



Two sides of the same coin: A study of Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in selected works of John Keats

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DEDICATION

*To the memory of my grandfather,
W.J. Wright (1937-2017),
who first taught me to read and write.*

No health-farm, clinic, yoga course
No mantra *om*, no *Star Wars* force
 Will compensate
For what is lost when the mind divides.
Even science now concedes
The brain has two conjugal sides,
 The left and right.

To have to marry intuition
To the analytic reason
 For psychic balance.
Head sleeps with heart, begets a creature
Free yet cornered in its nature.
To be your whole self, you must mate your
 Brains and glands.

—Seamus Heaney, 1982

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines selected narrative and lyric poems from the final collection of poetry published during Keats's lifetime, *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes and Other Poems* (1820). It does so through the lens of Nietzsche's conception of Apollonian and Dionysian artistic impulses as explicated in his *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872). Although Keats died fifty-one years before the first publication of Nietzsche's treatise, from the beginning stages of his poetry, Keats showed a sensible awareness of what he called a 'complex Mind', which is: 'one that is imaginative and at the same time careful of its fruits, who would exist partly on sensation, partly on thought'. To my mind, Keats's development of his own 'complex Mind' reaches its greatest achievement in this final collection of poetry. Consequently, Nietzsche's notion of Apollonian and Dionysian impulses (which, in overly simple terms, can be seen to draw on, respectively, 'thought' and 'sensation'), provides a suitable framework to interpret the selected poems from this volume. Moreover, I attempt to show that by investigating the interaction between these two artistic drives in the selected poems, we will be able to better comprehend the relation between both aspects of his 'complex Mind'. The selected poems are further grouped into two main chapters: one focusing on three of Keats's narrative verse romances and the other focusing on four of his lyrical odes.

Chapter one contextualises the research problem of the dissertation while also shedding light on the pertinence of the Nietzschean ideal of Apollonian and Dionysian impulses for a Romantic study. Furthermore, I also identify the main research aims and establish the theoretical framework of the dissertation in this section. Chapter two focuses on the interaction between the Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in three of Keats's narrative verse romances: *Lamia, Isabella; or, The Pot of Basil*, and *The Eve of St. Agnes*. Accordingly, it considers narrative elements such as theme, plot and character, as well as their relations with one another in the light of the theoretical framework of the study. Chapter three will bring us closer to the poet himself (as lyric poetry inevitably does) and I will focus on the intermingling and counterbalancing relationship which exists between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in relation to the poet's creative process in four of his great odes: 'Ode to a Nightingale', 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', 'Ode to Psyche', and 'To Autumn'. This creative process, I argue, includes, *inter alia*, the interplay among the following components: the empathetical imagination and the immortalising thereof through the structural craftsmanship of a technically sound poem; imagination and the plastic arts (sculpture); the abstract and the concrete; and spontaneous immersion in nature and the conscious employment of language. Finally, the fourth chapter will provide concluding remarks and a summation of the key findings of the study.

Key words: John Keats, Friedrich Nietzsche, Apollonian, Dionysian, 1820 volume of poetry, Romances, Odes

NOTES ON REFERENCING

All references to Keats's poems are from Miriam Allott's (1970) Longman Edition, *The Poems of John Keats*. I have used this edition in the writing of this dissertation despite the appearance of a growing number of new editions or Jack Stillinger's (1978) standard edition, because of its comprehensive yet accessible annotations.

I have deviated from the standard Harvard method implemented throughout this dissertation in documenting the above source. Where the conventional rule stipulates that in-text citations should be provided, within brackets, to the author, date and page number, I have, for the sake of fluency in the text, only documented the relevant page numbers once at the beginning of a new discussion on a different poem. Line numbers of the poems under consideration are, however, continuously provided as footnotes to aid the reader.

In Table 1, page numbers are provided without the author's name and date. This was done to improve readability. All quotations in this table are from the same edition of Nietzsche's (1999), *The Birth of Tragedy*, utilised throughout the dissertation.

NOTES ON THE TEXT

In order to ensure continuity, all references to Apollo and Dionysus or Apollonian and Dionysian correspond with Nietzsche's interpretation of the terms, as defined in *The Birth of Tragedy*. I am aware of the fact that Keats's understanding of Apollo is different from Nietzsche's. At times, Keats's Apollo even bears traces of Nietzsche's Dionysus. A study such as Keith D. White's (1996), *John Keats and the Loss of Romantic Innocence*, illustrates the complexity of the Apollonian metaphor in Keats's poetry. In order to remove such ambiguities, the usage of Apollonian and Dionysian throughout this dissertation, unless explicitly stated otherwise, is based on an exclusively Nietzschean understanding of these two terms. I am also aware of the fact that these terms did not exist, at least not in Nietzsche's terminology, for Keats, but, for the sake of fluency, they will be used ahistorically throughout the dissertation.

The introductory chapter provides an indication of the background reading, but does not, as is the norm, contain an individual section on the literature review. However, I include a literature review for each of the selected poems prior to their analyses. I believe that this approach is better suited for the nature of the present study as it prevents a vague and unspecified literature review. Keats criticism is a large field and can differ greatly from poem to poem. The approach adopted in this dissertation will allow one to situate the present study within the smaller critical context of each poem while also taking the larger critical context of Keats scholarship into consideration.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXTUALISATION

This dissertation investigates the Nietzschean notion of Apollonian and Dionysian artistic impulses in selected poems of John Keats. In the face of present-day pressures in the humanities, it might seem evasive to engage in a study which employs an ostensibly outdated and rarefied theoretical antithesis rooted in Greek mythology to examine the poetry of a British Romantic poet, as this dissertation attempts to do. Nietzsche's theory, however, is not so far removed from our present predicaments as might at first be apparent. In his seminal study, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of The Western World*, Iain McGilchrist (2009:352) suggests that contemporary Western culture has:¹

... now reached a point where ... the balance has swung too far—perhaps irretrievably far—towards the Apollonian left hemisphere, which now appears to believe that it can do anything, make anything, on its own.

At an earlier stage in the book, McGilchrist (2009:232) provides complementing and necessary context for the above statement:

... what were anciently seen as the Apollonian, more rationalistic, and Dionysian, more intuitive, aspects of our being have become grossly unbalanced. Nietzsche claimed that the constant opposition between these two very different tendencies led to a fruitful incitement to further and ever higher levels of life and creativity (which accords with the evidence of the relationship between the two hemispheres at its best). War, as Heraclitus said, is the father of all things. But the war between these tendencies has become, according to Heidegger, no longer creative but merely destructive. 'We have become pre-eminently endowed with the ability to grasp and delimit': the Apollonian has triumphed at the expense of the Dionysian. We are caught up, he believed, in a frenzy of 'forming projects, enclosures, frameworks, division and structuring', destroying ourselves and our environment and turning all into 'resource', something to be merely exploited, Nature turned into 'one gigantic filling station' as he once graphically put it.

¹ The Romantic critic, Jonathan Bate (2010:2), states that 'If McGilchrist is even to a small degree correct in his diagnosis, then this must be one of the most important books of the new millennium. And even if he is completely wrong, he has still offered readers a cornucopia of fascinating information and provocative speculation'.

This is the opposite of the problem the Greeks confronted, for whom the balance lay more towards the Dionysian, and who therefore strove, and needed to strive, towards the Apollonian.

In this modernised world steeped in materiality and technological advancement, one might also question the pertinence of reading Keats's poetry which concerns itself deeply with the finer aspects of natural existence. However, McGilchrist's use of 'Apollonian' and 'Dionysian' raises the intriguing possibility of reviving the Nietzschean distinction between these two artistic drives in the light of a present-day imperative—one clearly anticipated by Keats and the other major Romantics. Recent studies such as McGilchrist's and Patrick Curry's (2023), *Art and Enchantment: How Wonder Works*, affirm that the distinction between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses does not solely belong to the ancient world, but should also be treated as a fundamental concern in our present age of the 'machine apocalypse' (McGilchrist, 2024). Broadly speaking, we find ourselves in an Apollonian-dominated world which continuously seeks certainty and fixity, often at the expense of intuition and imagination (simply think of the considerable impact of artificial intelligence in the context of the humanities).² Viewed from this perspective, the sentiments and historical circumstances of the Romantic period are not as far removed from our own: the Romantic poets reacted against an ever-increasing mechanistic and rationalistic world—much like the world we find ourselves in at present. By returning to the poetry of Keats from this framework, I believe we can appreciate the intrinsic value of a balanced relationship between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses. Keats's poetry brings us into contact with the higher powers of the imagination which McGilchrist (2024) regards as a quintessential element for leading a more harmonious existence in future years.³ I am not at all harbouring or promoting some naïve and nostalgic conception which believes that reading Keats's poetry will provide the solution for rebalancing the Apollonian and Dionysian energies in the modern Western World. Nevertheless, I do believe and will argue that his best poetry offers a fruitful interaction between the two realms and, in this manner, is able to speak to our present concerns as well.

McGilchrist demonstrates the significance of the Nietzschean duality for our modern world, but in order for us to fully appreciate the pertinence of these two literary and philosophical concepts as a framework for reading the poetry of Keats, a brief historical overview within the broader sphere of Romanticism is also necessary. This overview will situate the study in its appropriate context by

² See Hein Viljoen's (2008:1-19) article on the humanities in general, as well as Szmyd and Mitera's (2024:1022-1039) study concerning the impact of AI on the humanities.

³ See McGilchrist (2024): 'What matters for the future of humanity is imagination'. Moreover, in his third Sophia lecture delivered at Ralston College, McGilchrist further elaborates on this notion by returning to the moral significance associated with the imagination in the Romantic period. Focusing, in his introduction, on most of the major Romantics, McGilchrist shows that the seriousness with which the Romantics regarded the imagination seems to be lacking in contemporary society and the regaining of our imaginative strengths might lead to a more fruitful interaction with the cosmos. If we use our living imagination as a moral power, we become the grateful recipients of the gifts of the earth, whereas if we imagine nature purely as a heap of resources to be exploited, we slip back into the role of the exploiter (Ralston College, 2025).

focusing on the circumstances leading up to what we now regard as the Romantic age. Moreover, it will also allow us to perceive the connection between Nietzsche's theory of the Apollonian and Dionysian and the ideals of the major Romantics (which obviously includes Keats). One of the challenges we encounter when endeavouring to contextualise Romanticism is that we soon find that 'Romanticism resists its definers, who can fix neither its characteristics nor its dates. It is a broad movement in the history of European consciousness' (Bloom and Trilling, 1973:3).⁴ Isaiah Berlin (2013:1) exemplifies the challenge of defining this 'broad movement' when he introduces his astute study, *The Roots of Romanticism*, in the following manner:

I might be expected to begin, or to attempt to begin, with some kind of definition of Romanticism, or at least some generalisation, in order to make clear what it is that I mean by it. I do not propose to walk into that particular trap. The eminent and wise Professor Northrop Frye points out that whenever anyone embarks on a generalisation on the subject of Romanticism, even something so innocuous, for example, as to say that a new attitude sprang up among English poets towards nature—in Wordsworth and Coleridge, let us say, as against Racine and Pope—somebody will always be found who will produce countervailing evidence from the writings of Homer, Kālidāsa, pre-Muslim Arabian epics, medieval Spanish verse—and finally Racine and Pope themselves. For this reason, I do not propose to generalise, but to convey in some other way what it is that I think Romanticism to be.

The above passage summarises the conundrum tasked to the Romantic scholar who seeks a clear and fixed definition of the historical period he is working with. Nevertheless, as is generally concurred, we can approach a tentative definition of the Romantic age from 'some other' angle. That is, we can contextualise the Romantic movement by viewing it as some form of 'revolt against the shared standards and conventions of an earlier age' (Everest, 1990:2):

The term 'Romanticism' is usually used to describe a literary and philosophical movement that occurred in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries. The term is often used to distinguish the thought and literature of the period from that of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, or of the 'Enlightenment', and the expressions 'Enlightenment' and 'Romanticism' are frequently used to suggest contrasting ways of looking at the world. Simply put, such a contrast might be expressed in terms of binary oppositions, such as reason versus

⁴ Also see Berlin (2013:1-2), 'The importance of Romanticism is that it is the largest recent movement to transform the lives and the thought of the Western world. It seems to me to be the greatest single shift in the consciousness of the West that has occurred, and all the other shifts which have occurred in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries appear to me in comparison less important, and at any rate deeply influenced by it'.

emotion; objectivity versus subjectivity; spontaneity versus control; limitation versus aspiration; empiricism versus transcendentalism; society versus the individual; public versus private; order versus rebellion; the cosmopolitan versus the national, and so on. Recent writing, however, has tended to problematize this opposition, arguing that there is not so clean a break between the ideas of the eighteenth century and those of the Age of Romanticism as might at first be apparent. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the canonical Romantic poets were both building upon and reacting against the thought of their predecessors ... (Kitson, 1999:39).

It is certainly true that there is ‘not so clean a break between the ideas of the eighteenth century and those of the Age of Romanticism’ and I return again to this point in a more detailed manner later in this contextualisation. However, for the moment, we first need to briefly familiarise ourselves with the beginning stages of this movement which expressed the first departure from the Enlightenment period. The so-called ‘revolt’ was first initiated by preromantic poets (among others) who ‘not only anticipated the Romantic flowering but showed ways of leaving the strictly classical values of the British Augustan age behind them’ (Tolley, 1999:15). Northrop Frye (1956:144) has fittingly termed this period in English literature the ‘age of sensibility’ as opposed to the broader and more ambiguous term (i.e. preromantic). The ‘revolt’ by the poets belonging to the ‘age of sensibility’ against the ‘classical values’ embodied by the British Augustan age was, however, perhaps too fervent in its embarkation. Frye (1956:151), for instance, notes that ‘Far more than the time of Rimbaud and Verlaine is this period of literature a period of the *poète maudit*.⁵ The list of poets over whom the shadows of mental breakdown fell is far too long to be coincidence’.⁶ This implication is especially evident in the ‘admirable but doomed poets like Chatterton, Cowper and Collins’ who were ‘victims of circumstance and of the false dawn of Sensibility’ (Bloom, 1971:15). Michael J. Tolley (1999:20), on the other hand, states that ‘madness or some other absence of reason is not enough to qualify a poet to be hailed a preromantic’. Tolley is, of course, essentially accurate in indicating that we should not restrictively classify the ‘preromantic’ poets merely according to their mental instability. Notwithstanding the shortcomings of such an oversimplification, we can also not dismiss the fact that ‘the list of poets’ who experienced ‘mental breakdowns’ is ‘far too long to be coincidence’. This suggests that ‘madness or some other absence of reason’ was indeed a common thread running through the ‘age of sensibility’.⁷ Cowper and Collins both suffered from mental illnesses and spent years in asylums (Hopps and Stabler, 2006:45) while Chatterton committed suicide when he was only seventeen years old (Rawson, 1999:15). In a no-nonsense lecture delivered at

⁵ The OED (2025) defines the term ‘*poète maudit*’ as ‘A poet rejected by the literary establishment or who writes outside the mainstream of poetry’.

⁶ Also see McGilchrist’s (2010) article, ‘Four Walls: A Psychiatrist’s View of Poetry and Poets’.

⁷ James Whitehead (2017) offers a comprehensive and lucid investigation of this area in his study, *Madness and the Romantic Poet: A Critical History*.

Cambridge, the poet and classicist, A.E. Houseman (1950:37), expresses this common thread rather frankly:

As matters actually stand, who are the English poets of that age in whom pre-eminently one can hear and recognise the true poetic accent emerging clearly from the contemporary dialect? These four: Collins, Christopher Smart, Cowper, and Blake. And what other characteristic had these four in common? They were mad.⁸

Houseman (1950:38) briefly elaborates this statement and finally distinguishes Blake from his contemporaries by declaring that ‘Blake was never mad enough to be locked up’. It might, at this point, seem like I am making a point about psychology rather than literature, but this background will later prove valuable for recognising the appositeness of Nietzsche’s theory of Apollonian and Dionysian impulses for a Romantic study. In Nietzschean terms, I believe that the poets of the preromantic period were not able successfully to channel the Dionysian spirit which the Augustans, with their prescriptive Apollonian rationalistic worldview, oppressed for so long. This resulted in an excess of the Dionysian and, in the human psyche, might not an excess of the Dionysian result in madness or despair?⁹ Certainly the lives of numerous poets of the preromantic era (some of them briefly mentioned above) contributed to this belief. Blake, considered mad by some (a fact which elicited both his very sane amusement and contemptuous scorn), was, nevertheless, herald of a new era which was able to channel the Dionysian energy by tempering it with some form of Apollonian measure. Roderick Tweedy’s (2012) study, *The God of the Left Hemisphere: Blake, Bolte Taylor, and the Myth of Creation*, supports this view as it sheds new light on the Apollonian qualities of Blake’s work. This evidence further supports the shift to a new era (exemplified by the canonical Romantics) in which the major poets were able successfully to balance Dionysian spontaneity with Apollonian control. Blake was, of course, a wholehearted believer in the power of the imagination, but he was not opposed to all forms of reason either, as Tweedy’s (2012) study reveals. What he was steadfastly opposed to, though, was a one-dimensional Apollonian way of interacting with the universe:

⁸ Whitehead (2017:225) points out that ‘It seems likely that Housman’s stance was intended to provoke an academic Cambridge audience (he called the university “an asylum—in more senses than one”), which (possibly apocryphally) included such figures of analytic criticism as I. A. Richards, Empson, and Leavis’. Kathleen Raine (2017:242) certainly shared Houseman’s sentiments when she wrote: ‘When I was at Cambridge in the early thirties Keats was rated low by the school of I. A. Richards, F. R. Leavis, and William Empson. That so-called “scientific criticism” was grounded in the positivist ideologies then current; the very terms of such criticism discounted the Imagination’.

⁹ The other side of this issue is, of course, also true, but perhaps less germane to the Romantic period as such. McGilchrist (2009:332) notes that “‘To lose one’s reason” is the old expression for madness. But an excess of rationality is the grounds of another kind of madness...’. An example might include a poet such as Edgar Allan Poe.

Blake's enemies, the persons whom he regards as the villains of the whole modern period, are Locke and Newton. Them he regards as those devils who killed the spirit by cutting reality into some kind of mathematically symmetrical pieces What Blake ... desired was some kind of recovery of control over the spiritual element, which had become petrified as a result of human degeneration and the wicked work of unimaginative killers of the human spirit ... (Berlin, 2013:58).

The Romantic poets, in their unique ways, all 'desired' a 'recovery' of the 'spiritual element' of the world. They demonstrated 'a return to a certain form of naturalism after the forced abstraction of the Enlightenment' (De Man, 1969:182). This 'return' can be seen as 'a renaissance of the Renaissance' (Bloom, 1970:226); a return to the imaginative and 'spiritual' powers of Spenser, Milton and Shakespeare.¹⁰ This imaginative and 'spiritual' homecoming naturally included a reawakening of the Dionysian spirit which the age of Enlightenment, with its emphasis on reason and rationality, inevitably oppressed: 'The Nietzschean Dionysus, as a symbol of psychic renewal through the dissolution of the self, is the climactic expression of the instinctual yearnings of European Romanticism' (Feder, 1980:204). However, in rekindling the great power of Dionysian vitality, the Romantics did not abandon reason per se, but rather the limiting and restrictive sense of reason which sought to disenchant the world and, in Keats's words (as quoted in Plumly, 2014:129), 'destroyed all the poetry of the rainbow, by reducing it to a prism'. The Romantics saw that the Enlightenment's emphasis on the power of reason and humankind's mastery of all things was potentially damaging to our wholeness of being. Whereas the preromantic poets shifted the balance from an unyielding Apollonian worldview (embodied by the Enlightenment) to the Dionysian, they were, as far as one could tell by the evident line of 'mental breakdowns', not able to successfully master this newfound Dionysian energy. The Romantic poets, on the other hand, were able to strike some sort of balance between these two extremes.¹¹ McGilchrist (2009:352) succinctly captures the crux of this matter and provides us with a helpful lens through which to view the Romantic movement:

The well-worn phrase 'the Romantic Revolution' conjures a picture of something like that contemporaneous political upheaval, the French Revolution; one would therefore expect to see the established squires and landed gentry of the intellect finding the equivalent of revolting masses at their gates—as though the revolutionaries sprang fully armed from the head of Zeus. In fact, what one finds is an almost invisible, seamless transition, and I don't think it was even

¹⁰ See Bloom's (1971:15) remark, 'What allies Blake and Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats, is their strong mutual conviction that they are reviving the true English tradition of poetry, which they thought had vanished after the death of Milton'.

¹¹ See Michael O'Neill and Madeleine Callaghan (2018:6): 'Romantic poetry matters because it recognizes the facts of division and disunity and longs to repair rents in the fabric of experience. These recognitions and longings enmesh with its high valuation of what we are told by both heart and head'.

a revolution in the sense that people consciously reacted against a way of looking at the world that they found to be deficient. Instead, it was more like a Romantic *Evolution* than a Revolution—in which the seeds of Romanticism were there in the stuff of Enlightenment. How did this come about? The answer, it seems to me, is that Romanticism is more inclusive. The best of Enlightenment values were not negated, but *aufgehoben*,¹² by Romanticism, and persist not only into the coming era, but in fact to this day—along with some of the Enlightenment's more damagingly simplistic notions.

This is, in my view, one of the chief aspects which sets the canonical Romantics apart from their 'doomed' forerunners. For the Romantics, it was not so much a question of 'reason *versus* emotion' or 'spontaneity *versus* control' (my emphases) as it seemed to have been for the poets of the Enlightenment on the one hand and the poets of the 'age of sensibility' on the other. Their outlook was indeed 'more inclusive'. They obviously valued the higher powers of the Dionysian imagination deeply, but they were also aware of the importance of the sobering qualities which the Apollonian offers. This is evident from as early as Wordsworth's (as quoted in Wu, 2012:514) famous expression of poetry in the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800):

Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion similar to that which was before the subject of contemplation is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind.¹³

The above excerpt highlights both the Dionysian ('spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings') and Apollonian ('recollected in tranquillity') characteristics in the mind of the Romantic poet. This is important as it portrays the 'more inclusive' approach to poetry modelled by these poets of the 'Romantic *Evolution*' and, accordingly, expresses the need for a 'more inclusive' critical approach to Romantic poetry which, I believe, can be found in Nietzsche's theory of Apollonian and Dionysian artistic impulses.

Hitherto, my focus has mainly fallen on Romanticism in general. This was necessary to comprehend the connection between Nietzsche's theory of Apollonian and Dionysian impulses and the ideologies of Romanticism in a broader sense. I now want to narrow the focus down to the main subject of this study: Keats. From a biographical perspective, Keats is the ideal subject for the present study:

¹² The term 'aufgehoben' may be thought of as 'the process by which the conflict between two opposed or contrasting things or ideas is resolved by the emergence of a new idea, which both preserves and transcends them' (OED, 2025).

¹³ Coleridge (as quoted in Wu, 2012:514) also recorded a similar idea in his notebook when he stated that poetry was a 'recalling of passion in tranquillity'.

working as a surgeon and a poet, he had to find a way to balance Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in his everyday life. Nevertheless, my emphasis will not be on his personal life, but rather his poetry and how these two opposing, yet complementing impulses manifest themselves in his selected poems. In a critical introduction to his poetry, the Victorian poet and critic, Matthew Arnold (1880:428), wrote that ‘No one can question the eminency, in Keats’s poetry, of the quality of sensuousness. Keats as a poet is abundantly and enchantingly sensuous; the question with some people will be, whether he is anything else?’. Keats scholarship has come a long way since this view was the norm. Douglas Bush (1966:xii-xiii), for instance, asserts that:

Though Keats’s name is identified with sensuous richness, he was never the aesthete or voluptuary of sensation that, to the later nineteenth century, he often seemed to be. For one thing, he was—except in genius—too normal and sensible: if we can imagine ourselves contemporaries, and in urgent need of advice, we would never think of consulting Shelley or Byron or Blake or Coleridge or even Wordsworth, but we would turn with confidence to Keats, the youngest of the lot.

In recent years scholars such as Noel Jackson (2008), Richard Holmes (2008) and Stuart Curran (2017) have taken this ‘sensible’ aspect to greater heights by underscoring Keats’s engagement with science in his poetry. Curran (2017:155) notes that:

Throughout his writing ... Keats evinces a double consciousness as trained medical student and poet, and it is indispensable in reading him that we do not forget, as we honour the subtlety of his aesthetic formulations, the scientific precision he acquired over years of study and praxis.

This ‘double consciousness’ is now a well-established idea in Keats criticism.¹⁴ Hence, it remains vital that we pay careful attention to both the Apollonian and Dionysian aspects of Keats’s work to give credence to the significance of this ‘double consciousness’ present in his poetry. Keats (2005:54-55) believed in the transformative power of the imagination; this is evident in his well-known assertion in an early letter to Benjamin Bailey: ‘I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart’s affections and the truth of Imagination. What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth—whether it existed before or not...’. Notwithstanding the power of his imaginative capacities, Harold Bloom (1961:xv) also notes that of all the major Romantics, Keats ‘had the healthiest of imaginations, balanced at last in a harmony of its own impulses’. I agree with Bloom; even from as early as 1817, Keats, in the same letter, shows a sensible awareness of what he calls a ‘complex Mind, one that is imaginative and at the

¹⁴ I am thinking here of a contemporary study such as Hrileena Ghosh’s (2020) *John Keats’ Medical Notebook: Text, Context, and Poems*, which offers more insights into Keats’s medical career and the impact thereof on his poetry.

same time careful of its fruits, who would exist partly on sensation, partly on thought'. Keats's early verse is often characterised as somewhat naïve and inferior to his later verse romances and, of course, his odes. This is evidently true, but as Kathleen Raine (2000) writes in a preface to her *Collected Poems* of that year, 'It is nevertheless true that a writer's early work often contains the essence of the work that follows, a sort of map of that special vision'. I believe that this view is also appropriate in the case of Keats; even in his first serious attempt to outline his poetic ambitions, *Sleep and Poetry*, we can identify early traces of the 'complex Mind' (which incorporates 'sensation' and 'thought') that Keats (1970:69-85) would continue to refine up to the magnum opus of his 1820 volume:

Oh, for ten years, that I may overwhelm
Myself in poesy; so I may do the deed
That my own soul has to itself decreed.
Then will I pass the countries that I see
In long perspective, and continually
Taste their pure fountains. First the realm I'll pass
Of Flora, and old Pan: sleep in the grass,
Feed upon apples red, and strawberries,
And choose each pleasure that my fancy sees;
Catch the white-handed nymphs in shady places.
To woo sweet kisses from averted faces,
Play with their fingers, touch their shoulders white
Into a pretty shrinking with a bite
As hard as lips can make it, till, agreed,
A lovely tale of human life we'll read.
And one will teach a tame dove how it best
May fan the cool air gently o'er my rest;
Another, bending o'er her nimble tread,
Will set a green robe floating round her head,
And still will dance with ever varied ease,
Smiling upon the flowers and the trees;
Another will entice me on and on
Through almond blossoms and rich cinnamon,
Till in the bosom of a leafy world
We rest in silence, like two gems upcurled
In the recesses of a pearly shell.

And can I ever bid these joys farewell?

Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life,
Where I may find the agonies, the strife
Of human hearts ...¹⁵

Keats never permanently forsook 'the agonies' and 'the strife / Of human hearts' to luxuriate 'In the recesses of a pearly shell'. He did, however, visit these magical realms through the transforming power of the imagination. He drank from the 'pure fountains' of 'Flora, and old Pan' and befriended 'white-handed nymphs', but he always found his way back to the 'nobler life' (the words 'Yes, I must pass them' clearly shows a strong sense of purpose in the real world too). To my mind, the Nietzschean model of Apollonian and Dionysian impulses thus provides us with a most useful theoretical framework for examining important concerns in Keats's poetry such as: engagement with reality, the empathetic imagination, immersion in the natural world, and the formal and technical qualities of his poetry not only as only separate elements but as interconnected entities. The above contextualisation demonstrates that Romanticism was not merely an imaginative escape from all aspects of reason, but was, indeed, a 'more inclusive' approach to life and poetry. By drawing on Nietzsche's duality of the Apollonian and Dionysian, I will attempt to show that these two impulses represent 'two sides of the same coin' in Keats's poetry.

It may at first appear problematic to employ Nietzsche's aesthetic theory as a framework for reading a Romantic poet, given his well-documented ambivalence—if not outright hostility—towards Romanticism. Yet, as Caroline Joan S. Picart (1997:273-291) points out, although 'it is undeniable that Nietzsche himself, in his later pieces, sought to distance himself from what he viewed as the befogging influence of Romanticism', he nevertheless remained deeply indebted to its concerns, to the extent that he may be regarded as 'a masked Romantic'. Mark Sandy (2015:133-144) likewise identifies striking continuities between Nietzschean thought and the English Romantics, noting in particular their shared emphasis on the transformative potential of art and the imagination, as well as Nietzsche's affinity for the Dionysian as an artistic principle. Such insights suggest that Nietzsche's fraught but productive relationship with Romanticism does not foreclose the possibility of a Nietzschean reading of Romantic poetry; on the contrary, it invites a more nuanced critical dialogue, one that is sensitive to both Nietzsche's debts to and his critiques of the movement. I am aware of the possible pitfalls of this approach; however, I believe that Nietzsche's notion provides solid ground for interpreting the poetry of Keats. Where McGilchrist implements Nietzsche's theory to interpret our present condition, this dissertation will employ it retrospectively to better understand Keats's poetry in terms of its concerns with, among others, reality and imagination.

Despite this compatibility, it seems that there has not yet been a sustained Nietzschean reading of Keats's poetry in terms of the Apollonian and Dionysian artistic impulses. Several scholars have,

¹⁵ *Sleep and Poetry*, lines 96-124.

however, recognised moments where this framework is suggestive. Earl R. Wasserman (1967:180), for instance, notes of the odes that ‘the ideal condition towards which Keats always strives because it is his ideal, is one in which mortal and immortal, dynamism and stasis, the Dionysian and the Apollonian, beauty and truth, are one’. Philip Lindholm (2018:268), writing about *Lamia*, observes that ‘the conflict between the Dionysian and Apollonian’ constitutes ‘one of the great underlying themes’ of Keats’s narrative poems. Douglas B. Wilson (1985:823-844) applies the same dialectic to the ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’, arguing that ‘not the least of Keats’s achievements’ lies in his creation of a tension between surface and depth: a dynamic that ‘survives the Nietzschean criticism of Romantic idealism by exposing the Dionysian suffering through the transparency of the Apollonian dream’. More recently, Xiaorui Chen (2023:83-87) has drawn attention to the shifting interplay between the Apollonian and Dionysian in the ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, where earlier stanzas emphasise the Dionysian before the Apollonian reasserts itself in the poem’s closing sobriety:

Ode to a Nightingale is a poem that expresses Keats’s worldview of life and death. He projected himself onto the narrator, and through the journey with the narrator, he showed both Dionysian and Apollonian spirits. When Dionysian establishes the supremacy in previous stanzas, the mournful feeling for beauty’s perishing is more obvious; when Apollonian takes the upwind, the sobriety towards life is presented.

At the level of book-length studies, Mark Sandy’s *Poetics of Self and Form in Keats and Shelley: Nietzschean Subjectivity and Genre* (2005) and *Romanticism, Memory, and Mourning* (2016) represent fruitful approaches to a sustained Nietzschean reading. The former focuses primarily on Keats and Shelley’s narrative poems, while the latter addresses Romantic poetry more generally. In both, however, Sandy acknowledges the productive interaction of Apollonian and Dionysian forces, as in his discussion of the ‘Ode to a Nightingale’:

Appreciating these complexities of Romantic and post-Romantic avian poetic representation pinpoints a cardinal literary moment not of disjuncture but continuity, where, for Nietzsche, ‘Dionysus speaks the language of Apollo and Apollo finally speaks the language of Dionysus’. The Victorian imagination was inescapably captivated by those Romantic Apollonian harmonies interfused with the Dionysian tragic consciousness of Keats’s nightingale.

These studies demonstrate the pertinence of Apollonian and Dionysian categories for understanding Keats’s poetry. What remains lacking, however, is a comprehensive and systematic reading that treats this dualism not as a passing observation, but as a central interpretive framework. Previous scholarship has tended either to isolate particular poems (as in the studies on the ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ and the ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’) or to incorporate Keats into broader Romantic or post-Romantic contexts,

rather than pursuing a sustained engagement with his oeuvre as a whole. Moreover, there has been no attempt to trace the development of Apollonian and Dionysian energies across the trajectory of Keats's 1820 volume, which contains both narrative and lyric poems.

This dissertation, therefore, seeks to fill this critical gap. It argues that Nietzsche's dualism of Apollonian and Dionysian artistic impulses provides a fruitful lens through which to re-examine Keats's 1820 poems, illuminating not only the tensions between Apollonian form and Dionysian intensity, but also the evolving ways in which Keats negotiates their interplay. By focusing exclusively on Keats within a Nietzschean framework, this study attempts to provide a sustained analysis of the poet's work in terms of these two impulses.

1.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As can be deduced from the above contextualisation, the present study will examine the selected poems of Keats through the Nietzschean lens of Apollonian and Dionysian impulses as defined in his treatise, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872). According to Nietzsche (1999:14):

... the continuous evolution of art is bound up with the duality of the *Apollonian* and the *Dionysian* in much the same way as reproduction depends on there being two sexes which co-exist in a state of perpetual conflict interrupted only occasionally by periods of reconciliation. We have borrowed these names from the Greeks who reveal the profound mysteries of their view of art to those with insight, not in concepts, admittedly, but through the penetratingly vivid figures of their gods. Their two deities of art, Apollo and Dionysus, provide the starting-point for our recognition that there exists in the world of the Greeks an enormous opposition, both in origin and goals, between the Apollonian art of the image maker or sculptor (*Bildner*) and the imageless art of music, which is that of Dionysus. These two very different drives (*Triebe*) exist side by side, mostly in open conflict, stimulating and provoking (*reizen*) one another to give birth to ever-new, more vigorous offspring in whom they perpetuate the conflict inherent in the opposition between them ...

In order for us to grasp the 'open conflict' between these 'two deities of art', we first need to clarify what each of these concepts represent. The basic understanding of the Apollonian as a drive towards reason and rationality on the one hand, and the Dionysian as a drive towards intuition and imagination on the other, is, essentially, correct, but they also symbolise additional characteristics which can be associated with the two contrasting spheres of art. The table below illustrates the Apollonian and Dionysian elements that will be examined in the present study. Although this is not an all-encompassing

explication, the table does respectively classify the various elements that will be applied to Keats's selected poems in the succeeding chapters of this dissertation:¹⁶

Table 1: The Apollonian and the Dionysian

Apollonian	Dionysian
'all image-making energies' and 'plastic arts' (pp. 16;80)	'music' which embodies the power 'to shake us to our very foundations' (pp. 14;21)
'Apollonian dream-state' as long as it does not 'overstep' that 'delicate line' where one loses control over one's emotions (pp. 16;45)	'Dionysian state' of 'enchantment' or 'ecstasy' where 'the usual barriers and limits of existence are destroyed' (pp. 30;40;81)
'measured limitation' (p. 16)	'blissful ecstasy' (p. 17)
'clarity', 'firmness', 'definiteness' and 'sophistication' (p. 46)	the 'unrestrictive' power of the 'imagination' (p. 18)
'intricate Apollonian artistry' which, for our purposes, also includes the technical elements of a poem which is consciously and deliberately designed (pp. 104-105)	'daemonic' power of the Dionysian which expresses a power beyond our control (p. 94)
'respect for the limits of the individual' and 'strives to dissolve myth' (pp. 27;85)	dissolution of the self and 'mystical self-abandon' exemplified by Keats's theory of Negative Capability (p. 19)
'logical schematism' and 'science' (pp. 69;87)	'intoxication' and 'drunkenness' but also used metaphorically with regards to an overabundance of feeling and emotion (p. 19)
'believes in correcting the world through knowledge' and 'the energies of the spirits of nature' are 'understood and applied in the service' of man (p. 85)	'destruction of the vale of maya' and 'one-ness' with 'nature' (p. 21)
'getting above oneself and excess were regarded as the true hostile demons of the non-Apollonian sphere' (p. 27)	'excess of sexual indiscipline' (p. 20)
Apollonian 'control' over life also known as ' <i>Mäßigung</i> ' in the original German (p. 155)	Dionysian 'enchantment' (p. 60)

¹⁶ These elements will, of course, be dealt with in a more detailed manner later in the dissertation.

Although Nietzsche was writing about Greek tragedy at the time, his duality of Apollonian and Dionysian impulses can also be applied to poetry. For Nietzsche, the Apollonian and Dionysian should exist as ‘two interwoven artistic drives’ in any successful work of art. They are constantly in ‘open conflict’ with one another, but also ‘stimulate’ each other’s powers and abilities and, at their best, represent ‘a bond of brotherhood’ where Dionysus speaks the language of Apollo, but ‘Apollo’ also ‘speaks that of Dionysus’ (Nietzsche, 1999:59;104). In this dissertation, I attempt to show how these ‘two art-worlds which differ in their deepest essence and highest goals’ can be used as a suitable theoretical framework for analysing Keats’s poetry. I will not only explore these elements as individual concepts, but will also investigate the interplay between them.

1.3 RESEARCH AIMS AND DESIGN

This study investigates the interaction between Apollonian and Dionysian artistic impulses in selected poetry of John Keats. With this in mind, the following aims have been identified:

1. To identify the Apollonian and Dionysian elements which are present in the selected Keats poems.
2. To demonstrate how these elements interrelate, modify and complement one another.
3. To finally show that there exists a balance or a perceived need for balance (to be determined in the case of each poem) between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in Keats’s selected poetry and that we ought to regard both these elements as vital components of his work.

To meet the research aims defined above, this dissertation will implement ‘close readings’ to examine the selected poems vis-à-vis the Nietzschean theoretical framework of the study while also taking deep consideration of the all-too-brief Keats canon. This type of ‘close reading’ entails ‘the detailed analysis of the complex interrelationships and *ambiguities* (multiple meanings) of the verbal and figurative components within a work’ (Abrams and Harpham, 2015:242). Furthermore, I will routinely draw on Keats’s letters to acquire deeper insight as to what these ‘ambiguities’ in his poems might account for.

The poems selected for this study were all first published in Keats’s 1820 volume: *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes and Other Poems*. The selected poems which will be analysed in connection with the theoretical framework of the study are: *Lamia; Isabella; or, The Pot of Basil*¹⁷; *The Eve of St. Agnes*; ‘Ode to a Nightingale’; ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’; ‘Ode to Psyche’; and ‘To Autumn’. The analyses of these poems are further grouped into two chapters according to their genre. Keats’s narrative poems (i.e. three of his shorter verse romances) are discussed in the second chapter while his lyric poems (i.e. four of his odes) are examined in the third chapter. I maintain that this arrangement

¹⁷ Henceforth this poem will be referred to as *Isabella*.

will create a sense of continuity in the argument of this dissertation, because specific concerns relating to narrative poetry or lyric poetry can, accordingly, be addressed in the same space. Moreover, I also believe that this will provide a more comprehensive depiction of the significance of the Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy in Keats's poetry as a whole, as it allows us to deal with both his narrative and lyric poetry. Lastly, the selected poems will be analysed in correlation with their original sequence as they were first published in the 1820 volume and not according to their composition dates. The merit of reading the poems in this sequence will be further explained in the introductory section of the succeeding chapter.

