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THE POET AND THE “TEMPLE OF DELIGHT”:

ALLEGORY IN “ODE ON MELANCHOLY” AND BLAKE’S “SONGS”

by

STUART H. HUNT

Under the Direction of Lee Anne Richardson

ABSTRACT

In the final stanza of John Keats’s “Ode on Melancholy,” there are capitalized emotions such as “Joy” that are characters within the poem. William Blake’s “Songs of Innocence” and “Songs of Experience” include personified emotions in much the same way. In this paper I will define allegory as using a “radical dispersonification” in which personified objects within the poem point to something abstract that exists on its own, outside the context of the poem. Given the similarity of Keats’s poem and Blake’s “Songs,” there is the possibility that as Romantics, Blake influenced Keats. In the sense that Blake’s “Songs” are ultimately a religious or political allegory, which Blake manifests as states of “Innocence” and “Experience,” and Keats’s poem is allegorical in the sense that it is about an abstract state called “Melancholy” that he has experienced as a poet.

THE POET AND THE “TEMPLE OF DELIGHT”:
ALLEGORY IN “ODE ON MELANCHOLY” AND BLAKE’S “SONGS”

by

STUART H. HUNT

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Bachelor of Arts in English
in the College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
2010

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The Gods of the earth and sea,
 Sought thro' Nature to find this Tree
 But their search was all in vain;
 There grows one in the Human Brain

- William Blake, "The Human Abstract"

INTRODUCTION

In a letter to Shelley on August 16, 1820, Keats wrote, "A modern work it is said must have a purpose" (*Norton* 1857). In the "Ode on Melancholy," Keats's stated purpose was to direct the reader toward an emotional state that he calls "Melancholy" (9). It is in this sense that the poem is allegorical. Keats uses personification in the service of allegory; capitalized, personified emotions such as "Joy" (32) that are characters in the poem. In "Songs of Innocence" and "Songs of Experience," William Blake uses personification – capitalized, personified emotions as allegorical landmarks toward the final state emphasized by the poem, a state of Innocence or Experience in the same way that Keats uses "Beauty," "Joy" and "Delight" (31-5) to direct the reader towards the emotional state that exists in the final couplet of the poem. Whoever the "Ode on Melancholy" is addressed to must first find out what it means to experience these emotions: "Melancholy" is "seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue / Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine" (37-8), who lives in the "temple of Delight" (35) and who understands that "Beauty... must die" (31). To the extent that the "Ode on

Melancholy” was a modern Romantic work, in this paper I will argue the possibility that Blake’s “Songs of Innocence” and “Songs of Experience,” written in 1787 and 1794, use allegory to direct the reader to the emotional states of Innocence and Experience in the same manner as Keats in “Ode on Melancholy,” written in the Spring of 1819, uses allegory to direct the reader to an emotional state where the poet has been.

The primary difference between personification and allegory is that the personified subject exists only within the context of the poem, while allegory refers to an abstract idea outside the context of the poem (*Handbook* 10). The second definition of allegory in the *OED* is that allegory is a “description of a subject under the guise of some other subject of aptly suggestive resemblance.” Keats’s poem is a “description” of how to get to the abstract emotional state of “Melancholy” in the guise of a poem about going “not to Lethe” (11) and experiencing the positive emotions of the last stanza. This “subject” is not, like the personified subject, primarily within the poem but outside it, in the experience of the reader. In this case, Keats’s poem is a “description” of the subject “Melancholy” under the guise of the personified emotions that “suggest” it. The “abstractness” of qualities like a “Beauty that must die” (31) makes “Ode on Melancholy” allegorical. Another definition of allegory is “a figurative sentence, discourse or narrative, in which properties and circumstances attributed to the apparent subject really refer to the subject they are meant to suggest” (*OED*). In Keats’s poem, “Beauty,” “Joy,” and “Pleasure” (33) are made to exist in the human “circumstances” of being a “Beauty that must die,” “Bidding adieu” (33) and “aching” (33).

According to the *Oxford Companion to English Literature*, personification or prosopopoeia is “a figure of speech in which inanimate objects or abstractions are endowed with human qualities or represented as possessing human form” (781-2). In Blake’s “Infant Joy,” the

emotional state of joy is represented as an infant (in other words possessing a “human form).” It is like the “Joy” who is constantly going away, “whose hand is ever at his lips/ Bidding adieu” (32-3) in the final stanza of “Ode on Melancholy.” Keats’s poem is allegorical in the same way as “Infant Joy” in that both use an anthropomorphized character called “Joy” to signify an abstract joy that is a part of human experience. Darren Howard argues that Blake’s allegory involves “characters with names that evoke abstractions” (560). Keats’s use of capitalized names like “Joy” is consistent with this statement in that the name of the infant, “Joy,” is a character whose name “evokes” the abstraction of joy. In Blake’s poem there is a direct relationship between the name of “Joy” (5) and what it means in the abstract sense. The personified character “Joy” resembles or suggests the abstract quality of joy because it is constantly fleeting; joy is a passing emotion both in the context of the poem and in the experience of joy in general.

“Infant Joy” is presumably about a two-day old infant. However, it can also be construed to be about a “Joy” that the speaker has just experienced two days ago. He says, “What shall I call thee?” (3) and the “Joy” replies “I happy am / Joy is my name” (4-5). This contradicts the first line, in which the “Joy” says, “I have no name” (1). The poem is about the abstract nature of joy, “anonymous and spontaneous delight” (Dike 355). The adult speaker of the poem says, “Sweet joy befall thee!” (6) at the end of the first stanza, and then again in the last line, although in the case of the last line there is no exclamation point, implying that he is less enthusiastic about the “Joy” than at the beginning of the poem. This correlates with Keats’s poem in which “Joy” is given the human quality of being something that is always “Bidding adieu,” an emotion that does not last, although it does lead in the end to something that does last, namely, to “be among her [Melancholy’s] cloudy trophies hung” (40). The statement “I sing the while” (11)

may be the speaker trying to comfort himself about losing the “joy.” The discrepancy between the voice of the “Infant Joy” and the speaker of the poem is consistent with Blake in general.

The set of relationships between the allegorical “abstractions” in Keats’s poem is what gives it its meaning and structure. *A Handbook to Literature* addresses the idea of a “double signification” in the “order of words” that is present in allegory. Double signification refers to the idea that there exist in the poem two levels of meaning – that meaning that exists within the context of the poem and the abstraction that it refers to outside the context of the poem. The words in a poem represent characters and these characters or allegorical subjects refer to an abstract idea (*Handbook* 10). This double signification is not present in personification; there is only the thing and its personification as they exist in the poem. The “order of words,” in this case is “Joy” being followed by “Bidding adieu.” There is also a “dual interest” in the “events, characters, and setting” and the abstract idea (*Handbook* 10), insofar as the characters and events of “Ode on Melancholy” – specifically the “Joy,” whose “event” is “Bidding adieu” – represent the intangible emotional state in the final couplet of the poem. Furthermore, “*Allegory* clarifies this process by giving patently meaningful names to persons and places” (*Handbook* 10); in the case of Keats’s poem and “Infant Joy,” the “patently meaningful name” of “Joy” is given to a character.

