



INIJOSS

İnönü University International Journal of Social Sciences / İnönü Üniversitesi Uluslararası Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi,

Volume/Cilt 9, Number/Sayı 1, (2020)

<http://inonu.edu.tr/tr/inijoss> --- <http://dergipark.gov.tr/inijoss>

ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Gönderim Tarihi: 20.02.2020 | Kabul Tarihi: 28.05.2020

AESTHETIC AND REALITY: PERPETUAL REALISM IN THE ART OF JOHN KEATS

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Atif / Citation: Asiatidou, A. (2020). Aesthetic and Reality: Perpetual Realism in the Art Of John Keats. *İnönü University International Journal of Social Sciences & İnönü Üniversitesi Uluslararası Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, (INIJOSS), 9(1), 195-210.

Abstract

This article examines the way Keats uses aesthetic in his poetry through the analysis of his poetic methods and forms that seem to allow or support the creation of new perceptions of what is beautiful, knowledgeable, and real. These perceptions—although they are a mixture created based on ancient (Platonic) and eighteenth-century (Kantian) philosophy about what is Real and Reality—also impressively lie on an agreement with a contemporary subset of Speculative Realism. The theoretical orientation of Object-Oriented Ontology and much of the poesy of John Keats share an enduring exploration of the aesthetic object as an enticing experience of understanding the nature of reality. The exploration of the aesthetic element in Keats' poetry can be viewed as an aestheticized ontological synopsis highlighting even future significant inquiries of Philosophical Realism.

Keywords: Aesthetic, Reality, Object-Oriented Ontology, Realism

ESTETİK VE GERÇEKLİK: JOHN KEATS SANATINDA SÜREKLİ GERÇEKÇİLİK

Öz

Bu makale Keats'in şiirinde estetiği kullanma biçimini inceliyor. İnceleme; güzel, bilgili ve gerçek olanın yeni algılarının yaratılmasına izin veren veya destekleyen şiirsel yöntemlerinin

ve biçimlerinin analizini kapsıyor. Bu algılar her ne kadar gerçek ve gerçeklik hakkında eski (platonik) ve on sekizinci yüzyıl (Kantçı) felsefesine dayanan bir karışım olsalar da aynı zamanda etkileyici bir şekilde spekülâtif gerçekçiliğin çağdaş bir alt kümesiyle yapılan bir anlamaya dayanıyor. Nesne yönelimli ontolojinin teorik yaklaşımı ve John Keats'in şiirinin çoğu estetik nesnenin kalıcı bir keşfini, gerçekliğin doğasını anlamayı ilgi çekici bir deneyim olarak belirtiyor. Keats'in şiirindeki estetiğin keşfi, felsefi gerçekçiliğin gelecekteki önemli soruların bile üzerinde duran estetik bir ontolojik özet olabilir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Estetik, Gerçeklik, Nesne-Yönelimli Ontoloji, Gerçekçilik

Following the philosophical inquiry about art and beauty in Plato's theories from the 5th century BC till the nineteenth century's Aestheticism, it is seen that the concept of aesthetic is indissolubly connected with the discussions about reality. In the case of Platonic philosophy, the knowledge of beauty can lead one to the rediscovery of reality as the divine truth. After many centuries, Aesthetic movement developed the view that "a 'pure' aesthetic experience consists of 'disinterested' contemplation of an object that 'pleases for its own sake,' without reference to reality or the 'external' ends of utility or morality" (Abrams, 1999: 3). Independently if Aestheticism focused on the supremacy or indifference of art from practical life, its definition was defined by its relation to reality. Aestheticism's initial declaration of Art for Art's sake converted into a more extreme version of Life for Art's sake supporting, that life is worth living when it is based on aesthetic criteria (Comfort, 2008: 2). Such a claim strengthens the relation and the value of art for reality by supporting the ultimate significance of art for life. Hence, an artwork defined by beauty because of its aesthetic form is an end by itself. It does not need any connection with the reality of practical life to prove the usefulness of its existence. In contrast, it is life itself that needs art. The most recent Philosophical Realism places an unusually high value on aesthetic experience (Harman, 2018: 58). Although it rejects that art is a form of knowledge (p. 76), it supports that only art and the aesthetic experience can give us the true inwardness of things viz. the opening of their "executant reality" (pp. 79-81).

The poetry of John Keats stands between the Enlightenment's humanistic life essence and the Aestheticism's supremacy of beauty as a rule for a worth living life. Although Keats' poetry negotiates concepts which concerned the literary and philosophical majority of his age, like history, the individual mind and life purpose, however, Keats' interest in these concepts is permeated by their relation to the concept of beauty as knowledge of the truth. His synopsis of truth in the beauty of art-objects and the beauty of nature leads him experiencing a work-life based on aesthetic criteria-qualities. Literary critics have categorized Keats not only as a Romantic but also as a forerunner of the aesthetic movement too. This article explores the Romantic poetry of Keats affected by the Platonic ideas about art, beauty, knowledge, and truth/reality and permeated by the Kantian ideology of individualism and humanism, which composed the traditional perception of the aesthetic. This article mainly examines the way Keats uses aesthetic in his poetry through the analysis of his poetic methods and forms, which seem to allow or support the creation of new perceptions of what is beautiful, knowledgeable, and real. These perceptions— although they are a mixture created based on ancient and eighteenth-century philosophy about what is Real and Reality—also impressively lie on an agreement with the contemporary Speculative Realism. Two basic aspirations permeate the agreement: the real value of objects, which is independent of their knowledgeable qualities, purpose, and use (Harman, 2018: 259), and the nature of reality, as a world that exists independently from the human mind (p. 202). Without ignoring or disregarding the various distinctions in the realms of

Philosophical Realism, this article focuses on Speculative Realism, particularly the subset of Object-Oriented Ontology. The theoretical orientation of Object-Oriented Ontology and much of the poesy of John Keats share an enduring exploration of the aesthetic object as an enticing experience of understanding the nature of reality.

