a poet can only survive in poetry because it can only be expressed sufficiently, poetically. *Adonais* is perhaps the apotheosis of Romanticism because it stands on the precipice between despair and redemption. It recognizes absence as a potential space for either. It stalls in the space of the revolutionary demand, to remain engaged politically or to divest.

The argument of this chapter has been that *Adonais* as a text has been progressively misread by scholars interested in manipulating Shelley's late work to mirror the concerns of his earlier career, which affirm political investment in humanity. I have disputed these readings by focusing my reading on the critical approach to one element of the poem—the suicidal ideation of the poet. Approaching suicidal ideation, in which the subject fantasizes about killing the self, requires recognizing that ambivalence is central to the poem. As I argue above, the poet's ambivalence is never resolved, for even as the poet yearns for transcendence, he does not die on the page. The poem ends with the hypnotic draw of Adonais, whom we feel drawing the poet in, but if he does indeed succeed it occurs 'off-stage.'

Adonais eschews the false rhetoric of intimacy most elegists depend upon and it does not maintain the fantasy that the event of death is unlike any other. While death certainly creates an "irrevocable distance" it shares this with the grief that emerges from loss, trauma and failure. Perhaps the only reason a mourner survives the death of another is because s/he has been so effectively acclimatized to loss before the ultimate distance occurs (Spargo, 143). Insofar as the poem seeks to redeem poetry itself, to save Keats and Shelley both for futurity, *Adonais* must end in ambivalence, for this, as Blanchot suggests, is the beginning of language:

> Language can only begin with the void; no fullness, no certainty can ever speak; something essential is lacking in anyone who expresses himself. Negation is tied to language. When I first begin, I do not speak in order to say something, rather a nothing demands to speak, nothing speaks, nothing finds its being in speech and the being of speech is nothing. (43)

The nothing that demands speech is the very alterity of Keats, who compels the poet forward. Shelley follows this demand, but ambivalent about the efficacy of his own speech, seeks to join Keats in a shared self-negation. This negation moves poetry forward, causing other poets to rise in his place, before they also fold into the darkness.

Chapter Three: "Dark Secrets Look for Light" or Fragments Making Knowledge in the Poetry of Keats[52]

> Nur wer die eigene Vergangenheit als Ausgeburt des Zwanges und der Not zu betrachten wüßte, der wäre fähig, sie in jeder Gegenwart aufs höchste für sich wert zu machen. Denn was einer lebte, ist bestenfalls der schönen Figur vergleichbar, der auf Transporten alle Glieder abgeschlagen wurden, und die nun nichts als den kostbaren Block abgibt, aus dem er das Bild seiner Zukunft zu hauen hat (*EBS* 46).
> "Torso," *Einbahnstraße,* Walter Benjamin

> Only he who can view his own past as *an abortion* sprung from compulsion and need can use it to full advantage in the present. For what one has lived is at best comparable to a beautiful statue which has had all its limbs knocked off in transit, and now yields nothing but the precious block out of which the image of one's future must be hewn.[53]

This chapter is the first of two in which I explore the effects of melancholia in the poetry of John Keats. These chapters operate on the fundamental understanding that the emotional upheavals the poet experiences are not discrete, limited scenes but a series of transformative events which catalyzes his understanding of his literary project. Through engagements with history and literature the poet reassesses the ethical implications of the aesthetic ideology he has been perpetuating. These chapters, like the others in this dissertation, argue that melancholia can in fact be expressed ethically, and the expression of this creates the space

for a dynamic re-envisioning of literature and society. I have divided the poet's evolution into three stages: the poet's struggles with the status quo, his development of a resolution, and his attempts to find meaning through this resolution. I describe Keats' development as stages here to emphasize the dialectical quality of this thought. However, it is also productive to think of his process as a negotiation of spaces. Taking Keats' formulation of negative capability seriously means recognizing the production of sentiments not as a striving for answers but as an exploration of various desires. The epitome of this technique is Keats' aesthetic descriptions of death which he returns to frequently throughout his career. Even though he resolves his concerns in "Ode to a Nightingale" which I discuss in the following chapter, the desire regenerates throughout his career. For example, I will begin this chapter's argument with a discussion of the 1817 lyric "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles," but we see the same sentiments reappear in the late 1819 "Sonnet to Sleep." Fundamental to understanding the poetry of John Keats is acknowledging the repetitive manner of his thought. The goal of the poet, as opposed to Wordsworth or Coleridge, to whom he contrasts himself, is not to answer questions, but to develop a way of life that places the questioning mind at the center of it. One could describe this tendency as a compulsion or a series of iterations depending on one's theoretical proclivities, but what is essential is that one recognizes the pattern as fundamental to the poet's production of knowledge throughout his literary project. To trace the trajectory of the poet's movement in this chapter I will discuss the lyrics "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles" and "Epistle to John Reynolds" and show how the issues they raise find their fullest expression in the 1819 "Ode on a Grecian Urn."

I

In the passage at the head of this chapter from the "Antiquities" section of *Einbahnstraße* (*One-Way Street*), Walter Benjamin uses the evocative image of a statue as a metaphor to

deconstruct the narrative ideology that he argues accompanies perceptions of subjectivity. He compares the subject's perception of the past to "a beautiful statue" (46). By comparing the subject's past to a work of art, a static historical entity, he objectifies it. This brings into stark relief the subject's desire for narrative coherence, undergirded by a demand for significance the subject seeks from his/her personal past and from history in general. Benjamin condemns this approach which effectively reifies the past in its consecration. The demand for significance disfigures the subject's ability to recognize the potentiality of the present. Whatever stability a narrative ideology may provide, it also doubles as a limitation on what is possible for the subject to comprehend. Narrowing one's frame of comprehension prevents the subject from doing the imaginative work that will bring about a future redemption. If one is to take seriously a philosophical contemplation of the present (and thus the future), Benjamin argues that one must consider the past (and within that the subject's nostalgia for it) which contains one's personal history and the universal, as—"sprung from compulsion and need." It is necessary for its purposes, but worthless in and of itself. Benjamin is not here arguing that history is worthless, but that one must treat it strategically. The past, which is both history and memory, thus the subject's perception of the past, has had its "limbs knocked off in transit." [54] If we read these "limbs" as the interpretive frame of the past, than the "precious block" which remains is the essence of it, which is liberated through its destruction. This medium, a remnant, is thus what the work of the future must be accomplished upon.

It is important to note that, as in many of Benjamin's essays, this text operates with a curious latent ambivalence. He argues for the necessary destruction of his metaphor of the past, the statue, despite its beauty and assumed value. This means that the formation of the future is an implicitly destructive act that involves a transgression of the past. However,

Benjamin also deeply values that past, and acknowledges its necessity in the formation of the future. This is not an ambivalence that can be resolved and remains shot through the text. Benjamin's discussion of history using the metaphor of the statue resonates with another writer's experience of statues over a hundred years before. In the short lyric "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles," written in March 1817, the British Romantic poet John Keats documents his reaction upon viewing what were known as the 'Elgin Marbles.' As Grant F. Scott documents, the marbles began arriving from Greece in 1801, but were only available for private viewings after Lord Elgin returned to England post-imprisonment in 1807 (125).[55] The condition of the statues was significantly compromised, many of the marbles lacking limbs and other components. This provoked almost unanimous negative criticism from spectators and reviewers alike (125-126). No doubt spectators were unduly influenced by the structure which housed the artifacts, a shed Benjamin Haydon described as a "dirty pent-house" (125-6). Joseph Farington recorded many of these negative responses in his diary which include descriptions of them as "a Mass of ruins" and "mutilated fragments" evoking disgust, not pleasure (Scott 125). The degraded state of these artifacts caused many to question their value, thus delaying the British government's procurement of the marbles which was a protracted spectacle, in and of itself (126-7). However, they were eventually recognized as extremely valuable, and compared to the Apollo Belvedere, the Farnese Hercules and the Lacoon by the artists who acted as witnesses at the parliamentary hearings. Haydon encouraged Keats to visit the marbles in their new installation at the British Museum which he did in March of 1817. Keats wrote "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles," quickly thereafter.[56]

I note the history of the objects which inspired Keats' lyric to emphasize how essential the degradation of the marbles are to understanding the text. The "mass of ruins"

act as a revenant which foretells the poet's demise (Scott, 125). As Benjamin's statue goes through a degradation to enter redemption, Keats attempts to face within these fragments his own aesthetic commitments.

"On Seeing the Elgin Marbles"

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

We see here a series of hyphenated images that contrast a sense of greatness and majesty with the failure of the poet to accomplish it. The lyric communicates two lines of inquiry, neither of which he can resolve satisfactorily—the failure to succeed and the underlying existential condition that promotes it (his melancholia). Viewing these imperfect statues

causes the poet to reflect on his own desire and the finitude incumbent upon it. Facing these statues, artifacts from another time, bring to the fore the poet's inability to resolve his competing needs. Keats poses his weak spirit against what he describes as the weight of his mortality (1-2). Impending death is a burden he feels unable to handle and yet also unable to displace "like an unwilling sleep" (2). This dialectic is what fuels the tensions of the text. The poet's images are suggestive in their opacity even as the poet struggles to predict the close of the poem. He describes his failures as a weakness tending to death, "Like a sick eagle looking at the sky" (6). Keats uses the image of the eagle to communicate his own potential for greatness, although he imagines himself as now fated for failure. Yet, instead of resisting what his infirmities have caused, or feeling guilty about his failure, the poet is paradoxically relieved to be liberated from the burden of pursuing greatness. The poet recognizes that finding solace in this failure is "dim-conceived" which provokes an "undescribable feud" within himself (9-10). He seems to know that this relief is a symptom of a false consciousness and wants to fight himself, but his weakness again envelopes him with a "dizzy pain" (11). The pain is "dizzy" because it shakes the poet, making him unsteady. He vacillates between the extremes of "Grecian grandeur" and the "rude/Wasting of old time" (12-13). The former exemplifies aesthetic ideology, with its emphasis on static permanence and perfection. The latter, the "rude/Wasting of old time" insists on temporality while celebrating the decay of the marbles. If even the celebrated marbles of the Grecian Age cannot persist how can the poet have any confidence in his own project? The extremes the poet describes represent the poet's unresolved feelings towards his own poetic project. [57] The poem closes, crumbling under the weight of the poet's struggle, which results in a series of disjointed images separated by hyphens. The deployment of these hyphens is a strategy the poet turns to throughout his career to communicate loss, sorrow and a desire to reach

into death.[58] The hyphens communicate the poet's inability to find the words which describe his condition. His inability to write is a struggle with negativity, with an extreme absence he often describes as sleep or death. The poet's project is shot through with the coming finitude and anxiety of death as this absence mutes him and he faces the unyielding drives of power and decay. The marbles' decay thus reflects the poet's own struggle to both project a narrative and also embrace his own weaknesses. What is also evident however is the poet's yearning. The collapse at the close of the poem is not terminal but momentary for him. His "shadow of a magnitude" is a power that is limited, a "weak messianic power" as Benjamin describes in "On the Concept of History" (Keats, 14; Benjamin, *SW4* 254). The poet identifies something potentially recuperative in the ruins. They are not worthless due to their imperfections, but instead more valuable as witnesses to history and the passage of time. However, the poet cannot redeem this potential here. He must first understand the nature of his own contradictory desires more thoroughly, which he explores in the "Epistle to John Hamilton Reynolds."

II

While "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles" certainly lacks the neat progression of many of Keats' other works, the text develops its persuasive power through the strength of the intertwined sentiments of anxiety and depression. On its face, the March 1818 "Epistle to Reynolds" written a year after the Elgin lyric could not be more different. An epistolary poem written within the body of a letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, it is, in Sperry's words, a "humorous distraction" meant to distract the addressee from his illness (583).[59] Upon first read, this poem appears as a bit of jocular detritus largely forgettable save for the evocative phrase "material sublime" and the lines which look forward to the 1819 odes.[60] Despite these apparent drawbacks I will argue below that this is a liminal text between the "Elgin Marbles"

sonnet and "Ode on a Grecian Urn" in which the poet further explores the contradictory desires that plague his thoughts. Despite the poem's "chaotic" incongruities, the fragmentation and opacity that is central to the images of the "Elgin Marbles" sonnet return again in the "Epistle to Reynolds" and ultimately seek resolution in "Ode on a Grecian Urn."

Stuart Sperry, who writes a defense of the text, describes the poem as "strangely disjointed and even, at times, incoherent" (583). It opens with these lines,

> Dear Reynolds, as last night I lay in bed,
>
> There came before my eyes that wonted thread
>
> Of shapes, and shadows, and remembrances,
>
> That every other minute vex and please:
>
> Things all disjointed come from north and south,—
>
> Two witch's eyes above a cherub's mouth,
>
> Voltaire with casque and shield and habergeon,
>
> And Alexander with his night-cap on;
>
> Old Socrates a tying his cravat,
>
> And Hazlitt playing with Miss Edgeworth's cat; (1-10)

The poem persists for a hundred lines with a confusing pastiche of nonsensical, anachronistic images—mythological, historical, folkloric, artistic, personal and public. The poem self-consciously describes the images it enumerates as disjointed, "Things all disjointed come from north and south," but lacks a narrative voice to frame these incongruities in a meaningful way (5). Sperry writes, "It is not merely that the images themselves are ludicrously inconsistent with each other; but they neither suggest nor lead on to anything more" (584). Keats declares his theme—the bombardment of life by disturbing,

uncontrollable images—but then overwhelms it with the chaotic images that he pours into the text. The frame of a dream sequence is a frequent lyrical device for the poet, but he here overwhelms it with his superfluous images.[61] While the "Epistle to Reynolds" initially resists a coherent reading, clusters of lines give way to insight.[62] One is tempted to describe the poet's technique in the Epistle as a kind of automatic writing—an enumeration of images that progresses without the complete comprehension of the writer, but populates the page under his hand nonetheless. Sperry describes Keats' technique as a "progression by way of contrasts and oppositions" (586). The enumerating contrast of banal and fantastic images loosely lead to a fictitious faery tale which ends at a castle. From these particulars the poet enters a more aestheticized realm to consider nature's beauty:

> 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 day-time
> In the dark void of night… (67-71)

The poet here longs to make his dreams as beautiful as nature, instead of the dark moods which plague him. As in the "Ode to a Nightingale," Keats reaches for his imagination to envelop him, instead of turning to the lure of death as "Sonnet to Sleep" does. The "material sublime" that the poet wishes to draw from here is framed as a positive quality, opposed to "our own soul's day-time/In the dark void of night" which draws Keats into depression (66-67).[63] Given the richness the phrase "material sublime" evokes, its presence has spawned multiple interpretations. The readings of Stuart Sperry and Onno Oerlemans, which I discuss below, both explore the poet's approach to nature and his ability to conceptualize a relationship with it. Stuart Sperry's approach highlights a tradition which values close

readings which have an internal coherence within the poet's corpus as a whole. Oerlemans fleshes out the philosophical possibilities of the term to further ecological insights into romanticism. Sperry interprets "material sublime" and its position within the eighth stanza through Keats' later letter to his brothers George and Tom, in December 1818 (107-9). This letter contains another Keatsian neologism, negative capability. Keats writes,

> …I had not a dispute but a disquisition with Dilke, on various subjects; 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—Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge. This pursued through Volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration. (108-9)

In this letter, Keats argues that great art is created by an artist who is "capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason" (109). Keats seems to point to the moral ambiguities that Shakespeare has indeed become famous for, as Keats notes. This does not imply a stance of amorality, but instead an ability to exist in a world with no clear answers—in poetry, politics, or life. Keats contrasts this with Coleridge, who for Keats is a writer who would prefer to generate an unsatisfactory solution, rather than admit an inability to know one. This criticism is a serious one, although clothed in mockery. Negative capability operates in service of beauty, as Keats makes clear at the close of the lines, introducing the element of destruction into the poet's conception of

beauty. He links the capacity for "being in uncertainties" to appreciating, and thus creating, Beauty. Instead of valuing an aesthetic ideology of permanence and stasis, Keats writes, "Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration" (109). This obliteration insists on a destructive, anarchic power within Beauty, one that Benjamin would describe as redemptive, though Keats does not clarify this comment. Keats gestures towards a destructive character within the literary at various points throughout his corpus (the "Ode on Melancholy" perhaps giving it its fullest treatment). It represents for him a process which may at first appear negative, but is in fact essential to the progress of art. As exemplified in Benjamin's torso, time meets out destruction upon the statue, but that does not limit its redemptive potential—in fact it liberates it. Sperry argues that the phrase expresses "the desire of the imagination to possess at once the best of both worlds, the ethereal and the concrete" (589). Sperry contrasts this with Keats' contemporary, Hazlitt who also reveled in "the spiritual aspect of the creative process" but did not afford the negative space to it which Keats was so attuned to (589). This contrast is a productive one—Keats yearns for beauty, but cannot ignore its evanescence, and its fall "that fade away into shadows and uncertainty" (589). It is this recognition of destruction that guides Sperry's reading of the eighth stanza of the "Epistle to Reynolds." He sees the poet's deployment of the phrase "tease us out of thought" as "subtly different" from its position in "Ode on a Grecian Urn" in which the line reappears.[64] Sperry argues that in the Epistle the poet is not defending the virtues of negative capability, but lamenting its "limitations and defects" (590). What is at one moment liberation, then becomes imprisonment when the very nature of its freedom is based on a lack of knowledge, or reason. Sperry argues that Imagination in the wrong space is "Lost in a sort of Purgatory blind" (80). In this way one is able to understand Keats' seeming denunciation of negative capability here. He writes,

> ……It is a flaw
>
> In happiness to see beyond our bourn,—
>
> It forces us in summer skies to mourn,
>
> It spoils the singing of the Nightingale. (82-5)

The poet regrets how his yearning provokes a melancholia which then taints his perception of nature's beauty. We see Keats here echoing his fears from the Elgin Marbles sonnet; his inability to resolve his anxieties lead him to doubt his philosophical insights. These contradictory drives Sperry argues

> …spoil whatever consolations either taken singly might afford…The poet is trapped in limbo, somewhere between the uncertain heaven figured by the visionary imagination and the real hell of actual existence when stripped of all its romantic possibilities (590).

Keats mines this vein of anxiety and melancholia to rich effect in "Ode to a Nightingale," "Sonnet--To Sleep" and other poems. These texts explore a brooding negativity that occurs through expressions of depression often in tandem with a desire for death, though they lack any scenes of violence. The closing stanza of the Epistle extends the poet's tight, shaking knot of ambivalence into just such a space.

