KEATS'S ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE

BY RICHARD HARTER FOGLE

The Nightingale ode has been judiciously dealt with from inside the tradition of Keats scholarship by such experts as Sir Sidney Colvin, Ernest de Sélincourt, Douglas Bush, and H. W. Garrod. Recent reinterpretations by Brooks and Warren, by Thomas and Brown, by Allen Tate, F. R. Leavis, Marshall McLuhan, G. Wilson Knight, Albert Guérard, Jr., and others, have brought the Ode into contact with current critical theories. In following them here I can, I believe, be most useful by steering something of a middle course between the modern and traditional: with, however, an unusual emphasis upon general English Romanticism. My explication, then, will consider the Ode to a Nightingale as a Romantic poem, and will venture some exposition of its Romantic principles. I shall also try to bear in mind the implications of recent criticism.

The Nightingale is a Romantic poem of the family of Kubla Khan and The Eve of St. Agnes in that it describes a choice and rare experience, intentionally remote from the commonplace. Nowadays we sometimes underrate the skill required for this sort of thing. The masters of Romantic magic were aware that ecstasy, for example, is not adequately projected by crying, “I am ecstatic!” Keats gets his effects in the Nightingale by framing the consummate moment in oppositions, by consciously emphasizing its brevity; he sets off his ideal by the contrast of the actual. 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. These terms are of course only expedients; they are products of “that false secondary power which multiplies distinctions,” and I fear might easily be multiplied still further. I defend them as the best I am able to frame, and as necessary for analysis.

The drugged, dull pain in lines 1–4 is a frame and a contrast for the poignant pleasure of the climax; at the same time, it is inseparable from it. “Extremes meet,” as Coleridge was fond of saying, and as Keats also has said elsewhere in A Song of Opposites and the Ode on Melancholy. They meet because they are extremes, as very hot and cold water are alike to the touch—their extremity is their affinity—and because of a Romantic prepossession to unity of experience, which in Keats was a matter of temperament as well as of conviction. Both pleasure and pain are deliberately heightened, and meet in a common intensity. The pain
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is the natural sequel of "too much happiness," the systole to the diastole of joy.

'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,  
But being too happy in thine happiness,—

Despite this disavowal of envy, perhaps the envy is about the same as being "too happy." The felicity which is permanent in the nightingale is transient and therefore excessive in the poet. It is too heavy a burden to be borne more than briefly, and dangerous in its transience. Its attractions make everyday living ugly by contrast. Cleanth Brooks has defined as the theme of the poem "the following paradox: the world of the imagination offers a release from the painful world of actuality, yet at the same time it renders the world of actuality more painful by contrast." Allen Tate has called the Nightingale "an emblem of one limit of our experience: the impossibility of synthesizing, in the order of experience, the antiny of the ideal and the real." Both statements strike into the crucial dilemma of the Romantic imagination, a basic donnée of the Romantic poet which he may turn to his advantage or his bane as he is able to cope with it. Good Romantic poems, like Kubla Khan and the Nightingale, define this dilemma, dramatize it, and transform it to a source of strength. Such poetry accepts the risk to get at the value, in full awareness of the issues. To affirm either that the difficulty itself is avoidable, or that it could be definitively solved by a properly framed discourse, would be to talk of something other than poetry.

The theme of stanza 2 is plenitude. The ideal lies in fullness. The nightingale sings "in full-throated ease," the longed-for beaker is "full of the warm South, / Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene." This fullness contrasts with the sad satiety of stanza 3, "Where but to think is to be full of sorrow"; it is modulated in the "embalmed darkness" of stanza 5, in richness of sensuous texture; and it ends in stanza 6 in a climactic fullness of song:

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

The fabric of stanza 2 is too fine for common wear, a happiness too great, a conjunction of circumstances impossibly appropriate. The draught of vintage has been "Cooled a long age in the deep-delved earth," the quite un-Miltonic fount of the Muses is "the true, the blushful Hippocrene," and the beaker is brim-full, with "purple-stained mouth." Such concentration of effect is probably what Keats had in mind when he

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advised Shelley to "load every rift with ore." Here it is used to image a
Golden Age, before Jove reigned, of fullness, gusto, ease, and freedom.
To achieve this ideal, however, the imagination builds upon the finite
actual. The passage is deliberately pure and quintessential—the ore has
been refined—and in its purity delicately defiant and mirthful. Such
writing is a Romantic equivalent of metaphysical wit. It differs from the
metaphysical mode in its more thorough subordination to the total
meaning.

