THE IMMORTALITY OF THE NATURAL:
KEATS’ “ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE”

BY ANDREW J. KAPPEL

The seventh stanza of Keats’ “Ode to a Nightingale,” famous for an unexpected allusion to the Book of Ruth and for a peculiar resistance to criticism, begins with a bald assertion of the immortality of the nightingale.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down.

These lines initiate the vexed issue of the bird’s immortality which is still, despite much discussion, a stumbling block to satisfactory interpretation of the stanza. Several critics speculate that the immortality is only relative, that Keats’ assertion refers not to an individual bird but to a species, whose longevity makes negligible the lifetime of any single member.¹ The chief objection to this interpretation is that by the same token, the relative longevity of the species, man as well as the nightingale is immortal. This of course cannot be the case because the poem explores and insists upon the generic difference between mortal and immortal. In determining the basis of Keats’ claim for the bird’s immortality what we want is an explanation that grounds the immortality in an aspect of the bird’s nature that is not shared by man and hence that does not qualify him, too, for immortality.

Some critics who, for the reason just cited, reject the generic basis of the bird’s immortality, prefer a symbolic interpretation of the nightingale, locating the basis of the claim to immortality in that symbolic significance.² According to David Perkins, who most fully argues this position, the bird or, more accurately, its song is the composite lyric voice of poetry as it has sounded throughout the ages and whose life extends beyond the deaths of successive individual bards.³ This explanation is subject to the same objection as the former. It humanizes the bird and in the process erases the poem’s raison d’être. If the nightingale’s song is a symbol of lyric poetry, the words “immortal Bird” must refer to the Poet. In which case, Keats, identifying singer and song (and perhaps anticipating

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Yeats, who couldn’t distinguish dancer from dance), ends up asserting a type of human immortality.

These two interpretations of Keats’ nightingale, in the first case as a representative of a species and in the second as a symbol of lyric poetry (or more broadly, of all art), have provided valuable critical insights into the poem. The latter, for instance, leads to Perkins’ seminal notion of symbolic debate. But when we look to them to explain the nature of the bird’s immortality, they prove inadequate. Critics have naturally turned toward them for this purpose, however, because of the seventh stanza of the poem.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the selfsame 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 ofttimes hath
Charm’d magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Critics perceive a note “of strain”4 in the opening assertion and then guess that in the lines that follow Keats is trying to explain and defend the statement he has just made by suggesting a basis for the claim of immortality. Since Keats refers to past instances of the nightingale’s song, to past generations of nightingales that sang to past generations of men, the generic basis seems intimated. At the same time, the voice referred to is that of literary nightingales; this suggests the symbolic interpretation. Certainly, these are important dimensions of the nightingale’s identity; but neither explains why it is immortal and man is not. We need not suspect Keats of wobbly thinking, however, because there is, I will argue, another dimension of the bird’s significance, one that provides a basis for immortality that excludes human claims, and one, moreover, that is evident throughout the poem. This eliminates the supposed need to justify the assertion after it is made and allows us to see the lines that follow it as something other than unconvincing evidence for a self-consciously extreme claim.

II

According to Charles Brown’s famous account of the poem’s composition, there was a nightingale singing while Keats wrote. In fact,

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according to Brown, Keats had heard the song of the nightingale many times before the morning of composition; on that particular day, says Brown, Keats moved his chair "from the breakfast table to the grass-plot under a plum-tree." To begin with, then, Keats' nightingale is an actual bird in an actual tree, a comfortable inhabitant of the natural world whose song, heard through the poet's sensual ear, has drawn him from the human ceremony of breakfast to infiltrate the natural occasion involving grass-plot, plum-tree and singing bird.

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

As Earl Wasserman has pointed out in *The Finer Tone*, by calling the bird a "Dryad," a creature whose being "is that of the tree it inhabits" (p. 186), Keats stresses the naturalness of the bird. The wine,

Cool'd for a long age in the deep-delved earth,  
Tasting of Flora and the country green,

derives from and embodies the natural world and therefore the forgetfulness it promises might well constitute the desired naturalizing of the human which the poet undertook when he moved his chair from the breakfast table into the plum-tree's shade. The trajectory of the bird's withdrawal at the end of the poem is an indication that its ontological status as a natural being is maintained to the end. As it withdraws, it moves from one natural setting to another, never ventures outside nature and seems, indeed, to retreat ever more deeply into the natural world.