Allegory is more complicated than personification because it remains “a figurative narrative or description, conveying a veiled moral meaning” (*Oxford Companion* 18). In the case of Blake, this “moral meaning” takes the form of political and religious allegory. Allegory is figurative like personification but in the context of the “narrative” of an allegorical work the characters are representative of a kind of moral discourse or abstract morality. S.T. Coleridge stated that “an allegory is but a translation of abstract notions into picture-language” (*Handbook*

11). This is present in Keats's poem in the "translation" of abstractions into the images of personified emotions in all four stanzas of the poem. And since Coleridge was a Romantic poet, allegory is consistent with Romanticism. Personification is not on its own allegory; it is only the making of a thing into a person. But when personification is used within the context of an allegory that gives an exterior structure to the poem it accomplishes a "double signification."

In the "Ode on Melancholy," personification is used in the service of allegory. Indeed, what is at work in "Ode on Melancholy" can be called, in Samuel Levin's phrase "radical dispersonification" (30). This stems from a conceptual dissonance where the predicate is forced to represent a condition congruous with "the *object* named by the noun" (35). In other words, the predicate "Bidding adieu" is made to be congruous with the "object," joy, named by the capitalized noun "Joy." This fleeting aspect of joy is consistent with our experience of joy in general. However, "Bidding adieu" is not something one would expect from an inanimate emotion; the personification is "forced" and there exists a "conceptual" discrepancy (29-30). Rather than making the object congruous with an anthropomorphic quality, it is the human quality, the predicate "Bidding adieu," that is forced by the association with the object to make the object an allegorical figure. Levin writes, "In this reading predicates are construed so as to radically dispersonify their meanings" (35); the predicate "Bidding adieu" makes "Joy" into an allegorical figure. The object is no longer merely personified; it becomes something else. It is about, for Keats, "Melancholy."

In Theresa Kelley's "Romantic ambivalences I," she writes that allegory represents "things or ideas as though they were present" (109): the "Melancholy" of the discarded stanza, "Wolfs-bane" (12) and "Psyche" (17), the "melancholy fit" falling and the personified emotions of the last stanza. Furthermore, "Bidding adieu" makes joy "present." However, when

personification uses “sensible or concrete things to convey abstract ideas, the outcome is merely rhetorically vivid language” (Kelley 109). Thus there exists in allegory a kind of conceptual discrepancy that is necessary for it to remain allegory; in “Ode on Melancholy,” the “sensible or concrete” character “Joy” conveys the abstract emotion joy, but this on its own is not allegory. It is more than “vivid language” because it transcends the poem and becomes about something else.

ALLEGORY IN “ODE ON MELANCHOLY” AND BLAKE’S “SONGS”

The poem is in this sense about Keats. It is about a place where he has been, an instruction how to get to the “temple of Delight,” – a place of poetic inspiration imbued with his experience of “Melancholy.” He is in effect saying, become a great poet “*as I am!* But this does not end the pretense” (Smith 689). In that sense, the “Ode on Melancholy” is also addressed to a reader capable of poetic inspiration, an instruction how to get to a place where Keats has been. In describing how he accomplished the state in the final couplet of the poem, to “be among her cloudy trophies hung,” the reader to whom the poem is addressed can follow the allegorical figures and he too can “be among her cloudy trophies hung.” It is unclear whether the poem is entirely about Keats, addressed to the “thy” of “glut thy sorrow” (25) in the second stanza, or in the case of the last stanza the poet capable of same inspiration as Keats. This is consistent with the discrepancy between the speaker and the characters within Blake’s “Songs.” Insofar as it is being about being a poet “*as I am!*” the “Ode on Melancholy” is about the same things as Keats’s

letters from the Spring of 1819¹. But “even when his health was good, Keats felt a foreboding of early death and applied himself to his art with a desperate urgency” (*Norton* 1794). This “applied himself” is consistent with the poems being about the same things as his letters. This sense of purpose was in particular applied to “Melancholy” rather than the other odes, and Keats’s awareness of his own mortality certainly affected the content of this poem – it is, after all, ultimately about death. In a letter to Fanny Brawne in July of 1819, Keats wrote, “I have two luxuries to brood over in my walks, your Loveliness and the hour of my death” (*Norton* 1856). Certainly the events of his life – the meeting of Fanny Brawne and his own sense of the frailty to human life – influenced the Odes, and in the same letter he writes, “would I could take a sweet poison from your lips” (1856) a phrase that mirrors the “poisonous wine” (12) and “the ruby grape of Proserpine” (14) of the first stanza of “Ode on Melancholy.” E.C. Pettet writes, “his 1819 moods of indolence, not always pleasurable, have much to do with the odes” (285). The imagery of “shade to shade” coming “drowsily” (19) is indolent in this sense, and the emotions of the last stanza are certainly not “pleasurable.”

The “Ode on Melancholy” was written in search of a recourse for these feelings, and in the end the poem is allegorical in the sense that what he is writing about is the *abstract state of being* embodied in the final couplet. Helen Vendler states in *The Odes of John Keats* that in “*Melancholy* alone among the odes” the poet “addresses admonitions to himself” (158). These “admonitions” take the form of “go not to Lethe, neither twist / Wolf’s-bane” (11-2) and the other suicidal images. In this sense the poem is addressed by Keats to himself. Furthermore, the poem reduces its audience to “the poet himself” (Eaves 784). In Romanticism, the “first-person pronoun announces the writer’s elevation of an individual self to an acceptable poetic subject”

¹In the summer of 1818 Keats contracted an illness of the throat, after watching his brother die of tuberculosis.

(Simpkins 21). Although Keats never uses the “first-person pronoun” in “Ode on Melancholy,” he appears to be the speaker. It is unclear whether “you” (8) in the discarded stanza, “you would fail / To find the Melancholy” (8-9), is directed to Keats himself. This is consistent with the poem being addressed to the “thy” (25) of the following stanzas or to another poet, as in the last stanza. However, the argument that Keats’s poem is directed to “the poet himself,” Keats, is still consistent with the argument that he is writing about an emotional state where he has been such that the reader can follow him, and this is what makes “Ode on Melancholy” allegorical.