The draught of vintage, itself an instrument of imagination, symbo-
lizes an imaginative escape from actuality. The longing to "fade away
into the forest dim" is in order to avoid another kind of fading away, the
melancholy dissolutions of change and physical decay. The world of
stanza 3 is the antitype of the golden world of 2: for ease is substituted
"the weariness, the fever, and the fret," for plenitude "a few sad, last
grey hairs." It is a world of privation, "Where youth grows pale, and
spectre-thin, and dies."

In his judicial reading of the Ode to a Nightingale Mr. Allen Tate finds
little to say for this stanza. It is bad eighteenth-century personification,
without on the one hand Pope's precision, or the energy of Blake on the
other. "It gives us," says Mr. Tate, "... a 'picture' of common reality,
in which the life of man is all mutability and frustration. But here if
anywhere in the poem the necessity to dramatize time or the pressure of
actuality, is paramount. Keats has no language of his own for this realm of
experience" (p. 174). Keats's mode is pictorial, and this mode "allows
him to present the thesis of his dilemma, the ideality of the nightingale
symbol, but not the antithesis, the world of common experience, which is
the substance of stanza three... The climax contains a little less than
the full situation; it reaches us a little too simplified" (p. 176).

My dissent can be summarized in the counter-assertion that, with
certain inevitable reservations, the privation is as vividly realized as is
the ideal plenitude. The personifications of age, youth, beauty, and love are
vitalized by their contexts; they are comparable to "Veiled Melancholy"
in "her sovran shrine" in the Ode on Melancholy, and the personifications
of To Autumn. The particulars transform the abstractions, which are
themselves explicable as necessary economies in a broadly typical ac-
count. (Any sort of detailed and documented realism would be un-
thinkable.) Time and the pressure of actuality, Mr. Tate to the contrary,
are dramatized in parallelism, repetition, and progression. "The wear-
iness, the fever, and the fret"; "a few, sad, last grey hairs"; "grows pale,
and spectre-thin, and dies"; here is the process of tedium, time, and de-
cay; here is the very movement of the meaning. The fourfold repetition
of "Where" is a further reinforcement, with its rhetorical suggestion of
rising emotion to counterbalance the falling series of time. The stanza, one may well assert, has an intensity equal to its antithesis of the imaginative ideal, as Douglas Bush has remarked in his persuasive argument that the real theme of Keats's six great odes is the sadness of mutability. It has also, what Professor Bush failed to point out, an energy of thought and a complex suavity which is best indicated in the last two lines—an effect in which personification plays a considerable part.

One grows uncomfortably aware of the limits of explication upon such an issue. I cannot say what shadows of Tom Keats and Fanny Brawne may haunt my reading of stanza 3, nor what reverberations from that old-fashioned doctrine of sincerity. One is left, at any rate, with a feeling that objective analysis goes only halfway—an avowal the humility of which is perhaps damaged by the fact that I wish to hit Mr. Tate with it more than myself. Assuming that Keats is a pictorial poet, he finds stanza 3 inadequately pictorial. Here he is pushing a metaphor too far. The Nightingale does not seem a notably pictorial poem; in it the associations of objects are much more important than their outlines.

The crucial issue, however, is the conception of unity implied by Mr. Tate's criticism. What can properly be asked of a poem? The first consideration in the Nightingale ode is the imaginative experience of the ideal. Different elements come into the picture, but there is at bottom one emphasis only. The objection to stanza 3 comes from very interesting assumptions about the nature of poetic unity, wholeness, and the reconciliation of opposites, which should be examined.