The final stanza examines the poet's claims of the previous stanza in depth, revealing to his addressee the revelatory moment which led him to his beliefs. He opens the stanza by describing the scene in which he learned the "mysterious tale" of which he "cannot speak" (86-7). The act of reading, the poet describes as having occurred "upon a Lampit rock of green sea-weed/Among the breakers" (88-89). Assuming that the poet is not speaking of a book he brought with him onto the rock, the poet is describing the revelation of his vision in terms of reading. He continues,

……I was at home

And should have been most happy,—but I saw

Too far into the sea, where every maw

The greater on the less feeds evermore,—

But I saw too distinct into the core

Of an eternal fierce destruction,

And so from happiness I far was gone.

Still am I sick of it, tho' to-day

I've gathered young spring-leaves, and flowers gay

Of periwinkle and wild strawberry,

Still do I that most fierce destruction see,— (92-102)

In the previous stanza the poet is frustrated by his inability to enjoy nature without being disturbed by his imagination which yearns "beyond its proper bounds" (79). Here he reveals that what his imagination provokes is a powerful vision that deeply disturbs him and leads to his melancholia. By looking "too far into the sea" the poet has provoked nature to reveal its inner essence to him, which he describes in terms of animal predation. The poet is deeply disturbed by this "eternal fierce destruction" and admits to his addressee that while he goes through the motions of happy activity, he remains disturbed by what he saw (97). By describing the survival instincts of creatures in nature in this way, Keats lends their acts an existential terror which reveals his state of mind. His imagination has provoked a vision of violent, carnivorous destruction that threatens the poet.

This attitude stands in stark contrast to the poet's earlier reference to animal sacrifice.

The sacrifice goes on; the pontif knife

Gleams in the sun, the milk-white heifer lows (20-1)

As in "Ode on a Grecian Urn," which the lines prefigure, the sacrificial death of the female cow operates as an aesthetic object, removed from the organic context the poet describes in the final stanza of the poem. Sperry writes, "Keats' eye probes beneath the surface to discern signs of sacrifice, oppression, and underlying disorder—not the bloodless and beautifully ceremonial picture of sacrifice that had earlier come alive in his imagination" (590). The poet's vision of the world is no longer buttressed by a deep aesthetic sense, but held captive to a survivalist demand for death. After momentarily breaking off from this scene, it compels his return:

Still do I that most fierce destruction see,—
The Shark at savage prey,—the Hawk at pounce,--
The gentle Robin, like a pard or ounce,
Ravening a worm,—Away, ye horrid moods!
Moods of one's mind! You know I hate them well. (102-6)

Keats first lists sharks and hawks, known for their predatory skill, but ensuring the totality of nature is included in his point, he then compares a robin hunting for a worm to a leopard and an ocelot. In his vision no creature is without its prey. The poet is disturbed by the "naked brutality of primeval nature" as Sperry describes these lines, a "nature reduced to universal rapacity" (590; 591). This destruction is not momentary or sporadic—it is an essential function of the natural order, the "core" of the world, which has been indelibly articulated into the mind of the poet via the imaginative capacity (96). He blames these lines on his "horrid moods" before breaking off the vision to close the poem with a cheery salute to Reynolds, wishing him and the poet's brother, Tom, good health.

The vision of nature as a murderous cycle of predation is certainly unmatched anywhere else in Keats' corpus. However, as we see in the December 1818 letter to his

brothers, he does consider violence as a means to facilitate the production of art. He writes, "with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration" (109). As I argue above, we see the poet return to questions of violence in "Ode on Melancholy" which I will discuss in the following chapter. What is important to read here is the way in which the power of violence exists as a specter upon the poet, which he will call upon with increasing need as he approaches his Odes. He may aestheticize it to varying degrees for the purposes of his lyrics, but he cannot put it off forever. The introduction of a "natural" violence represents a growing presence in Keats' oeuvre to find a productivity in the violence he encounters within his visions. Bracketing that, the violence here signifies the poet's increasing inability to maintain a vision of nature that is sufficiently aesthetically ideological. It confronts the ideal he had previously upheld of nature as a highly aestheticized, reified object—the product of his Fancy.[65] Keats' struggle to navigate a space between a perfected aesthetic vision and the fierce, rapacious, predatory state of nature leaves the poet at an impasse, which he will be unable to resolve until "Ode on a Grecian Urn."

One could argue that the lines' austere biological rhetoric is influenced by the burgeoning naturalist and evolutionary insights of the era. However, this only places limits on the poet's own vision and provides no insight into it. We can however make sense of this turn if we reconsider the poet's invocation of "material sublime" in the previous stanza of the poem. While Sperry (as discussed above) argues that one can read "material sublime" as an expression of the poet confronting the shortcomings of his idyllic description of negative capability, Onno Oerlemans approaches the material sublime from a philosophical perspective upon which he generates an ecocritical paradigm to develop readings about Romantic writings. In his 2010 book, *Materiality of Nature,* Oerlemans contextualizes

"material sublime" within a discussion of the sublime. He draws on the work of Thomas Weiskel who defines the sublime as that which "determines the mind to regard its inability to grasp wholly the object as a symbol of the mind's relation to a transcendent order" (23, Weiskel; Oerlemans 4). Oerlemans argues that Weiskel is here underlining the important recognition that the human mind cannot adequately conceptualize the object, which imbues the transcendent order with an alterity that it is fundamentally impossible for the poet to account for. Oerlemans contrasts this with traditional conceptions of the sublime in British Romantic thought which, in his view, works such as Shelley's "Mont Blanc" epitomize. He writes,

> The material sublime is in this instance not just a sense of awe and fear (those horrid moods) but a sudden recognition that it is possible to see at once how thought and existence are estranged from a clear awareness of the physical world, and that they are yet inexplicably rooted in it. It is also, of course, a yearning to recover that rootedness... (4)

Oerlemans defines the material sublime as at once an estrangement and a yearning to make present "the actuality of the physical world, its facticity and presence as contrasted to the artificiality of art" (4). Keats suffers, not necessarily because his vision is violent, but because he fails to account for its presence in his poetry. Oerlemans frames this as not only an ecological issue, but an ethical one. He writes, "The material sublime occurs when consciousness recognizes that it cannot fully represent the material order (which is truly 'other')… (4-5). Nature, as the ultimate alterity, cannot be known, cannot be comprehensively conceptualized, and thus always operates as an excess of reason.[66] The material sublime is thus, for Oerlemans, an expression of the poet's striving to be in nature

and the event of his failure to do so. The poet's interaction with nature operates as the impossibility to complete the Concept. Oerlemans writes,

> If anything, it produces an awareness of one's difference from the world, and one's isolation within it. It emphasizes the otherness of the physical as a first step in acknowledging where and how we exist. Rather than breeding familiarity, or creating an illusion of knowledge, it brings us to the limits of what we know we can construct an idea of nature, make a useful order, but know too that there is a fundamental order that eludes us. (20)

This line of thought has significant affinities with Timothy Morton's work in *Ecology without Nature*. Like Morton, Oerlemans seeks to highlight moments which do not produce a "surfeit of being" but instead highlight the negative—what one cannot know. Oerlemans argues that "the romantic gesture of putting the self into nature" does not reinforce anthropocentrism but in fact undermines it (84). They represent an important sea change in ecocriticism today. Their work moves away from readings which would seek to generate jeremiads against the anthropomorphizing tendencies of poets and instead seek a space in which one can contemplate the desire of the poet to face nature, and the ethical implications of this action. Thus Oerlemans' reading of the material sublime here creates a space in which one can recognize the larger struggle of Keats' literary project. Forced to recognize the features an aesthetic ideology refuses to account for, he must negotiate a way of being that embraces life, accepts finitude but can also honor the need to produce art which can endure beyond his organic life. We read his struggle which generates a melancholic ambivalence, throughout his career. Within the space of this melancholy, as both Morton and Spargo have argued, the poet does approach nature in a manner which is free from anthropomorphism.[67] The Epistle contains his most violent turn away from this, envisioning a nature based on

predation, not beauty. Only with the completion of "Ode on a Grecian Urn" do we find that the poet has produced a coherent aesthetic vision.

Elgin Marbles' is a fragmented yet powerful antecedent to the sustained philosophical inquiry Keats pursues in "Ode on a Grecian Urn." The poet interrogates the world around him, asking all in his orbit, history and nature: how does an artist pursue permanence and prevent decay. This inquiry re-frames his deep melancholy as the allure of aesthetic ideology falls away and his previous beliefs cease to be persuasive. While much powerful scholarship has already been produced on Keats' odes, I will here argue that in the odes we witness an ethical turn that can only be accounted for by placing its origin in the poet's melancholia. The world of the marbles brings into focus the poet's struggle with his own finitude and the survival of his art. His deep paralysis is due to his inability to pull away from an aesthetic ideology that dictates a preference for objects that celebrate the eternal. He is beset by an ambivalent melancholia he feels incapable of resolving. Keats is transfixed by the medusa-like stare of the marbles which draw him in to meet his own death.

III

"Ode on a Grecian Urn" is the poet's formal resolution of the queries and contradictions in the Elgin Marbles sonnet and the "Epistle to Reynolds." He uses the Ode as an opportunity to develop a discourse on his own finitude and the place in history he may seek. He liberates himself from the demands of aesthetic ideology that had risen up around the most valued literature of his time and articulates a project that positions this tension as central to his literary project. By reengaging with the object of a marble, Keats positions the urn as not only an object of speculation, but a vessel for the "horrid moods" and "material sublime" which both plague and inspire the poet. He makes full accounting here, of himself as a poet and the literary tradition he hopes his poetry will be enveloped into.

In stanza one, the poet feminizes the urn, referring to it as both an "unravished bride of quietness" and a "foster-child of Silence and slow time" (1-2). The urn is a "sylvan historian," a silent, eternal witness to history (3). Having feminized the urn, he assures her that no one can tell the urn's tale better than "our rhyme" and asks what "leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape" or what legend that she has witnessed (4-5). He asks if the figures wrought onto her form are "deities or mortals, or … both," (8). He closes the stanza with the possibility of a lusty pursuit, which he poses in highly aesthetic, Grecian mythological terms.

While the first stanza closes with the poet voyeuristically asking what "mad pursuit" and "wild ecstasy" may occur, in the second stanza the poet imagines two lovers on the face of the urn. This couple is no longer animated, as the first stanza implied, but paralyzed in their precoital activities (9-10). As the poet continues to describe the scene, his valuation of unheard music meant for spirits instead of the "sensual ear" reinforces the poet's adherence to aesthetic ideology, which values a spiritual, idealized art form, over organic, decaying matter (13). He advises the lovers not to grieve but to embrace their position in eternity:

> Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
>
> Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
>
> Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
>
> Though winning near the goal yet, do not grieve;
>
> She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
>
> For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

The couple are passive and mute, they cannot respond to the poet, whose advice thus doubles as a command. The stanza's emotional impact reveals the poet's desire for intimacy and his ambivalence about the perfection of the urn. He desires the pleasures only nature

can provide, but also values the transcendent art form of the urn. As Hermione de Almeida points out, stanza two explores the oppositional drives of consumption and perfection, decay and stasis. She writes that stanza two is

> …is first and foremost a celebration of the stasis and stationing of life and love made possible by art in spite of the irremissible power and necessarily changing currents of life. The urn's stasis is in its perfection; its depiction of stasis, meanwhile, is a symbol of the perfection of art….steadfastness, self-sufficient splendor within teeming nature, unchangeability of form and brightness within a natural flux of light and motion." (117)

The urn is here perceived as a mastery of nature, a depiction of a perfection that defies nature. The poet presents them with a cold comfort—though unable to consummate their desire, they are also now free from decay and eternal. This scene provokes the poet's growing ambivalence which leads to the strange excesses of the next stanza.

Many scholars have commented on stanza three's strained rhetoric, which reiterates the sentiments of the second stanza and critics argue provides no new insight or movement for the ode (Mauro, 293). Helen Vendler writes, "The semantic and syntactical repetitiveness rises in the third stanza of the ode to a form of babble, in which what is being said is palpably subordinated to the effect of incoherent envy…" (Vendler 138). While I have argued above that texts such as "Epistle to Reynolds" should not be analyzed as anything other than the spontaneous lyric that they are, stanza three is not an example of a poorly written stanza. The "form of babble" in stanza three is in fact the poet at the apotheosis of aesthetic ideology's lure. Like the close of stanza one, stanza three revels in the lust and passion the poet imagines. As the poet returns to describe the lovers' music, it becomes clear

that their music is a euphemism for sex. Unable to maintain the sterility of stanza two, the poet retreats from the urn as he describes its eternal passion,

More happy love! more happy, happy love!
  For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,
    For ever panting, and forever young;
All breathing human passion far above,
  That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,
    A burning forehead, and a parching tongue (25-30).

While this stanza technically shares the same subject matter with the second stanza, it takes on a completely different tone and approach. There is no advisement here, no careful accounting of eternity—no restraint. The third stanza is the gratuitous excess by which the poet breaks from the aesthetic ideology that dominated the first two stanzas, and perversely provokes the violence of the closing stanzas. (As we will see in the discussion of the "Ode on Melancholy" in the following chapter Keats regularly associates consumption with loss and melancholia.) Thus the consummation of the lovers leaves the poet "high-sorrowful" in the postcoital moment that closes stanza three (28-30).

As stanza four opens with the question, "Who are these coming to the sacrifice?" one wonders if the lovers are included in this sacrifice (31). Criticism typically reads this as a shift to a different scene and yet one may also suspect a certain continuity—at the least that it is because the poet is unable to preserve sexual desire, or enjoy it ad infinitum the poet envisions a scene of sacrificial violence. The poet introduces another passive figure, the heifer, a female cow, which is led by a "mysterious priest" as she communicates her distress, "lowing at the skies" (32-33). The poet, now recoiling from the urn, in all his despair and uncertainty, identifies with the sacrificial cow. The poem aches with the gentle empathy the

poet shows for her. He hears himself in her primordial, organic cry as opposed to the previous stanza's "spirit ditties of no tone" (14). The poet's language envelopes her heavy frame as she is lead against her will to be slain out of nature into society. The poet sees her as being forced to bear the burdens of humanity, just as he has also suffered. The final lines revise our experience of the previous stanzas. We understand the nefarious effect of the poet's initial devotion to the urn which mimics the all-encompassing adoration (and death-wish) he experiences in "Elgin Marbles." In writing a scene of sacrifice the poet again builds the tension of his idealized object of art against the organic scene of transition the sacrifice represents. The poet questions why the town "is emptied of its folk" and the tone shifts from that of a ceremonial slaughter with the lines:

> And, little town, thy streets for evermore
>
> Will silent be; and not a soul, to tell
>
> Why thou art desolate, can e'er return. (37-40).

While the poet caringly hushes the lovers in stanza two, the town's predicament elicits no sympathy from the poet, who makes no promises here. Instead of preservation, the poet narrates a scene of collapse and desolation. The pendulum swings from a celebration of the idealized urn in the opening stanza to the heightened destruction of a town. These two scenes represent the extremes Keats feared being subsumed into—a transcendent, static art or a transient scene of nature which for him, also meant a silence to, and absence in, history. No witnesses remain "to tell/Why thou are desolate, can e'er return" (39-40). The effect of this scene recalls an ancient memorial—Pompeii. The poet consumes the village like the *nuee ardente* (burning cloud) of a volcano leaving only a barren landscape in its wake. The poet fears his own opus will suffer from a similar fate, unable to survive. By the close of stanza four it becomes clear that if one side of the urn espouses aesthetic ideology the other side

must accept destruction as its conclusion. To valorize aesthetic ideology is to create an equally powerful violence that turns back and destroys it.

Keats returns to consider the urn's form, its "Attic shape" in the final stanza as he had in the beginning (41). The emphasis on its form redirects the reader's eye from descriptive scenes on the urn to the urn qua object. However, instead of now wondering what "leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape," the poet describes it "with brede/ Of marble men and maidens overwrought" (5, 42). The destruction of the village in the previous stanza effectively breaks the poet's feverous desire for the urn, and by extension his embrace of aesthetic ideology. The figures on the urn are no longer a source of imagined sexual reverie but cold marble, "brede" and "overwrought" self-consciously marked *as such* distancing the poet from the distance of art (41-42). While "brede" refers to an art form that involves the weaving of thread, such as plaiting or embroidery, I believe Keats uses the term idiosyncratically with "overwrought" to describe the urn as excessively decorated, no longer a work of art, but overdone, tacky—"overwrought" (42). Lacking even technical beauty now, the allure of the urn has fallen away completely. The poet's language also becomes more prosaic as the "happy boughs" of stanza three are now "forest branches and the trodden weed" (21, 43). The grand rhetoric of the previous stanzas is now dwarfed by the poet's recoil from the urn. He emphasizes the urn's silence and frigidity as he did in the first stanza: Thou, silent form! dost tease us out of thought/As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral! (44-45).[68] The urn's "silent form" like eternity, "tease[s]" the poet out of his reverie and into the descent back to earth. The urn's similarity to eternity does not rest solely in its ability to "tease" the poet. Both act as witnesses to history in their timelessness. With the failed consolation of the urn now in focus the poet realizes that it is not a document of history but one of the deception and subversion. The destruction of the village signals the poet's

recognition that the urn's circularity is a false coherence. With this emphasis on the urn's role as witness he closes the poem with these lines:

> When old age shall this generation waste,
> Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
> Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,
> "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all
> Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

The poet may still admire the urn's immortality, but it is an eternity of silence. What is read upon its form, what legends its' viewers decipher, are interpolated upon the urn. Up to this point, the poem has the features of an inner dialogue. Absorbed in the drama of the urn, it is only here the poet speak directly to his concerns about his own temporality and finitude. As the poet turns to face his own mortality the poem also opens up to directly consider the future of art and its readers. Scholarship varies on what the aphorism signifies. Vendler, among others, argues that through the power of the urn, the poet comes to accept the temporality of life in service to the eternality of art. This art, which we are to read as the urn and Keats' poem, will persist and provide comfort and meaning to others. Others such as Sperry place less importance on the aphorism itself and instead emphasize how the poet come to terms with the "half-knowledge" art provides to man (277-8).[69] Below I will contrast Vendler's position with a more recent reading by Jason Mauro.