Chapter one of the dissertation has contextualised the research problem, specified the theoretical framework and identified subsequent research questions and aims. The second chapter focuses on the interaction between the Apollonian and Dionysian from a narrative point of view. It thus focuses on narrative elements such as theme, plot and the characters and their relations with one another in relation to the theoretical framework of the study. The third chapter will bring us closer to the poet himself (as lyric poetry inevitably does) and I will focus on the intermingling and counterbalancing relationship which exists between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in the light of the poet's creative process. This includes, *inter alia*, the interplay among the following components: the empathetical imagination and the immortalising thereof through the structural craftsmanship of a technically sound poem; imagination and the plastic arts (sculpture); the abstract and the concrete; and spontaneous immersion in nature and the conscious employment of language. Finally, the fourth chapter will provide concluding remarks and a summation of the main points of the study.

CHAPTER 2: THE NARRATIVE APOLLONIAN AND DIONYSIAN

O golden-tongued Romance, with serene lute!

Fair pluméd Siren, Queen of far-away!

Leave melodizing on this wintry day,

Shut up thine olden pages, and be mute.

Adieu! For, once again, the fierce dispute

Betwixt damnation and impassioned clay

Must I burn through, once more humbly assay

The bitter-sweet of this Shakespearian fruit.¹⁸

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The following chapter attempts to cast light on the interaction between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in the title poems of Keats's 1820 volume: *Lamia*, *Isabella* and *The Eve of St. Agnes*. I argue that close readings vis-à-vis the Nietzschean ideal of Apollonian and Dionysian drives of the selected romances will allow us to better perceive some of the main themes and concerns in the poems. In the previous chapter, I mentioned that Keats's poetry might help us realise the potential of a fruitful intermingling between the Apollonian and Dionysian. While this is true, *Lamia* and *Isabella* show us this in an indirect manner. That is, as we will see later, they show the ultimate dangers and shortcomings of a limiting and one-sided interaction with existence which completely abandons either the Apollonian or the Dionysian. My main focus in this chapter, apart from an instance in *The Eve of St. Agnes* where I investigate the Apollonian effects of light and the plastic arts, mainly revolves around the immersive lives of the characters and their relationships with one another in the respective romances.¹⁹ M.H. Abrams (1953:246) notes that Keats 'expressed a similar conception of Shakespeare's impersonality'.

¹⁸ Extract from the sonnet, 'On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again' (see Keats, 1970:295-296).

¹⁹ I am aware of the fact that there are other forms of Apollonian and Dionysian interaction present in the romances in question. One of the most prominent ones is, of course, the relation between form (Apollonian) and content (at times Dionysian if we think of daemonic creatures, magical settings, enchantments and so forth in the romances). Keats was acutely aware of poetic form throughout his writing career. Nicholas Roe argues that, in a formal sense, the 1820 volume is a *tour de force* as it incorporates both long established conventional forms as well as more experimental verse forms (Bangalore International Centre, 2020). Moreover, Curran (1986:54), for instance, notes that 'Keats's condensation of uncontrollable passion is ... achieved through a breathtaking technical mastery'. Notwithstanding the importance of this notion, for the sake of coherence and to avoid tedious repetition, I return again to this matter in greater detail in the succeeding chapter where I focus on the significance of poetic form in the 'Ode to a Nightingale'.

Keats (2005:194-195) himself affirms this ‘impersonality’ in one of his most well-known letters on the ‘poetical Character’:

As to the poetical Character itself ... it is not itself—it has no self—it is everything and nothing—It has no character—it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated. It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher, delights the camelion Poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things any more than from its taste for the bright one; because they both end in speculation. A Poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence because he has no Identity; he is continually in for and filling some other Body. The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute. The poet has none; no identity. He is certainly the most unpoetical of all God’s Creatures.²⁰

It is the ‘impersonality’ exemplified by Keats’s chameleon-like ‘poetical Character’ which prompts me, in some way, to make the characters (as well as their actions and relations to one another) the main point of analysis in this chapter. In all three of the romances under discussion, Keats succeeds in ‘filling some other Body’. He is never prescriptive or programmatic, but rather allows the scenarios in the poems to play out for themselves without intervening too much on the characters’ parts. Thus, he succeeds in portraying a realistic and accurate account of events in the romances. Moreover, we encounter authentic yet complex characters, because Keats is able to distribute his consciousness through the ‘impersonality’ of his ‘poetical Character’. Consequently, we are not only focusing on his fictional characters, but also on what each of these characters stand for, which, as we will see in the following close readings of the three romances, informs much of my present analysis. By engaging in such an analysis, I believe that we will be able to recognise the irreconcilable Apollonian and Dionysian conflicts in *Lamia* and *Isabella*, and, contrastingly, we will also be able to identify the fruitful intermingling between these two artistic forces in *The Eve of St. Agnes*. Before I progress to my analysis of the three romances, it is first necessary to familiarise ourselves with Keats’s own thinking about romance at this time in his writing career as it certainly impacted the composition, nature and style of the romances. Moreover, a brief contextualisation of his attitude towards romance will also demonstrate the pertinence of the Nietzschean theoretical framework of Apollonian and Dionysian impulses for examining the three selected romances in this chapter.

²⁰ Letter to Richard Woodhouse (27 October 1818). For a helpful discussion on the letter, see Seamus Perry’s (2017:178-187), ‘The Poetical Character’.

When Keats set himself down to write the sonnet, ‘On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again’, on a wintry night of the 22nd of January 1818 at Wentworth Place, we see him banishing ‘golden-tongued Romance’.²¹ Keats’s renouncement of ‘Romance’ in the sonnet might appear somewhat puzzling if we keep in mind that within a month and a half (roughly speaking) he endeavoured to write a new romance, *Isabella*.²² Furthermore, following this sonnet, Keats wrote the three major romances which became the title poems of his final lifetime volume of poetry published in the summer of 1820: *Lamia*, *Isabella*, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, and *Other Poems*.²³ It is, then, also rather ironic that the volume in question introduces Keats as primarily a writer of romances by referring to him as the ‘Author of *Endymion*’: his longest romance of all completed prior to the publication of his 1820 collection (as quoted in Roe, 1997:248).²⁴ Finally, Shelley (1904) also introduces his *Adonais* by acknowledging Keats in accordance with his narrative poems: ‘An Elegy on the Death of John Keats, Author of *Endymion*, *Hyperion* etc.’.

As we can see from the above, Keats could not escape romance, just as romance could not escape Keats. How, then, should we attempt to interpret Keats’s attitude towards romance at this juncture? In my view, a good starting point will be to focus our attention more meticulously on the adjective ‘golden-tongued’: I believe this will provide a good indication of the *type* of romance Keats had in mind when composing the sonnet. Jeffrey N. Cox (2001:98) notes that ‘Keats stayed a poet of romance’, but these ‘late romances are, of course, romances of an unusual kind’ (Rajan, 1980:100). Fraistat (1985:97) goes one step further to clarify what these ‘romances of an unusual kind’ can account for:

Keats dedicates himself to becoming a poet of the ‘agonies, the strife / Of human hearts’. Only such a poet can possibly accommodate human beings to the loss that is at the center of human experience. The *Lamia* volume records Keats’s attempt at this accommodation.

In striving to become ‘such a poet’, Keats writes his ‘new’ romances in which the ‘agonies’ and ‘strife’ of our own mortal reality are not abandoned, but instead worked into the fabric of these narrative poems.

²¹ For the act of reading Shakespeare as well as Keats’s own mannerisms and rituals when reading, see Theodore B. Leinwand’s (2002:106-123), ‘On Sitting Down to Read Shakespeare Once Again’

²² I use the word ‘new’ in two ways here. Firstly, meaning that the romance has been ‘brought into existence for the first time’, thus it is a newly composed poem, but I also have in mind its other meaning: ‘Of a kind now first invented or introduced’ (OED, 2025). The three romances Keats wrote after this sonnet are romances of a ‘new’ kind as will become clear later in the chapter.

²³ For the original cover of the volume in question, see Neil Fraistat’s (1985:96), *The Poem and the Book: Interpreting Collections of Romantic Poetry*.

²⁴ Roe (1997:230-266) provides a thorough contextualisation and reception of Keats’s 1820 collection in his book, *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent*.

According to Abrams and Harpham (2015:45), the romance (a word stemming from the genre's origins in French literature, the Romance language stemming from the Roman language, Latin) is characterized by its medieval air and chivalric ideals of courage, loyalty, honour and mercifulness. Keats admired romances written by Chaucer, Ronsard and Boccaccio, but, according to Andrew Motion (1997:248-249), felt he needed to challenge 'the gentleness of old Romance' in his 1820 volume. Beth Lau (2022:196) perceives the ending of 'On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again' as Keats's 'desire to awaken from the pleasing illusion offered by Romance and grapple with the harsh but authentic and meaningful realities ("our deep eternal theme") he confronts in Shakespeare's drama'. Moreover, Susan J. Wolfson (2015:49) effectively notes that '*old* echoes Romance's "*golden-tongued*" "*olden Pages*". The dismissal of 'Romance' in the sonnet is therefore not a dismissal of *all* 'Romance', but the overly sentimental '*golden-tongued*' romance under the rule of the 'Queen of *far-away*' (my emphasis) which too easily forsakes reality for 'the recesses of a pearly shell'.²⁵ In these 'late romances', we thus recognise what Nicholas Roe (2012:310) regards as a movement away from 'decorative romance' which Albert Gérard (1962:18) explains as the following:

Fortunately for English poetry, Keats was neither a politician, nor a civil servant, nor a soldier, and the only way for him to solve the antinomy between life and art and to do some good to mankind was through art. Art itself was the way out of his dilemma. Not, of course, the kind of poetry that he sometimes thought 'a mere Jack-a-lantern', the poetry of summer luxury and facile escapism which had been so gratifying to his sense of happiness and perfection. It was Keats's task to revise for himself his conception of art so as to reconcile his hankering after ideal beauty, his clear-sighted perception of actual misery, and his impatient craving to help mankind.²⁶

From the above quotations, one can begin to perceive the movement away from 'the poetry of summer luxury and facile escapism' in Keats's 1820 volume. He leaves behind the 'Realm of Flora' where one can block out all sense of harsh reality.²⁷ The latter part of Keats's (1970:320) epistle, 'To J.H. Reynolds,

²⁵ I am aware of the fact that certain medieval romances definitely explore dark themes and engage with the harsher aspects of reality. Therefore, I stress the term 'golden-tongued' as a way to distinguish the escapist tendencies of these romances from the more serious ones.

²⁶ Also see Keats's (2005:98-101) letter to Benjamin Bailey (13 March 1818): 'I am sometimes so very sceptical as to think Poetry itself a mere Jack-a-lantern to amuse whoever may chance to be struck with its brilliance'.

²⁷ Alan Bewell's (1992:71-98) 'Keats's "Realm of Flora"', offers an extensive exploration of this concept. My usage of the term here is in correlation with Bewell's account of the 'realm of Flora' and, also, in relation with Keats's own description in *Sleep and Poetry*. Also see Abrams's (1953:328), *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*: 'Keats had predicted that he must one day desert the realm of Flora and Old Pan "to find the agonies, the strife Of human hearts"'.

Esq.’ (written at around the same time as *Isabella*) builds on this idea and, accordingly, offers us another helpful (and this time more direct) way to understand his own outlook on life during this period:

Dear Reynolds! I have a mysterious tale,
And cannot speak it: the first page I read
Upon a Lampit rock of green sea-weed
Among the breakers; ‘twas a quiet eve,
The rocks were silent, the wide sea did weave
An untumultous fringe of silver foam
Along the flat brown sand; I was at home
And should have been most happy, —but I saw
Too far into the sea, where every maw
The greater on the less feeds evermore.
But I saw too distinct into the core
Of an eternal fierce destruction,
And so from happiness I far was gone.²⁸

Even though Keats never intended for these impromptu verses to meet the public eye, the epistle ‘goes far toward explaining the sense of mist and darkness, the feeling of the “burden of the Mystery” that was beginning to oppress him while forcing him, at the same time, to extend his vision into the “dark Passages” that were opening on all sides’ (Sperry, 1969:563).²⁹ Keats, at this point in his short career, is able to see ‘Too far into the sea’; the naivety of his earlier visions is no longer there. Consequently, he is able to ‘extend his vision’ and recognise the darker aspects of nature and human existence (by seeing ‘too distinct into the core’). Even though he ‘should have been most happy’ in this moment, his awareness of the ‘eternal fierce destruction’ hampers this feeling of happiness. The fact that Keats can recognise ‘destruction’ in the silent rocks and the ‘untumultous fringe of silver foam’ does not necessarily point to an overly pessimistic outlook on life, but rather a growing awareness that everything is not always as it seems and that we should be conscious of this reality. We can further elaborate this notion by considering another of Keats’s (2005:124) letters to Reynolds (written about a month after the epistle):

Well, I compare human life to a large Mansion of Many Apartments, two of which I can only describe, the doors of the rest being as yet shut upon me. The first we step into we call the infant

²⁸ ‘To J.H. Reynolds, Esq.’, lines 86-98.

²⁹ For an in-depth discussion of the epistle in question, see Stuart M. Sperry’s (1969:562-574), ‘Keats’s Epistle to John Hamilton Reynolds’.

or thoughtless Chamber, in which we remain as long as we do not think. We remain there a long while, and notwithstanding the doors of the second Chamber remain wide open showing a bright appearance, we care not to hasten to it, but are at length imperceptibly impelled by the awakening of the thinking principle within us. We no sooner get into the second Chamber, which I shall call the Chamber of Maiden-Thought, than we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere, we see nothing but pleasant wonders and think of delaying there forever in delight. However, among the effects this breathing is father of is that tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of Man, of convincing one's nerves that the World is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression, whereby This Chamber of Maiden Thought becomes gradually darken'd and at the same time on all sides of it many doors are set open, but all dark, all leading to dark passages.³⁰

Keats's chamber metaphor here is significant, because it shows that his thinking on life includes 'Many Apartments' and, pertinently for our concerns, mirrors his awareness that in our minds we should also be able to visit and draw from our own (in terms of this dissertation) Apollonian and Dionysian chambers. Up to this point, I have placed greater emphasis on Keats's ever-growing awareness of reality and the general insufficiency of 'golden-tongued Romance' for him at this time in his career. This was necessary for us to comprehend and contextualise Keats's thinking with regards to romance leading up to the composition of the three romances in question. However, even though Keats's 'late romances' do portray a more immediate sense of reality, we should also not linger in this 'Chamber' forever. We should always remember that Keats still possessed a 'massively powerful imaginative mind' (Engell, 1981:277).³¹ Therefore, we should not shut all other (imaginative) doors and make this sense of reality our sole concern. This would only result in a one-sided (thus limiting) reading of the romances. In fact, in *Lamia* and *Isabella*, we can see how damaging a restrictive outlook which bounds you to one chamber of existence can be. I return again to Keats's idea of different chambers in my close readings of the romances.

In conclusion to the point under discussion, Robert Kern (1990:69) summarises Keats's attitude with regards to his 'late romances' as follows:

The dilemma that romance becomes for Keats does not lie in the question of whether or not to reject it, but in the question of how to make it more inclusive, how to establish a greater continuity between the beauty of romance and the harsh truths of reality.

³⁰ Letter to Reynolds (3 May 1818).

³¹ It is, as Charles W. Mahoney (2017:168) puts it: 'To do justice to Keats, that is to say, one must attempt to do justice to his imagination'.

The word ‘inclusive’ is important, as it clearly connects with the importance of a ‘more inclusive’ worldview for the Romantics identified in the previous chapter. It is indeed ‘more inclusive’ of reality, which not all romances are, hence, my initial focus on Keats’s emphasis on reality in these romances. Notwithstanding this emphasis, Keats’s ‘late romances’ lead us from one chamber to another: they allow us to perceive the danger and potential of both the Apollonian and Dionysian realms. In order for us to fully appreciate these three romances, we must be willing to visit Keats’s different chambers. I aim to recognise the ‘inclusive’ nature of these romances and, accordingly, produce close readings from the doorsteps of both (Apollonian and Dionysian) chambers.

The above discussion clarifies Keats’s disapproval of ‘golden-tongued Romance’ and, in turn, demonstrates the suitability of reading these romances through a ‘more inclusive’ framework such as the Nietzschean dichotomy of Apollonian and Dionysian impulses. In terms of the structure of my argument, I have chosen to analyse the three romances in their original sequence as first published in the 1820 volume. Fraistat (1985:98) notes that ‘whether Keats assembled the *Lamia* volume alone or jointly with his editors ... it does show sophisticated organization’. *Lamia* (August 1819), for example, was written after *Isabella* (March 1818) and *The Eve of St. Agnes* (January 1819), yet it appears first in the 1820 volume. Positionings such as these ‘suggest that the order of the poems is itself important’ (Fraistat, 1985:98). Although it is, perhaps, ‘impossible to prove that Keats consciously organised the *Lamia* volume ... it can be shown that such a reading is consonant with Keats’s own view of the poetic process and the actual movement of the poems’ (Fraistat, 1985:98). I agree with Fraistat that reading the 1820 volume in its original sequence is valuable for appreciating this ‘movement of the poems’. Bate (1982:235) notes that most developments in Keats’s writing operates ‘subterraneously’. For the purposes of this study, then, I believe that we can also recognise a ‘subterranean’ development of Apollonian and Dionysian interaction when we read the poems in their original sequence. As we move through the romances, the relationship between the Apollonian and Dionysian progresses from conflict (*Lamia* and *Isabella*) to subtle intermingling (*The Eve of St. Agnes*). At the end of *The Eve of St. Agnes*, the reader experiences a sense of relief when the lovers can finally escape to begin a new life elsewhere; something that was not possible in the previous two romances. Moreover, as the following close readings argue: this sense of relief is also metaphorically mirrored by a sense of relief regarding the Apollonian and Dionysian tensions in the romances. For these reasons, I have chosen to read the poems in their original sequence.³²

³² I believe that, for the purposes of our study, the sequence of the poems is perhaps less important when it comes to the odes. However, to maintain a sense of continuity in the argument, I also analyse the odes in the originally published sequence.

2.2 LAMIA

*Do you hear me, Lycius? Do you hear these dreams
moving like words out of the air, it seems?
You think you saw me thin into a ghost,
impaled by his old eyes, with their shuddering boast
of pride that kills truth with philosophy.
But you hear this voice. Is it a serpent's, or
is it a woman's, this rich-emblazoned core
reaching out loud for you, as I once reached
for you with my two hands, and your whole life beseeched?*

*But now I am all serpent, and I go
where serpents go, taking my path, as slow
as any creature fallen to the earth—
though I will flash with somber fire mirth
through my volcano belly when you come near,
till every human word you say is clear.³³*

2.2.1 Introduction

Richard Benvenuto (1972:10) states that ‘To read *Lamia* rightly, we must read it without allegiance’. As hard a task as this might be, it is my intention to examine *Lamia* in this chapter ‘without allegiance’. In the case of this reading, it involves looking with an objective eye at both *Lamia* and Apollonius’s respective influence on Lycius in the romance. I have stated previously that this study will examine the intermingling between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses, however, in *Lamia*, Keats reveals the other side of the shield: this romance offers ‘a mode in which to contemplate irreconcilable dualities’ (Badcoe, 2011:354). We therefore find that we cannot examine the ‘fruitful intermingling’ between the two impulses, but we can, nevertheless, examine their interaction, even if this leads to an ‘irreconcilable’

³³ Extract from a poem, ‘*Lamia to Lycius*’, by Annie Finch (1998:376).

conflict between them. *Lamia* turns inwardly towards the character's inner-beings, and, in this part of the chapter, I will thus explore the conflict between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in *Lamia* by focussing on the three main characters (and their triangular relationship) in the poem: Lamia, Lycius and Apollonius. In essence, *Lamia* allows us to discern a world in which the *imbalance* between Apollonian and Dionysian energies reigns. This perspective will later prove valuable as it will enable a juxtaposition which will certainly sharpen our understanding regarding the necessity of a *balance* between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in Keats's poetry.

2.2.2 Literature Review

There appears to be a general consensus among critics that there are 'conflicting impulses' at work in *Lamia* (Roberts, 2018:55).³⁴ What appears to be a more contested matter, though, is what constitutes these 'conflicting impulses'. Indeed, in Keats's personal life at the time of writing *Lamia*, numerous 'conflicting impulses' presented themselves to him. On the one hand, Keats 'wanted to devote himself to writing for just a few more months', but, on the other hand, Keats (struggling financially at this point in time) 'began to consider signing up as a ship's surgeon on an Indiaman' (Bate, 1982:526). Moreover, Keats's brother, George (who had often helped Keats out financially in the past), was in desperate need of money, but Keats, himself trying (and barely succeeding) to make ends meet, was unable to help him (Bate, 1982:525-526). In addition to the abovementioned, Keats was stuck between his intense love for Fanny Brawne, while he was also harbouring the thought that he did not have a 'right feeling towards women' (Keats, 2005:169). During the time of *Lamia*'s composition, Keats's 'health was [also] deteriorating' and his 'throat was sore', leaving him torn between his need for productivity and recovering from the illness which was weighing him down (Motion, 1997:417).³⁵ The list seems exhausting and one can, potentially, recognise more of these 'conflicting impulses' in Keats's personal life during his 'living year'.³⁶ It is, therefore, possible that the above misfortunes played a hand in Keats's writing of *Lamia*, thus it is worth taking note of these 'conflicting impulses' before we progress to the analysis of the poem.³⁷

³⁴ The words 'conflicting impulses' also occur in E. Douka Kabitoglou's (1992:121) article on *Lamia*.

³⁵ See Keats's (2005:315) letter to Fanny Brawne, dated 15 June 1819: 'I have been in so irritable a state of health these two or three last days, that I do not think I should be able to write this week'.

³⁶ I borrow this phrase from the title of Robert Gittings's (1971) book, *John Keats: The Living Year*. Also see Wootton (2022:113-117) for a more contemporary commentary on Keats's 1819 year. Keats's most fertile period in writing was also a particularly challenging period in his personal life.

³⁷ The South African poet and medical doctor (who also read medicine at Guy's Hospital), C. Louis Leipoldt (1980:21), writing on Keats for *The Westminster Review* during the aftermath of the Anglo Boer War in 1907, for example, notes that the 'items of personal detail' regarding Keats's life are 'intrinsically valuable' as they 'often afford valuable clues to the individuality of the man'.

From the brief biographical contextualisation above, one can form a tentative picture of the ‘conflicting impulses’ informing Keats’s personal life during the period in which he wrote *Lamia*. Critical scholarship vis-à-vis the romance in question, similarly, identifies numerous conflicts in the poem. Edward T. Norris (1935:323) regards *Lamia* as a conflict between ‘the principle of feeling as opposed to thought, of sensuousness as opposed to knowledge’. Stiller (1971:58) writes that the romance ‘serves well to introduce the basic Keatsian conflict between mundane reality and some extra-worldly ideal state’. Benvenuto (1972:6) notes that the poem ‘reflects the emerging conflict between nineteenth-century science and poetry’. Fraistat (1985:130) identifies a conflict between romance and reality as a major thread in the poem. Kabitoglou (1992:121) sheds light on the contradiction between ‘intellectualism’ and ‘enthusiasm’ in *Lamia* with regards to the eighteenth-century literary tradition that ‘looked suspiciously upon any intensity of consciousness’ or ‘exalted mood’. Denise Gigante (2002:433-448) draws attention to Keats’s opinion of Newton and, subsequently, examines the conflict between poetry and science in *Lamia*. William Ulmer (2021:181-183) notes that Regency England ‘left Keats struggling for commercial success’ and, consequently, he views the romance as a ‘compromise between [Keats’s] artistic principles and the preference of Regency readers’. Most recently, Beth Lau (2022:198) stated that ‘What previous studies of Keats and romance have overlooked is another set of conflicts featured in his work: that between facts and invention or imagination’.

All the above interpretations are well-motivated; however, significantly for this study, Philip Lindholm (2018:268) perceives a ‘conflict between the Dionysian and Apollonian’ as ‘one of the great underlying themes of Keats’s narrative poem [*Lamia*]’.³⁸ The last-mentioned conflict is especially pertinent to our concerns and is, accordingly, the one that will be explored in this reading.

The short critical overview above intends not merely to provide a brief summary of the dominant critical discourse on the poem, but it also aims to support the pertinence of Nietzsche’s Apollonian and Dionysian dichotomy as a theoretical framework for the poem in question. The Apollonian and Dionysian notions are encompassing and far-reaching terms and, through examining the conflict between these two impulses in the poem, one will, additionally, shed light (albeit not specifically or comprehensively) on a number of the above conflicts, as various of these notions, in one way or another, form part of Nietzsche’s Apollonian or Dionysian classifications.

2.2.3 The First Meeting

Before we come to Lamia and Lycius’s first encounter in the romance, it might be advantageous to contextualise, briefly, the events leading up to this meeting. The first part of the poem (Part I, lines 1-

³⁸ This reference is especially germane; although it is not stated whether Lindholm had Nietzsche’s theory of the Apollonian and Dionysian in mind here, the basic context of the article seems to support the idea that he is also speaking of the Nietzschean Apollonian and Dionysian.

145) ‘provides a context for the sequence of events that follows’ (Reiman, 1971:663). It introduces Lamia’s magical powers, since she implements her magic to help Hermes track down his ‘sweet nymph’ (Part I, line 122) (Keats, 1970:613-648). Hermes, fulfilling his side of the bargain, aids in Lamia’s regaining her ‘woman’s shape’ as ‘charming as’ she had ‘before’ (Part I, line 118) by releasing her from her ‘wreathéd tomb’ (Part I, line 38).³⁹ The romance between Hermes and the nymph at the beginning of the poem indicates a distinction for subsequent relationships in *Lamia*. Hermes and the nymph are both supernatural beings, hence they can ‘escape reality totally’ (Walker, 1982:110). They exist in a totally fictive realm; they do not have roots which bind them to earth, accordingly they can love in liberty.⁴⁰ Lamia, on the other hand, ‘has claims to both the region above and this earth’, therefore she ‘is destined to have a bad time of it in her relationships with Lycius who cannot fly’ (Walker, 1982:108). Lycius, as a mortal being, will always be at odds with the magical realm of Lamia. Hermes and the nymph’s fairy tale love emphasises and foreshadows the unattainability of this type of love for mortals in the romance. Consequently, Keats uses it as such and does not spend a great deal of time on their love affair.⁴¹ In Lamia and Lycius’s romance, however, the ‘agonies’ and ‘strife’ of ‘human hearts’ are fully explored, making their romance especially relevant to our present concerns in this chapter.

The previous paragraph provides sufficient context for us to now consider Lamia and Lycius’s first encounter in the poem:

For by some freakful chance he made retire
 From his companions, and set forth to walk,
 Perhaps grown wearied of their Corinth talk.
 Over the solitary hills he fared,
 Thoughtless at first, but ere eve’s star appeared
 His phantasy was lost, where reason fades,
 In the calmed twilight of Platonic shades.⁴²

³⁹ Lamia’s transformation from ‘Lamia the snake’ to ‘Lamia the woman’ takes place from lines 146-170 in ‘semi-scientific terms, as if Keats were observing a violent experiment in a laboratory, or a surgical procedure’ (Holmes, 2008:324-325).

⁴⁰ See Part I, lines 127-128: ‘Real are the dreams of Gods, and smoothly pass / Their pleasures in a long immortal dream’, and line 145: ‘Nor grew they pale, as mortal lover’s do’.

⁴¹ ‘Once Lamia has been granted her wish to return to human form, Hermes and the nymph are irrelevant to the subsequent action; nor do they even linger as an ironic backdrop against which Lamia and Lycius act out the tragedy of human yearning for an immortality of passion’ (Wasserman, 1967:158).

⁴² *Lamia*, Part I lines 230-236.

Earl R. Wasserman (1967:165) notes that Lycius ‘has been ... prepared for the meeting with *Lamia*’. This is a helpful observation and an important one in order to understand Lycius and Lamia’s first ‘meeting’. In the process of ‘retiring’ from ‘his companions’, Lycius also (‘by some freakful chance’) retired from his world of ‘commerce, envious rivals and public engagement’ (Badcoe, 2011:359). Furthermore, he retired from ‘their Corinth talk’ involving systematising life into categories of logic and fact.⁴³ The young Corinthian philosopher thus manages to stray beyond the confines and encroachments of the rational mind through his ‘solitary’ intuiting.⁴⁴ His ‘Thoughtless’ wandering leads him to the place ‘where reason fades’ and his own intuition and feelings gain the upper-hand. His move from city to forest is, consequently, also a metaphorical move from a pure Apollonian (rational) outlook on life to a Dionysian (intuitive) frame of mind.⁴⁵ He looks beyond his ‘Apollonian consciousness’ (the rational, limiting worldview of Corinth) that ‘hid this Dionysian world’ (which he is about to discover) from him ‘like a veil’ (Nietzsche, 1999:21). This relocation (physically and spiritually) sets up Lycius’s first meeting with Lamia:

... He passed, shut up in mysteries,
 His mind wrapped like his mantle, while her [Lamia’s] eyes
 Followed his [Lycius’s] steps, and her neck regal white
 Turned—syllabbling thus, ‘Ah, Lycius bright,
 And will you leave me on the hills alone?
 Lycius, look back! and be some pity shown!’
 He did—not with cold wonder fearingly,
 But Orpheus-like at an Eurydice;
 For so delicious were the words she sung,
 It seemed he had loved them a whole summer long.
 And soon his eyes had drunk her beauty up,
 Leaving no drop in the bewildering cup ...⁴⁶

⁴³ See Benvenuto (1972:6): ‘Keats’s famous indictment of “cold philosophy” is not an attack upon fact or objective inquiry’. In *Lamia*, ‘philosophy’, ‘includes all systematic thinking whose procedure is to categorize realities into fixed exclusive quantities’.

⁴⁴ For a full exploration of the Platonic reference in this passage, see Joseph C. Sitterson (1984:200-213).

⁴⁵ Mark Thomas (1989:73-79) provides a geographical and orthographical reading of the poem which specifies some of the ambiguous locations in the poem.

⁴⁶ *Lamia*, Part I lines 241-252

It is important for us to recognise the immediate shift of Lycius's frame of mind in this passage: he is now 'shut up in mysteries', which stands in total contrast to Corinth's logical approach (which attempts to suppress all sense of mystery) to life. Hence, he has been 'prepared' for his meeting (as Wasserman notes) with Lamia, because he is in an intuitive mood prior to their encounter. In Nietzsche's (1999:60) treatise, we find an account particularly pertinent to the above extract from the poem:

... but the god Dionysus is too powerful; even the most rational and thoughtful of his opponents, such as Pentheus in the *Bacchae*, becomes enchanted by him unexpectedly and later runs into his fate because of this enchantment.

We can paraphrase this extract in order to clarify (according to the Apollonian and Dionysian concerns of the study) the above episode in the romance: Lamia's music is 'too powerful', so that even the 'rational' and 'thoughtful' Lycius 'becomes enchanted' by her ('and later runs into his fate because of this enchantment'). Northrop Frye (1983:123) notes that 'charm is from *carmen*, music' and 'the primary associations of charm are with music, sound and rhythm'. Moreover, Paul Endo (1999:115) states that the 'ear is a prominent opening for Lamia's magic' and that it is 'her singing' which 'enchants Lycius' during their first meeting.⁴⁷ It is clear that Lamia draws on her power of Dionysian music to seduce the rationalistically inclined Lycius in the previously referred to episode from the poem. Lamia's 'song of love' is 'too sweet for *earthly* lyres' (line 299).⁴⁸ Her 'daemonically fascinating song' exceeds the 'earthly' music of mundane reality (Nietzsche, 1999:128). Her 'ever more seductive, magical melodies' are from a Dionysian realm and so too are their powerful impact on Lycius (see Nietzsche, 1999:27).⁴⁹ It is Lamia's beautiful singing, charged and replete with Dionysian energy, that makes Lycius fall in love with her. Moreover, as Anne K. Mellor (2001:223) notes, 'For Lycius to fall in love with Lamia', he is ultimately committing himself to a higher 'daemonic power'.⁵⁰ Nicholas Meihuizen

⁴⁷ See *Lamia*, line 268: '...these ravished ears of mine'. The OED (2025) defines the word 'ravished' in this context as 'Transported in spirit or with some strong emotion, entranced, enraptured, captivated'.

⁴⁸ The emphasis on 'earthly' here is my own and used to indicate the otherworldly nature of her music.

⁴⁹ Although the context differs greatly, Nietzsche (1999:71) writes about the powerful impact of music on another rationally-inclined philosopher in his account: 'Just occasionally that despotic logician felt there was something missing in his relation to art, an emptiness, a half-reproach, a duty which he had perhaps failed to perform. As he tells his friends in prison, the same figure kept appearing to him in dream time after time, and it always said the same thing: "Socrates, make music!" Until his very last days he put his mind at rest with the thought that his philosophizing was the highest art of the Muses, and that he could not really believe a deity would remind him of "common, popular music". Finally, in prison, he agrees to play the music for which he has so little respect, so as to unburden his conscience completely'. The powerful Dionysian power of Lamia's music encourages, to an extent, also a metaphorical unchaining of the narrow-sighted Corinthian society in the character of Lycius.

⁵⁰ Also consider Bruce Clarke's (1984:560) statement: 'Participation turns daemonic when one of the participating agents is possessed or dispossessed by another'. One cannot help but notice an analogy between

(2024:392-393) also emphasises her daemonic (part of the Dionysian) nature when he states that, 'Simply, Lamia is daemonic because "beyond the human" in her very essence, a creature of the imagination (and the refinement of consciousness Keatsian imagination implies) with a profound impact on the human world'.

Nietzsche (1999:26) notes that 'Apollo demands measure from all who belong to him' and 'getting above oneself and excess were regarded as true hostile demons of the non-Apollonian sphere'. He also notes that the Apollonian impulse is marked by 'thoughtful moderation' (Nietzsche, 1999:121). In this part of the poem, we can clearly perceive that Lycius abandons the 'thoughtful moderation' of the Apollonian realm (resembled by, albeit extreme fashion, his own Corinthian society) in order to welcome the emotional 'excess' of the Dionysian realm. Lycius 'had drunk her beauty up / Leaving no drop in the bewildering cup'. The fact that Lycius left 'no drop' in the 'bewildering cup' sheds light on his overpowering Dionysian feeling of 'excess' during this meeting. It is crucial for us to note the unmitigated balance-shift between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses from as early as their first meeting. Lycius does not attempt to temper Lamia's Dionysian presence with any form of Apollonian restraint, instead, he suspends all Apollonian thoughts in favour of a Dionysian feeling of 'excess'. Their first encounter thus anticipates the ratio of Apollonian and Dionysian influence that will direct their short relationship throughout the remainder of the romance.

2.2.4 Unperplexed Delight

The previous paragraph introduces the Dionysian power Lamia holds over Lycius, but it might prove germane for us briefly to examine another one of their encounters in the romance in order to shed more light on this Dionysian influence:

Then from amaze into delight he fell
To hear her whisper woman's lore so well;
And every word she spake enticed him on
To unperplexed delight and pleasure known.⁵¹

Lamia and the 'very wildest of nature's' Dionysian creatures described by Nietzsche (1999:20) as 'a mixture of cruelty and sensuality'. Holmes (2008:324) notes that Keats presents Lamia 'as if she were the result of some astonishing new chemical or biological combination, producing a gleaming, seductive but utterly alien life form'. Her presence to Lycius is, therefore, daemonic throughout the romance.

⁵¹ *Lamia*, Part I lines 324-327.

Reiman (1971:667) notes that Lamia ‘creates a palace of sensual delight, an urban bower of bliss, in which the present moment is all in all’. Lamia, this time by whispering ‘woman’s lore so well’, opens a new (Dionysian) world up for Lycius, a world which the rational and logical environment of Corinth kept hidden from him for too long.⁵² Under her Dionysian influence, he experiences ‘unperplexed’ delight which is not modified by any deliberate thought except his own intuitive response to the ‘present moment’. At this point in the romance, Lamia’s Dionysian effect is still beneficial to Lycius, because it allows him to experience a new mode of existence beyond the rigid and limiting demands of Corinth. I have on a number of occasions emphasised the rational approach of the Corinthian society of *Lamia*. There is a peculiar instance in the final stages of the romance which sheds even more light on their rationalistic inclinations: during Lycius and Lamia’s wedding, the guests arrive and, immediately, ‘themselves in order placed’ (Part II, line 196). Their world is one of ‘order’ leaving no space for one’s own instinctual freedom. However, if the Dionysian impulse becomes too dominant, it might have a similar and dangerous (even limiting) effect, as the succeeding section will consider.

2.2.5 The Limits of the Bower of Bliss

After establishing the Dionysian control Lamia holds over Lycius in the first part of the poem, it might now be beneficial for us to examine the inevitable danger of this one-sided power as their relationship progresses through the romance:

Deafening the swallow’s twitter, came a thrill
 Of trumpets—Lycius started—the sounds fled,
 But left a thought, a-buzzing in his head.
 For the first time, since first he harboured in
 That purple-lined palace of sweet sin,
 His spirit passed beyond its golden bourn

⁵² Lamia’s character is veiled in ambiguities. Earlier in the romance, we learn that she is ‘A virgin purest lipped, yet in the lore / Of love deep learned to the red heart’s core’ (lines 189-190). She is ‘still unshent’, yet it also appears ‘As though in Cupid’s college she had spent / Sweet days as a lovely graduate’. The matter becomes even more complex when we consider Frye’s (1976:73) statement which stipulates that ‘in the social conditions’ of romance, ‘virginity is to a woman what honor is to a man’. We do not have the space to fully explore Lamia’s character here, but these ambiguities add an extra layer to her Dionysian character, therefore they are worth taking note of at this juncture. For a more comprehensive exploration of Lamia’s origin and the ambiguities surrounding her character, see Coleman O. Parsons’s (1977:183-192) account which includes a definition of and discussion on ‘lamiae’ from Keats’s standard John Lemprière (1801:433) reference. Furthermore, also see Garret Stewart (1976:3-41) for a careful investigation of Lamia’s past and the effect it has on the narrative as a whole.

Into the noisy world almost forsworn.
 The lady, ever watchful, penetrant,
 Saw this with pain, so arguing a want
 Of something more, more than her empery
 Of joys; and she began to moan and sigh
 Because he mused beyond her, knowing well
 That but a moment's thought is passion's passing-bell.⁵³

'For the first time' in their brief love affair, Lycius's 'thoughts' began to surface. In their 'purple-lined palace of sweet sin', Lycius was solely guided by Lamia's 'emperry / Of joys'. The 'hoarse alarm of Corinth's voice' (Part II, line 61) embodied in the 'thrill' of the 'trumpets' reignites Lycius's Apollonian consciousness ('leaving a *thought*, a-buzzing in his head').⁵⁴ Reiman (1971:666) pertinently notes that:

... as one experienced in the uses of the imagination, she [Lamia] knows that same visionary power that stimulated her to pursue young Lycius may cause him to become dissatisfied with her love. Once he is enraptured by passion, she must shut the windows of his imagination, for power to see beyond one's bourne will spoil the pleasures of all sensation.

Lamia commits the same fallacy as the Corinthian society and Apollonius in this section of the poem. She revealed a new Dionysian world for Lycius earlier in the romance, enriching his life by allowing him to experience 'unperplexed delight' and to recognise the value of his own feelings and intuition. Notwithstanding the significance of this emotional enrichment, she also now 'shuts the windows' to another world, more specifically, an Apollonian world. We can, at this point, recall Keats's 'simile of human life' based on the 'Mansion' image mentioned in the chapter's introduction: Lamia bolts the door of the Apollonian chamber; she wants to keep him in this intoxicating atmosphere, her 'magic palace' where he sees only 'pleasant wonders' (Raine, 2017:242). She expresses her 'pain' when Lycius 'mused beyond her' in need of 'something more'. Lycius's need of 'something more' links up with the balance required between both impulses (something Keats certainly seemed to care for as well). Even though he has now discovered a new instinctive part of himself, Lamia knows that when Lycius is musing 'beyond her', he is also musing 'beyond' the life she is capable of offering him.