According to these assumptions unity is less important than wholeness, which in turn might be defined as an ideal reconciliation of all possible opposites. I argue against them that no poem is whole in this sense, or finally in any but its own terms. No poem contains all modes of experience, or even two experiences or ideas projected with equal force. The reconciliation of equal opposites is a theoretical, not an actual process; it would be colorless, odorless, tasteless, faceless. All logical opposites stand to each other in a dual relationship. They are first conceived as equals in that they are opposed; but they then arrange themselves in varying relations of inequality. Imagination can be reconciled to reason as the whole of which reason is a part; or the relation may be one of predominance, in which some elements of the weaker opposite are sacrificed to bring it into line—as a conservative will argue that he has incorporated the best features of progressivism into his conservative system. Opposites can be reconciled through related qualities of feeling, or simply by having common attributes. In a loose sense they may be said to be reconciled.

through the fact that they co-exist, as in the Romantic assumption that reality is One. The concept of the reconciliation of opposites, then, covers many processes, none of which corresponds precisely with the theoretical ideal. And none of these processes can be dismissed as in itself incomplete or dishonest.

If a poem, then, is thought of as a logical argument (which is to use an imperfect metaphor), the poet is under no obligation to do literal justice to both sides of the question, which would in any event be impossible. He does enough if he makes his argument interesting. If he also shows an awareness of other opinions, so much the better. If he seems crucially engaged with his problem we permit him to be a little unceremonious. In the *Nightingale* Keats is both interesting and as well-mannered as a man need be who is expressing his convictions. He is affirming the value of the ideal, and this is the primary fact. He is also paying due tribute to the power of the actual, and this is an important but secondary consideration. The stress of the poem lies in the conflict of value and power. Keats is at once agonized and amused at the inescapable discrepancy between them. He reconciles them by a prior imaginative acceptance of the unity of experience, by means of which he invests them with a common extremity and intensity of feeling. He need not give equal attention to both, for the actual can take care of itself; it is the frail ideal which requires bolstering.

The manner of Keats’s reconciliation of opposites appears in stanza 4:

> Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
> But on the viewless wings of Poesy . . .

This rejection is only ostensible. Like Coleridge, and as W. H. Auden has lately remarked about the Romantics in general, Keats prefers “both . . . and” to “either . . . or.” The “draught of vintage” is not cancelled by, but combined with the vision in the forest, which deepens rather than discards the suggestions of “Flora and the country green.” The intuitive speed of imagination is dramatized by “Already with thee!” The forest scene is Romantically picturesque without being really pictorial: one does not visualize it, but its composition is describable in visual metaphor. Its unity is a matter of blending, with objects softened and distanced by the veil of darkness, which itself shades off into moonlight filtered through forest leaves. The moonlight, a symbol of imagination, intermingling with darkness evokes the enchantment of mystery, the wondrous secret just out of reach. After thus using suggestion Keats goes on to specification, much as he has done with “Bacchus and his pards.” The imagery is particular and sensuous, but not highly visual. Hawthorne, eglantine, violets, and musk rose are important chiefly for their pastoral associations.
In the total effect sensations are blended in a soft and complex unity. Odor merges with touch and kinesthetic strain in “what soft incense hangs upon the boughs.” “The grass, the thicket, and the fruit tree wild” have tactual and plastic qualities. The “fast fading violets” are invested with organic sensation through empathy by being “covered up in leaves,” and the associations of the musk rose include taste and sound. As in stanza 2 the theme is fullness, but with an added poignance and complexity from the introduction of darkness and death. The generous fertility of Nature is inseparable from the grave, the height demands its complement in depth, and intesest life turns imperceptibly to its opposite.

The death theme, however, may easily be made too much of. The embalmed darkness and the fast fading violets certainly suggest it, but the imaginative escape of stanza 4 is less into death (or the womb) than into an ideal nature. The death of stanza 5 is, indeed, a reasonable inference from the experience of the forest. As freedom, ease, intensity, plenitude, and consummation the two are one. Death is easyful and rich, it is associated with the nightingale’s song in lavishness of giving. “To cease upon the midnight” is in one respect the same as “pouring forth thy soul abroad.” In each is an outpouring, and a release from the pruning self. This imaginative acceptance of death is not, however, unreserved. “I have been half in love with easyful Death” and “Now more than ever seems it rich to die” are measured statements. The acceptance, in fact, includes the reservation, since it is an acceptance of the limits as well as the freedoms of this death:

Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
To thy high requiem become a sod.

Momentarily death has identified Keats with the nightingale, but only momentarily. Its meaning shifts from the most heightened consciousness to blank oblivion, and what seemed pure spirit is sheer inert mass.