The final couplet is Keats’s conclusion – he is directing the reader to an emotional state that he has accomplished as a poet. “It is still John Keats who is, even then, pretending to be the poet-as-poet” (Smith 689). Even when the mimetic nature of the poem is taken into account, it is “still John Keats” who is writing the poem. According to Morris Eaves, the same poetic identification can be found in Blake: “This is the romantic ego – ‘self-devoting genius’ – in its melancholy aesthetic phase, crying ‘I. I.’” (786). The Romantic poetic genius is asserting his identity as the author of the poem. The “true Man” (786) who occurs in Blake’s poems, for example the “Bard” (1) in the “Introduction” to “Songs of Experience,” *signifies* the abstract quality of imagination. In the first stanza of “The Human Abstract” it is man who is speaking, “If all were as happy as we” (4), but the rest of the poem is spoken by the Bard who “Present, Past & Future sees” (2) as stated in the “Introduction” to “Experience” (Gleckner 377). This is Blake’s identity as a poet crying “I. I.” – he is writing about the poetic process. As in “Ode on Melancholy,” the meaning in Blake’s prophetic works depends on the identity of the speaker, and it is often unclear who the speaker is or who he is speaking to (Howard 563-4). In Blake’s “Songs” the speaker is sometimes a character in the poem and sometimes not. In both Blake and

Keats, the speaker of the poem is present insofar as he is telling the reader how to get to a certain emotional state that he has experienced, and it is here that the allegory is leading.

Walter Jackson Bate argues that the “Ode on Melancholy” was in large part different from the other Odes of 1819 in the sense that Keats had to address “Melancholy” directly because of his youth. He had not been formally educated and had not in this sense been criticized, and was “without thought of the winding stair” that one must climb in order to become an accomplished poet, although he had been “reassured” by earlier Romantic poets (521). Bate’s assurance that Keats learned how to write from earlier Romantics corroborates the argument that he had been influenced by Blake.

The “Introduction” to “Songs of Innocence” is about poetic authorial intent. Thomas R. Frosch argues that this poem is about a transition from the state of “Innocence” to the state of “Experience.” The child asks the piper to pipe the song and write it down, which takes the piper “beyond the child’s capacity” (74) and the child disappears. The piper “plucks” a “hollow reed” and with this “rural pen” he “stains” the “water clear” (Frosch 74). Thus, the poem is about the “writing down” of a song about the lamb of “Innocence” that takes the poem into the realm of “Experience.” These are acts according to Frosch, “tinged with destructiveness” (74). They have connotations of “Experience.” The poem is spoken primarily by the piper of “Experience.” He encounters a child, who asks him to “Pipe a song about a Lamb” (5). Then the first couplet of the third and fourth stanzas is spoken by the child, asking the piper to then sing the song and then to write it down. The piper responds in both cases by piping the song again and then writing it down. The poem ends with the piper writing down his “happy songs” (19) that “Every child may joy to hear” (20). This is Blake’s intention in “Songs of Innocence,” to write poems that “Every child may joy to hear.” It is about comprehending a state of “Innocence”

experienced by Blake². Many poems from “Songs of Innocence” are written like nursery rhymes, as if addressed to a child, and the adult who reads the poem thus comprehends something directed towards innocent children. The ambivalence of the speaker, alternating between child and Piper, echoes Keats’s poem, in which the first two included stanzas are addressed to the “thy” of the second stanza while the last stanza is more of an omniscient statement about where “Melancholy” can be found.

Barbara Herrnstein-Smith argues that “Ode on Melancholy” takes the form: (1) “*Do not do these things*” (2) “*Instead, do THESE things*” (3) “*Because*” this (682). The (1) Do not commit suicide, (2) instead “glut thy sorrow” is not addressed to the same person as (3) because “She dwells with Beauty.” The last stanza is spoken in omniscient third person and is about where the “temple of Delight” can be found, for Keats and the poet to whom the poem is addressed. The imperative second person, (2) do “these” things is not addressed to Keats himself but the “thy” of the second stanza: “glut *thy* sorrow” (25). The “you would fail / To find the Melancholy” (8-9) is certainly true for the “thy” and the ambiguity of the speaker in Keats’s poem is allegorical in the sense that whether the “you” of “you would fail” is Keats addressing himself or the reader capable of poetic inspiration, the poem remains allegorical because it is about the abstract state of “Melancholy.”

Keats is giving himself several alternatives: committing suicide would be too easy: “For shade to shade will come too drowsily” (19). He could dwell on life’s pleasures, including his love for Fanny Brawne; but then he realizes that “She dwells with Beauty” (31). The “She” here does not refer to Fanny or the “peerless” mistress; rather, the poetry that he truly loves belongs

² Blake knew about “Innocence” because he had been a child. As a child he had visionary experiences, including seeing a tree full of angels. He was apprenticed to an engraver and the “Experience” that his poems condemn was a response to the adult world and the political and religious establishment.

with a “Beauty that must die” – in the end he chooses to be a great poet, one who sees what is “seen of none save him” (36) – *his soul* “shall taste the sadness of her might, / And be [immortal] among her cloudy trophies hung” (37-40). It can be argued that *all four stanzas of the poem are allegorical*. The structure of the poem in its entirety is about how to find “Melancholy;” the first two stanzas say what *not* to do to find her: “go to Lethe” (11) or commit suicide, while the final stanzas are about how to find her – “glutting” on the phenomenal world or going to the “temple of Delight.”

Vendler argues that the first stanza is mythological, the second is not “and the third neither mythology nor nature but allegory” (159). She calls the first stanza mythological because of the references to Greek mythology in “Lethe” (10), “Proserpine” (14) and “Psyche” (17). The second stanza is pastoral and the third is allegorical. “Beauty,” “Joy,” “Pleasure” and “Delight” are what one encounters along the way.

Keats wrote a stanza of “Ode on Melancholy” that is often not included in publications of the poem; it is about a Persean or Stygian mythological quest for “Melancholy,” although Keats structures the stanza such that “you would fail / To find the Melancholy.” The first two quatrains are about a “bark” (1) from the underworld, with “a phantom gibbet for a mast” (2), a sail sewn with “creeds” and filled with “groans” (3), a “Dragon’s tail” for a rudder (5) and the cordage of the ship “uprootings from the skull / Of bald Medusa” (7-8). The personification of this passage involves the different aspects of the “bark” that would sail through the underworld in search of “Melancholy.” The volta at line eight qualifies this first passage with “certes you would fail / To find the Melancholy, whether she / Dreameth in any isle of Lethe dull” (8-10). The stanza can be broken down into (1) though you would do this (2) you would fail (Vendler 169).