Keats lived in the age when the emphasis was on the individual and humanity. Initially, his perceptions about history, knowledge, and life are related to the view of the individual mind as the essence of humanity. For Keats, an individual mind's pursuit of knowledge leads to the revelation of the great whole that is the substance of life, the truth. (Keats, 1990: 397). Thus, the individual effort to explore and to understand life is the primary element that leads to the knowledge of perfection. His idea combines the Platonic and the Kantian philosophy: The Platonic idea of a pre-existed perfect condition that man tries to regain through the "knowledge of thyself"(self-awareness) (Plato, Phaedrus, 2008) and the Kantian view of human history as a collective finality (Wood, 2001: xvi). Yet, his poetic pursuit of knowledge is unstoppable; hence the tensions that are created by aestheticizing his pre-existed thoughts on history, individual mind, and reality lead more to confusion than a direct truth. However, it is this confusion that allows Keats to grasp an indirect glimpse of truth through the use of aesthetic as a means of experiencing possible aspects of the real or of what is real. Keats' direct handling of beauty and his indirect grasping of truth is what connects him with contemporary speculative Realism. In its understanding of reality, Object-Oriented Ontology "opposes any form of realism that reality can be directly obtained" (Harman, 2018: 161). It supports that "art can include knowledge about reality but only by first aestheticizing it" (p. 102).

In his poem "Ode on a Grecian Urn," Keats chooses an ancient object showing that his inspiration is oriented in the past. The old amphora is not only an aesthetic object but an object which carries the past. By bringing the past into the present through an art- object, Keats offers knowledge about the object and knowledge of what kind of inspiration the poet traced by it. The poetic description of the specific object makes the imaginative process move through the past and invites the reader to experience what the poet was inspired by it. An object from the past becomes the materialization of the concept of history as a continuum of the past (the object), the present (poet's inspiration), and the future (readers' response). The perception of history as a continuum moves on the aesthetic axes of an art-object. Thus, Keats' perception of art is that the beauty of art may not produce particular knowledge of the past, except for the qualities of the past object but certainly recognizes the passing of certain qualities from generation to generation that, through their endurance, become immortal. To an extent, Keats seems to capture the undervalued reality of objects beyond the human centrism of his period that only recently Object-Oriented ontology underlines. Considering the view of a real amphora into the museum by the poet, the amphora acts as indirect access to truth. It is an independent object that exists by itself, although it is made in the past, it exceeds the conventions of time and space as well as a fixed meaning. Moreover, although the reality of its existence is more evident than its correlation with the poet's mental fascinations (imagination/inspiration), as an art-object also becomes a medium for the poet to create a new thing in itself, the amphora of the poem. In that sense, by using the "trendy" for his age theme of history, Keats is echoing future concerns of Realism; as Harman (2018) says, "art is not the production of knowledge about things, but it creates new things-in-themselves" (p. 105).

In his “Ode on a Grecian Urn” (lines 45-50), Keats places his aesthetic object in an isolated and timeless space from the social conditions that created it as the Aesthetic movement supporting the independence of the artwork from social life. Hence, poetically, he gave to his art-object a form that can speak to the man and guide him about the truth remaining in a way loyal to the humanistic spirit of his age and the social function of art. Keats’ commitment to the humanizing and ethical dimension of poetry distinguished him from the claims of radical Aestheticism. Still, his resistance did not help him to avoid the tension between the aesthetic and knowledge, that is, the tension that seems to result from the distance of the aesthetic by itself to become convincing as a source of knowledge. This matter of tension exists in parallel with the study of the aesthetic, from the time of Platonic Antilogike, “the art of giving contradictory arguments” (Moore, 2012: 15), as a dialectic process (knowledge in its higher stage of human cognition) (Plato, Republic, 2008: VII 533-C) in the pursuit of truth to Keats’ Aestheticism. The tension between aesthetic and knowledge also existed throughout the literary criticism of the Aesthetic movement and the new Aestheticism till the “tension between the object and its qualities” (Harman, 2018: 75) as the Speculative Realism points out. In literature, the tension between the aesthetic and knowledge has taken many names over time: Keatsian anxiety, aesthetic displacement, aesthetic conflict, and catastrophic change. Poetically, the tension between the aesthetic and knowledge leads indicatively to contrasting feelings, ambiguity, uncertainty, the unattainability of the prior desire, and the disorientation of the authorial power. This article sheds light on how Keats’ perception of beauty as knowledge/medium to truth is given in his poems as a way that the aesthetic triumphs over the appearance of the above conditions.

Keats perceives reality as moments that are flowing, but, it is not static, and it can be found through life, through the motion (Keats, 1990:426). In this sense, he grasps reality through changeability, a key feature in Object-Oriented Ontology (Harman, 2018:9). The elements of an unresting mind and the feeling of clarity compose a condition of ‘fineness,’ that is, the truth, the reality (Keats, 1990:381). Elizabeth Cook (1990), in the “Introduction” of her work *John Keats: The Major Works* writes: “(the Greek word *εὐάργεια* brings the two together) is entirely characteristic of Keats who apprehended reality as a continual process of manifestation” (p.xxiv). *Εὐάργεια*—in the way Cook mentions it—can be found in Keats’ perception of imagination as a condition which allows man to live in a thousand worlds (Keats, 1990: 428). For Keats’, reality and imagination co-exist in the production of history and human life. They are from the same substance. Like all the manners and customs of old societies, the material of the past, the urn—which Keats uses in “Ode to a Grecian Urn”—gives meaning to his imagination, and it creates a new product, event, art viz. casts reality. Keats’ relation with the past is transformed into an aesthetic experience. His poems “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer,” “On Seeing the Elgin Marbles,” “On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again,” “Ode to a Nightingale,” and “Ode on a Grecian Urn” are a transferring to the past through artistic activities such as literature, pottery, music, and sculpture. Keats’ imagination transforms the knowledge of art and history into a knowledge of the aesthetic experience capable of transferring the reader tactfully into different worlds and cultures. The art-objects and the past seem to be the motives for his creative process, and anything that motivates Keats’ imagination becomes as real as the products of his artistic process, the aesthetic experience. Thus, both the motives and the products of his creative process compose a new reality in themselves.