In another swift transition the death theme turns to a basis for the immortality of the nightingale: a shift which restresses both the identification and the withdrawal from the identification. We are probably no longer greatly troubled by the objection seen by Robert Bridges, that the bird is obviously not immortal.4

H. W. Garrod has remarked that the nightingale commences as a particular bird, but is imaginatively transformed to a myth in such phrases as “light-winged Dryad of the trees.”5 The objection has also

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been met by the suggestion that Keats is thinking of the species, not the
individual nightingale. Both of these solutions seem provisionally true;
a little further on I wish to comment on the mortal-immortal difficulty
as it is peculiar to Keats’s imagination. In stanza 7, at any rate, the bird
is a universal and undying voice: the voice of nature, of imaginative
sympathy, and therefore of an ideal Romantic poetry, infinitely powerful
and profuse (compare the “profuse strains of unpremeditated art” of
Shelley’s Skylark, and the “music loud and long” of Kubla Khan). As
sympathy it resolves all differences into the main fact of what Hawthorne
has called the magnetic chain of humanity. It speaks to high and low;
it comforts the human homesickness of Ruth and frees her from bitter
isolation; and equally it opens the casements of the remote and magical.
Lines 65–70 perhaps contain the two kinds of Romanticism which Cole-
ridge differentiated in Chapter xiv of Biographia Literaria: but the do-
meric and the exotic varieties are linked by their common purpose of
fusing the usual with the strange. Ruth is distanced and framed by time
and rich association, but in relation to the magic casements she is homely
and familiar.

These magic casements are the apex and the climax of the imaginative
experience. They are deliberately towering and frail, dramatizing the
value, the gallantry, and the precariousness of the Romantic imagination
at its height. They are connected with the actual by defying it, by their
affirmation that what the mind can imagine is beauty and truth, an ex-
erience to be prized all the more for its brevity. The different senses of
“forlorn,” upon which Mr. Brooks has acutely commented (p. 31), relate
the passage to Ruth as well as to the final stanza, which returns to com-
mon earth. Ruth is forlorn in her loneliness. The faery lands are pleas-
urably forlorn in a remoteness which is really the condition of their
value. “Forlorn” is like a bell which tolls the death of the imagination.

Stanza 8, despite the suddenness of the transition, is nevertheless a
soft and quiet withdrawal from the heights. “The fancy cannot cheat so
well / As she is famed to do” is not a rejection of imagination, but part
of the total experience. The diction is unobtrusively lowered, to give an
effect of half-humorous ruefulness. The inner movement of the conclu-
sion is objectified in the gradual fading of the song, “Past the near mead-
ows, over the still stream, / Up the hillside,” in a perfect fusion of out-
ward setting with mental experience. I am unable to see deep significance
in the fact that the bird is now “buried deep / In the next valley-glade,”
but it would seem that it works like Wordsworth’s

But there’s a tree, of many, one,
A single field which I have looked upon,
Both of them speak of something that is gone,
by emphasizing a difference in sameness. The line recalls the “embalmed darkness” of the forest dim, and thus realizes the gulf between the earlier participation and the final withdrawal.

Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music—do I wake or sleep?

These questions are objective in that they portray rather than abstract from Keats's state of mind. Like the beginning of the poem they suggest a prostrating reaction to an experience too powerful to be mastered, while as questions they also express an attempt to control and to understand it. Intellectually they raise a vital issue of Romanticism, which might be underlined by remembering that Keats's original draft ran, “Was it a vision real or waking dream?” It is the problem of the truth of imagination, which adds a further tension to the various stresses of actual and ideal. “I am certain,” wrote Keats, “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.” Which was the dream, and which the reality? Which was the true, the peak or the plain, the rare or the commonplace, the ideal of permanence or the fact of change?

The answer concerns our problem of the reconciliation of opposites. The imaginative ideal is in a sense more true because it is more valuable, and the Ode to a Nightingale celebrates the poetic imagination. As it opposes the ideal to the actual, imagination against commonsense reason, imagination and ideal still predominate. They stand to their opposites as high against low, apex against base, action against reaction. Ideal and actual meet only as extremes, joined in the circle of experience. But the full power of the poem comes from adding the deadly question, is not the worse the true, the better the illusion? Should we not change the meaning of truth?