⁵³ *Lamia*, Part II lines 27-39.

⁵⁴ The emphasis on 'thought' here is my own.

On the level of narrative, Lamia's world is as *imbalanced* as Corinth's world. Her 'empery / Of joys' is too far removed from reality to make it an enduring enrichment for Lycius. Furthermore, the authenticity of their relationship is called into question here. Lycius cannot truly be himself in the company of Lamia; he has to adjust his character to fit into her modes of existence and the conditions thereof. Besides experiencing 'unperplexed delight' earlier in the romance, Lycius is still 'a scholar' (line 279) and well-trained in rational philosophy by his 'trusty guide' (line 375) and 'good instructor' (line 376), Apollonius. Lamia, however, will not allow this side of Lycius to exist whenever he is in her presence. He cannot be a 'man of reason' *and* a 'man of intuition' (Nietzsche, 1999:152); neither in the company of Lamia, nor in the company of Apollonius (as we will see later). For Lamia, 'a moment's thought [Apollonian contemplation] is passion's [Dionysian feeling] passing-bell'. The two impulses cannot mutually exist in her world. By allowing 'thought' into his consciousness, Lamia feels Lycius has 'deserted' (Part II, line 42) her and, more broadly then, her Dionysian effects on him completely. Consequently, for Lamia, Lycius is *either* a 'man of reason' (i.e. her enemy) *or* a 'man of intuition' (i.e. her lover), but her worldview refuses to let him fulfil both roles. Even when Lamia grants Lycius his wish of a public 'marriage feast' (Part II, line 91), she, nevertheless, 'attempts to defend herself against the intruders of the "busy world" of Corinth by overpowering them with music and wine' (both Dionysian elements) (Reiman, 1971:667). Notwithstanding the fact that Lamia agreed to a public wedding, she did so on her own terms by only appearing after 'the wine has done its rosy deed' (Part II, line 209) and 'God Bacchus' was 'at meridian height' (Part II, line 213). She does, therefore, not attempt to harmonise with the 'noisy world' of Apollonian culture, but, contrastingly, she implements two of her foremost Dionysian powers to deceive the 'dreadful guests' from spoiling 'her solitude' (Part II, line 145).⁵⁵

From the above, it becomes clear that Lamia has no intention to accommodate Apollonian culture in her Dionysian sphere. Establishing Lamia's Dionysian disposition in the romance allows us to direct our attention to Apollonius who embodies the same intolerance, albeit in a different (Apollonian) domain.

2.2.6 The Mere Touch of Cold Philosophy

Apollonius's hostility towards Dionysian feelings finds its most intense expression during Lamia and Lycius's 'wedding feast':

⁵⁵ See Nietzsche (1999:30) for a similar episode in his treatise.

'Fool!' said the sophist, in an under-tone
 Gruff with contempt; which a death-nighing moan
 From Lycius answered, as heart-struck and lost,
 He sank supine beside the aching ghost.
 'Fool! Fool!' repeated he, while his eyes still
 Relented not, nor moved: 'From every ill
 Of life have I preserved thee to this day,
 And shall I see thee made a serpent's prey?'
 Then Lamia breathed death-breath; the sophist's eye,
 Like a sharp spear, went through her utterly,
 Keen, cruel, perçant, stinging ...⁵⁶

The 'sophist', Apollonius, who witnessed the Dionysian effect Lamia had on Lycius, destroys Lamia in the final moments of the romance. He refers to Lycius as a 'Fool!' for letting Lamia (and, therefore, his Dionysian feelings) influence his life. Apollonius is 'No dreamer' and with his 'piercing gaze', he destroys Lamia, but he also destroys Lycius in the process (Wolfson, 2022:375;380). He steadfastly endeavoured to preserve Lycius 'From every ill / Of life', but, as impossible (and rather naïve, especially for a rationalist) a task as this might prove, he, ironically, fails seriously in this part of the romance while trying to accomplish just that feat. The moment one steps into the Dionysian realm, one becomes vulnerable, because it involves feelings and emotions.⁵⁷ Apollonius is aware of this: therefore, he intends to 'save' his 'young disciple', Lycius (Part II, line 164), by intervening with his 'sophist's eye' to remove the source of Lycius's Dionysian feeling from his life. However, Apollonius does not realise the value emotions and feelings bring to one's life. In the inquiring and sceptical eyes of Apollonius, whenever one gives way to feelings and emotion, one becomes a 'Fool' and, consequently, the 'prey' of the 'ills' of the Dionysian realm. There is, thus, no place for 'unperplexed delight' in the rational and logical world of Apollonius. He embodies the Apollonian extreme of thinking all answers are logical and readily available. The Dionysian realm, then, inevitably involves mystery which would present threats to Apollonius's logical mode of existence.

⁵⁶ *Lamia*, Part II lines 291-301.

⁵⁷ Consider Keats's (2005:280-291) letter regarding 'The Vale of Soul-Making' which might suggest that Keats would have been skeptical of Apollonius's 'protection' of Lycius: 'Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a soul? A Place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways!'.

The above passage makes it clear that there exists no middle-ground in Apollonius's worldview: only a 'Fool' would allow his own feelings to impact his life and decisions. With his 'touch of cold philosophy' (Part II, line 230), Apollonius clips the wings of Lamia's charms. More significantly, however, he also clips the wings of an intuitive Dionysian world, shutting Lycius off completely from an essential *part* of his being. It thus emphasises the 'limits of logical nature' when it is completely isolated from the world of feeling and emotion (Nietzsche, 1999:71). Clarke (1984:573) importantly notes that 'Apollonius is a little Apollo' and, moreover, 'the anti-Dionysus'. This statement helps affirm Apollonius's motifs in the romance, but it also locates his character in the present study: he is the 'anti-Dionysus [that is, anti-Lamia]'.

2.2.7 Irreconcilable Charms

In the previous sections, we have, primarily, examined Lamia and Apollonius's characters exclusively (as individual entities). This allowed us to discern their independent influence on Lycius. Moreover, the examination now allows us to investigate their collective impact in the romance vis-à-vis the Nietzschean Apollonian and Dionysian framework of the study.

Miriam Allott (as quoted in Keats, 1970:648) states that 'Keats doubts both Apollonius's "cold philosophy" and Lamia's magical enchantment; the poem poses his dilemma but leaves it unresolved'. Although Keats presents 'poor' Lamia much more sympathetically than Apollonius, her influence, if not tempered by reality, still poses a great threat.⁵⁸ Wolfson (2015:119) notes that 'It's not just that romance lives but in books, but that it cannot live in Keats's book [*Lamia*]'. Moreover, she regards 'Lamia and Apollonius' as 'the warring names for Lycius's mortal division'. As stated in the introductory chapter, it is not that Keats regards all 'philosophy' (reasoned thoughts) as 'cold' or evil. Similarly, Keats does not regard intuition and 'unperplexed delight' as inherently dangerous. However, the romance is a vivid example of the dangers of *extremities*: more specifically for our purposes—the extremities of Apollonian and Dionysian division. Lamia's influence (opening up an entirely new realm for Lycius) did not develop into a threat, because Lycius attended to his intuitive faculties; it occurred because he abandoned all recollections of 'thought' in the process. Similarly, the imaginatively restrictive world of Corinth (i.e. Apollonius's outlook) is not necessarily soulless; it becomes soulless, because it oppresses all intuitive feelings and emotions. Apollonius and Lamia embody the dangers associated with a pure Apollonian *or* pure Dionysian existence. Lamia and Apollonius's respective hostile rejection of reason and emotion drive the narrative to its unfortunate conclusion.

⁵⁸ See Meihuizen (2024:393), 'Keats, far from not being hostile, is overtly sympathetic towards his Lamia. Even as a serpent, she is beautiful in her daemonic otherness'.

This romance, therefore, is an interesting depiction of the dangers associated with an imbalance between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses. There is no reconciliation on the battlefield in *Lamia*, instead it shows how limiting Apollonian and Dionysian powers are without one another to either temper or enhance each other.

2.2.8 Conclusion

From the above analysis, it is clear that there is no fruitful intermingling between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in *Lamia*. In fact, *Lamia* provides us with a view of a world where the extreme opposition between Apollonian and Dionysian forces refuses such an intermingling. Through the characters of Apollonius (completely Apollonian) and Lamia (completely Dionysian), we can see that Keats presents the dangers of conforming to an exclusive category without any regard or concern for the other. Finally, by portraying these dangers in his narrative poem, Keats attempts to reveal the dangers that such extreme worldviews without balance hold for our human existence.

2.3 ISABELLA

I see a school-boy when I think of him [Keats]

*With face and nose pressed to a sweet-shop window.*⁵⁹

2.3.1 Introduction

On the 3rd of February, 1818, Keats attended (as he often did) one of William Hazlitt's lectures on the English poets (Motion, 19997:229).⁶⁰ In this lecture, Hazlitt suggested 'that a translation of some of the other serious tales ... as that of *Isabella*' in Boccaccio's *The Decameron* 'if executed with taste and spirit, could not fail to succeed in the present day' (Hazlitt, 1910:82). Hazlitt's remark prompted Keats to inspect an English prose translation of Boccaccio's tales for possibilities. Keats decided on the fifth tale of the fourth day which he read in 'the fifth edition, published by Awnsham Churchill in 1684, of

⁵⁹ See WB Yeats' (1974:79) poem, 'Ego Dominus Tuus'. The full significance of this quotation will be explained later in this section.

⁶⁰ For more information on the influence of Hazlitt's lectures on Keats, see Roe's (2012:318-319) biography of Keats.

the English translation of 1620' (Wright, 1957:397).⁶¹ Keats's *Isabella* is, hence, a retelling of an already existing tale to which Keats adds his own passions and predispositions. This presents the critic with an idiosyncratic challenge; as Bate (1982:310) notes: 'any offence or pleasure given by the narrative as such must be principally attributed to Boccaccio rather than Keats'. Given this challenge, it will be my aim to position the focus on distinctively Keatsian passages or qualities in the poem. I have, therefore, endeavoured to be particularly selective in order to ensure the passages and technical qualities of the romance analysed in this chapter reflect more of Keats than of Boccaccio. Through focusing on Keats's additions and expansions, it is my contention that we notice a similar conflict between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in the poem as we noticed in *Lamia* in the previous section of this chapter. This conflict greatly impacts the unfolding of the narrative up to the ending. In this segment, I will, therefore, investigate this Apollonian and Dionysian friction in the poem.

2.3.2 Literature Review

It is not surprising that *Isabella* is Keats's most critically neglected romance. After all, it is Keats (2005:340) himself who referred to it as 'mawkish'.⁶² Partly based on Keats's discontent with the romance, numerous critics have considered *Isabella* to be as 'smokeable' as Keats (2005:351) thought it to be.⁶³ With that said, there have been serious studies conducted on the poem; a fact which suggests that *Isabella* is not merely a 'transitional poem' in Keats's literary career, but a complex romance that deserves our attention.

Through emphasising the 'realistic details' present in the poem, Jack Stillinger (1968:593-605) provides a reading of *Isabella* as an 'anti-romance'. This influential study allowed the romance to venture across a new critical route: Louise Z. Smith (1974:300), writing shortly after Stillinger, modifies his view, arguing that the poem balances both romantic sensibility and realistic detachment. Susan J. Wolfson (1986:245) regards the poem as both a romance and an anti-romance and, subsequently, classifies the poem as a 'meta-romance' which she defines as 'a narrative mood in which the conventional circumstances and attitudes of "old Romance" are subject to critical scrutiny and ironic play'.⁶⁴ Kurt Heinzelman's (1988:159-193) reading sheds light on the complex economic and political qualities in the poem. Diane Long Hoeveler (1994:321-338) recognises a relation between the narrative

⁶¹ For a full exploration of Keats's translation process as well as digressions from his main source, see Herbert Gladstone's Wright's (1957:396-420), *Boccaccio in England: From Chaucer to Tennyson*.

⁶² See Richard Woodhouse's letter to John Taylor (20 September 1819).

⁶³ See Michael Lagory's (1995:321) statement: 'Leavis, James, Wasserman, Murray, Pettet, Perkins, Evert, Bloom, Dickstein, Sperry, Bostetter: the list of critics whose major studies of Keats ignores or barely mentions *Isabella*; or, *The Pot of Basil*'.

⁶⁴ Also see Susan J. Wolfson's (1985:247-261) article, 'Keats's "Isabella" and the Digressions of Romance' as well as Beth Lau's (1985:30-50), 'Madeline at Northanger Abbey: Keats's Antiromances and Gothic Satire'.

and Keats's own troubled childhood as well as his personal circumstances at the point of the poem's composition (here we can also recall the 'conflicts' in Keats's life mentioned in the previous section on *Lamia*). Consequently, this reading provides a more biographical approach which she believes brings us to 'the very real core of this shocking and angry poem'. Beth Lau (2006:81-110) offers a juxtaposition of Keats's approach to writing his later romances (including *Isabella*) and Jane Austen's novels. More recently, Nikki Hessel (2016:157-166) identified a gap in existing Keats scholarship with regards to Indian medicine. Accordingly, she analyses the influence of Keats's knowledge of Indian medicine, as perceived in *Isabella*. Brian Rejack and Susan J. Wolfson (2021:11-29) investigated the epithet, 'their murdered man' (line 209) in the capital contexts of Keats's day by principally drawing on *The Examiner* and other newspapers (Keats, 1970:326-351).

Most pertinently to our concerns, Kelvin Everest (2021:40-58) provided a serious reading of the conflicting opposites in the poem while also focusing on Keats's relation to feminism. Everest's reading prompts, with its brief exploration of thematic contrasts, my present reading of Keats's *Isabella*. Everest (2021:44) notes that in *Isabella* an 'imaginative idealism is found in contrast and conflict with rationalist empiricism'. Although this view is more commonly associated with *Lamia* than *Isabella*, 'it is not difficult to produce a reading of *Isabella* which also conforms to a similarly contrastive thematic opposition'. Everest briefly engages in an examination of this conflict, but does not elaborate on this 'thematic opposition' extensively. Therefore, by building on his initial statements, I aim to investigate this 'opposition' within the context of the Apollonian and Dionysian framework of this study in order to shed more light on this 'conflict' apparent in the poem.

2.3.3 Dionysian Beginnings: Keats's Depiction of the Lovers in the Romance

Keats's elaborate description of the lovers in the beginning of the poem (lines 1-88) is a digression from Boccaccio's 'business-like introduction of all the characters and the situation of the tale' (Wolfson, 1986:285). This makes the detailed depiction of their love a Keatsian expansion and is, therefore, worth considering in detail. The fact that Keats spends considerable time on describing the intimate love between *Isabella* and *Lorenzo* is significant, especially for the purposes of this study, because it illustrates and emphasises their predominantly Dionysian perspective in the opening stages of the romance:

Fair Isabel, poor simple Isabel!
 Lorenzo, a young palmer in Love's eye!
 They could not in the self-same mansion dwell
 Without some stir of heart, some malady;
 They could not sit at meals but feel how well

It soothed each to be the other by;
They could not, sure, beneath the same roof sleep
But to each other dream, and nightly weep.⁶⁵

Nietzsche's (1999:19;120) notion of Dionysian intoxication is often regarded as 'drunkenness' through 'narcotic drink'. Although it does relate to this type of intoxication, his theory is more complex than this and involves other modes of intoxication as well. His notion of Dionysian intoxication can be extended to 'the intoxication of *feeling*'. This type of intoxication can be marked by 'an excess of pleasure and [or] suffering'. In the 'ecstasy of the Dionysian state ... the usual barriers and limits of existence are destroyed'. It is this 'gulf of oblivion' caused by Dionysian intoxication that 'separates the worlds of everyday life and Dionysian experience' (Nietzsche, 1999:40;128;137).

I believe we can identify a similar 'intoxication of feeling' in the above stanzas. The OED (2025) defines the word 'stir' (line 4) in the context of the poem as a 'movement of feeling; emotion; impulse' (n.5). This relates to the Dionysian state which is marked by impulsive feeling and emotion. In the following line, we are told that 'They could not sit at meals but *feel* how' wonderful it would be to be together (my emphasis). From the outset of the poem, it is clear that 'feeling' plays a pivotal role for both the lovers. These two lines set up the Dionysian nature of their relationship which becomes clearer as the poem progresses. Their love will blossom into 'an excess of pleasure', but, for now, it is 'suffering' which occupies the first few stanzas. In the final line of the first stanza, Keats writes that the two lovers weep 'nightly'. The OED (2025) defines the word 'weep' as: 'To manifest the combination of bodily symptoms (instinctive cries or moans, sobs, and shedding of tears) which is the natural, audible, and visible expression of painful (and sometimes of intensely pleasurable) emotion' (v.1.a). Thus, we can assert their expression of weeping in the stanza is caused by an excess of emotion. Furthermore, we can connect this intense show of emotion with Nietzsche's 'intoxication of feeling' caused by an excess of suffering. This does not apply to suffering in a physical sense, but, rather in an emotional one. The cause of the 'suffering' which brings the lovers to 'weep' is the fact that they cannot 'be the other by'. The word 'nightly' is also significant in this context, because it emphasises the extent (and frequency) of their emotional excess and sets the scene for the next stanza:

With every morn their love grew tenderer,
With every eve deeper and tenderer still;
He might not in house, field, or garden stir,
But her full shape would all his seeing fill;

⁶⁵ *Isabella*, lines 1-8

And his continual voice was pleasanter
To her, than noise of trees or hidden rill;
Her lute-string gave an echo of his name,
She spoilt her half-done broidery with the same.⁶⁶

In the above stanza, we can see how their ‘love grew tenderer’ and ‘deeper’. As their love deepens and grows, so too does the extremity of their Dionysian outlook on life. Lorenzo cannot engage in his everyday labouring, ‘But her full shape would *all* his seeing fill’ (again, my emphasis). Similarly, ‘the noise of trees or hidden rill’ fades out of Isabella’s world in favour of ‘his continual voice’.

At this point in the poem, the ‘gulf of oblivion’, caused by an intoxication of feeling, is starting to reveal itself. Isabella and Lorenzo’s oblivion in the above stanza is brought on by Dionysian ‘intoxication of feeling’ in the actual world. Everest (2021:45) similarly notes that throughout their brief relationship, the lovers sustain ‘a kind of entranced oblivion to other human society’. The initial stages of this ‘oblivion’ can be discerned in the above quoted stanza. The fact that Isabella fills ‘*all*’ of Lorenzo’s ‘seeing’ stresses the Dionysian oblivion of his present state. Similarly, the fact that Isabella’s ‘lute string gave an echo of his name’ provides us with enough evidence, for now, to perceive at least the initial stages of this ‘oblivion’. As the romance evolves, so too does the extremity of their Dionysian intoxication. However, it moves from an ‘excess of suffering’ to an ‘excess of pleasure’. It might, therefore, prove advantageous, at this point, to move on to a later instance where the ‘gulf of oblivion’ related to Dionysian intoxication is again evident in order to shed more light on this matter:

‘Love, thou art leading me from wintry cold,
Lady, thou leadest me to summer clime,
And I must taste the blossoms that unfold
In its ripe warmth this gracious morning time.’
So said, his erewhile timid lips grew bold,
And poesied with hers in dewy rhyme.
Great bliss was with them, and great happiness
Grew like a lusty flower in June’s caress.
Parting they seemed to tread upon the air,
Twin roses by the zephyr blown apart
Only to meet again more close, and share
The inward fragrance of each other’s heart.

⁶⁶ *Isabella*, lines 9-16.

She, to her chamber gone, a ditty fair
Sang, of delicious love and honeyed dart;
He with light steps went up a western hill,
And bade the sun farewell, and joyed his fill.

All close they met again, before the dusk
Had taken from the stars its pleasant veil,
All close they met, all eves, before the dusk
Had taken from the stars its pleasant veil,
Close in a bower of hyacinth and musk,
Unknown of any, free from whispering tale ...⁶⁷

This lengthy quotation is necessary fully to demonstrate that a heightened Dionysian intoxication of feeling has now assumed control over Isabella and Lorenzo. They are completely out of touch with the objective and physical world. Isabella leads Lorenzo ‘from wintry cold’ (i.e. the challenges of the actual world) to ‘summer clime’ (i.e. his present Dionysian state of excessive pleasure). Notwithstanding these two lines, it is not only Isabella seducing Lorenzo here; this is a mutual sentiment and, accordingly, both characters, being in this pure Dionysian state, are blinded to the concerns of the actual world. ‘Great bliss’ and ‘happiness’ keep growing ‘like a lusty flower in June’s caress’. As this happiness grows, so too does the breadth of their pleasure. This ‘excess of pleasure’, not tempered by any degree of Apollonian moderation, deepens the effects of their ‘intoxication of feeling’. Keats subtly elaborates, once more, on this feeling when he portrays Isabella as singing alone ‘of delicious love’. This ‘almost wilfully self-blinding marginality to the wider range of human activity’ (Everest, 2021:45) affirms that these two characters are, by now, seized by the ‘gulf of oblivion’ associated with Dionysian intoxication. The succeeding stanza states this concern in its most obvious and undecorated terms thus far: ‘Unknown of any’. It is, then, not merely a ‘bower of hyacinth and musk’, but also a ‘bower’ of Dionysian intoxication, or more to the point, a ‘bower’ consisting of an ‘excess of pleasure’ in love. At this juncture, one can again recall the ‘Mansion’ image in Keats’s letter: in this chamber of delight, the realities of the mortal world are shrouded to the extent that the two lovers completely lose touch with the Apollonian world of reality.

We can thus perceive that in this Dionysian ‘bower’ of feeling and emotion, the two characters are oblivious to the objective world of reality: ‘the usual barriers and limits of existence are destroyed’, because they, rather frankly, do not concern the lovers. The ‘barriers and limits’ of the ‘wintry cold’ world are not part of the ‘summer clime’, because the ‘gulf of [Dionysian] oblivion’ keeps the characters

⁶⁷ *Isabella*, lines 65-81.

hidden from it. They surpass the limits of their transgressive love quite effortlessly, because they do not recognise it as a 'limit' or 'barrier' in this exalted state of Dionysian intoxication. All of these instances in the narrative help to establish the dominating Dionysian outlook of Isabella and Lorenzo at the beginning stages of the romance. It might, at this time, prove helpful to shift the attention to the other *contrasting* outlook in the poem: the pure Apollonian reasoning of Isabella's two merchant-capitalist brothers.

2.3.4 Apollonian Intrusion: Keats's Depiction of Isabella's Brothers

After establishing the Dionysian nature of Isabella and Lorenzo's relationship above, I want to shift the focus to the contrasting nature of her two brothers. Everest (2021:44) states that the two brothers 'set against young love and mutually absorbing sexual passion a coolly and grimly calculating spirit of mercantile enterprise'. This 'coolly and grimly calculating spirit' is what classifies these two characters as part of the Apollonian world. There are, of course, other elements which contribute to this statement: their incessant need for order and societal norms (hierarchical ordering) to be maintained as well as a rational mode of thinking when responding to the world around them:

These brethren having found by many signs
What love Lorenzo for their sister had,
And how she loved him too, each unconfines
His bitter thoughts to other, well nigh mad
That he, the servant of their trade designs,
Should in their sister's love be blithe and glad,
When 'twas their plan to coax her by degrees
To some high noble and his olive-trees.

And many a jealous conference had they,
And many times they bit their lips alone,
Before they fixed upon a surest way
To make the youngster for his crime atone;
And at the last, these men of cruel clay
Cut Mercy with a sharp knife to the bone;

For they resolved in some forest dim
To kill Lorenzo, and there bury him.⁶⁸

The brothers' hatred of Lorenzo is fuelled by the fact that he is 'the servant of their trade designs' and is now 'blithe and glad' in 'their sister's love' while it was their plan to 'coax her' to 'some high noble'. The ultimate limitation of their standpoint is immediately apparent: they pay no regard to emotions and feelings. In their world, Isabella's partner must be chosen on the basis of cold-hearted hierarchism. She cannot love Lorenzo, because he is a 'servant'; instead, according to their imposed social rankings, she must love a 'high noble'. Nietzsche (1999:69) writes of an Apollonian 'logical schematism' in his study which applies to the brothers' 'social rankings' and also relates to McGilchrist's (2009:319) notion of left-hemispheric 'power-hungry' culture.⁶⁹ This is precisely what we see in the first of the above quoted stanzas: their vexation of Isabella's love affair with Lorenzo is based on the fact that logically it does not comply with their societal norms. One of the powers associated with the Apollonian impulse, is to bring calmness and clarity 'to individual beings precisely by drawing boundaries between them'. However, Nietzsche (1999:50-51) does not stop here; he also writes of the danger associated with an exclusively Apollonian perspective on life: that one will freeze 'into a stiffness and coldness' of thought (and heart), because there will be no place for emotional intervention in such a calculating logic. This results in the Apollonian attempting 'to prescribe the course ... of each individual' which is the result of 'the one-sidedly Apollonian' trying to 'confine' life into this sort of categorical logic. The 'stiffness and coldness' of the two brothers cause them to look at Isabella's situation with a 'cold scrutiny' (Everest, 2021:45) which refuses to accommodate her feelings in their decisions.

In the second of the above stanzas, their 'one-sidedly Apollonian' outlook on life becomes even more apparent. Keats writes that 'many times they bit their lips alone' which is a conventional sign of emotion being held back. Their exclusively Apollonian perspective keeps emotions at bay. After 'many' conferences, 'these money-bags' (line 142) decided 'upon a surest way' to kill Lorenzo. The diction employed by Keats here is especially important for our purposes: he makes it clear that this decision was planned: we are told that they had '*many*' meetings to discuss the murder. Furthermore, we are told that they took some time before deciding on the '*surest* way' to commit the crime. These two adjectives, one reflecting a large number of meetings and the other being in the superlative form, point to the fact that this was not an impulsive Dionysian decision. Instead, it was the result of detached Apollonian logic and planning. One can recognise the sole Apollonian nature of their decision-making, as it excludes any emotional connections. Lorenzo is treated as a mere pawn on a chessboard which must be

⁶⁸ *Isabella*, lines 161-176.

⁶⁹ Although there are obvious differences between Nietzsche's Apollonian and McGilchrist's notion of the left hemisphere, whenever these two ways of looking at the world operate without their counterparts, their outlook appears to be relatively analogous (see Dr Iain McGilchrist, 2020).

removed to eventually win the game. Even in the interaction leading up to the murder, we are reminded of the fact that the brothers 'invade' Lorenzo's happiness with 'Calm speculation'.

This discussion establishes the brothers' 'one-sidedly Apollonian' nature in the romance. Furthermore, this point will, at this juncture, allow us to move on and further investigate the Dionysian and Apollonian conflict in the romance.

2.3.5 Irreconcilable Once Again

Everest (2021:44) notes that:

The lovers in the poem embody an idealism, founded on an imaginary conception of the good life in a close union of spiritual and physical modes of fulfilment, which is opposite to, and thwarted by, the cold, hard-headed pragmatic realism and financial acumen of the brothers.

This statement connects with the Apollonian and Dionysian conflict present in the poem. In the previous two sections, we have established the respective Apollonian and Dionysian positions in the poem. It is, at this point, possible to identify the thematic opposition in the poem: the two lovers' Dionysian intoxication stands in direct contrast with the two brothers' Apollonian cold logic.

It is quite easy for us to perceive the mentality of the two brothers as unattractive and humanly limited. However, as Everest (2021:45) points out: their mentality 'is not in fact any more limited than the inwardness of the two lovers'. The two lovers completely lose touch with the objective world of reality, while the two brothers completely abandon the emotional world of feeling. Both mentalities are, essentially, limited, because for a fruitful and healthy balance to exist, one should be able to channel both instincts. We again come close to the Apollonian and Dionysian conflict at the heart of *Lamia*. It is the excessive nature of Isabella and Lorenzo's love that causes them to escape to a 'bower' of feeling that eventually leads to their downfall. The two brothers' actions, based on greedy materialism, are void of any emotional considerations and the effects of this, eventually, cause them to flee.

Fundamentally, then, both parties are inherently self-destructive, and their governed perspectives have repercussions. We are, therefore, posed with a similar dilemma as in *Lamia*. A significant difference, however, is the fact that *Lamia* ends directly after this clash of two separate worlds. In *Isabella*, Keats elaborates Isabella's decay until her death. Her state, up to her death, remains, inherently, a Dionysian one:

And she forgot the stars, the moon, and sun,
And she forgot the blue above the trees,
And she forgot the dells where waters run,
And she forgot the chilly autumn breeze;
She had no knowledge when the day was done,
And the new morn she saw not: but in peace
Hung over her sweet Basil evermore,
And moistened it with tears unto the core.⁷⁰

Stillinger (1968:602) notes how, in the above quoted stanza, Isabella ‘entirely shuts out the objective world around her’. The use of anaphora centring on the word ‘and’ unites, trance-like, all the physical objects which she does not notice anymore. We are, therefore, seeing Isabella in a similar state of ‘intoxication of feeling’, but this time based again on an ‘excess of suffering’. We notice a similar ‘oblivion’ to the objective world where her ‘intoxication of feeling’ shuts all of the actual world’s aspects out. Her once ‘bower’ of pleasure has become a ‘bower’ of suffering.

Although Keats’s enlargement of the ‘physical details’ (Stillinger, 1968:600) seen during his time at Guy’s hospital is Apollonian in nature, it does not manage to balance Isabella’s intoxication of suffering in the thematic qualities of the poem. This ‘intoxication’ leaves Isabella in a state of suffering where she can only experience this suffering and nothing of the actual world. Ultimately, there is no Apollonian measure or restraint to temper her Dionysian intoxication and her life fades away in her own ‘bower’ of suffering; the conflict between the Apollonian and Dionysian states in the romance remains unresolved.

2.3.6 Conclusion

Through the discussion above, we can discern that in *Isabella* we find a conflict similar to the one experienced in *Lamia*. Through the lovers’ Dionysian oblivion caused by an ‘intoxication of feeling’, we can see that they pay no regard to the material and actual world. We can also notice a similar limitation in the two brothers’ mentality, because they cannot embrace the world of emotional empathy due to their ‘one-sidedly Apollonian’ nature. Isabella’s ‘intoxication of feeling’ persists throughout the poem in the form of an ‘excess of suffering’ until she finally dies. As in *Lamia*, Keats leaves the conflict unresolved and we are, once again, alerted to the dangers of such a limiting existence based on an overbalance to either side. The characters in the poem become a modification of the view of Keats in

⁷⁰ *Isabella*, lines 417-424.

Yeats's 'Ego Dominus Tuus': there remains a shut glass window between the two contrary states of being in the poem and, unfortunately, no major character can see past this window separating the Apollonian and Dionysian realms.⁷¹

2.4 THE EVE OF ST. AGNES

*The excellence of every Art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate from their being in close relationship with beauty and truth.*⁷²

2.4.1 Introduction

After examining the irreconcilable Apollonian-Dionysian conflict in *Lamia* and *Isabella*, we can now move on to a different sort of romance when viewed through the Apollonian and Dionysian theoretical framework of this study. It is my contention that there exists a balance between these two artistic impulses, in various forms, in Keats's medieval-toned *The Eve of St. Agnes*.⁷³ The romance genre, in general, can also frequently be classified as a mode of escapism or 'just a story' (Frye, 1976:38).⁷⁴ Through investigating the Apollonian-Dionysian dualism, by means of close readings of selected segments of Keats's *The Eve of St. Agnes*, I believe that one will be able to perceive the complexities of the poem, but also of Keats's sophisticated employment of the romance genre.⁷⁵ The interaction between the Apollonian and Dionysian is evident throughout the poem, but I will specifically focus on the following areas in the romance vis-à-vis their Apollonian and Dionysian properties and

⁷¹ Yeats saw Keatsian sensuousness as compensation for straitened circumstances, a clinging to the Dionysian in the face of Apollonian astringency. Yeats was not aware of Keats's ideas on 'The Vale of Soul-Making', and thus of his acceptance of what Yeats would call 'the Vision of Evil', the contrary force necessary for progress (see Bornstein, 1970:201-202).

⁷² See Keats's (2005:60) letter to brothers, George and Tom, dated December 1817.

⁷³ Martin Aske (1981:196), for example, states that the narrative of *The Eve of St. Agnes* embodies 'energy, coherence and economy'. Although the Apollonian ('coherence') and Dionysian ('energy') interplay is much more extensive in this verse romance, a statement such as this already hints at the mutual existence of these two impulses.

⁷⁴ Also see Frye's (1957:186) statement about romance in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, 'The romance is nearest of all literary forms to wish-fulfilment'. However, he also notes that 'there is a genuinely 'proletarian' element in romance too which is never satisfied with its incarnations, and in fact the incarnations themselves indicate that no matter how great a change may take place in society, romance will turn up again, as hungry as ever, looking for new hopes and desires to feed on'.

⁷⁵ Leigh Hunt (1871:285) praised *The Eve of St. Agnes* in his study, *Imagination and Fancy*, and wrote that the poem 'still appears to me the most delightful and complete specimen of [Keats's] genius'. Similarly, Allan Danzig (1971:4), in the introduction to the volume, *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Eve of St. Agnes*, calls the romance 'Keats's most nearly all-embracing poem, and possibly his most successful'.

intermingling: the utilisation of light and sculpture, Madeline's dream state, and the role and effect of music.

2.4.2 Literature Review

Before I commence with my analysis, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the major critical interpretations of the poem. This overview will, in turn, allow me to locate my analysis within the poem's broader range of criticism. In a South African context, Dan Wylie (2014:81), notes that 'The Romantic is frequently caricatured as politics-free nature-worship, a perception that does a severe injustice to many, if not all, the [six major] English Romantics'.⁷⁶ The poem under discussion makes this point abundantly clear. Marjorie Levinson (1988:97) pertinently notes that the 'scholarly discourse on "St. Agnes" looks like an exemplary critical pluralism'. As any scholar of *The Eve of St. Agnes* can testify, there are two leading and contradictory critical standpoints when we come to the romance in question which informs this 'critical pluralism'.

At the one end of the field, we have the 'metaphysical reading' of Earl R. Wasserman (1967:84-138). The more 'sceptical' approach of Jack Stillinger's (1971:533-555) examination defines the other end of the field.⁷⁷ These two studies dominated most readings and interpretations of *The Eve of St. Agnes* for a long period of time and, in some sense, still do. David Wiener (1980:120) introduced his analysis of the romance by stating that 'No serious reader of Keats can begin a study of "The Eve of St. Agnes" without at least some consideration of Jack Stillinger's unsettling essay "The Hoodwinking of Madeline"'. One might, at this juncture, question the appositeness of the sources mentioned here because of their publication dates. On that account, one can perceive the influence of Stillinger's analysis once more in one of the more contemporary articles on the poem (see Keivan, 2020:213-214).⁷⁸

Bearing the abovementioned in mind, Mary Arseneau (1997:228), recognises that 'In many ways, modern criticism on "The Eve of St. Agnes" occupies a middle-ground between Earl R.

⁷⁶ Apart from Nicholas Meihuizen's (2024), *Romantic Daemons in the Poetry of Blake, Shelley and Keats: Beyond the Human*, recent scholarly work on the English Romantics by South African scholars is rare. For two interesting articles on Romanticism by South African scholars, see: Nicholas Meihuizen's (1988), 'Birds and Bird-Song in Wordsworth, Shelley and Yeats: The Study of a Relationship between Three Poems' and Dirk Klopper's (1998), 'On the Edge of Darkness: Stephen Watson and the Return of the Romantic Imagination'. For a short South African article which specifically focuses on Keats's, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, see Rodney Stenning Edgcombe's (1994:77-79), 'Keats's *The Eve of St. Agnes*'.

⁷⁷ For all their familiarity in Keats criticism, it might bear repeating summarising these two contrasting approaches to the poem in this paragraph. For a brief overview of the main difference between these two approaches, see Stuart M. Sperry (1971:27-28). For a full, comprehensive outline of important scholarly output and discussions on Keats's *The Eve of St. Agnes*, see Marjorie Levinson (1988:96-104).

⁷⁸ Stillinger's theory even became the subject of another Romanticist, R.H. Fogle's (1975:33), amusing lyric: 'It is no Time for Song and Laughter / The Cold Gray Dawn of the Morning After. / Alack for Madeline, poor hoodwink'd maid, / By Porphyro first, then Stillinger betrayed'.

Wasserman's metaphysical reading of the poem and Jack Stillinger's reaction against that reading'.⁷⁹ From this brief outline, the disagreement among critics, concerning 'what [the romance] says and the way it says it' becomes clear (Danzig, 1971:5).⁸⁰ Notwithstanding this disagreement, one aspect on which most critics have agreed is 'the use of contraries' and 'dramatic oppositions' which Keats maintains throughout the romance (Danzig, 1971:4).

I will not rush in where angels fear to tread and do not intend to condemn previous critical reactions in favour of a contemporary revolutionary reading. I do, however, intend to add one more layer to 'the ebb and flow of emerging contrasts and partial resolutions' (Bate, 1982:442) prevalent in the poem by determining how the contrasting, yet complementing, nature of Nietzsche's Apollonian and Dionysian impulses contributes in making the poem remarkably intricate.⁸¹ Consequently, in terms of Keats scholarship, I do not wish to categorise my approach to conform to any school of thought, yet I believe that through the Nietzschean framework of my investigation, my reading will, inevitably, also form part of the middle-ground between the two aforementioned critical viewpoints.

2.4.3 Dynastic Struggles

The prevalence of conflict in the romance is evident from the outset of the poem. We are initially presented with the antagonisms and tensions of two feuding families. Meihuizen (2024:355) notes that 'The families of the two lovers, echoing the strife between Montagues and Capulets, hate each other'. In addition to the tension between the two families, Green (2017:96) notices 'a hierarchical arrangement' in the romance where men are the dominant and authoritarian figures and women have to be obedient. Collick (1991:39) indicates a 'theme of dynastic oppression' where the heroine, Madeline's 'existence is determined by her position within society'. Nietzsche (1999:27) explains that the Apollonian world exhibits a 'respect for the limits of the individual'. The order and structure of the castle present us with a world of measure; an environment where every person's place rests upon a hierarchical category where 'limits' are to be respected.

⁷⁹ Levinson (1988:98), for example, states that 'Harold Bloom's critique of "St. Agnes" takes up residence somewhere between these extremes'.

⁸⁰ Beverley Fields (1983:246) explains the situation well: 'If there are at least thirteen ways of looking at a nightingale, there are surely many more ways of looking at such a complex poem as "The Eve of St. Agnes"'. Like a number of Keats's other poems, "The Eve of St. Agnes", especially in its uneasy moments, resists any single critical direction'.

⁸¹ Some of these 'contrasts and partial resolutions' for Bate (1982:442) include: 'the advanced age and frailty of the two minor characters and the youth of the lovers; the temporary inner warmth and the all-enveloping cold; music and silence; the interplay of the religious and the erotic'. Judith Arcana (1987:43-57) recognises another contrast in the poem: between 'the old religion of Britain known as the Craft, Witchcraft or Faery' and Christianity.

The intrusion of the hero, Porphyro, would therefore, in many ways, not only be an infringement based on their forbidden love, but also of the ordering principles of the castle. For this reason, ‘those chambers held barbarian hordes’ who would readily savage ‘his lineage’. From the level of narrative, Porphyro acting on his love for Madeline would be a Dionysian attack on Apollonian structure—an attempt to turn the ordered into the chaotic. It does not require particularly careful contemplation to recognise this ‘conflict’ between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses. This is, primarily, because this is a friction originating in the outside and exterior world. One does not have to be a sensitive reader to recognise explicit ‘conflict’ in the narrative, but this friction nevertheless indicates that the ‘conflict’ is apparent from the beginning of the poem. Moreover, recognising this conflict provides the basis and necessary foreshadowing for the much more complex (internal) Apollonian-Dionysian interplay to come later in the romance.