In “Kindling and Ash: Radical Aestheticism in Keats and Shelley,” Forest Pyle (2013) writes: “The poetic reflection of the workings and effects of the aesthetic is a necessary precondition for a genuinely radical aestheticism” (p. 430). Thus, the relation of the aesthetic with the history and knowledge can be better understood through “the relationship between art’s sensuous aspects and its ethical or political responsibilities”(Pyle, 2013: 430). More as a negotiation, than as an imposing of fixed opinions, Keats’ “Ode on a Grecian Urn” can be perceived as a poem that poses radical Aestheticism (lines 1-5 & 11-14). Keats places his aesthetic object, the urn, in a space that reflects history as a “Sylvan historian.” Still, the history it reflects is not of a particular time or place. In the specific poem, Keats—although he is an escapist as a Romantic poet—opposes the concept of time as an escape and orients his interest into the new reality which the art-object carries.

Similarly, Object-Oriented Ontology is in the route of saying that Derrida’s postmodern perception of time as an escape from presence fails. That is because “presence is merely a translation of an absent real object that can never appear in the flesh without becoming something other than it really is” (Harman, 2018: 201). Although the urn has Greek origins, the place of its exposition is unknown, if we know that Keats was inspired by his visit to the British Museum, there is still a displacement. The urn is a “foster-child of silence and slow time.” Although the use of the adjective “slow” refers to the word “time,” it stresses more the sense of the distance of a past condition. It is as the urn’s existence is distant, but it does not belong only to the past. It is a part of the history but only as an aesthetic object that its effect belongs to the continuum of human life. The urn seems to be timeless. The use of the words “quietness” and “silence” in the first two lines emphasizes the static, motionless, and unobtrusive state of the urn. Despite its static condition, in the next lines, it speaks, “to express a tale that is sweeter than the [human] rhyme,” like the melodies from the pipes that are depicted on it “Are sweeter” than the ones that are heard from the “sensual ear.”

The poem produces radical Aestheticism primarily based on its aesthetic object that is a product of art, an urn. Moreover, even though it is an artistic product produced by man, its beauty carries qualities over the one that man tries to produce through poetry (our rhyme) and music (Heard melodies). The qualities that the urn has are aesthetic. As such, they are not qualities connected with the sensible factors of hearing or talking but only the spiritual song (spirit ditties of no tone) of the imagination. In that way, Keats negotiates the perception of history as a continuum through the effect of an ancient artistic object which belongs to history as infinity and not as a past: “Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought / As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!” (lines 44-45). Furthermore, it stresses the importance of art as an aesthetic experience, the quality of art that can be experienced through the spiritual process of imagination, over the sensual experience of art. The materialization of art is useful when, apart from our senses, it provokes our thoughts too (lines 47-50).

The poem underlines a distinction between the art that we just see or hear and the art that inspires thoughts beyond its materialization. It is the art that inspires our imagination and suggests different places of action which are not defined by the factors of place and time or by the cause or purpose of their synthesis. The significance and beauty of the artistic object are experienced through the combination of mental and sensual human capacities and thus are real, true. The use of the urn as the aesthetic object secures the experience of the aesthetic, because of its artistic form, and places it in direct relation with the beauty and the truth that the aesthetic element can produce as a necessary

element in the imaginative process. Moreover, it reveals the plausible and flowing machinations of an artistic object in the creation or discovery of new entities like thoughts, new artistic objects, and new correlations between thoughts and objects. These are elements that Speculative Realism recognizes in objects as it highlights their value and establishes with integrity their production of reality. The Grecian urn orients the focus on the beauty of the art that is not only sensually experienced but is a psychic reality. The urn reveals the truth and promotes a radical aestheticism, isolating art from its past and reiterating it in the beauty of a flowing reality, the beauty of the inspired moment.

During the Romantic Period, art was perceived as independent from society, despite the acceptance of its possible social function. Art, as an activity incompatible with the ideology of utilitarianism, was not connected with the practical life of the bourgeois society. Thus, artistic creation was perceived as an ornamental product (Phinney 1991: 209). Keats' urn seems distant as much from its social context of production, ancient Greek society, as from the present too. Its purpose is perceived as a "standing" of inspired beauty; "it becomes visible as the pure work of art," as Gadamer refers to it in his theory of "aesthetic differentiation." For Gadamer, the urn affords aesthetic differentiation as "disregarding everything in which a work is rooted (its original context of life, and the religious or secular function which gave it its significance)" (qtd in Phinney, 1991: 212). So, the urn condenses the idea that an artistic product transcends the limits of history and culture by inspiring an independent world of beauty that is counterposed and equally real to the world of responsibilities and limitations of the secular life. Still, the choice of an object of the past introduces a problematization about the relationship between history and art. In the lines "What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape/ Of deities or mortals, or of both," (5-6) the urn appears to be a "carrier" of legends. The urn is more representative of an inspiring ideal past rather than a sample of its specific period. Thus, to understand the urn as a sufficient mode of understanding free from its historical context and perceive it only as "aesthetic," we have to distinguish its inadequacy as a representative of its time. As Isobel Armstrong points out about Adorno's method of exposing the Aesthetic: "The 'aesthetic' knows itself by what it is not. It is not life, history, ideology, production, but something that opposes them" (qtd in Leighton, 2007: 76). Similarly, Keats exposes his aesthetic object through its contradiction with the context that produced it.