Keats instructs the reader to go to Lethe in his Persean quest to slay Medusa. But this quest does not lead to “Melancholy,” and after all the poem is about “Melancholy,” so Keats cut it. There is some debate whether the inclusion of the discarded stanza would disrupt the structure of the poem, although in this paper I am arguing that it provides a balance; the first two stanzas are about what not to do, and the third and fourth stanzas are what one should do. Pettet writes on the subject of Keats’s discarding of this stanza that “the coarseness of the contrast would destroy the general effect of luxurious tenderness which it was the object of the poem to produce” (300). The contrast he is referring to is the strictly mythological nature of this stanza that contradicts so sharply the rest of the poem, particularly the pastoral second stanza. “No, no, go not to Lethe” is Keats’s realization that the Persean quest cannot find “Melancholy.” This “luxurious tenderness” is embodied in Keats’s language: the fit that falls “Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud” (22) and “him whose strenuous tongue / Can burst Joy’s grape against his palate fine” (37-8). But since it can be argued that the entirety of the poem is allegorical, the discarded stanza does not in fact “destroy the general effect.” The inclusion of this mythological stanza provides a midpoint in the poem, right at the point “when the melancholy fit shall fall” (21). The poem started as a mythological allegory, then this stanza was discarded, although the poem retained its allegorical nature.

In an earlier draft of “Ode on Melancholy,” at line 3 of the discarded stanza, Lord Houghton has “shrouds” instead of “creeds” (Pettet 302). Although “shrouds” certainly does not “destroy the general effect” of this stanza,” it lacks the religious allegory of “creeds” (3). It is consistent with the Stygian nature of this passage, although it lacks the kind of “political allegory” that can be found in Blake. The mythological nature of the poem is consistent with its religious imagery. Thus, with the addition of “creeds,” the “general effect” of the stanza is

supported by its religious allegory. In a letter to his brother and sister in 1819, Keats writes about the “hethen mythology in which abstractions are personified” (*Norton* 1855). The mythological quest for “Melancholy” of the discarded stanza and the personified “abstraction” of “Psyche” are consistent with this statement. In the same letter Keats wrote about the “Salvation of children” in the context of the Christian establishment and how the “chr[i]stain scheme” developed from ancient Greek philosophy (*Norton* 854-5). In other words, religious allegory is represented in the poem with the “Proserpine” (14) and “Psyche” of the first stanza. Similar religious allegory about Christianity can be found in Blake’s “Songs.” In “The Chimney Sweeper” of “Innocence,” the chimney sweepers are “lock’d up in coffins of black” (12). An Angel comes with “a bright key” (13) and sets them free into a paradisaal world. The Angel tells Tom “if he’d be a good boy,/ He’d have God for his father and never want joy” (19-20). The “coffins” and the “bright key” are allegorical symbols, leading ultimately to the moral or religious statement at the end of the poem that is its abstract allegorical content that includes joy. In the poem by the same name in “Experience,” the first stanza is spoken by an anonymous narrator, who asks, “Where are thy father & mother?” (3) and then the child answers, “They are both gone up to the church to pray” (4). In other words, they have abandoned their child to go and “pray.” The second stanza begins spoken in the first person by the chimney sweeper, presumably Tom Dacre, although there is no dream of release into the paradisaal world that David Simpson mentions in the companion poem from “Innocence” (50). The chimney sweeper then says, “And because I am happy, & dance & sing, / They think they have done me no injury” (9-10). Thus, the speaker suffers and has been done “injury” by his parents, although he appears to be happy and in a state of “Innocence.” The last line of the poem addresses God and the religious establishment, “Who make up a heaven of our misery” (12). The word “heaven” is not

capitalized, indicating that it is not Heaven that Blake is referring to but rather the false “heaven” of the religious establishment that is based on suffering. Harold Pagliaro says that the chimney sweeper who narrates most of the poem connects his parents with this “false heaven” (123). “Misery” in this sense is an emotion in the context of a religious allegory. Scott Simpkins asks if reading this poem as commentary on “Christian establishment” tells us how to read “The Chimney Sweeper” of “Songs of Innocence” (53).

The “bark of dead men’s bones” (1) of this stanza resembles Arthur Rimbaud’s “The Drunken Boat.”

As I came down the impassible Rivers,
I felt no more the bargemen’s guiding hands....
And great peninsulas unmoored
Never knew more triumphant uproar than I knew. (1-12)

The comparison here is that both poems are about the visionary process. Rimbaud’s poem is a metaphor for becoming a poet: “I felt no more the bargemen’s guiding hands” is him breaking away from his influences. James O’Rourke cites Keats as a Romantic poet who shares “a visionary indulgence associated with Blake or Shelley” (97). In other words, the visionary nature of the discarded stanza and of the final couplet of the poem “associates” Keats with Blake and other Romantic poets. The “bark” in the discarded stanza of Keats’s poem mirrors the barge in “The Drunken Boat,” and it is the “Melancholy” that cannot be found, “whether she / Dreameth in any isle of Lethe dull” (9-10). This stanza resembles several of the plates for “Songs of Innocence” and “Songs of Experience.” According to Houghton, the discarded first stanza was “as grim a picture as Blake... could have dreamed and painted” (170). In the plates to “The Human Abstract” and “A Poison Tree,” Blake etches the kind of “grim pictures” that can

be compared to this stanza of "Ode on Melancholy." In "A Poison Tree," a man lies prostrate on the ground. He is doubtless the "foe" (3) who has been killed by the "Poison Tree" that the speaker has "waterd" with his fears (5). The speaker's "wrath" (2) is made into a tree that he "waters" with his "fears" and "tears" (6). These personified aspects of himself with which he "waters" the tree cause his wrath to grow (4). This poem by Blake is in this way about how one's fears and sadness lead to a cultivation of wrath in the speaker, represented as a tree: at the end of the poem, he is glad to see his foe dead, "outstretched beneath the tree" (16). In the plate, the lower branch of the tree is anthropomorphized, reaching for the corpse underneath. To the left of the man the tree branch that is growing over him forms a kind of rib cage comparable to the "bark of dead men's bones" in "Ode on Melancholy." In the plate to "The Human Abstract," an old man kneels, bound with "cords" that appear to be coming out of his head and behind him to the left there is a series of dark lines in the form of a rib cage. The cords or ropes coming out of his head is comparable to the "cordage" that is "large uprooting from the skull" (7) of the person who is being addressed in the discarded stanza of Keats's poem. The "Tree" in "The Human Abstract" is according to Keynes's commentary the "Tree of Mystery" (plate 47). The "uprootings" in this stanza echo the "Tree of Mystery."