The Ode to a Nightingale contains the highest, the fullest, the most intense, the most valuable mental experience which Keats can imagine. This is its center, this the basis of its unity. Within this unity, however, is a complex of feeling and thought which moves in alternate swellings and subsidences, a series of waves, each with its attendant trough. These waves are not of equal height; they rise gradually to a climax in stanza 7, and the rise subsides in the conclusion. Herbert Marshall McLuhan has suggested the musical organization of the fugue to define the structures of Keats’s odes. Most ambitious Romantic poems of inner experience,
indeed, offer wide variety of mood, with sudden and dramatic transitions. The *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*, with its organ-like swellings and sinkings, and its abrupt and effective changes of direction, is similar to the *Nightingale* in organization. Both make central affirmations, and both make these affirmations interesting by providing a controlled complexity of movement based upon a crucial suspense. Keats concludes with a question and Wordsworth with an answer, of course, but then Wordsworth knew more answers than Keats.

I have repeatedly made use of the metaphors of wholeness and intensity in this essay. In explication they are radically metaphors, I believe, rather than complete concepts. The theory of wholeness earlier imputed to Mr. Tate is a characteristically modern idea, equivalent to the metaphysical wit described by Eliot, the inclusive poetry of Richards, the ironic poetry of Brooks and Warren, and the modern poetry of knowledge adumbrated by John Crowe Ransom in *The World’s Body*, which is not the poetry of children, nor of the heart’s desire, but of the fallen mind, “since ours too are fallen.” Such poetry is to be armed at all points, invulnerable to irony. Nothing can be objected to it, for it has foreseen all objections. It is a poetry of wholeness in that it has synthesized all conceivable arguments and attitudes. It follows that its conception of synthesis emphasizes the number and the diversity of the elements to be synthesized, and gives correspondingly less attention to the synthesizing agent. A poem constructed on this theory would emphasize difficulties and contradictions, discords and roughness, and only on inspection should its unity emerge, ideally the more satisfying because it has been struggled for.

Keats’s notion of wholeness has the same elements as the modern, but with a different order and emphasis. “The excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth.”9 Here the agent of synthesis comes first, the unity and the harmony, not the complexity and the discordance. The “disagreeables” must be attended to, but Keats is confident that they can be “evaporated” in intensity. The difference in emphasis might be illustrated in Tate’s comments on Longinus’ famous account of Sappho’s ode. In Longinus Mr. Tate sees an early exponent of the reconciliation of opposites, who is using wholeness and complexity as his criteria of excellence.10 A Romantic, however, would probably settle first upon the passion which has unified the complexity, and would then interest himself in Longinus’ remarks about the principle

9 *Letters of Keats*, p. 71.
of selection in the poem. Sappho does not give everything, but only a selected part of the whole. The ode is an essence, not an imitation of reality. The details are chosen for the greatest intensity of concentration, with the irrelevant and trivial excluded.

Intense concentration of effect in Keats, the loading every rift with ore, is a way of obtaining profusion, as the Nightingale itself demonstrates. F. R. Leavis has said that "One remembers the poem both as recording, and as being for the reader, an indulgence." I find Mr. Leavis too austere, but he points out a quality which Keats plainly sought for. His profusion and prodigality is, however, modified by a principle of sobriety. He has recorded both the profusion and its attendant restraint: 1st. I think poetry should surprise by a fine excess, and not by singularity; it should strike the reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost as a remembrance.

2nd. Its touches of beauty should never be halfway, thereby making the reader breathless, instead of content. The rise, the progress, the setting of Imagery should, like the sun, come natural to him, shine over him, and set soberly, although in magnificence, leaving him in the luxury of twilight . . .

Another axiom—that if poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all.12

This passage can be taken, I think, to represent the artistic purposes of the Nightingale. Wholeness, intensity, and naturalness are its appropriate standards. Nature is, indeed, the real norm—the physical face of nature, as it appears to the Romantic imagination—and wholeness and intensity are attributes of nature, as are freedom, ease, spontaneity, harmony, and sobriety. Imagined as the Golden Age of Flora and the country green, and more fully as the forest of the nightingale, it becomes first the bird, the voice of nature; then the ideal poet; and finally the ideal itself. This nature is the antithesis of the privative actual in stanza 3.