The choice of a Greek amphora as his aesthetic object was partially a social trend of Greek culture during his time (Phinney, 1991: 211). What "saves" Keats' poetry to be perceived as 'fashionable' poetry of his time is the use of a social tendency in a way that escapes the established social perception of reality and suggests a new one. Keats's aesthetic object, which is the subject of the poem, distances itself from its Greek origins through the poet's new imaginative qualities, which he attributes to it. The representations on the urn inspire Keats to imagine the narration of tales that are not depicted and the playing of supreme melodies that cannot be heard. As Adorno (1997) points out: "If the subject is no longer able to speak directly, then at least it should speak through things, through their alienated and mutilated form"(p.118). The poet's visual contact with the urn— which belongs to reality—becomes the motive for the massive mobility of the poet's senses. Keats escapes to a new reality that consists of the view of legendary figures and places, the hearing of divine melodies played by pipes, and the watching of the customs and natural environment of a small town. The poet escapes to a reality consisted of the truth of original beauty. Keats transformed a Greek cultural product into

a transmitter of the Greek spirit (Kabitoğlu, 1992: 135). Keats' poetry attempts not to trade upon the ancient Greek grandeur but to transmit the ideal of its spirit, the immortality of its ideals as a source of unlimited inspiration and unchanging beauty. Even though the urn is ancient Greek, the qualities that it carries are not the particularity of a place and time but the beauty of its youthful figures that make the poet feel the eternal quality of human passion and love (lines 15-20). The spirit that inspires Keats is the unalterable quality of human need for passion as an inspiration to human imagination. Keats becomes particularly persistent in the inspiring quality of human passion in the lines 25-30. The line "All breathing human passion far above" underlines a passion that is beyond the human realm of feeling. It is a passion that only the act of imagination can seize, a new one kind of passion just seized (just and forever seized and interpreted differently by the poet, the poem, and its readers). Keats creates a synaesthetic passion—a human expression of love—as his momentary imagination seized it and gave it to its readers as his moment of truth. In this way, he invites them to experience in the same way their interpretation and truth as they get inspired by his poem.

In the "Ode on a Grecian Urn," the urn has an uncertain quality. It is a "foster-child of silence and slow time" and a "Cold pastoral," defining distance and immobility. At the same time, it is direct and a cause for animation, "being a friend to man" and inspiring the poet's inexhaustible imagination. The urn, as a friend to man, provides him with the knowledge of the truth of imagination and the reality that the aesthetic (as an urn for the poet and as a poem for the readers) can create—a multiplicity of unhindered perceptions, inspirations, and interpretations. Similarly, in "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles," the aesthetic object is an artistic object that shows the truth. Yet, unlike the urn, which 'speaks' directly the beauty of truth as a friend to the poet, the view of Elgin marbles leads him to 'discover' the truth of his distance from them (lines 1-14).

The poem begins with the poet's realization of his mortal nature in contradiction with the marbles' immortality. The poet's pain of his mortality is perceived as rudeness towards the magnitude of the marbles. In his effort to blend "The Grecian grandeur"/ the spirit of ideal art, which is immortal with his pain of mortality, the poet effaces his rudeness. This negative capacity comes in contrast with the gentle ideality of Greek art. At the end of the poem, there is no sign of the poet's relief from his pain. There is only the feeling of the distance from the significant and his inadequacy to converge with the ideal. The limits of man's mortal state contradict the quality of art to preserve its grandeur over time. Thus, art can be an inexhaustible source for truth/knowledge in contrast with the mortal state of man. In this poem, there is no description of the artistic creation as in the urn. What the reader perceives from "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles" is a quick look-understanding on their supremacy. The "Ode on a Grecian urn" is a long discourse about how art mobilizes the creative process for reaching the knowledge/finding the truth. Hence, "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles" seems to be a look at how man realizes his mortality and appreciates the ways that make his (imaginative) spirit immortal. The artistic object, apart from its simplified vision as a materialization of man's momentary imagination, it can reveal a new reality. A reality constituted by a sensual object (the poet's perception of the marbles) with real qualities (the poem that was created by this perception) and a real object (the Elgin marbles) with sensual qualities(as a source of inspiration). The poem seems to share a common rationale with Object-Oriented Ontology, subsequently its theorizing on four fundamental relations between sensual object, a real object, sensual qualities, and real qualities (Harman, 2018: 80). The magnitude of marbles is preserved through their lack of change in years. As

an eternal form, the marbles preserve the continuation of new perceptions out of a prime inspiration, as a milestone of man's ways of approaching the knowledge/ the truth, the realization that the art-objects are real enough to act as the medium for man to perceive the reality.

Essential elements of the two poems above also exist in Keats' "Ode to Psyche." In "Ode to Psyche," the dynamism of the poem is not based on its primary figure, that is, "the Psyche" but on the poet's "working brain." In "Ode to Psyche," the poet looks at the psyche and focuses not on her description but on the inspired thoughts that her realization has produced, reminding us of the way he has looked at the Elgin Marbles. Like in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn," in "Ode to Psyche," the poet creates a synaesthetic perception, but this time through elements in nature: "A brooklet, scarce espied:/Mid hush'd, cool-rooted flowers, fragrant-eyed" (lines 12-13). The vision of supernatural elements represents the poet's imaginative spirit, a vision that makes him a prophet and a priest of new thoughts: "Of pale-mouth'd prophet dreaming" (lines 34 & 49). Some lines after, the poet writes, "Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane / In some untrodden region of my mind,/ Where branched thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain" (lines 50-52). The poet is the energetic subject who builds a temple for the soul. This temple is a place in his mind, and inspiration that he never had before. Out of the blending of the sensual with the mental experience, "pleasant pain" and "branched thoughts, new grow," he would make his mind a landmark of knowledge "A bright torch," of pleasure "for thee all soft delight," and of love "To let the warm Love in!"