2.4.4 The Casement and the Moon

The previous paragraph leads me to my first focal point in this section of the chapter: Keats’s utilisation of light and sculpture in the poem. Nietzsche (1999:16) affirms that Apollo is ‘the god of light’. Furthermore, he also associates Apollo with the ‘plastic arts’, sculpture and architecture (Nietzsche, 1999:80). We can see something of these highly structured art forms which require great technical craftsmanship and precision, in stanzas XXIV-XXV:

A casement high and triple-arched there was,
All garlanded with carven imageries
Of fruits, and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass,
And diamonded with panes of quaint device
Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,
As are the tiger-moth’s deep-damasked wings;
And in the midst, ’mong thousand heraldries,
And twilight saints, and dim emblazonings,
A shielded scutcheon blushed with blood of queens and kings.

Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,

And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast⁸²

Miriam Allott (as quoted in Keats, 1970:466) notes that Keats (1970:450-480) 'took some details for this stanza [XXIV] from buildings seen at Chichester and Stansted'. It is clear from the above stanzas that Keats took time to explain the intricacies and details of the 'casement'; he ensures that the reader is fully aware of the great technical artistry displayed by it.

In this Spenserian stanza, three lines begin with the word 'And'. This perhaps does not qualify as anaphora, but it borders on it and certainly contributes to emphasising the structural complexity of the 'casement'. The word 'And' signals a continuing extra dimension to the structure of this 'casement': whenever Keats makes use of the conjunction, he joins more and more elements together, a fact which informs and highlights the carefully worked detail of the structured objects. In Nietzschean terms, then, the 'casement' is a marvellous product of the Apollonian 'image-making god' (Nietzsche, 1999:16). Moreover, we encounter another important Apollonian element in this stanza: the 'scutcheon'. Allott (as quoted in Keats, 1970:467) explains that this is a 'coat of arms' and that it 'showed the quarterings of the family and their royal connections'. Collick (1991:40) states that the 'scutcheon' is 'the strongest image in the window'.⁸³ In a sense, the 'scutcheon' is, thus, the symbol of the family and castle's hierarchical ordering and the values which it represents. Daniela Garofalo (2010:372) supports this view when she states that the 'scutcheon' can be seen as 'the master signifier of patriarchal and aristocratic order'. Furthermore, it is a meticulously constructed work of art loaded with symbolic details contributing to the Apollonian refinement thereof.

With the above emphasis on the sophistication of these works of art in mind, I want, briefly, to shift the focus to the aforementioned observation of Apollo as 'the god of light'. In my view, light plays an important role in the poem and its presence or absence contribute to the complexity of the narrative. For the purposes of this analysis, I will chiefly focus on the light cast by the 'wintry moon' in stanza XXXXV. The fact that it is winter, and the 'middle of the night' heightens the prominence of the moonlight, as the sky would have been clothed in darkness, except, of course, for the beam of light shining from the moon.

As indicated above, there are two distinctly Apollonian features encountered in the above stanzas: structure and refinement in the forms of the 'casement' and the 'scutcheon' as well as light in the form of 'the wintry moon'. These two elements, apart from their symbolic value, may seem somewhat meaningless if one views them in isolation from each other. Hence, I will examine them in the manner in which they complement one another in the romance. If we consider the impact of these two Apollonian attributes, we can recognise a subtle intermingling with the Dionysian. The 'wintry

⁸² *The Eve of St. Agnes*, lines 208-218.

⁸³ For a full exploration of the 'shielded scutcheon' and its symbolic value, see Collick (1991:40-41).

moon' (light) shines 'Full' on the 'casement' (a highly structured artwork) to throw 'warm gules' on 'Madeline's fair breast'.⁸⁴ This alters the nature of the 'casement' in a sense. Levinson (1988:105) points to the 'natural confinement' of these objects, because they are fixed in stone. However, when combined with the moonlight, the casement becomes functional and, in a way, loses its passivity. Its objects reflect on Madeline and their reflection creates movement through her image. The fact that the light shines on 'Madeline's fair breast' is also consequential. It reflects Madeline in a totally free, Dionysian state: in symbolic terms, she is not merely freeing herself from her clothes, but also from the patriarchal society that confines her. Accordingly, the Apollonian features are necessary to reveal Madeline's captivating radiance to Porphyro. It is only through the reflection from the 'casement' that Porphyro can catch sight of Madeline's most intimate beauty. Meihuizen (2024:358) notes something of the power of Madeline's presence at this time when he states that 'Madeline at this moment ... is "beyond the human", she is daemonic'. However interestingly, the 'unseen' here only becomes conceivable to Porphyro through the two predominantly Apollonian elements. Thus, we can identify a subtle moment of Apollonian and Dionysian intermingling in the above stanza.

This intermingling between Apollonian and Dionysian impacts the narrative in a major way for the remainder of the poem. It assembles the necessary pieces for the two lovers' future meeting. The Dionysian state, free from all materiality and limits, is portrayed, in sensual fashion, through Madeline's exposed 'breast'. Yet, for Porphyro to experience 'all unseen', the Apollonian elements of light and sculpture are required. This subtle intermingling drives the narrative to evolve and helps enable their love to be fully realised later in the poem. We can thus perceive how these two elements need each other to reach their utmost significance in the romance. Moreover, their mutual cooperation further excites Porphyro's love for Madeline, thereby allowing the narrative to approach the climax which follows later in the narrative.

2.4.5 Madeline's Dream Vision

The most complex element in the poem, if examined through the lens of Nietzsche's Apollonian and Dionysian theory, is certainly Madeline's dream vision. The heroine's dream has been extensively analysed by a number of different critics. Bate (1982:446), for example, interprets the dream as 'a deliberate variation of Adam's dream'. In more recent years, Nancy Rosenfeld (2000:48), drew parallels between Madeline's dream and Eve's dream in *Paradise Lost*. Such divergent critical reactions indicate the complexity of her dream. For the present study, however, its complexity arises due to the fact that her dream can, convincingly, be examined as either Apollonian or Dionysian. Hence, I will briefly

⁸⁴ Edgecombe (1994:78) notices a comprehensive colour scheme here where 'the blue, white and silver of chastity' (Apollonian) converts to the 'red and purple of passion' (Dionysian).

juxtapose both impulses in her dream vision in order for us to best perceive the nature of her dream in relation to Nietzsche's theory. I acknowledge the fact that some elements of the two impulses might overlap in her dream vision, but I believe a brief juxtaposition will help to highlight the predominantly Apollonian nature of the dream which I regard as a more accurate interpretation for reasons elaborated on below.

I will commence with a brief sketch of a possible Dionysian interpretation of the dream. Nietzsche (1999:40) states that after the Dionysian 'state of ecstasy', one's 'daily reality re-enters consciousness' and is, accordingly, 'experienced ... with a sense of revulsion':

Her eyes were open, but she still beheld,
Now wide awake, the vision of her sleep—
There was a painful change, that night expelled
The blisses of her dream so pure and deep.
At which fair Madeline began to weep⁸⁵

The above extract seems to present a similar experience as the one laid out in Nietzsche's treatise. As soon as Madeline becomes aware of her 'reality', she experiences a similar 'revulsion' ('At which fair Madeline began to weep') with the 'painful change' of her circumstances. The 'blisses of her dream' were far more comforting and gratifying than the real world into which she has awakened. Porscha Fermanis (2009:61) seems to understand the dream as fundamentally Dionysian: 'Madeline's general stupor, her "vague, regardless eyes" and "fancy" suggest instead that her understanding is based on an almost intuitive perception of the world around her: she exists in an empirical world of physical "sensations" rather than conscious "thoughts"'. If one thinks along these lines, the Dionysian nature of the 'steadfast spell' seems direct enough.⁸⁶ Even the night itself seems to be charged with an unusual energy.⁸⁷ In the medieval realm of the poem, 'sorcery, charm and spell' are all part of the world Keats portrays (Harvey, 1985:83). Moreover, Charles Patterson (1970:112-114) indicates that a daemonic mood and atmosphere are sustained throughout the poem. Furthermore, an 'intuitive perception of the

⁸⁵ *The Eve of St. Agnes*, lines 298-302.

⁸⁶ Various studies have focused on charms and magic in *The Eve of St. Agnes*. See for example: Marian Hollingworth Cusac's (1968), 'Keats as Enchanter: An Organizing Principle of "The Eve of St. Agnes"' and, for a more contemporary source, Laura Wells Betz's (2008), 'Keats and the Charm of Words: Making Sense of "The Eve of St. Agnes"'.
⁸⁷ Consider stanza XIX: 'Never on such a night have lovers met / Since Merlin paid his Demon all the monstrous debt.' (lines 170-171). Helen Farish and Nicholas Roe (2025) also emphasized the energy associated with the night itself in an online reading event of the poem, hosted by The Poetry Society, which I attended on St. Agnes's Eve (20 January, 2025).

world' is, after all, one of the foremost Dionysian means of interacting with the world. However, in my view, the dream vision in the romance is more convoluted than this and requires more attention, as my discussion below will demonstrate.

Through the above interpretation, one can discern how a Dionysian interpretation of the dream might be feasible. However, in this paragraph, I intend to demonstrate its Apollonian qualities as well to throw sufficient light on my Apollonian classification of the dream. Nietzsche classifies Apollo as 'the diviner of dreams' and also highlights 'the perfection of these dream-states in contrast to the only partially intelligible reality of the daylight world' (Nietzsche, 1999:16;25). Moreover, he also states that in this 'Apollonian dream-state ... the day-world becomes shrouded and a new ... more affecting world' takes its place, thus, the 'lovely semblance of the world of dreams is his [Apollo's] realm too' (Nietzsche, 1999:45;120):

Her soothèd limbs, and soul fatigued—away
Flown, like a thought, until the morrow-day;
Blissfully havened both from joy and pain;
Clasped like a missal where swart Paynims pray;
Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain,
As though a rose should shut, and be a bud again.⁸⁸

We can easily enough recognise the 'perfection' of the 'dream-state' in the above stanza. It is a world free from the 'reality of the daylight world'—a world 'havened both from joy and pain', 'from sunshine and from rain' as well as the dangers of the 'wintry day' outside the castle and the 'hot-blooded lords' inside the castle. Andrew Bennet (1992:103-104) notes something similar when he writes that 'In her bed, she is "Flown", "havened", "Clasped" and, finally, "Blinded": all these participles point to a protective withdrawal from the world of sensation'. Keats makes it clear that the concerns of the 'day-world' are not present in this 'dream-state', all mortal considerations become 'shrouded'. It does, however, seem to linger on the doorstep of the abovementioned Dionysian realm. I should perhaps, at this point, reiterate and, once again, emphasise that the two impulses do overlap in her dream, but it is necessary to classify the dream according to its dominant impulse.

How can we, then, classify her dream as, predominantly, reflecting an Apollonian impulse? Notwithstanding its close proximity with the Dionysian, I believe it is necessary to examine the dream

⁸⁸ *The Eve of St. Agnes*, lines 238-243.

even more carefully in order for its Apollonian colours to fully reveal themselves. Farnell (1995:403) refers to the ‘*terms* of the St. Agnes ritual’ which must be carried out by Madeline (in brief: she must retire supperless to bed without looking behind to enable her to dream of her future husband).⁸⁹ Heidi Thomson (1998:346) refers to the ritual as ‘Madeline’s *script*’.⁹⁰ The diction employed by these two critics seems idiosyncratic: both the words ‘terms’ and ‘script’ refer to something along the lines of a set of instructions which needs to be followed. In some sense, then, Madeline’s dream is governed by a set of rules and ‘terms’. In Nietzsche’s treatise, he writes about something similar when he states that ‘The virgins who walk solemnly to the temple of Apollo, bearing laurel branches in their hands and singing a processional hymn as they go, remain who they are and retain their civic names’ (Nietzsche, 1999:43). Madeline’s dream will not change her in any major way in the romance: it may provide brief enjoyment, but dreams are fleeting and, essentially, she will remain who she is. Northrop Frye (1963:17) notes that one can discern ‘Apollonian cultures based on obedience to rituals’. The *terms* of St. Agnes’ eve are based on ritual. Therefore, Madeline, steadfastly adhering to her ‘script’, is signalling a similar ‘obedience to rituals’.

The Dionysian impulse is intuitive and ‘instinctive’ (Nietzsche, 1999:34). Consequently, the dream cannot derive from Dionysian energy, because Dionysian energy does not require a ‘script’; in fact, its power lies in its instinctiveness, its ability to act without any prior reasoning. This is where Madeline’s dream differs from Lamia and Isabella’s ‘bowers of bliss’. Lamia and Isabella’s Dionysian states relied solely on instinctual and emotional association. Madeline’s dream is ritualistic, thereby governed by prescriptions and rules, and actually functions as a ‘withdrawal from the world of sensation’. Her dream does not involve the same intuitive overflow of emotions which Lamia and Isabella’s retreats from reality involve.

2.4.6 An Ancient Ditty

After the above juxtaposition vis-à-vis Madeline’s dream, I want to move on and draw attention to the role and effect that music plays in the romance. It is important to evaluate music in a similar manner as the dream vision above in order to lay the necessary groundwork for the interaction between Madeline’s dream vision and music which follows later in the romance to become clear. Notwithstanding the fact that music plays a fundamental role, it has not attracted the same extensive critical reactions as Madeline’s dream.⁹¹

⁸⁹ ‘... supperless to bed they must retire’ and ‘Nor look behind, nor sideways...’ (lines 51 and 53)

⁹⁰ In both quotations, the emphases are my own.

⁹¹ See Heidi Thomson’s (1998:337-351), ‘Eavesdropping on “The Eve of St. Agnes”: Madeline’s Sensual Ear and Porphyro’s Ancient Ditty’ for a well-rounded interpretation of music in the poem.

I believe that dream and music are closely related in the poem. The present investigation will, thus, not merely serve its own purpose, but will allow one to later perceive the climax of the Apollonian and Dionysian intermingling in the poem. Music is present from the beginning of the poem, from the moment its 'golden tongue' flatters the ancient beadsman 'to tears' (lines 20-21). I acknowledge the fact that music has a peculiar effect on the old beadsman, but I will not analyse it here, because, in my view, it is not particularly relevant to Madeline's dream vision. Accordingly, I will focus my attention on Madeline's first encounter with music in the poem:

Full of this whim was thoughtful Madeline.

The music, yearning like a God in pain,

She scarcely heard ...⁹²

Madeline, steadfast in the rites of St. Agnes, 'scarcely heard' the music 'yearning' for her attention in hyperbolic simile. Her 'thoughtful', Apollonian dream-state keeps her oblivious to it. Thomson (1998:341) refers to the music in this stanza as 'the party music'. This is important, because it might, according to the theoretical framework of this study, provide an answer as to why she 'scarcely heard' it, despite the obvious intensity of its sound. The 'party music' is the music of the Apollonian world she finds herself in at the beginning of the poem. Its root is the 'dynastic oppression' Madeline knows all too well. Put in other words, it stems from the root of the hierarchical structure of the castle where men are the dominant figures and the 'limits' of this world ought to be respected.

It is important to realise that Madeline's preparation for the eve of St. Agnes has already begun at this point, and as previously established, her dream-state is, predominantly, an Apollonian one. As a result, the Apollonian music does not seem to have any true impact on Madeline. At this juncture, it might be profitable to, briefly, juxtapose this music with a later occurrence of music in the romance: that of Porphyro's ancient ditty:

Awakening up, he took her hollow lute,

Tumultuous, and, in chords that tenderest be,

He played an ancient ditty, long since mute,

In Provence called, 'La belle dame sans mercy',

⁹² *The Eve of St. Agnes*, lines 55-57.

Close to her ear touching the melody—
 Wherewith disturbed, she uttered a soft moan.
 He ceased—she panted quick—and suddenly
 Her blue afracayed eyes wide open shone;
 Upon his knees he sank, pale as smooth-sculptured stone⁹³

Nietzsche (1999:21) notes that ‘the very element which defines the character of Dionysian music ... [is] the power of its sound to shake us to our very foundations’. Daniels (2014:55), writing on Nietzsche’s, *The Birth of Tragedy*, notes that the Dionysian ‘revealed music in a more emotionally charged dimension’. Furthermore, he notes that the ‘power of Dionysian music comes from its ability to speak directly to the body, indeed to *control* the body’. This is what we see in the above stanza and is, accordingly, the reason why I discern Porphyro’s music as Dionysian. Her dream was ‘Impossible to melt as icèd stream’, yet through the ‘ancient ditty’ her ‘eyes wide open shone’. The party’s ‘music, yearning like a God in pain’ stands in direct contrast with Porphyro’s ‘chords that tenderest be’.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, the gentle melody of his ‘ancient ditty’ is far more effective and powerful than the fervent music of the party. The ‘Dionysian depths of [Porphyro’s] music’ far outweighs the ‘reason-governed’ party music (Nietzsche, 1999:91). Once again, we can evaluate the music based on its root. Porphyro’s music stems from a place of love and desire; a place loaded with ‘daemonic power’ and energy (Nietzsche, 1999:60).⁹⁵

2.4.7 Melting into the Dream

As argued above, it is the daemonic power behind his song which causes Madeline to awake from her dream.⁹⁶ Her dream is, fundamentally, a state of innocence, because it suspends participation in reality (‘havened both from joy and pain’). The Dionysian energy behind the song takes Madeline out of the world of innocence and later allows her to embrace the world of experience through the consummation of their love. Thomson (1998:346) states that:

⁹³ *The Eve of St. Agnes*, lines 289-297.

⁹⁴ Also consider Nietzsche’s (1999:27) statement: ‘let us imagine how little the psalm-singing artist of Apollo and the ghostly sound of his harp could mean in comparison with this daemonic popular song!’.

⁹⁵ I use the term ‘energy’ here with its Blakean connotations. See Ross Woodman’s (1990:115-149), ‘Nietzsche, Blake, Keats and Shelley: The Making of a Metaphorical Body’ for a discussion and comparison of Blake’s usage of ‘energy’ and Nietzsche’s usage of ‘Dionysian’.

⁹⁶ Also consider the following statement by Nietzsche (1999:60) previously referred to when I focused on Lamia’s music and its effects on Lycius: ‘[the] god Dionysus is too powerful; even the most rational and thoughtful of his opponents ... becomes enchanted by him’.

The blend which is about to happen on a sexual level, also happens on an intertextual one. Madeline loses control over the Agnes's Eve ritual by allowing herself, subconsciously, to respond to the song of 'La belle dame sans mercy'. The plots of these stories merge in Madeline's response to Porphyro's song. While the controlled vision of St. Agnes' Eve is solitary, celibate in itself, the encounter between Madeline and Porphyro is a dialogue, an interaction ...

The fact that Thomson refers to Madeline's dream as 'the controlled vision of St. Agnes' Eve further endorses the Apollonian nature of her dream. It is 'controlled', up to the point of their consummation, up to the point that the Dionysian (in this case embodied through music) intrudes on the Apollonian world.⁹⁷ Farnell (1995:403) also notes that the 'virgins of St. Agnes are only supposed to dream of their future husbands, not actually sleep with them the following morning'. Thus, in many ways, 'the usual barriers and limits of existence are destroyed', even the limitations of her dream-world (Nietzsche, 1999:40).

It is also pertinent to note that the power of the Dionysian can cause beings to transform and completely forget their 'civic past and their social position' (Nietzsche, 1999:44). This is, essentially, what happens at the time of the two lovers' consummation. Porphyro is a foe of Madeline's family. Through their consummation, the usual barriers of lineage and hierarchy are destroyed. At this point, it can become easy to think that the Dionysian triumphs over the Apollonian. It is, after all, Dionysian music which caused Madeline's Apollonian dream vision to fade away and which draws her out of the Apollonian realm of dream; but Keats, living up to his aforementioned remark of endeavouring to make 'all disagreeables evaporate', does not allow this to happen. Despite the fact that she was drawn out of her Apollonian dream-state, Madeline's dream does not lose all of its significance:

Into her dream he melted, as the rose
Blendeth its odour with the violet,
Solution sweet ...⁹⁸

Madeline's dream idealisation becomes realised in material terms in the above extract. Following her bewilderment at Porphyro's tangible appearance, he finally melts into her dream-vision, and it becomes reality.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Consider Nietzsche's (1999:120) statement: 'But the image of Apollo must also include that delicate line which the dream image must not overstep if its effect is not to become pathological, in which case the semblance does not simply deceive but also cheats; it must include that measured limitation, that freedom from wilder impulses'.

⁹⁸ Stanza XXXVI, lines 320-323.

⁹⁹ Also see Meihuizen's (2024:359-360) account of the same episode.

Through the above extract, Keats creates a ‘union between Madeline’s dream of Porphyro and his actual presence’ (Sandy, 2009). Lyndel Colglazier (1992:2) points to a ‘fused harmony’ obtained through the ‘blending of reality and dream’. It is this ‘fused harmony’ which is especially germane to the purposes of this study. As stated previously, Thomson (1998:346) notes, ‘The blend which is about to happen ... also happens on an intertextual one’. I want to add that the ‘blend’ also carries through to a metaphorical level. Magdalena Ostas (2011:336) importantly points out the following with regards to Keats’s characters:

Whether they emerge as rich and full or come forward as hollow and empty vessels, the selves in Keats’s poetry always reach beyond their own identities. They stand for or are more than themselves.

I agree with Ostas’s understanding of Keatsian characters, and, moreover, I believe that Madeline and Porphyro ‘reach beyond their own identities’ in the scene in question. In metaphorical terms, we also reach a ‘blend[ing]’ between the Apollonian and Dionysian here. Neither the Apollonian nor the Dionysian gets defeated, in fact, they enhance each other’s powers.

The Apollonian dream-state signifies ‘perfection’ in the face of ‘the only partially intelligible reality’ of the actual world. Notwithstanding its ‘perfection’, it is also removed from reality, therefore not capable of any true development. Porphyro leading Madeline out of this dream-state through his ditty is, hence, not the Dionysian undermining the Apollonian, but rather the Dionysian allowing the Apollonian to share in the world of feeling and emotion. The natural confines of the dream world are bent to embrace the sensuous realm of the Dionysian. The perfection of Madeline’s dream state does not lose its power when the ‘ditty’ interrupts it, nor its perfection, because it does not completely vanish. It is only through combining with the Dionysian that the Apollonian can cross ‘the delicate line’ of the ‘dream image’ and give the ‘image’ meaning in the actual world.

Accordingly, in this ‘blend’, ‘both gods emerged victorious, as it were, from their contest: an act of reconciliation on the battlefield’ (Nietzsche, 1999:122). Through their mutual existence and intermingling, both impulses enable each other to develop to their utmost ability. The Dionysian realm of feeling and emotion gains the perfection of the Apollonian dream-state, whereas the Apollonian dream-state realises itself in material terms when it ‘blends’ with the Dionysian world. Through carefully balancing and controlling both impulses, Keats creates a memorable love scene where not only two contrasting worlds collide, but also two contrasting impulses, offering the narrative a remarkable uniqueness and complexity.

2.4.8 Conclusion

Through the above analysis, I hope to have shed some light on the Apollonian and Dionysian intermingling in Keats's verse romance, *The Eve of St. Agnes*. Through the utilisation of light and sculpture and dream-vision and music, Keats carved out a very intricate artwork filled with symbolic details. For the first time in Keats's 1820 volume, we reach an apparently fortunate ending where the two lovers can escape their challenges to begin a new life elsewhere. *The Eve of St. Agnes* thus differs from *Lamia* and *Isabella* in the sense that the Apollonian and Dionysian impulses are not solely conflicting and self-destructive. We can recognise the complementing nature of their interaction in the romance in question. Through his 'melting' of Apollonian and Dionysian impulses, Keats lived up to his aspiration of making 'all disagreeables evaporate' and, accordingly, he gave us an interwoven romance where the two artistic impulses challenge and modify one another to, ultimately, heighten each other's powers and achievements. Finally, through the above examination, I hope to have illustrated some sense of the *balance* which exists between these two drives in *The Eve of St. Agnes*.

2.5 CONCLUSION TO THE CHAPTER

From the various close readings in this chapter, we can see that the interaction between Nietzsche's Apollonian and Dionysian impulses is one of the main underlying themes in *Lamia*, *Isabella* and *The Eve of St. Agnes*. By moving through the romances sequentially, we can also recognise how the relationship between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses changes and develops in the respective romances. We are able to perceive the Apollonian and Dionysian disjunctions in two of the romances, but we are also able to appreciate their dualism in the final romance. In the plot structures and characters of *Lamia* and *Isabella*, Keats portrays the dangers of a divided world: these two poems allow us to recognise the self-destructive nature when either our Apollonian or Dionysian impulse completely precludes the other and the consequences when we close all other chamber doors in favour of an exclusive (thus limiting) perspective on life. However, in *The Eve of St. Agnes*, Keats also portrays the potential of a complementing relationship between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in the characters of Madeline and Porphyro. My focus in this chapter has primarily been thematic in nature and I focused my attention mainly on the characters in the three respective romances. The narrative nature of the poems allowed and encouraged this type of reading. Although different in genre, I believe the above readings will now allow us to move on to an analysis of Keats's lyrical poems in the form of his great odes.

CHAPTER 3: THE LYRICAL APOLLONIAN AND DIONYSIAN

*A creative person has little power over his own life. He is not free. He is captive and driven by his daimon.*¹⁰⁰

*My Imagination is a Monastery and I am its Monk.*¹⁰¹

*They do not understand how, while differing from (or: being at variance), (it) is in agreement with itself. (There is) a back-turning connection, like (that) of a bow or lyre.*¹⁰²

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Now that Madeline and Porphyro have ‘fled away into the storm’ to a ‘house’ over ‘the southern moors’, we move from the narrative world of romance to the more personal lyrical world of Keats’s odes. The previous chapter concluded with a seemingly fortunate ending and a reconciliation between Apollonian and Dionysian forces after their hostile disjunction in *Lamia* and *Isabella*. The following chapter builds on the fruitful intermingling between the Apollonian and Dionysian in the *Eve of St. Agnes* and, in my view, the two drives reach their full potential in Keats’s great odes. The odes are ‘At the centre of Keats’s achievements’ (Meihuizen, 2024:363) and are often regarded as the high point of his art. I believe that they are also the high point of Keats’s balancing of Apollonian and Dionysian impulses. Motion (1997:382) states the following about the odes:

¹⁰⁰ See C.G. Jung’s (1965:357), *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*.

¹⁰¹ See Keats’s (2005:464) letter to Shelley dated 16 August 1820.

¹⁰² See Heraclitus’s Fragment 51 (1987:37). Heraclitus’s statement of the bow and the lyre speaks of a ‘balanced tension’ and it is this ‘particular state of balanced tension which makes the lyre a functioning whole or unity, its finely tuned strings “sing together” (*synaideiri*); any tendency in the opposite direction (i.e., towards a slackening or over-tightening of the strings) will produce a malfunction, in which the strings “sing apart” (*diaideiri*)’ (Robinson as quoted in Heraclitus, 1987:82). Moreover, Daniel W. Graham (2008:178) describes this ‘balanced tension’ as follows: ‘Without the opposition between string and wood, the bow would not be able to shoot, the lyre to play. But in the tension there is the unifying structure (*harmonîê*) of the bow or the attunement of the lyre’. The fine balance which makes music or harmony exist in the tuning of a musical instrument is a suitable metaphor for understanding Apollonian and Dionysian impulses. Although they pull in opposite directions, it is their co-existence that creates harmony.

They investigate the value and nature of the creative process and the role played by negative capability. They explore the relation between conscious and unconscious forces, between art and life, and between ‘philosophy’ and ‘sensation’. They parallel sexual feelings with mental activity. They struggle to transcend time, and are fully aware of being written within time. As their themes mingle and clash, they create an extraordinary combination of inwardness and sociability.

I attempt to show something of this ‘relation between conscious and unconscious forces’ through the theoretical framework of the present study. More specifically, in the following chapter, I will examine the relationship between Apollonian and Dionysian forces in four of Keats’s odes: ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’, ‘Ode to Psyche’, and ‘To Autumn’.¹⁰³ In the ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, I examine the relationship between the Dionysian nature of the birdsong (including its stimulating imaginative power) and the Apollonian craftsmanship evident in the poem’s carefully structured technical qualities. In the ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’, I investigate the opposite: that is, the Dionysian imagination acting and enhancing the Apollonian source of inspiration (i.e. the Grecian urn). In the ‘Ode to Psyche’, I focus on the interaction between the abstract (Dionysian imagination) and the concrete (Apollonian architecture). Finally, in ‘To Autumn’, I explore the intermingling between Keats’s Dionysian immersion in nature and his conscious Apollonian use of language.

Through the following close readings of the four odes, I hope to show that the Nietzschean ideal of Apollonian and Dionysian impulses is a prevalent concern in all four of these lyric poems. Moreover, I believe that a similar harmony (*‘harmonie’*) which is produced by finely tuned strings on a lyre also exists in the balancing of Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in Keats’s odes. Finally, I will strive to demonstrate that the four poems can be constructively read through the Nietzschean theoretical framework of this study. Andrew Motion (1997:405) reminds us of the importance of Keats’s balancing of opposites in his great odes:

In ‘Psyche’, the ‘Grecian Urn’ and the ‘Nightingale’ [I, of course, add ‘To Autumn’], the hopes to which he bids ‘farewell’ are magnificently realised. He had struck the balance he imagined when speaking about negative capability, and also undertaken the journey he had supposed would lead him from the chamber of maiden thought. He had embraced the ‘difficulties’ of life in his work, without losing the fine point of his soul. He had found a way of celebrating the triumph of art while reflecting—and admitting the need to endure—the harsh facts of historical time. For all these reasons, he had no justification in feeling that his greatest achievements lay

¹⁰³ As stated in the previous chapter, I will continue to analyse the poems in Keats’s 1820 volume in the sequence in that edition.

elsewhere, in other forms and in different types of narrative. At the same time, he was right to suppose that the odes raise disturbing questions ... they show a steady evaporation of negative capability. Striving to reconcile opposites, to balance ‘thought’ with ‘sensation’, and to explore the relationship between art’s powers of consolation and life’s unavoidable hardships, they demonstrate that force of circumstance was exerting an irresistible pressure on Keats’s imagination.

3.2 ‘ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE’

*The freedom of birds—Keats’s nightingale, Shelley’s skylark—is a necessary imagining. I stand in the field behind my house, watching and listening as the skylark rises. My heart leaps up. But my mind has fallen into knowledge: a biologist will be able to explain to me why the lark rises. Freedom has nothing to do with it. The freedom of the lark is only in my imagination, just as the state of nature—Arcadia, Ariel’s island—is but a necessary dream. Maybe the true poets are those who hold fast to the dream even as they recognize it as a dream.*¹⁰⁴

3.2.1 Introduction

In his study of Keats’s major poems, *The Finer Tone*, Wasserman (1967:180) states the following regarding the ‘Ode to a Nightingale’: ‘The ideal condition towards which Keats always strives because it is his ideal, is one in which mortal and immortal, dynamism and stasis, the Dionysian and the Apollonian, beauty and truth, are one’.¹⁰⁵ This statement seems most pertinent to our concerns, especially when it comes to Keats’s ‘Ode to a Nightingale’.¹⁰⁶ Wasserman perceives the significance of the Apollonian and Dionysian relationship in Keats’s odes, but he does not investigate this relationship in definite or exhaustive detail. Using Wasserman’s premise above as a starting point, this section will consider the following question: *how* does Keats achieve a sense of unity between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in the present poem? I will focus on the following aspects of the poem to formulate

¹⁰⁴ See Jonathan Bate’s (2000:93) book, *The Song of the Earth*.

¹⁰⁵ Also see Fogle (1953:111): ‘The principal stress of the poem is a struggle between ideal and actual: inclusive terms which, however, contain more particular antitheses of pleasure and pain, of imagination and commonsense reason, of fullness and privation, of permanence and change, of nature and the human, of art and life, freedom and bondage, waking and dream’. More recently, Kelvin Everest (2021:34) notes: ‘One of the defining qualities of Keats’s greatest poetry is the perfect poise with which it expresses a tensed balancing of motion with stillness, of process with stasis, of the comings and goings of life with the permanence of art. Everything about the medium of the great Odes is expressive of this balanced tension’.

¹⁰⁶ As expressed at the beginning of the study: Nietzsche’s portrayal of the Dionysian, at times, bears close resemblance to Keats’s abstractions of Apollo. Therefore, for the sake of continuity (among other concerns), one must be particularly selective when drawing on the terms if one encounters them outside of Nietzsche’s treatise. However, by considering the context of Wasserman’s (1967:32-33) usage of the terms elsewhere in the book, it seems as if he also has Nietzsche’s notion in mind here.

a tentative answer to the question outlined above: the Dionysian nature of the birdsong in relation to the Apollonian formal structure of the poem, and the Apollonian and Dionysian interaction at the thematic centre of the poem. Moreover, I will juxtapose Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' with his contemporary, John Clare's, 'The Nightingale's Nest', to cast further light on Keats's balancing of Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in the poem at hand.¹⁰⁷

3.2.2 Literature Review

In his volume of Keats's *Complete Poems*, Jack Stillinger (as quoted in Keats, 1978:469) notes that 'most of the best critical work [on the 'Ode to a Nightingale'] has been done in full-length general studies'. In some sense, this statement is still germane to Keats studies in the 21st century. Much of the scholarly material which informs my reading of the poem in this section of the chapter are from 'full-length general studies'. Nevertheless, I also draw on a range of different articles as one will see below. While considering the 'Ode to a Nightingale' and its various, and sometimes contradicting, critical interpretations, John Baker (1988:109) states that:

Keats scholarship has never unified itself into the kind of collective enterprise and even progenitor of critical schools which Blake and Wordsworth scholarship have periodically become. Keats is not the exponent of a doctrine in the way that Blake is, and that Wordsworth can be made to look.¹⁰⁸

In the three romances of the previous chapter, one could identify (albeit tentatively at least) dominant approaches or interpretations of the respective romances. The 'Ode to a Nightingale', on the other hand, is exemplary of the fact that Keats scholarship does not form a 'kind of collective enterprise' as the poem opens itself up to many different interpretations and Keats scholars have walked numerous and varying critical routes to add something to the vast scholarly output already conducted on the poem. Stephen Gurney (1983:46), nevertheless, attempts to narrow the critical scope down to the following when he writes that:

¹⁰⁷ It is important to note that this comparison cannot be regarded as an exhaustive or all-inclusive one; its chief purpose is to highlight specific tendencies of Apollonian and Dionysian intermingling in Keats's odes. An analysis of Keats and Clare is no straightforward task, as John Goodridge (2011:32-54) has shown in his article, 'Junkets and Clarissimus: The Clare-Keats Dialogue'. The reason for choosing Clare specifically will become apparent as my discussion develops.

¹⁰⁸ Baker's (1988:109-128) study, 'Dialectics and Reduction: Keats Criticism and the "Ode to a Nightingale"', provides a thorough critical overview of the poem. For the sake of brevity, I will not engage in such a review, but his survey can, in the 21st century, still be regarded as a meticulous account of the odes' diverse schools of thought.

The 'Ode to a Nightingale' has been severally read by a host of disparate critics who tend to fall into two antagonistic camps. On the one hand, as Earl R. Wasserman and the exponents of his views affirm, the poem is negative insofar as it witnesses to the poet's inability to achieve the spiritual stasis of the nightingale; while, on the other hand, as Jack Stillinger and the exponents of his views argue, the poem is essentially affirmative insofar as the poet has successfully extricated himself from the irresponsible enticements of the nightingale's song.¹⁰⁹

This citation is overall an accurate summary to help comprehend one of the principal points of disagreement among critical discussions of the 'Ode to a Nightingale', although the standpoints of the 'two antagonistic camps' can oftentimes become more ambiguous than the view above expresses, as I intend to show later in my analysis of the poem.

Another aspect which adds even more depth to the ode is: in addition to attracting the attention of several critics, the 'Ode to a Nightingale' is also a deeply influential poem for a host of later poets.¹¹⁰ In one of his fifteen lectures delivered as Oxford Professor of Poetry, Paul Muldoon (2006:12) recalls the following anecdote which emphasises the 'Ode to a Nightingale's' association with the Irish poet, W.B. Yeats:

For now, let me direct you to a near-perfect rhyme, the rhyme between Yeats and Keats. I'm reminded immediately of the occasion when Yeats read at Colgate University in Hamilton, New York, and the university president, who'd insisted on making the introduction and had obviously boned up big-time, introduced Yeats as the author of 'Ode to Psyche,' 'Ode to a Nightingale' and 'Ode on Melancholy.' This is not only an honest mistake, of the sort that anyone who stands up to speak is likely to make, but it's not entirely without basis.

Muldoon (2006:12-28) commences to give a justification of this 'basis' by focusing on the Keatsian borrowings from the 'Ode to a Nightingale' prevalent in Yeats's 'All Souls' Night'.¹¹¹

In the work of a more contemporary and mainstream wordsmith, Christopher Ricks (2003:361-369) demonstrates the influence of the 'Ode to a Nightingale' on Bob Dylan's song, 'Not Dark Yet', by drawing particular attention to the similarities in diction:

¹⁰⁹ See Stillinger (1968:1-16) for a more comprehensive explanation of these two contrasting viewpoints.

¹¹⁰ McGilchrist, for instance, asserts that the 'Ode to a Nightingale' 'has the best claim to be the most famous poem in the English language' (Dr Iain McGilchrist, 2020).

¹¹¹ For instance, Muldoon notices that 'There's a realisation, too, that this being line 10, the stanza is somewhat outside Yeats's normative ottava rima, the form of most of his big poems of the previous ten years. That "All Souls Night" should make its way into the world in ten-line units reintroduces the idea of Yeats being visited by Keats, since a ten-line unit (though not with the same rhyme-scheme) is employed in both "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode on Melancholy," each of which has very specific connections with this first stanza of "All Souls Night"'. Moreover, J.L. Jones (1975:147-151) and, more recently, Kelvin Everest (2021:37) perceive parallels between Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' and Yeats's, 'Sailing to Byzantium'.

Verse 3

- first line: Dylan and Keats, *well*
- second line: Dylan, *the river*/ Keats, *the still stream* [and *Lethe*, the river
that in 'Too Much of Nothing' flows into Dylan's 'waters of oblivion']
Dylan, *the sea*/ Keats, *seas*
- third line: Dylan, *been down*/ Keats, *tread thee down*
Dylan, *world full of lies* / Keats, *world; full* [five times, of which four
are *full of*, one being *full of the true*]
- fourth line: Dylan and Keats, *eyes*
- fifth line: Dylan, *Sometimes* / Keats, *oft-times; many a time*

Even on African shores, the ode's influence can clearly be seen in a poem such as the Zimbabwean, John Eppel's (2020:88-93), 'Scrub Robin'.¹¹² In the context of the poem, the scrub robin becomes something of an African equivalent of the European nightingale, whereas the ten-line stanza of the ode is also effectively employed by Eppel. Consider the first stanza of the poem:

I'm not reclining beneath a plum tree
on Hampstead Heath; I'm not about to fade
into oblivion. True, I can't see
what's going on about my feet displayed
in the season's first mud. They say the act
of observation changes whatever
is observed. Does that apply to birdsong?
Can sound be smelt? Cool seepage soothes my cracked heels
as I, a Friday's child, endeavour
to locate it bob, bob, bobbins' along.