In Vendler's *The Odes of John Keats* she reads the poet as turning to the urn "for refuge and solace" which provides answers and comforts him (Vendler 131, 134). The source of the poet's despair is the transience of life, which she terms the "fact of process" (Vendler 124). Thus she interprets the aphorism in the final lines as spoken by the urn to the poet, who "in his prophecy, recounts what the urn will say to succeeding generations" (134). The urn acts

as a friend to man, reassuring him and future generations that all the truth and beauty one needs to know is within the circular shape of the urn. Vendler's poet reaffirms the transcendental, aesthetic ideals of his time, which favor permanence and comprehension over transience, read as failure and fragmentation. It is my contention that the poet is doing the exact opposite. Having identified aesthetic ideology as the false consciousness which has fuelled the melancholia we see in "Elgin" and "Epistle" he breaks away from it in "Urn," finalizing his critique in an ironic aphorism that amplifies the duplicitous nature of transcendental aesthetic ideals.

In "The Shape of Despair" Mauro brings Vendler into dialogue with the literary anthropological paradigm developed by Karl Kroeber (289).[70] Mauro argues that the urn is not merely a dream being communicated to a passive audience, but can be read as a vision that is shared and perpetuated by the poet's community. Mauro writes, "Keats' ode is a site for a ritual transformation of the reader, where we are allowed to participate in a transformative vision rather than witness a poet's dream" (290). By defining the poem by its communitarian value, it takes on a political valence absent from other readings. He argues that Keats does indeed initially turn to the urn for consolation but by the close reads it as a cautionary tale. This vision alleviates the poet's sense of despair by embedding him in an authentic, meaningful interaction with his community. Mauro's reading acts as an interesting transition point between Vendler's reading which reaffirms aesthetic fetishization and my own argument.

Mauro assigns the poem the shape of a sine-wave (as opposed to Vendler's parabolic trajectory) to represent what he argues is the intersection of the poem's origin in despair and its descent. Mauro writes,

> More accurately, the ode inscribes a sine-wave, with five distinctive points along its length (see Fig. 1): first, the poet is steeped in despair brought about by the world's unrelenting flux; second, upon encountering the urn, he is filled with the hope that he has found an antidote to his despair; third, he finds that his hope is unfounded, that the antidote was no more than a placebo; fourth, as he more closely examines the urn, he finds that it embodies a terror far more intense than the despair from which he originally sought relief, that the placebo is in fact a poison; and finally, he embraces the transient condition of the world as an antidote to the terror inherent in the urn. The most distinguishing feature of the sine-wave, as distinct from a circle or a series of parabolas, is that the point of origin-the poet's initial despair from which he wishes to ascend-becomes the point of salvation to which, by the end of the ode, he wishes to climb (291).

In perhaps an ingenious move, Mauro argues that the "transient condition of the world," or "fact of process" which led the poet to the urn, by the end of the poem becomes the "antidote to the terror inherent in the urn" (291). While Mauro agrees with Vendler that the urn is a "good friend," it is for vastly different reasons. The urn does not function as a balm for Mauro but operates as a cautionary tale that persuades the poet that "fact of process" is preferable to "static fixation" of the urn (299). Facing the "terror" of "static fixation" the poet then embraces temporality, and transmits a vision to his present and future community. Mauro describes the poet's turn back to the origin of his despair, the "fact of process" as an embrace and a resolution, but this is in some ways a false economy. While this is indeed a return to the "fact of process" the poet still remains where he did at the opening of the poem, struggling to come to terms with his melancholia. He does not freely choose the "fact of process" for its features, but despite it. He wishes only to avoid the medusa-like gaze of

the urn, not revel in transience and finitude of his life. Mauro's argument sculpts a poet who has mastered the urn and chides it through the aphorism. Beauty "is the truth of process and transience, not the stasis of you, the urn" he writes (299). I agree that the poet does spurn the urn, but I read a much messier, sordid trajectory. While Mauro recognizes the deceit of the urn, he neglects to chart the ideological effect of the urn on the poet. By describing the poet's crisis as seeking an "antidote" to the "fact of process" Mauro implicitly reaffirms the ideological structure that undergirds the poet's search. We have to recognize that the poet's turn to the urn for meaning is only a symptom of the larger aesthetic ideology which manipulates him. While Mauro's reading provides a structural resolution to which he assigns the shape of the sine wave, he stops short of recognizing the origin of the poet's crisis and thus his despair.

The poet does not ultimately take solace in the urn, as Vendler argues. Nor does he witness the urn as a cautionary tale as Mauro does. "Ode to a Grecian Urn" is the opening salvo of the existential project which becomes the Ode cycle. The epigram that closes the poem is not a riddle the poet expects his readers to solve but a mystery he himself seeks to embrace. While Vendler and Mauro generate penetrating, fascinating readings neither attend to the structural deficiency in the poem—that is to say, the false expectation that the poet will find an answer by the close of the poem. The Ode here operates as a non-resolution. The speaker knows where the answer is, but not what it is. He must embrace transience, although does not yet know how. Readings that position themselves as seeking a resolution, whether through embracing the urn or turning away from it have failed to recognize the broader point which Keats exposes in the final stanza. The poet rejects the urn, not because the answer can be found elsewhere, but because he recognizes the false premise of the urn. The answers he seeks are not eternal, such as failure or perfection—they are temporary,

wavering, incomplete and prone to inaccuracy—"…uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason…" (230). The poet recognizes that he must step outside its paradigm if he is going to find any resolution to his despair, which this false consciousness has induced in him.

This insight is catalyzed by the poet's melancholia. As I argue in the first chapter of this dissertation, melancholia is not merely one among a series of affects inside a larger group of expressions. It is the ethical turn through which the subject can understand his connection to himself and the organic would around him. This connection, and its incipient non-connection, the alterity that exists with every grasp, is the foundation of the romantic tradition. One makes an accounting of knowledge through which one cannot know. This is not the end of knowledge, but a productive aporia through which, by recognizing the face of the Other, one can strive towards a recuperation, a potentiality, and a redemption from it. The aphorism reveals the deceit of the urn's promise. To accept the urn's friendship does not guarantee a place in history, but desolation in its wake. The unity and perfection of the urn symbolizes the domination of history and the manner with which it silences, mutes, and absents the scenes of violence and domination from the narrative to which is belongs. The poet, through his "dizzy pain" recognizes that the degradation of the "Grecian grandeur" can be recuperated through a re-assessment of its meaning.

I would like here to return to where I opened the chapter, with Walter Benjamin's prose piece, "Torso" from *Einbahnstraße*. In "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles" and the "Epistle to Reynolds" and "Ode to a Grecian Urn" Keats prepares a recuperation, of the literary tradition upon which he looks backward. The Elgin marbles and the Epistle are for Keats as "…a beautiful statue which has had all its limbs knocked off in transit, and now yields nothing but the precious block out of which the image of one's future must be hewn" (46).

The Grecian marbles are an evocative provocation to the poet who is susceptible to the melancholia these histories provoke in him. With this melancholic face, Keats works upon the remaining block reassembling the remnants to produce a future, a legacy not mired in aesthetic ideology but potentiality.[71] Longing is inherent to Keats's poetic project. The fragmented lyrics are expressions of his attempts to communicate his melancholia in all its mysterious and ubiquitous appeal. Through the urn the poet learns to embrace transience but does not yet know how to find meaning in this. He must now learn how to recognize the meaning that does arise from transience. What this meaning is, is the question that pursues the poet in the remaining the Odes.

By removing his object of contemplation out of his inherited aesthetic context, Keats facilitates a perspective that can "displace and estrange the world," as Adorno writes in the closing entry of *Minima Moralia*:

> The only philosophy which can be responsibly practiced in face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption: all else is reconstruction, mere technique. Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light. To gain such perspectives without velleity or violence, entirely from the felt contact with its objects – this alone is the task of thought. *"Finale" (153)*

Adorno here writes that when one is in a position of despair, the only meaningful philosophy that can be produced must be done "from the standpoint of redemption." To contemplate the world from this standpoint does not simply mean to judge it by one's chosen ideology—or for that manner to idealize or spiritualize it through the forms of

beauty—but to forge a way of thinking that can displace and estrange the most familiar concepts in one's life, to see them in a new light which can then provide insight into the world in which one lives. This insight, is the light of redemption, as Adorno writes. A powerful distortion that can facilitate insight.[72]

Adorno's language testifies to a profound ecological sensibility he goes on to explore throughout his career.[73] To emphasize that the necessary perspective will emerge "from the felt contact with its objects" is to argue for a conscientious attendance to the object. It displays a resonance with Keats' own approach, who also in his literary "task" seeks not to sculpt or anthropomorphize nature but to attend to it in all of its various dimensions, nuances, variations. This act cannot counteract despair or melancholia in and of itself, but in the modest production of knowledge the poet-philosopher gains a certainty. Not that he is correct or that his concepts are complete but that a messianic light does exist. This is the role of the poet—not to create knowledge, but to re-affirm its possibility. To view something from the standpoint of redemption is not to complete utopia but to see the path open up by which it may occur.

Through "Ode on a Grecian Urn," the poet recognizes that the melancholia which burdens him in lyrics such as "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles" and "Epistle to Reynolds" among others, is not an effect of some passing environment, but fundamental to his inquiry. By writing poems which feature cycles of pleasure, writing, and melancholia Keats creates a dialectical movement through which to pursue the outstanding questions 'Elgin Marbles' evoke. As I will argue in the next chapter, the remaining Odes provide a space in which to face his own aesthetic, ethical and political concerns. The project of the odes is not to resolve these problems however, but to position the questioning mind at the center of his philosophy.

Chapter Four, "All fires have to burn alive to live" or Keats' Melancholy Science[74]

As established in the previous chapter, "Ode on a Grecian Urn" represents a formative moment in the poet's literary development. I argue through a reading of "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles" and "Epistle to John Hamilton Reynolds" that as the poet liberates himself

from the expectations of aesthetic ideology he obtains a level of clarity about his own poetic project that culminates in the poetic grandeur of the 1819 Odes. Despite this theoretical clarity, the poet's melancholy persists which appears to defy the lessons of "Urn." In this chapter I will argue that the poet's search to understand his own melancholia comes full circle through a recognition of the ethical stakes of melancholia. As I argue throughout my dissertation, the poet's interaction with nature—imagined and real, "natural" and artificial—is the space within which this occurs. The absence around which the poet's subjectivity spins is the distance between the subject and the object s/he desires intimacy with. I argue that we see this denouement in "Ode to a Nightingale," "Sonnet—To Sleep," "Isabella; or The Pot of Basil," and "Ode on Melancholy." These poems (all of which save "Sonnet—To Sleep" Keats published in his 1820 "Lamia" volume) narrate scenes of in which the speaker explores different ways of coping with his melancholia. Through these scenes, they also show a heightened attentiveness to ecology which provides an "antidote" of sorts to the poet's melancholia. This antidote is not a resolution of melancholia but in fact a refusal to be healed—it is an embrace of transience and finitude. This attendance occurs in two ways, the first exploring a hopeful unity which we see in "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Sonnet" and the second, an acceptance of ecology and thus transience in "Isabella" and "Ode on Melancholy." While the speaker's treatment of the bird in "Nightingale" and "Sonnet" seeks union with nature, this is not to be confused with a return to aesthetic ideology. The poet frames the bird within its significant literary tradition then signals through his own language that he is unable to complete this union. By admitting to this failure, the poet confirms the most important feature of ecology—the distance between the subject and alterity. The intensity of vision in "Nightingale" and the single-minded determination argue that true immersion is impossible, and any attempt to overcome results in fantasies of death.

"Isabella" forges an incredible break from the melancholic narrative. While previous works operate under the conceit that the speaker's consciousness can be maintained throughout immersion the speaker of "Isabella" argues that the only immersion one can hope for is the one upon which decomposition insists. This turn to a more materialist understanding of ecology is facilitated by insights from science upon which the poet draws, such as theories of the exchange of energies after death, and the circulation of blood. The vitality of the blood and theories of medical potential were active discussions in Romantic medicine, which had importance for the poet as Almeida discusses at length in chapters 7 and 8 of *John Keats and Romantic Medicine* (87-110). As I also analyze the positioning of the metaphor of embalming throughout these and other texts. I argue that the logic of toxic botany in "Ode on Melancholy" can only be fully comprehended through the turn to the organic that "Isabella" facilitates. The immortality that the poet has sought from "Epistle to John Hamilton Reynolds" is finally set aside. His consciousness cannot persist past death, but the life energy of his body will. While "Isabella" stages the movement of bodily energy into vegetal, "Melancholy" explores the influence of vegetal toxins on the body. He then moves from this to envision himself receiving funeral rites in which he himself becomes an object among the other "cloudy trophies" of Melancholy and Joy. We see through this final effacement that the poet ultimately understands himself as one of the many organisms that populate nature without becoming identified with any of them. "Ode on Melancholy" presents a stark contrast to the subject-centered melancholia of "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles," "Epistle" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn." He no longer describes his death as a violent sacrifice or apocalypse, but a matter of organic decomposition. Drawing on scientific insights of the time facilitates a radical expansion in the poet's conception of melancholia and nature.

I

While the texts under discussion here all explore themes of melancholy and ecology as I stated above, there is also a particular medical concept the poet frequently employs within a short period of time: embalming. A version of the word 'embalm' appears in Keats' body of work four times. We see it in Book I of *Endymion*, in "Isabella," "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Sonnet—To Sleep." The last three appear within a year of each other. Keats wrote "Isabella" while finishing the revisions of *Endymion* (February-March 1818) and "Nightingale" was written a month after "Sonnet" (April 1819) (Cox 143-4, 409-10). Keats' use of the word in poetic context appears unique or at least unusual. While the Oxford English Dictionary quotes several poets to demonstrate its literal usage (Milton among them), there are no examples of poetry using the term figuratively. Quotes contemporaneous to the poet are James Boswell, Samuel Johnson's biographer, in 1791 and William Hazlitt a friend of Keats in 1820, who use the term in epitaphs. There is no record of poetic usage until Lord Tennyson in 1850 ("embalm"). I point this out not to argue that Keats is the first poet in the English language to use the term figuratively but to instead highlight the poet's willingness to draw on medical procedures and scientific theory to express ideas in his poetry.

The figure of embalming is important to trace throughout these texts because it acts for the poet as the paradoxical apotheosis of his melancholia. To embalm a body is to preserve it from decay through the use of spices, aromatic oils and later medicinal preparations. The embalmed body is thus "impregnated" with botanically-derived ointments in order to temporarily suspend its decomposition, and preserve a semblance of its past vitality. The act of embalming also preserves what remains of a body's energy although it has clearly been drained of whatever truly made it alive. Keats' deployment of the figure of the

embalmed body also implies an entombment, as is expressed the most directly in "Sonnet—To Sleep" but occurs in all his deployments as I will show below.[75] The embalming separates the body from the nature to which it has supposedly been given, which suggests the paradoxical position the poet maintains throughout much of his poetry. We can read in this entombment the poet's own vitality cut off from the thing it most desires communion with—nature. The figure of embalming thus stands in for the poet's own frustrated desires and ambivalence. This is however a distance he cannot breach while maintaining his own imaginative consciousness. In his entombment he is able to imagine lovely transgressions, but until he is loosed from his own vitality, he cannot enjoy the immersion he seeks.[76]

Embalming at the turn of the 19th century was in constant renovation, which Keats witnessed first-hand as embalming fell under the aegis of surgeons and barbers. While Pre-1650, embalming was done primarily with ointments and odiferous herbs the discovery of the circulation of blood by William Harvey in the mid-17th century revolutionized embalming. Based on his circulatory experiments Harvey then introduced what remains today as the cornerstone of embalming: arterial injection embalming. Instead of removing organs and treating the body with herbal preparations a surgeon would inject an embalming fluid into the vascular system which then flushed the blood out of the body. This method quickly gained prominence and was considered best practice by the 18th century ("embalming"). By the early 1800s when Keats was training advances in chemistry and pharmacology produced more advanced preserving fluids which led to the practice of "anatomical embalming," a preservation of body parts and organs in order to further research and education by scientists and naturalists (Trompette and Lemonnier 12, 11). The science of embalming was increasingly technical and antiseptic. One could argue perhaps even a distant cry from the embalming Keats evokes in his poetry. However this presents the

opportunity for a productive disparity that I among others argue that the poet mines again and again for inspiration.

Keats' first use of 'embalm' occurs in Book I of *Endymion* and introduces themes that return in the later examples. The narrator describes Endymion in a trance and unable to partake of the conversations going on around him. He is dreaming of the goddess Cynthia, for whom he will embark on the journey that makes up the rest of the books. His sister Peona is witnessing this dreaming-trance, to which he communicates the contents of his dream afterwards.

> . . . . . .yet hourly had he striven
> To hide the cankering venom, that had riven
> His fainting recollections. Now indeed
> His senses had swoon'd off: he did not heed
> The sudden silence, or the whispers low,
> Or the old eyes dissolving at his woe,
> Or anxious calls, or close of trembling palms,
> Or maiden's sigh, that grief itself embalms:
> But in the self-same fixed trance he kept,
> Like one who on the earth had never stept.
> Aye, even as dead-still as a marble man,
> Frozen in that old tale Arabian. (395-406)

Here the poet invokes the imagery of embalming while describing the trance the shepherd-prince Endymion falls into. We see the prince no longer able to resist fainting, which he describes as being poisoned by a "cankering venom" (396). He is unable to recognize the worried concerns of those around him, not the elderly or young women. He refers to the

latter through the image of a "…maiden's sigh, that grief itself embalms" (402). This can be read in two complimentary ways: the grief embalms the maiden and her sigh is that which embalms, that is to say preserves, grief thus rendering it immortal. As the poem unfolds Endymion indeed fears that his grief is unending, while the maiden is imprisoned by her grief. While the figure of embalming is liberating for the poet in "Sonnet" and "Ode" the maiden only suffers here for her grief, perhaps because Endymion is ignorant of it. He is lost in a trance that itself mirrors the maiden's embalming. While her embalming-grief is immediate and quickly resolved upon his waking, his embalming trance only gives way to prolonged grief coupled with a desire which will only be resolved at the close of the poem. Keats communicates the extremity of Endymion's trance by comparing it to a bloodless death, an image which can imply embalming.[77] The prince is "as dead-still as a marble man/Frozen" (405-6). His pallor gives him the appearance of the perfected youth of a sculpture even as he is quickly receding from life, entranced by another world. Like the poisons, or *pharmakon* I will explore below, the embalming trance is a dangerous one the poet cannot always return from.

