

CM Poésie romantique

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CM 1

General background: a “revolutionary” transition

Historical context

It is important to bear in mind that the four poets mainly represented in the anthology, in spite of their affinities, belong to two generations:

Wordsworth	1770-1850	/ Coleridge	1772-1834
Shelley	1792-1822	/ Keats	1795-1821

The first two belong partly to the 18th century, partly to the 19th. Their intellectual life has its roots in the 18th c. This is not true for the other pair who belong almost exclusively to the 19th. This is particularly important if we consider the fact that a cardinal event took place, on the European scale, when Wordsworth and Coleridge were young men: the bursting out of the French Revolution. Both Wordsworth and Coleridge took part, in their way, in the revolutionary ferment, ideals, activities: W journeyed through France in his early twenties, had a love affair with a French young woman (his daughter Caroline was born of that union), struck a friendship with a French officer from the Revolutionary army, a “Girondin.” Coleridge published a magazine, gave lectures and canvassed, spread the Revolutionary faith in South-West England (he reports in his autobiography that he was suspected of being a spy because he was overheard speaking of “Spi-noza” in a country tavern). Shelley, as for him, kept his revolutionary faith throughout his life, even if it was more idealised and intellectualised. He got married with the daughter of the main “radical” philosopher of the time, William Godwin.

The problem of the transition from the 18th to the 19th centuries is a particularly interesting one. History obeys a kind of interior rhythm, divides itself as it were naturally and from the inside into different “periods” or eras: between the two centuries we can observe both a perfect continuity and a complete break, disruption. Somewhere between the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th c. the whole intellectual landscape was transformed, an “epistemological break” had taken place. What happens looks like an effect of “dissolve” in a film, a technique used to create a transition from one image to another: instead of a clear-cut juxtaposition, the first image gradually vanishes and is replaced by the new one. A change in “kind” is suddenly operated, new frameworks of thought emerge, the vision of life is renewed.

But this can only take place in the context of wider changes: changes in the political systems which govern the relationships between men within society, changes in the social and economic structures of societies, changes in the overall conception of arts and aesthetics.

If we consider the three major fields of reference: economy, ideology, aesthetics (the same revolutionary spirit, the same concept of “revolution”, whether in a literal or in a figurative meaning, may be applied to characterise the changes which take place in these three fields at about the same period in different countries of Europe, in a similar spirit of “radical transformation.”

In the field of economic and social relationships, we can speak of a radical transformation with the growth of economic liberalism, the development of large-scale industry, the expansion of trade, the demographic revolution (concentration of the population in industrial areas): all these phenomena fall under the label “Industrial Revolution.”

In politics and ideology, broadly considered, the revolutionary spirit was marked by the conjunction of two principles : the assertion of the rights of the individual, and the growth of the spirit of nations.

In arts, a “revolution” on a European scale (it started in Germany) which replaces the ideal of “imitation” (the famous principle of “mimesis,” which was the utmost principle of perfection and beauty in the classical age) with that of inspiration and creation (“poiesis”)—poetry becomes an analogon of creation—, and which shifts the central dictate of art from “rule” to “feeling,” thus fulfilling the properly “aesthetic” function of art: the word “aesthetic” was forged in the middle of the eighteenth century to express the idea that beauty is not submitted to rules but “affects the senses” and gives rise to “feelings.”

Each time a specific birthplace and trademark for each of these three orders of phenomena (France, England, Germany) but a diffusion, circulation, ramification throughout Europe.

As regards the development of “thought” philosophically considered, two main currents come into opposition: British empiricism and German idealism. Philosophy in the eighteenth century is dominated by the empirical tradition of the British school (at the start, a refusal of “innate” ideas). It opens a space of freedom for man and makes him someone unique and irreplaceable. Wordsworth and Coleridge, in spite of their distrust of scepticism, as expressed notably by Hume, felt an early enthusiasm for philosophers like David Hartley, who built up a complete system of man linking the sensations, which are the basis of his experience and personality, to his feelings, and eventually to his moral and spiritual aspirations. According to that system, man thus develops as a complete and unique being.

This “empirical” tradition gradually reached its limits and gave way to “idealism,” first under the systematic attack of Kant (who criticised Hume’s notion of causality and postulated the existence of “a priori” categories of the understanding), then in the wake of the revolutionary faith and ideals: Fichte, for instance, asserts the

transcendent value of the self. What was under attack was the “materialistic,” “mechanistic,” “atomistic” philosophy of the 18th c: it deprives man of his will and freedom. After his early phase of revolutionary faith, Coleridge’s main concern was to build a philosophical and religious system including a “Logos” (a philosophy of language), such as should free man from the “errors” of materialistic philosophy, and open a space for his moral aspirations, create a space of transcendence.

CM2

The concept of poetry in Romantic theory: from early “associations” to the transcendent “One”

Main works of reference to study the theory of the British romantics :

Wordsworth : prefaces to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800, 1802) and to *Collected Poems* (1815)

Coleridge : *Biographia Literaria* (1817)

Shelley : “A Defence of Poetry” (composed 1821)

Keats : *Letters*

Main outlines

1. Wordsworth and Coleridge

- against “poetic diction” and the cult of ornament, personification, etc.: speech as the “dress of thought,” poetic form is added to ordinary speech to embellish it. Gave rise to a passionate debate between the two poets on the nature of poetic language. For W there is no essential difference between good prose and poetry. C endeavoured to adjust this conception with which he could not completely sympathise. For him a poem has a specific purpose that we do not find in prose: produce pleasure through an adequation of the parts and the whole (idea of organic form).
- theory of poetic language as a language of emotions and passions (“passionate” discourse), both W and C accepted the theory developed in the second part of the eighteenth c. according to which poetry is anterior to prose (cf W’s use of onomatopoeias, C’s imitation of an ancient manuscript in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”).
- cult of “nature” (something very different from “human nature” in the 18th c., which is a kind of “norm”): for the romantics, nature stands for “creation” at its most original, unadulterated, primitive. The beauty of nature is “permanent,” an unchanging reference, an absolute touchstone, “the anchor of my thought,” a refuge. Nature is a set of forms, beautiful in themselves, but also a vital principle (the secret life of things), an energy, a movement;
- theory of “associations”: man is framed by his “associations,” which are activated by states of “excitement”: a sudden encounter, a vision, an epiphany.
- man as a victim of society, figure of the outcast, the pariah. Best example: the ancient mariner has sinned against the order of the universe by killing the albatross in an act of free will and is freed from his curse by blessing the water-snakes.
- vocation of poetry to say the truth, celebration of truth which cannot be apprehended by mere reason, such as is embodied, for instance, by the child. Best example: “We are seven,” dialogue between the adult and the child about death, refusal to separate the living from the dead.
- quest of the self, growth of the mind, notion of self vs man and human nature, what human beings possess in common, stability of norms.
- theory of the imagination: “esemplastic,” shapes into one. Concept of “oneness” (Keats), “one life within us and abroad” (Coleridge): the very end of poetry. Perception of the unity of things, of the universe, celebration of the “life” of the universe, adequation (union) of thought and feeling.

2. Shelley and Keats

- philosophy of beauty, adequation truth/beauty, a more idealistic conception of poetry. The poet lives in the dream of beauty. K compares the working of poetic imagination to Adam’s dream in Genesis: “he awoke and found it truth”. Affinity with the world of essence (“fellowship with essence”), transmutation of the world into a spiritual universe.
- Keats: intense experience of pain, suffering, familiarity with death + cult of sensation for sensation’s sake (moral/aesthetic dimension)
- Shelley: the poet as prophet
- mythical dimension, revival of myth and mythology (Prometheus, Hyperion, Endymion...). The poet becomes a myth-maker.