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.

The movement from the breakfast table to the grass-plot is the advance that balances (and perhaps forces) this retreat.

The ontological difference between the nightingale and the poet is the difference between a purely natural being and a human being. This ontological difference gives rise to the essential experiential distinction between the two beings, around which the poem is built: the bird is oblivious to death, man painfully aware of it. This dis-
tinction between natural and human experience is directly stated elsewhere in Keats’ poetry. For instance, in “Drear-Nighted December” obliviousness to death or awareness of it is revealed as the sole determinant of the quality—whether happy or woeful—of an existence. Like the tree in the first stanza of the poem and the brook in the second, and unlike the “gentle girl and boy” of the third, the nightingale has no awareness of the terminations of its various joys and is therefore “happy.” To continue with the terminology of the earlier poem, the nightingale’s song expresses what is humanly unknowable (though humanly imaginable), “the feel of not to feel it,” that is, the absence of the “wringing” over “passed joy” that an awareness of local and ultimate terminations produces. What the poet seeks in the draught of vintage is “numbed sense to steal it,” that is, an obliviousness to passed joy or ultimately death.

To desire union with the nightingale, then, is to seek an ontological change. The opening lines of stanza three characterize that change as in part a forgetting, specifically of what the bird has never known.

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,

beside sick-beds or at breakfast tables. (Note that the nightingale is addressed as “thou among the leaves,” which stresses its native naturalness, at the point at which its obliviousness to transience is asserted.) To accompany the forgetting and further the approximation of the nightingale’s ontology, the poet seeks intensification of the senses. A draught of vintage promises to turn this double trick, allowing the poet “to leave the world,” the requisite forgetting, and additionally, to partake of “dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth,” the concomitant sensual invigoration. That activation of the senses, at the flirtatious beck of Keats’ vivacious personification (“the blushful Hippocrene, / With beaded bubbles winking at the brim, / And purple-stained mouth”) contrasts directly with the passivity and torpidity that plague the human ontology from which the poet seeks escape: the world where men don’t dance, sing, or wink but sit “full of sorrow / And leaden-eyed despair.” When, in stanza four, the poet turns from Bacchus’ chariot and pards to the viewless wings of poesy as his chosen conveyance, he is cashing in the metaphor latent in his call for vintage (wine is

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a metaphor for poetry throughout Keats’ work6) and patent in the reference to Hippocrene (the fountain of the Muses on Mt. Helicon). He still seeks the same two-fold experience, a forgetting and quickening at once: the sorrows of stanza three fade as the sensual pleasures of stanza five accumulate.

The only “sense” that is to be numbed by either wine or poesy is that referred to in “Drear-Nighted December”: “numbed sense to steel it,” the sense, that is, that perceives the passage of joys. Man can approach the natural only through the senses whose heightened activation as the mind fades can establish for the human consciousness they now direct a local temporal focus, an infinitely narrow, instantaneous temporal perspective that an active mind, remembering and anticipating incessantly, can never achieve. Instances of this effect run throughout Keats’ poetry. Two famous ones that come to mind are both pieces of advice, Endymion’s “fold / A rose leaf round thy finger’s taperness, / And soothe thy lips” (1.781-83) and that from the “Ode on Melancholy,” “if thy mistress some rich anger shows, / Emprison her soft hand, and let her rave, / And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes.” In both cases the exhortation is to engage the senses directly, intimately, and exclusively with their object and in that act to create a closed impenetrable node of attentiveness and intensity. Lips and finger (taste and touch) locked to rose leaf and lovers’ locked hands and eyes define two self-contained configurations, two universes, each of which knows nothing but itself.