In the same way that we see the shepherd-prince, we see the poet-speaker describing his engagements with imagination as dreams or trances. As we will see in "Sonnet" and "Nightingale" this performance takes on a ritualized function which opens with references to a *pharmakon*. I am here following Almeida's usage of the term *pharmakon* because it highlights both the medical conventions of romantic science and Keats' own poetic sensibilities. As Almeida delineates, a substance that is a *pharmakon* is not solely benevolent or malevolent—it has the capacity to be both. It can be a poison or an antidote depending on its dosage and application (Almeida 10).[78] She reads in Keats' work "the philosophic consequence of its technical knowledge of specific poisons" which finds its strongest

expression in "Ode on Melancholy" which I will explore in the final section of this chapter (11).

II

While I identify "Urn" and "Nightingale" as accomplishing very different tasks within the Keats' oeuvre they do bear significant similarities that help to clarify the role of melancholia in the latter poem. Comparing the two poems, Li Ou writes

> Like "Nightingale", "Urn" is also built on the irreconcilable conflict between immortality and transience, and presents the conflict by a dramatic confrontation between a human speaker and a symbol of permanence. In both odes, the speaker attempts to engage his self with the existence of his ideal Other, and in both, the very fulfillment of the engagement sets the disassociation in motion… (158)

As I argue in the previous chapter, this "disassociation" as Ou phrases it, is what leads to the poet's final rejection of aesthetic ideology in the "Urn." "Nightingale" develops in a somewhat different direction. The nightingale is certainly a "symbol of permanence" much like the urn, but such a description belies the other ways the figure operates in the text. Just as the poet cannot overcome his distance from the antiquity of the urn, he also cannot account for the 'wildness' of the bird.[79] However, by performing his failure to engage "with the existence of his ideal Other" within the lyric, it reveals the more startling insight that this failure and inability to breach the distance is in fact necessary for the poet to accept his ecological position within nature (158). "Nightingale" is not devoid of ecological meaning because of this failure, but finds its meaning in the failure. When the poet is aware that he cannot banish the distance of his relationship to the otherness, he then must learn to embrace its meaning for his life (202 *Ecology without Nature*).[80]

"Ode to a Nightingale" opens with a familiar scene—perhaps almost a kind of self-embalming like the maiden's sigh: the speaker expresses feelings of heartache and a "drowsy numbness" which he compares to being sedated by hemlock or an opiate. Both operate as pharmakon here, able to induce a trance or death depending on the dose (Keats 1; Cox 457). The poet seeks a state which will liberate him from the earth while also providing insight into his temporal despairs. By referring to the river Lethe, which in Greek mythology runs through the underworld and erases the memories of those about to be reborn, we see that the speaker seeks to experience a trance and not death (Cox 457). He positions himself as deeply unhappy with his life, and thus by the fourth line of the first stanza the poet has established a sense of enchantment similar to the three romances prior to the Ode in the *Lamia* volume (Fraistat 597-8).[81] The subject of his direct address beginning in line five, the bird initially seems out of place. The speaker turns away from his own emotions to assure the bird that he is not envious of the bird's own happiness. He declares that his pain is not derived from "envy of thy happy lot" (5). He addresses her as the "light-winged Dryad of the trees," a pagan-folk figure who populates the faery world he positions as parallel to his own (7).[82] He envisions her in "some melodious plot/Of beechen green, and shadows numberless," singing throughout the summer (10-11). We do not know the time or place of this alternative space, only the season and her role within it. While the faery references would imply an earlier age, he is not threatened by antiquity as he is in the "Urn." Her song is a calming, restorative force by which he is able to contemplate his life. She is a symbol not only of permanence but of liberatory joy

In stanza two the poet transitions from the mythos-laden pharmakon of hemlock and opium to expatiate on the powers of a more familiar drug—wine. Like opium, Keats had both a literary and a medical relationship with this possible antidote. As he describes the

qualities it embodies we see that he envisions the wine as not only a pleasant "draught of vintage" but an alchemical potion, the ingredients of which are: the goddess Flora, the troubadour romances of Provence and the sacred fountain of Hippocrene (Cox 458). While the imagery of opiates and hemlock hints at a possible consumption ("*as though* of hemlock I had drunk"), this stanza brings it to the fore, through the speaker scrutinizing the appearance and ingredients of the wine. However he does not want only to consume his drug and experience a short-lived enchantment. He wishes to be transformed, to "drink, and leave the world unseen/And with thee fade away into the forest dim" (20-21). By imbibing a product of the earth he hopes to return to it. This transformation doubles as a return to the organic state that death provides, throwing into question what the poet truly wishes the *pharmakon* to act as. He does not describe this is as a death, but a flight, an engagement with the nightingale which will result in full immersion in the faery world of his imagination.

In stanza three the poet enumerates the reasons he desires this immersion. "The weariness, the fever, the fret" which the bird "has never known" (23, 22). By positioning the bird outside human existence, he structures her world as free from the anxieties that plague him. "Nightingale

differs from "Urn" in that it avoids any sexual or violent tensions. Here the poet's thoughts are entirely morbid, dominated by aging, illness, failure and disappointment. The speaker seems to imply that no wisdom is accrued with aging, or knowledge gained by experience. Beauty and love cannot be even momentarily enjoyed, as we see in "Urn," but are always already decaying and dying.

Overcome by the urgency of his own impending finitude, the poet again addresses the bird directly in the opening of stanza four. Realizing that wine is just as inadequate for his imaginative journey as opium and hemlock, he now spurns it, with its attendant

mythologies calling "Away! Away! for I will fly to thee,/Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards" (31-2). He insists instead that he will reach the bird "on the viewless wings of Poesy" (33). By refusing even wine, the poet reaffirms his commitment to and celebration of the imaginative capacity which he relies on as a poet. He announces that he will accomplish this in spite of the fact his "dull brain perplexes and retards" (34). By using the word 'brain,' a material, scientific term, the speaker does not merely remind the reader of the poet's medical training, but invokes the paradox which has underwritten the whole of his plight. The speaker claims to seek unity with the nightingale. While their shared organic material ties them both to nature it does not enable the ultimate unity the poet seems to seek. Yet finally it is his mind that separates him from the bird, not his body, as he seems to argue. This is confirmed below with what does eventually separate the poet from the bird—language. By acknowledging his own organic state, the speaker communicates the stark contrast between the two forms he is trying to bridge the organic and imaginary. Because the speaker/subject cannot ever unite with the bird, he must instead come to terms with the distance between them. Addressing this kind of dynamic in John Clare's "Poem: I AM," Timothy Morton writes, "Rather than seeking some false oneness, acknowledging the gap is a paradoxical way of having some greater fidelity to things" (*EWN* 142). The distance, or gap, as Morton describes it, between self and other or, in Keats' case, the organic and the imaginary, is not something one can terminate, nor should one wish to.[83] This "greater fidelity" to what both the speaker and his "addressee" simultaneously are and are not, is essential to the future preservation of the relation not just to subjectivity but to the environment that is also at stake in Keats' poem or rather to the relation between them. It accepts the distance between the two (subject and environment) as necessary, productive and ultimately an external example of the distance the subject experiences from his own organic state. Accepting this

distance does not reassert a false devaluation of the environment but instead allows a recognition of our own shared fragility and vulnerabilities. This recognition of our inherent mutual fragility forges an ethical impulse that can more judiciously guide the subject-speaker's interactions. Morton refers to this construction as "dark ecology" or a "melancholic ethics" because, as he argues, the subject's melancholia becomes the motivating force for an ethical rapprochement with nature (*EWN* 168-9).

Turning back to "Ode to a Nightingale" we recognize that in stanza four the speaker is at the height of his desire for a "false oneness" with the nightingale (*EWN* 142). It is the apex of his dream as he proclaims, "The Queen-Moon is on her throne,/Clustered around by all her starry Fays" (36-7). The poet is emotive and tender, enchanted by the heights he has reached with the bird. Despite this precious happiness, hesitation appears in line 38—"But here there is no light/ Save what from heaven is with breezes blown" (38-9). The poet's emphasis on blindness continues into stanza five as he opens with "I cannot see what flowers are at my feet" (41).[84] Despite imagining the scents and sensations of the nightingale's environment, he cannot overcome his blindness which culminates in the return of the figure of "embalmed darkness," which, like the maiden's sigh in *Endymion* operates as an ambivalent image. While the poet describes the space as open and a part of nature, it conceals and entombs him in its perfected darkness even as he imprisons the bird within his lyric. The poet-speaker perhaps cannot know whether his vision is an entombment or a liberation from death. With the embalmed darkness the poet has recreated the Urn, only this time with himself and the bird as its' occupants. He has indeed avoided "the weariness, the fever, the fret" of the living by draining away his own blood on the way to Lethe (23).

The ambivalence of this scene mirrors the poet's own refusal to embrace certainties as he declares in his December 1818 letter to his brothers George and Tom exploring what he calls "negative capability" (107-9):

> …I had not a dispute but a disquisition with Dilke, on various subjects; 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—Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge. This pursued through Volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration. (108-9)

As discussed in the previous chapter, Keats argues here that great art is created by an artist who is "capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason" (109). This does not imply a stance of amorality, but instead an ability to exist in a world with no clear answers—in poetry, politics, or life. Keats contrasts this position with Coleridge, who in Keats' estimation is a writer who would rather generate an unsatisfactory resolution than admit to being in the presence of a mystery. The speaker cannot regret seeking his nightingale, for that search for beauty "overcomes" and "obliterates all consideration" (109). The "embalmed darkness" may be an entombment, or it may be a liberation. Embalming is thus a powerful figure for negative capability here which he will carry into "Sonnet—To Sleep."

The poet's blindness persists in stanza five as he imagines his surroundings. He does not know what incense "hangs upon the boughs" and can only "guess each sweet/Wherewith the seasonable month endows" (42, 43-4). The "seasonable month" is May, which he names later in the stanza, but also alludes to by inserting white hawthorn, a flower which blooms in May and is necessary for various May Day celebrations, as Wentersdorf among others has pointed out (78-9).[85] He goes on to argue that hawthorn, eglantine, violets and roses are all pastoral allusions to romance and eros which insist upon an essentially romantic reading of the text (79-80).[86] While this is certainly a plausible reading of the speaker's desire for union with the bird, Almeida troubles this analysis by suggesting an alternative matrix of meanings for the flowers. She argues that they are in fact determined by Keats' reading of Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Almeida discovered that in Keats' copy of the text he underlined the cures for "head-melancholy" which among other things are "rose-water" and "violet flowers" (159). The presence of these flowers would then frame the stanza as an antidote for the poet. While an underlined page may be just as convincing as rich pastoral allusions, we know Keats paid close attention to Burton's text in this period, basing *Lamia* on a description within it. However, both scholars press upon important themes here. The speaker's celebration of the spring is an attempt to embrace what he envisions as the environment of the nightingale although the "fast-fading violets" remind the reader that all joy is evanescent, and ultimately met with sorrow (47).[87] The violets are not only an antidote to melancholia here, but by reinserting transience into the lyric, they create a fissure in the embalmed darkness which surrounds the poet.

Stanza six opens with the speaker stepping back from his revelry to contemplate the forces that have led him to this space (43). By writing that "for many a time/I have been half in love with easeful Death" the speaker admits to pursuing an economy of self-destruction

which he is now critical of (51-2). But what exactly does it mean to be "*half* in love with easeful Death?" (52) Even the poet's renunciation is ambivalent. Throughout Keats' oeuvre there are multiple poems which perform a desire for death, and others which openly fear it. Of such lyrics which express a love for death the April 1819 "Sonnet—To Sleep proceeds on two fronts.[88] It demonstrates how "an easeful death" functions *within* the poet's paradigm even when it is tacitly the subject of criticism as in the "Ode to a Nightingale" while also forwarding our understanding of the poet's figuration of embalming. He writes

> O SOFT embalmer of the still midnight!
>
> Shutting with careful fingers and benign
>
> Our gloom-pleas'd eyes, embower'd from the light,
>
> Enshaded in forgetfulness divine;
>
> O soothest Sleep! if so it please thee, close,
>
> In midst of this thine hymn, my willing eyes,
>
> Or wait the amen, ere thy poppy throws
>
> Around my bed its lulling charities;
>
> Then save me, or the passed day will shine
>
> Upon my pillow, breeding many woes;
>
> Save me from curious conscience, that still lords
>
> Its strength for darkness, burrowing like a mole;
>
> Turn the key deftly in the oiled wards,
>
> And seal the hushed casket of my soul. (346)

Like "Ode to a Nightingale" and *Endymion*, "To Sleep" uses the frame of a dream-trance as a device to facilitate imaginative insights. The sonnet also functions as an ode to a feminine-personified Sleep. The figure of sleep has a dual purpose: she acts as a mother who eases a

child into sleep and as an angel of death who ushers the speaker out of life. While this sonnet is a contemporaneous example of the poet being "half in love with easeful Death" it also differs considerably "Nightingale." "To Sleep" offers none of the self-critique of the Odes, or the movement towards an eco-ethical equanimity. The sonnet instead operates as a grief-stricken specter which seeks to veil the insights of the Odes. In this way the sonnet is its own creeping darkness which seeks to entomb the poet's corpus.

The speaker addresses Sleep in the first line as a "soft embalmer of the still midnight" (1). He positions his feminine ideal in an active but gentle role, the embalmer of midnight, while in "Nightingale" it contains limited agency as a modifier to describe the speaker's environment, "in embalmed darkness" (43). This "soft embalmer" fastidiously closes the speaker's "gloom-pleas'd eyes" (3). She both embowers and enshades the speaker, vegetal references which recall embalm in both sound and meaning (3-4). She, like the bower in "Nightingale," protects him from the light, "Enshaded in forgetfulness divine" (4). He then addresses her as "O soothest sleep" further conflating sleep with an embalming death (5). While her actions mimic those of a nighttime ritual, she prepares the infantilized speaker for death by enrobing him in darkness. Keen to please this feminine aspect, the poet-child reveals he is singing this poem to her, and entreats her to put him to sleep "in the midst of this thine hymn" if she desires to (6). He entreats her to throw poppies around his head, here an antidote against remembering the troubles of the day, which will harass him by "breeding many woes" and preventing his sleep (10). He then writes

> Save me from curious conscience, that still lords
>
> Its strength for darkness, burrowing like a mole; (11-12)

It is not enough that the poet is protected from the outside, he needs to be embalmed from within and without—to be removed from life, and from his own imagination, which only

results in a "curious conscience" (11). If his "curious conscience" cannot be prevented it will burrow through the darkness "like a mole" to find him, thus presenting another fissure (11-12). While the speaker opens the text describing Sleep as a "soft embalmer" he closes the scene with his final request: " Turn the key deftly in the oiled wards,

And seal the hushed casket of my soul. (13-4).

Having embalmed the poet, she must now turn her key "deftly in the oiled wards" to lock him in his coffin against his "breeding…woes" and "curious conscience" (13, 10-11). The sealing of the speaker's casket marks the text's final reference to embalming which extends itself beyond the other texts to expressly engage with the figure of the casket as well. The desire for a casket, however, is an expression of the ambivalence we see in *Endymion* and "Nightingale." The speaker asks Sleep to "seal the hushed casket of my soul" as a further measure against the chances of life reaching into him. But as his "curious conscience" proves, the speaker needs this added entombment to preserve, or rather paralyze, himself. Sleep has moved beyond the embalmment of the body to seal his psyche as well.

This text exemplifies the poet's desire for an escape from the unresolved anxieties of life, as we have seen in "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles" and "Epistle to John Hamilton Reynolds." Instead of invoking figures of natural violence or apocalypse—external violence—the speaker turns inward choosing to drain the life from himself. As with "Nightingale," he is seeking union with alterity, his idealized Other which only death can guarantee. The "Sonnet" recalls "Elgin Marbles" and "Epistle" for its reliance on aesthetic ideology to accomplish its needs. The "Sonnet" performs a double gesture: as the poet seeks to be passively embalmed within the poem, the text as a whole seeks to embalm the lyrics which invoke its figure. That is to say, there is a colonizing gesture within the figure of

embalming, which once the speaker employs takes on a 'life' of its own, a specter against which the other poems are cast.

The speaker of "Ode to a Nightingale" engages with this specter as he reflects on his motivations in the first half of stanza six for being "half in love with an easeful Death" (52). This is not a past desire, for "now more than ever seems it rich to die" (55). The ambivalent love of death bears a continued presence throughout the poet's oeuvre, to which my reading of "Sonnet" attests. Here in stanza six, the speaker's fantasy of immersion reaches its apex just as he also begins his descent and recoil. He envisions his death as coinciding with the height of the bird's song: "To cease upon the midnight with no pain/ While though art pouring forth thy soul abroad/In such an ecstasy!" (56-8). I read these lines as structuring an exchange of vitality, or "vivifying potency" as Almeida terms it, between the speaker and nature which I will explore at length as it reappears in "Isabella" and "Melancholy" (165). The poet drains himself of his vitality in order for the bird to reach the ecstatic peaks of her song-cum-requiem, even while he is unable to witness or enjoy it (58). This draining effectively embalms him, thus rendering his corpse as little more than a clod of dirt, a "sod" which could be of the poet's body or just as likely the body of the earth (60). By directly comparing the degradation of the poet's sensibilities, represented by his ears, to the earth the poet positions the decomposition of the body as central to his burgeoning understanding of his ecological relationship with nature (59). Even as he recoils from his delusive fantasy he is preparing for his only guarantee of intimacy—his body's transmutation into the vegetal world.

Having imagined his death in stanza three and performed it in stanza six, the speaker addresses the bird in this, his penultimate stanza. He exclaims, "Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!" (61). This interpolation mirrors the first three stanzas of the text,

which, with the poet now in descent, circles the poet's fantasy to preserve it.[89] When he writes the Nightingale is "[N]ot born for death" the speaker idealizes the bird, ripping her out of her own ecological frame so he can express his own fears about death (61). He feels burdened, tired and mournful declaring to the bird, "No hungry generations tread thee down" (62). A latent ambivalence appears, as the poet is grateful that his beautiful object has not endured the cruelties of humanity, but this also prevents him from identifying—or empathizing with her. The poet's gaze mimics the nightingale's wandering song as his conceptualization of her purpose alters. He luxuriates in her song, imagining that it has been heard for centuries, throughout different historical periods and a variety of economic strata. The bird's song is egalitarian, falling upon the ears of both "emperor and clown" (61). The speaker then pauses on the image of Ruth the Moabite from the Hebrew Scriptures.[90] He writes

> Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
>
> Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
>
> She stood in tears amid the alien corn; (65-7)

The speaker feels an intimacy with her, a tearful widow in a foreign land (Wentersdorf 81). He then invokes a scene of "faery lands" near a body of water in which the bird charms "magic casements, opening on the foam/Of perilious seas, in faery lands forlorn." (66-70). The speaker demonstrates that the song of the nightingale is not solely for the poet, but comforts kings and fools, Hebrews and pagans. This will continue without the poet however, as his descent to earth is assured through his choice of words: "faery lands forlorn" (70):

> Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
>
> To toll me back from thee to my sole self!

Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is famed to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music:—do I wake or sleep? (71-80)

The speaker's tenuous grasp on his vision finally dissolves here with the call, "Forlorn!" (71). It descends from the description of "faery land" to return to the poet his own melancholia (70-1). The final stanza communicates a violent absence as he exclaims, "the very word is like a bell/To toll me back from thee to my sole self!" (71-2). While Keats is undoubtedly using 'toll' to mean "to attract, entice," by using the simile "like a bell," he is reminding his readers that he is not in fact a "sod," his vitality is not in flux—he is very much alive, and hears himself calling. I read the tolling of the subject as a recoil which is necessarily violent. The language which the poet has been using has now turned against him, creating a whiplash. It is also an empty, or absent gesture because the speaker never achieves the immersion in nature he desires, thus forging a kernel of absence around which the violence revolves. He cannot return to his "sole self" for he never left it. This violent absence reaffirms importance of the *techne* the speaker engages in—writing. The medium that facilitates the poet's engagement in creative activities always already separates the subject from nature.

The speaker emits a quiet confidence as he chides Fancy, claiming that she is not as effective at enchantment as she is "fam'd" (74). The poet is grateful to have survived the

dream as he bids the nightingale farewell. As her "plaintive anthem fades" he envisions her now "buried deep/In the next valley-glades" (75). As the bird fades, he is forced to return to society. He cannot do so without looking back on the scene closes the poem with a set of rhetorical questions: "Was it a vision, or a waking dream?/Fled is that music:--Do I wake or sleep?" (80). Although the speaker has formally closed the frame of the dream and separated himself from the subject of his enchantment, he seems to ask a very specific question: am I alive, or have I been embalmed?

While "Ode to a Nightingale" garners an abundance of scholarly attention it is not generally read as a 'green' poem, despite the centrality of the nightingale to it.[91] This is perhaps due to its similarities with "Urn" making it deceptively simple to map readings of the latter on to the former.[92] Each poems' choices of idealized objects do bear similarities in the questions the speaker asks of it, such as questions of finitude, pleasure, history and temporality. However, the poet's treatment of his addressees diverge when the poet attempts to actively unite with them. As I argue here and elsewhere, the wildness of the bird sets it apart, realigning the speaker's interests along ethical and ecological lines instead of aesthetic ones. The bird is a figure of infinite alterity, an Other that cannot be known or accounted for, an empty cipher upon which the poet interpolates his desires. Being unable to engage with this Other leads the poem to a startling insight: his failure to breach the distance is in fact necessary for the poet to accept his ecological position as a finite, transient being within nature. By turning away from the bird, he refuses to perpetuate a fantasy of immersion. He chooses the "fever" and "fret" of mortality (23). The poem is ultimately a deeply ethical and ecological statement that confirms the speaker will not choose death in a search for meaning, but will examine the consequences of such in his poetry.

II

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, the poet presents vastly different ecological concerns in "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode on Melancholy." Both appear to conform to the rhetoric of engagement we see in these and other lyrics such as "Sonnet—To Sleep." This rhetoric entails the lyric being described as a dream or vision, be accompanied by *pharmaka*, and fantasize about communion with an idealized Other who is outside the speaker's society. While "Melancholy" adheres to these features, it does not seek communion with an idealized other, but instead turns inward to address the speaker's own struggles with melancholia. The ode is largely instructive, criticizing and recommending botanical antidotes that help the speaker manage his unwieldy set of emotions. The speaker is matter of fact: he embraces death as the ultimate expression of life, which cannot be outmaneuvered or overcome. "Melancholy" thus argues for the fullest possible consumption of all of life, joy and sorrow. How has the poet come to this point? What has changed for the poet so that he is able to produce a text that celebrates death as the fullest expression of life?

The remaining balance of this chapter will explore this transition, which I argue is due to the poet re-imagining his relationship with nature by drawing on Romantic era understandings of *pharmaka* and human vitality. While Almeida, Denise Gigante and others have done important work charting the influences and interactions of romantic literature and science, this chapter is less concerned with any particular scientist and more with how the poet synthesizes scientific insights into his literary project. I draw on the examples of *pharmaka* and vitality in order to provide a framework in which to understand the poet's expanded conception of nature in "Isabella" and "Ode on Melancholy." Following Almeida's proposition that Keats was indeed influenced by John Hunter's hypothesis that

the energy of life was found in the "direct vitality of the blood" we see him paying increased attention to the exchange of energies between bodies, human and vegetal (111). Hunter's work on monsters also led to "the notion of a self-propagating vital power, which could assert itself beyond the physical border of the organism" as Gigante explains (435). She argues that this theory of a transgressive life force "found creative expression…a radically new aesthetic" in the work of Romantic writers (434).[93] Pulling these insights together, I am arguing that the poet no longer conceptualizes nature as an immersive event between a dominant, conscious-laden subject and passive object, but ecologically—a relationship of influences and reciprocity between organic beings. We can read this reciprocity in "Isabella" between Isabel and Lorenzo, and in relation to organic matter, namely, the pot of basil. The agency that the basil exhibits resonates with the litany of botanicals that populate "Ode on Melancholy." Envisioning *pharmaka* as able to engage in the same reciprocity of vitality as we see in "Isabella" allows for a broad re-reading of "Ode on Melancholy." I will argue below that through the staging of the reciprocity of vitality between plants and humans in his poetry the poet can finally accept his own imminent finitude by setting aside his expectations of consciousness and alternately conceiving of his being as a "vivifying potency" as Almeida terms it.[94]

"Isabella; or The Pot of Basil" was published alongside "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and the other 1819 odes in the *Lamia* volume.[95] It is a loose adaptation from Boccaccio's *Decameron*, the fifth story of the fourth day of (Cox 429-430).[96] The poem narrates the love affair of two young people, Isabel and Lorenzo. After Isabel's calculating brothers realize that they are in love, they kill Lorenzo because they plan to marry her to someone wealthy of their choosing. They hide the crime from Isabel by burying him in the forest and claiming Lorenzo is travelling. She is driven to distraction by her lover's

absence, unsure what has become of him. Grief-stricken and melancholic, she is guided by a dream to the forest where she discovers his body. She exhumes it, detaches his head, plants it in a pot of basil and spends the rest of her days tending to it. As the plant feeds upon Lorenzo's decomposing head and Isabel's grief, it becomes the most lustrous plant in the region. The brothers, curious about the plant's prodigious growth, scheme to steal it when Isabel has stepped away. They do so, and lifting the plant from the pot see "vile with green and livid spot…Lorenzo's face" (475-6). Terrified of being caught, they flee Florence. Isabel, now deprived of her pot of basil, becomes even more delusional: "And so she pined, and so she died forlorn,/Imploring for her Basil to the last" (497-8).

As we see between the speaker and the bird in "Ode to a Nightingale," the speaker's energy is drained away as the agent of nature's strength grows. Almeida points out, "The exchange of blood warmth or vitality between lovers is a familiar pattern in Keats' poetry: energy is given and taken (stolen) between lovers according to their relative life intensities" (97). As I have argued above, the draining of life from a body can be read as an embalmment, which in the texts discussed in this chapter is also accompanied by references to embalming. The figure of embalming persists in a liminal space, representing both preservation and entombment. This figure reappears in Stanza XIII of "Isabella" which foreshadows the lover's deaths. While previous instances are broadly figurative, "Isabella" uses it literally—i.e., to refer to the process of physical embalming, and in the negative. The poet writes

> But, for the general award of love,
>
> The little sweet doth kill much bitterness;
>
> Though Dido silent is in under-grove,
>
> And Isabella's was a great distress,

> Though young Lorenzo in warm Indian clove
>
> Was not embalm'd, this truth is not the less—
>
> Even bees, the little almsmen of spring-bowers,
>
> Know there is richest juice in poison-flowers. (97-104)

In these lines we see the speaker foreshadowing Lorenzo's bizarre end. The speaker evokes Dido's suicide along with Isabel's own distress to communicate a sense of impending loss. While the narrator claims Lorenzo will not be embalmed, he does obtain a very different kind of preservation through the pot of basil. However, this preservation is also in question, because the basil is feeding upon the boy's vitality, while also syphoning off Isabel's energy. Perhaps the basil is attracted to the boy's potency and, like the bees, cannot resist the "richest juice in poison-flowers" (104). Bees appear propelled towards destruction just as the lovers are. Almeida notes the belief of Romantic era naturalists that honey harvested from poisonous flowers retained its toxicity and bees even preferred it (178). This rather esoteric observation highlights the fundamental theme of Keats' career—happiness and beauty are evanescent, due to always turn to sadness. We see this exchange of opposing energies in the poet's February-May 1819 letter to his brother George Keats in which he writes,

> Circumstances are like Clouds continually gathering and bursting—While we are laughing the seed of some trouble is put into the wide arable land of events—while we are laughing it sprouts it grows and suddenly bears a poison fruit which we must pluck. (321-2)

As we will see in "Melancholy" the poet is compelled towards poisons as towards beauty, knowing each is the undeniable consequence of the other. The seeds of Lorenzo's fall are planted by his love for Isabel and her death proceeds from being unable to put limitations

upon it. Lorenzo's vitality transgresses Isabel's dreams, refusing to let go of her. With Lorenzo already dead Isabel endures a painful, drawn out exchange of vitality.

In Stanza XLVI as Isabel nears her lover's clandestine grave, we see an exchange of energies, not between humans, but the earth and the woman:

> She gaz'd into the fresh-thrown mould, as though
> One glance did fully all its secrets tell;
> Clearly she saw, as other eyes would know
> Pale limbs at bottom of a crystal well;
> Upon the murderous spot she seem'd to grow,
> Like to a native lily of the dell:
> Then with her knife, all sudden, she began
> To dig more fervently than misers can. (361-368)

Gaining energy from the "murderous spot" where her lover died, she proceeds to exhume his body "more fervently than misers can" (368). Almeida argues that this exchange of powers represents "The metaphor of a substance giving life through death, or death through its vivifying potency" (165). Isabel is infused with this potency in order to discover her lover. Comparing her growth to the "native lily of the dell" the poet makes no distinction between the interchange of human and vegetal energies; all are essentially organic. These comparisons multiply as the romance reaches its climax, the organic energies overwhelming its human participant. While the previous exchange of energies infused Isabel and allowed her to face the body of her lover, the exchange in stanza LVI feeds upon her grief. As Isabel mourns for the now confirmed dead Lorenzo the poet employs another organic metaphor to represent an exchange of powers which saps Isabel of her vitality. While her grief is expressed freely

for her lover, the reader cannot help but understand the slackening of her vitality as somehow coerced as her death is presumed:

For simple Isabel is soon to be
Among the dead: She withers, like a palm
Cut by an Indian for its juicy balm (446-8)

The violent image of a palm tree being felled for its heart, expresses the precipitation of Isabel's own grief-ridden energy. Almeida points out, "Lorenzo's deathliness feeds upon life and reverses life's signs: Isabella's beauty grows upon him even as she fades" (86). Instead of Isabel's spirit being buttressed by the pot of basil, she will die extending her energy to him. Almeida argues that Keats understood "life energy" to be "finite…even the vitality of such a pair of lovers; energy consumes energy to exhaustion" (97). We see this exhaustion settle upon Isabel as she effectively embalms herself in preparing her lover's head for its own entombment in the pot. Her grief drains her body of vitality, transferring it to the plant through her tears (423-4). By feeding on both Isabel and Lorenzo's vitality the plant grows prodigiously. In stanza LIV the poet writes

And so she ever fed it with thin tears,
Whence thick, and green, and beautiful it grew,
So that it smelt more balmy than its peers
Of Basil-tufts in Florence; for it drew
Nurture besides, and life, from human fears,
From the fast mouldering head there shut from view:
So that the jewel, safely casketed,
Came forth, and in perfumed leafits spread. (425-432)

He describes the plant flourishing due to Isabel's "thin tears," "human fears" and the "mouldering head" of Lorenzo (425, 429, 430). Though dead, Lorenzo's head still bears a "vivifying potency" which the plant thrives upon. The *balminess* speaks to an embalmment that is less entombing than vivifying even as the figure of the casket suggests (as in "To Sleep") that hints of embalming's ambivalence remain inscribed in the poem's account of finite energies.

While drawing on much the same nexus of imagery, "Isabella" demonstrates a radically different construction of vitality that appears alien to Keats' other work, and in fact suggests a different potential line of thinking in Keats' thought than the existential unease we see in "Nightingale." While other lyrics represent aging, disease and death as final, "Isabella" refuses to acknowledge this. Yes, human life terminates, but its "vivifying potency" does not. The organic energy of the human body persists beyond consciousness. While imagining the genius of the mind giving way to a lush basil plant may not provoke universal ease, this is the insight the poet delivers repeatedly throughout "Isabella." By conceiving of all of nature, himself included, as vessels of vitality which operate through degrees of reciprocity, he is able to side step the delusive fantasies of immersion, which demands a subject-object relation. Reciprocity is radically egalitarian in its refusal to privilege one kind of organic body over another. The agency of vegetal vitality and its reciprocity, in turn, suggests the possibility of a dynamic re-reading of "Ode on Melancholy" as the poet engages with a variety of organic *pharmaka* in order to confront his own long-standing disease—melancholia.

III

"Ode on Melancholy"

1

No, no, go not to Lethe, neither twist
Wolf's-bane, tight-rooted, for its poisonous wine;
Nor suffer thy pale forehead to be kiss'd
By nightshade, ruby grape of Proserpine;
Make not your rosary of yew-berries,
Nor let the beetle, nor the death-moth be
Your mournful Psyche, nor the downy owl
A partner in your sorrow's mysteries;
For shade to shade will come too drowsily,
And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul.

2

But when the melancholy fit shall fall
Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud,
That fosters the droop-headed flowers all,
And hides the green hill in an April shroud;
Then glut thy sorrow on a morning rose,
Or on the rainbow of the salt sand-wave,
Or on the wealth of globed peonies;
Or if thy mistress some rich anger shows,
Emprison her soft hand, and let her rave,
And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes.

3

She dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die;

And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh,
Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips:
Ay, in the very temple of Delight
Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine,
Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue
Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine;
His soul shalt taste the sadness of her might,
And be among her cloudy trophies hung.

While this "Ode" certainly bears similarities to its companions in *Lamia* it is also bears a radical difference. The speaker of this text does not seek immortality or literary fame. He does not address any idealized objects with which he seeks resolution or union. The poet-speaker addresses himself on how to endure the anxieties of life while enveloping himself in the corrosive and healing properties of *pharmaka*. As the basil drew in the vitality of Isabel, he hopes to draw upon the healing energy of these plants before his own vitality is drawn upon in the final stanza. The poet demarcates drugs that are corrosive, which will prey upon the body (like the basil), and those that can lead to genuine insight and succor.

In this chapter and the previous one I have examined several lyrics that traverse the melancholic space. "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles," and "Epistle to John Hamilton Reynolds" culminate in a disavowal of aesthetic ideology as seen in "Ode on a Grecian Urn" which liberates the poet from the social and literary expectations that were preventing a fully productive engagement with his imagination. The melancholy I have explored in this chapter is an underlying anxiety about death. Having removed aesthetic ideology from his literary framework he is able to critique his desire for an "easeful death" even as he still longs for it,

as we see in "Nightingale" and "To Sleep." However, the poet is still unable to resolve his emotions as he struggles to understand the distance between himself and his idealized alterity. While one could read "Nightingale" and "Melancholy" as episodes in the poet's depressive spiral, both are persistently ethical in their stances. As I demonstrated above, the distance the poet finally insists upon at the close of "Nightingale" is in fact a recognition of the fallacy of immersion in nature. Immersion, that is, understood through an aesthetic frame. The poet of "Ode on Melancholy" no longer attempts to eradicate his melancholia, but to understand the insights it facilitates about his own life and death.

"Melancholy" is an exploration of the poet's emotional life, a questioning: can he endure the emotional volatility that is incumbent upon a figure who opens himself to the influence of negative capability? His audience can only be his own soul here, for that is the only space that remains open for analysis. The source of his melancholy is not antiquity or nature—they only exacerbate it—but his fear of death. However, when removed from its aesthetic frame, nature becomes ecology, and can offer some consolation to the poet. The opening stanza of "Melancholy" appears on the face as similar to "Nightingale" with the latter's references to hemlock and opium, but the former quickly moves past the mythos-influenced tropes. As in "To Sleep," his tone is a synthesis of prescription and longing. The poet lists a series of drugs to avoid, describing each in lush, aching terms. He invokes the river Lethe but this time as a warning—do not let yourself be washed into forgetfulness, do not drink a cup of wolf's-bane's poisonous wine.[97] By emphasizing the physical consumption of these poisons, the poet positions his physical experience of melancholy as just as central as his psychological one. Lines one and five evoke the image of anxious fingers as he warns, "neither twist/Wolfsbane, tight-rooted" nor "Make not your rosary of yew-berries" (1, 5). The body of the poet then becomes passive: "Nor suffer thy pale forehead to be kiss'd/By

nightshade, ruby grape of Proserpine" (3-4). As we have seen before, this whiteness stands for a draining away of vitality, which the nightshade can accomplish. While he here avoids Proserpine's kiss in order to put off death, the "ruby grape" will return in stanza three. He then "inverts the traditional image" for Psyche, the butterfly, by inserting the death's head moth instead, and pairs it with the owl, "a partner in your sorrow's mysteries" (Cox 474; 8).

A cursory reading of the first stanza thus appears to present a speaker who is opposed to all melancholy. This is however not true; Almeida argues that the poet is only advising against a false melancholy which is solipsistic and self-destructive, like the "self-indulgent melancholy" of the shepherd-prince in *Endymion* (171). The first stanza cautions abstinence from this set of *pharmaka* which Almeida argues he chooses, "for they compound both technical knowledge and metaphorical truth in their fraught potion" (168). The poet chooses Wolf's-bane, nightshade and yew to express his desire to avoid a self-destructive melancholia and instead prepare for one that can be productive. The poet contrasts the drugs of the first stanza, which will only sedate the speaker, and those which can protect "the wakeful anguish of the soul" (10). This anguish is the seat of the poet's perception, his contemplative function. He is not to avoid this anguish through sedation, but to embrace its difficulty for the insight it brings.