Detail and commented quotations

1. Wordsworth: excerpts from the prefaces to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800, 1802) and to *Collected Poems* (1815)

Poetry

1.1 "illustrate the manner in which our **feelings** and **ideas** are **associated** in a state of **excitement**"

[a state of excitement (the elementary stage of "passion": cf. 1.4) activates the circulation between feeling and idea ; feeling is originally produced by the sensation as affected by pain and pleasure ; feeling is sensation as affected with a quantity of pain and pleasure—vs sensation as such, "raw sensation."

"associated" : associations are "random" originally, but gradually they dig channels in the nervous system and build up systems owing to the operation of "custom"]

1.2 "follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature"

[eg : "tracing the maternal passion through many of its more subtle windings ; accompanying the last struggles of a human being at the approach of death ; showing the perplexity and obscurity which in childhood attend our notion of death, or rather our utter inability to admit that notion . . ."]

The poet

1.3 "a man who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility had also thought long and deeply"

["our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings"]

Passion

1.4 [a definition by the philosopher David Hume] "A violent and sensible emotion of the mind when any good or evil is presented, or any object which, by the original formation of our faculties, is fitted to excite an appetite"

1.5 "In describing any passions whatsoever, the mind will upon the whole be in a state of enjoyment"

Pleasure and pain

1.6 "we have no sympathy but what is propagated by pleasure. . . . Whenever we sympathize with pain it will be found that the sympathy is produced and carried on by subtle combinations with pleasure"

[W indebted to David Hartley, an important eighteenth-century British philosopher: 1) basic situation = "sympathize with the pain of others" ; but the working of sympathy is far more complex and may induce us in a similar way to 2) rejoice at the happiness of others, 3) rejoice at their unhappiness, 4) grieve at their happiness]

1.7 "the end of poetry is to produce excitement in coexistence with an overbalance of pleasure"

[man's psychological and moral system is made of subtle combinations of pain and pleasure ; "delight" for instance in Burke [Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, 1754] is analysed as distinct from simple pleasure = the withdrawal [removal] of pain and danger > linked with the experience of the sublime > combination in W of pathos and sublimity.

Imagination

1.8 "disposition to be **affected** by absent things as if they were present"

1.9 "In poetry it is the imaginative only, viz. [namely] that which is conversant with, or turns upon **infinity**, that powerfully affects me."

2. Coleridge: excerpts from *Biographia Literaria*, *Notebooks*, etc.

Thought/feeling

2.1 "I **feel** strongly and I **think** strongly; but I seldom feel without thinking or think without feeling"

2.2 "no man was ever yet a great **poet** without being at the same time a profound **philosopher**"

[C asserts the "philosophical" ambition of poetry : to search for a superior truth, for the hidden meaning of things, to lift the veil of the invisible. More ambitious than W : what triggered his inspiration was more complex, more elaborate than W's relatively simple "experiences," encounters. Main examples: longer poems written like complex parables ("Christabel," "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" : the one was left unfinished, the other was completed with a "gloss", because their very meaning eluded him . . .) ; the shorter "Conversation poems," directly addressed to a close relationship (his son in "Frost," Wordsw. and Dorothy in "Nightingale", his close friend Charles Lamb in "Lime-tree Bower"), written on a casual but falsely simple tone and dedicated to the exploration of philosophical truths, such as the transformation/metamorphosis of the world into a spiritual universe under the power of sympathy. Ex: epiphany in "Lime-tree" 41-44 : "less gross than bodily." Last : poems written as pure "visions" or dreams, dictated by the unconscious, e.g. "Kubla Khan" which conveyed into words a poetic vision under the power of opium]

"feel/think" : more "feeling" than "thinking" in W (organic sensibility), the reverse in C . . . (a more intellectual sensibility, less "appetites").

Symbol, idea

2.3 ". . . all that meets the **bodily sense** I deem

Symbolical, one **mighty alphabet**

For **infant minds**"

[esoteric tradition of poetry : the universe as a secret system of signs into which man has to be initiated]

2.4 "An idea, in the highest sense of that word, cannot be conveyed but by a symbol"

[post-Kantian conception of "idea" : distinct from mere understanding ; eludes the grasp of analytical reason ; an a priori principle. The "symbol" is the medium through which "ideas" are revealed]

2.5 "an abridgement of nature"

2.6 [a symbol is] "characterized by a translucence of the special in the individual, or of the general in the special, or of the universal in the general. Above all by the **translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal**. It always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that unity of which it is the representative."

Imagination

2.7 "the esemplastic power" (= "shape into one")

2.8 "the laboratory in which thought elaborates essence into existence"

2.9 "that reconciling and mediatory power which, incorporating the reason in images of the sense . . . gives birth to a system of symbols, harmonious in themselves and consubstantial with the truths of which they are the conductors."

2.10 "the imagination then I consider either as primary or secondary. The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as **a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM**. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former. . . . it dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to **re-create** . . . it struggles to **idealize** and to **unify**.

The fancy is indeed no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space."

3. P. B. Shelley

Background :

- Plato ("intellectual beauty")
- Rousseau, Godwin (ideal of social reform, cult of reason)
- Rejects Wordsworth's idea of nature as a moral guide
- Shares with Coleridge the concept of organic form.

Theory

- Central assumption of Shelley's poetics (see "*A Defence of Poetry*"): belief in a form of utmost perfection called "the One," the "transcendent Absolute" (indifferently equated with the true, the good, the beautiful, which in his system are all equivalent).
- This transcendent "One" is a **creative power** which "models all the elements of this mixed universe to the purest and most perfect shape which it belongs to their nature to assume."

Just as each man's mind is an equivalent particle of the Absolute, the poet (like poetry itself) "**participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one**"

[cf similar concepts in C, W, K . . .]

- Poetic **inspiration**: apprehension of the perfect unitary form through the mediation of imagination

As opposed to a "story," which is a mere catalogue of detached facts only connected by "time, place, circumstance, cause and effect," the true poetic form "defeats the curse which binds us to be subjected to the accident of surrounding impressions."

- Conception of the **poet-prophet**: not a mystical gift for foretelling events, but an apprehension of eternal order

[the poet "beholds the future in the present"]

Prophecy is an attribute of poetry because futurity is a temporal attribute of eternity.

- Shelley founds his poetics on the **organic unity** of the work of art. Apprehension of unity = divine power within the mind, "visitations of the divinity in man." The mind possesses a particle of "**the one spirit's plastic stress**" which organizes the true world. Purpose of the highest poetry: "approximate" the experience of the absolute order (which is what gives the most intense and purest pleasure).

J. Keats

1. Neoplatonism, neoplatonic philosophy of beauty

"I have loved the principle of beauty in all things" (Shaftesbury)

History

two main periods

1) Beginnings, school of Alexandria. The Neoplatonist school founded by Plotinus in III^d c. A.D. Main representatives : Plotinus (studied philosophy at Alexandria, taught it at Rome, had a great influence on religious thinking and on the Renaissance), Porphyry, Iamblichus.

2) Italian Renaissance, school of Florence (Florentine Academy).

Ficino, the leader of that school, devoted his life to the translation and interpretation of Plato's dialogues, interpreting Plato in the light of the neoplatonism of Plotinus (Ficino translated the whole of Plotinus). The Florentine Academy thus developed the living tradition of Platonism, which appears in Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare.

Theory

Neoplatonism is based on the belief in a principle of unity which transcends the flux of the material world. It is opposed to all types of "naturalistic" philosophies, which claim that nothing is permanent or absolute, that the only source of knowledge is sensory impressions. Neoplatonism is founded upon the denial of the reality of matter. As in Plato, the whole "natural" world is a world of illusion.