The power of the imaginative process to produce new perceptions and thoughts of love through the vision of Psyche comes in contrast to the old knowledge about it. The tension between aesthetic and history/past that we experience in "Ode on a Grecian urn" is visible in "Ode to Psyche" too. Psyche is the "latest born and loveliest vision far / Of all Olympus' faded hierarchy,"; but, even if she is the "brightest!" it is "too late for antique vows." Psyche is a part of a declined past. The new vision of Psyche is inspired through the poet's eyes, his momentary vision. In *The Aesthetic Development: The Poetic Spirit of Psychoanalysis*, Meg Williams (2010) discusses the common principles of poetry with that of psychoanalysis. She refers to what would be useful for a practicing analyst, claiming: "to suffer the meaning and learn from the present experience, memory and desire must be set aside" (p. 12). Thus, the significance of momentary knowledge is built on the refusal of the past. Between the "days so far retir'd" and the "Fluttering among the faint Olympians," it is the inspired mind of the poet which discovers the way that "warm Love" will be let in. The poet's working brain perceives the beauty around him and transforms it into new thoughts, viz. new perceptions of reality.

The widening of mind's awareness through the creative fusion of reality with imagination is not the only element in the interpretation of Keats' poems, which reminds us of the dialectic processes that Socrates suggests as knowledge of reality. In "Ode on Melancholy," although Keats refers to traditional themes and motifs—such as the inseparability of melancholy and joy—he is original in the use of the conflicting feelings of joy and sorrow. Keats insists that melancholy, though distinct from joy, exists in delight through "a process of penetration" (Kroeber, 1963: 266). In this poem sorrow and joy lead to alternating conditions (lines 25-26). Keats applies an "anti logical" perception of melancholy impregnated with delight. The feeling of sorrow 'impudently' exists in delight/pleasure, a condition commonly connected with its contradictory feeling of joy. Additionally, in Keats' lines, "But when the melancholy fit shall fall / Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud," melancholy,

which is regularly perceived as a negative aspect of human psychology, is perceived as a heavenly condition.

Although in romantic poems, the “I” of the poet dominates, in this poem, the poetic voice is in the second person. The poet’s addressing himself like he addresses another person is a kind of detachment from his subjectivity. In this way, he succeeds in having an objective perspective, or he expresses a matter of truth, creating, at the same time, a dialogical illusion. Alternatively, Keats refuses the “I” for himself and recognizes an “I” for his aesthetically inspired self. Similarly, Ortega (1975) explains that an object can be an “I.” In his crucial philosophical essay, both for Realism and aesthetics, he writes: “Everything, from the point of view within itself, is an I” (p. 134). The clarification of such a view comes by saying, “that an object is an ‘I’ not because it is conscious, but simply because it is” (Harman, 2018: 77). Thus, the fictional aesthetic self of Keats, which Object-Oriented Ontology perceives as an object, is an “I” solely because it just exists. Furthermore, the intense anxiety that the poet feels—instead of being expressed as a personal feeling—takes the form of general advice for a matter of a general truth: How and why sorrow is connected more with life than with death. The anxiety in the poet’s speech can be mostly perceived through the repetition of the negative “No” and “nor” which creates a stable rhythm of anticipation. The general subject of the first stanza (lines 1-10) condenses anxiety provoked by a possible lack. In the first eight lines, the poem consists of prohibitions/advice until the explanation of the above prohibitions’ reason in the last two lines of the first stanza. The poet warns for the necessity of “the wakeful anguish of the soul” to be preserved. According to Keats, sorrow is not a feeling that leads to death but a feeling that leads the soul to anxiety and delight. Sorrow carries her mysteries, and these mysteries, like life’s mysteries in general, should be explored. In his poem, Keats describes the feelings of joy and sorrow as they are giving way to each other. The passing of the mind from one condition to another (melancholy makes the mind joyful, and joy makes the mind sorrowful), the “wakeful anguish of the soul,” as is perceived through the poem, is the value of human life, the truth of it. A removing from the “anguish of the soul” (suicide/death), which the poet anxiously describes in the first verse, is a denial of the truth. According to the perceptions that are created by the poem, a dialectic process of thinking on conflicting conditions can lead to perceptions of truth.

In “The New Humanism of Keats’ Odes,” Karl Kroeber (1963) claims that the first eight lines of the poem are dominated by three classical references that are connected with death: The Lethe, the Proserpine, and the Psyche. Indeed, these references stand as an introduction to the first stanza’s subject, which is death/suicide. As the poem progresses in the second and the third stanza, these mythical figures “are not resurrected classical deities; they are embodiments of new powers, psychological powers which synthesize the shadowy traditions of antiquity with the sensory vividness of immediate experience” (p.266). Melancholy, Beauty, Joy, Pleasure, and Delight are fused in a poetic dialectic process that renegotiates their relationship and, in this way, widens their perceptions and their power to redefine what is valuable in life. Understanding that the interchange of man’s emotions is inevitable, the individual mind is not oriented only to the pursuit of delight but to the discovery of the mind’s processes, which are capable of transforming every human emotion into an awakening of human awareness.