The nature of the Nightingale is particular, since it conforms to its dramatic situation. The rich darkness of the forest is peculiar to the poem, not literally entire and universal. The poet uses his donnée, and no extension of his symbols will transcend its limits. Given his particular and concrete nature, Keats infers from it peace, fulfillment, and ideal freedom. His apprehension of nature is characteristically Romantic but peculiarly his own in its sensuous immediacy. While he feels the Romantic impulsion toward an overarching and ideal unity, in him the sensuous

12 Letters of Keats, p. 108. Punctuation and capitals altered.
real is inseparable from its ideal opposite. It is as if for Keats the primary and secondary imaginations of Coleridge were one, and the process of “dissolving, diffusing, dissipating, in order to recreate” unnecessary to him. To his apprehension physical nature is immediately absolute and permanent. In the Nightingale, as in To Autumn, he arrests change in mid-motion by contemplation apotheosized, which fixes the temporal object within a timeless frame. And thus the immortality of the nightingale; it is a question of focus. Nature is always dying but always alive, forever changing but always the same. With the nightingale Keats fixes his imagination upon sameness and life.

The standard of nature involves effects of spontaneity and artlessness which sometimes confuse us into suspecting that the poet is confusing his art with reality. The Romantics have laid themselves open to this misconstruction, but it is nevertheless a great mistake to take their artistic imitations for experience in the raw. The Nightingale imitates spontaneity without being spontaneous. Its opening lines, for example, are calculated to disarm judgment by a show of unrehearsed feeling. These lines are, however, a classic instance of Keats’s technique. The repeated suggestions in “as though of hemlock I had drunk,” “emptied some dull opiate to the drains,” and “Lethe-wards had sunk,” with their undersong of assonance, are obviously more than coincidental.

The transitional links of the poem are also at first sight spontaneous and merely associational. They are too invariably happy, however, to be literally unpremeditated. H. W. Garrod has asserted that the transitions of the Nightingale are governed by Keats’s intoxication with his own words. “... the infection of his own accidents of style, if I may so call them, compels the direction of thought; the rhythm and words together determine the stanza which comes next ...” 13 One wonders what or who determines the rhythm and words. More recently Albert Guérand, Jr., viewing the Nightingale as a poem which consummately expresses the universal impulse toward submersion of consciousness, has said that this impulse is a “longing not for art but a free reverie of any kind. The form of the poem is that of progression by association, so that the movement of feeling is at the mercy of words evoked by chance, such words as fade and forlorn, the very word which like a bell tolls the dreamer back to his sole self.” 14 This passage occurs in an interesting and a favorable account of the poem. Mr. Guérand, like Mr. Garrod, admires Keats. Nevertheless, “longing not for art but a free reverie of any kind,” and “the movement of the feeling is at the mercy of words evoked by chance” constitute damaging charges, indicting the Ode for bad art and

13 Keats, p. 111.
14 “Prometheus and the Aeolian Lyre,” Yale Review, xxxiii (1944), 495.
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low-grade mental activity. Such charges against Romantic poems have become rather frequent since Babbitt reigned. A Romantic critic still has trouble answering them, however, because their assumptions are strange to him. One is always dismayed to find what he had happily taken for a virtue suddenly and persuasively attacked as one of the lower forms of vice.

I will nevertheless venture some suggestions on the specific problem of associational transitions like "fade away" and "forlorn." To adopt Mr. McLuhan's musical analogy, they are motifs woven into a varied musical pattern. Dramatically they are important in objectifying the theme in a word, revealing instantaneously the central stress of the poem. They work like Wordsworth's tree, which focusses the problem of his ode, "Where is it now, the glory and the dream?" in a single concrete image. So "fade away" and "forlorn" dramatize sharply the two states of mind in the poem. Why they should be said to control the movement of the feeling is not clear to me; they appear only to indicate the movement, as patches of foam on the tops of the swells.

It is easy to make nonsense of the Romantic aesthetic of nature by noticing only its major term, and omitting its elaborate qualifications. Coleridge gives its true emphasis, I think, in describing poetic imagination as the power which "while it blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature, the manner to the matter; and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry." The natural must be blended with the artificial; art is to be subordinated, not extinguished. In this context art is to be understood as the appearance of art, as it strikes the eye of the beholder; Coleridge is not establishing a quota on the art which can actually go into the poem.

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15 Biographia Literaria. Ch. xiv.