Stanza two contrasts to the first stanza by invoking an active and tumultuous natural world. The poet of the first stanza would be pale and sickly, drained of life while the second stanza invokes visions of strength and vitality. He describes this melancholia as a storm, "sudden from heaven" which "hides the green hill in an April shroud" (12, 14). This storm may be momentarily disruptive, but in fact cultivates the fertile ground on which it showers. By encouraging consumption here, advising the addressee to "glut thy sorrow on a morning rose,/Or on the rainbow of the salt sand-wave,/Or on the wealth of globed peonies," the

poet shows himself eager to administer antidotes, not lose the addressee in false enchantments (15-7). Almeida notes the "intensity and captured fullness of the Keatsian moment of ripeness" the phrase "wealth of globed peonies" implies and we see continued in the close of the stanza (171; 17). The poet also banishes solitude by recommending that the poet interact with his beloved: "Or if thy mistress some rich anger shows,/Emprison her soft hand, and let her rave,/And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes" (18-20).[98] Recalling the tormented reciprocity of vitality that ruined Isabel, the poet here presents a productive instance in which the poet can be rejuvenated by his beloved's passion. However, this vitality cannot remain static within the poet, who now recalls the origin of his melancholia: the transience of beauty.

The invocation of his beloved reminds the poet of the evanescence of beauty, thus opening the final stanza by positioning his beloved among idealized aesthetic qualities, which, like her, must obey the harsh law of decay. The death of Beauty recalls Keats' command that "Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration" (109). This destructive, anarchic power compels Keats to embrace pleasure, even as he describes its decay. Pleasure turns "to poison while the bee-mouth sips:/Ay in the very temple of Delight" (24-5). Even flowers, sweet in their origin will turn to poison over time. We see that the origin of all pleasure is sorrow by his positioning the "shrine" of Melancholy in the "temple of Delight" (25-6). Entering the "temple of Delight" in order to view where "Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine," the poet reaches his final entombment. It is reserved only for those "whose strenuous tongue/Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine" (28). While the opening stanza warned against the consumption of Proserpine's grape, likening the result to a man drained of vitality, it is now required. He who

is capable of consuming Joy, must also "taste the sadness of her might,/ And be among her cloudy trophies hung." (29-30).[99]

I read the transformation of the speaker into a one of Joy's trophies as the completion of the principles of vitality he explored in "Isabella." His consumption of "Joy's grape" has defaced and objectified him, stripping from him his subjectivity, where his melancholia abides. This is not a warning or a cautionary tale, but a relief. By understanding his body as a vessel of vitality, which draws upon others and is drawn upon by a variety of organic forms, which will persist past the termination of his consciousness, he is able to revel in the heights of pleasure while also accepting the transience of their condition. He is able to minimize his melancholia not by idealizing death, but by confronting its most prominent feature—transformation. He does not annihilate alterity but enters into its interplay of differences and exchanges without the privilege of consciousness.

The poet presents two important models of ecological insight through "Ode to a Nightingale" "Isabella" and "Ode on Melancholy." In "Nightingale" the speaker stages a scene of immersion in which he attempts to unite with his idealized object, the bird. While he appears to succeed throughout the majority of the text, his reflection on language strips him of this delusion, and reveals the failure of his attempt. However, this failure reveals the more startling insight that the inability to breach the distance surrounding the object is in fact necessary for the poet to accept his ecological position within nature. Recognizing that alterity is an essential feature of his life, the poet can begin to structure his life around this absence. Accepting that he cannot eradicate the "fever" and "fret" of life, but learn to live within it, is what leads to the ecological insights of "Isabella" and "Melancholy" (23). In "Isabella" the poet represents human interaction with nature in terms of an exchange of energies, or vitalities. Natural objects are no longer objects, but agents which can act upon

and influence a subject just as s/he would upon nature. The recognition of objects' vitality leads to an understanding of a reciprocity of powers. Just as Isabella and Lorenzo share each other's vitality, the ground where he is murdered imparts some to her. This relation can kill however, as Isabel's doting upon the plant drains her of life. "Melancholy" extends the parasitic feeding of the basil by describing a series of *pharmaka* that can either drain the poet of energy or imbue him with it. The speaker encourages his addressee to embrace life, even at its most painful in order to fully experience both the pleasure and pain of living. He closes the poem understanding that death is inevitable, but one can choose whether to approach it in anxiety or exuberance. His melancholia is no longer a source of unrest but a space of creative intuition and insight by which the poet approaches the world. The figure of embalming which appears throughout these texts represents the poet's melancholia. Through the draining of vitalities and the language of preservation and entombment, we see the poet explore his own ambivalence as he struggles to understand the persistence of nature in the light of his own decay. By reconceptualizing his relationship to nature in term of vitalities, decay and eternity are no longer opposing forces, but companion features of nature.

Work Cited

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

_____*Natural Supernaturalism* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1973.

Adorno, Theodor. *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. New York: Verso, 2006.

_____ *Negative Dialectics*. Trans. E.B. Ashton. NY: Continuum Books, 1973.

_____ *Aesthetic Theory*. Trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.

Arditi, Neil. "Shelley's 'Adonais' and The Literary Canon." *Raritan: A Quarterly Review* 17.1 (1997): 121-139. MLA International Bibliography. Web. 18 Jan. 2014.

_____"T. S. Eliot and 'The Triumph of Life.'" *Keats-Shelley Journal* 50 (2001): 124-143.

Arnold, Matthew. *Essays in Criticism: Second Series. London: Macmillian and Co., 1921.*

"Ausgeburt" *Chemnitz Beolingus German-English Dictionary*. 2006-2014. Web. April 1, 2014.

_____ *Collins German-English Dictionary*. 2014. Web. April 1, 2014.

Barnard, John. 'The Busy Time': Keats's Duties at Guy's Hospital from Autumn 1816 to March 1817." *Romanticism.* 13.3 (2007): 199-218. Print.

Barrell, John. *The Idea of Landscape and Sense of Place 1730-1840* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972. Print.

Bate, Jonathan. *Song of the Earth*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 2000. Print.

_____ *John Clare: A Biography*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2003. Print.

Bates, Walter Jackson. *John Keats*. Boston: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963.

"Begriff" *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*. Ed. Barbara Cassein. Trans. Ed.

Emily Apter, Jacques Lezra and Michael Wood. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014. Print.

Benjamin, Walter. "Antiquitäten." *Einbahnstraußе*. [One-way-street]. Berlin: Verlag, 1928. Print. 46.

_____ *One-Way Street and Other Writings*. "Antiquities" Trans. Edmund Jephcott. London: New Left Books, 1979. Print. 75-6.

_____ *Selected Writings Volume 1 1913-1926. One-Way Street*. Ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003. Print. 395.

_____ *Selected Writings Volume 3: 1935-38*. Ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006.

_____*Selected Writings Volume 4 1938-1940*. Ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006.

Berrios, G.E. "Melancholy and Depression in the 19th Century: A Conceptual History." *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 153 (1988): 298-304. Print.

Blackshaw, James. *Love is the Plan, the Plan is Death*. Important Records, 2012. CD.

Blanchot, Maurice. "Literature and the Right to Death." *The Gaze of Orpheus*. Ed. P. Adams Sitney. Barrytown: Station Hill Press, 1995. Print.

Bloom, Harold. *Shelley's Mythmaking*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969. Print.

_____*Visionary Company* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971. Print.

The Book of Common Prayer. New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2007. Print.

Brennan, Matthew C. "Keats, Turner, and Claudian Landscape: Re-Visioning Lorrain's The Enchanted Castle" *The CEA Critic*. 2010 Fall; 73. 1-2 (2010-11): 64-73. Print.

Byron, George Gordon, Lord. *Childe Harold. Byron's Poetry and Prose*.

Chase, Cynthia. *Decomposing Figures*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986. Print.

Clare, John. *'I AM' The Selected Poetry of John Clare*. Ed. Jonathan Bate. 1st ed. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003. Print.

_____ *Major Works* Ed. Eric Robinson and David Powell. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008. Print.

Clare, Johanne. *John Clare and the Bounds of Circumstance* Kingston: Mcgill-Queen's University Press, 1987. Print.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Major Works*. Ed. H. J. Jackson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. Print. 156-482.

Cook, Deborah. *Adorno on Nature*. Durham: Acumen Publishing, 2011. Print.

Cox, Jeffrey N. *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt and their Circle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Print.

Curran, Stuart. "*Adonais* in Context." *Shelley Revalued: Essays from the Greynog Conference*. Ed. Kelvin Everest. New York: The University Press, 1983. Print.

"darkling, n.1." *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Oxford University Press. June 2014. Web. 7 July 2014.

"darkling, adv. and adj." *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Oxford University Press. June 2014. Web. 7 July 2014.

De Almeida, Hermione. *Romanic Medicine and John Keats*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990. Print.

De Man, Paul. *Rhetoric of Romanticism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984. Print.

Derrida, Jacques. *Disseminations*. 1st ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983. Print.

Douglass, Paul and Rosemary March. "That "Vital Spark of Genius": Lady Caroline Lamb's

Writing before Byron." *Pacific Coast Philology* 41(2006) 43-62. Print.

Eberly, Susan S. "A Thorn among the Lilies: The Hawthorn in Medieval Love Allegory." *Folklore* 100.1 (1989): 41-52. Print.

Edgecombe, Rodney Stenning. "Keats's Sonnet 'To Sleep,' Sidney, Drummond, Daniel and Beaumont and Fletcher." *ELN* 36.3 (1999): 61-67. Print.

Elmore, Lauren T. "The Implications of Immortal Grief in Shelley's *Adonais* and Keats's *The Fall of Hyperion*." *The Explicator* 68.1(2010): 15–18. Print.

"embalm." *An Electronic Concordance to Keats's Poetry*. Ed. Noah Comet. *Romantic Circles*. March 2005. Web. April 1, 2014.

"embalming" *Encyclopedia Britannica* 2014. Web. April 1, 2014.

"embalm, v." *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Oxford University Press. June 2014. Web. 12 June 2014.

Eng, David and David Kazanjian. Preface. *Loss: The Politics of Mourning.* Oakland: University of California Press, 2002. Print.

Esterhammer, Angela. "Translating The Elgin Marbles: Byron, Hemans, Keats." *Wordsworth Circle* 40.1 (2009): 29-36. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 10 June 2014.

Everest, Kelvin. "Shelley's Adonais and John Keats." *Essays in Criticism* 57.3 (2007): 237-64. Print.

Evans, Gareth. "Poison Wine: John Keats and the Botanic Pharmacy." *Keats-Shelley Review* 16 (2002) 31-55. Print.

_____ "John Keats: Poet and Herbalist." *Herbs* 23.2 1998. Print.

Evans, Gareth and Niall Boyce. "Nothing but Flowers." *The Lancet* 378.9802 (2011): 1541-1542. Print.

Fermanis, Porscha. *John Keats and the Ideas of the Enlightenment*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh

University Press, 2009. Print.

Fraistat, Neil. "'Lamia' Progressing: Keats' 1820 Volume." *Keats' Poetry and Prose*. Ed. Jeffrey N. Cox. 1st edition. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008. 592-603. Print.

Fry, Paul H. "Green to the Very Door? The Natural Wordsworth." *Essays in Honor of Geoffrey H. Hartman*. Spec. issue of *Studies in Romanticism*. 35.4 (1996): 535-551. Print.

Gigante, Denise. "The Monster in the Rainbow: Keats and the Science of Life" *PMLA* 117. 3 (2002): 433-448. Print.

Gittings, Robert. *John Keats*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1968. Print.

Gradman, Barry. "King Lear" and the Image of Ruth in Keats's "Nightingale" Ode." *Keats-Shelley Journal* 25 (1976): 15-22. Print.

Grimes, Kyle. "Current Bibliography" *Keats-Shelley Journal* 49 (2000): 228-294. Print.

Grosholz, Emily. "Clouds, Sensation and the Infinite in the Poetry of John Keats." *The Hudson Review* 53.4 (2001): 599-606. Print.

Hartman, Geoffrey. *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964. Print.

Haughton, Hugh. "Progress and Rhyme: 'The Nightingale's Nest' and Romantic Poetry." *John Clare in Context*. Ed. Hugh Haughton, Adam Phillips and Geoffrey Summerfield. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. Print.

Heman, Felicia *Modern Greece, A Poem. Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Letters, Reception Materials*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000. 34-69. Print.

Hoeveler, Diane Long. "Decapitating Romance: Class, Fetish, and Ideology in Keats's Isabella." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 49. 3 (1994): 321-338. Print.

Jackson H.J. "The 'Ai' in 'Adonais'" *Review of English Studies* 62.257 (777-784): 2011. Print.

Jamison, Kay Redfield. *Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament*.

New York: Free Press, 1996. Print.

Jamison, Kay Redfield and Frederick Goodwin *Manic-Depressive Illness: Bipolar Disorders and Recurrent Depression*. 2nd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007. Print.

Kaufman, Robert. "Aura, Still" *October*. 99 (2002): 45-80. Print.

Keats, John. *Keats' Poetry and Prose*. Ed. Jeffrey N. Cox. 1st edition. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008. Print.

Kennedy, David. *Elegy*. New York: Routledge, 2007. Print.

Kirschner, Suzanne. *The Religious and Romantic Origins of Psychoanalysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Print.

Kristeva Julia. *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. NY: Columbia UP, 1989. Print.

Kroeber, Karl. "Poem, Dream, and the Consuming of Culture." *Georgia Review* 32.2 (1978): 266-280. Print.

Lacan, Jacques. "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud" *Ecrits: A Selection*. Trans. Bruce Fink. New York: W. W. Norton & Company. 138-168. Print.

_____ *Ecrits: A Selection*. Trans. Alan Sheridan, 1977. Print.

Lagory, Michael. "Wormy Circumstance: Symbolism in Keats's 'Isabella'" *Studies in Romanticism* 34.3 (1995): 321-342. Print.

Liu, Alain. *Wordsworth: Sense of History*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989. Print.

Lovell. "Byron and Mary Shelley," Ernest J. Lovell, Jr. *Keats-Shelley Journal* 2 (1953): 35-49. Print.

Mackenzie, Clayton G. "Ideas of Landscape in John Keats' Teignmouth Poems" *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia: An International Review of English Studies* 42 (2006) 501-10. Print.

Marshall Donald G. Foreword "Wordsworth and Post-Enlightenment Culture." *The Unremarkable Wordsworth*. By Geoffrey Hartman. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987. Print.

Mauro, Jason. "The Shape of Despair: Structure and Vision in Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn."" *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 52. 3 (1997): 289-301. Print.

Mcgrath, Brian. *The Poetics of Unremembered Acts: Reading, Lyric, Pedagogy*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2012. Print.

McKusick, James C. "The Return of the Nightingale." *Wordsworth Circle* 38 (2007): 34-40. Print.

_____ *Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology*. New York: Palgrave/St. Martin's Press, 2000. Print.

Morton, Timothy. "The Dark Ecology of Elegy" The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy. Ed. Karen Weisman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. Print.

_____ *Ecology without Nature*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2007. Print.

_____"John Clare's Dark Ecology." *Studies in Romanticism* 47.2 (2008) 179-193. Print.

Motion, Andrew. *Keats*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1998. Print.

Muehlenkamp, Jennifer J. and Peter M. Gutierrez. "An Investigation of Differences Between Self-Injurious Behavior and Suicide Attempts in a Sample of Adolescents." *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior* 34. 1 (12–23) 2004. Print.

Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds. "From Her to Eternity." *From Her to Eternity*. Mute Records, 1984.CD.

"non-, prefix." OED Online. *Oxford University Press*, June 2014. Web. 21 July 2014.

Oerlemans, Onno. *Romanticism and the Materiality of Nature*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. Print.

O'Neill, Michael. "A. C. Bradley's Views of Shelley's Poetry and Poetics" *Romanticism* 14. 1(2008): 36-46. Print.

Orbach, Israel "Self-Destructive Processes and Suicide" *Israel Journal of Psychiatry and Related Sciences* 44. 4 (2007) 266–279. Print.

Ou, Li. Keats and *Negative Capability*; 1st ed. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009. Print.

Piano Magic. "Dark Secrets Look For Light." *Low Birth Weight*. Rocket Girl, 1999. CD.

Reiman, Donald H. *Shelley and his Circle 1773-1822*. Vol. 5. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973. Print.

Robinson, Polly. "'Physician to All Men'?-The Influence of Keats's Medical Training." *Keats-Shelley Review*. 20 (2006): 32-43. Print.

Rogers, Kathleen. "'A Kind of Necessary Inhumanity': Cultivating Negative Capability through the Clinical Gaze." *Studies in the Humanities* 34.2 (2007): 164-83. Print.

Rose, Gillian. *Melancholy Science: An Introduction into the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno*. 1978. New York: Verso, 2014. Print.

Rovee, Christopher. "Trashing Keats." *ELH*. 75. 4 (2008) 993-1022. Print.

Sacks, Peter. *The English Elegy*: *Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987. Print.

Scott, Grant F. "Beautiful Ruins: The Elgin Marbles Sonnet in Its Historical and Generic Contexts."*Keats-Shelley Journal* 39 (1990): 123-150. Print.

Scrivener, Michael. *Radical Shelley: The Philosophical Anarchism and Utopian Thought of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982. Print.

Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *Shelley's Poetry and Prose.* Ed Neil Fraistat and Donald H. Reiman. 2nd ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002. Print.

The Smiths. "Sweet and Tender Hooligan." *Louder than Bombs*. Warner Music, 1986. CD.

Spargo, R. Clifton. *The Ethics of Mourning Grief and Responsibility in Elegiac Literature* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2004. Print.

Sperry, Stuart. *Keats the Poet*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973. Print.

_____"Keats's Epistle to John Hamilton Reynolds" *Keats' Poetry and Prose*. Ed. Jeffrey N. Cox. 1st edition. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008. 583-591. Print.

_____ "Keats's Epistle to John Hamilton Reynolds." *ELH* 36. 3 (1969): 562-574. Print.

Stiegler, Bernard. *Technics and Time: The Fault of Epithemeus.* Volume 1. Trans. Richard Beardsworth. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998. Print.

"Suicidal Ideation." *The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology*. Penguin Books, 2009. Web. 14 January 2014. Print.

Tagore, Proma. "Keats in an Age of Consumption: the 'Ode to a Nightingale'" *Keats-Shelley Journal* 49 (2000): 67-84. Print.

Thiem, Annika. "Adorno's Tears: Textures of Philosophical Emotionality" *MLN* 124.3 (2009) 592-613. Print.