One of the central points of the neoplatonic doctrine is its philosophy of beauty, its concept of a "chain of beauty." Ideal beauty exists in God (also called the "Original Essence") alone. But God, contemplating his own beauty, loved it and desired to "propagate" it beyond itself, in a series of "emanations"—to the Mind, the Soul, and the various elements (plants, animals) which are part of the material world. Each order of emanation possesses a "reflection" of ideal beauty, beauty is the "chain" that links together the various orders of emanation, from the highest forms of the spirit to the lowest forms of matter.

Love thus becomes a desire to "propagate" beauty (cf. Keats, in the letter which best summarizes his neoplatonic beliefs : "for I have the same Idea of all our Passions as of Love they are all in their sublime [= dans leur aspect sublime], creative of essential Beauty."), as God did with his own beauty. One may distinguish different levels : the mere instinct of procreation ; the desire for the perpetuation of the beauty of the mind, i.e. artistic creation ; and the desire for the reunion of the soul with God (ultimate stage of mystic love).

In the neoplatonic quest, one rises from a love of beauty in material things to a love of ideal beauty, a reunion with the "original essence," a "**fellowship with essence**" [Keats, *Endymion*]. This may be attained in death, or temporarily during life by means of "ecstasy," "prophetic vision," climactic moments of "epiphany" when the sensuous perception of the world is transcended and dissolved. In old forms of mysticism, such a state is (theoretically at least) reached by discarding sensation, negating the body through the discipline of fasting and contemplation, by liberating one's soul through the repression of physical sensation - whereas in "modern" forms of mysticism, ecstasy is reached by means of sensation: "O for a life of sensations rather than of Thoughts" (Keats). Poets like Wordsworth or Keats reject abstraction—what the latter calls "consequitive reasoning"—which violates the organic process of nature.

2. Imagination

Imagination becomes the only faculty by which man can reach truth. It can be defined as **the faculty of apprehending truth in the form of beauty**, of converting beauty into truth: "What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth." Beauty is converted into truth under the guidance of imagination. Imagination introduces us to that perfect world of the unchanging, "foreshadows" reality to come. Just as human life is "repeated" in a spiritual form in Heaven, imagination allows us to catch a glimpse of the "Empyrean" (the sphere of the highest heaven), a world of perfect truth, divine essence. The evocation of Adam's dream in *Genesis* - the perfect poet's dream - best epitomizes the poet's aspiration to a fusion of sense and spirit. Just like Adam discovering Eve, the poet wants to wake up and discover the world (that emanation of divine essence, of spiritual reality) as he saw it in his dream:

Letter to Benjamin Bailey, 1817: "**What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth. . . . The Imagination may be compared to Adam's dream - he awoke and found it truth.**"

[Adam's dream : Genesis 1.21-25:

And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept : and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This *is* now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh : she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife : and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed]

3. "Negative capability" (the capacity of absorption into the essence of things)

In such a philosophy of beauty, perception and imagination, the poet becomes, ideally, some kind of active/passive being who both perceives the created world and creates it anew. The world has no existence till it is perceived by a human mind, perception calls for the cooperating creativity of the mind ("we half-perceive, half-create," Coleridge writes). Knowledge, which is nothing but agreement with reality, union of man and nature, is achieved through a fusion of object and mind, of perceived object and perceiving mind - thanks to the intensity of the imagination.

Hence this dual image of the poet we find in Coleridge ("The Eolian Harp"), Shelley ("Ode to the West Wind"), Keats : he is both the one who gives the universe life and unity, who awakens its "harmonies" - and the one who is best receptive to the influences of the outside world, who is the best "passive agent." In the "Eolian Harp," (an object, and musical instrument, chosen as symbolic meeting-place of the self and the outside world), the poet is now the creative, musical wind, now the strings of the harp caressed by that wind. In "Ode to the West Wind," he, again, is now the "leaf, the wave, the cloud" carried by the wind, now the wind itself - and he aspires at being both. In Keats the imagery is different but the idea is the same : is it better, he asks, to "sit like Jove" or "fly like Mercury ?" - to "let (ourselves) open our leaves like a flower and be passive and receptive" or to "glut beauty on a morning rose" ("Ode on Melancholy") - to be the flower, or the bee ? The question is never answered but in an ambivalent way. The two functions, to Keats's eyes, are but the reversed image of each other, the bee is nothing without the flower. Thus the poet can be both the one who, like the bee, "sips," "gluts," "feeds" on beauty under all its possible forms, and the one who is essentially receptive to the qualities of the outside world, whose main virtue is a "sympathetic absorption" in the essential significance of objects (cf. Keats's judgment of Shakespeare the dramatist : he was "the least of an egotist that it was possible to be," he was "all that others were.") Imagination has an essentially "sympathetic" character, it requires that capacity of projection, identification, osmosis which began to be theorized in the 18th century as the corollary of "self-love." Through that identification, the self gets purified, gets rid of its "disagreeables" (what does not agree, what is not in keeping), reaches a state of acceptance, of fusion with the outside world, an ideal of "disinterestedness."

Quotes from *Endymion*

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever :
Its loveliness increases ; it will never
Pass into nothingness, but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.
Therefore, on every morrow, are we wreathing
A flowery band to bind us to the earth,
Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth
Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,
Of all the unhealthy and o'er darkened ways,
Made for our searching—yes, in spite of all,
Some shape of beauty moves away the pall
From our dark spirits.

. . .
Nor do we merely feel these essences
For one short hour; no, even as the trees
That whisper round a temple become soon
Dear as the temple's self, so does the moon,
The passion poesy, glories infinite,
Haunt us till they become a cheering light
Unto our souls, and bound to us so fast
That, whether there be shine or gloom o'ercast,
They always must be with us, or we die.

Apollo's upward fire
Made every eastern cloud a silvery pyre
Of brightness so unsullied that therein
A melancholy spirit well might win
Oblivion, and melt out his essence fine
Into the winds.

Be still the unimaginable lodge
For solitary thinkings—such as dodge
Conception to the very bourne of heaven,
Then leave the naked brain; be still the leaven,
That spreading in this dull and clodded earth
Gives it a touch ethereal, a new birth

Wherein lies happiness? In that which becks
Our ready minds to fellowship divine,
A fellowship with essence, till we shine
Full alchemized, and free of space.

Feel we these things? That moment have we stepped
Into a sort of oneness, and our state
Is like a floating spirit's.

. . . leading, by degrees,
To the chief intensity : the crown of these
Is made of love and friendship

CM 3

The metaphorical being of poetry: the metaphor of the "veil" and the essence of poetry

Importance, in romantic poetry, of the image of the "veil" as a symbol of the poetic process, the symbol of what is "revealed" or "disclosed" by the experience of poetry.

Etymological link between "veil" and "reveal" : "re" = remove + Latin "velum" = veil

Hence the meaning of "reveal": "remove the veil," "disclose as from under a veil"

Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry"

different metaphors connected with the "veil" define the nature of poetry:

- "Poetry **lifts the veil** from the hidden beauty of the world"
- "it **strips the veil** of familiarity from the world and **lays bare** the naked and sleeping beauty, which is the **spirit** of its forms"

> same notion : lifting, discarding of a veil.

The veil is the cover, the appearance of things, and is opposed to the true beauty, the essence underneath the surface. The veil is one of "familiarity" and supposed "plainness" or "ugliness" which conceals the beauty of things. The discarding of the veil "lays bare" the beauty of form and spirit: these two notions are important and complementary as an approach to "essence."