The above instances (albeit brief references) clearly exemplify the widespread influence of the 'Ode to a Nightingale'. Moreover, just as poets have drawn on the ode in their own unique fashions, so too have critics provided disparate readings of the poem. Richard Harter Fogle (1953:211-222) reads the poem primarily as 'a Romantic poem' by focussing specifically on the 'Romantic principles' evident in the ode. Stephen Gurney (1983:46-69) provides a Heideggerian reading of the poem, while Beth Lau (1983:46-62) applies to it association theory, which 'has long been recognized as an important influence

¹¹² For more information regarding the influence of Keats's ode on 'Scrub Robin', see Ruth Eppel's (2021) video interview with John Eppel wherein he discusses this influence in detail.

on Romantic poets'. Karl P. Wentersdorf (1984:70-84) illustrates a 'sub-text' present in the ode, based on the notion that 'there is [among other sub-texts] a dichotomy between what the poet has come to recognize as the grim truth about life and, on the other hand, man's eternal hope' and that it 'is the same muted hope that shines through, however fitfully, in the subtext of the Ode'. James O'Rourke (1988:43-57) provides a critique of 'intrinsic criticism' and Cynthia Chase's (1985:208-225) intertextual reading of the poem, by emphasising the restrictive nature of such a reading in relation to the ode under discussion. Elizabeth A. Lawrence (1999:21-30) recognises that critics 'have largely neglected the dimension of Keats's experience with an actual bird whose song inspired him to compose the poem' and, therefore, she studies 'that interaction' between nightingale and poet and how this enhances our 'understanding of the Ode and elucidates some important aspects of the poet's mode of thought regarding the question of boundaries between humankind and nature'. Nicholas Roe (2012:442) opens another Dionysian dimension to the poem when he states that the 'Ode to a Nightingale' 'deserves a place alongside "Kubla Khan" or De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* as one of the greatest re-creations of a drug-inspired dream-vision in English literature'.¹¹³ In more recent years, William A. Ulmer (2016:449-469), examines the dramatic qualities of the poem while Elizabeth Oldfather (2019:557-572) focuses on 'Keats's exploration of the particularity of sensory imagery' and how this 'gives rise to imaginings that are unique to the cognitive ecosystem of verse'. These examples clearly demonstrate the fact that 'Keats scholarship has never unified itself into [a] kind of collective enterprise' and that a poem such as the 'Ode to a Nightingale' cannot be limited to one specific 'doctrine'.

As stated earlier, there are also numerous 'full-length general studies' of the 'Ode to a Nightingale'. To avoid tediousness, I am not going to include these studies here, but I do refer to several of them in my analysis below. Nevertheless, I do want to, briefly, direct attention to Nicholas Meihuizen's (2024:370-378) daemonic reading of the poem. Meihuizen notes that the 'Ode to a Nightingale' is 'in part concerned with the mind and heart acting upon each other'. It is important to point out that my examination follows the same understanding of the poem. The significance lies in the fact that it is 'mind *and* heart'; in my terms: Apollonian *and* Dionysian acting upon *each other*.

Consequently, if I must locate my reading in one of Gurney's 'two antagonistic camps', I see it straddling the fence with one foot on either side of the two camps: I believe the Dionysian imaginative flight 'on the viewless wings of Poesy' and the return to the 'sole [Apollonian] self' are equally important to appreciate the full significance of the poem (Keats, 1970:523-532).

3.2.3 'Darkling, I listen': The Dionysian Song of the Nightingale

As is evident from the study thus far, music plays an integral role in the intermingling between Apollonian and Dionysian energies in Keats's poetry. We can recall from the previous chapter that it

¹¹³ I return to this point in more detail in the dissertation's appendix on the 'Ode on Indolence'.

was Lamia's Dionysian music that first enticed the then-Apollonian and reasoning Lycius to approach her and, accordingly, led to his discovering another, more emotionally charged, dimension to life. Furthermore, it was Dionysian music that liberated Madeline from her Apollonian dream state and enabled her to enter the world of feeling and emotion to finally escape the hostile confines of the castle. The music in the 'Ode to a Nightingale' welling about him is, however, unique, and significant in the sense that this is our first encounter without characters or plot-structures separating it from Keats. In the more personal, lyrical world of the ode, we can now see Keats himself receiving Dionysian inspiration stimulated by the music of the nightingale. Furthermore, Keats might have appreciated the nightingale's song even more deeply, as John A. Minahan (1992:117) notes when he sheds light on Keats's profound relationship with music:

To know and love Haydn and Mozart, one must understand musical structure, at least enough to be able to respond appropriately to the ways in which notes and chords and rhythms in the tonal idiom establish basic patterns such as tension and release. Keats had no musical training. But given that he was an unusually intuitive person, it's not unlikely that he could have felt the workings of the music, much as he claimed to be able to feel the delight in motion a billiard ball might feel. Apparently, Keats had a good ear as well, and knew much music by heart: he and his brothers and friends would often perform 'concerts' in which each would imitate an instrument of the orchestra; these concerts would go on for hours at a time. Keats was usually the bassoon. This perhaps suggests that he sang in a deep voice. More important, it also suggests that he could pick out the bass line, which requires more skill than singing the main melody. We know, then, not only what music was in the air, we also know that Keats was listening, and listening well. At some level he must have heard and understood the music's re-collective character. Such would be true for any competent listener, and doubly so for one as keen and perceptive as Keats.

In the 'Ode to a Nightingale', we also see Keats 'listening, and listening well' and the nightingale's song is more intricate than we might initially expect.¹¹⁴ Keats's 'keen and perceptive' ear would have appreciated the melodious subtleties in the nightingale's song, thereby heightening its inspirational potentiality. On this topic, Lawrence (1999:22) notes the following:

It is understandable that Keats, like many other listeners, was deeply affected by the distinctive beauty and power of the nightingale's voice. The song is vehement, loud, and musical, with repeated bubbling notes followed by slow phrases that rise to a pealing crescendo. Nightingales

¹¹⁴ Keats would have been familiar with nightingale songs as they were commonplace at Enfield where Keats went to school and read Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, next to a pond in the 'rural paradise' of the schoolyard (Motion, 1997:24).

usually sing from a hidden perch, and are noteworthy for bursting forth with their songs both at night and during the day. Scientists as well as poets are intrigued with the nightingale's astounding ability as a songster. For example, zoologist John Krebs has shown that the nightingale's song is enormously complex; his studies determined that the song contains more notes than Mendelsohn's Violin Concerto.

Despite the 'enormously complex' nature of the nightingale's song, I regard it as primarily Dionysian. Helen Vendler (1983:69;79-81), on the other hand, sees the Nightingale's singing as 'the art of Apollo', but, as stated earlier, she probably has Keats's Apollo in mind, who certainly displays characteristics of Nietzsche's Dionysus. Given the profound effect of the nightingale's song, Keats, most certainly, would have also regarded it as something Dionysian—something originating outside our everyday reality. Nietzsche (1999:14;21) ascribes the 'imageless art of music' to Dionysus and he differentiates between Apollonian and Dionysian music in the following respects:

Although it seems that music was already familiar to the Greeks as an Apollonian art, they only knew it, strictly speaking, in the form of a wave-like rhythm with an image-making power which they developed to represent Apollonian states. The music of Apollo was Doric architectonics in sound, but only in the kind of hinted-at tones characteristic of the *cithara*. It keeps at a distance, as something un-Apollonian, the very element which defines the character of Dionysian music (and thus of music generally): the power of its sound to shake us to our very foundations, the unified stream of melody and the quite incomparable world of harmony.

The Dionysian description of music above seems much more pertinent to the way Keats perceives the nightingale's song in the first stanza of the ode:

That thou, light-wingèd Dryad of the trees,
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.¹¹⁵

Keats's description of the nightingale as a 'light-wingèd Dryad of the trees' sheds further light on its Dionysian nature: the nightingale is transformed into a spiritual inhabitant of the woods from the classical past bursting into song from the 'quite incomparable world of harmony'. From this Dionysian realm, the nightingale cries out its 'daemonically fascinating song' (Nietzsche, 1999:128) 'beyond the

¹¹⁵ 'Ode to a Nightingale', lines 7-10.

reach of ordinary human capability' (Meihuizen, 2024:371).¹¹⁶ If one compares it to the 'party's music' in *The Eve of St. Agnes*, it is clearly much more significant as it captures the listener's ear and draws it into its song in a way ordinary music (like that of the castle) cannot succeed in doing. Despite the Apollonian complexity of its song, it springs forth 'in full-throated ease' which tells of effortless, almost intuitive, expression.¹¹⁷ Yet, this 'ease[ful]' singing is still 'full-throated', which complements the fact that it is an impassioned effort, not mediated or contained by Apollonian 'measured limitation' (Nietzsche, 1999:16). This becomes clearer later in the poem when Keats describes the nightingale's singing again as follows:

While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy.¹¹⁸

The OED (2025) defines the word 'ecstasy' as: 'An exalted state of feeling which engrosses the mind to the exclusion of thought; rapture, transport'. The fact that the bird is singing 'In such an ecstasy' further establishes the Dionysian nature of the nightingale's song: the 'exclusion of thought' in this act of singing clearly locates it in the Dionysian realm.¹¹⁹ Moreover, the word 'soul' is more analogous to feeling and emotion ('state of feeling') than to logic and reasoning and this adds to the 'remarkable energy and force of the nightingale's song' (Lawrence, 1999:25). We can also discern another, perhaps undervalued, element of Dionysian music in the ode: its ability to destroy 'the usual barriers and limits of existence':

The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft-times hath
Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam

¹¹⁶ See Nietzsche (1999:54): 'The re-born genius of Dionysian music now took hold of this dying myth and under its hand it blossomed anew, in colours such as it had never shown before and with a perfume that awakened a longing premonition of a metaphysical world'. Also consider Karl Kroeber's (1964:79) view: 'the bird's song does not, as some have thought, urge us toward death but toward a new life. Properly understood, understood by the poet who does not "have ears in vain," the song leads on to the visionary realm where he may be, through his creative consciousness, more than his "sole self"'.
¹¹⁷ Also see Keats (2005:97): 'If Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all'.

¹¹⁸ 'Ode to a Nightingale', lines 57-58.

¹¹⁹ See Nietzsche (1999:40): it is in 'the ecstasy of the Dionysian state' where 'the usual barriers and limits of existence are destroyed'.

Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.¹²⁰

The song of the nightingale is not bound to temporal limits: its 'voice' was 'heard / In ancient days' and in biblical times and places ('the sad heart of Ruth').¹²¹ Furthermore, societal 'barriers' are destroyed as it provided the same solace for 'emperor and clown'; two clearly distinct types in society. Wentersdorf (1984:81) supports this quality of the nightingale's song when he writes that 'To rulers, ruled, and displaced persons alike, the bird's melodious song would have been a token of happiness or of consolation for unhappiness, especially in affairs of the heart'. Furthermore, it also possesses a similar 'magic [quality] of the Dionysian' (1999:18), as in the 'casements' and 'faery lands' alluded to in the last two lines of the stanza.

From the above, one can perceive the nightingale's song as Dionysian. This knowledge allows us to now focus on the birdsong in relation to the 'nature of the creative process' in Keats's ode (Motion, 1997:382). The song of the nightingale plays an important role in the 'nature of the creative process': it is the Dionysian inspiration, the imaginative stimulus behind the poem. Its mellifluous music first prompted the listening poet of the ode to compose the poem. Charles Brown (as quoted in Motion, 1997:394-395) provided the following account of the ode's composition:

In the spring of 1819 a nightingale had built her nest near my house. Keats felt a tranquil and continual joy in her song; and one morning he took a chair from the breakfast table to the grass-plot under a plum tree, where he sat for two or three hours. When he came into the house, I perceived he had some scraps of paper in his hand, and these he was quietly thrusting behind the books. On inquiry, I found these scraps, four or five in number, contained his poetic feeling on the song of our nightingale. The writing was not well legible; and it was difficult to arrange the stanzas on so many scraps. With his assistance I succeeded, and this was his 'Ode to a Nightingale', a poem which has been the delight of everyone. Immediately afterwards I searched for more of his (in reality) fugitive pieces, in which task, at my request, he again assisted me. Thus I rescued that Ode and other valuable short poems, which might otherwise have been lost. From that day he gave me permission to copy any verses he might write, & I fully availed myself of it. He cared so little for them himself, when once, as it appeared to me, his imagination was released from their influence, that it required a friend at hand to preserve them.

¹²⁰ 'Ode to a Nightingale', lines 63-70.

¹²¹ For a comprehensive exploration of Keats's reference to Ruth in this stanza, see Everest (2021:30-33).

Brown slips happily into the right-hand man who ‘rescued’ one of Keats’s greatest poems in the above instance, but the credibility of his account is somewhat questionable.¹²² Nevertheless, he seems to capture the importance of the nightingale’s song as the primary mode of inspiration for Keats to write his ode, thereby emphasising its role in the ‘creative process’ of the poem.¹²³ But, Dionysian inspiration *alone*, no matter how powerful, does not create a poem such as the ‘Ode to a Nightingale’. Keats and Nietzsche (1999:35) would have been deeply conscious of the fact that:

... the lyric poet needs all the stirrings of passion, from the whisper of inclination to the fury of madness; impelled by the drive to speak of music in Apollonian symbols ... by virtue of the fact that he interprets music in images, he himself is at rest on the still, calm sea of Apollonian contemplation, no matter how much all those things around him which he contemplates through the medium of music are in the grip of thrusting, driving motion.

In the ode, we can perceive ‘all the stirrings of passion’ evoked by the nightingale’s song. However, inspiration, no matter how profound, is fleeting, as Shelley (2007:65) knew when he wrote that ‘the mind in creation is as a fading coal’. When the coal eventually burns out, one has to do something to ignite it again. How does Keats manage to capture the powerful song of the nightingale in a way that does justice to its beauty? This brings us to the other side of the coin (or the ‘creative process’): the intricate technical structure of the poem which must have been the result of careful craftsmanship on the ‘calm sea of Apollonian contemplation’. The ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ is significant as its Apollonian craftsmanship visualises the birdsong in the final stanza of the poem, thereby retaining a sense of the initial Dionysian inspiration.

3.2.4 Clothing ‘the naked foot of Poesy’: Apollonian Refinement in ‘The Ode to a Nightingale’

Only a few days before Keats wrote the ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, he wrote the last of his experimental sonnets, ‘If by dull rhymes our English must be chained’. This anti-sonnet sonnet is important for our concerns here, as it clearly shows that Keats (1970:521-522) was consciously thinking (in terms of this

¹²² See, for example, Everest (2021:26-27): ‘A manuscript of the Ode in Keats’s hand survives in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. It looks like a first draft; there is a probable false start, the first thirty lines are written continuously with no stanza divisions, and thereafter there are stanza breaks but no numbering, with a few light running corrections. It cannot be squared with what Brown says. There is no ambiguity about the order of the stanzas in the Fitzwilliam manuscript, neither is it written semi-legibly on four or five scraps but perfectly neatly on two half-sheets. Perhaps Brown, writing twenty years after the event, was confusing his memories’.

¹²³ See Nietzsche (1999:33): ‘Melody gives birth to poetry, and does so over and over again, in ever new ways’.

dissertation) of the relationship between Apollonian structure and Dionysian inspiration before writing the ‘Ode to a Nightingale’¹²⁴:

If by dull rhymes our English must be chained,
And, like Andromeda, the Sonnet sweet
Fettered, in spite of pained loveliness,
Let us find out, if we must be constrained,
Sandals more interwoven and complete
To fit the naked foot of Poesy.
Let us inspect the lyre, and weigh the stress
Of every chord, and see what may be gained
By ear industrious, and attention meet;
Misers of sound and syllable, no less
Than Midas of his coinage, let us be
Jealous of dead leaves in the bay wreath crown;
So, if we may not let the Muse be free,
She will be bound with garlands of her own.

In the previous chapter, the Apollonian focus rested chiefly on its more reductive aspects when logic and reasoning were taken too far at the expense of Dionysian emotion and feeling.¹²⁵ However, we should not forget, as Nietzsche (1999:43;110) reminds us, that the Dionysian and Apollonian each ‘govern a separate kingdom of *art*’ and that the Apollonian is still an ‘*artistic impulse*’ (my emphases). Therefore its artistic abilities, albeit more stable and fixed, should not be undermined or neglected. Nietzsche (1999:92) notes somewhat sceptically that it is an ‘idyllic belief that every man of feeling is actually an artist’. Keats’s contemplation of form in the sonnet focuses the attention on the Apollonian aspects of his poetry as opposed to pure ‘feeling’. Just as the Dionysian song endeavours to inspire, so too does Apollonian structure strive to satisfy ‘the sense of beauty which thirsts after great and sublime forms; it parades images of life before our eyes and stimulates us to comprehend in thought the core of life contained within them’ (Nietzsche, 1999:102). Keats was acutely aware of traditional forms throughout his oeuvre, and he was also able to utilise these forms in original and creative ways as the

¹²⁴ See Michael O’Neill (2017:198): ‘In “If by dull rhymes our English must be chained” Keats writes an anti-sonnet sonnet; he protests against constraints of rhyme imposed by traditional schemes. He proposes and in the poem itself enacts “Sandals more interwoven and complete / To fit the naked foot of Poesy”. The odes reap the benefit of this experimentation to find “Sandals” that will “fit Poesy’s naked foot”, a comparison that wittily undercuts itself since the pun on “foot” (implying metrical form as well as limb) complicates the metaphor of clothing’.

¹²⁵ Consider, for example, Apollonius’s intervention in *Lamia*, the money-grabbing brothers in *Isabella* who disregard their sister’s feelings and emotions and see her marriage as a type of logical transaction where money is to be made and, to a lesser extent, the hierarchical ordering of the castle in *The Eve of St. Agnes*.

‘new form of sonnet-resourceful symmetrical stanzas’ in the ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ illustrate (Wolfson, 2022:332).¹²⁶ Therefore, in an Apollonian sense, we see Keats contemplating ‘sublime forms’ which would fit the ‘naked foot of Poesy’ best in the above sonnet. He is clearly recognising Apollonian art’s ability to ‘see what may be gained’ when it enhances rather than restricts its Dionysian counterpart (inspiration). It is impossible for the nightingale’s song, as depicted by Keats in the ode, to ‘be [as] free’ as her actual ‘full-throated’ melody. As soon as one chooses to portray this song in writing, one is, in a sense, already restricting it, because then it becomes fixed and bound to the form of the poem, or at least the words on the page. However, Keats implements his Apollonian craftsmanship to give the nightingale’s song a voice in the poem by ‘bound[ing]’ her with ‘garlands of her own’ and weighing ‘the stress / Of every chord’:

Away! away! For I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards.¹²⁷

Walter Jackson Bate (1945:139) notes that Keats’s use of spondees (two consecutive strong stresses) here ‘are used in connection with slow flight’.¹²⁸ He further notes that ‘in the final stanza of the “Ode to a Nightingale”, the distinctive use of scattered spondees, together with initial inversion, lend an approximate phonetic suggestion of the peculiar spring and bounce of the bird in its flight’:

Adieu! adieu! Thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now ’tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades¹²⁹

Similarly, O’Neill (2017:201) notes that in the above stanza, ‘body is given to the bird’s winged departure’. Through Keats’s Apollonian placement of ‘scattered spondees’, he succeeds in giving the nightingale a type of material representation in this part of the poem with the ‘phonetic suggestion of the peculiar spring and bounce of the bird in its flight’.

Notwithstanding the importance of this meticulous use of spondees, I want to suggest another technical element which Keats employs with careful Apollonian intent in this stanza: the indentation of

¹²⁶ For a comprehensive examination of Keats’s inventiveness in this regard, see Jonathan Mulrooney’s (2008:935-948), ‘Keats’s “Dull Rhymes” and the Making of the Ode Stanza’. Also see Abrams’s (1965:527-560), ‘Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric’.

¹²⁷ ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, lines 31-34.

¹²⁸ Michael O’Neill (2017:198) recently referred to Bate’s study as ‘still an essential companion to the poetry’.

¹²⁹ ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, lines 75-78.

the four lines above seems to be particularly significant. Meihuizen (2024:378) notes that these lines trace the ‘ever-retreating sound of the bird (even as far as line-shape is concerned)’. As the bird moves ‘Past the *near* meadows... / Up the hill-side... / In the *next* valley-glades’, the line moves further and further away from the left-hand side of the page. The shift from ‘near’ to ultimately ‘next’ emphasises the ‘ever-retreating sound of the bird’ for the listening poet in the final part of the ode. Keats, by drawing on the ‘image-making energies’ associated with Apollo (Nietzsche, 1999:16), succeeds in visually recreating something of the birdsong and the fleeting inspiration it provided. We can imagine Keats listening and situated on the left-hand side of the page and, as the bird and its ‘plaintive anthem’ moves further and further to the right, its sound, accordingly, becomes fainter and fainter. Through this indentation, Keats manages to retain a sense of the Dionysian inspiration which first inspired him to write the ode. The Apollonian structure manages to make something permanent of the fleeting Dionysian inspiration. These four lines also show something of the bird’s freedom: even in the poem, it is able to move from left to right and is not bound to begin at one place, it achieves movement, where the poet cannot move with it and remains fixed on the left-hand side of the page, further emphasising the bird’s freedom (as a spiritual ‘light-wingèd Dryad’) in contrast to the poet’s reality. By visualising the fading echoes through the carefully selected line indentations, there remains something concrete left of the inspirational birdsong in the poem. Keats, from the ‘calm sea of Apollonian contemplation’, manages to create an Apollonian visual representation of how he perceives the birdsong at the end of the poem.

The Irish poet, Richard Murphy’s (1980) views about form in poetry seem pertinent to Keats’s usage of form and structure in the ‘Ode to a Nightingale’:

I think that the form now comes up through the language itself. One of the reasons why I write poetry is to try to keep people alive in words, and before I stopped in March I was writing poems about Tony White, who died over three years ago. I’d written nothing about him for the first couple of years after he died, though I’d thought about him continually, felt his loss every day and still do, but then I started to write the first of several poems about him, and it came out in very strict rhymes, effortlessly, which is unusual for me, since I find rhyming rather difficult. I thought as I wrote that the rhymes were coming almost too easily, but that poem was written out of necessity and I think that’s how poetry should be written: out of need. And yet it rhymed and was strict in metre, a formal ode, and obviously the form wasn’t imposed like a uniform upon a recruit. It came from the depths and was part of the person it was about. Subsequently I’ve written two or three more poems about him, and they’ve taken longer to write but they’ve all been equally intricate in form, partly because, although he seemed to his friends to be the freest person they knew, his freedom depended on a concealed self-discipline. He’s the person to whom Tom Gunn’s poem ‘Innocence’ is dedicated. Gunn’s form manages to hold and to

distance this terrible subject matter, to cool it sufficiently so that it becomes bearable and not just shocking or disgusting.

The specific use of spondees and the indentation in the final stanza is ‘part of the’ nightingale and its song. Through poetic technique, Keats manages ‘to keep something’ (although it is the fading decrescendo) of the nightingale’s song ‘alive’ in the ode. He creates a visual representation of his ‘Muse’s’ inspiration and how it finally disappears into the ‘next valley-glades’. By recreating a sonnet type stanza, Keats constructs a form in which the nightingale and its song can move more freely than in a traditional sonnet, but necessarily it is still restricted, as poetic inspiration is, because it is fleeting and constrained by time. It can never move totally freely, because there is always the realisation that the coal will eventually burn out. It does not, however, have to be ‘chained’ by ‘dull rhymes’, but can be enhanced and balanced by Apollonian form and structure. Meihuizen (2016:183) notes that ‘Murphy used graph-paper notebooks; he felt that the graph paper, in providing him with a square for each letter of each word, helped him to “hold in its net the music of poetry, and prevent words from swimming into measureless prolixity”’. Keats’s careful technical mastery in the present poem also helps to capture (‘hold’) something of the nightingale’s ‘music’ while also preventing the music to fade ‘into measureless prolixity’. If Keats ‘may not let the Muse be free’, he succeeds in clothing her with ‘garlands of her own’ which complement her and do not necessarily confine her to the stiffness of a *forced* traditional form.

The above demonstration is, however, not the only Apollonian implementation of indentation in the poem. Keats also effectively implements the indentation of lines earlier, in the third stanza of the poem. Here, the use of indentation is also significant, but not to complement the nightingale’s song. On the contrary, here the indentation is used to emphasise the poet’s reality as opposed to the freedom of the bird:

Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs¹³⁰

Wolfson (2015:95) notes that ‘Keats adds a relentless anaphora of *Where*, which picks up the *here* inside its lettering’. This is a helpful insight as it is clearly the ‘here’ of the real world which separates the poet from the nightingale. As we saw earlier with the fading voice of the nightingale being echoed by the indentation of the lines, the opposite is being illustrated here: the nightingale is still singing in this part

¹³⁰ ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, lines 24-28.

of the poem; thus, it is still on the left-hand side of the page with the poet, but every realisation of the harsh truths of his reality, every '[W]here' distances the poet somewhat from the nightingale and he moves further and further away from its song. The poet does achieve a type of movement here, but it is an unwilling one, leading him away from the momentary freedom the nightingale's song offers. As the poet lists the drawbacks of his reality by implementing the 'relentless anaphora', he recognises the distance between the confined state of his reality and the freedom of the birdsong. Therefore, the Apollonian intent of these four lines reemphasise something about the contrast between the birdsong and the poet.

From the above, we can see how Keats drew on his Apollonian craftsmanship to open another dimension to his art and which enhances the subject-matter of the poem. Through a careful use of line indentation, the inspirational birdsong manages to work itself into the structure of the poem. Keats succeeds in creating a visual representation of the Dionysian means of inspiration, therefore it does not completely get lost. Bloom (1971:10) notes that 'the strong Romantic poet, when he is most himself, makes a world in which his Real Man, the Imagination, can never die'. In the poem under discussion, Keats 'makes a world in which' the transient nature of the birdsong and its imaginative potentiality 'can never die', because they are recreated, to a certain extent at least, in the formal structure of the poem. We can, therefore, recognise how the Apollonian provided a concreteness to the abstract song of the nightingale, emphasising their interdependence in the ode.

3.2.5 'Do I wake or sleep?': More Apollonian and Dionysian Intermingling

After illustrating the relationship between Dionysian inspiration and Apollonian form in the 'Ode to a Nightingale', I now want to focus on the theme of the poem vis-à-vis its Apollonian and Dionysian interaction. Beth Lau (1983:57) perceives a relationship between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in the ode when she writes that:

Though he [Keats] now wants to temper his spontaneity with some measure of conscious control, he still insists on the value of an intuitive, organic, 'independent' approach. Keats did not completely reject his former beliefs when unexpected, disturbing insights began to erode them. Instead, in the great poems and the letters of 1818-19, he continually seeks ways in which he can reconcile his youthful interest in associative reveries and visionary flights with his new commitment to knowledge, careful artistry, and 'the sweet and bitter world' of reality. Keats's success in combining the benefits of open-minded free association and controlled development is nowhere so striking as in 'Ode to a Nightingale'.¹³¹

¹³¹ G. Kim Blank (2018) calls this development the 'controlled intensity' of the odes.

We have already focused on the ‘careful artistry’ in relation to Dionysian inspiration, but we can go further and examine how Keats manages to temper ‘visionary flights’ or ‘reveries’ with the world of ‘reality’. The ode opens with Keats clearly in a Dionysian state of a surfeit of emotion:

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk.
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thine happiness¹³²

Through his empathetic imagination, Keats is able to be ‘too happy’ in the nightingale’s happiness here. However, happiness is also the cause of his aching ‘heart’ and ‘drowsy numbness’. A comparison of his situation with that of the bird leads to ache and ‘numbness’, but also to ‘happiness’ at the joy of its song. In an attempt to unite himself with the nightingale, Keats then considers another means of Dionysian transport to enter the realm of the nightingale:

Oh, for a draught of vintage that hath been
Cooled a long age in the deep-delvèd earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!
Oh, for a beaker full of the warm South,
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stainèd mouth,
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim—¹³³

In this stanza, Keats’s longs for a ‘draught of vintage’, a Dionysian ‘narcotic drink’ (Nietzsche, 1999:17), with the inspirational qualities of Hippocrene which might enable him to ‘leave the world unseen’ and, with the nightingale, ‘fade away into the forest dim’.¹³⁴ Dionysian intoxication is, therefore, considered as a stimulus to join in the nightingale’s realm. Keats’s hope here is that if he drinks, the ‘beaded bubbles’

¹³² ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, lines 1-6.

¹³³ ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, lines 11-20.

¹³⁴ Also see Christopher Ricks’s (1984:201-203), *Keats and Embarrassment*, for a full discussion of the alcoholic references in the stanza.

of Dionysian intoxication might reveal the realm of the nightingale to be more accessible. He hopes that the ‘beaker full of the warm South’ and the ‘influence of narcotic drink’ might succeed in placing ‘no constraints on [his] imagination’ when he ‘begins to approach the Dionysian’, to the point where ‘the slave is a freeman’ and ‘all the rigid, hostile barriers, which necessity, caprice, or impudent fashion have established between human beings [or birds], break asunder’ (Nietzsche, 1999:18). Keats wants to enjoy the same freedom as the nightingale and feels that the power of Dionysian intoxication might assist him in this journey. However, a contrasting Apollonian awareness of reality soon imposes itself upon Keats and his pondering on the evocative powers of Dionysian stimulus through alcohol disappears at the sight of a more logical, Apollonian awareness regarding the harsh truths of reality:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
 What thou among the leaves hast never known,
 The weariness, the fever, and the fret
 Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
 Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
 Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
 Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
 And leaden-eyed despairs;
 Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
 Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.¹³⁵

The third stanza, Meihuizen (2024:373) notes, ‘is indeed a despairing account of the human condition, subject to sickness, age, premature death (with Tom’s recent death in mind), the burden of consciousness, and the transience of beauty and love’. It speaks of the reality of the poet, something that the nightingale ‘among the leaves hast never known’. In the poet’s reality, ‘to think is to be full of sorrow’. That is because thinking requires objective reasoning and an evaluation of one’s circumstances from a detached position. The stanza makes it clear that reality cannot be completely abandoned, because even though the birdsong moves the poet deeply, reality is still a constant presence in the poet’s mind. In the succeeding stanza, he expresses again the longing to escape this world, but this time, through a different imaginative vehicle:

Away! away! For I will fly to thee,
 Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
 But on the viewless wings of Poesy,

¹³⁵ ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, lines 21-30.

Though the dull brain perplexes and retards.¹³⁶

On the rejection of 'Bacchus and his pards' as a suitable means of imaginative transport, Wentersdorf (1984:76) importantly notes that:

The Bacchanalia had been an uninhibited celebration of life, marked by drunkenness, debauchery, and bloodshed. Bacchus was a god not only of inspiration but also of the wildest passions. The pards drawing his car, beautiful but terrifying in their savagery, symbolized the disorderly and sometimes violent manifestations of human sexuality. Hence in turning away from the pard-drawn chariot, Keats rejects the dangerous aspects of eros.¹³⁷

While rejecting the 'wildest passions' of the Dionysian, Keats, nevertheless, 'seeks and achieves communion with the nightingale', but, through another Dionysian 'kind of inspiration that is ardent and enthralling but without the Bacchic elements of disorder and destruction' (Wentersdorf, 1984:76). In rather choosing to mount 'the viewless wings of Poesy', Keats chooses a more controlled element of Dionysian transcendence.¹³⁸ In the imagination, there is still room for 'the dull brain' which 'insists upon [Apollonian] clarity and logical order' (Brooks and Warren, 1968:46).¹³⁹ If Keats chose to 'fly' to the nightingale's realm with 'Bacchus and his pards', the 'wildest passions' of this journey might have completely abandoned the 'dull brain' and, subsequently, it would have made room for the more 'dangerous aspects of' Dionysian intoxication. There seems to be an Apollonian awareness imbedded in Keats's decision here. He still manages to empathise with his subject, but not at the total expense of Apollonian reality. In the final stanza of the poem, we can clearly recognise the importance of the 'dull brain' alluded to above:

Forlorn! The very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well

¹³⁶ 'Ode to a Nightingale', lines 31-34.

¹³⁷ Also see Nietzsche (1999:20): 'Here the very wildest of nature's beasts were unleashed, up to and including that repulsive mixture of sensuality and cruelty which has always struck me as the true "witches' brew".'

¹³⁸ Consider the following statement by Nietzsche (1999:27) in relation to Keats's rejection of 'Bacchus and his pards': 'As an ethical divinity Apollo demands measure from all who belong to him and, so that they may respect that measure, knowledge of themselves. Thus the aesthetic necessity of beauty is accompanied by the demands: "Know thyself" and "Not too much!", whereas getting above oneself and excess were regarded as the true hostile demons of the non-Apollonian sphere, and thus as qualities of the pre-Apollonian period, the age of the Titans, and that of the barbarians'.

¹³⁹ Deborah Forbes (2004:158) notes that 'If "Already with thee" is successful, it is successful in a strangely self-thwarting manner. The "brain" is abandoned in favor of "poesy," but this same "dull brain" is likely an instrument that the poet must use to imagine the union of himself and the nightingale. Although relinquishing his own consciousness may help the poet be completely "with" the nightingale, he needs this consciousness in order to assert his will and summon the language that makes the claim "Already with thee!" possible'.

As she is famed to do, deceiving elf.
 Adieu! adieu! Thy plaintive anthem fades
 Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
 Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
 In the next valley-glades:
 Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
 Fled is that music ... Do I wake or sleep?¹⁴⁰

The Dionysian 'viewless wings of Poesy', propelled by the nightingale's song, allowed the poet to visit ancient times and 'fairy lands forlorn' in the previous stanza of the poem. In the final stanza, however, the 'bell' of Apollonian consciousness, 'tolls' the poet 'back' from the nightingale to his 'sole self'. Nevertheless, the poet is not his 'sole self' anymore. His imaginative association with the nightingale opened up a new dimension previously unknown to him. He states that 'the fancy cannot cheat so well', yet, the 'fancy' allowed him to empathise with remotest times and places which would have been otherwise inaccessible to him. Fancy does not cause the world to disappear, because there is a clear Apollonian awareness of reality throughout the poem. This awareness is necessary, because it causes the poem not to fall into 'aimless reverie' of the Dionysian when it forsakes its sense of Apollonian awareness. Only by having knowledge of the material world, can one appreciate the Dionysian inspiration of the birdsong. Fancy still allows the poet to extend his consciousness to a natural being such as the nightingale and a biblical figure such as Ruth. But, significantly, an Apollonian awareness of reality ensures that the Dionysian does not soar at the expense of the Apollonian, but rather that something of the Dionysian realm achieved through the 'viewless wings of Poesy' makes its way back to reality, thereby, heightening our sensitivity to the natural world around us.

3.2.6 'Ode to a Nightingale' vs 'The Nightingale's Nest'

Keats and Clare never met one another, but Clare mentions Keats a respectable twenty-four times in his collected letters.¹⁴¹ They also had a publisher in common, John Taylor, who would pass messages and comments between them.¹⁴² Clare, from what one can discern through his letters, seems to have admired Keats's poetry and found him 'a brother wanderer in the rough road of life' (Clare, 1985:74). Clare particularly enjoyed Keats's *Endymion* (1818), and even offered warm advice and consolations during Keats's period of sickness (Clare, 1985: 51;78). From the limited evidence available in the letters, it does seem that Clare took more notice of Keats than vice versa. However, as mentioned earlier in the

¹⁴⁰ 'Ode to a Nightingale', lines 71-80.

¹⁴¹ For a detailed analysis of Keats's presence in Clare's letters, see Luisa Conti Camaiora's (2000:160-176), 'Keats in John Clare's Letters'.

¹⁴² Paul Chirico (2003:147) questions the reliability of these comments, because of Taylor's 'habit of discouraging adverse criticism'.

chapter, the following juxtaposition will at least serve to highlight some aspects of Apollonian and Dionysian interaction in Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale'.

In September of 1820, Taylor wrote to Clare with some feedback by Keats on his new poem, 'Solitude': although Taylor relays that Keats found the poem favourable, he does also state that Keats feels 'the Description too much prevailed over the Sentiment' and that 'Images from Nature are too much introduced without being called for by a particular Sentiment ... [Keats] feels as if the Description overlaid & stifled that which ought to be the prevailing Idea' (as quoted in Clare, 1985:38;99). Clare (1985:519), on the other hand, wrote that:

Keats keeps up a constant alusion or illusion to the Grecian Mythol[og]y & there I cannot follow but as far [as] I can judge his descriptions of senery are often very fine but as it is the case with other inhabitants of great citys he often described nature as she appeared to his fancys & not as he would have described her had he witnessed the things he describes.¹⁴³

Both these letters are, to an extent, accurate and should be kept firmly in mind when one compares the two poets. I now want, briefly, to focus the attention on Clare's (1990:108-111) poem, 'The Nightingale's Nest':

Hark! there she is as usual—let's be hush—
For in this black-thorn clump, if rightly guest
Her curious house is hidden. Part aside
These hazel branches in a gentle way
And stoop right cautious 'neath the rustling boughs
For we will have another search to day
And hunt this fern-strewn thorn-clump round and round
And where this reeded wood-grass idly bows
We'll wade right through it is a likely nook
In such like spots and often on the ground
They'll build, where rude boys never think to look
Aye, as I live! her secret nest is here
Upon this white-thorn stump! I've searched about
For hours in vain. There! put that bramble by
Nay, trample on its branches and get near.

¹⁴³ The American poet, Gerald Stern, states that 'If you ask me to choose between Wordsworth and John Clare, I'll choose John Clare. I do like Wordsworth too, at his best: His long poem [*The Prelude*] still dominates our poetic lives. But Coleridge identifies what I also consider are all the weaknesses of Wordsworth: his solemnity, his stuffiness, his pomposity. But there's none of that in Clare. Keats felt that he wasn't sufficiently philosophical, but that's just what I like about him. Clare is very descriptive' (as quoted in White, 2006:6-7).

How subtle is the bird! she started out
 And raised a plaintive note of danger nigh
 Ere we were past the brambles and now near
 Her nest, she sudden stops as choking fear
 That might betray her home.

The poet, John Ashbery (2000:17), notes that there is a surprising ‘lack of distance’ between the ‘poet and the poem’ in Clare’s nature poetry. He also notes that Clare’s nature poems are ‘far from emotion recollected in tranquillity or even the gently shaping music of Keats’s grasshopper sonnet. Clare’s poems are dispatches from the front’. Moreover, Seamus Heaney (1995:63-82) underscores the ‘effortless’, ‘spontaneous’, ‘unpretentious’ and ‘instinctive’ nature of Clare’s poetry. He also states that Clare seemed to write some of his nature poems ‘as naturally as he breathed’.¹⁴⁴ Clare (1985:101) himself wrote that ‘I always write my poems in great haste and generally finish them at once whether long or short for if I did not they generally were left unfinished what corrections I made I always made them while writing the poem and never could do anything with them afterwards’.¹⁴⁵ The spontaneous nature of Clare’s poems is clearly perceivable in the above poem. Phrases such as ‘Hark!’, ‘let’s be hush’ and ‘Aye, as I live!’ exemplify Clare’s Dionysian approach to writing poetry.¹⁴⁶ The fact that he ‘always’ writes his ‘poems in great haste’ reveals something of the spur-of-the-moment approach of his composition: it is done while in the moment of inspiration, there is no ‘calm sea of Apollonian contemplation’ present in his approach here.

Despite this, Clare seems to be acutely aware of the subtleties of the natural world around him. His natural impulse is much more sensitive to Apollonian details than most poets of the Romantic period. One always thinks about what Clare lost by not receiving much formal education, but he also seemed to gain this Apollonian awareness and sensitivity towards nature from working out in the natural world since his childhood. Although this Apollonian attention to detail seems to come naturally to him, his primary mode of composition is still chiefly Dionysian.

If we place a stanza from Keats’s ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ next to Clare’s ‘The Nightingale’s Nest’, the balance between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses for Keats’s ‘creative process’ becomes clear:

Table 2: The ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ and ‘The Nightingale’s Nest’

‘Ode to a Nightingale’	‘The Nightingale’s Nest’
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¹⁴⁴ ‘The real strength’ of Clare’s style ‘is the way the idiom has sprung into its place in the line without any trace of choice or forethought on the poet’s part . . . couplets hurry in upon themselves as fast as pencil-strokes in an excited drawing’ (Heaney, 1995:67).