Tiptree Jr., James [Alice Bradley Shelton]. "Love is the Plan the Plan is Death" *The Alien Condition*. Ed. Stephen Goldin. New York: Ballantine Books, 1973. Print.

"toll | tole, v.1." OED Online. Oxford University Press, June 2014. Web. 8 July 2014.

Trompette Pascale and Mélanie Lemonnier "Funeral embalming: the transformation of a medical innovation." *Science Studies*. 22.2-3(2009) 9-30. Print.

Ulmer, William. "Adonais and the Death of Poetry." *Studies in Romanticism* 32.3 (425-51):

1993. Print.

"Vergangenheit" *Chemnitz Beolingus German-English Dictionary*. 2006-2014. Web. April 1, 2014.

Weiskel, Thomas. *Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1976. Print.

Wentersdorf, Karl P. "The Sub-Text of Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale"" *Keats-Shelley Journal*. 33 (1984): 70-84. Print.

Woodman, Ross. *The Apocalyptic Vision in the Poetry of Shelley*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964. Print.

_____ "Romanticism, Alchemy and Psychology." *Romantic Circles Praxis Series: Romanticism, Psyche and Psychoanalysis. Romantic Praxis* Dec. 2008. *Romantic Circles*. n. pag. Web September 2015.

_____"Shelley's Urania," *Studies in Romanticism*. 17 (1978): 61-75. Print.

Wordsworth, William. *The Prelude. Major Works*. Reissue. Ed. Stephen Gill. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. Print. 375-590.

Ziarek, Ewa, "Kristeva and Levinas: Mourning, Ethics and the Feminine." *Ethics, Politics, and Difference in Julia Kristeva's Writing*. Ed. Kelly Oliver. New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.

Žižek, Slavoj. *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*. Boston: The MIT Press, 1991. Print.

_____*Sublime Object of Ideology*. 2nd ed. New York: Verso Books, 2009. Print.

Vendler, Helen. *The Odes of John Keats*. Boston: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1985.Print.

Wasserman, Earl. *Shelley: A Critical Reading*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1977. Print.

_____ *The Subtler Language: Critical Readings of Neoclassic and Romantic Poems*.

Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1959. Print.

[1] "In the midst of life we are in death" is a line from the Book of Common Prayer. The prayer, recited during Anglican and Episcopalian burial rites reads in full:

In the midst of life we are in death;
of whom may we seek for succor,
but of thee, O Lord,
who for our sins art justly displeased?
Yet, O Lord God most holy, O Lord most mighty,
O holy and most merciful Savior,
deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death.
Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts;
shut not thy merciful ears to our prayer;
but spare us, Lord most holy, O God most mighty,
O holy and merciful Savior,
thou most worthy Judge eternal.
Suffer us not, at our last hour,
through any pains of death, to fall from thee. (484)

The line also appears in The Smith's song "Sweet and Tender Hooligan" released in the 1987 compilation *Louder than Bombs*.

[2] English speaking audiences are most familiar with Edmund Jephcott's translation which appears in NLB's 1977 translation of *One-way Street and Other Writings* and is reprinted in Harvard University Press' *Selected Writings* series. The word for which "abortion" is meant to stand in for, *Ausgeburt* is defined by Chemnitz as "an evil product" while Collins defines it as "a monstrous product" (Chemnitz, Collins). Considering these generic definitions, I think that it is misleading to translate *Ausgeburt* as 'abortion.'

[3] See chapter five of *Song of the Earth*, "Nest, Shells, Landmarks" for Bate's full discussion of Clare (153-175).

[4] The name of this chapter is inspired by a song written by the band Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds for their 1984 debut album, *From Her to Eternity*.

[5] The title of this chapter includes the title of James Blackshaw's 2012 album *Love is the Plan, the Plan is Death*. Blackshaw in turn named his album after the 1972 science fiction short story by James Tiptree Jr.

[6] "Dark Secrets Look For Light" is the title of the 1999 song by Piano Magic released on their album *Low Birth Weight*.

[7] Kaufman continues:

> The critique of aesthetic ideology holds that high romantic poetics and Kantian aesthetics – building on eighteenth-century advances in bourgeois sociopolitical power – establish an essentialist or transcendental theory of cultural value. This is said to be an ideological theory whose function, enacted practically through literary/ aesthetic experience and form, is to serve bourgeois hegemony by rerouting attention, interest, and energy from the sociopolitical to the artistic-cultural realm. This bourgeois theory's Other, from romanticism through modernism, will consequently be the material, the sociopolitical, and the historical, all of which the critique of aesthetic ideology understands to be subjugated or erased—ideologically deformed—by artistic-philosophical form. The critique's overarching analysis (of high romanticism's and then modernism's character and foundationality vis-a-vis canonical notions of literary, artistic, and cultural value) has of course frequently been articulated in the vocabulary and syntax of Marxian or Marxian-inflected methodology. But despite shared concerns about the sociohistorical, Frankfurt School theory—Adorno's especially, and above all his decades-long meditation on Benjamin's oeuvre—diverges sharply from critique of- aesthetic-ideology views about poetics and aesthetics since Romanticism. (354-5)

[8] "All fires have to burn alive to live" is a lyric from the song "All Fires" written by the band Swan Lake. Gillian Rose entitles her introduction to the work of Theodor Adorno *The Melancholy Science*, a phrase which she draws from the dedication of *Minima Moralia* (*MM* 15).

[9] The name of this chapter is inspired by a song written by the band Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds for their 1984 debut album, *From Her to Eternity*.

[10] Clare's opposition to the dominant attitudes of British society of the early 19th century were based on what he perceived as an attack on man's connection to the natural world. Born and raised as a rural laborer, he was well aware of the ways the economy and society were structured in favor of the upper classes. The Enclosure Acts, which significantly hampered the ability of the poorest famers to make a living, further exacerbated this frustration (Haughton, Hugh, Adam Phillips and Geoffrey Summerfield.eds. *John Clare in Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994).

[11] Scholars generally categorize Clare's work into three periods: early work, asylum years, and late work. The Oxford *Major Works* follows this convention, although Bate's *Selected Poems* does not. Clare was first committed to the High Beach Asylum in 1837, but after escaping in 1841 was sent to Northampton where he would remain until his death in 1864 (*Major Works* xxxii). While editors do their best to date his manuscripts, the majority of them were written in an asylum, and went undated. Since the majority of his years were spent in one asylum or another, it misleading in my mind to construct an argument based on a linear narrative there is no textual evidence for. This does not undercut my argument—a shift does occur in his poetry, but it is important not to over determine this by tying it to a biographical node.

[12] A contrast between Clare's naturalist and transcendental moments in many ways parallels Coleridge's earlier distinctions (drawn from his readings of Spinoza) in *Biographia Literaria* between *natura naturans*—the elementary powers of nature and imagination and *natura naturata*—the material objects it creates, whether found in nature (birds and badgers) or a piece of art such as a poem.

[13] I have coined the term 'immersion ethic' to operate as a short-hand reference to the narrative theory many ecocriticscritics advance that the poet desires to positively immerse him/herself in nature. All ecology and philosophy being a form of ethics it is essential that the reader remains attentive to the ethical and subjective effects of such a theory.

[14] There are numerous terms one could use to describe the series of beliefs attached to Clare's devotion to nature, ideology, religion, and philosophy being among the top. However, all of these imply an argumentative consistency that Clare's thought lacked. That is not to say it was irrational or poorly-conceived, but it was not a formalized set of beliefs, rather a moving system of signifiers that could mean multiple things depending on the context. Therefore it makes the most sense to me to refer to his beliefs as a system of signification, which captures the literary quality of his thought.

[15]See John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and Sense of Place 1730-1840* (1972); Johanne Clare, *John Clare and the Bounds of Circumstance* (1987); James McKusick, *Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology* (2000); Jonathan Bate, *Song of the Earth* (2000), *John Clare: A Biography (*2003*)*, *"I AM": The Selected Poetry of John Clare* (2003). Paul H. Fry provides an excellent contemporary history of Wordsworth criticism in "Green to the Very Door."

[16] Haughton's essay "Progress and Rhyme" pits Clare's "Nightingale's Nest" against Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" and is typical of the scholarly evaluations I am referring to above (*John Clare in Context* 1994).

[17] While it may be safely assumed that ecocriticism was spawned by the environmental movement of the last fifty years or so it would be a mistake to assume that it automatically aligns with new historicism. Through the valence of ethics Morton asks his readers to move beyond the sort of historicist approach that seeks a one-to-one correlation of text to politics and consider instead how an ethical assessment of subjectivity impacts literary criticism and political activism at the same time.

[18] Morton has also contributed an essay on the subject to *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*, entitled "The Dark Ecology of Elegy" that will contribute to my reading of Shelley's *Adonais* in Chapter Two.

[19] Morton's desire to reassess and ultimately erase nature as a metaphysical concept shares company with Alan Liu and Slavoj Žižek. Alan Liu is famous for writing "There is no nature except as it is constituted by acts of political definition made possible by particular forms of government" (*Wordsworth: Sense of History*, 104). In *Looking Awry* Žižek riffs on Lacan's famous dictum "The woman does not exist" to theorize that nature also cannot exist as a formal category (37-39). All three effectively argue we can only preserve the "natural" world by destroying the concept of nature rhetorically. Morton cites Žižek but not Liu. Morton, *EWN* 185, 234f; 204, 237f. It is worth noting that while Morton presents a sustained reading of Hegel to produce his criticism of nature, Žižek symptomizes responses via psychoanalysis to the current environmental crisis but not to the natural world per se.

[20] In the introduction to *Negative Dialectics* Adorno elaborates how dialectics critiques and breaks down the reification process he believes is inherent to the conceptualization of any idea (4-6. Trans by E.B. Ashton. NY: Continuum, 1973).

[21] "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud" *Ecrits: A Selection*. Trans. Bruce Fink. NY: Norton. 138-168. Morton cites the previous 1977 translation by Alan Sheridan, but now Fink is the preferred translation by most academics.

[22] Any cursory history of mental illness in the 18th and 19th century will attest to the fact that the term 'melancholia' functions as an umbrella for the varied symptoms of mental illness, from what is today recognized as mania and psychosis, to depression. Morton seems to assume his reader considers melancholia to be a state of depression, though he never defines it for his argument.

[23] Morton often seems inspired by what he is reading, even if the text does not speak directly to his concerns, or only applies tangentially. In recounting Morton's line of thought, the scholar is torn between accounting for every movement and where it originates from (in this case Adorno), although to quote the Adorno may unnecessarily complicate the matter (Cf. *Aesthetic Theory* 269, 245). As Robert Kaufman remarks in "Aura, Still" : "These last, moreover, are perhaps the original and ultimate objects of Adorno's simultaneous theorization of aura, 'second-reflection,' and the *Erschütterung* or shaking of the subject in aesthetic experience. Adorno conceives *Erschütterung* as that which, by dint of aura's dynamic of charged distance, can break down the hardening of subjectivity-can break down through this shaking, in other words, 'the subject's petrification in his or her own subjectivity' and hence can allow the subject to 'catch ... the slightest glimpse beyond that prison that it [the 'I'] itself is,' thus permitting the 'I," once shaken, to perceiv[e] its own limitedness and finitude and so to experience the critical possibility of thinking otherness." (49).

[24] While this appears to be rooted in Levinas' theorization of the infinite guilt of the subject in the face of the other, Morton does not cite him in reference to this, but instead cites Žižek who discusses infinite guilt in relation to Hegel's beautiful soul in *Sublime Object of Ideology*, 217-218.

---

[25] In private correspondence, Morton confirms that the mother is a reference to Julia Kristeva, who has also written on melancholy in *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. NY: Columbia UP, 1989.

[26] Clare frequently reused titles, causing significant confusion for scholars. I will be reading his two poems entitled "I AM" which Bate distinguishes between (in his edition of the selected poems) by prefixing to the three-stanza title "Lines: 'I AM"' and to the sonnet "Sonnet: 'I AM."' I will follow this convention by referring to the poems as "Lines" and "Sonnet." However, in *EWN* and "Dark Ecology" Morton refers to "Lines" by its original title "I AM." He always refers to the three-stanza poem and never the sonnet.

[27] The OED puts the first use of the word "nonidentity" as in an 1808 scientific treatise about electricity. Its next appearance is not until 1880 when it became synonymous with identity. non-, prefix Third edition, December 2003; online version March 2012. <http://www.oed.com.proxy.library.emory.edu/view/Entry/127776>; accessed 12 May 2012. An entry for this word was first included in *New English Dictionary*, 1907.

[28] Bernard Stiegler has made this point repeatedly throughout his *Technics and Time* series especially *Technics and Time: The Fault of Epithemeus, Volume 1*.

[29] *Negative Dialectics*, 4-6.

[30] Due to the lack of reliable dating for many of the late texts and Clare's tendency to reuse titles, scholars have delineated geographic periods for Clare's poems to help designate each particular text. Both the Oxford Major Works and Bate's *Selected Poetry* follow this convention.

[31] Clare's destruction of chronicles and almanacs here reminds the reader of Wordsworth's fear in Book V of *The Prelude* about the longevity of his own texts.

[32] In an essay that works through the implications of reading Levinas' ethics with Kristeva's interpretations of melancholy Ziarek writes that melancholic speech defamiliarizes language and literature itself (74).

[33] The title of this chapter includes the title of James Blackshaw's 2012 album "Love is the Plan, the Plan is Death." Blackshaw in turn named his album after the 1972 science fiction short story by James Tiptree Jr.

[34] The *Penguin Dictionary of Psychology* defines suicidal ideation as "Recurrent thoughts about suicide. They may be simple and unelaborated or complex and involve detailed plans about how to take one's life. Such thoughts are common in cases of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and bipolar disorder and, while they typically do not lead to actual suicide, they are signals that mental health workers cannot ignore" ("Suicidal ideation").

[35] In "Shelley's *Adonais* and the Literary Canon" Neil Arditi recounts Sacks' position in *The English Elegy* ("*Adonais* surely concludes on a suicidal note" 25) and the triumphalism Wasserman and later Curran read into the text *(*Arditi para 21-22; .*Shelley: Critical Readings*;

"*Adonais* in Context."). While Sacks most certainly provides a meaningful framework for questioning the triumphalism of Wasserman, Arditi perhaps overstates Sacks' position which, when read in the context of the whole chapter, lacks the systematic framework Woodman applies to the poet's suicidal ideation in *The Apocalyptic Vision in the Poetry of Shelley*.

[36] For more recent studies see: Arditi, Everest, Jackson, O'Neill and Lauren Elmore. Arditi and Everest present intertextual studies of *Adonais*; Arditi focusing on mourning and consolation through Peter Sacks' *The English Elegy* while Everest critiques readings of Neoplatonism exemplified by Wasserman. Jackson reconsiders Wasserman's authoritative etymological study of the name "Adonais" in his *SL* and *SCR*. O'Neill also reconsiders Wasserman's influential criticism by troubling Wasserman's account of power in *Adonais*. Elmore presents a study of Moneta and Thea in contrast to Shelley's conceptualization of Urania which dovetails with Woodman's own study on Urania in "Shelley's Urania."

[37] Among clinicians, Jamieson is best known for the textbook she co-wrote with Frederick Goodwin *Manic-Depressive Illness: Bipolar Disorders and Recurrent Depression*. Outside the academic community, her reputation is based on the memoir of her own early struggles with bipolar disorder, *An Unquiet Mind*, and the text discussed above *Touched with Fire*.

[38] In *Radical Shelley*, Scrivener argues through a reading of *Prometheus Unbound* that Neoplatonism is not essential to *Adonais*, but "…is a metaphor, a symbol, and must be understood as a poetically useful fiction" that adds philosophical weight to the poet's melancholy (273). Perhaps the most nuanced account of Shelley's turn to the neoplatonic is in Spargo who writes of the transcendental narrative in terms of reciprocity, "Whether we speak of the reciprocity between a mourner and the natural world that signified enduring grief, or the reciprocity between the natural world and the lost other that preserves his significance, Shelley's anti-elegy makes us aware that the transcendental premise informing any consolatory resolution of grief is really an idealized version of reciprocity" (148).
[39] Paul Fry and Peter Sacks have written two excellent genre studies. Stuart Curran also provides an excellent introduction to the genre of the pastoral elegy, which he parlays into a persuasive reading of *Adonais* as a resolution to "Ode to a Nightingale."

[40] For example see Eliot.

[41] For a fuller discussion of Shelley's reputation see Arditi, "T. S. Eliot and 'The Triumph of Life'" (124-143).
[42] Bloom writes in *Visionary Company* that *Adonais* is a "triumph of human despair...a great but suicidal stanza" (341).

[43] An instance of Shelley being described as effeminate can be found in Lovell.

[44] Lauren T. Elmore contrasts the "immortal grief" of *Adonais'* Urania to Keats' Moneta and Thea. See Elmore 15-18.

[45] Scholars have debated the point. Donald Reiman and Stuart Curran have produced persuasive studies which argue for the intertextual nature of *Adonais*. Reiman catalogs the numerous allusions to Keats in "Keats and Shelley: personal and literary relations" arguing

that Shelley chose the Venus and Adonis myth for his elegy because of Keats' well-known gusto for classic mythology and its inclusion in *Endymion* (426). Engaging with Reiman's work, Curran argues further that Shelley does not just "create a tissue of allusions" between *Adonais* and Keats' poetry but that both share a philosophical project. Curran writes

> The very perfection of the ideal, which should nurture the poet who pursues it, instead poisons his temporal existence. The Keatsian dreamer, drawn toward the void by the nightingale's song, is no less as Actaeon pursued by his own creation than the mourner at the bier of Adonais. (174)

While I ultimately disagree with Curran, as stated above, his argument is an eloquent and moving one.

[46] Sacks predicts this in the closing of his own reading of *Adonais* writing "If we wondered how Shelley could have accepted this most conventional of forms, the pastoral elegy, we recognize now how thoroughly he has driven his version of the genre to the brink of its own ruin. Not surprisingly, *Adonais* marks an extremity that no later elegy would reach" (165).

[47] For example, Kennedy 54.

[48] For a further discussion of Morton's conceptualization of melancholia see my discussion of "dark ecology" in Chapter One of this dissertation.

[49] It is worth quoting the first stanza of "Ode to the West Wind"

> O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
> Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
> Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,
>
> Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
> Pestilence-stricken multitudes: O Thou,
> Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed
>
> The wingèd seeds, where they lie cold and low,
> Each like a corpse within its grave, until
> Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow
>
> Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
> (Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
> With living hues and odours plain and hill:
>
> Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;
> Destroyer and Preserver; hear, O hear! (1-14)

[50] *Adonais* bears striking similarities to John Clare's apocalyptic poems which I discuss in chapter one.