> a little further on we note a dilemma, a hesitation in the formulation :

- "whether it **spreads its own figured curtain**, or **withdraws life's dark veil** from before the scene of things . . . "

two hypotheses

1. spread its curtain
2. withdraw the veil

two alternatives ("whether . . . or") :

1. spread a curtain of beauty ("figured," or "patterned" connotes the use of a poetic rhetoric and creates a link with the notion of ornament which was criticized by W)
2. withdraw a veil of ugliness

Coleridge, "This Lime-tree Bower," p. 12

". . . of such hues / As **veil the Almighty Spirit**, when yet he makes / **Spirits perceive** his presence" (42-44)

> not a very clear statement, even if the moment is ecstatic ! shows at least one thing : the veil is ambivalent. The "Spirit" ("spiritual reality of the world") can be, at one and the same time, veiled and perceived (by "fellow-spirits" : process of sympathy (communication) or "empathy" (complete absorption, projection, fusion, merging, dissolution into the being of another).

Gloss: (1) one must become a "spirit" to come into contact with "spiritual" reality, even if (2) the revelation is bound to remain incomplete, dim, uncertain.

Wordsworth, "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge," p. 8

More certainty, purity of vision, brightness, as attests the reference to Genesis (the beauty of *light*), to the first days of creation ("in his first splendour," line 10).

Yet also based on the metaphor of the veil: the city is both embellished by the morning light, which it wears like a "garment" of light and beauty ("This City now doth, like a garment, wear . . ."), and perceived in the nakedness of its forms ("silent, bare, / Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie"). The metaphor of the garment is almost a "conceit," in the old rhetorical sense (a "sustained metaphor" in the form of a parallel between two very dissimilar things or situations (comparing/compared): London in the early morning and the beauty of a feminine body—cf typical example in Donne: the lovers and the legs of a compass; here, the "conceit" is implicitly articulated on the device of personification)

In the use of that conceit, we note the ambivalence of meaning and expression : is the city beautiful because of the "garment" it wears, or because of the nakedness ("bare") of its forms ? the perception of the veil of morning beauty which covers it, cannot be separated from the feeling of an original purity of its shapes. The veiling and the unveiling are one and the same process.

Comment, questions about the metaphorical process

1) Is poetry an act of **veiling**, the laying of a "figured curtain" (Shelley) over the world [to make it more beautiful], or an act of **unveiling**, a withdrawing of the veil of appearance to display the world of pure form and essence?

Or again :

2) Is the "world of pure form," **underneath** the surface, or somewhere in a different area, **above** the world of human existence ("above breathing human passion," "Ode on a Grecian Urn," p. 25, line 28)—in a world of essence cut off from the world of existence?

In other words, what is "uncovered" or "disclosed" by the poetic process? Is it the "world of essence," of "spiritual reality" according to the conception of the romantics ("fellowship with essence," "translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal"—something which "shines through" and is grasped from "above")—or the true nature of things and beings as grasped from "below," from beneath the veil of familiarity? Is the process of poetry a lifting of the veil through which spiritual reality is revealed, or a reaching to the true, permanent essence of things and beings?

The two hypotheses amount in fact to the same thing, reality *is* spiritual to the poet's eye: cf. "Frost at Midnight" (p. 10): metamorphosis of the world into a world of spiritual reality: the whole world becomes a mirror ("quietly shining" 75).

These different images may be seen as metaphors of the poetic process. What is characteristic about these metaphors is their **ambivalent** nature. The very use of metaphor prevents us from opposing the true to the false, "A" to "non-A." The meaning becomes two-sided, because a metaphor can always be turned upside down: what is important is its capacity for "**transference**" (original meaning of the word "metaphor").

The romantics reject "ornament" but cultivate and worship "metaphor." It is symptomatic that, while rejecting "ornaments," they should have remained faithful to metaphor as a hermeneutic tool, and to the central metaphor of the "veil," in its ambivalent uses, to define poetry.

The ambivalence of metaphor

A propensity in metaphor to open on to, to generate ambivalence

Loss of stability, of univocal meaning in the metaphorical "régime," in the use of metaphors by the romantics.

"Ode to the West Wind" (pp. 17-18)

Ambivalence of essence, dual image of the poetic self

Lines 43-45: wish of identification with the "leaf," the "cloud," the "wave" as metaphorical equivalents of what the poet wishes to be: the poet asks to be submitted to the wind, to be floating and tempestuous like the cloud at the approach of the storm, to be shaped and sculpted, moulded like the wave, in short to be receptive to the harmonies of the universe and gather all its energies.

Lines 61-62: the identification works the other way round: identification with the wind itself, complete fusion, empathy, between the two beings: "Be thou . . . /My spirit! Be thou me. The wind, as destroyer, preserver, prophetic . . . creative, becomes the breath of the poet.

Similar ambivalence in an early poem by Coleridge ("The Eolian Harp"): the same duality appears, the poet is either the musician or the instrument ; now called a "bold lover" who creates music by "sweep[ing] the strings boldly," now someone with an "indolent and passive mind" giving rise to music by being receptive to the harmonies of the universe.

> this ambivalence corresponds basically to the two well-known trends analysed by Keats: "egotistical sublime," "negative capability"

To situate oneself on a more philosophical plane, as Earl Wasserman explains in his analysis of Shelley's thought, on the one hand, one may consider each individual mind as a **portion** of the one mind, a passive instrument, the temporary receptacle of a portion of the eternal One. On the other hand, one may consider that each self, an autonomous *microcosm*, as the **vehicle** of the absolute. The question is whether the absolute is considered as an *attribute* or as the *essence* of the self. To speak more metaphorically, the self may be "**a cloud suffused with light**" or a "**centre radiating its own light**" (Shelley).

CM 4

Some aspects of the rhetoric of romantic poets : the use of framing devices and patterns of reversibility, rhetorical use of negation, syntactic ambivalence...

The use of framing devices

Typical example: Keats, "**Grecian Urn**" (p. 25)

1. the "legend" (line 5) of men and gods ("deities or mortals," 6): the allegory of human life in its human and its divine dimensions; the whole "natural" world : nature, music, and love ("happy boughs," "happy melodist," "happy love"—in the ambivalence of "pursuit" and "escape", love-hatred, attraction-repulsion, violence-love, "wild ecstasy"), all of this, human pilgrimage, ending with the departing of the soul (the altar, the sacrifice follow the love ecstasy), an epitome of human existence, is represented, written on the flanks of the urn, circumscribed, enframed by the urn: "haunts about thy shape" (5).
2. Urn = circularity of shape, image of life as a cycle + the secrets of life are enclosed inside within its sides.
3. a network of analogies between the "enframed" and the "enframing" : the urn itself is an "unravished bride," like the maidens represented on its flanks; the figures on the urn are silent ("not a soul to tell"), also like the urn ("Silent form," 44).

"Ode to a Nightingale"

another use of the framing device: the central moment of "ecstasy," "fellowship with essence," that the poem describes is embedded between two phases of pain,

>opposition between poetic aspiration, reaching toward "essence," and human "existence" ("breathing human passion," Grecian Urn 28).

The poet's "finitude" (signalled by his suffering, his oncoming death), is opposed to the "infinite" nature of the work of art: by virtue of its own nature it belongs to eternity, it escapes the rule of time.

Yet the relationship between the two worlds (essence/existence, finite/infinite) is more complex than might appear at first sight. It does not fall under a chronological or linear sequence, but under a pattern of reversibility which creates ambivalence: which is the enframing, which the enframed? Which includes or is larger than the other?

Both readings may hold true yet we can only have one at a time : it is impossible to keep them both at the same time, one reading excludes the other (cf analysis of ambivalence by Gombrich in *Art and Illusion*, Prickett 125 "the famous figure which can either be seen as a rabbit or a duck. Gombrich's point is that however fast we switch from one reading to the other we can never see both creatures at the same time).