One sense, however, is relinquished as the imagination comes alive: eyes close and in the poem day turns to night. Poetic convention may explain this anomaly: as attentive a student of Milton as Keats would naturally associate the loss of sight with the invigoration and exercise of the imagination. But there may be a more relevant explanation. Sight is the one sense greatly given to panoramic perception, at least in Keats’ poetry where the eye characteristically positions itself so as to enjoy the widest possible focus, preferably encompassing infinity. This occurs in the early sonnet “On First Looking Into Chapman’s Homer”:

Felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He star’d at the Pacific—and all his men
Look’d at each other with a wild surmise—
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

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The oceans, a practical near-infinity in 1817, are a favorite object of visual contemplation in the early poetry, the seashore a favorite poetic haunt. Because of this proclivity toward the panoramic, sight might well be unwelcome at this point in the poem.

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

Sight aside, the imagination seeks through the senses of taste ("each sweet," "dewy wine"), hearing ("murmurous haunt of flies"), smell ("embalmed darkness," "musk-rose") and even touch ("violets cover'd up in leaves") to achieve the intense engagement that will afford to the consciousness now living predominately through its physical senses the collapsed temporal focus that permits obliviousness to transience.

This night world is the perfect arena for the imagination's enactment of the desired transformation. In the poem "Fancy" Keats recommends the night of the year's shortest day ("When the Night doth meet the Noon / In a dark conspiracy / To banish Even from her sky" [ll. 21-23]) as the most propitious time to set Fancy to work. This night is without a temporal dimension because all time's eventualities are there simultaneously. Under its aegis, Fancy creates, in both "Fancy" and the ode, a garden of natural beauties drawn from different seasons, co-mingling in an eternal present; each sweet of the "seasonable" month is there; each moment's eventualities exist distinctly; joys are not arranged in generations for there is neither before nor after. By collapsing or concentrating all time into this instantaneity, Keats cripples time's erosive hand. As the double connotation of "embalm" suggests, the flowery fragrances both perfume and preserve. This garden Fancy grows is the time-blind nightingale's haunt and home where death and the whole temporal order it presupposes, the march of the seasons, for instance, is unknown. The poet has joined it there, his ontological transformation won.

Understandably, he would have it last forever. And so at this

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point in the poem death comes to the poet’s mind as the possible preserver of Fancy’s garden, as a way of making the transformation irreversible. It is, recalling earlier terminology, an ultimate and irrevocable forgetfulness, far greater than inebriation or night, and it seems “rich to die” because this more secure forgetfulness promises a freer field for Fancy and a richer garden of delights. These thoughts pass quickly though because, only speculations, they are easily dispelled by the hard fact that death, whatever else it might be, is, as Keats said in a letter to Charles Brown (September 30, 1820), “the great divorcer for ever”; more certain than translation to a deathless ontology is unredeemable, unending torpidity. Unlike wine, death is a denial of the senses, too crude, too thorough a forgetter. As Bate says (p. 508), death is “the reverse of union with the bird”; the nightingale is a living creature whose song is heard only by living ears. (I should note at this point that although this stanza ends with a conviction of death’s inadequacy as an agent of ontological change, Keats has taken the other position elsewhere in his poetry, in “Why Did I Laugh Tonight?” and “Bright Star” for example, and in his work as a whole the question is left unresolved. Death is either a door to another realm or it is not.)

The stanza courting death is directly followed by the apostrophe asserting the nightingale’s immortality (“Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!”). This apostrophe echoes the exclamatory opening of stanza four (“Away! away! for I will fly to thee”) which also follows verses that dwell on death and dying. These are parallel turning points in the poem where oppressive thoughts of death and the dying world of men naturally bring to the poet’s mind, as more poignantly desirable than ever, the deathless ontological state of the nightingale. It is death which haunts the poet throughout the poem, death which his mind, yearning for forgetfulness, cannot forget. The nightingale, as the being “not born for death,” who does not know death, is the object of emulation. Its immortality is simply and exactly its ignorance of death; it is not an ultimate longevity, has, in fact, nothing to do with duration but instead with quality of existence. Lived in Fancy’s garden, each moment of the bird’s life is an eternity: it contains all time’s eventualities. No generations tread the bird down because there are no such things in that realm. Its unregulated self-enactment or full livingness (it “singeset of summer in full-throated ease” and “pours forth [its] soul abroad / In such an ecstasy”) is not, surely, an acceleration of its life in fear of death’s imminence, because for the bird there is, in a

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stricter sense than usual, no tomorrow, only a series of todays, and the easy ecstasy of its singing can seem wasteful only to an ontology for which there is a tomorrow and which, hoping to live in it, invents conservation.