The use of contrasting elements as a base for the widening individual awareness and as a process of widening the perceptions about reality through the artistic creation can also be found in Keats' "Ode on Indolence." In the poem contrasting emotions interchange in the same pattern that was described in the "Ode on Melancholy." However, the "Ode on Indolence" is a poem that focuses on the creative process of the poem. The poem's subject matter is the fluctuation of the poet between the emotion of apathy and active creativity based on matters of common sense to succeed artistically. At the beginning of the poem (lines 1-10), the poet is in general in a passive state, but the verbs "stepp'd, pass'd and shifted round" claim the mobility of the three figures, in contrast with the passive condition of the poet who just saw them before him. The figures are dressed 'placid' and 'grace' according to the standard ancient dressing code of sandals and white robes and reminiscent of figures in ancient creations like a marble urn. This connection with the past indicates some level of familiarity with the figures, but it is still unidentified. The perception of the figures as "Shades [which] return/...And they were strange to me," signifies the poet's ignorance about the origin, identity, and purpose of the figures' appearance. In the second stanza, the poet starts to wonder about his ignorance (line 11). However, more than his ignorance, the poet worries about the disturbance of his "idle days" (lines 13-15). The poet's state of idleness is not artistically passive. In opposition, the main problem of the poet is to "leave without a task" his "Idle days." He experiences his passivity as a "blissful cloud of summer" (line 16), and for this reason, he wishes his sense to be free from any state apart from "nothingness." In the lines, 19-20 aspires a sort of passivity. The poet's passivity, defined as his desire to be 'Unhaunted quite of all,' echoes the basic principle of Aestheticism, the creation of art which is free from any obligation apart from its aesthetic parameters. The description of laziness as a state where, "Pain had no sting, and Pleasure's wreath no flower" (line 18), detaches the conditions of pain and pleasure from elements that are commonly related to. The poet creates a perception of the process of artistic creation as a condition of indifference and detachment from old or familiar/usual bonds. The poet's passive condition signifies the attainment of his state of disinterestedness, an application of 'Negative capability' to increase artistic creativity.

In the third stanza, the poetic voice recognizes the three figures and reveals their names: Love, Ambition, and Poesy. He also reveals that the following of the figures would lead him to the distraction of his tranquillity (lines 23-24). The third time that the figures re-appear is a kind of intrusion. They arrive uninvited by the poet and, like "shadows," interrupt his state of tranquillity. However, the concluding stanza makes clear that the poet has decided not to fall into their temptation to come out of his indolence (lines 51 & 55-56). It is a moment of realization for the poet that the three figures are not real, but they are ghosts and day visions that do not differ from his countless night dreams. The lines 57-58 show that Love, Ambition, and Poesy should be perceived again as the shadowy figures "on the dreamy Urn," as an undefined part of the past which—although they partially comprise a temptation for the artist to deal with—are not more valuable than his visions of his passivity. The poet seems to perceive Love, Ambition, and Poesy as ghosts that he has to deal with during the workings of his creative imagination. Between these factors that traditionally every artistic common sense has to deal with and his "blissful cloud" of passivity, the poet chooses the latter as a better state for him to be artistically productive. In lines 59-60, his command of the Phantoms to vanish and never return shows the decision of the poet to comfort himself in his dreamy disinterestedness. The paradoxical desire of the poet to remain in indolence is expressed through the creation of an artistic product, his poem. Consequently, neither writing poetry nor being ambitious

about it should be a condition for the artist to create his art. “Ode on Indolence” leads us to the paradoxical perception that to be artistically consistent, viz. to produce a beautiful poem, the poet should move away from poetry and trust his visions of indifference above common sense.

Keats’ “Ode on a Grecian Urn” demonstrates that not only the creative process of an artistic product but also the perception of the artistic product can problematize the poet about its value-fineness as it preserves its free activity opposed to the reality that has created it. In his effort to capture the limits of the truth of his visions, the poet gets involved in a dialectic process of examining every possible perspective of the same subject, in this case of the aesthetic/ artistic object. Keats’ inspired visions, which are based on a Grecian urn’s drawings, lead toward conflicting perceptions of the artistic product (of the urn and the poem), warning through this way about the multiple aspects of the reality and the means of her shaping. Through Keats’ creative imagination, the urn is perceived as it transcends the earthly limits, or even renegotiates them. Keats’ unique personal experience—his vision of the urn—can be considered to be a process.

In contrast, the poet’s sensuous response to an art object is transformed into a mental jump to the unknown (another reality) and the uncertain and results in a spiritual search of the truth. Jean-Claude Salle (1972) notifies the transcending qualities of the urn, “its [urn’s] ambiguity is that of a poetic trance, leaving the mind in doubt whether it has been moved by a meaningless emotion or granted a glimpse of heaven” (p.81). There is no doubt that the urn is real, and its value is not based on its effects on the poet. Similarly, there is also the reality of the sight of the urn as the stimulus for the poet to put his creative imagination in action. In this respect, the poet’s imaginative capacity unravels what can exist beyond what the visual sense can provide. It is the poet’s transcendence into the unknown as a movement towards the knowledge that could not be attained by the usually limited uses of the senses. The ideality of the urn that is mentally captured by the poet re-substantiates the perception of the urn from an expression of the poet’s ambiguous thoughts to an expression of reality’s relativity concerning an artistic/aesthetic object. The urn is real, and a part of its reality speaks the poet’s combined sensual and spiritual perceptions of it. Through the elements of ambiguity as well as the fusion of the actual and the ideal, the poetic urn could lead to a new experience. This is an experience of the truth not as a finalized actuality based on a regular understanding through the senses but as an apocalyptic reality, one based on the inexhaustible imaginative responses of the poet to the art, the urn.

According to Helen Vendler (1973), the belated experiential beginnings in Keats’ poems point out primarily the distinction of the two kinds of the poet’s experience: the actual one that is the stimuli for sensual responses and the psychological one which shapes the inspiring form of the poem. This change in time signifies how “a psychological beginning can so condition a poem that the verse must change its landscape and its attitudes” (p.595). This change may also be a sign of the artistic power to form an authentic experience, a felt one like the melancholic psychology of the poet over the actual events in his life. The postponed revelation of the experiential base of the poem may be perceived at least as a means of widening the perspective of reality, if not as degradation of actuality.