Reversibility of meaning

"A Slumber did my spirit seal" (p. 6)

two readings

1. "if we assume that the first stanza describes a past situation, to be contrasted with the present, the poet was living in a trance-like state of bliss when his love seemed protected from the reach of time and death. Now, however, she is dead and gone, her vitality absorbed into the cold earth. Read in this way the poem suggests a physical horror of death. ["slumber" comme concomitant à l'expérience de la transe amoureuse, protégeant l'amour, le couvrant d'un voile d'idéal, à mettre en contraste avec la réalité de l'horreur de la mort.]"
2. "if on the other hand, the first stanza can be taken as describing a particular visionary moment after the death of his love ["slumber" dans ce sens est à interpréter comme empêchant de prendre conscience de la mort; le poète vient de réaliser qu'elle est morte], then the second stanza can be interpreted as a comfort to his grief by the realization that in her union with nature she has acquired a kind of mute immortality. Clearly, read in this way the poem is resigned or even hopeful. The point is that for all the apparent contradiction, neither meaning can fully obliterate the other in our assimilation of the poem, and we are left not with a resolution, but a very radical feeling of doubt about death" (Prickett 126).

"When I have fears that I may cease to be" (p. 22)

same kind of ambivalent relationship between life and death

1. first reading: the fear of his oncoming death puts an end to his dreams of poetic creation. Poetic activity is embedded within human existence and limited by the mortal condition of the poet.
2. second reading: on the other hand, poetic activity allows the poet to transcend the limits of his mortality. The poem includes the thought of death which imposes its limits on poetic activity. The poem survives the thought of death. Human existence, including the thought of its mortality, is now embedded in poetic activity, the relationship has been turned inside out. Subtle movement of reversibility.

Use of framing device in "There was a boy" (p. 5), "Three years she grew" (p. 7).

Similar theme: the shaping ("moulding," Three Years 23) of the child's personality by Nature, the religion of nature, a gradual osmosis with nature, a moral voice (power of energy and vitality, power of temperance). And yet also contains its contrary : this language is mute, secret. There is also a fascination for what is mute, immovable, "insensate" (18) as if life and death were present in what nature has to teach. Secret affinity of nature with life and death together.

Wordsworth's endings: use of suspended utterance, something remains unfinished, enigmatic

"Strange fits of passion" a movement, a displacement along different lines (the horse, the moon) which never comes full circle, which is never fully accomplished. Epiphany resides in that small gap.

"There was a boy" : pause, silence, another voice (Nature has two voices: overt/covert, secret/manifest).

The rhetorical use of negation

"Bright Star"

Sonnet built on pattern of oppositions.

Yet numerous analogies between what is rejected and what is vindicated.

➤ contradiction between the explicit rhetoric of the text and its hidden meaning. **The text asserts what the grammar negates.**

Syntactic ambivalence

Recherche d'une ambivalence structurelle de la syntaxe.

"Melancholy" (24)

"thy mistress . . . She . . . Melancholy" ("Melancholy"): anaphoric and cataphoric function of "She" fused into one. "She" refers back to "thy mistress" (18) in the world of human existence and announces "Veil'd Melancholy" in the world of beauty and imagination (26).

[def. Anaphore/cataphore]

Numerous examples

"West Wind" ("leaves dead are driven" 1-2, p. 17)

A long-established tradition in poetic writing (Milton, Shakespeare: sentences which can be read both ways)

Poetry must avoid excessive simplicity of diction ?

Dialectical patterns: solved or unsolved dialectics

- "Melancholy" (p. 24)

dialectical pattern : no/but/addition 1 + 2. The "dialectics" between life and death is solved, a "solution" is worked out: melancholy.

- "Simplon Pass" (p. 8)

unsolved dialectics of contraries. The poem finds its unity in a meeting of opposites.

- "To Autumn" (p. 26)

ambivalence reaches its climactic (though unobtrusive) form since it opposes and fuses together "life and death" (line 29).

Conclusion

Poets entrust rhetoric with the huge task of merging together truth and beauty, form and spirit, of conversing with the infinite through imagination. The task, broadly considered is one of conciliation of opposites, and it has some affinity with the power of metaphor to transfer meaning from one level of reference to another. Yet this conciliation is bound to remain for ever an elusive task. No ultimate conciliation is possible, the system of meaning of the (short) romantic poem (often) rests on enigmatic frameworks and cannot be circumscribed.

Metre and prosody

I - A reminder of elementary notions

Opposition between two basic kinds of poetic lines: **unrhymed** ("blank verse," as in Shakespeare's tragedy and Milton's epic) vs. **rhymed** (as in religious and popular tradition).

Patterns of rhymes:

alternate	abab
enclosed	abba
couplet	aabb

Metre

x 5 stresses (or "beats")	pentameter
x 4	tetrameter
x 3	trimeter
x 2	dimeter
x 6	hexameter

Metrical unit

	binary/rising	iamb (offbeat/beat	o B)
	binary/falling	trochee (beat/offbeat	B o)
	ternary/rising	anapaest (double offbeat/ beat	oo B)
(rare)	ternary/falling	dactyl (beat/double offbeat	B oo)
(occasional)	binary/equal	spondee (double beat	B B)
		pyrrhic (double offbeat	o o)

The terms "beat" and "offbeat" are borrowed from Derek Attridge, *The Rhythms of English Poetry* (London: Longman, 1982), and are, roughly speaking, synonyms for **stressed** and **unstressed** syllables.

Some "variation" patterns

anticipation of stress through "trochaic reversal" (sometimes called "choriambus") : B o o B (trochee + iamb – such a pattern is often to be found at the beginning of lines)

Ex: p. 6, line 12 ("Tossing their heads"), p. 13 line 5 ("**Down to a sun**-less sea")

delaying of stress through "pyrrhic-spondee" sequence : o o B B

Ex: p. 30 ("Ode on a Grecian Urn"), line 2 ("si-**lence and slow time**")

feminine ending: a line which ends with an unstressed syllable.

If that syllable is **added** to the "normal" rhythmic pattern, the line is called "**hypermetric**".

Ex: "The Solitary Reaper" (p. 8), lines 26 ("ending"), 28 ("bending").

The reverse of "hypermetric" is "catalectic": one element (usually the final syllable) is missing to make the line regular.

Another typical device: **run-on line**:

Ex: "There was a boy" (p. 1), lines 16-17 ("a pause/Of silence"), 18-19 ("hung/Listening")

(Adequation form/meaning)

Definition:

"Non-alignment of metrical frame and syntactic period at line-end. Overflow into the following poetic line of a syntactic phrase (with its intonational contour) begun in the preceding line without a major juncture or pause" (*The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*).

II - Application: metrical structure of "Kubla Khan" (p. 13)

1. Pentameters

lines 8-30, 35-6.

Out of these 25 **pentameters**, 11 have an additional syllable ("hypermetric pentameters"): lines 12-18, 23-25, 28.

Tetrameters and trimeters.

lines 1-4 = regular **iambic tetrameters**

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan

o B o B o B o B (pattern A)

line 5 = **trimeter**

Down to a sunless sea

B o o B o B

Pattern A (regular iambic tetrameter) may be found again in lines 6-7, 37, 39-40 in spite of a more difficult scanning, and again, in a more obvious way, in lines 47-50 and 52-54.

Line 33 may be viewed as a regular **trochaic tetrameter** (/B o B o B o B o/) and lines 31 and 44 as hypermetric tetrameters (tetrameters with one additional syllable, a "feminine ending" /o B o B o B o B o/).

Another recurring pattern may be detected in lines 32, 34, 38, 45-46, 51 : the line begins and ends with a stressed syllable, it has four stresses and seven syllables :

Weave a circle round him thrice

B o B o B o B

This type of tetrameter, beginning and ending with a stressed syllable, is famous and was used, for instance, by Blake in "Tyger" ("Tyger, tyger, burning bright"). It may be called "heptasyllabic" (or "**catalectic**") tetrameter.