[51] I think it is important to note that while a subject who is self-destructive may self-harm, this does not correlate with the desire to die. It is important to note that the claim that my claim—self-destruction and suicidal ideation do not necessarily coincide— is a strongly

contested assertion within the psychiatric community. There is no general consensus on this matter. While attitudes in the psychiatric community often conflate the two behaviors, Muehlenkamp and Gutierrez's 2011 study is evidence of a sea change which recognizes that a subject being self-destructive does not necessarily mean the subject is suicidal. One can however compare this to Orbach's who maintains the opposite, that there is in fact a strong correlation between self-destruction and suicidal ideation. I do not agree with his findings, but some professionals find them quite persuasive.

[52] "Dark Secrets Look For Light" is the title of the 1999 song by Piano Magic released on their album *Low Birth Weight*.

[53] English speaking audiences are most familiar with Edmund Jephcott's translation which appears in NLB's 1977 translation of *One-way Street and Other Writings* and is reprinted in Harvard University Press' *Selected Writings Volume 1*. The word for which "abortion" is meant to stand in for, *Ausgeburt* is defined by Chemnitz as "an evil product" while Collins defines it as "a monstrous product" (Chemnitz, Collins). Considering these generic definitions, I think that it is misleading to translate *Ausgeburt* as 'abortion.'

[54] The German word, *Vergangenheit*, which is here translated as past, can also mean nostalgia (Chemnitz).

[55] Cox positions Keats' lyrics on the Elgin Marbles within the framework of his relationship with the Cockney School. See chapters three and five of his book *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt and their Circle*.

[56] See the remainder of Scott's essay for a fuller history of the Elgin Marbles' early years in Britain. He uses this context to read Keats' sonnet as a member of the *ekphrastic* tradition.

[57] Excellent recent criticism of "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles" includes Angela Esterhammer (2014) and Chistopher Rovee (2008) essays, Esterhammer reassesses Lord Byron's Elgin Marbles scene from *Childe Harold* through the lens of Keats' lyric and Felicia Heman's *Modern Greece*. Esterhammer reads Keats' fragmentary rhetoric as a response to the disrepair of the statues, which I also argue above. Through a reading of "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and "One Seeing the Elgin Marbles" Christopher Rovee argues that Keats' poor reputation in literary circles of the time was due to his rejection of the aesthetic values of the period. He assists this analysis with Adorno's conceptualization of kitsch in *Aesthetic Theory*.

[58] See "Sonnet To—Sleep," discussed in the following chapter.

[59] Throughout this chapter I cite the Stuart Sperry essay "Keats's Epistle to John Hamilton Reynolds." The version I quote and cite pages from appears in Norton Critical Edition's *Keats' Poetry and Prose*. This version was republished and lightly abridged from the original essay published by *ELH* in 1969.

[60] While the following chapter will discuss the 1819 Odes more fully, it is worth noting here that lines 67, 77 and 85 prefigure "Ode to a Nightingale."

[61] Keats' use of the dream sequence finds its greatest iteration in the "Ode to a Nightingale" but it also appears in the 1816 text "Sleep and Poetry" and the 1819 "Sonnet to Sleep" where he structures the text to avoid and then explore the troubling images of his Fancy.

[62] While "Epistle to John Hamilton Reynolds" does not receive the same level of critical attention, two recent studies approach the poem from an eco-critical, "green" lens. Mackenzie (2006) pairs a study of the landscape around where Keats wrote the "Epistle" with discussion of his care his terminally ill brother Tom who died of consumption (tuberculosis) which Keats would later also succumb to. Brennan (2010) analyzes the influence of the paintings of Claude Lorrain on Keats' perception of the landscape while writing the "Epistle."

[63] We can again find a reiteration of this claim in "Sonnet—To Sleep" where the poet describes the thoughts that plague him as "curious conscience" (11).

[64] Sperry writes, "The phrase 'tease us out of thought,' which he was to use again within a subtly different context in the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn,' here suggests that tantalizing ability of the speculative life to raise, only to defer answering, our final questions" (590).

[65] Perhaps due to the unfortunate brevity of Keats' career, we see that while his poetry evolves stylistically and formally, his interests remain constant throughout. Among his earliest works we see poems which foreshadow his later work, such as "Sonnet: As from the darkening gloom a silver dome" and "Fill for me a brimming bowl." The former celebrate the freedom of a bird, which can be read as a precursor to "Ode to a Nightingale" while the latter bears the seeds which would flourish in "Ode on Melancholy." However, although the themes are consistent, these earlier texts rely on an aesthetic ideology of beauty as the embodiment of meaning that the later texts put under pressure. They lack the self-questioning and the embrace of mystery that becomes so essential to the later work.

[66] Oerlemans here presses upon important insights from critical theory. See Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (4-6). For an excellent summary of the intellectual history and philosophy engaging with the term *Begriff* see entry "Begriff" in *Dictionary of Untranslateables*, (90-3).

[67] See Morton's discussion of the ethical opportunities in melancholia in *Ecology without Nature*. Spargo makes a similar arguments throughout his discussion of Shelley in (128-9)

[68] Fraistat presents a similar reading, arguing that Keats is seeking "a type of art resistant to enchantment, an art in which the mind halts its retreat from the world and confronts suffering and loss" he writes further

> [Q]uest…for an art that is both beautiful and true. For it discovers that the type of art the urn represents is of only limited value to humanity; while this art temporarily comforts by providing visions of a world without loss, it ultimately reminds one of one's exclusion from such a world. The urn is both "a friend to man" and a "Cold Pastoral"…What is needed is a type of art resistant to enchantment an art in which the mind halts its retreat from the world and confronts suffering and loss (598-9).

[69] Sperry reads the aphorism ironically according to British Romantic reinventions of irony (245). He relates this to Keats' conception of Negative capability. Sperry recounts previous criticism that explains the aphorism as an immature reliance on a "ringing declaration" (277). He goes on to write

> What the ode expresses is the difficulty and yet necessity of remaining content with the way art speaks to us, with the kind of "half knowledge" it offers. Once we demand the "Urn" to speak to us definitely, in a way commensurable with "fact & reason," we find we have destroyed its life. The very kind of imaginative response required to fulfill the urn, to give it depth and meaning, limits its value and separates it from us. (278)

[70] Throughout his essay, Mauro frequently references Kroeber's essay "Poem, Dream, and the Consuming of Culture," (1978) which defines Keats' poem as a dream (following Stuart Sperry's distinction) instead of a vision. While Mauro disagrees with Kroeber's conclusion, he embraces Kroeber's paradigm.

[71] It is important to note the passive tense Benjamin maintains here. He does not name the culprit which knocks off the past-as-statue's limbs, whether it be society, historicism, capitalism, etc. This unknown subject forces the statue into the passive position, upon which action is acted upon, and formally becomes an object.

[72] For a fascinating discussion on Adorno's affect and "philosophical emotionality" see Thiem.

[73]See Deborah Cook's excellent ecocritical reassessment of Adorno.

[74] "All fires have to burn alive to live" is a lyric from the song "All Fires" written by the band Swan Lake. Gillian Rose entitles her introduction to the work of Theodor Adorno *The Melancholy Science*, a phrase which she draws from the dedication of *Minima Moralia* (*MM* 15).

[75] While Almeida does not overtly link embalming and entombment in the text of her book, she cross-lists the two in the index which led me to consider the similarities of the two in the development of my reading (413). She does compare a scene in Book III of *Endymion* to the preserved specimens of the Hunterian medical museum (121).

[76] We also see with his use of the word 'brain' in "Nightingale" how Keats the poet draws on his medical knowledge to enrich his poetry. The intersection of romanticism and science has been a growing field of interest alongside ecocriticism for several years Almeida (1991), Gigante (2002) and Herringman (2004) are among the best on the subject. There has also been a renewed interest in Keats' own medical training. From the beginning of Keats' apprenticeship to a surgeon and apothecary in 1811 to his exit from medical training in 1816 to focus on poetry, he was involved in the profession of medicine. In this time he completed his apprenticeship, became a dresser (surgeon's assistant) at Guy's Hospital, and passed his exams at Apothecaries Hall, which certified him to practice as an apothecary, physician or surgeon (Cox 654). As Almeida demonstrates, Keats' studies were not limited to surgical knowledge but also demonstrated a mastery of the apothecary science (Almeida 147-8). I state these episodes from Keats' biography in order to emphasize not only the poet's

mastery of physic, but to underline his constant awareness of the organic and biological processes that propelled the human body in the world and contemporary theories about them. Recent essays on Keats' medical career include those by Barnard (2006) and Robinson (2006). Drawing on previously undiscovered documents, Barnard presents a reassessment of classic biographical accounts by Walter Jackson Bate and Robert Gittings along with the more recent work of Andrew Motion. Robinson reads Keats' poetry through a comprehensive reading of his medical training.

[77]As I will discuss below, Almeida points out the discovery of the circulatory system in 1801, which revolutionized embalming. While it is outside the purview of this essay, it would be interesting to bring this to bear on a re-reading of "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" which Keats wrote in April 1819.

[78] Almeida explores the history of the concept of pharmakon at length in chapter 11 of Romantic Medicine. She emphasizes its originary dual ability to be a "healing drug" or a "corrosive poison" in order to appropriately explain the education Keats receives at the time (147, n350). She argues, which I here agree, that poet understood each plant to be capable of poison or antidote. She cites Derrida's work on the *Phaedrus* and Levinson's reading of Derrida for *Keats' Life of Allegory* as also influential to her work.

[79] The rise of ecocriticism throughout the humanities in the last twenty-years, exemplified by scholars such as Jonathan Bate, Timothy Morton, among others, has been a valuable and important critique that I and many other young scholars would be significantly impoverished without. One of the unfortunate ticks within it however is an occasional tendency to judge certain writers and artists more or less "green" according to whatever series of figures the scholar has chosen to value at any given time. The best of ecocriticism thrives not in the hierarchical paradigm of a value system but in a manner of reading that allows for the complications of a text to arise, whether that be the intersections of nature, gender, class or a plethora of other images and issues. Li Ou is an excellent scholar, and certainly not prone to the kind of error I describe. Her formulation "symbol of permanence" is not incorrect, merely in this isolated instance does not attend to the multiplicity of ways the meaning of a symbol can slip, and provide space for an ecological insight. Haughton provides a thoughtful comparison of recently recovered "green" romantic, John Clare, whom I discuss elsewhere, and Keats whom I am here arguing in fact develops an appreciation for ecology which comes to the fore in "Isabella" and "Ode on Melancholy."

[80] Morton does not make this point in reference to Keats, but in his reading of Shelley's *Alastor* in "The Dark Ecology of Elegy" and John Clare in *Ecology without Nature* and "John Clare's Dark Ecology."

[81] The three romances prior to "Ode to a Nightingale" are *Lamia*, "The Eve of St. Agnes" and "Isabella; or The Pot of Basil."

[82] Many romantic poets, Keats among them, embraced the Graeco-Roman influence on British Literary tradition and communicate their own ideas through reinterpretations of myths and folklore that fall under its umbrella. I make this obvious point in order to point out how an acceptance of this view belies an often underappreciated and I argue deeply

ideological theme in Keats' work—the presence of expressly pagan and "faery" elements. While the presence of what I am calling a "faery" rhetoric may appear as mere aesthetic window-dressing perhaps influenced by Shakespeare or Northern British mythology, it in fact represents a preference for the faculty of the imagination, and the protection of it, over and against the scientific progress of the day. Keats is not merely invoking familiar mythological tropes to provide a false patina to a poem. The poet deploys this language to communicate a desire for an alternate world free from the "the weariness, the fever, the fret" of his current predicament (23). He is no longer critiquing his mortality, but the conditions under which he must survive.

Keats' critique of reason is at its most persuasive in *Lamia*, one of the romances published with the odes in the 1820 volume. Here Keats presents philosophy as the opponent of Nature, and the faery elements populated within it. The writing of *Lamia* was inspired by a section from Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (Cox 412). His argument is crystalized in the lines "Philosophy will clip the wings

> …….Do not all charms fly
> At the mere touch of cold philosophy?
> There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:
> We know her woof, her texture; she is given
> In the dull catalogue of common things.
> Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,
> Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,
> Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine—
> Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made
> The tender-person'd Lamia melt into a shade. (229-38)

As Cox notes, Keats along with Hazlitt and Lamb believed that knowledge limited the potential of imagination and poetry (427, n6). While Keats' affection for pagan elements in his poetry may seem like an unremarkable insight, part and parcel of the Romantic ideology against the Enlightenment, it becomes more remarkable when considering its author, a trained surgeon. As I will argue below, knowledge did not in fact "clip" the poet's "wings" but strengthens them. For a further discussion of *Lamia* see Fraistat.

[83] While it is outside the purview of this chapter, see chapter four of this dissertation for an extended discussion of the implications of Morton's concepts and his critique of ecological theory that does pursue what he describes as "false oneness" (*EWN* 142) See also "John Clare's Dark Ecology" especially discussion on page 190 and *EWN* 202.

[84]Chapter 3 of Cynthia Chase's 1984 book *Decomposing Figures* contains a deconstructive analysis of the rhetoric of blindness in "Nightingale."

[85] My understanding of the various classical literary associations of stanza five's flowers is drawn from Wentersdorf's 1984 essay. His thesis is that "Ode to a Nightingale" is essentially an ode that expresses a hope for love even while recognizing failure is more likely. While I disagree with this reading, the themes he points to are certainly present in the text and make an important addition to our understanding of the poem.

[86] Evan Gareth has also written on the theme of ethnobotany in Keats. While most of his work is published in the popular magazine *Herbs*, his 2002 essay "Poison Wine—Keats and

the Botanic Pharmacy" has been published by the *Keats-Shelley Review*. In it he discusses a resurgence of interest in toxic herbs understood traditionally as poisons ("Poison Wine" 32).

[87] "Welcome joy, and welcome sorrow" is a fragment by Keats written circa October 1818 (Cox 123). It traverses themes in "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode on Melancholy," with several references to *pharmakon* such as nightshade, roses, yew and other vegetation (14-15, 30-31).

[88] Scholars often read "Sonnet—To Sleep" within the context of "Ode to a Nightingale" and the other 1819 odes as I also do. Recent readings of this nature include Tagore's analysis of "Sonnet" and "Nightingale" in terms of the rise of the middle class and its consumerism. Grosholz analyzes the figuration of clouds and sensations in "Sonnet" and the Odes to explore what she calls the "infinity of the immediate" (599). Douglas and March take a decidedly different tact, producing a comparative analysis of Keats' sonnet and Lady Caroline Lamb's first text "Oh balm of nature to the mind opprest" which dovetails nicely with the questions posed by Rodney Stenning Edgecombe in "Keats's Sonnet 'To Sleep,' Sidney, Drummond, Daniel and Beaumont and Fletcher." He argues that Keats wrote the poem within a context of literary 'borrowings.' Kyle Grimes describes the argument as "placing the Keats poem in the context of Romantic era plagiarism, or, more accurately, a kind
of literary appropriation and transformation" (Grimes 270).

[89] Vendler discusses the shape that Keats odes take on, and the trajectory of their descent in The Odes of John Keats.

[90] Scholars are often perplexed by Keats' choice of the biblical figure of Ruth. While some scholars have suggested that his portrayal was due to a recent viewing of a painting, Gradman argues that the poet is unintentionally conflating the Biblical figure with Cordelia from "King Lear."

[91] McKusick forges an interesting middle ground through his re-examination of the nightingale as a literary trope in Romantic poetry using ecocritical insights garnered from the work of Karl Kroeber in his 2007 essay.

[92] In chapter 3 of *The Odes of John Keats* Vendler does just this, arguing that it is hard to imagine two poems less different than "Nightingale" and "Urn" (118).

[93]Denise Gigante's 2002 essay "The Monster in the Rainbow: Keats and the Science of Life," draws on scientific theories of vital power and monstrosity to read Keats' *Lamia*.

[94] "Isabella" has enjoyed a curious resurgence of scholarly interest in the last twenty years. Chapter four of Brian McGrath's 2013 *The Poetics of Unremembered Acts* positions the poem within the framework of "an ethical project carried on in the absence of understanding and knowledge" which argues for the presence of a lyrical yawn in the lyric as opposed to lyrical voice (14). In chapter 4 of Fermanis' 2009 *John Keats and the Ideas of the Enlightenment* she argues that "Isabella" and "Lamia" contribute to arguments against the commercialization of society through their "representations of industrial labor" which were active at the time as a

backlash against commercial Enlightenment ideals (15). While somewhat older, Lagory's 1995 essay is worth mentioning for its excellent positioning of "Isabella" within contemporary scholarship. He traces the scholarly debate over the sentimentality present in "Isabella" and whether to read it as sincere or satirical. He attends to these concerns through an analysis of metaphors of oppositional visions throughout the text which he roughly demarcates as "sentiment and reason" (323).

[95] Fraistat reads the three romances in the "Lamia" volume "Lamia," "Eve of St. Agnes," and "Isabella; or the Pot of Basil" as ironic disavowals of enchantment, which he argues can only lead to a "poetics of death" (592-4). Stillinger, on the contrary, locates the lesson of these romances to be an "achievement of the ripest, fullest expression that one is capable of" (614).

[96] While I will be drawing extensively on Almeida's work throughout the rest of this chapter for my argument it is important to note that while Almeida argues for the presence of a theory of vitality in "Isabella" she does not provide a close reading of the text, does not frame it in terms of ecocriticism or melancholia, and does not link it to a reading of "Melancholy."

[97] While many of the specifics properties, elements, chemical compounds and related functions are outside the purview of this discussion, Almeida's exhaustive research provides, in abundant detail, profiles of all of the flora in "Melancholy," all of their related flora and contemporaneous scientific innovations and ethno-botanical profiles. See pages 168-174 for extended discussion.

[98] It is difficult to overlook the implicit violence in lines 18-20, which to most readers does not read pleasantly. While most of the questions these lines provoke are outside the purview of this chapter, it is important to note that the poet here stages another exchange of energies between lovers. Here, the melancholic man is told to work his mistress into a rage "And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes" (20). His mood will thus improve through a voyeuristic consumption of her passion.

[99] Cox notes the similarities between this final line and Shakespeare's Sonnet 31: "Thou art the grave where buried love doth live,/ Hung with the trophies of all my lovers gone" (474; 9-10).