The negotiation of the view and understanding of reality as an “indecisive” condition may also be clarified through the poem’s “Ode to a Grecian urn” fluctuation on its last statement about truth. The fluctuation regarding who has the power to say the truth is based on the poem’s series of

ambiguous perceptions about the role of the artistic object (the urn and the poem) as a means of knowledge/truth/beauty. Art's role is examined under its relations with the concepts of spatiality and temporality. Notably, the poem's interpretation stands ambivalent towards the aesthetic's contextualization based on specific time and space and— in general— towards the meaning of the urn's immutability. However, James O'Rourke (1987), in his "Persona and Voice in the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn,'" supports that the poem clarifies the speaker's belief on a kind of an a priori ability of the urn to tell a story (p.35). In this respect, it shows the poet's intention to attribute to the urn abilities out of the limited beauty of its form and to perceive it as an embodiment of a message (Spitzer, 1962: 73). Thus, the poet only admits that the urn's narration transcends the limits of urn's spatiality without revealing the content of its narration. Only in the last two lines of the poem, the poet declares, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." Referring to the gap of knowledge between urn's ability to narrate and the content of its narration, O'Rourke (1987) mentions, "The urn can only depict, but the implications that would have pursued in the questions of the Ode's first stanza are beyond its powers of representation. A poet who would pursue these implications would need to get beyond the realm of the urn" (p.35).

In any case, the aesthetic in the form of art's beauty (of the urn and the poem) seems to be the focus of the poem. In the final lines of the poem, there is the revelation of truth as beauty and beauty as truth. Although throughout the poem, the poet is identified with the poetic persona who addresses questions to the artistic object, in the final lines, there is a displacement of the poetic persona's identification. The poetic persona seems to be identified with the urn, which eventually answers the poet's previous questions. This kind of identification qualifies the perception that through art, man can find the truth and that the content of this truth is beauty. In this respect, the aesthetic is perceived as the possible or available answer to the poet's above questions and to the poet's vacillation about the path to which the artistic object leads him.

Moreover, in the final lines of the poem, the attribution of beauty and truth to the urn distances the poet from an omniscient authorial role and places him in a dialectic poetic progression while he examines the conflicting qualities of the urn. The poet perceives the urn as a historian but also as a narrator of a tale beyond human standards; the poet perceives the urn as a "cold pastoral" but also as "a friend to man." Examining these conflicting qualities of the urn, the poet concludes the truth that his encountering with the aesthetic can result in beauty. Regardless of who utters the final lines, the urn or not, the message in the closing of the poem is the significance of the truth of the aesthetic above all other considerations or other forms of knowledge. The closing lines of the poem can be perceived more as a statement of the truth than as a personal authorial opinion. These lines seem to answer the ambiguous points of the poem—the poet's primary questions—and state the poem's self-consciousness towards its pursuits and its effect on the perception of the truth.

Jack Stillinger (1997), in "Multiple Readers, Multiple texts, Multiple Keats," claims that the interaction between the author and the text is a "complex adaptive system" which changes and becomes more complicated, especially after the reader's involvement (p. 564). In that sense, Stillinger seems to perceive the text not as a form of fixed ideas but as an open field of interaction between the author and his/her creation, the author and the reader, the text and its reader. The text's different interpretations are equally valuable. However, multiple interpretations of the same text reduce the

authorial power by limiting the perception of the author as omnipotent. Keats' multiple versions of important works, in combination with the existence of different and contradicting meanings in the same text, result in multiple interpretations and the redistribution of the power from the author to the readers as co-determinant of the poem's meaning and perceptions out of it. In any case, such a multiplicity in all aspects shifts the interest from the discovery of the real meaning to the meaning of an aesthetic object on the understanding of the multidimensionality of what is real.

Keats' ambiguous and contradictory details on the same text depict the poet's "self-division" (p.559) as Stillinger (1997) named it and a condition of "mystic oxymoron" (qtd in Stillinger, 1997: 563) as Kenneth Burke defined it. The obvious juxtaposition of contrasting elements in the line "Welcome joy, and welcome sorrow" from "A song of Opposites" and the intellectually demanding analysis of the mismatching elements in the poems "Ode to a Nightingale," "Ode on a Grecian Urn," and "Ode to Autumn" provide material for multiple interpretations. Notably, in the sixth stanza of the "Ode to a Nightingale," the speaker declares that more than ever he perceives the condition of death as richness; soon after, however, he seems to reject his perception as he refers to the unavoidability of his sad mortal fate to "become a sod." With the same easiness, after the intervention of only one line, "such an ecstasy" becomes a "high requiem." Similarly, in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn," there are two points of doubtful compatibility. In the lines 15-20, the young lover in the urn would never kiss his beloved, but she would not leave either. She would always remain to wait for his kiss and his love.

In the same way, in one of the following stanzas (lines 31-40), there is the description of some people on the way to a green altar, but the speaker does not make clear if eventually these people ever reach their destination. The only information is that they will probably never return in the little town since "streets for evermore / Will silent be" and desolate. Analyzing the "Ode to Autumn," Stillinger (1997) points out that the readers encounter "first, a series of statements about how beautiful the season is; then the realization that all this beauty is dying; and finally, if we put these two contrary notions together, the idea that somehow death is beautiful" (p. 563). The matching of ideas commonly perceived as contradictory—such as death and beauty—composes a poetic complexity that invites rather than distances the reader to examine it. The poet seems to follow a path of alternity to give a form to his inspiration. And that is precisely the challenge that his readers have to pass through to analyze his poems. Keats forces the reader to abandon every fixed opinion and, through his new alternative perceptions of beauty, inspire a wide range of readers' interpretations and perceptions of life. The use of contrasting ideas under the same text inspires an ambiguity related to the meaning of the poem, and Keats' poetic style of uncertainty appears to lessen the authorial power but negotiates in general if not the cognitive qualities of an aesthetic object, its reality. If the reader accepts the poet's suggestion of alternative perceptions of fixed concepts, he is led to stay focused on the aesthetic reality offered by the poem. The reader's aesthetically oriented seclusion brings him towards a kind of a non-full a specific knowledge as a limitation. Thus, what critically we name ambiguity or uncertainty in Keats' poems may also be interpreted as freedom or "a form of an unjustified true belief," as Harman (2018) claims for the aesthetic (pp. 180-181).