Difficult lines

Line 43 should be viewed as a **trimeter**:

Her symphony and song

o B o (B) o B

Lines 41-42 may be viewed as hypermetric trimeters:

Singing of Mount Abora

B o o B o B o [the line starts with a choriambus]

Could I revive within me

o B o B o B o

To conclude, the following patterns can be made out:

1. hypermetric pentameter (x 11)
2. pentameter (x 14)
3. tetrameter (x 18)
4. heptasyllabic ("catalectic") tetrameter (x 7)
5. trimeter (

Dissertation

Revelation in English romantic poetry, with reference to the texts in the anthology

Introduction

What is new in romantic poetry? A quality of self-awareness, the emergence of a concept of poetic essence. The poetic activity is no longer merely a skill but an activity of the soul. The poetic process becomes something sacred which makes it almost a religion, a form of superior language expressing a higher truth. Truth in this higher form cannot be separated from vision (in its literal and its figurative sense) and becomes a revelation.

How can we define revelation? All definitions point to a dual meaning:

disclose in a supernatural manner

disclose by discourse, communication

What is the etymology of the word?

It comes from Latin: "re" = remove + "velum" = veil, hence the meaning "disclose as from under a veil."

Now Shelley, for instance, in "A Defence of Poetry," uses different metaphors connected with the "veil" to define the nature of poetry: "strip the veil," "lift the veil," "withdraw the veil"—or again in "Mont Blanc": "unfurl the veil."

> Hence the following problematic:

To what extent does revelation, through its intensity, its sacredness, but also its self-contradictions and doubts, its aporetic nature, expresses what is central in the poetic process.

Two main parts in the development:

1. Revelation as the end of poetic experience

2. The "limits" of revelation

- inner evolution which links together and separates Wordsworth's and Coleridge's early production from those of a later generation (Shelley and Keats)
- self-contradictions, ambivalence, inherent in the metaphorical process.

I - Revelation as the "end" of poetic experience

1. A moment of **shock and encounter**

With the romantics, the poetic process is rooted in a form of **direct experience or encounter** which operates like a shock upon the mind. The encounter may be a real one, a sudden vision or natural perception ("I wandered lonely"), sometimes leading to a form of mute dialogue as in "The Solitary Reaper"—or an imaginary one ("Ode to Psyche": the whole poem originates in a vision, a dream-like sight of the goddess Psyche with her lover Cupid). The intensity of the encounter leads to contemplation, meditation, projection of the self into the object of contemplation (a process called "empathy," such as we may observe in "Ode to a Grecian Urn": the poet identifies himself with the figures on the urn). Coleridge's "Conversation Poems" ("Frost at Midnight," "This Lime-tree Bower my Prison") are rooted in familiar situations (a father waking at night in company with his new-born babe, a party of friends taking an excursion over the neighbouring hills) but give these moments an exceptional significance. The encounter, and the revelation that ensues, leaves its imprint on the mind for ever, which, according to Wordsworth, is the very definition of the imaginative process.

2. A process of **transformation and renewal**.

The moment of exceptional encounter achieved through the poetic process leads to a renewal, both of things in the outside world and of the self. Both emerge as the *same yet different*. "Frost at Midnight" is the canonical example: a complete renewal in the perception of the world and of human beings (the son succeeding to the father) is achieved, in a framework of cyclical time, through the "secret ministry of frost." The end of the poem eventually joins up with its beginning but everything is transformed, having undergone a secret metamorphosis. In "This Lime-tree Bower my Prison," the scene seems to be perceived with new eyes, with the use of the past in the description of the bower (lines 47-56): the poet's sight has been renewed by contact with the spiritual reality glimpsed at the end of the second verse-paragraph (lines 42-44). The revelation here amounts to a grasp of the spiritual unity of the world.

3. **Sacredness** of the experience.

The state of revelation is the poetic equivalent of a religious state. The poems are (almost) free from any form of religious orthodoxy but betray, on the one hand, a deep sense of the sacredness of the world, a sense of the "divine" (which, by the way, may include pagan elements, as in "Kubla Khan" or often in Keats, with his well-known fondness for Greek mythology), and, on the other hand, a distinctly "religious" element, a religious "link" [religion comes from Latin *religere*, link] between self and other, the self and the universe. The "divine" is thus equated with the "one," a sacred sense of the unity of the world and of the universality of language. The poet comes into contact with, or at least within reach of, the "oneness of essence" through a process of spiritualization. "Fellowship with essence" is the end of the poetic quest according to Keats, a dissolution of the self in the pure world of essence. The sense of "oneness" may also be reached through an intense awareness of a

"union of contraries," as in "Simplon Pass" or "Kubla Khan." In "Simplon Pass," it is symptomatic that Wordsworth should speak of "the great Apocalypse" (the Book of Revelation in the Bible) in connection with this moment of intense awareness when contraries are fused together (line 18). The eternity of time is condensed in one moment of spiritual encounter.

Yet, if we observe a common intensity in these forms of poetic experience, the same intense questioning of the self and the same need of reaching to a higher truth, revelation also has its "limits." Its "end" cannot be separated from its "means." The metaphorical being of poetry (metaphor = transference, the transference from one level of meaning, the literal one, to another, the metaphorical one) is bound to express itself through ambivalence.

II - The "limits" of revelation

1. First vs second generation of poets

phase of assertion and conquest (Wordsworth, Coleridge), phase of doubt (Shelley's questioning, aporetic nature of Keats' Odes). The working of revelation may lead to two contradictory states: a strengthening of the self, a dissolution of the self. A state of "bliss" and "glee" may be opposed to one of intense probing of the self and painful "soul-searching." The "warmth" of the scene on the flanks of the urn (line 26) is contradicted by its very "coldness" (line 45), its "legend" (line 5) by its "silence" (line 44). Revelation "teases [the brain] out of thought" (line 44). It takes the form of a maxim, a silent utterance ("Beauty is truth, truth beauty"), but this supposed message, the "be-all and end-all" of poetry, does not contain the whole truth and sounds restrictive with respect to the poem itself. The utmost form of contradiction, the one between life and death, can find no expression and is bound to remain unsolved. The poet in "Mont Blanc" "unfurls the veil of life and death" (lines 53-54) but can go no further. Nothing is "revealed," no truth asserted in "To Autumn": the harmonies of life and death prevail. "Ode for a Nightingale" expresses a "half-love" for "easeful death" (line 52) but ends with a questioning.

2. The ambivalence of metaphor

The source of these ambiguities is to be found in the poetic process as enacted by the romantics. Metaphor, the end and the means of poetry (the disclosure and the disclosing), is a prey to major ambiguities. What is "uncovered" or "disclosed" by the poetic process? Is it the world of "essence," of "spiritual reality" according to the romantics (cf. the image of "translucence" used by Coleridge to define the symbol: it shines through and is grasped from above)--or the true, essential nature of things and beings as grasped from below, from beneath the veil of familiarity? It amounts in fact to the same thing, both gestures express the same need of reaching to the true essence of things, reality *is* spiritual to the poet's eye. In the same way, according to Shelley's phrasing, is it the function of poetry to "spread its own figured curtain, or withdraw life's dark veil from before the scene of things"? Is revelation a discarding or a laying of the veil, a discarding of the veil of appearance and ugliness or the laying of a veil of beauty? Or again is it a "lift[ing of] the veil from the hidden beauty of the world" (Shelley)? Once more these different gestures come to be identical in their ambivalence. Poetry is described in terms of antagonistic metaphors. The very use of metaphor prevents us from opposing the true to the false, the real to the artificial. Meaning becomes two-sided, because a metaphor can always be turned inside out, and perhaps because the major form of ambivalence, that between life and death, is one which cannot be solved. Incidentally (but this may not be incidental), it is symptomatic that throughout centuries metaphor, a major figure of speech, should have been seen as the "dress," the "ornament" of poetry, and that the romantics, while pretending to reject poetic diction, should have remained faithful to the central metaphor of the "veil," in its ambivalent uses, to define poetry. Metaphor as a "garment-which-has-to-be-discarded" (cf. "Westminster Bridge," which dwells on the beauty of the veil *and* the beauty of the naked form), this sounds very much like a definition of the poetic process according to the romantics.