III

With the basis for the immortality clarified, we may now turn to the promised discussion of the lines following the misjudged assertion of stanza seven. The basis of the bird’s immortality, its naturalness, is, as we have seen, manifest in many details throughout the first six stanzas of the poem. The assertion, therefore, is well prepared for and needs no justification after it has been made. By this point in the poem, the bird’s immortality is a given. And the frantic rhetorical gesture with which the assertion is made betrays no “strain” of belief on the poet’s part in what he says but rather a strain of acceptance, a resistance to a painful knowledge, specifically, that the bird enjoys a peculiar but real immortality from which the mortal poet is excluded. The opening lines of the stanza are as much a recognition of the poet’s mortality as an assertion of the bird’s immortality. “Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird,” as I was. “No hungry generations tread thee down” as they do me.

With his own predicament acutely in mind, then, Keats gathers into the rest of the stanza three situations analogous to his own. In the second of the three, he imagines the simple sensual pleasure of the bird’s song cheering Ruth amid sorrow. Similarly, the birdsong the poet himself hears carries him from the woes of stanza three to the sensual delights of stanza five. Or, Keats may have a more elaborate parallel in mind. According to the Biblical account, one voice Ruth hears amid the alien corn is that of the man Boaz. She finds herself in his cornfield because she has, like the poet, chosen to forsake her native land for a foreign realm. Boaz’ words, like the nightingale’s song, promote and sanction that movement to a new world. In the last of the analogues, the bird is heard charming an open casement; it is poised near and presides over a beckoning threshold. Like Keats’ hidden bird, heard at the interface of the natural and the human, this bird, heard but not seen, also pours forth its soul “abroad,” that is, beyond its native land, seeking alien ears.

Because the three analogous situations Keats presents read, one-hundred-and-fifty years later, with a certain inevitability, we may

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lose sight of the peculiarity of the second and third. Certainly, we
would not expect the figure of Ruth to appear in any compilation of
singing nightingales done in ignorance of Keats’ poem. There is no
bird in the Book of Ruth to persuade us otherwise. For the same
reason, the third instance is also anomalous in such a context. In
all the commonly cited sources—Claude Lorrain’s Enchanted
Castle; sea imagery in Diodorus, Book III, Chapter 3; any of
the several casements and tumultuous seascapes in Radcliffe’s Myster-
ies of Udolpho; Coleridge’s “Fears in Solitude,” l. 87; or Cary’s
translation of the Inferno, i.22-23—no nightingale appears. This is
hardly the way to go about establishing the universality and change-
lessness of the nightingale as the supposed basis of its immortality.
To cite precedents which are such only because the poet has added
the qualifying element, the birdsong, is to beg the question hope-
lessly. Clearly, Keats is not out to prove anything but seeks instead,
as the speculative nature of his analogues suggests, to explore the
nature of the experience those analogues image, his own experi-
ence has recorded so far in the poem. Through them, he seeks to
comprehend and validate that experience, to confirm his suspicion
that the imagination can so invigorate the senses as to allow a mortal
man to share the immortality of the natural.

Though at the end of the poem he can straddle the fence nicely,
neither denying nor confirming, in stanza seven his analogues trace
a stepwise approach to an awareness of the experience’s possible
fraudulence and his own delusion. David Perkins and Walter Evert,
two critics who see Keats’ poetic career as a gradual rejection of the
visionary imagination (and approve that rejection), acknowledge
this tendency in stanza seven. The emperor and clown, to begin
with, are “figures presumably out of the historical past.”8 (Keats
could have read of Theophilus and his golden birds, a possible
source of the allusion, in Gibbon, Chapter 53.) The image of Ruth
marks a shift toward the fictive; the Biblical legend mediates be-
tween the historically-based emperor and the fanciful “magic”
casements of faeryland or what Evert calls the “never-never land of
the imagination,”9 an illusion akin to Lamia’s fabrications. This
movement from the historical to the legendary to the purely fictive
is a critical speculation worth entertaining because it suggests the
logic and inevitability of the final turn of the poem. The poet’s
experience, his uneasy union with the nightingale, finally snaps at
the end of an analogical comprehension of that experience that al-
lows it validity only on a level of reality, the supernatural realm of

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magic and charms, that is far removed from the one on which it was achieved in the first place, the natural.