The first line of the poem begins as a confirmation of what Keats is saying in the discarded stanza: "Melancholy" cannot be found "in any isle of Lethe dull." Thus, the poem begins (regarding those accounts which do not include the oft discarded stanza), "No, no, go not to Lethe" (11). This stanza represents the Romantic conflict between the use of opiates for poetic inspiration and the fear of deadly intoxicants. Martha Hale Shackford states that "Keats longed for... a draught that would help the poetic imagination to escape from the brooding sorrows" for which death was the only release (479). On this account Keats's mood in the

Spring of 1819 affected the imagery of the Odes, and he turned to his “poetic imagination” to remedy his disillusionment. Hence the suicidal imagery in the first stanza, and although there is no certainty that “nor [let] the death-moth be / Your mournful Psyche” (16-7) is a statement against suicide, “neither twist / Wolf’s bane” (11-2) certainly is (Pettet 303). “No, no, go not to Lethe” remains a statement *not* to kill yourself. If he takes “wolfs-bane,” he does not know what will happen except that “shade to shade will come too drowsily” (19) and he will fall into nothing, forgetting the “Joy” of mortal life. The imagery of this first stanza is an example of what Pettet calls Keats’s “un-Romantic realization of the danger of trace and abstraction” (285). The apprehension about allowing one’s “pale forehead to be kiss’d / By nightshade” (13-4) and twisting “Wolf’s-bane” is not consistent with the Romantics’ use of opium to conduce poetic inspiration. Keats’s “realization” in this sense is that there is something “dangerous” about the “abstraction” of his poem

The first stanza is allegorical because of the radical dispersonification in “mournful Psyche” (17). The death of a personified “Psyche” is something to be avoided in the search of the poet, contrary to the personified emotions in the last stanza. Keats is telling the reader not to let his “mournful Psyche” die. The nature of the imagery of the first stanza: “Wolf’s-bane,” “nightshade” and “yew-berries” (15) is contrary to the imagery of the second stanza: the “morning rose” (25) and the “globed peonies” (27). This is consistent with Blake’s contraries, namely “Innocence” and “Experience.” The second stanza is dominantly pastoral, however it remains allegorical because the “melancholy” in line 11 is the referent of “She” in the first line of the last stanza: “She dwells with Beauty – Beauty that must die” (31). In this manner, the entirety of “Ode on Melancholy” is allegorical.

The fact that the poem can be broken down into, “when the melancholy fit” falls, Then do this, or this, or this, or this (Smith 687) is consistent with the poem being instructions for the ordinary “thy,” to experience the pastoral beauty of the world and the romantic love of his mistress in order to compensate for melancholy and suffering: “feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes” (30) because he cannot achieve the abstract allegorical state at the end of the poem. The third “Or” in line 18 can mean different things; this passage can be construed as a choice between “glut thy sorrow” on pastoral beauty or “if thy mistress some rich anger shows, / ...feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes” (28-9) and “glut thy sorrow” upon “the salt sand-wave” (26) *or* “the “globed peonies” *or* the “rich anger” of “thy mistress,” as stated by Vendler (172). These are all solutions belonging to a phenomenal world. This stanza is only a secondary alternative.

The pastoral second stanza of Keats’s poem remains allegorical in a way consistent with Blake. Simpkins states that the speaker of “Ode to a Nightingale” experiences a sense of loss and “limits” the sensory content of the poem to “finite” objects in ways that would disappoint Wordsworth or Blake (24). “Ode to a Nightingale” is limited to pastoral imagery in a manner that would disappoint Blake because his pastoral poems are allegorical. The pastoral imagery or sensory content in “Ode on Melancholy” is limited to “finite” objects that are radically dispersonified such that they are no longer “limited” to the sensory content: in the case of the second stanza, “droop-headed flowers” and the “April shroud” and in the last stanza the capitalized emotions that are “finite” in the sense that they are characters within the poem.

At this point I will argue that the second stanza of Keats’s poem echoes Blake’s “The Little Boy lost” and “The Little Boy found,” in that the apparently innocent pastoral in both cases is tinged with aspects of “Experience,” represented in Keats’s poem by the mistress and the

“temple of Delight.” “The Little Boy lost” is about a father abandoning his child: “Father, father, where are you going / O do not walk so fast” (1-2). The child is eventually alone: “The night was dark no father was there” (5). The father disappears and the child weeps: “The mire was deep, & the child did weep” (7). The child concludes “Or else I shall be lost” (4); his father is walking too fast, perhaps representing his being in the realm of “Experience” where the innocent child cannot reach him. The child weeps, and then the “vapour” (8) vanishes.

According to Thomas Connolly and George Levine, in “The Little Boy lost,” there is a causal relationship between the “weeping” and the disappearance of the “vapour” that represents the illusory nature of the father (257). In its companion poem, “The Little Boy found,” the same child is “lost in the lonely fen” (1). God appears as his father and brings him to his mother, who has been looking for him. There is a difference of awareness in the unnamed speaker and the lost child (Connolly, Levine 261); in “The Little Boy found,” the mother “thro’ the lonely dale / Her little boy weeping sought” (7-8). The “lonely dale” (7) of “The Little Boy found” shares the pastoral setting of the second stanza of “Ode on Melancholy.” “Weeping” is consistent with the personification of “melancholy” as falling “Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud” (22), and the idea of “heaven” mirrors Blake’s religious allegory. The plate to “The Little Boy lost” shows a girl wandering through a forest towards a bright light. Connolly and Levine argue that the “pointed rays” symbolize the connection of the father to the political and religious establishment (263). The plate of “The Little Boy found” shows a haloed mother hand in hand in a forest with a child. In this plate, God appears as a father in white (262), although the person in the picture is a female. The “wand’ring light” (2) that represents God, however, is represented on the plate for “The Little Boy lost” (Connolly, Levine 257). In the plate to “The Little Boy lost,” a large, dark tree looms over the lost child; in its companion poem, mother and child are walking through a

bower made of trees that appear to encircle them, and the child is resting his hand on a tree. The recurrence of trees in the plates for “Songs” is perhaps indicative of the “Tree of Experience” (cite) and the father is representative of abandonment. He is also representative of Urizen and Christ; the father created by Urizen represents prohibition and the father created by Christ represents the “visionary imagination” (Connolly, Levine 258-263). Thus there is both the irreliability of characters in Blake’s “Songs” and political or religious allegory. Furthermore, the “vapour” is indicative of Blake’s visionary process³ (Connolly, Levine 261).

The “weeping” of “The Little Boy lost” and “The Little Boy found” echoes the “laughing” (2) that occurs in the “Nurse’s Song” from “Innocence.” The “Nurse’s Song” of “Innocence” and the companion poem from “Experience” share the pastoral imagery of the second stanza of “Ode on Melancholy.” The “dews of night” that are “arising” (6) mirror the “hides the green hill in an April shroud” (24) of Keats’s poem. This poem can be compared to its companion in “Innocence” in that one nurse hears “laughing” and the other “whispers” (2). When the nurse of “Innocence” asks the children to return home, they do not want to, and this is followed by the pastoral image, the “hills are all covered with sheep” (12). The nurse concedes and lets them play, and “all the hills echoed” (16) with their laughing. In the poem from “Experience,” the children do in fact return home when the nurse tells them to because the “dews of night” are arising (6). In both poems, the pastoral imagery is ultimately about the contrary states of the nurse who represents “Experience” and the innocent children.