Conclusion

There is in romantic poetry a common faith in poetic "essence," in the power of poetry to reveal new meanings, to bring man closer to the mysterious life or "oneness" of the universe. Revelation makes poetry a form of religious experience. Yet the "unveiling" is not only the end of the poetic process but also its means, and its metaphor itself. In uncovering the "secret strength of things" ("Mont Blanc," line 139), it also uncovers its own doubts and its own ambivalence. Revelation is the "limit" of poetic experience.

J. Keats, "To Autumn" (p. 26)

The poem, the last of Keats's odes, should be read together with an extract from his letter dated 21 Sept. 1819, which explains its circumstances of composition. It tells us about a "sunday's walk" Keats had in the countryside, his preference for autumn rather than spring, the "beauty" of the season, the "warmth" of the "stubble fields," "temperate sharpness" of the air, "chaste weather" and "Dian skies." All these sensations account for the tonality of the text. Autumn is physically present throughout the poem, it permeates the whole atmosphere. We must note immediately that, contrary to the other five odes, "To Autumn" was not explicitly entitled an "ode." If we remember the two main features of the traditional ode — a complex stanza form and a structure based on large movements of reversal and opposition, assertion and negation (strophe and antistrophe) —, we see that it has the first, but not the second. Its structure is extremely simple and not "dialectical," which probably goes together with the fact that the enunciator's presence remains very unobtrusive throughout the text. The dominant rhetorical mode is not that of dialectics or epiphany (presence/absence, illusion/disenchantment) as in the other odes. Everything here is given and nothing is taken back. Yet the "being" of autumn is more divided than would appear at first sight. Within a framework of accumulated images and sensations, Keats manages to create a sense of ambivalence. Opposite extremes meet in autumn, each stanza ends on a mysterious sense of suspension and opening, a dual "and"/"or" logic presides over the text.

Let's start with a detailed examination of the general structure of the text. The poem is made of three stanzas of eleven lines: an unusual number which gives rise to a complex rhyme pattern (a b a b c d e c d d e in stanzas 2 and 3, a b a b c d e d c c e in stanza 1). The first line in each stanza is detached from the rest: we start with an address or invocation to autumn, we go on with a question (which, in strict grammatical terms and in spite of the punctuation, directly follows from the address: "Season of mists . . . /Who has not seen thee . . . ?") and we end with a more insistent, repeated form of questioning, as the narrator or enunciator seems to merge his voice with that of his addressee, before he eventually provides his own answer: "Where are the songs of Spring? . . . /Think not of them. . . ". The rest of each stanza is made of one long sentence (or semi-sentence as in stanza 1), built as a succession of coordinated pictures hinging around three main themes or fields of reference: "fruitfulness" and abundance in stanza 1, harvest-time and its various forms of activity or inactivity in stanza 2, sound impressions or the "music" of autumn in stanza 3. Moreover we notice that the poem manages to move through a rough chronological framework: from the ripeness of a pre-harvest stage, to the harvest proper, to end with the gathering of swallows in the skies, a prelude to the on-coming winter.

Each stanza has its own grammatical structure. Stanza 1 is built as a succession of coupled infinitives depending on "conspiring": "to load and bless," "to bend . . . and fill," "to swell and plump," and eventually "to set," coupled with a time-clause: "until they think." Stanza 2 is neatly divided into four pictures, or postures, of autumn, falling into symmetrical groups of three or two lines ("sometimes . . . or . . . and sometimes . . . or"): "sitting careless" (lines 13-15), "sound asleep" (16-18), "keep / Steady . . ." (19-20), "watchest" (21-22). Stanza 3 begins with time ("while") and goes on with the "choir" or symphony of autumn songs, borrowing its images from the world of animal life (insects, birds, cattle): "gnats mourn," "lambs bleat," "hedge-crickets sing," "the red-breast whistles," "swallows twitter." The consistent use of the present tense here makes these notations more concrete, but also, paradoxically, creates a feeling of suspended time and atemporality.

One dominant feature in the text, of course, is the mode of presence of the enunciator. We have no "I-form," no rhetorical emphasis, no reversal, and even no "metatextual" statement as to the nature of poetry, as is so often the case with romantic poetry and with Keats in particular. The poet is almost absent as enunciator. Line 13 is significant in this respect: he might be anyone, "whoever seeks abroad", a mere wanderer, apparently gifted with no particular ability. Yet the word "seeks," which implies the idea of a quest, a "search" into the being of autumn — the being of the universe in this particular setting and at that particular moment of the year —, makes him far more than a mere observer. Through an apparently objective description, he manages to converse with his addressee throughout the text. Autumn is first introduced as the sun's "bosom-friend," but the repeated use of "thee," "thou," or "thy" in stanza 2 (lines 12, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22) testifies to a growing intimacy with the poet himself: she becomes his "model." Line 23 may be read at first sight as an author's or an enunciator's intrusion, the expression of the poet's nostalgic feelings, but through a subtle use of ambivalence he manages to have it read as enounced by autumn itself. The blending of the two voices indubitably shows a projection of the poet's being into that of autumn. He then turns into a composer and orchestrates the sensations of autumn, becoming a living witness in the full sense of the term, perhaps because the music creates a sense of irrevocability.

Thus, a general study of the rhetoric of the text shows that "To Autumn" is written in no dialectical or epiphanic mood. No emphatic assertion follows upon negation as in "Ode on Melancholy," nothing is revealed and suddenly taken back as in "Ode to a Nightingale." The narrator in "To Autumn" is never in the foreground and

his addressee is submitted to no presence-and-absence or assertion-and-negation pattern. Yet the poem would obviously be meaningless if it did not unfold through a pattern of change and transformation.

Such a pattern is provided, first and foremost, by the different faces of autumn in each respective stanza, its evolution or metamorphosis from "substance" to "spirit."

It is present in stanza 1 through its "fruitfulness" (line 1) — a Keatsian neologism? —, a principle of plenitude, growth, union. Nature's bosom is "loaded," literally "o'er-brimm(ing)" with fruit (lines 3, 11). Autumn is a season of fecundity bringing growth to its ultimate perfection, a stage of "ripeness" and "maturity" (lines 6, 2). "All fruit" reach their perfection in terms of taste ("sweet") and substance, density ("fill," "swell," "plump"). In spite of its amorous complicity with the sun, which may indeed be viewed as a form of sexual union (but more will have to be said about this later), autumn is not responsible for the whole process of growth, but brings the final touch, if one may say so. The world described is an Eden, a Golden Age in which men (like the bees in lines 10-11) live in the illusion of eternal warmth: "warm days will never cease."

In stanza 2, the dominant sense is no longer taste but sight. The idea of substance ("amid thy store") is still the same, but men now have to work in order to gather nature's fruit. Autumn has become a field worker, presumably a young woman: "carelessness" (line 14) is not an attribute of old or mature age, neither is a "steady" head (line 20) when carrying a bundle of straw after gleaning in the fields. She is single and solitary now, a kind of "silent reaper." Wordsworth's "solitary reaper" was "o'er her sickle bending." Keats's, strangely enough, is described in intervals of rest ("sitting careless," "sound asleep"), suspended motion ("keep . . . across"), or sheer fixity ("with patient look / Thou watchest . . ."). Autumn is linked with a sense of unfinished work and division, separation ("half reaped furrow," "spares the next swath," "across a brook").