I have said nothing, in my consideration of sources, of the myth of Philomela, the nightingale story from which all others derive. Obviously, Keats sought no direct or detailed correspondence with the myth and all discussion is perforce speculative. There is, however, in the case of the third analogue, a possible connection with Lempriere’s account of the myth in his Classical Dictionary, to which Keats regularly referred. Lempriere describes Philomela’s place of concealment as “a lonely castle.” This is a departure from Golding’s “pelting graunge that peakishly did stand / In woods forgrowen” (ll. 663-64) and from Sandys’ “Lodge . . . Obscur’d with woods” (ll. 520-21). Lempriere’s phrase may have suggested to Keats the possibility of holding Ovid, Claude, and Radcliffe together in a single allusion.

Another possible correspondence, one particularly pertinent to this essay, is with Golding’s and Sandys’ translations. In both, when Philomela first appears, she is described in terms remarkably similar to those Keats uses in the first description of his nightingale. In Golding’s version she comes “in raiment very rich, / And yet in beautie farre more rich, even like the Fairies which / Reported are the pleasant woods and water springs to haunt” (ll. 578-80); in Sandys’, “in rich array; / More rich in beauty. So they use to say / The stately Naiades, and Dryad’s goe / In Sylvan shades” (ll. 451-54). In comparison, Keats’ first descriptive phrase is “light-winged Dryad of the trees.” Additionally in this regard, both Golding and Sandys are careful to retain Ovid’s distinction between the respective haunts of Philomela and Procne after their transformations. According to Sandys, Philomela, now a nightingale, “sings / In woods” (ll. 669-70) while Procne, a swallow, “neare the house remaines” (l. 670); or, in Golding’s words, “the one away / To woodward flies, the other still about the house doth stay” (ll. 845-46). Keats’ association of the nightingale with nature is not without precedent.

That Keats noticed these details when he read Lempriere, Golding, and Sandys is certainly possible; that he remembered them on a certain May morning is perhaps less likely and, of course, hardly crucial. The best argument of the nightingale’s naturalness lay elsewhere, not in Lempriere, Sandys, Golding, Gibbon or the Bible but close-by, within earshot, in the tree above the poet’s head.

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The early naive yearning for immortality, whatever it might have meant for Keats as he wrote *Endymion* for instance, had matured by 1819, had clarified itself into a desire for a certain inner experience of time quite unrelated to the fact or imminence of death. The old desire and this new insight into its meaning inspire and guide the action of “Ode to a Nightingale” where Keats explores ways of achieving the nightingale’s sense of things. He discovers that the poetry-making Fancy is the creator of a world that embodies the desired temporal perspective—possibly. Thus, “Ode on a Grecian Urn” follows logically from the “Ode to a Nightingale” as a direct exploration of the possibility suggested there. In the latter poem, Keats considers the congeniality of the urn-world’s experience of time or the suitability, that is, of Fancy’s creations in light of his newly-understood desire for immortality. As opposed to the nightingale’s warm garden, the cold urn-world gives up so much in achieving its temporal perspective that Fancy’s fraudulence, suspected in the earlier ode, is confirmed here. (*Lamia* dispells any lingering doubts.)

In September 1819, with the earlier odes several months old, Keats wrote “To Autumn,” and in that act affirmed process, abandoning, it would seem, the quest for a nightingale-like experience of time. The inexorable temporal march abhorred in the earlier odes is affectionately traced here. It is difficult to know how this became possible for Keats though I think we can see two separate pathways leading simultaneously to this position.

According to Geoffrey Hartman, the important development from the earlier odes to “To Autumn” is a shift in style and metaphysic from assertion to surmise. Specifically, the existence of an achievable alternate ontology with a more satisfying experience of time is no longer asserted but casually surmised. The poetic consciousness does not leap to and fro, boldly asserting a sense of presence, then sinking in regret as that sense dissipates; instead, it slides gently in non-commitment, quietly courting possibility. Hartman argues that this is a startling development in the practice of the ode in Western literature, as it surely seems, but Keats achieves it naturally and logically. It is, to begin with, an application to his poetry of the desired negative capability pervading the letters. With regard to an existence of another ontology of greater justice than our own, he can remain, with desire undiminished, “in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.”