¹⁴⁵ Weiner (2014:52) also notes that ‘Clare wrote from impulse rather than craft’.

¹⁴⁶ Also see Melvyn Bragg’s (2020) podcast episode, *John Clare*, where Clare critics discuss this nature of his poetry.

Darkling, I listen; and, for many a time I have been half in love with easeful Death, Called him soft names in many a musèd rhyme, To take into the air my quiet breath; Now more than ever seems it rich to die, To cease upon the midnight with no pain, While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad In such an ecstasy. Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain— To thy high requiem become a sod.	How curious is the nest ; no other bird Uses such loose materials, or weaves Its dwelling in such spots : dead oaken leaves Are placed without, and velvet moss within, And little scraps of grass, and, scant and spare, What scarcely seem materials, down and hair; For from men's haunts she nothing seems to win. Yet Nature is the builder, and contrives Homes for her children's comfort, even here; Where Solitude's disciples spend their lives
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From the above, one can clearly see the difference between the technical aspects of the two respective poems. Clare's poem does not involve the set rhyme scheme and metrical features of the 'Ode to a Nightingale'.¹⁴⁷ The conversational tone of the poem mirrors the spontaneous mode of composition for Clare. Furthermore, for him, the subject is imperative, therefore he describes the bird's nest in minute detail (hence Keats's reference to 'Description' in Clare's nature poetry). For Keats, the subject might remain something of a 'Darkling', but this leaves room for the poetic inspiration to interact with it (in Clare's terms, 'he often described nature as she appeared to his fancys'). Keats's 'creative process' is not as spontaneous as that of Clare's: we perceived how Keats managed to visually express the fading birdsong earlier in this section after the 'Muse' has already left the poet. This stands in total contrast to Clare who states that he 'never could do anything with them [his poems] afterwards'. Keats manages to find a way to work the fleeting moment of inspiration into the structure of the poem, even after the initial moment of Dionysian inspiration has passed. Clare was correct when he wrote about Keats's frequent allusions to Greek myth. This is important, because it shows that the initial Dionysian inspiration was first bolstered by Keats through, among other things, his knowledge of Greek myth. We can see this in the range of different allusions in the 'Ode to a Nightingale': from the classical past to biblical times and 'fairy lands forlorn'. The carefully constructed ode stanza in comparison with Clare's conversational style sheds further light on the importance of Apollonian temperance in Keats's 'creative process'. This brief comparison helps to shed more light on Keats's 'creative process' and how the Apollonian and Dionysian each has a role to play. The Dionysian inspires, but the Apollonian is very much involved in his more conscious approach to writing poetry.

3.2.7 Our Apollonian Dilemma: The 'Ode to a Nightingale' in 2025

¹⁴⁷ Hugh Haughton (1994:51-86) focuses on Clare's knowledge of traditional forms and his use thereof.

McGilchrist (2024) states: ‘No two ways about it: we are making ourselves wretched. We are more affluent than ever, but riches—and power, the only point in having riches—do not make people happy’. He also fears that we are approaching a ‘machine apocalypse’: AI and industrialisation are gradually taking over our world. Moreover, Everest (2021:36-37) notes the following about nightingales in our modern world:

You could probably never have heard one in Berkeley Square, but they must have been a very familiar sound on Hampstead Heath, until not too long ago. You cannot hear them in London now, and they are increasingly rare as the world changes around them. It is not just habitat loss in the UK. A bird electronically tagged in 2009 left England on 25 July. By September it had flown over the Pyrenees to rest near Lisbon, and in October it was in Senegambia in West Africa, heading even further south to spend December near Conakry, the capital of Guinea, just by the northern border of Sierra Leone, more than 3000 miles from Hampstead Heath. All of its immemorial resting and feeding stops on that migration are under threat, from changes in farming and land management, climate change, hunting, and so on. Like the cuckoo, the day might one day come when there are none making it back to the UK in April. Nightingales are mortal, as Keats was all too mortal.

Our natural world is clearly under threat. Our left-hemispheric narrow vision has completely blinded us to the damage that we are imposing on the world around us.¹⁴⁸ McGilchrist (2024) notes that currently, we ‘need spontaneity, openness to risk, and trust in our intuition in order to exercise imagination and creativity—and in order to be alive and truly present’. If nothing else, the ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ is a plea to become ‘truly present’ again in the modern world: no form of artificial intelligence could ever replace the Dionysian delight one feels in hearing the song of a nightingale. The poem, although written over 200 years ago, speaks to our age much more than we might appreciate. It emphasises the empathy ‘with other living beings’ and ‘the natural world’ which we so desperately need at the moment (McGilchrist, 2024). We have reached a point where our reliance on left-hemispheric machines is spoiling the singing of the nightingale, because we are not ‘truly present’ to appreciate these small gifts of the natural world anymore. The programmatic nature of AI encourages us to believe that all the answers are logical and readily available, but we are part of a much larger and greater cosmos and through a natural Dionysian song such as the nightingale’s, we can identify with both ‘emperors’ and ‘clowns’ and we can know that the same song which comforted ‘the sad heart of Ruth’ is also accessible for us if we are, as Keats was, ‘truly present’. Raine (2017:249) states that ‘From that elemental world the poet may learn “strange lore, and read it deep”, Keats writes. As against our scientifically oriented

¹⁴⁸ Although the Apollonian can produce beautiful forms and pleasing images, if not kept under control it can, similarly, become narrowly restrictive and rid of all emotion, as we saw in the previous chapter.

knowledge of nature, he knew nature imaginatively, yet in a detailed and intimate manner in which nature is not merely cognized but experienced; not observed, but lived'. A poem such as the 'Ode to a Nightingale' encourages us ('against our scientifically oriented knowledge of nature') to appreciate nature again as something that can be 'experienced', 'lived' and not merely exploited as 'one gigantic filling station' (to recall an image from the introduction) which has become a grave concern in our left-hemispheric mode of existence.

3.2.8 Conclusion

From the above examination, it is clear that there is a discernible intermingling between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale'. We can perceive this intermingling in the interaction between the Dionysian nature of the birdsong and the Apollonian structure of the ode stanza with its careful line indentations and use of spondees. Furthermore, we also recognise this intermingling in the theme of the poem. We can identify a clear tension between the 'viewless wings of Poesy' and the 'dull brain' in the poem. These two different functions stimulate one another to the point where the Dionysian empathetic imagination heightens our sensitivity to the natural world and living beings in our reality. Therefore, neither the Apollonian nor the Dionysian flourishes at the expense of the other. Finally, by comparing Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' with Clare's 'The Nightingale's Nest' (based on intuitive, spontaneous interaction, despite its attention to detail), we can further see how the Apollonian and Dionysian inform one another in Keats's 'creative process'.

3.3 'ODE ON A GRECIAN URN'

*With unrivalled skill
As nicest observation furnished hints
For studious fancy, his quick hand bestowed
On fluent operations a fixed shape;
Metal or stone idolatrously served.*¹⁴⁹

*To put a statue into motion ... or to give appropriate, natural, and powerful expression to set features of any kind, is at all times difficult.*¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ See William Wordsworth's (2011:412), *The Excursion*.

¹⁵⁰ See William Hazlitt's (in Wu, 2015:782-783), 'On Gusto'.

*I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination.
What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth—whether it existed before or not ...*¹⁵¹

3.3.1 Introduction

Vendler (1983:116) notes that the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' is 'as near a twin to the earlier ode ['Ode to a Nightingale'] as one poem can be to another'. I agree with Vendler in the sense that in both poems we can clearly perceive the 'rising and falling movement of imaginative engagement and disengagement' (Sperry, 1994:244). Notwithstanding this analogy, there is also an important distinction concerning the Apollonian-Dionysian theoretical framework of this study which we need to indicate before we can examine the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'. That is: in the 'Ode to a Nightingale' we recognise the Dionysian song of the nightingale energising the listening Keats's imagination and encouraging a creative response to capture that song in a more concrete manner.¹⁵² In the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', however, the stimulus behind the poet's imaginative excursion is, in fact, an Apollonian artifact.¹⁵³ The fact that an Apollonian artwork drives, in this case, the force of inspiration allows us the opportunity to also now focus on the inspirational powers of Apollonian art.¹⁵⁴ In this part of the chapter, I will focus on the Apollonian and Dionysian dichotomy evident in the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'. I will pay specific attention to the interaction between the Apollonian structure and refinery of the Grecian urn in relation to the Dionysian scenes depicted on it. Furthermore, I will also examine the Dionysian imagination acting on an Apollonian artifact and, moreover, examine how the imagination (Dionysian) is able to enhance the Urn's (Apollonian) significance in the poem.

3.3.2 Literature Review

Like the 'Ode to a Nightingale', the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' has attracted a host of critical readings. Merely the concluding two lines of the ode, for example, have 'become virtually an industry unto itself'

¹⁵¹ See Keats (2005:54) in a letter to Bailey, dated 22 November 1817.

¹⁵² I will, at appropriate intervals, briefly juxtapose the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' with the 'Ode to a Nightingale' to highlight key aspects of the Apollonian and Dionysian intermingling in the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'.

¹⁵³ Vendler (1983:116) notes that: '[in] abandoning nonrepresentational "natural" music as his metaphor, he took as metaphor another special case, the one (because of the Elgin marbles) most in the public eye, the case of sculpture'.

¹⁵⁴ Also see Vendler (1983:116): 'If *Nightingale* is an experiment in thinking about art in terms of pure, "natural," nonrepresentational music prolonged in time, the *Urn* is an experiment in thinking about art in terms of pure, "artificial," representational visuality extended in space (a space whose extension, in Keats's special case, rounds on itself—the urn is a self-limiting frieze)'.

(Shokoff, 1975:102).¹⁵⁵ One of the most well-known responses to the Truth-Beauty aphorism at the end of the poem is by T.S. Eliot (1964:231):

I am at first inclined to agree with him, because this statement of equivalence means nothing to me. But on re-reading the whole Ode, this line strikes me as a serious blemish on a beautiful poem; and the reason must be either that I fail to understand it, or that it is a statement which is untrue. And I suppose that Keats meant something by it, however remote his truth and his beauty may have been from these words in ordinary use.

Although various critics have since argued for or against Eliot's statement above, the effectiveness of the concluding two lines of the poem is an issue still partially unresolved among a number of critics nowadays.¹⁵⁶ Patricia Lockwood (2017:513) seems to capture something of this idea in the last stanza of her 'The Ode on a Grecian Urn':

and the Ode is murmuring almost gently,
"But do you like my ending?
Some people don't like my ending,"
I don't, I never did, I thought it was
so overwrought,
though now that I'm here myself why not
if it has to be this way
then better
put a bright red cough on all that white¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ These contrasting critical approaches have been so plentiful and varying that they led Jack Stillinger (1970:113-114) to 'summarize briefly the various possibilities, along with the objections usually raised against each' in an essay titled, 'Who Says What to Whom at the End of Ode on a Grecian Urn?'.
¹⁵⁶ 'The enigmatic final lines of the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" have generated two major currents of interpretive response. Sharing the premise that Keats is engaged in a meditation on the opposition between the mutability of life and the eternity of art, the two most popular interpretations of the poem describe it as an expression of either an idealistic or a realistic view of reality. Those who see Keats as the champion of art take the poem's closing lines as an explicit avowal of transcendent values represented by the urn. The contrary, and perhaps more prevalent, tendency, fostered by Stillinger and the Harvard Keatsians, has been to distance Keats from such idealistic pronouncements. Those who would celebrate Keats's "robust realism" (Bate's phrase) cannot conceive of his endorsing a transcendent aestheticism in such unqualified terms, and they have endeavoured to attribute the closing statement of the poem only to the urn and not to the author' (O'Rourke, 1987:27). O'Rourke also considers and summarises the three variants of these lines which existed in Keats's lifetime.

¹⁵⁷ This part of the poem is much more intricate than I make it out to be here. The meaning is somewhat obscure (perhaps mirroring the ambiguity of Keats's final two lines). Her reference to tuberculosis at the end of the poem raises awareness of our frailty and mortality; her sense of 'overwrought' might then link up with this idea (as it was a reality consciously repeating in the mind of Keats too). Notwithstanding these difficulties, my main intent with this extract lies with the opening lines commenting on the ending of the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'. I found her personification of the urn helpful in portraying, in a fresh manner, the perplexing nature of the final two lines.

Notwithstanding the importance of the Truth-Beauty aphorism in relation to the meaning of the poem, in some sense, I do feel, if I may borrow from Heaney (1966:4), that ‘I’ve no spade to follow men like them’. Given the minute attention critics have afforded the poem’s conclusion over the years, I will not explicitly attempt to define the meaning of the final two lines in my terms here. I do, however, hope that my reading, as a whole, provides a tentative answer as to how I comprehend the poem’s concluding lines.

As mentioned previously, the ode in question has been analysed through numerous critical lenses: James A. Notopoulos (1966:180-182) analysed the poem in relation to the Elgin Marbles which Keats saw for the first time in 1817 and which seemed to have a deep and lasting impact on him. Mario L. D’Avanzo (1974:95-105) focuses on a literary inspiration which might easily be overlooked as an important influence for the poem: Wordsworth’s, *The Excursion*. William F. Zak (1982:82-104) offers a comparative reading of the ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ in relation to the ‘Ode to Psyche’. Geraldine Friedman (1993:225-243) considers the ode in the light of hermeneutics and provides a thorough reading with regards to the erotic in the poem, while Thomas H. Schmid (1995:66-83) investigates the pastoral elements evident in the poem. Rodney Stenning Edgecombe (2008:91-94) argues that John Opie’s thoughts and views on art may have had some influence on Keats’s ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’. Stefan Hawlin (2015:263-279) juxtaposes Keats’s ode with Robert Browning’s, ‘A Toccata of Galuppi’s’ and thereby shows in which manner Keats’s ode might have influenced Browning’s poem. Grant F. Scott (2015:288-304) shows how Keats’s ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ was clearly a source of inspiration for his close friend, Joseph Severn’s, *The Fountain*:

In setting forth the ‘richly wrought’ marble well carved in the ‘high relief’ of ‘Greek sculpture’, the poem’s opening lines would certainly have reminded Severn of Keats’s great ode. And once we recognize the importance of ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ for the principal themes of *The Fountain* the picture’s multiple allusions to the poem become apparent everywhere—in the myriad water jugs that resemble classical vases; the sarcophagus-fountain with its reference to the Elgin friezes (metopes); the visual rhythm of movement and stillness in the overall composition; the seated shepherd soft-piping his, to us, unheard melodies; the steady progression of the women at the top left toward the altar above; and of course the convocation of ‘unravished’ brides assuming a series of ‘fair attitudes’ as they drape their Beauty over the Truth of the tomb.

Most recently, Joseph P. Jordan (2018:192-197) investigated the sound devices implemented in the poem in what he terms ‘syllable-position rhyme’ and ‘ideational echoes’. Moreover, Sun Shuting and James Chambers (2023:151-183) provide a Hegelian and Marxian interpretation of the ode.¹⁵⁸

Hitherto, critics have not explicitly focused on the Apollonian and Dionysian dualism in the poem. However, I believe that such a reading might throw new light on some of the main themes in the poem, such as: the opposition between Apollonian permanence and the Dionysian transience of passion as well as the significance of imaginative (Dionysian) responses to structured (Apollonian) art.

3.3.3 That ‘unravished’ Urn of Apollonian Craftsmanship

Nietzsche (1999:14;16) associates Apollonian art with that of the ‘image-maker or sculptor (*Bildner*)’. This form of art is created with ‘measured limitation ... [and] that wise calm of the image-making god’. Furthermore, Apollo is regarded as the god of the ‘plastic arts’ under which the artform of sculpture, inevitably, falls. The sculptor, being one of the ‘true Apollonian artists’, thus imbues his artwork with the ‘sophistication’, ‘clarity’, ‘firmness’, and ‘definiteness’ associated with this Apollonian realm of art and ‘never tires of contemplating lovingly even the minutest details’ of his artwork (Nietzsche, 1999:30;46;56;104). The Grecian urn, being a product of the ‘plastic arts’, is, therefore, Apollonian in intent and nature, exhibiting the fixity which we associate with this artworld.¹⁵⁹ Notwithstanding its Apollonian dominance, with closer scrutiny it becomes more convoluted, because some of the scenes depicted on the urn are clearly Dionysian representations. I return to this matter in the succeeding subsection of this examination. For the time being, we can regard the urn as fundamentally Apollonian to the same degree that we have perceived the nightingale’s song as Dionysian (despite its complex Apollonian qualities and intricate melodies): the urn is essentially Apollonian, because it was meticulously and conscientiously chiselled and crafted to perfection in contrast to the Dionysian spontaneity of the nightingale’s natural song.

Prior to writing the ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’, Keats (1970:532-538) took a keen interest in Greek urns and vases. We know this, because ‘he made a drawing of the Sosibios Vase from Henry Moses’s *A Collection of Antique Vases, Altars, Paterae* (1814) ... and he was impressed by other vases, paintings, and pieces of statuary in the British Museum and elsewhere: the Townley Vase, the Borghese Vase, the Holland House Vase, the Elgin Marbles, Claude’s picture of “The Sacrifice to Apollo” and Poussin’s

¹⁵⁸ There are, of course, many more important critical responses to the poem. However, my intention with the above brief summation was to highlight the far-reaching influence of Keats’s ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’. As one could perceive with the previous section on the ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, there are also important critical essays in the form of book chapters focusing on the ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’. For the sake of brevity, I will not include them in this section of the examination, but my references to them in the analysis will nevertheless shed light on how they might have influenced my reading of the poem.

¹⁵⁹ See Martin Aske (1985:102): ‘The Grecian urn ... appears to be Keats’s most concrete and determinate emblem of antiquity’; and Jones (1975:79): the Grecian urn symbolises ‘the artistic perfection of ... material form’.

“Polyphemus” (Motion, 1997:291).¹⁶⁰ The above statement shows that Keats was obviously inspired by the material artifacts of urns and vases.¹⁶¹ The opening four lines of the ode immediately highlight the Apollonian nature of the urn:

Thou still unravished bride of quietness,
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme!¹⁶²

The first address to the urn in the poem is as a ‘still unravished bride of quietness’. The fact that it comprises the first line of the poem should provide further encouragement for us to take this peculiar and somewhat paradoxical address seriously. Susan J. Wolfson (2022:346) discerns two meanings of the word ‘still’ and regards them as germane to the first line of the poem: ‘A *still unravished bride* may reside in *quietness* (one meaning of *still*), but this also leans into a temporal *still*: an “as yet”, poised for the right approach’. Notwithstanding the pertinence of these two meanings, there is another temporal meaning of ‘still’ of significance here: Meihuizen (2024:379) reminds us that the archaic meaning of the word ‘still’ is ‘always’. In my view, these two temporal meanings of ‘still’ are both at play in the first line: the ‘bride’ is ‘unravished’ therefore she is in a state of ‘as yet’ (i.e. awaiting ‘ravishment’), but, because this moment in time is eternalised and externalised through the structure of the urn, she will ‘always’ remain in this state of ‘as yet’. By addressing the urn as an ‘unravished bride’, its eternal virgin presence is emphasised. If virginity implies a continual creative potential (‘as yet’), it is always operative in the urn, because it will (can) never be ‘ravished’, therefore its virginal beauty will ‘always’ remain present and will not get lost. We must also remember that because the urn is forever ‘unravished’, its potential will forever remain in this potential state and will thus never be fulfilled. The state of ‘as yet’, despite its potential, is, inevitably, an unfulfilled state. James Booth (1973:60) states that ‘The phrase “Thou still unravished bride of quietness” suggests that the urn, like a virgin before marriage, possesses its purity only at the cost of a certain incompleteness and holding back from involvement or fruition’.¹⁶³ The eternal state of potential is hence also a state of ‘holding back’. This reminds us again of Nietzsche’s (1999:27) analogous statement:

¹⁶⁰ Ian Jack (1967:214-224) offers a thorough exploration of the sources (urns and vases) which might have inspired some of Keats’s ideas in the ode.

¹⁶¹ Allott (as quoted in Keats, 1970:534), for instance, draws a connection between the compound ‘leaf-fringed’ and the Sosibios and Borghese Vases.

¹⁶² ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’, lines 1-4.

¹⁶³ Also see Shutting and Chambers’ (2023:153) view that ‘The bride awaiting ravishment is sometimes inferred to be a metaphor for the undeciphered urn awaiting the narrator’s analysis’.

As an ethical divinity Apollo demands measure from all who belong to him and, so that they may respect that measure, knowledge of themselves. Thus, the aesthetic necessity of beauty is accompanied by the demands: 'Know thyself' and 'Not too much!', whereas getting above oneself and excess were regarded as the true hostile demons of the non-Apollonian sphere ...

Engaging in the act of 'ravishment' will ultimately result in 'getting above oneself and excess'. The eternal virgin quality of the urn sheds further light on its Apollonian nature: it will forever be associated with the measured moderation of the Apollonian sphere, because it remains forever 'unravished'.

Despite addressing the urn as the 'bride of quietness' (i.e. the absence of noise), Keats also describes it as a 'foster-child of silence and slow time'. Given the fact that the potter who made the vase (its birth parent) passed away, it was 'fostered by time and silence' (Wu, 2015:1466). The urn's associations with 'silence', 'time' and 'quietness' are also significant for our concerns. Throughout the study, we have focused on the importance of Dionysian music in Keats's oeuvre. However, in this instance, we encounter 'silence' and 'quietness'. Apollo is, broadly speaking, regarded as the god of image-making energies while Dionysus is regarded as the god of the imageless art of music. We are clearly in the presence of the Apollonian image-making artworld above. Where the 'Ode to a Nightingale' focused the attention on the aural (Dionysian music) inspiration, the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' shifts the inspiration to a visual level (Apollonian art).

Finally, Keats also addresses the urn as a 'Sylvan historian'. 'Sylvan' refers to the pastoral scenes which the urn depicts. The reference to 'historian', on the other hand, is somewhat ambiguous in this context. Allott (as quoted in Keats, 1970:524) and Wu (2015:1466) note that the urn is a historian because it tells a story. The OED (2025) contains two meanings for the word 'historian' when used as a noun (as is the case in the third line of the poem). Firstly, in accordance with Allott and Wu's views, it can be seen as 'A person who relates a narrative or tale; a storyteller'. However, we should also note that the last entry based on this meaning dates back to 1667, thus it was already obsolete when Keats wrote the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'.¹⁶⁴ The second meaning of the word is: 'A writer of history, *esp.* one who analyses events critically, as opposed to a chronicler or compiler; an expert in or student of history' (OED, 2025). The second meaning emphasises the Apollonian nature of the address. A historian '*analyses events critically*' and requires the 'clarity' associated with the Apollonian precision. Apart from this critical and analytical emphasis inherent in the word 'historian', the urn is also able to 'express / A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme!'. In spite of the fact that the historian is working logically with facts, the urn as historian is also able to inspire through its detailed accounts. Although the urn is a product of the Apollonian world of fixity and structure, it has the power to inspire the poet's imaginative faculties.¹⁶⁵ This illustrates that Apollonian structured art can also be a force of inspiration.

¹⁶⁴ Keats, however, was an avid reader and might have encountered this meaning in older sources which he knew.

¹⁶⁵ The urn 'is unarguably man-made in a highly intellectual and conventionalized form' (see Vendler, 1983:118).

In the same vein that spontaneous (natural) Dionysian art (exemplified in the nightingale's song, for example) inspired Keats to compose the 'Ode to a Nightingale'; the disciplined Apollonian art of sculpture can also act as a force of inspiration.¹⁶⁶

3.3.4 Dionysian Life Frozen on the Urn

As one perceives from the above, the urn is, essentially, an Apollonian artifact. However, there now also arises a tension between the Apollonian form of the urn and the Dionysian scenes which the urn depicts. Various critics have recognised the Dionysian nature of the scene described in the latter half of the first stanza. Roy Arthur Swanson (1962:303), for example, discerns a 'Dionysian mystery' in this part of the stanza. Leslie M. Thompson (1973:28) notices a 'Dionysian rite' while Brooke Hopkins (1986:125) refers to the scene in question as a 'bacchic revel'. Additionally, Hawlin (2015:267) pertinently notes that 'we begin with a scene of sexual pursuit and flight, with "maidens loth," "mad pursuit," and "wild ecstasy" (ll. 8, 9, 10), a scene discreetly obscured by vagueness but clearly bacchanalian in some way':

What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both,
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?¹⁶⁷

The 'Dionysian mystery' in the above lines is further established by the use of numerous rhetorical questions (seven in total) starting with the interrogative pronoun 'What'.¹⁶⁸ Helen Vendler (1983:123) provides something of an informal 'museum notice' which helps to outline the main events taking place:

This scene represents a ceremonial orgy in honor of the god such-and-such; participants attempted ecstatic sexual experience by the use of intoxicants, and ritual music was played on the kind of pipe represented here.

¹⁶⁶ I am aware of the 'heaviness' that the word 'force' carries in this context (although I also used it in the introduction to the present ode). However, if one considers the extent and intensity of the imaginative inspiration the urn provides for the poet, I believe the use of the word is justified, as we must give voice to the 'heaviness' of this 'force'.

¹⁶⁷ 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', lines 5-10.

¹⁶⁸ The 'Dionysian view of the world ... lives on in the Mysteries' (Nietzsche, 1999:82).

Although Vendler's description is intentionally simplified and informal here, the words 'orgy in honor of the god', 'ecstatic sexual experience', 'the use of intoxicants' and 'music' are all clearly elements which we associate with Dionysus. Nietzsche (1999:20) writes about a similar type of festival when he states that:

From all corners of the ancient world (leaving aside the modern one in this instance), from Rome to Babylon, we can demonstrate the existence of Dionysiac festivals of a type which, at best, stands in the same relation to the Greek festivals as the bearded satyr, whose name and attributes were borrowed from the goat, stands to Dionysus himself. Almost everywhere an excess of sexual indiscipline, which flooded in waves over all family life and its venerable statutes, lay at the heart of such festivals. Here the very wildest of nature's beasts were unleashed, up to and including that repulsive mixture of sensuality and cruelty which has always struck me as the true 'witches' brew'.

Hitherto, we have not afforded detailed attention to the darker aspects of the Dionysian, but it is clearly evoked in the latter half of this stanza.¹⁶⁹ The excessive 'pursuit' of disinclined and unwilling 'maidens' conveys the 'excess of sexual indiscipline' prevalent in this scene.¹⁷⁰ It provides a cursory glance at the 'cruelty' which might surface when the 'wildest' passions of human nature are not tamed by a sense of Apollonian consciousness or reason. In the previous chapter, we focused on the Dionysian association with 'ecstasy' and in this part of the first stanza, we are again confronted with the 'wild ecstasy' of the Dionysian realm. There seems to be no 'moderation' to speak of in this urn-scene. Even the explosively-laden words of 'pipes and timbrels' (Dionysian sound and music) form part of a fundamentally Dionysian scene depicted on the urn.

3.3.5 The Apollonian Urn and its Dionysian Scenes

The above demonstration establishes and underscores the Dionysian dominance of the first urn scene. This allows us to now examine the tension between Apollonian and Dionysian elements with regards to the structured urn and the Dionysian condition which it presents. To a certain degree, the Apollonian structured form of art tempers the 'bacchanalian' in the latter half of the stanza. Nietzsche (1999:80) notes that 'Apollo overcomes the individual's suffering by his luminous glorification of the *eternity of*

¹⁶⁹ See Meihuizen (2024:380): 'More than just "sweetness" is expressed. The "mad pursuit" of "maidens loth" and "struggle to escape" convey a fragmentary narrative of sexual violence, certainly not alien to Grecian myth and history, and tempering the notion of "beauty" with experience from the darker chambers of human experience and "Soul-making"'.
¹⁷⁰ Also see Nietzsche (1999:122): 'Nature expresses itself with its highest energy in Dionysian intoxication, in the tumultuous, wild chase across all the scales of the soul under the influence of narcotic stimulants or when the drives of spring are unleashed'.

appearance; here beauty gains victory over the suffering inherent in life...'. The 'eternity' of the urn's 'appearance' freezes the dark Dionysian scene and restricts it from developing and evolving further. The structured world of Apollonian art freezes the scene into eternal 'appearance' and, in this manner, moderates the 'sexual violence' of the scene. Because the scene cannot move beyond its Apollonian structure (except through the imagination, as will become evident later), it remains a fixed and static presentation and cannot develop into something more drastic and violent.

The same is, of course, true for the more pleasant Dionysian scenes depicted on the urn. This idea is perceptible in the latter half of the second stanza:

Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
 Though winning near the goal—yet do not grieve:
 She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
 For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!¹⁷¹

In the previous stanza, the emphasis was on the darker aspects of Dionysian emotion. In this stanza, however, we encounter the more welcoming aspects of the Dionysian: the spontaneous emotion and feelings experienced in youthful love. The Apollonian concrete artwork still tempers the Dionysian feeling, but, because we are now in the presence of the more pleasing aspects of the Dionysian, the Apollonian does not necessarily fulfil the role of tempering, but is rather restricting the Dionysian emotions in the stanza. The 'Bold lover' and his 'fair' maiden's love will 'never, never' be consummated. This is where we encounter another tension between the Apollonian and the Dionysian. The Apollonian 'eternity of appearance' (emphasised by the repetition of 'never') leaves the Dionysian emotion 'near the goal', but ultimately unfulfilled. Because the scene is set in marble, it cannot transform into something greater than the present moment, it reaches a point of stasis, and it cannot free itself from this position. The formal constraints of the Apollonian work of art eternalise the beauty of the maiden (signalled by the words 'For ever'), but there can be no Dionysian 'bliss', because the fixed nature of the urn does not allow actual movement or progress to take place.¹⁷² The tension between the Apollonian and Dionysian insofar as the relationship between the material urn and the scenes depicted on it thus moves from fruitful (tempering the darker passions) to restrictive (restricting emotions of youthful mutual love).

¹⁷¹ 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', lines 17-20.

¹⁷² See Jacob D. Wigod (1957:114): 'But the tree, piper, lover, and maiden will always be enjoying or about to enjoy: the tree, its green leaves; the piper, his song; the lover, his persuasion and the hope of winning his bliss; the maiden, her spiritedly radiant beauty. The graceful movement and living action of human natures? Moments of being and becoming, aspiration and growth—have been caught and held, suspended permanently in art'.

3.3.6 The Empathetic Imagination in the ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’

The previous sub-sections have mostly focused on the urn itself (as material subject) and the scenes which the urn depicts. I have also placed emphasis on the fixed nature of the urn as object. Hence, my focus has mostly been on the material aspects of the urn itself. Up to this point, I have not explicitly focussed on Keats himself in the poem. Although the urn is a static product of the Apollonian sphere of art, through the poet’s Dionysian imagination, it can become something more than an antique artifact. This notion is evident in the third stanza of the poem:

Ah, happy, happy boughs, that cannot shed
Your leaves, nor ever bid the spring adieu;
And, happy melodist, unwearied,
For ever piping songs for ever new!
More happy love, more happy, happy love!
For ever warm and still to be enjoyed,
For ever panting, and for ever young...¹⁷³

The ‘exclamatory manner of the [above] stanza’ has been characterised by some critics as ‘a form of babble’ or dismissed as ‘excessive’ and ‘strained’ (Kent, 1997:21).¹⁷⁴ Nevertheless, I believe that this stanza is important for our concerns as it displays, in some sense, the strength of Keats’s empathetic imagination. Nietzsche (1999:43) notes that ‘what makes a poet a poet is the fact that he sees himself surrounded by figures who live and act before him, and into whose innermost essence he gazes’, and ‘To the poet, a character is not a whole composed of selected single features, but an insistent alive person whom he sees before his very eyes...’. The characters on the urn are ‘motionless and numbed’ in their Apollonian fixity (Nietzsche, 1999:101). Yet, through the empathetic imagination, they are able to become alive, as we will see in sufficient detail in the succeeding stanza. For the moment, however, I believe we can again recall Keats’s (2005:194-195) famous formulation of the ‘Poetical Character’:

A Poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence because he has no Identity; he is continually in for and filling some other Body. The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute. The poet has none; no identity. He is certainly the most unpoetical of all God’s Creatures.

¹⁷³ ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’, lines 21-27.

¹⁷⁴ In contrast to these views, Wasserman (1967:31), for instance, perceives this stanza as something of a climax in the poem.

Through the imagination, the poet is able to live in ‘some other Body’: the characters become ‘insistently alive’, and he is able to extend his imagination to feel the ‘happy love’ of the characters in the third stanza of the poem.

The language use in this stanza is analogous to the spontaneity of feelings and emotions evident in the stanza. The repetition of the word ‘happy’ emphasises the ‘state of Dionysian excitement’ prevalent in the stanza (Nietzsche, 1999:45). The instinctive nature of the use of language in this stanza thus stands in contrast to the economical refinery of the Apollonian artwork. The excitement portrayed by the poet for the characters seems difficult to contain. Therefore, we also encounter the exclamations which form part of the emotional richness in the stanza. The songs of the ‘piper’ are ‘for ever new’, because they are refreshed by new imagining each time he is seen. Thus, the imagination plays a role in giving voice and expression to his songs.

The most pertinent expression of the Dionysian imagination’s ability to enrich the Apollonian stability of the urn occurs in the fourth stanza of the poem:

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
Leadest thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
And all her silken flanks with garlands dressed?
What little town by river or sea shore,
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?
And, little town, thy streets for evermore
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate, can e’er return.¹⁷⁵

The above scene, as is generally agreed, is a product of Keats’s own imagination. Krishana Rayan (1977:18), for example, notes that:

Coming back to the fourth stanza of the ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’, one notes how the imagination’s capacity to extend and enrich is exemplified by the empty town which is wholly extraneous to the urn and is a second-generation fiction—it is not a myth represented on the artefact but a pure product of the beholder’s roused imagination.

¹⁷⁵ ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’, lines 31-40.

Through the ‘beholder’s roused imagination’, the ‘artefact’ (urn) is enriched and one of the most memorable scenes in the poem is created. The ‘concept of beauty which is valid in the world of image-making [Apollonian world] ... should arouse *pleasure in beautiful forms*’ (Nietzsche, 1999:77). It is precisely the ‘beautiful form’ of the Grecian urn that prompts the poet’s imagination to ‘enter imaginatively into the world of antiquity’ (Hawlin, 2015:267). The rhetorical questions demonstrate the inquisitive nature of the poet’s imagination in this stanza. With each question, the poet’s sharp imagination is living itself into the scene more and more until he can create this imaginative ‘desolate’ town.¹⁷⁶ As the stanza progresses, the poet becomes more emotionally invested in his imagined characters and, by creating ‘a past for the pictured scene’, the imagination is able to identify more fully with the characters (Sallé, 1972:87).

In the ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, the imagination produced a spontaneous Dionysian song, therefore the Apollonian sense of structure (in the form of spondees and line indentations) had to impose some sense of permanence for the Dionysian transience of the birdsong. In the ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’, however, we begin with the structured Apollonian artwork and the Dionysian imagination enriches the artwork with its own colouring. The urn becomes a springboard for the poet’s imagination: just as the Dionysian song of the nightingale inspired Keats to identify with ‘emperors and clowns’, the Apollonian urn now inspires him to imagine the ‘little town by river or sea shore’.

The urn, with all its structured ‘beauty’ is, however, not complete on its own. It requires ‘a greeting of the spirit’ to become fully alive for its spectator. This ‘greeting’ is, of course, the imagination of the Dionysian realm. At this juncture, it might be profitable to explore the same notion through a different lens. This will clarify the point that when the imagination acts upon a material product, it can alter the significance of this object. The poet Mark Doty (as quoted in Fellows, 2004:44) stated the following about an old water vessel:

Where the body of the vessel bells out, at its midriff, the silver’s worn away, revealing the brass beneath; it’s here it must have been rubbed the most, as it was washed, year after year. Along the base there are dents and indentations, abrasions where it’s been set down hard, or pushed across a counter, or jostled in a sink. These marks and wearings-down mark the evidence of time, the acclimation of the object’s body to human bodies. They are what make it beautiful; it may have been handsome to begin with, but I believe that its beauty is the result of use, of being subject to time.

The water vessel, not nearly as grandiose an object as the Grecian urn, becomes something more when it becomes enriched by the imagination. Its contact with ‘human bodies’ and imaginings is what makes it memorable and unique. We can also perceive the ‘imagination’s capacity to extend and enrich’ the

¹⁷⁶ See Shokoff (1975:103): ‘the poet animates the figures and tries to understand their existence’.

Grecian urn as material object in the fourth stanza of the poem. Through its contact with human empathy and imagination, it becomes a richer artwork. By allowing the Dionysian imagination to act upon the Apollonian object, we are able to, imaginatively, enter a door that would have remained bolted and shut if not for the Dionysian empathetic imagination which offers a key to the unknown behind the door. There is thus a fruitful intermingling and codependent relationship between the Apollonian and Dionysian in this part of the poem. The Apollonian urn inspires the poet, but by enriching the initial inspiration with the Dionysian imagination, the urn gains another layer of meaning. There thus exists ‘a balance between passion [Dionysian] and permanence [Apollonian]’ in this stanza (Patterson, 1956:209). This illustrates that in order to fully reach its potential as an inspirational work of art, the Apollonian urn, indeed, requires a greeting of the Dionysian spirit of imagination.

3.3.7 Returning to the Apollonian

In the final stanza of the ode, the imaginative ‘trance’ is broken, and the speaker again focuses his attention on the Apollonian materiality of the urn:

O Attic shape! Fair attitude! With brede
 Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
 With forest branches and the trodden weed—
 Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
 As doth eternity. Cold pastoral!
 When old age shall this generation waste,
 Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
 Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say’st,
 ‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty’—that is all
 Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.¹⁷⁷

From the first line, we are made firmly aware of the fact that the urn, despite the imaginative energy of the previous stanza, is, nevertheless, an ‘Attic shape’. The reference to ‘Attic’ again underscores the Apollonian artistry and intricacy of the vase, because ‘Attic’ art is the most refined of all Grecian art, hailing from Athens and the district around Athens. The word ‘shape’, likewise, addresses the urn in terms of its Apollonian, material complexion inasmuch as it refers to the ‘External form or contour’ of something (OED, 2025). Even though Keats described the imagined episode so vividly in the previous stanza, we are now again mindful of the reality that the urn is, ultimately, embroidered with ‘marble men and maidens’, fixed and set to stone, and the liveliness of the characters throughout the previous

¹⁷⁷ ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’, lines 41-50.

two stanzas must have been a product of the poet's 'roused imagination'.¹⁷⁸ Moreover, the second address to the urn in the stanza, once more, highlights the Apollonian quality of the urn: it is a 'silent form' originating in the Apollonian sphere of art.

The poet, hence, elaborates the Apollonian essence of the urn in the first four lines by addressing it in this manner. Nevertheless, he also states that the 'silent form' of the urn 'dost tease us out of thought'. This is significant, because it speaks of the inspirational power of Apollonian art. The urn 'teases us out of thought', but also lifts us beyond the powers of both the reasoning and the imagining mind. In the previous section, focusing on the nightingale ode, I emphasised the notion that Apollo, in Nietzsche's terms, still governs a kingdom of *art*. As an artwork of delicate and meticulous craftsmanship, the 'Attic' urn is able to inspire the poet: to 'tease' him 'out of thought'. There is something incomprehensible about the urn's timelessness ('Thou shalt remain') which deeply inspires the poet. Thus, pertinent to our concerns, the urn demonstrates that Apollonian art has the power to inform the whole Dionysian enterprise, by ensuring the timeless expression of its energy. This is the way in which the Apollonian and Dionysian interact in the ode; the urn's Apollonian timelessness seems to speak deeply to the poet's Dionysian imagination, thereby inspiring a memorable interaction between Apollonian and Dionysian energies.