The nurse is also comparable to the “mistress” in Keats’s poem. Donald Dike addresses Blake’s tendency to use the pastoral to juxtapose different aspects of “Experience.” He does this

³Blake would stay awake late at night and talk to angels and devils.

in the context of a “guardian” of a pastoral scene, a governess, whose repression of sexual feelings feeds into her ambivalent role as suppressing the children’s independence and emotional development. The conflict here is that of the contrasting roles of the nurse as both protecting and harming her charges (364). The “Nurses Song” of “Experience” shares the simply pastoral nature of its companion poem, however there is a darkness present that is not there in the “Nurse’s Song” of “Innocence.” In Geoffrey Keynes’ commentary on the plate for the “Nurse’s Song” of “Experience” he writes that the children are now “adolescents aware of sex” (plate 38). This is perhaps represented by the “whisprings” in the pastoral “dale” (2). The nurse laments her lost youth: “The days of my youth rise fresh in my mind, / My face turns green and pale” (3-4). Keynes states that “green and pale” indicates that the nurse longs for sexual experiences that she will never have (plate 38). The final couplet of the “Nurse’s Song” is about how childhood is spent quickly, and adult life is spent in the hypocrisy and “disguise” (8) of the adult world. The “raving” (29) and “deepness” (30) of the mistress’s eyes imply a kind of insanity, consistent with that of the nurse.

The abstract quality of the “mistress” in the second stanza of Keats’s poem is certainly influenced by his love affair with Fanny Brawne. According to Shackford,

Fanny Brawne began now to absorb the attention and affection of Keats; but the love which grew so rapidly gave him excitement, suffering, suspense, rather than peace and joy. The young girl, with her natural love of pleasure and coquetry, was unable to understand the intensity of her lover’s nature, and from sheer inexperience and youthful self-absorption did not grasp the nature of his concentrated affection, but she must be absolved of any intentional cruelty. (478)

Fanny Brawne's inability "to understand the intensity of her lover's nature" and her "youthful self-absorption" that "did not grasp the nature" of his affection certainly gave Keats a motive for constructing a poem that is instructive of how to experience joy and romantic love: "Emprison her soft hand" (29). The "fit" falling suddenly "from heaven like a weeping cloud" (21-2) is perhaps an account of the suddenness of Keats's affection for Fanny Brawne. Clearly she was "peerless" in the eyes of Keats in the same way that the mistress is "peerless" for the "thy" of Keats's poem. Shackford's account of Fanny's "coquetry" and unintentional cruelty is certainly consistent with the almost cruel nature of the mistress, however the statement that she should be forgiven because she could not possibly understand Keats also is consistent with the "thy" of Keats's poem being told to "Emprison her soft hand." O'Rourke argues that this "emprisoning" of the mistress' hand is a "reversal – and the revenge – called for by Keats's 'entrammeling by Fanny Brawne'" (121). In this sense "Ode on Melancholy" is in part about Fanny being "peerless" for Keats and him feeding "deep, deep" on her anger.

The "suffering" that he experienced from his romance with Fanny Brawne is largely present in all four stanzas: the idea of a "sail" (3) that with "groans" (3) is filled out and a "rudder... / ...still hard with agony" (5-6) are examples of radical dispersonification that imply a physical suffering. This stanza is ultimately about the "Melancholy" that cannot be found in "any Isle of Lethe." Certainly the idea of twisting "Wolf's-bane, tight-rooted, for its poisonous wine" (11-2) implies a mortal suffering that can lead a person to commit suicide. The "feed deep, deep upon her [the mistress's] peerless eyes" is a kind of romantic suffering. The last stanza is about what one must undergo to "be among her cloudy trophies hung" – he must experience a "Beauty that must die" and "Pleasure... / Turning to poison" (33-4). Furthermore,

being a “trophy” in the “temple of Delight” (Greenblatt, Abrams 1823n.9) implies an immortal suffering.

Keats said, “I will not spoil my love of gloom by writing an ode to darkness” (O’Rourke 109). In other words, the “Ode on Melancholy” is not about death. There is one sense in which, despite Keats’s gloomy mood, the poem is about how there is hope for the ordinary “thy” in the first and second stanzas, that he has alternatives other than “nightshade;” he can “glut” himself on his pastoral surroundings and “feed” on his mistress’ anger. Clearly, however, death is represented in the Stygian nature of the first stanza and the final lines of the poem, and Harold Bloom cites Keats’s “consciousness of mutability and death” (100) when he was writing the Odes. This is consistent with the imagery of the poem. The “April shroud” is a radical dispersonification of “April” as wearing a “shroud.” The “morning rose” is a radical dispersonification of the “rose” as mourning. And there is the constant farewell of a “Beauty that must die.” All of this imagery represents death. He wrote in a letter on the ship from Italy, where he went to convalesce after he fell ill, “I wish for death every day and night to deliver me from these pains, and then I wish death away, for death would destroy even those pains which are better than nothing” (Vendler 171). This echoes the advice not to commit suicide “And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul” (20) because even suffering is better than the “nothing” of death. Keats wrote in a letter to his brother and sister in early Spring of 1819, “I can imagine such happiness carried to an extreme – but what must it end in? – Death” (Norton 1853). The “happiness” here is the “happiness” of mankind in general, and death itself is inevitable, even if one follows the advice of the poem. Keats’s longing for death, represented as being a poetic sacrifice to the goddess “Melancholy” and being a “trophy” in her “cloudy” (40) temple (Greenblatt, Abrams 1823 n.9), is apparent in this epistolary evidence, which points to the fact

that the poem is in fact about Keats himself, although there remains the possibility that he was “deprived of all society” (Vendler 168), even poetic society, and no one could follow him to the “temple of Delight.”

The transition between the second stanza and the last is apparent in the *Epistle to Reynolds*. Keats wrote: “Still I am sick of it, and tho’, to-day,/ I’ve gathered young spring-leaves and flowers gay / Of periwinkle and wild strawberry, / Still do I that most fierce destruction see” (Shackford 482). The imagery of this passage is similar to the flowers in the second stanza of Keats’s poem, however Keats states that all the same there is something immanent, a kind of “destruction” like that of the implied death of being a “trophy” (Greenblatt, Abrams 1823n.9) in the “sovrán shrine” (36) of “Veil’d Melancholy” (36). The fact that “Melancholy” is “Veil’d” implies a kind of grief, insofar as her allegorical companions are dying; “Melancholy” requires an experience and then a loss of emotions like “Joy,” “Pleasure” and “Delight.” Vendler addresses the “intellectual difficulties with the proposition ‘Sensation is a path to Truth’” (184). Here she is referring first to the “Sensation” of the second stanza: the “weeping cloud,” “droop-headed flowers” (23) and other pastoral images. The difficulty here is that these things do not represent the “Truth” of the final couplet. The second thing she is referring to are the “intellectual difficulties” of a “Beauty that must die,” “Joy... / Bidding adieu” (32-3) and the other instances of predicates that imply a contradiction with their object where radical dispersonification is present.