A last stage in this process of transformation is reached in stanza 3. Autumn loses its substance and becomes evanescent, light as air. Everything here is light, unsubstantial, transient. The stanza is dominated by the sense of hearing, but visual references are not forgotten. Colour is introduced for the first time here ("rosy hue") and the landscape is enlarged ("hilly bourn"). The description alternates between earth ("stubble plains," "hilly bourn," "garden croft") and sky or atmosphere ("clouds," "wind," "skies"). The "full-grown" lambs remind us of the growth and plenitude of stanza 1, but their distant "bleating" conveys a sense of bereavement. The other animals mentioned are small or even tiny, short-lived (the "gnats"), seasonal (the "gathering swallows"). Keats completes the insect paradigm he had started with the bees at the end of stanza 1, but the transformation is obvious. The bees were working in their cells in a world of sweetness and plenty; the gnats are mournful and indolent. Nature no longer knows if it "lives or dies." Something comes to an end, the being of autumn no longer has any concrete shape or substance. It has almost vanished, melted into the air. The "skies" on which the poem ends testify to the fully achieved spiritualization of autumn's being.

As we gradually soar from "substance" to "spirit" throughout the ode, autumn's being seems to be approached through a process of stepped progression. Isn't Keats trying, here as elsewhere, to bridge the gap between sensation and spirit, in a kind of neoplatonic programme — to approach the essence through a series of hierarchized levels of being? Yet, this logic is obviously undermined by another principle: at each level of being, reality is fissured, dual, ambivalent. The quest for essence is subtly undermined by a process of inner negation and contradiction. How to account for this counter-principle?

Keats's rhetoric, to begin with, may be called one of "implied (or implicit) antithesis." He juxtaposes antithetic truths or images while remaining in a framework of accumulation and assertion. In stanza 2, for instance, we have a series of four images of autumn. Yet, on a closer inspection, we discover a principle of contradiction and symmetry. A certain "carefulness" is needed to cross the brook, which contradicts the "carelessness" of the first attitude; just as the intent gaze ("watching") by the cider press obviously contradicts the sleep of the second. Two qualities, or modes of being, of autumn thus receive an equal emphasis: sleep, carelessness on the one hand; care, wakefulness on the other. The opposition remains implicit, or at least undiscussed, and yet it is obvious, and makes autumn a strangely dual being. The same might be said about the opening line of the text, obviously structured around an opposition and complementarity between the two central words (connected by an alliteration), "mists" and "mellow." The antithesis here is between cold and warm, wet and dry, and mostly, perhaps, between airy, light, evanescent, and fully substantial, juicy, fleshy. This "implied antithesis" in fact structures the whole text. It is significant that we should have to search for its meaning and, as a matter of fact, read the whole text, before we can catch its full implications. Its working as an antithesis remains partly concealed and mysterious. Once more, two modes of being seem equally valorized: "substance" and "evanescence." Each time ambivalence is used (whether fully consciously or not, since genuine ambivalence is difficult to master), Keats is in search of some fundamental truth. This becomes more explicit in stanza 3: "lives or dies." The duality of space (closed and open, finite and infinite) and of time (an end and a departure) in this stanza almost explicitly becomes a matter of "life and death."

Two striking images of time are introduced at the end of stanzas 1 and 2: the bees, thinking "warm days will never cease," and the farmgirl watching the "last ooziings hour by hour." These two images are indeed contradictory, since the bees are deceived by time, victims of the illusion of eternity, whereas the patient farmgirl

is watchful and learns, in some way, how to master time, to conciliate time and timelessness. Time never ends, since the last drop never comes. The process described is one of "unending end." Bees and farmgirl come to the same conclusion: it will never end. But the former reach it through an illusory sense of eternal plenty, and the latter through a sense of scarcity. She rises above time by catching a glimpse of timelessness, she reaches eternity through an awareness of time. In stanza 3, the presence of time becomes explicit, time words come to the foreground and provide the text with its very structure: "while. . . then . . . and now." The stanza begins in the past, the memories of another time (springtime), goes on in the present, and ends with the implicit announcement of future times ("gathering in the skies"). Yet time is strangely suspended: no "process" is described, the series of sensation verbs in the present is not really "sequential." The paradigm of linking words in the text is worth quoting in full: "and . . . and . . . and . . . and . . . and . . . until" (stanza 1); "sometimes . . . or . . . and sometimes . . . or" (stanza 2); "while . . . and . . . then . . . or . . . as . . . or . . . and . . . and now . . . and" (stanza 3). We can note the shift from "sometimes" (stanza 2) to "now" (stanza 3), testifying to the growing awareness of time, the explicit apparition of the present in the text; and that from "and" (the word of parataxis, unmarked coordination), used in stanza 1, to "or" (the word of explicit ambivalence, duality), which appears in stanza 2. It is not surprising that stanza 3 should use a mixture of the two. The "and"/"or" dichotomy of stanzas 1 and 2 has prepared us for the ambivalence of sensation and essence, time and timelessness, which is fully expressed in stanza 3. Time goes on and returns eternally.

Keats's "narrative (or descriptive) programme" in "To Autumn" — and this will be our last point — may be clarified by his use of mythology, but here again we'll notice that it remains strangely ambivalent. In his journal-letter dated 21 Sept. 1819, written immediately after the poem was composed, he associates the quality of autumn with "Dian," or Artemis, known for her "chastity" (Keats mentions the "chastity," or purity, of autumn weather). Now Artemis was the twin sister of Apollo, the god of the sun. This simple mythological network allows us to identify the two "bosom friends" in line 2 as Artemis and Apollo. We are not speaking of course of a literal identification, but of a form of connexion that was more or less present in the background of Keats's mind when he was writing the poem. In that case the two symbolic figures ought to be considered, not as a procreating couple, but as twins, as brother and sister (the term "bosom friend" may or may not imply a love relationship). There is undoubtedly some confusion here, since a word like "bless" (3) unmistakably suggests an idea of birth and pregnancy. But something remains true: contrary to what happens in many of Keats's poems, there is no "consummation," nor even any "consumption" here. The flowers are sucked by the bees, but the fruit remain mostly untouched, unconsumed; the cider is not drunk, the poet is in no "glutting" mood (cf. "On Melancholy," line 15). The reaper is drowsed by the "fume of poppies" (17), but this remains an involuntary consumption (of drug...), contrary to what happens with the drinking of "hemlock" or wolf's-bane's "poisonous wine" in "To a Nightingale" (line 2) and "On Melancholy" (line 2). Autumn feeds the poet's sensations but does not "cloy" his appetite ("On a Grecian Urn," line 29). Autumn's chastity invites to no excess. Any violence or theatricality would be out of place here.

This helps to understand (and these will be our concluding remarks) what *kind* of duality presides over the text. In the "spring odes," written in a dialectical mood, the poet indulges in violent and passionate sensations, before he finally finds himself estranged from the world he had been trying to reach. The world of "experience" and the world of "essence" are cut apart. The process in "To Autumn" is quite different. The poet remains in sensation throughout the text, soaring from one level of sensation to another. "The poem starts on enchanted ground and never leaves it," one critic wrote. The "warmth" of the fields and the "chastity" of the air appear as the two poles, the two antinomic signs, around which the text is structured. The "melodies" of autumn *are* "heard" ("On a Grecian Urn" 11) and its bosom does feed the poet's sensations — yet its harvest remains strangely unfinished, as if it suffered from a mysterious lack or sense of division or separation. This division is not a violent or painful one. As time slows down and gradually merges into timelessness, the sweetness of autumn's fruit is converted into a heavenly music, we enter the world of "spiritual sensation": Keats here writes for the "spiritual eye," the "spiritual touch" (*Letters*). The text bridges the gap between sensation and spirit, the two worlds of the poet's experience. Difference is thus associated with sameness, and process with ambivalence.