The words 'Cold pastoral!' serves the same function as 'Forlorn!' in the final stanza of the 'Ode to a Nightingale'. It 'tolls' the speaker back to an Apollonian contemplative mood and indicates that the imaginative excursion into the urn-world has come to an end. Yet, the urn remains 'a friend to man', because through the Dionysian imagination the poet has discovered a new world in the urn which would not have been accessible had it not been for the imagination and the urn's fruitful intermingling in the poem. Despite the fact that the Dionysian adventure has come to an end, the poet was able to participate in a more animate world of antiquity. In the same manner that Wordsworth's speaker can experience the golden daffodils on his couch at home, the urn has now become part of the poet's imaginative memory and will remain 'a friend to man' through the imagination.

The Apollonian 'Beauty' of the urn has led the poet to a new 'truth' only accessible through the powers of the imagination. Ultimately the 'truth' and fixity of the Apollonian artwork stimulates the 'beauty' of the imagination, yet it is only through the 'truth' of the imagination that the 'beauty' of the urn can be enhanced and fully realised.

3.3.8 Conclusion

From the above, we can recognise the interaction between the Apollonian and the Dionysian in the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'. This theme is clear in the Apollonian permanence of the Grecian vase and the

¹⁷⁸ See Zak (1982:100): 'The speaker [in the last stanza] withdraws to consider once again the urn's inhabitants as figures on a Greek vase'.

Dionysian scenes of unbridled passion and emotion embroidered on the urn. We can also recognise how the Apollonian structure tempers the darker aspects of Dionysian passions when taken too far, but we can discern too the tension between the Apollonian form and the youthful love that can ‘never’ evolve into something more. Finally, we can also perceive how the Apollonian artwork is able to inspire the Dionysian imagination and how the Dionysian imagination, ultimately, enhances and enriches the meaning of the Apollonian Attic urn.

3.4 ‘ODE TO PSYCHE’

*Into my heart an air that kills
From yon far country blows:
What are those blue remembered hills,
What spires, what farms are those?*

*That is the land of lost content,
I see it shining plain,
The happy highways where I went
And cannot come again.¹⁷⁹*

I feel that a Man may be happy in this World. And I know that This World Is a World of Imagination & Vision. I see Every thing I paint In This World, but Every body does not see alike. To the Eyes of a Miser a Guinea is more beautiful than the Sun, & a bag worn with the use of Money has more beautiful proportions than a Vine filled with Grapes. The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only a Green thing that stands in the way. Some See Nature all Ridicule & Deformity, & by these I shall not regulate my proportions; & Some Scarce see Nature at all. But to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination, Nature is Imagination itself. As a man is, So he Sees. As the Eye is formed, such are its Powers.¹⁸⁰

3.4.1 Introduction

¹⁷⁹ See the poem, ‘A Shropshire Lad, XL’ by A.E. Houseman (1953:58).

¹⁸⁰ See William Blake’s (1968:30) letter to Dr Trusler dated 23 August 1799.

The 'Ode to Psyche' was the first of the series of great odes written by Keats in his *annus mirabilis* of 1819.¹⁸¹ Something of the motivation behind the poem's theme can be perceived in a letter Keats (2005:294) wrote to George and Georgiana Keats:¹⁸²

You must recollect that Psyche was not embodied as a goddess before the time of Apuleius the Platonist who lived after the Augustan age, and consequently the Goddess was never worshipped or sacrificed to with any of the ancient fervour, and perhaps never thought of in the old religion. I am more orthodox than to let a hethen Goddess be so neglected.

In his 'orthodox' unorthodoxy, Keats, then, decided to write the ode in question as a lasting tribute to the 'neglected' goddess, Psyche. Given the fact that Psyche was never 'worshipped' like the other ancient gods or goddesses 'in the old religion', Keats (1970:514-520), through the medium of poetry, endeavours to give praise to her as a goddess of equal measure (or, more accurately, as the 'loveliest.../ Of all Olympus' faded hierarchy!'). There are numerous and varying instances of Apollonian and Dionysian intermingling in the ode under discussion, as I will briefly indicate below. However, I will examine two of these instances critically in the following reading. Firstly, I will focus on the Dionysian notion of the re-enchantment of the world through the imagination as it is found in Keats's lament for the numinous nature of the ancient world and the need to recreate something of that in the modern world. Secondly, I will focus on Keats's desire to build an interior temple (i.e. a concrete product of careful Apollonian architecture) in his mind for his imaginative visions (i.e. abstract Dionysian inspiration) of Psyche in order to create something tangible and permanent for the goddess. Lastly, by analysing the above Apollonian and Dionysian elements, I will attempt to illustrate the interdependent relationship between Apollonian and Dionysian characteristics in the poem through the manner in which these two elements act upon each other in the ode.

3.4.2 Literature Review

While a great deal of critical attention has been paid to the 'Ode to a Nightingale' and the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', the 'Ode to Psyche' has been, as has its eponymous subject, somewhat neglected or overlooked in comparison. Kenneth Allott (1968:17) accurately refers to the poem as 'the Cinderella of Keats's great odes'.¹⁸³ The poem is not without its champions, however. T.S. Eliot (1933:100), for instance, held the ode in high regard when he wrote that 'Keats seems to me also a great poet ... The

¹⁸¹ However, as previously stated, in the original published sequence of Keats's 1820 volume, it comes after the 'Ode to a Nightingale' and the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'.

¹⁸² This letter is dated 21 April 1819.

¹⁸³ Also see Leon Waldo's (1977:410) comment stating that 'at times it seems to be more of a problem child, stubbornly refusing to join the others in any harmonious grouping'.

Odes—especially perhaps the *Ode to Psyche*—are enough for his reputation’. Furthermore, there have been various serious interpretations of the poem. Charles W. Hagelman (1962:73-82) analyses the last stanza of the ode in the light of Keats’s medical training and argues that Keats’s scientific knowledge of the brain played an important hand in the ideas developed in the stanza. James H. Bunn (1970:581-594) and Donald C. Goellnicht (1988:91-103) focus on Keats’s construction of a ‘mental landscape’ created through the internalisation of the animating and transformative power of the imagination (an important concern which I also explore in my reading of the poem that follows). Jonathan Bate (1990:325-333) proposes the possible influence which Thomas Moore’s poetry might have had on the ode, whereas Kris Steyaert (1996) regards it as an ‘example of a poem indicative of Keats’s often neglected or misinterpreted (male) gender politics’. Moreover, Erin Ferris (2005:399-415) classifies the ode as a ‘just poem’ and, accordingly, examines it with the purposes of addressing ‘the long-standing debate concerning poetry’s justice’. More recently, Forest Pyle (2019:315-321) explores the concept of ‘Romantic agnosticism’ in the poem. Finally, a recent book-length study, *Cupid and Psyche: The Reception of Apuleius’ Love Story since 1600* (see May and Harrison, 2020) provides a thorough overview of the Cupid-Psyche myth which inspired Keats to write his ode.¹⁸⁴ The above readings do, in some way, highlight the long-standing influence of the poem. Moreover, they show that the ‘Ode to Psyche’, despite not being as exhaustively studied as the ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ and the ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’, is still germane to a good few of our present concerns, as I will also attempt to show (through an Apollonian-Dionysian lens) at a later stage in my examination.

3.4.3 A Multidimensional Affair of Intermingling

In my brief introduction to the poem, I mentioned that there are various instances of Apollonian and Dionysian intermingling in the poem. At this point in my argument, I will elaborate on that statement by providing a condensed overview of two of these alternative interpretations with regards to the intermingling between Apollonian and Dionysian characteristics in the poem.

Firstly, in the same letter that Keats (2005:294) wrote to George and Georgiana, there is a passage where he provides insight into the spirit in which he composed the poem. The passage reveals some form of Apollonian contemplation present at this stage of his writing and thinking:

The following Poem—the last I have written—is the first and the only one with which I have taken even moderate pains. I have for the most part dash’d off my lines in a hurry. This I have

¹⁸⁴ This study was particularly helpful to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the mythical story while also gaining more insight into previous interpretations of the story and how these might have had an influence on Keats’s ‘Ode to Psyche’.

done leisurely; I think it reads the more richly for it and will I hope encourage me to write other things in even a more peaceable and healthy spirit.

The fact that he wrote the poem at a more ‘leisurely’ pace is important for our concerns. The ‘peaceable and healthy spirit’ which accompanied him in the writing of the ode tells us that there might have also been a more ‘contemplative spirit’ (associated with the Apollonian) present during the exercise of writing the poem (Nietzsche, 1999:50-51;98):

... it is the will of Apollo to bring rest and calm to individual beings precisely by drawing boundaries between them, and by reminding them constantly, with his demands for self-knowledge and measure, that these are the most sacred laws in the world.

An important quality of the Apollonian is ‘to bring [a sense of] rest and calm[ness]’ to Dionysian emotional turmoil. In the above excerpt from Keats’s letter, we can perceive that there seems to have been a calm and reflective Apollonian sensibility (‘contemplative spirit’) at the point of composition.

We can further elaborate on this notion by considering the use of the word ‘pains’ in the aforementioned letter in greater detail. For Walter H. Evert (1965:28) the usage of the word here refers to the fact that ‘he was preoccupied with “sound and syllable” in a way that he had not been when he made the cavalier pronouncement about “Poetry” coming as naturally as leaves to a tree’. Everest (2021:63), similarly, highlights Keats’s preoccupations with the formal and metrical qualities of poetry at the time of writing the ‘Ode to Psyche’ when he states that ‘The poem we are reading—“these tuneless numbers”—characterizes itself as born of “sweet enforcement and remembrance dear” (the combination of mental materials with the enjoyable labour of poetic craftsmanship)’.¹⁸⁵ The ‘enjoyable labour of poetic craftsmanship’ is a product of the Apollonian world of attention to detail and its ‘image-making’ abilities. Therefore, the ‘pains’ Keats took in writing the poem might have also included Apollonian ‘pains’ of endeavouring to utilise the most appropriate structural and formal components for the poem:

O Goddess! Hear these tuneless numbers, wrung
By sweet enforcement and remembrance dear,
And pardon that thy secrets should be sung
Even into thine own soft-conchèd ear.
Surely I dreamt to-day, or did I see
The wingèd Psyche with awakened eyes?
I wandered in a forest thoughtlessly,

¹⁸⁵ For more studies related to the formal elements of the poem, see H.W. Garrod’s (1926:83-90), *Keats*, M.R. Ridley’s (1933:195-210), *Keats’s Craftsmanship: A Study in Poetic Development*, and Walter Jackson Bate’s (1945:125-133), *The Stylistic Development of Keats*.

And, on the sudden, fainting with surprise,
 Saw two fair creatures, couchèd side by side
 In deepest grass, beneath the whispering roof
 Of leaves and trembled blossoms, where there ran
 A brooklet, scarce espied.
 'Mid hushed, cool-rooted flowers, fragrant-eyed,
 Blue, silver-white and budded Tyrian,
 They lay calm-breathing on the bedded grass
 Their arms embracèd, and their pinions too;
 Their lips touched not, but had not bade adieu ...¹⁸⁶

The spontaneous nature ('I wandered in a forest thoughtlessly') of the action leading up to the initial vision of Psyche and Cupid in the above extract is balanced by the 'poetic craftsmanship' of form and relies on clear language to convey the full significance of the imaginative vision to the poetic audience. Although the first vision of Cupid and Psyche is 'sudden' and catches the speaker by 'surprise', it is later carefully formulated and chiselled into poetic form. An example of this includes the careful choice of line indentations (an important aspect in the 'Ode to a Nightingale' too, as argued previously) in the final two lines of the above extract. In my view, it further demonstrates (on a visual level) the intertwined nature of Psyche and Cupid for the poet: by grouping these two lines together in such a manner as to let them start on the same part of the page, the poet is demonstrating something of his imaginative vision in the formal aspects of the poem. It allows their intimacy to be perceived on an Apollonian level as well: the two lines in question are displayed as something of an intertwining unit on the page (through the use of line indentations), in the same manner as when the initial vision of Cupid and Psyche enters the poet's consciousness. This interpretation is far from a thorough one, but we can tentatively perceive how Apollonian form is needed in order to temper, but also to enhance and complement, the spontaneous bursts of Dionysian imaginative vision. In order to avoid repetition, I will not deal with this aspect of the poem exhaustively in this space as it was one of my main focal points earlier in the chapter.

On closer scrutiny, we can discern another (though not completely unrelated) occurrence of Apollonian and Dionysian intermingling in the above extract. On the level of narrative, we can recognise a form of intermingling in the description of Cupid and Psyche in the final line above: 'Their lips touched not, but had not bade adieu'. From the previous chapter, we know that the Apollonian is responsible for tempering the sporadically impulsive nature of Dionysian feelings and emotions. However, this depiction of Cupid and Psyche does, in my view, occupy a middle-ground between the Apollonian realm of self-control and the Dionysian realm of instinctive emotion. The fact that 'Their lips touched not' signifies a measure of Apollonian restraint, yet they 'had not bade adieu' either, which

¹⁸⁶ 'Ode to Psyche', lines 1-17.

is telling us that Dionysian passion is still present in this moment. The image of the two characters thus exemplifies an idiosyncratic intermingling between the Apollonian and Dionysian realms created by a shared tension which is not fully devoid of, yet also not fully committed to, passion (embodied, in this case, through the exchange of a kiss). They are suspended in an in-between state which is neither completely Apollonian nor completely Dionysian, but rather contains characteristics which are indicative of both the realms. It is, therefore, this depiction of the two characters caught in the ‘in-betweenness’ of Apollonian restraint and Dionysian passion that leads me to understand it as some mode of intermingling between the two energies.¹⁸⁷

The above discussion (albeit not offering much more than a cursory glance) introduces two possible interpretations of Apollonian and Dionysian intermingling in the ode in question. I now focus on my main argument in this section: the respective role played by the Apollonian and the Dionysian in furthering the process of re-enchantment in the poem.

3.4.4 Re-enchanting the (Inner) World

The English poet, Malcolm Guite (2023), regards the ‘Ode to Psyche’ as ‘Keats’s great poem of enchantment and re-enchantment’. He elaborates on this statement by noting that Keats is living in London, in an industrial age that is breaking everything down to mere material bits and pieces, whereas he is actually longing to live in a world such as that of pagan antiquity; a ‘land of lost content’ in Houseman’s terms, where there was soul (i.e. Psyche, if we keep the Greek meaning of the word in mind) and everything was alive and animated.¹⁸⁸ The poem, for Guite, becomes a lament for that lost enchantment of the ancient world.¹⁸⁹ Guite is, of course, not alone in recognising the notion of lost enchantment in the poem. Bloom (1961:391-392), for instance, much earlier noted that ‘On one level Keats is still voicing an ostensible regret for the days not “so far retired / From happy pieties” (happy in contrast to later pieties), when earth and its forest growths and the other elements were all accounted

¹⁸⁷ See Meihuizen (2024:367): ‘The passion of sensual love has not been spent; the two are suspended in the continuing present of love, “calm-breathing”, embracing, with proximate lips ready to carry on kissing, and closed eyelids anticipating the “tender eye-dawn of aurean love”, where first looking into each other’s eyes on awakening will bear for individual subjectivity the same perceptual and existential importance as a gentle morning sunrise’. Also see Bloom (1961:390): ‘He finds them at that moment of Keatsian intensity when they are neither apart nor joined together, but rather in an embrace scarcely ended and another about to commence’.

¹⁸⁸ The OED (2025) defines the word *psyche* as ‘The mind, soul, or spirit, as distinguished from the body’, but another obsolete definition of the word might also be implied: ‘The animating principle of the universe; *anima mundi*’. I am aware of the fact that this meaning of the word was obsolete in Keats’s time, but as stated earlier in the ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’, we have to remember that Keats was drawing on sources written when this use of the term might have still been in regular use. For a more comprehensive discussion on the significance of the word ‘soul’ in the ode and its usage related to Keats’s view of the world as a ‘vale of Soul-making’, see Meihuizen (2024:364-370).

¹⁸⁹ The longing to return to such an understanding of the world is, of course, a Romantic ideal as well. For example, see Wordsworth’s (1989:146-152) ‘Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood’ which includes the stirring rhetorical question: ‘Where is it now, the glory and the dream?’.

holy. Now they are not, for other pieties and the analytical mind combine to take away their sanctification'. Moreover, Jack Stillinger (1971:105) states that 'it is up to the poet himself to compensate for the cruel banishment of fairies, gods, myth, and religion by Lockean and Newtonian "cold philosophy"', and, if one adopts this view, the poem can be understood as the poet's attempt to 're-create lost glory and loveliness' through the 'working of the imagination'. Furthermore, James Chandler (1998:415-416) notices a similar concern in the poem and, through a historical perspective, reads the poem as a critique of 'the sensational scepticism of an Enlightenment that, in certain moments, lost sight of the soul altogether', and states that:¹⁹⁰

The 'neglect' of Psyche that Keats playfully describes himself as too 'orthodox' a heathen to countenance is thus a double neglect: the neglect of the pagan-Platonic 'Psyche' in favor of the Christian 'soul' and the neglect of the Psyche/soul in any form by the mechanist strain in Enlightenment moral philosophy.

In this part of my argument, I will follow in the footsteps of the above scholars, but I will do so by developing my argument through an Apollonian-Dionysian understanding which, in my view, might be particularly helpful to appreciate the notion of re-enchantment in the poem. If one reads the poem from this point of view, it seems especially germane to some of our present predicaments in contemporary culture as well, especially if we keep McGilchrist's (2009) theory, as explained in the first (introductory) chapter of this study, regarding the narrow-sighted and materialistic left-hemispheric prominence of the modern Western world, in mind.¹⁹¹ At this point, one might (rightfully too) question what precisely I regard as 're-enchantment', as it is a multi-layered term which has the possibility of becoming rather ambiguous. In my view, it involves looking at the world from an animate Dionysian level of possibility. If we can recall from the previous chapter, Nietzsche (1999:21) writes about a one-sidedly narrow 'Apollonian consciousness' that can hide the 'Dionysian world from [us] ... like a veil'. As soon as one loses touch with the Dionysian imagination and the sense that there is a power beyond our control, as soon as one forsakes this notion of Dionysian mystery altogether for absolute Apollonian certainty and fixity, one, inevitably, fails to realise or appreciate a sense of sacredness in the world.¹⁹² This is, of

¹⁹⁰ Also see Hartman (2011:89): 'Though Keats's poem is a belated version of a belated myth, it reverses Psyche's fading status in that twilight of the gods we call the Enlightenment. A sense of what Psyche might mean for love and the imaginative life returns'.

¹⁹¹ McGilchrist emphasizes the vital importance and need of re-enchantment in our present environment (Dr Iain McGilchrist, 2023).

¹⁹² The Romantics would certainly have been aware of a power beyond our ordinary capabilities. See, for example, McGilchrist's (2009:363) statement that 'The breakthrough in Romantic thinking to the essential connectedness of things enabled them to see that those who are in awe of any great object—whether it be God, or the vastness, beauty and complexity of nature—do not set themselves apart from it; they feel something that is Other, certainly, but also something of which they partake. Because of the empathic connection or betweenness—of which depth here is a metaphor—they both share in the character of the Other and feel their separateness from it. Reverence is no abasement, they understood, but with as much truth and exaltation: a sense of belonging to

course, a serious oversimplification, but I hope my reading will establish this view in an at once more concise and detailed manner. In the beginning of the second stanza, we encounter Keats's most direct engagement with the idea of lost enchantment:

O brightest, though too late for antique vows!
Too, too late for the fond believing lyre,
When holy were the haunted forest boughs,
Holy the air, the water and the fire.
Yet even in these days so far retired
From happy pieties, thy lucent fans,
Fluttering among the faint Olympians,
I see, and sing, by my own eyes inspired.¹⁹³

Keats writes that Psyche arrived 'too late for antique vows' and 'too late' to be praised by the 'fond believing lyre'. The holiness of the natural world ('the air, the water and the fire') seems to be 'far retired' and part of a rather distant, unfamiliar world. Andrew Motion (1997:387) notes that Keats develops a 'connection between Psyche and his own identity. Keats sees himself, like the goddess, as a kind of arriviste, struggling to find a place in the "hierarchy" of poetry without the "privileges of birth and education", as Coleridge called them'. Motion is accurate when he recognises this 'connection' between them, but I believe that there is another meaningful 'connection' worthy to take note of here: both Psyche and Keats were 'too late' to treasure this sense of sacredness in a world, 'When holy were the haunted forest boughs, / Holy the air, the water and the fire'. The 'happy pieties' of such a world seem to belong to a universe ages and ages since and not to their present mode of existence.

At this point, this notion of lost enchantment may come across as a rather pessimistic view of the world. However, Keats does not leave it there, but writes that 'even in these days so far retired / From happy pieties... / I see, and sing, by my own eyes inspired'. Bunn (1979:584) pertinently notes that 'Despite his awareness that this is an Iron Age, that nature no longer is holy, in his vision he is inspired by the properties he will gain as her attendant. She will render holy his inward mind, and he can become her priest, building the paradise within'. Psyche may have been 'Too late for antique vows, but [she arrived] in good time for the imaginative vow that Keats is about to give [her]'. Although the world Keats finds himself in does not necessarily appreciate nor even recognise the holiness of the natural world anymore, he can restore a sense of this holiness through his 'own eyes inspired'. Through the Dionysian imagination, the sacredness of the world can be valued in his 'inward mind' once again: 'the Eyes of the Man of Imagination' grant one access (albeit inwardly) to the 'happy highways' of a

something greater than oneself, which for the Romantics was the phenomenal world, and what one could see through it'.

¹⁹³ 'Ode to Psyche', lines 36-43.

more animate universe again.¹⁹⁴ Through the Dionysian imagination ('the unrestricted invention of the Fancy'), 'the usual barriers and limits of existence' can be overcome to create an *inner world* which resembles the sacredness of the classical past and enables one to share in that sense of sacredness (Bloom, 1961:395 and Nietzsche, 1999:40,51):

The flood-tide of the Dionysian [imagination] would destroy periodically all the small circles in which the one-sidedly Apollonian will attempted to confine Hellenic life.

The imagination is thus able to create a similar awareness of the sacredness of existence in the modern (at times 'one-sidedly Apollonian') world by re-creating a more numinous vision in one's 'inward mind'; 'As the Eye is formed, such are its Powers'. If the 'Eye is formed', with the aid of the imagination, to recognise the 'holiness' of existence, its 'Powers' will also reflect an ability to recreate a world such as pagan antiquity. From this point of view, the imagination is, therefore, able to re-enchant the modern world in one's 'inward mind'. The re-enchanting power of the imagination leads me to my next point in the argument where I will elaborate on this notion of re-enchantment by examining the temple Keats builds for Psyche in the final stanza of the poem.

3.4.5 Building the Enchanted Temple

From the previous section, one can, tentatively, perceive how Keats aspires to extend his imaginative vision in order to create an inner world ('mental landscape') imbued with a sense of sacredness reminiscent of the 'days so far retired'. In the final stanza of the poem, Keats fulfils this imaginative attempt:

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,
Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind:
Far, far around shall those dark-clustered trees
Fledge the wild-ridgèd mountains steep by steep;
And there by zephyrs, streams, and birds, and bees,
The moss-lain Dryads shall be lulled to sleep;

¹⁹⁴ If Romanticism is, indeed, 'a Renaissance of the English Renaissance', then it is also a return to appreciating the importance of imaginative power to alter our view and understanding of the world (see Bloom and Trilling (1973:3).

And in the midst of this wide quietness
A rosy sanctuary will I dress
With the wreathed trellis of a working brain,
With buds, and bells, and stars without a name ...¹⁹⁵

‘In some untrodden region’ of his *mind*, Keats builds and designs a ‘fane’ (i.e. temple) to bring honour to Psyche. This is important, because it brings this specific Apollonian element to light for the first time in the ode: the fact that Keats wants to create something fixed and permanent (albeit mentally) for the goddess and the Dionysian inspiration she offers. Gillian Beer (1969:74) notes that ‘The internal world [created through the imagination] is given form’ through the mental construction of the temple. In a Nietzschean sense, the skill of architecture is associated with Apollo and requires the ‘definiteness and clarity’ which we associate with Apollonian precision (Nietzsche, 1999:46). Dionysian interventions of inspirational visions are fleeting. However, the lasting permanence of the ‘fane’ in the final stanza is able to immortalise the original imaginative vision of the poet. Max F. Schulz (1960:59-62) shares this view when he states that:

... as poet-priest he can recreate and immortalize Psyche, he can give poetic permanence to the divine soul of this lovely girl ... Through the agency of ‘the gardener Fancy,’ regarded as the voluntary poetic power, Keats is bringing the physical world ... into meaningful unified equilibrium with the ideal world of the spirit.

The ‘physical world’ of the Apollonian temple is ‘unified ... with the ideal world of [Dionysian] spirit’. There is, hence, a unification between Apollonian ‘fixity’ and permanence (exemplified by the temple), as it ‘immortalises’, and the fleeting nature of Dionysian visions of imagination.¹⁹⁶ The ‘fane’, built in honour of Psyche, further establishes the notion of re-enchantment in the poem as it becomes an eternal monument for the power of the imagination. Moreover, if we keep in mind that Psyche means ‘soul’, it also acts as a beacon of *anima mundi*: ‘The animating principle of the universe’. Through constructing a ‘fane’ in ‘some untrodden region’ of his own mind, Keats is also building a temple for the significance of ‘soul’ in the broader definition of the word and the need thereof in the modern world of industrialisation and materiality. Robert D. Wagner (1964:33) importantly notes that:

... we feel that in Psyche's temple, at least, the holiness of things has been renewed. If the gods no longer sanctify ‘the air, the water, and the fire,’ the poet's imagination does.

¹⁹⁵ ‘Ode to Psyche’, lines 50-61.

¹⁹⁶ The temple itself seems to be situated in a Dionysian world of magic and possibility as well, because it involves supernatural beings such as ‘Dryads’.

Keats is able to re-enchant his 'inward mind' with a sense of sacredness by blending the ephemeral Dionysian visions of imagination with the Apollonian fixity of a temple. Keats, though writing 'in these days so far retired' from pagan antiquity, offers his goddess a temple that is part of the interior world and infused with the holiness of the ancient world using imagination as his bricks and words as his clay. The poem, as tangible construct itself, becomes part of this interior temple created for Psyche and all that she signifies.

From this perspective, it is clear that there is a noteworthy duality between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in the ode. The Dionysian imagination relies on the Apollonian structure offered by something permanent (in this case a temple) to fulfil its role of re-enchanting the world with the holiness of the ancient world. Without the Apollonian definitiveness of a more concrete construction, the re-enchanting potential and energy of the imaginative vision will fleetingly fade into oblivion (like the nightingale's song would without its Apollonian form in the 'Ode to a Nightingale'). Similarly, the Apollonian mental construction needs the Dionysian spirit to become fully alive with the holiness of a more animated world of possibility.

3.4.6 Conclusion

From the above examination, it is clear that the 'Ode to Psyche' can be constructively read as a poem of re-enchantment through the Nietzschean theoretical framework of Apollonian and Dionysian impulses. Furthermore, one can perceive an intermingling between the Apollonian (embodied within the fixity of a temple) and the Dionysian (embodied within the power of the imaginative vision) in the ode in question. Consequently, this process of intermingling enables Keats to re-enchant his 'inward mind' which, in turn, also demonstrates the interdependent relationship between the Apollonian and the Dionysian in the poem.

3.5 'TO AUTUMN'

*When golden autumn, wreathed in ripened corn,
From purple clusters pressed the foamy wine,
Thy genius did his fallow brows adorn,
And made the beauties of the season thine.*

*With rustling sound the yellow foliage flies,
And wantons with the wind in rapid whirls;
The gurgling rivulet to the valley hies,*

*Whilst on its bank the spangled serpent curls.*¹⁹⁷

*Poems swim free of their age and live in ours; but if we understand them on their own terms rather than conform them to ours, they take on a fuller life, and so do we.*¹⁹⁸

*Salubrious air, free of the low fogs that were
(he wrote) like steam from cabbage water;
past scrubbed stoops and ram's-head-knocked
doors, a daily walk through the cathedral yard
down to the river: how beautiful
the season was—ay, better than
the chilly green of spring, the warmed hue
of grainfields' harsh stubs turned pictorial
with equinoctial bloom, the tincture of
the actual, the mellow aftermath of fever:
purgatorial winnowings, the harvest over.*¹⁹⁹

3.5.1 Introduction

It is generally accepted that Keats's sunset ode, 'To Autumn', is his finest and most impeccable short poem. Bloom (1961:421-422) exemplifies this viewpoint when he writes:

'To Autumn' is the subtlest and most beautiful of all Keats's odes, and as close to perfection as any shorter poem in the English language. That is of course cliché, but it cannot be demonstrated too often (it is more frequently asserted than evidenced).²⁰⁰

It is therefore, rather naturally, a somewhat daunting task for any critic to comment on a poem which is 'as close to perfection as any shorter poem in the English language'. Herbert Lidenberger (1970:127), in discussing the poem in question, states that 'Every critic has some axe to grind'. We may also add that every critic aspires to find the axe which adds something meaningful and noteworthy to the excellence of the poem at hand. Bloom (1961:421), at a later stage in the same discussion, fortunately

¹⁹⁷ See Thomas Chatterton's (1906:194), 'Elegy on the Death of Mr. Philips'.

¹⁹⁸ See Michael Schmidt's (1998:10), *Lives of Poets*.

¹⁹⁹ See Amy Clampitt's (1983:62), 'Keats at Winchester: The Autumn Equinox'.

²⁰⁰ Also see B.C. Southam (1960:91), 'Here we have, if anywhere, a great poem which may be received by the common reader without a heavy apparatus of footnotes or explication ... The ode can fittingly be described as a perfect work of art, flawless in detail, and composed in mood'.

reassures us of the importance of diverse critical interpretations of ‘To Autumn’ when he states that it is precisely the ‘incredible richness’ of the ode that will not only ‘sustain many readings’, but will ‘indeed ... demand them’. It is with this reassurance in mind that I pick up my double-sided axe to examine the ode, ‘To Autumn’, through the Apollonian-Dionysian theoretical framework of this study. In the following examination, I will predominantly focus on Keats’s immersion in the autumn scenery and his idiosyncratic employment of language in the ode. Hitherto, I have not paid considerable attention to these aspects of Keats’s writing, but they are certainly fundamental concerns in all of his 1819 odes (and his poetic oeuvre in general). The ode, ‘To Autumn’, allows us to perceive something of the significance of Keats’s absorption in the natural world and his employment of language (specifically his diction in this case) in relation to the balance between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in his poetry. It is my contention that there is a clear intermingling between Keats’s meticulous (Apollonian) use of language and his (Dionysian) immersion in the natural world of the autumnal landscape. Finally, I believe that this intermingling not only underscores the originality of the ode, but also establishes an intelligible balance between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in the poem.

3.5.2 Literature Review

The ode, ‘To Autumn’, has, as one can expect from its favourable reception, enjoyed considerable critical attention from various theoretical angles.²⁰¹ Nai-Tung Ting (1956:103-108) and Lucy Morrison (1996:35-50) examine the influence of Chatterton on Keats with particular reference to his vivid presence in ‘To Autumn’.²⁰² Virgil Nemoianu (1978:205-214) and, more recently, Yingjie Duan (2021:119-122) are, in their particular methods, both concerned with the concept of ‘movement’ in the poem. Nemoianu (1978:206) analyses various forms of movement in the poem ‘in combination with the evolution in *space*’. Duan (2021:119) argues that the ode ‘implicitly exhibits the cyclical movement of one day and four seasons, manifesting Northrop Frye’s definition of “process of life”’.²⁰³ Paul H. Fry (1986:211-219) and Andrew J. Bennet (1991:333-352), respectively, analyse the ode in line with its historical and political context which, of course, includes the Peterloo Massacre of August 1819 and the widespread food riots in rural areas. Fry (1986:212;217) regards the poem as ‘no politically encoded escape from history’ (as some critics of the late twentieth century conceived it to be), but instead sees it as a ‘social poem’ that is also preoccupied with the social and ‘class conflicts’ of the day.²⁰⁴ Bennet

²⁰¹ See Annabel M. Patterson’s (1979:449) syntactical study: ‘Keats’s “To Autumn” has become, I am tempted to say, an establishment. Combining, as it seems to, perfect conditions for interpretation (a text of marked virtuosity with a context rich in intentionalist data) the poem has invited much reading but has discouraged dispute. Its place in Keats’s mythic career has given it status as a finale...’.

²⁰² At a later stage in my reading, I also investigate this influence, but I do so from a more exclusively language (diction) point of view.

²⁰³ See Northrop Frye’s (1957:160), *Anatomy of Criticism*.

²⁰⁴ ‘...politically-minded critics [tend] to describe “To Autumn” as an escape from history: attempting to account for the discrepancy between the perfected language of the poem and the contemporary disruptions of politics;

(1991:34) examines the ‘Keatsian rhetoric of harvesting’ and argues that the poem can accordingly be ‘read both as a figure of political discourse and as a self-description of poetry and poetic making’.²⁰⁵ Mark Bracher (1990:633-655) adopts a Lacanian theoretical framework to explore what he regards as the ‘deeper ramifications of the poem’s ideological force’ in order to show that the ‘ultimate ideological significance’ of the poem ‘derives from the repositioning of death within the Imaginary and Symbolic orders’. Richard Marggraf Turley *et al.* (2012:797-817) thoroughly evaluate the influence of the Winchester setting (by drawing on new archival and topographical evidence) of Keats’s ode and relates this setting to some of the overlooked labour and economic crises evident at the time of writing the poem. In recent years, Mark Sandy (2022:257-272) provides a comparative reading between Keats and Wallace Stevens with specific reference to ‘To Autumn’.

When it comes to the focus of my study, the British poetess, Carol Rumens (2013) previously discerned an interesting and pertinent relationship between the Apollonian and the Dionysian in the poem:

In bringing Dionysus and Apollo together, Keats gives symbolic resolution to a personal, creative conflict. I’m not suggesting he was an alcoholic—poetry was his intoxicant. But now the young enthusiast who wrote ‘O for a life of Sensation rather than of Thought’, and told John Taylor that poetry should ‘come as naturally as Leaves to a tree’ (an image perhaps recalling the wine-god’s penchant for foliage), attains a point in his own ‘maturing’ where sensuous profusion and artistic control find perfect balance. ‘To Autumn’ becomes a parable of its own making.

I agree with Rumens (2013) in the sense that there exists a meaningful ‘balance’ between ‘sensuous profusion and artistic control’ in the ode. However, she does not thoroughly elaborate on this statement or attempt to answer *how* this ‘balance’ is achieved in the poem. Hence, it is a notion which I attempt to develop critically and, moreover, a question which I attempt to answer by throwing particular light on the Apollonian use of language and the Dionysian immersion in the autumn scenery as foundational stones which steady this ‘perfect balance’ in the poem.

Notwithstanding the importance and merit of the above interpretations, there have been two specific studies which most immediately influenced my reading and understanding of the poem concerning the Apollonian-Dionysian framework of this study. Firstly, Jonathan Bate’s (2021:1174-1175) reading of the poem illustrates Keats’s immersion in the natural world by drawing special

Jerome McGann, for example, has analysed “To Autumn” as an attempt to “escape” the period which provides the poem with its context’ (Bennet, 1991:33). Also see Jerome J. McGann (1979:61).

²⁰⁵ “‘To Autumn”, as a poem of harvesting, represents Keats’s most fully worked nexus of such homologies: among other things the poem is an articulation of the politics and economics both of agriculture and of writing’.

attention to Keats's deep appreciation of the pleasant autumnal weather of 1819.²⁰⁶ Moreover, Roe's (2017:237-258) analysis of the poem as a 'restoration of the English language' sheds light on Keats's deliberate use of an 'English Idiom' in the ode which was inspired by Chatterton (whom Keats associates with autumn).²⁰⁷ Both these studies identify salient particularities in the poem. Also, by way of drawing on these two interpretations, I want to address the hitherto neglected *interaction* between these two aspects of the poem through an Apollonian-Dionysian lens. In my view, Keats's immersion in the natural surroundings of autumn is mediated by his conscious and meticulous use of language in the ode. Furthermore, it is my contention that Keats's particular utilisation of an 'English Idiom' in the ode indeed complements his immersion in the *English* landscape of Winchester's autumn which, accordingly, establishes a fruitful relationship between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in the poem.

3.5.3 A New Autumn

In order for us to fully comprehend Keats's engrossment in the 1819 Winchester autumn, a brief contextualisation of the last few years' natural conditions leading up to the autumn under consideration is necessary. Bate (2021:1174) states that:

A central theme of the contemporary poets Keats most admired was the relationship between the human spirit and the natural world. William Wordsworth found serenity in the landscape of the Wye Valley above Tintern Abbey and sublimity in the cloudscapes of the Lake District and Snowdonia. Samuel Taylor Coleridge meditated on memory through observing the patterns of frost on the window of his cottage at midnight. Lord Byron brooded amid the storms and black clouds over Lake Geneva in 1816, which became known as 'the year without a summer'. 'The bright sun was extinguished', wrote Byron in his poem 'Darkness'. And it had been. A few weeks before Keats published his first poem, a sonnet on solitude, there was a huge eruption of the long-dormant volcano Mount Tambora on one of the Lesser Sunda Islands of Indonesia. The explosion was heard in Sumatra, more than 1000 miles away; thousands of people were killed. Volcanic ash rained down and lingered in the stratosphere, causing global disruption to weather patterns. Crops failed in many countries, partly leading to food riots and famine. In early September 1816, when Keats returned to London from the first of his seaside residences, daytime temperatures were far below the seasonal average. Three years later, there was at last a long stint of warm dry weather. Walking in the fields around Winchester, Keats basked in the heat as workers gathered in the first good harvest for years.

²⁰⁶ Also see Bate's (2000:102-118) longer discussion of 'To Autumn' as 'ecosystem' in his book, *The Song of the Earth*.

²⁰⁷ Elsewhere Roe refers to the poem as 'a history of the English language in thirty-three lines' (Bangalore International Centre, 2020). Also see Roe's (2012:473-475) biography of Keats for a similar discussion.

Keats certainly would have experienced the aftermath of the volcanic eruption of Mount Tambora due to the climate and environmental changes it brought about.²⁰⁸ In this regard, Bate (2021:1175) notes that ‘The volcanic ash of Tambora had shrouded the world in what Byron and others called a persistent “dry fog”, which reddened and dimmed the sunlight; scientists later called the effect a stratospheric sulphate aerosol veil’. However, in 1819 the ‘long stint of warm dry weather’ filled Keats with a new mood of serenity and a deep sense of appreciation for pleasant weather and agreeable natural elements manifesting a rekindled ‘relationship between the human spirit and the natural world’. This sense of appreciation is further evidenced in a letter Keats (2005:330-331) wrote to his sister, Fanny, about three weeks prior to writing his ode ‘To Autumn’:

The delightful Weather we have had for two Months is the highest gratification I could receive. No chill’d red noses, no shivering, but fair Atmosphere to think in, a clean towel mark’d with the mangle, and a basin of clear Water to drench one’s face with ten times a day ... I adore fine Weather as the greatest blessing I can have. Give me Books, fruit, French wine and fine weather and a little music out of doors, played by somebody I do not know ...²⁰⁹

The contrast between the ‘dry fog’ of the last few years and the mellow sunlight of 1819’s autumn would have certainly played an active role in the way Keats (2005:345) experienced the Winchester landscape around him which ultimately became the inspiration for one of his most accomplished poems:

How beautiful the season is now, how fine the air, a temperate sharpness about it. Really, without joking, chaste weather, Dian skies. I never lik’d stubble fields so much as now—Aye, better than the chilly green of the spring. Somehow a stubble plain looks warm—in the same way that some pictures look warm—this struck me so much in my Sunday’s walk that I composed upon it.²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ For a comprehensive discussion of the impact of this volcanic eruption, see William K. and Nicholas P. Klingaman’s (2013) book-length study, *The Year Without Summer: 1816 and the Volcano that Darkened the World and Changed History*. Although there are no specific references to Keats in their account, they do, on occasion, deal with Keats’s Romantic contemporaries, Byron and Shelley, which provides a helpful, albeit more general, contextualization.