The meaning of the second stanza of “Ode on Melancholy” remains in doubt until the first line of the last stanza (Bloom 100). In a letter to Benjamin Bailey in November of 1817, Keats wrote,

What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth –
 whether it existed before or not – for I have the same
 Idea of all our Passions as of Love, they are all in their
 sublime, creative of essential Beauty. (*Norton* 1843).

“Ode on Melancholy” is about personified notions such as “Beauty” through which the imagination “seizes” as a kind of “truth,” the poetic truth of “And be among her cloudy trophies hung” (40). This statement is clearly in the same vein as “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” where the final lines are, “‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty,’ – that is all / Ye need to know on earth, and all ye need to know” (49-50). The capitalized figures of “Passions,” “Love” and “Beauty” in this statement from Keats’s correspondence resemble the figures in his poem. The word “truth” is not capitalized either in Keats’s letter or “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” in that sense the “Ode on a Grecian Urn” is not using personification allegory. The “all ye need to know” of “Ode on a Grecian Urn” means that it is enough for ordinary people to know that “truth” and “Beauty” exist and are the same thing without really comprehending them. The “Ode on a Grecian Urn” is addressed to the same “thy” as in “Ode on Melancholy.” In both cases there is something beyond the ordinary mortal’s capacity. A “Beauty that must die” is consistent with Keats’s letters, in which he writes, “that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration” (*Norton* 1845). In other words, poetic inspiration whose only “truth” is “Beauty” “overcomes every other consideration” in writing “Ode on Melancholy,” and it is this that makes the poem allegorical. When he writes, “She dwells with Beauty – Beauty that must die,” at this point Keats is sure of what he is saying.

The first line of the last stanza, “She dwells with Beauty – Beauty that must die” (31) qualifies the “melancholy fit” and how to appreciate the pastoral beauty of a mortal, fleeting world “that must die.” All of that beauty is fleeting. “Melancholy” exists in that world, but

everything in that world “must die.” The “melancholy fit” that falls (and fosters creation) and the feeding “deep, deep” in the mistress’ anger imply something beyond the pastoral imagery. The final stanza is about the kind of poetic faith that it takes for one to “burst Joy’s grape against his palate fine” (38) and “palate” here implies a poetic discernment.

The doubt present in Keats’s addressing of the poem to himself echoes Blake’s existential philosophy. According to Robert Gleckner, for Blake, “Mystery” is “permanent doubt grounded on false, unimaginative belief” (379). A state of “permanent doubt” is what results from a “false, unimaginative belief in God,” in other words through the religious establishment. Blake’s commentary on “doubt” and an “unimaginative belief” in God mirrors Keats’s doubt until “She dwells with Beauty – Beauty that must die.” In a letter to his brothers in December of 1817, Keats expresses the “doubt” and “mystery” that are a part of Negative Capability (*Norton* 1845). This is the same “doubt” and “Mystery” (16) that are present in the religious allegory of “The Human Abstract. The entirety of the “Ode on Melancholy” to this point represents Keats’s doubt; his doubt that “Melancholy” can be found “in any isle of Lethe dull” (10) his doubt that one should go to “Lethe” in the first place, his doubt in poisonous intoxicants and his doubt what to do when the “melancholy fit” falls: “glut” on the various natural aspects or “feed deep” on the mistress’ eyes. But none of this is about Keats himself; the first three stanzas are addressed to the “thy” of the second stanza.

The authorial intent of Keats’s poem, in which it is addressed to the “thy” of the second stanza and the poet in the last stanza, is consistent with O’Rourke’s statement that “Those who see the world from a melancholic half-distance of theatrical specularity, the “Ode on Melancholy” suggests, paradoxically live more intensely than the fully interpellated subjects, the ‘men of power’ who live simply and wholeheartedly within the symbolic order” (140). Here he

is saying that those to whom the second stanza is addressed live “more intensely” because they are wholeheartedly involved in the phenomenal world of mortality, although they are seeing the “truth” of the final couplet from a “half-distance of theatrical specularity” because they cannot truly understand it. Those who live “within the symbolic order” of the allegorical last stanza are the poet and Keats himself. This “symbolic order” is represented by a “Beauty that must die” and the other personified emotions that lead to “Melancholy.” Blake is the “man of power” who lives “within the symbolic order” because is writing a political or religious allegory. In the same way, the speakers and characters of Blake’s “Songs” are fully involved in the state of “Innocence” or “Experience,” though their point of view is limited in this respect as they remain *within* the poem. Their “theatrical specularity” is represented in the fact that they are still characters, while Blake and Keats are the poet who is writing the poem.

The same poems that represent Blake’s political and religious allegory are about his poetic technique, which Gleckner argues is “the human abstract” (373). “The Human Abstract,” from “Songs of Experience” can be seen as a metaphor for the poetic process: “Cruelty knits a snare” (7), “Humility” takes root under his foot (11-2), “the shade / of Mystery” spreads “over his head” (13-4) and “bears the fruit of Deceit” (17). Blake is responding to the “Cruelty” of the religious establishment, which manifests itself in Christianity through “Humility” and the result of writing the poem is that the “shade” of the “Tree” (22) that is “Sought thro’ Nature” (22) grows over his head. The “Tree of Mystery” is a religious allegory; “God exists in the Tree of Mystery instead of the human breast” (Gleckner 379). When the “dismal shade / Of Mystery” (13-4) grows over his head, false, unimaginative religious belief is replaced by knowledge. The “fruit of Deceit, / Ruddy and sweet to eat” (17-8) is what results from the poetic process. “The

Human Abstract” is Blake writing about his own poetic process in the context of an allegorical poem. The final stanza,

The Gods of the earth and sea,
Sought thro’ Nature to find this Tree
But their search was all in vain;
There grows one in the Human Brain” (21-4)

echoes both the mythological journey of the discarded stanza that is “all in vain” because “Melancholy” cannot be found and the search for the “temple of Delight” in the final stanza, whose result is a state of “Melancholy” that exists, after all, “in the Human Brain.” The “Tree of Mystery” also resembles the “mournful Psyche” of the first stanza.