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As Hartman shows, in “To Autumn” this metaphysic finds a complementary stylistic poise: slow, meditative rhythms; flat, matter-of-fact diction; a vocabulary of tentativeness. The new poetic stance derives as well, however, from the poetic of empathy also cherished in the letters. As Bate intimates (p. 580), the poem is an entering into the life of the Winchester countryside about which Keats wandered during the days surrounding the composition of the poem. The landscape embodies the serenity the poet adopts. The complementary poetics of negative capability and empathy, then, co-author the “surmise”-metaphysic of the poem.

That new stance permits the affirmation of process. It is a relaxation of the distraction toward the other and tomorrow and grants every here-and-now integrity. It is a fitting of perceiver to perceived: if the poetic consciousness can hear the music of autumn has it is played, deaf to other seasonal songs, singer and listener will share the same timeless perspective, the serene landscape will be serenely perceived. In the sonnet “On Fame” Keats directly contrasts the “seasonableness” or poise in the moment of the natural ontology with the characteristic human distraction from itself and the present.

How fever’d is the man, who cannot look
   Upon his mortal days with temperate blood,
Who vexes all the leaves of his life’s book,
   And robs his fair name of its maidenhood;
It is as if the rose should pluck herself,
   Or the ripe plum finger its misty bloom,
As if the Naiad, like a meddling elf,
   Should darken her pure grot with muddy gloom;
But the rose leaves herself upon the briar,
   For winds to kiss and grateful bees to feed,
And the ripe plum still wears its dim attire;
   The undisturbed lake has crystal space;
Why then should man, teasing the world for grace,
   Spoil his salvation for a fierce miscreed?

Here the natural ontology of rose, plum, Naiad and lake, poised within themselves, offer a literal “salvation” or mode of immortality. They affirm process as they enact it and therein find an experiential escape from death, which can be known only from the outside; from within there is only fulfillment.

In “To Autumn” the poetic consciousness, activating its negative capability and empathic power, achieves the “surmise”-metaphysic and approximates the rose’s poise upon the briar, “looks /
Upon his mortal days with temperate blood,” accepts process (“mortal days”) calmly (“with temperate blood”) by enacting it, by hearing spring’s song during spring and autumn’s in autumn. The serene affirmation of process is not, then, an abandonment of the quest for a nightingale’s sense of things. It is not, for instance, the result of a panoramic perspective on time’s eventualities achieved through withdrawal from experience (as is the case with the Chinesemen in Yeats’ poem “Lapis Lazuli”). Instead, it is sort of dramatic decorum or composure, to continue with Yeats’ poem in mind, like that of an actor playing Hamlet or Lear who, though he is not Hamlet or Lear and so has a consciousness that perceives beyond them, does not fall out of character to articulate his wider perspective, does not break up his lines to weep.

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FOOTNOTES


2 In a note to lines 61 ff. Douglas Bush says “there is no doubt a logical confusion here, since the singing bird is no less mortal than the human poet, but in Keats’s mind the bird has become the disembodied and immortal voice of poetry.” John Keats: Selected Poems and Letters, edited and with an introduction and notes by Douglas Bush, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1959), p. 348.


4 Bate, p. 508.


6 See “To Charles Cowden Clarke,” ll. 25-27; Endymion, I, 23-24; or Hyperion, III, 118-20.

7 See, for example, “On Seeing the Elgin Marbles,” ll. 13-14; “On the Sea,” ll. 9-10; or “When I Have Fears,” ll. 12-13.

8 Perkins, p. 254.


10 The Fate of Reading (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1975), pp. 124-46.

11 Letter of 21, 27(?) December to George and Thomas Keats.
The Immortality of the Natural: Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" [pp. 270-284]

Please note: Due to an error in the print volume, the contents of pages 280 and 281 belong to the following article, "Self and Society in Trollope." In order to preserve the complete content of the following article, we have inserted pages 280 and 281 between pages 285 and 286. The article content is presented in its entirety and in the correct order.

The true page range for the current article, "The Immortality of the Natural: Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" is 270-279+282-284, with no content missing.

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