²⁰⁹ This letter is dated 28 August 1819 and was sent from Winchester. Keats’s, ‘To Autumn’, was most probably written on the 19th of September 1819.

²¹⁰ This letter to J.H. Reynolds is dated 21 September 1819 (two days after Keats wrote ‘To Autumn’).

Keats's appreciation of the season and the natural world on this autumnal walk is evidently Dionysian inasmuch as it resembles a corresponding enthusiastic response (Nietzsche, 1999:41).²¹¹ Likewise, the remark, 'this struck me so much', speaks of a spontaneous stimulus, rather than a preconceived mode of reasoning. Motion (1997:457) supports this view when he writes that 'To Autumn' is 'a poem for which he had made no self-conscious long-term preparation'.

One must not take the impression which this landscape made on Keats lightly. In a South African context, the poet, Stephen Watson (2010:298), also experienced the palpable inspiration which the natural world offers following a walk in the Cedarberg:

... no one who has ever visited the Cedarberg can escape awareness of the fact that this is an area of the world which has a special, indeed unique, power to compel the mind and imagination (as well as exercise the legs and lungs of those who climb there). This is a place which calls to mind Plato, who once spoke of place itself as 'a veritable matrix of energies'. It also reminds one of D.H. Lawrence who, in recognition of the singular influence and character that certain parts of the world exert, spoke of 'the spirit of place', or *genius loci*.

Looking over the landscape from St. Giles's Hill, Keats was overtaken by a similar sense of wonder.²¹² The landscape too was brimming with a 'matrix of energies'. It possessed the 'power to compel the mind and imagination' as one will see in the succeeding section. From this discussion, it is clear that a September English landscape left an inspired imprint on Keats's awareness and appreciation of the natural world. Moreover, I believe the dreadful weather of the last three years would have certainly heightened his sensibilities for valuing the beauty of the natural world leading to a poem where 'the human spirit and the natural world' are reunited in the 'stubble plains' of Winchester's autumn.

3.5.4 Filling the Body of Autumn

After this brief contextualisation, we can now turn to the poem itself and focus on Keats's Dionysian immersion in the landscape of 'To Autumn'. In the 'Ode to a Nightingale', 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', and 'Ode to Psyche', Keats's empathetic imagination enabled him to access ancient and mythological realms.

²¹¹ Jeffrey C. Robinson (1989:67) refers to the ode as the 'subtlest of walking poems' and places it in the broader context of Romantic walking poems. There is, of course, also a link between the warmer weather and Keats's ability to engage happily in the act of walking.

²¹² See Turley *et al.* (2012:801-802): 'From St Giles's Hill, the walker faces due west, and in the late-afternoon may observe the "maturing sun" together with the tinturing changes it brings to the landscape (the "rosy hue" of the "stubble-plains"), as well as indigenous wildlife such as low-flying swallows gathering insects over the Itchen's reed beds before nightfall. From its brow, the sights and sounds remembered in Keats's poem—from the "half reaped furrow" on which the reaper sleeps, to the bleats of "full-grown lambs" on "hilly bourn"—could be observed in one glorious sweep'.

In 'To Autumn', however, 'The setting is not that of dream or vision, nor is there any straining after "escape". The ideal and the actual are one' (Lovell, 1950:205). This is an important distinction to keep in mind. The Dionysian imagination as a means of transportation to unfamiliar domains ('ideal') is therefore less evident in 'To Autumn', because 'The ideal and the actual are one'. Nonetheless, there is another important (and altogether not entirely unrelated) Dionysian element at play in the making of the ode in question: immersion in the natural world. Of course, to fully immerse oneself in the natural world requires the imagination, but not as a form of transportation, instead as a way to extend one's consciousness to become part of the natural world.²¹³ Bate (2021:1175) states that 'The poet [of 'To Autumn'] is entirely absorbed in the landscape' of the poem. Moreover, James Lott (1970:76) recognises a 'oneness with the season', and Lovell (1950:205-206) notes that:

The focus in the Autumn Ode is never on the poet, but throughout upon the thing itself—autumn. In this respect it exemplifies, as perfectly as anything Keats wrote, his theory of the chameleon poet (empathy), who has no identity or individuality and may with equal ease be with Achilles shouting in the trenches or with Theocritus in the vales of Sicily.

Although the Dionysian imagination is not employed as a mode of transportation here, it is through the Dionysian imagination that Keats is able to extend his consciousness to immerse himself fully in the natural world which enables a 'oneness with the season' in this case. Because the 'ideal' and the 'actual' are one, an immersion in the natural landscape enables Keats to experience an analogous sense of the 'ideal' as he did previously in the 'Ode to a Nightingale'. However, this time it is not through Dionysian imaginative transportation, but rather through a Dionysian immersion in the here-and-now of the natural world.²¹⁴ At this point, one might also question precisely what I regard as 'Dionysian immersion' as it may seem a somewhat unspecific and ambiguous term. McGilchrist (2009:378) provides suitable context for explaining this idea:

There is a lack of self-consciousness to Wordsworth that is essential to his genius, and which enabled him to write his greatest as well as his worst lines. This is a characteristic he shares with both Blake and Keats (and later with Hopkins and Hardy). These three Romantic geniuses, very different, highly individual poets as they are, share what John Bayley, in describing Keats, refers to as his 'unmisgiving' quality ... The lack of misgiving explains their combination of greatness and at times insouciant foolishness: they make themselves vulnerable in order to

²¹³ Raine (2017:250) notes that 'This imaginative apprehension, this flowing out of the soul into nature, sets Keats apart from the descriptive school of English poetry'.

²¹⁴ If we keep the earlier contextualisation in mind, the beauty of the 1819 Autumn would certainly have been a season that Keats was prepared to immerse himself in.

become the conduit of something greater than themselves. The explicit, self-conscious workings of the left hemisphere constantly oppose this condition, and therefore need to be stilled.

To immerse himself fully in the autumn scene of Winchester, Keats must be in a Dionysian state of openness ‘in order to become the conduit of something greater than’ himself. If we think about Keats’s (2005:60) theory of ‘Negative Capability’ where ‘man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason’, we perceive ‘an open receptiveness’ (McGilchrist, 2009:174) to extend consciousness beyond Apollonian ‘fact and reason’.²¹⁵ Moreover, if we recall Keats’s notion of the ‘Poetical Character’ where the poet is able to extend his consciousness to fill ‘some other Body’, we better understand the extent of Keats’s Dionysian immersion in the world of autumn.²¹⁶ It is not merely an appreciation of the season, but a willing ‘lack of self-consciousness’ (Dionysian openness) which enables him truly to become part of the ‘ideal’ (the landscape of autumn). Through this Dionysian immersion, Keats fills the ‘Body’ of autumn and makes himself ‘vulnerable’ to ‘become the conduit of’ this Winchester autumn. Hence, by committing himself entirely to autumn (‘absorbing’ himself in it), Keats is, inevitably, committing himself to the higher power of the natural world as the presence of the poet fades into the mists of the landscape he describes: ‘Through the landscape in “To Autumn” Keats experiences the Great Moment and feels himself at one with the harmonious operations of Being in nature’ (Jones, 1975:146).²¹⁷

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun,
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run:
To bend with apples the mossed cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease.

²¹⁵ Also see McGilchrist’s (2021:794-795) discussion of Keats’s theory of ‘Negative Capability’ elsewhere: ‘It is because of the complexity of truth that we need to reach down into the realm of the unconscious, not just into that tiny part of our embodied being of which we are fully conscious, and where all is clear’.

²¹⁶ Perry (2017:180) reminds us that ‘The “poetical character” grows out of that culture of feeling, but extends and enhances it: for one thing, not just people fall within the scope of Keatsian sympathy, but all sorts of things animate and inanimate, including sparrows and billiard balls’; the landscape of autumn, then, also falls ‘within the scope of Keatsian sympathy’, thus he is able to fill its ‘Body’.

²¹⁷ Also see Meihuizen (2024:404): ‘The poem itself, replete with the natural substances it both celebrates and embodies, is daemonic...’.

For summer has o'er-brimmed their clammy cells.²¹⁸

It is clear that the presence of the poet is minimised in the above stanza; the focus is solely on the landscape which he describes. The lack of a defined human observer in the above excerpt shows that the poet is very much part of the landscape. Keats is not framing autumn from an external vantage point, but through his Dionysian imagination is able to fill the 'Body' of this world. By immersing himself in the 'Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness', he is also able to become a 'Close bosom-friend' of the natural world he describes. The absence of the poet's presence is, in some way, also a brief surrendering of Apollonian control. To immerse oneself so deeply in one's subject certainly demands that one abandons, even for a brief period, a sense of Apollonian control in order to become one with the natural world. It requires a state of Dionysian openness and instinctiveness to feel oneself 'at one with the harmonious operations of Being in nature'. With regards to this matter, Nietzsche (1999:18) states that:

Not only is the bond between human beings renewed by the magic of the Dionysian, but nature, alienated, inimical, or subjugated, celebrates once more her festival of reconciliation with her lost son, humankind. Freely the earth offers up her gifts ...

The 'magic of the Dionysian' (exemplified in the act of Dionysian immersion in this case) is able to renew the bond between the human spirit and the natural world. It is through the 'magic of the Dionysian' that the poet of 'To Autumn' can fully immerse himself in the landscape which inspired his poem. 'To Autumn' is therefore, in more than one way, a 'reconciliation' between 'nature' and 'humankind'. Through the poet's Dionysian immersion in the natural world, the elements of the autumnal landscape are not 'subjugated' to the poet's control anymore, but rather 'celebrate' a 'bond' between 'nature' and 'humankind'. The poet, through his Dionysian immersion, is able to fill the 'Body' and season of autumn.

3.5.5 Singing the Native Song of Autumn

From the above discussion, it is clear that Keats is able to become one with the natural world by immersing himself (in Dionysian fashion) in the landscape which he describes. There are, however, also strong Apollonian qualities in the poem. One of these qualities is the chronological movement of the poem and the logical progression from one stanza to another. Michael Quinn (1965:149) notes that:

The strong sense of artistic control [achieved in 'To Autumn'] also depends on the time-scale that underlies the structure of the whole poem, which moves firmly and steadily through time:

²¹⁸ 'To Autumn', lines 1-11.

whereas the first stanza deals with the period of fruition, the second concerns itself with the harvesting of the fruits, and the third with the time when the harvest is over and the land is clear and bare.

The poem's chronological movement certainly establishes a certain degree of 'artistic control'. Notwithstanding the importance of this Apollonian ordering element of the poem, I want to focus on a more idiosyncratic Apollonian quality which, in my view, balances the aforementioned Dionysian immersion in the natural world: Keats's meticulous use of language in the poem. Later, in the same letter Keats (2005:345) wrote to Reynolds about his autumn ode, he also writes the following:

I always somehow associate Chatterton with autumn. He is the purest writer in the English Language. He has no French idiom, or particles like Chaucer; 'tis genuine English Idiom in English words ... English ought to be kept up.

Keats's association of 'Chatterton with autumn' should not be underestimated. Meihuizen (2024:404), in discussing the 'way language is used' in the ode, states that 'Chatterton is the daemonic interlocuter who guides the course of the poem'.²¹⁹ This is an important observation as Keats's contemplation of language in his letter clearly reveals that it was a serious matter to him at this time. In Chatterton, Keats finds a writer whom he can admire for his pure 'English Idiom'.²²⁰ Roe (2017:248) states that 'If Keats's poetic language was "almost instinctive", achieved "half at Random", another half at least was consciously and artfully made'. It is the latter 'half' of 'Keats's poetic language', the 'half' that was 'consciously made' that I regard as an important Apollonian modifier in the poem. In my view, this 'half' of his language represents an Apollonian awareness that moderates his Dionysian immersion in the natural landscape of the ode:

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;

²¹⁹ Motion also emphasises the personal connection between Keats and Chatterton: 'But Chatterton was not simply a model of settled Englishness for Keats—one peculiarly well suited to Winchester, with its "door steps always fresh from the flannel", its "Cathedral yard", "gardens", and "clear river". He was also an emblem of the outcast poet, crushed by neglect, and of suffering youth generally'.

²²⁰ There are, of course, more ways in which Chatterton influenced Keats's 'To Autumn'. For instance, his poem was also inspired by Chatterton's *Aella* and Meihuizen (2024:405) furthermore refers to the alliteration found throughout the poem which is 'A markedly Anglo-Saxon device' that further 'creates a tenuous link with Chatterton'. For the sake of coherence, I will solely focus on the 'way language is used' in relation to Chatterton.

Or on a half-reaped furrow sound asleep,
 Drowsed with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
 Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers;
 And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
 Steady thy laden head across a brook;
 Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,
 Thou watchest the last oozy hours by hours.²²¹

The personification of Autumn in the above stanza is clearly a continuation and expansion of the poet's Dionysian immersion in the autumnal landscape. However, as stated previously, the ode 'To Autumn' is unique in the sense that the 'ideal and the actual are one'. Thus, we can clearly perceive characteristics of Winchester's agricultural landscape in the above stanza: the 'half-reaped furrow', the 'gleaner' and the 'cyder-press' are all familiar elements of the English harvesting season. Keats thus finds an appropriate 'English Idiom' to describe the peculiar English landscape which initially inspired his ode. With regards to Keats's use of an 'English Idiom' in the ode, Roe (2017:251) importantly notes that:

Keats begins his first stanza in a 'French idiom': like the word 'autumn', from the Old French *autompne*, 'season' was derived from *seson*; the word had been used by Chaucer in his Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* ... What follows in 'To Autumn', however, is in effect a restoration of the English language as Keats deploys a host of words long pre-dating Hunt's French and Italian 'schools' and fourteenth century verbal imports such as 'maturing', 'conspiring', and 'gourd'. Sun, bless, thatch, eve, moss, ripe, apple, swell, hazel, kernel, bee, warm, clammy, cell, winnow, reap, swath, brook, hook, cloud, gnat, fallow, bleat, bourn, hedge, croft, gather, and swallow: these old English words are plain, pared down, strangely chastened components for a lyrical celebration of autumn's richness. The OED has hook, fallow, gather, and swallow as the earliest, dating from as far back as c.700; hedge is slightly later, from 785; gnat and winnow are ninth century words; sun, swath, and brook are also dated to the late ninth century and first recorded, at Winchester, in King Alfred's translation of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*. Bourn, one of Keats's favourite words, meaning a stream or brook, can be traced back through Hamlet's 'undiscover'd country' to its first recorded use in William Langland's fourteenth century alliterative poem *Piers Plowman* ...²²²

The hoard of old, monosyllabic English words Keats employs in 'To Autumn' complements his Dionysian immersion in the English autumn. Robinson (2022:167) states that in the poem 'Keats is

²²¹ 'To Autumn', lines 12-22.

²²² The Italics, used for words from a different language in this extract, are my own.

turning to a language of origins, native and northern'. Keats's diction in the ode forms part of the 'other half' of his 'poetic language' that 'was consciously and artfully made'. Therefore, his diction in the ode is clearly Apollonian to the degree that it involves the careful selection of words that derived from the native 'English Idiom' he associates with Chatterton (and accordingly with autumn). The fact that this is a 'conscious' process further indicates its Apollonian nature (Nietzsche, 1999:63-64). By deploying words with a definite English origin, Keats's Apollonian use of language complements his Dionysian immersion in the English landscape; his words become 'strangely chastened components [Apollonian] for a lyrical celebration [Dionysian] of autumn's richness'.

It is the English landscape and English autumn which inspired the poem. Through the deliberate 'English Idiom' of the ode, Keats mirrors and develops his immersion in this landscape by drawing on its native language. The conscious Apollonian use of language complements the initial Dionysian immersion in the autumnal scene and indeed 'intensif[ies] its effects' (Nietzsche, 1999:102), because the poem speaks in the landscape's mother tongue. Keats (2005:97) famously asserted 'That if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all'.²²³ In 'To Autumn', the inspiration for writing 'Poetry' clearly comes naturally. However, Keats (2005:464) also advised Shelley to "'load every rift" of your subject with ore'.²²⁴ Keats certainly does justice to both these statements in the present ode, because he balances the poetic imagination that comes 'as naturally as the Leaves to a tree' by loading 'every rift' of his 'subject with ore'. In the 'Ode to a Nightingale', Keats's careful use of line indentations provides something concrete and permeant for the nightingale's song. In 'To Autumn', a similar effect is created by the pared use of language. On a literal and figurative level, we come to a place where 'the difficult relationship of the Apollonian and the Dionysian ... could be symbolized by a bond of brotherhood between the two deities: Dionysus speaks the language of Apollo, but finally it is Apollo who speaks that of Dionysus' (Nietzsche, 1999:104). The Apollonian 'speaks the language' of the Dionysian in 'To Autumn': the *English* landscape of Winchester's 1819 autumn continues to live on in the '*English Idiom*' (my italics) of the poem. Far from the nightingale's 'full-throated' call, 'To Autumn' sings its own powerful native song of the English harvest:

Where are the songs of spring? Aye, where are they?
 Think not of them, thou hast thy music too—
 While barrèd clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
 And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue.
 Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
 Among the river shallows, borne aloft
 Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;

²²³ Letter to Taylor dated 27 February 1818.

²²⁴ This letter is dated 16 August 1820.

And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
Hedge-cricket sing: and now with treble soft
The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft:
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.²²⁵

3.5.6 Conclusion

From the above examination, one can perceive the ‘balance’ which exists between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in ‘To Autumn’. I argued that this ‘balance’ is achieved through the Apollonian use of language in relation to the Dionysian immersion in the natural world. The environmental conditions leading up to Keats’s composition of ‘To Autumn’ clearly heightened his sensibilities to appreciate the mellow sunlight of 1819’s autumn. In this landscape, Keats could immerse himself fully to become a ‘conduit’ for autumn’s richness. Finally, one can see that it is the deliberate employment of an ‘English Idiom’ (Apollonian) which complements the poet’s (Dionysian) immersion in the English landscape of Winchester, thus manifesting a fruitful intermingling between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in ‘To Autumn’.

3.6 CONCLUSION TO THE CHAPTER

From the various close readings in the chapter, we can appreciate the intermingling between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in four of Keats’s great odes. Like the tension evident in the tuning of a lyre’s strings, the ‘balanced tension’ in Keats’s four odes creates a sense of harmony between Apollonian and Dionysian drives in the odes. This is evident in the relationship between the natural song of the nightingale and the detailed technical structure of the poem as well as the Dionysian empathetic imagination and the Apollonian awareness of reality. Moreover, we can appreciate the duality between these two impulses in the freezing of Dionysian scenes on an Apollonian urn and in the imagination acting on a carefully designed artifact in the ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’. Furthermore, the balance between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses is also evident in the blending of abstract imagination and the concrete temple in the ‘Ode to Psyche’. Finally, we can also perceive a fruitful intermingling between Keats’s Dionysian immersion in the natural world and his conscious use of Apollonian language in the ‘Ode to Autumn’.

²²⁵ ‘To Autumn’, lines 23-33.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

In the introduction to this dissertation, the following research aims were identified:

1. To identify the Apollonian and Dionysian elements which are present in the selected Keats poems.
2. To demonstrate how these elements interrelate, modify and complement one another.
3. To finally show that there exists a balance or a perceived need for balance (to be determined in the case of each poem) between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in Keats's selected poetry and that we ought to regard both these elements as vital components of his work.

To have met the research aims defined above, this dissertation implemented 'close readings' to examine the selected poems vis-à-vis the Nietzschean theoretical framework of the study and, accordingly, the following conclusions were reached:

In the second chapter of the dissertation, I investigated the interaction between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in three of Keats's narrative verse romances. Here we focussed chiefly on narrative elements such as plot and the characters and their relations to one another. We recognised the conflict between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in *Lamia* by considering the characters of Lamia and Apollonius (and their respective influences on Lycius). Lamia, as a daemonic character, embodies the Dionysian emphasis on intuition and imagination. She first enchanted the then-reasoning and logical young Corinthian, Lycius, with her daemonically-charged Dionysian music. Her euphonious voice encouraged Lycius to leave behind the narrow confines of his one-sidedly Apollonian Corinthian society to discover the Dionysian realm of intuition and emotion. However, her sole Dionysian character does not allow any Apollonian form of reasoning into her world and thus isolates Lycius from an essential (Apollonian) part of his being. Apollonius, on the other hand, embodies a sole Apollonian worldview and oppresses Dionysian engagement with the world. He rejects the newly-found Dionysian influence on Lycius's life and, consequently, destroys Lamia. In the context of this study, Lamia thus exemplifies a romance of *imbalance* between Apollonian and Dionysian forces. Mirrored in the characters of Lamia and Apollonius (the 'warring names for Lycius's mortal division'), Keats portrays the dangers of a one-sided interaction with existence in *Lamia*. Keats's illustration of the inflexible worldviews of Lamia and Apollonius emphasise the limits of either impulse when they do not modify or complement one another. Ultimately, there is no form of 'balance' between the two impulses in *Lamia*. The poem is, nevertheless, illustrative of the fact that Keats was acutely aware at this time of the importance of a 'complex Mind, one that is imaginative and at the same time careful of its fruits, who would exist partly on sensation, partly on thought'. Lamia's character exists entirely 'on sensation' whereas Apollonius's character exists entirely 'on thought' and their unaccommodating worldviews destroy all hopes of a harmonious 'balance' between Apollonian and Dionysian principles in the romance.

In *Isabella*, much like *Lamia*, we encounter another romance of *imbalance*. The love affair of Lorenzo and Isabella is completely built around Dionysian elements of feeling and emotion. They isolate themselves from reality and withdraw into their own Dionysian 'bower of feeling'. As a result, they lose all touch with the world of objective reality. Isabella's greedy and power-hungry brothers, on the other hand, are entirely focused on cold-hearted capital gain. They pay no regard to the feelings and emotions of their sister. Contrastingly, to satisfy their own selfish and material desires, they see her as an opportunity for financial prosperity. The Apollonian (embodied by Isabella's brothers) and the Dionysian (embodied by Lorenzo and Isabella) are thus in perpetual conflict throughout the romance. There is no form of compromise and thus no fruitful intermingling between the two forces in the romance. Consequently, *Isabella*, like *Lamia* before, explores this 'thematic opposition' between the Apollonian and Dionysian and, therefore, cannot reflect a balance between Apollonian and Dionysian forces. Instead, it also portrays the dangers and limitations of an imbalanced mode of existence.

After the tragic conclusions of *Lamia* and *Isabella*, we come to the first romance with a seemingly fortunate conclusion, *The Eve of St. Agnes*. I argued that the relief at the end of the romance

also metaphorically mirrors the release from the damaging tension between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses. In *The Eve of St. Agnes*, we recognise the intermingling between the Dionysian world of sensation and Apollonian dream when Madeline's dream blends with her waking state. Madeline's awakening from her dream prompted by Porphyro's Dionysian ditty allows the lovers to escape to a world where their love can exist freely and without the constraints of their feuding families. The intermingling between Apollonian and Dionysian elements in *The Eve of St. Agnes* anticipates the high point of Apollonian and Dionysian intermingling to follow in the third chapter of the dissertation, on four of Keats's great odes.

Here, we moved away from narrative elements to chiefly investigate the poet's creative process as well as the role of the imagination played in relation to this. In the 'Ode to a Nightingale', we discerned the relationship between Apollonian form and Dionysian inspiration (exemplified by the nightingale's song). Keats's carefully crafted line indentations give permeance to and a visual representation of the fleeting transience of the nightingale's Dionysian song. Moreover, there is another instance of Apollonian and Dionysian intermingling in the theme of the poem. We identified a clear interaction between the 'viewless wings of Poesy' and the 'dull brain' in the poem. These two different functions stimulate one another to the point where the Dionysian empathetic imagination heightens our sensitivity to the natural world and living beings in our own reality. By incorporating the above elements in this way, the poem thus succeeds in subtly balancing Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in a complementing manner.

In the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', the relationship between the Apollonian and Dionysian is first evident in the Dionysian scenes embroidered on the Apollonian urn. We could perceive both the positive and negative aspects of this freezing of Dionysian passion. On the one hand, it enables an effective tempering of the darker Dionysian passions, because these darker scenes, bound to the urn, as it is, cannot develop into something more severe. On the other hand, it also serves a restrictive purpose, because it confines the more pleasing passions of young love to the urn and, accordingly, they can never reach their full potential. Furthermore, we can also appreciate the power of the empathetic Dionysian imagination acting on an Apollonian work of structured art. Keats is able to enter metaphorically into the scenes on the urn and thereby the Dionysian imagination heightens the power of the Apollonian artifice. There is thus a fruitful intermingling between the Dionysian powers of imagination and the technically sound permanent nature of the Apollonian urn.

In the 'Ode to Psyche', we explored the notion of re-enchantment through the Apollonian and Dionysian theoretical framework of the study. We discerned that Keats is able to re-enchant his 'inward mind' with a sense of sacredness by blending the ephemeral Dionysian visions of imagination with the Apollonian fixity of a temple. In this manner, there exists a productive relationship between the Apollonian and the Dionysian in the poem.

Finally, we turned to 'To Autumn'. Here we were able to identify a different type of Apollonian and Dionysian intermingling in Keats's poetry. That is, the relationship between Dionysian immersion

in the natural world and Apollonian conscious use of language. We were able to appreciate the connection between the autumnal landscape and Keats's peculiar use of an 'English idiom'. Thus, the conscious use of an 'English idiom' complements the initial immersion in the natural world, thereby creating a constructive relationship between Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in the ode in question.

From the above summaries, one can see how the above research aims were addressed and elaborated on in this dissertation. Numerous Apollonian and Dionysian elements were identified in Keats's poetry and their respective relationships were accordingly examined. On the whole, the various close readings of the selected poems collectively shed light on the importance of Apollonian and Dionysian interaction in a study of Keats's poetry.

More generally speaking, I stated in the first chapter that a study of Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in Keats's poetry might speak to our present predicaments as well. Through this study, it is clear that Keats seemed to have been acutely aware of our two different modes of being (albeit not in terms of Nietzsche's terminology). In the selected poems, we can thus appreciate the potential of both our Apollonian and Dionysian characteristics. Moreover, we can also recognise the complementing capacities of their mutual existence while also taking the limitations of a one-sided interaction with existence into consideration. In our Apollonian-dominated modern Western world, Keats's poetry ultimately encourages us to revisit our imaginative faculties, to view nature as something to be 'lived' and not merely exploited, and to adopt a 'more inclusive' way of interacting with the world around us. Consequently, we can conclude that this is one of the most fundamental reasons for reading Keats's poetry (or Romantic poetry in general) in our modern world.

Stemming from the research conducted for this dissertation, an important area for future research, I believe, lies in McGilchrist's theory of left and right hemispheric ways of attending to the world. The South African scholar, Jim Phelps (2019:8) also recognises the importance of McGilchrist's notion when he states that:

While specialised neuroscientific research has been developing fast since 2009 when his book was published, I know of no new studies that have made the hemispherical lateralisation issues as available to serious interdisciplinary readers as his book. I am confident its achievement will be recognised as a landmark with relevance for literary studies into the future.

In my view a broader Romantic study vis-à-vis McGilchrist's theory might prove inherently valuable for the study of poetry in our present mode of existence. Moreover, it might, on a more psychological level, rekindle something of the importance of Romantic ideals and ambitions in contrast to our present left-hemispheric pursuits in the modern Western world. Broadly speaking, Romanticism engages more directly with McGilchrist's conception of the right-hemisphere, and its study can accordingly provide valuable insights for restoring a more harmonious relation between our two hemispheres in future years. This would, of course, require much more extensive research and, I believe, also a more general

consideration of Romanticism, while keeping modern left-hemispheric products such as AI in mind, but it might result in a valuable perspective onto Romantic studies in contemporary criticism.

Future possibilities aside, I believe that this dissertation demonstrates that the fundamental Nietzschean perceptions of the play of Apollonian and Dionysian impulses is surely of value in an appraisal of Keats poetry.

APPENDIX: THE DIONYSIAN POET OF INTOXICATION IN THE 'ODE ON INDOLENCE'

I have decided not to include a close-reading of Keats's 'Ode on Indolence' in the main argument of this dissertation. There are a number of reasons for this omission: Firstly, the 'Ode on Indolence' was not published in the same volume (or, in fact, at all during Keats's lifetime) as all the other poems focussed on in this study were, hence including it would have disrupted any form of continuity arising from analysing poems collected in a single volume of poetry. Secondly, the 'Ode on Indolence' breaks away from the typical structure of the other odes because it 'is the only one to use an image he had created inwardly rather than discovered in the external world' (Motion, 1997:403). Lastly, my reading of the poem below considers a controversial area of Keats's poetics which requires more exhaustive investigation than was possible for the present study, and I do not want to complicate my main argument by placing this contested area at centre stage. I am also well-aware of the fact that this area of Keats's poetry (if it is indeed an actual concern) plays a minor role in comparison with the other elements of his selected poems focused on in this dissertation.

These technicalities aside, I do believe that the 'Ode on Indolence' allows us to focus on a completely different type of Apollonian-Dionysian relationship in Keats's poetry which might otherwise have been overlooked. Despite the fact that the 'Ode on Indolence' is often regarded as the

black sheep of Keats's odes,²²⁶ I agree with Bloom (1961:410) that it is 'a remarkable poem in itself'.²²⁷ Moreover, Nicholas Roe (2012) opens the door to an untrodden region of Keats's ode which sheds new light on a potentially overlooked aspect of the poem. That is, the influence which Keats's usage of laudanum might have had on the vision which inspired the poem. In what follows, I briefly elaborate on Roe's view in relation to the Apollonian and Dionysian framework of this study.

In the entry for 19 March 1819 in the February-May journal-letter to his brother and sister-in-law, Keats (2005:269-270) writes that:

Yesterday I got a black eye, the first time I took a Cricket bat. Brown who is always one's friend in a disaster applied a leech to the eyelid, and there is no inflammation this morning, though the ball hit me directly on the sight ... This morning I am in a sort of temper indolent and supremely careless ... In this state of effeminacy the fibres of the brain are relaxed in common with the rest of the body, and to such a happy degree that pleasure has no show of enticement and pain no unbearable frown. Neither Poetry, nor Ambition, nor Love have any alertness of countenance as they pass by me; they seem rather like three figures on a greek vase—a Man and two women—whom no one but myself could distinguish in their disguise. This is the only happiness and is a rare instance of advantage in the body overpowering the Mind.

This episode was obviously the inspiration for Keats's 'Ode on Indolence'. However, there is more to this letter that should give us pause. Keats briefly mentions the 'black eye' he earned from playing cricket, but then immediately moves on to the indolent nature of his morning. Roe (2012:374;424), however, argues that it seems likely that 'Keats had taken laudanum to comfort his eye' and that the 'Ode on Indolence' was written under the influence of laudanum. Consequently, according to Roe, Keats's vision of the three Greek figures was a product of the laudanum he took the previous night (and perhaps the following morning as well). Moreover, he notes that laudanum was a 'standard painkiller' and that Keats, realising its effect (and potential) in his short medical career, was 'almost certainly dosing himself' with the drug. Furthermore, Roe (as quoted in Klinkenborg, 2012) also states that it was not uncommon for Keats to use laudanum, because, in his day and age, 'it was the only painkiller that worked'. We certainly know that Keats frequently made use of this tincture of opium in alcohol to ease his brother Tom's pain when he nursed him in his final days (Roe, 2012:374;392).

²²⁶ See, for example: Evert (1965:305), Stillinger (1968:5), Bate (1982:528) and Jack (1967:244).

²²⁷ Michael O'Neill (1997:xlii), similarly, suggests that it is 'an underestimated and central poem'. Moreover, there have been serious studies of the poem by scholars such as Margaret Yeates Robertson (1970) and William F. Zak (1976). In recent years, Carmen Fay Mathes (2014), Stacy McDowell (2018) and Susan J. Wolfson (2022) provide more detailed readings of the poem.

Roe's insights caused Keats's poem to earn a rare feature in popular press publications such as *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*. In an interview with *The Guardian*, Roe stated that if the poem's inspiration arose from an opium reverie, we encounter a 'less intellectual or philosophical Keats, and a poet who is closer to the mystical aspects of Romantic tradition associated with Blake, Baudelaire, Coleridge, De Quincey, Yeats, Huxley and Bob Dylan' (as quoted in Hill, 2012).²²⁸ Everest (2021:81) supports Roe's view when he writes about the events leading up to Keats's indolent state which inspired him to write the poem in question:

This indolence was accompanied, and no doubt encouraged by other traits of behaviour in the weeks before the meeting with Coleridge. This was probably the period when Keats's drinking was at its heaviest, though the evidence is sketchy. Keats particularly liked claret, another detail which is woven into the odes, and the headiness of intoxication was certainly being routinely experienced by regular self-dosings with laudanum, the alcoholic tincture of opium.

One must, nevertheless, be cautious not to overexaggerate the influence of opium on the poem as it was so readily available and easily prescribed in the Romantic period. It was routinely used for all sorts of ailments including everyday conditions such as headaches. Therefore, when Keats (1970:542-544) used opium to soothe the pain of his black eye, he perhaps intended for it to be nothing more than a standard painkiller, but its effects might have subterraneously stimulated the vision which inspired the poem:

One morn before me were three figures seen,
With bowèd necks, and joinèd hands, side-faced;
And one behind the other stepped serene,
In placid sandals, and in white robes graced;
They passed, like figures on a marble urn²²⁹

The 'three figures' mentioned in the opening lines of the poem form the basis of Keats's 'Ode on Indolence'. Moreover, the vision, as Roe and Everest assert, might have been 'encouraged by other traits of behaviour' such as Keats's 'self-dosing with laudanum'. From this point of view, the Keats of 'Ode on Indolence' comes closest to the true Dionysian poet of 'intoxication' operating 'under the influence of narcotic drink' (Nietzsche, 1999:17) and relying on 'the headiness of intoxication' to inspire

²²⁸ Motion (as quoted in Hill, 2012) contested Roe's belief due to lack of concrete evidence in Keats's letters: 'The former poet laureate Andrew Motion, winner of the Whitbread prize for biography and author of a biography of the poet, has said Roe made "assumptions" about Keats and his use of opiates that "simply have no warrant".'

²²⁹ 'Ode on Indolence', lines 1-5.

and vitalise his visions. The vision of the three 'Shadows' dressed in 'placid sandals' and 'white robes' might, therefore, have been the effect of the intoxicating powers of his laudanum usage. We have focused on the metaphorical notion of an 'intoxication of feelings' caused by an overabundance of unmitigated emotions, but we have not, up to this point, considered the presence of literal 'Dionysian drunkenness' in Keats's poetry (Nietzsche, 1999:19). M.H. Abrams (1971:4) notes the following about opium's inspirational faculties in the Romantic period:

The great gift of opium to these men was access to a new world as different from this as Mars may be and one which ordinary mortals, hindered by terrestrial conceptions, can never, from mere description, quite comprehend. It is a world of twisted, exquisite experience, sensuous and intellectual ... Above all, in this enchanted land, man is freed at last from those petty bonds upon which Kant insists: time and space.

The three 'Phantoms' of indolence are certainly part of an 'enchanted land'; they are not 'ordinary mortals', but 'Ghosts' from an ancient Grecian realm. They do not exist in our 'time and space', but occupy an otherworldly realm; 'a new world' only made known to the poet in his indolent trance. There is another statement in Keats's letter on the poem which we should consider in greater detail as it links up with Abrams's view on opium visions in the Romantic period. Keats writes that his indolent trance (which was possibly promoted by his use of laudanum) 'is a rare instance of advantage in the body overpowering the Mind'. One can easily overlook this statement in the letter due to the absorbing and mysterious presence of the three Greek figures. However, I believe it provides an important insight for us to fully comprehend his indolent state. If the 'body' overpowers the 'Mind', we can understand it as fundamentally Dionysian, and, in this state, one possesses the capability to suspend all thought. The 'fibres of the brain are relaxed' to the point where 'man is freed at last from those petty bonds' and one is no longer alert to the hindrances of 'terrestrial conceptions' which our everyday realities impose upon us. His opium-induced indolent trance thus reflects a detachment and indifference to reality and its affairs. Only when the 'body' overpowers the 'Mind' can one be so 'supremely careless' as Keats describes in his letter. In a similar vein, we might again recall Nietzsche's (1999:40) notion of the 'Dionysian state':

... the Dionysian state, in which the usual barriers and limits of existence are destroyed, contains, for as long as it lasts, a *lethargic* element in which all personal experiences from the past are submerged. This gulf of oblivion separates the worlds of everyday life and Dionysian experience.

The vision of the three Greek figures is not part of the world where the 'usual barriers and limits of existence' are pressing concerns. However, through Dionysian intoxication, the poet is able to share in this ancient realm. For a moment, the presence of his own 'time and space' is suspended and he shares in the 'time and space' of his Dionysian vision. We can, thus, identify an idiosyncratic relationship between the Apollonian and Dionysian in the 'Ode on Indolence'. The 'Dionysian experience' takes place outside the everyday world of 'time and space': its domain is 'The blissful cloud of summer indolence' where 'Pain had no sting, and pleasure's wreath no flower'. The poet shares in this vision and gains 'access to a new world' much different from his ordinary one (although his everyday obsessions, Love, Poesy and Ambition remain, to some extent, still present). The actual poem, though, needs to be written as an act of 'everyday life' in the world where 'time and space' are of greater significance. The poem can, therefore, be tentatively regarded as a Dionysian inspired vision which is recalled in a more sobering Apollonian mode of contemplation. There is thus a discernible relationship between the inspirational faculties of Dionysian intoxication and the meticulous act of actually composing a poem:

So, ye three Ghosts, adieu! Ye cannot raise
My head cool-bedded in the flowery grass;
For I would not be dieted with praise,
A pet-lamb in a sentimental farce!
Fade softly from my eyes, and be once more
In masque-like figures on the dreamy urn.
Farewell! I yet have visions for the night,
And for the day faint visions there is store.
Vanish, ye Phantoms, from my idle sprite
Into the clouds, and never more return!²³⁰

Keats finally banishes the 'three Ghosts' of his Dionysian vision in the concluding stanza of the poem. He asks them to 'Fade softly from' his 'eyes', but they will never be mere 'masque-like figures on the dreamy urn' again. For Keats, they became alive in his 'Dionysian experience'. Consequently, they

²³⁰ 'Ode on Indolence', lines 51-60.

became the inspiration for a poem and will, as a natural result of his Apollonian recollection of the vision, live on in the poem. They might have easily and unnoticeably drifted away into their habitual ‘enchanted land’ (‘Into the clouds, and never more return’), but the poet is able to recall this experience in a more contemplative Apollonian mood which results in the actual writing of the poem. Although he banishes them, their presence is forever captured in the poem. Whether the vision of the three graces was encouraged by laudanum or a mere idleness of mood, we will perhaps never know. But if Keats used the drug to soothe his injury, the possibility of an opium revery (and its Romantic connotations) remains, at least, a possibility. From this perspective, the Keats of the ‘Ode on Indolence’ comes very close to the Dionysian poet of intoxication in its most literal form.

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²³¹ For the referencing of YouTube videos, the NWU referencing guide stipulates that one should mention the YouTube channel and the specific date and year at the beginning of the respective reference. Hence, my idiosyncratic references to YouTube sources in this bibliography (and to in-text citations in the dissertation).

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