In 1803, Blake stated that “Allegory addressed to the Intellectual Powers while it is altogether hidden from the Corporeal Understanding is My Definition of the Most Sublime Poetry” (Howard 561). In 1810, nine years before Keats wrote the “Ode on Melancholy,” Blake stated, “Fable or Allegory are a totally distinct & inferior kind of Poetry” (Kelley 93), although the later prophetic works are clearly allegorical in their use of characters such as Urizen. There is a transition in Blake from allegory to emblem poetry, however when “Songs of Innocence” and “Songs of Experience” were written in 1789 and 1794 (Keynes xiii-xv), Blake still believed that “Allegory” is the “Most Sublime Poetry” and the statement that allegory is an “inferior kind of Poetry” does not mean that Keats was not influenced by Blake’s use of personification allegory in “Songs.” Kelley states regarding Coleridge’s political allegory that, “Elsewhere he [Coleridge] views allegory with more fear than hope” (118). Coleridge, a Romantic like Blake and Keats, had an ambivalent view about allegory.

It has been argued that Blake's "Songs" are not allegorical but symbolic or emblematic, and in this case he is not a suitable influence for Keats in "Ode on Melancholy." "Ah! Sun-flower" from "Songs of Experience" represents, according to Mary Lynn Johnson, Blake's movement from allegory towards emblematic literature (151-2). In that sense there is what I am calling a reverse corollary, in which Blake preceded Keats but was already moving away from allegory. "Ah! Sun-flower," remains according to Johnson an instance of a symbol that resists interpretation, although it is presumably about "the soul's longing for God" (152). Johnson says, "In Blake the poem does not point to the picture" (152). Rather, the poem is part of the picture in the sense that he etched the poem onto a metal plate. The argument for the emblematic nature of Blake's poetry is in part based on the printed plates that accompanied his poems. In Johnson's commentary on the plate for "Ah! Sun-flower," she says that the flower is "perhaps in the process of becoming human. Only the left leg of the flower-girl is fully formed.... She appears to be unable to free her leg from the blossom" (166). In this sense, the flower is anthropomorphized, personified as becoming a girl, who has to worry about things like death as a human being, while if she had remained a flower, she would not have to be conscious of such things. The plate for "Ah! Sun-flower" uses personification, however it is not the print but the poem itself that points to something abstract.

As with "Ode on Melancholy" and Blake's "Songs" in general, there is an ambiguity in who is speaking the poem that is ultimately allegorical. The speaker in the first stanza appears to be admiring the "Sun-flower." The antecedent of "Where" (4) has a clear meaning; an eternal afterlife that exists where the sun sets and where the speaker longs to go. The syntax is disrupted in the last line by "Where my Sun-flower wishes" (8). The final couplet could be written, where the "Youth" (5) and the "Virgin" (6) "aspire... / ... to go" (7-8) is where the "Sun-flower"

wishes to go. Also, if the first word of the second stanza, “Where” is removed, then the poem reads: where the “Youth” and the “Virgin” “aspire” to go is “Where my Sun-flower wishes to go” (8). Furthermore, if you take away “the” from the phrase “the Youth” (5) you have youth personified as “pined away with desire” (5) in its abstract longing for God; this is comparable to “Joy” “Bidding adieu” in Keats’s poem. Add “to go” at the end of line 7 then “Where the Youth” and the “pale Virgin” and the “Sun-flower” wish to go (5-8) is the same place: “Where the travelers journey is done” (4). Thus, the poem is about an abstract state like the “temple of Delight” in Keats’s poem.

“The Human Abstract” is about an “abstract” human condition, to which the reader is led by the experience of “Cruelty,” “Humility” and “Deceit.” Without human suffering, there would be according to Blake no more “Pity” (1) or “Mercy” (3). This is like a “Beauty that must die,” which is something one must experience in order to reach the “temple of Delight.” The page break after line 4 indicates that “mutual fear brings peace” (5) is qualified with the Bard’s statement, “Till the selfish loves increase” (6). The poem begins with Man speaking and then the bard speaks in the second stanza (Gleckner 378). The poem then relates the narrative of “Cruelty” knitting a snare (7) and spreading his “baits with care” (8) as the result of “selfish loves” increasing (6). The fact that Cruelty’s “fears” in line 9 are qualified as “holy” (9) in Gleckner’s account (378) is consistent with the fact that these personified emotions are ultimately a political or religious allegory leading to knowledge or “Experience.” “Humility takes root / Underneath his foot” (11-2) and becomes the “Tree of Mystery,” spreading over Cruelty’s head (13-4), and the “Catterpillar and the Fly, / Feed on the Mystery” (15-6). Then the “Raven” makes his nest in the “Tree of Mystery” (19-20). When “Cruelty” comes to regret his actions and fear God with “holy fears” (9) he experiences “Humility” and that becomes the “Tree

of Knowledge.” “Cruelty” is the protagonist of the poem until “Humility” takes root (11) as the “Tree of Knowledge.” The radical dispersonification of “Cruelty” in this poem makes it allegorical. The “Raven” (19) who makes his nest in the tree symbolizes “the Fear of Death” (Keynes plate 47); thus, fear of death is a part of knowledge. The “fruit of deceit” in line 17 echoes the “ruby grape” of “nightshade” and “yew-berries” of stanza 1 of “Ode on Melancholy,” insofar as death is a kind of “Deceit.” The capitalized emotions, “Pity,” “Mercy,” “Cruelty,” “Humility” and “Deceit” are allegorical personifications. Keynes states that the “Tree of Knowledge” symbolizes “the growth of religion, with the priesthood (the Catterpillar and the Fly) feeding on its leaves” (plate 47). In this sense, the poem is a religious allegory. This mirrors Keats’s letter to Reynolds in May of 1818: “the Burden of the Mystery” (*Norton* 1848). Gleckner argues that “the source of such cruelty and the cause of such poverty, [is] ‘the human brain’ itself” (377). This is a statement of political and religious allegory, insofar as “poverty” is a societal problem and the problems with society, for Blake, are caused by the religious establishment. “Innocence” is the state of man before industry and organized religion and “Experience” represents the world after.

CONCLUSIONS

Pettet argues that in the first two books of *Hyperion*, Keats “was led into Miltonic – and possibly Blakean – regions of empyreal remoteness” (48). This corroborates Bate’s statement that he had learned how to write from earlier Romantics (521). The similarity of the allegory in Blake’s “Songs” and the “Ode on Melancholy” also indicates this possibility. The allegorical

nature of Blake's "Songs" and Keats's "Ode on Melancholy" consists in personified emotions that lead to an abstract state at the end of the poem: "Melancholy" and Blake's contraries "Innocence and Experience." Blakean "regions of empyreal remoteness" are certainly present in the abstract "temple of Delight," and the similarity in the use of allegory in both texts raises the possibility that Blake actually influenced Keats. Despite the surface differences among the poems, Blake's "Songs" are about his visionary experience of the state of "Innocence" before industry and religion and "Experience" after, and Keats's poem is about the emotional state of "Melancholy" that he has experienced. In the end, it is up to the reader to know the world of "Innocence" and "Experience" and "To find the Melancholy, whether she / Dreameth in any isle of Lethe dull" (9-10).

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