Much of Keats' poetry depicts the poet's anxiety about the 'fate' of his poetry as part of his general interest in the purpose of poetry. This interest is notified to his poetry and accompanied by his waving

perception of art as a humanized and ethical process and as a supreme and self-oriented process. Keats' wavering about the usefulness of poetry is characterized by two essential sub kinds of vacillation. It is the poet's indecision about art's relationship with history and the poet's preservation of his unselfishness in his poems as he struggles to pursue self-knowledge during the creative process of the poem. In his poem "Sleep and Poetry," Keats creates the perception of a humanized poetry, which is oriented towards the good of man. Part of this ethical dimension of poetry is the rejection of the poet's egocentrism: "If I do hide myself, it sure shall be/ In the very fane, the light of Poesy" (lines 275-6). Based on Keats' poem, good poetry is the poetry in which the poet secures his disinterestedness and enforces the perception of the poem as an autonomous power that exercises a positive influence on man by engaging him in 'high' thoughts. Especially involves him in the reality that an independent aesthetic can indicate. So far, through his poem, Keats achieves the coexistence of a supreme and ethical art/poetry, and, in a way, he points out the ethical implications of a poetry marked by self-denial. However, in his later poems, Keats is more oriented in the pleasurable aspects of the aesthetic than in its ethical perspectives. In the introduction to his sonnet, "A dream, after reading Dante's Episode of Paolo and Francesca," states that he found a "delightful enjoyment" in an imaginary experience of Hell (Keats, 1990: 81). Such a statement reveals the dislocation of the aesthetic element from Heaven to Hell, offers a new perception of Hell as a place of joy, and presents the poet as indifferent towards the perception of beauty as an experience that improves us morally.

Keats' setting free of the aesthetic from its ethical obligations—in parallel with his tendency to preserve his disinterestedness in his poems—points out the question of what kind of knowledge is provided by poetry that holds out both ethical values and the poet's subjectivity. This question returns us to the examination of Keats's poems through the relationship of aesthetics with the concept of history. Rajan (1998), in his analysis of Keats' "Hyperion," writes: "Keats felt the pressure of history by his turn to epic, a form homologous with history" (p. 340). Moreover, he observes that Keats correlates the aesthetic with history, placing the aesthetic as a central concept to history as "it depicts the passing of authority from Hyperion, who has no association with art, to Apollo, who does" (p. 342). Thus, Keats uses history to pass a kind of authority to art. However, Rajan notifies that the abrupt ending of the poem and the poet's indecision about Apollo's youth reveals the poet's weakness to meet this challenge (p. 343). The figure of young Apollo acting as an aesthetic figure and, at the same time, one of resistance reveals that the aesthetic's position concerning history is not established yet (p. 343).

In "The Fall of Hyperion," Keats renegotiates the place of the aesthetic concerning history, reexamining poetry's ethical aspect as good for the world and the value of imagination by itself through his self-criticism as a poet (lines 8-11). Primarily, Keats notifies poetry as something sacred and mysterious through "The fine spell of words" leads imagination to higher uses than that of superficial charm and enchantment (lines 154-160). However, if poetry serves humanitarian values with the purpose of the comfort and the good of man, the poet comes closer to a limited and rationalized art rather than an inspired use of the imagination. This is a perception of art which cancels the sacredness of poetry as a means of transcendence from reality and unraveling of a new reality. As such, its usefulness is restricted to the acceptance of fixed perceptions of human reality like death, agony, and mortality. Keats attempts to negotiate the use of poetry through the divine figure of Moneta. To find knowledge, he should move out of the earthly limits, out of reality. Through

Moneta, the poet sees what a god can see; thus, to see the past and to find his identity and his place, he has to move out of himself. However, the fact that the poem remains incomplete does not reassure the self-image of the poet. Also, it does not close the open topic of poetry's meaning. Art still dangles between an unearthly "unworthiness" of the poet's dream and vision and an earthly humanistic pursuit. Jacques Khalip (2006) claims that "in the incomplete epic 'The Fall of Hyperion' Keats intimates that poetry's meaning maybe is a posthumous affair" (p. 905). In this respect, the poet's experience of lost identity during his effort to evaluate his poetry may point out that the exploration of art's value leads to the rejection of any interest, which may be ethical, or even self-interest. Thus, art's meaning may be an affair inquired through thinking procedures indifferent to reality.

Through his poems, Keats both condenses the complexities that might exist during the poet's effort to feel the pulse of the aesthetic as a mode of approaching knowledge and reveals its "openness" in creating reality. In his effort to escape from the ugliness of reality, the Romantic poet offers an alternative medium, the solution of a concentration on the aesthetic, humanistic, or isolated. His effort to escape reality through his focus on the aesthetic leads him to further turbulence and ambiguity concerning the actual value of his poetry's meaning. However, despite the confusion and the uncertainty of his poem's meaning, his escapism is so artistically beautified that it elevates beauty to a rebellious way of perceiving reality/truth. His poems epitomize the perception of truth/reality as beauty and the beauty as self-referential reality. In Keats' poetry, conflicting concepts, ideas, and conditions become stimuli for multiple perceptions of the essence of life and expand the perspectives for new correlations of beauty with knowledge and reality. Overall, through its prior orientation with the aesthetic object and the exploration of its functionality, John Keats' Romantic poetry recollects indirect knowledge about what can be real. Keats diverges from the limits of the philosophical preoccupations of his age, not only by using traditional concepts in new formations but also by radiating through his poetic schemes subsequent, futuristic inquiries of Realism about an independent reality of objects beyond the human mind.

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