“THE POETIC GROUND OF PHYSIOLOGY”: AESTHETIC AND BIOLOGICAL UNITY IN BRITISH ROMANTIC POETRY

by

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ABSTRACT

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British Romantic poets adapted the natural-philosophical idea of "organicism", a framework that explained life as a formative, generative power that pervades all organisms and provides unity to the parts that make the whole, as a way to judge art. The uniquely Romantic idea of organicism was defined by Samuel Taylor Coleridge as "unity in *multeity" (Theory of Life,* 42), which was the aesthetic ideal many poets strove to meet. I will explore how certain works in the Romantic era exemplify various aspects of organic theory, specifically: *The Sensitive Plant,* by P. B. Shelley, describes a personified organic force; *The Botanic Gardens,* by Erasmus Darwin, demonstrates how natural philosophers came to view the organization of life as a network, rather than a taxonomic hierarchy; and the ode encapsulates the organic ideal of synthesis. Understanding organic theory helps us to understand the ideal that the Romantics aspired to meet.

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Ch. 1 Introduction to Organicism

At the turn of the 19th century, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge published *Lyrical Ballads,* effectively kick-starting a new literary movement that was, in part, a rebellion against the mechanization of the Industrial Revolution and the search for perfect balance that typified the Neoclassicists of the 18th century, was (is?) called "Romanticism". It was characterized primarily by a longing to return to innocence and unblemished nature, and Coleridge was heavily influenced by scientific work in the study of organicism, which was a natural-philosophical framework that many poets and scientists in the late 18th century used to judge aesthetics and explain natural scientific phenomena. It grew out of the contested theory of epigenesis, which was first conceived of by Aristotle, and generally referred to "a gradual, internally motivated process of morphogenesis, commencing from what we might call an epicenter" (Gigante 7), as described in *Life* by Denise Gigante. One of the well-known examples of organicism is the now-discredited concept of "spontaneous generation", which is an interpretation of an experiment in which rotting meat produced flies. The experimenter claimed that the meat produced the flies, due to an ambiguous life-force that imbues the correct arrangement of matter with life. Similarly, the Romantics believed that ideal art was "spontaneously generated", which allowed a poet to combine seemingly disparate ideas into a single structure, held together by a unifying force.

As organicism fit the Romantic view of life well, other theories of life fit well with Neoclassicism, primarily the theory of preformation. The theory of preformation postulated that organisms formed from miniature versions of the organism, which then grew with proper nutrition. This theory fit well with the mechanistic and taxonomic views of Enlightenment science embraced by the Neoclassicists, as the form was pre-determined from conception, and

did not depend on an unknown force. Carolus Linnaeus endeavored to categorize all organisms in the natural world through a taxonomic system in 1735, a system which is still in widespread use today, and perfectly captures the search for order that characterized much of scientific discovery in the 18th century.

The discovery of ova and the "spermatic animals" in semen in the late 17th century seemed to confirm the theory of preformation, and many naturalists assumed that one of these cells provided the miniature form of the organism. However, it met with three substantial challenges in the mid- to late-18th century, namely, the work of Needham, Bonnet, and Trembley. John Turberville Needham's work with infusions of vegetable and animal matter led him to conclude that there was a generative life force beyond nutrition that enabled growth and life. Charles Bonnet's work with aphids, particularly finding that plant lice could reproduce asexually, also contributed to the dismantling of the theory of preformation, despite his vocal support of preformation. Most significantly, Abraham Trembley's work with the arm-polyp (now known as a hydra), showed that it was able to regenerate entire plants from cuttings. Gigante describes the hydra and its effects as follows, "An unusually plastic form of life and a possible link between the animal and plant kingdoms, the polyp was more than a match for proponents of preformation. If all life was preformed, skeptics wondered, how could a severed piece of a creature generate an entirely new living form?" (13), and she continues, "The morphological oddity of the polyp challenged the structural stability of the natural world and redirected naturalists back to the unsettling idea of formative power." (14) All of this work caused people to doubt the concept of preformation and seemed to support the presence of an organic, self-generating power.

The first naturalist to provide significant proof of the formative power suggested by the theory of epigenesis was Caspar Friedrich Wolff, who described the development of incubating chicks for his dissertation in 1759. He described an "essential power" that was beyond the grasp of anatomists and physiologists, as Gigante intimates, "While anatomists studied organisms through the structure of their parts and physiologists through the internal structure of the relations of diverse organ functions, Wolff assumed that all life forms develop analogously based on the workings of the vis essentialis (essential power)" (19). This idea of essential power revitalized the idea of epigenesis, and formed the basis for organicism as a philosophical framework. Wolff's successor, Blumenbach, proposed a formative power that organized organic matter, which he called *Bildungstrieb.* In "Romantic Philosophy and Romantic Tendencies: Blurred Boundaries and Terminological Problems", Elias Palti summarizes Blumenbach's idea as follows, "this principle should be assumed, but could not be turned into an object of knowledge; its action could be empirically demonstrated and observed in its effects, but its specific nature could never be defined according to concepts since it was placed beyond the realm of our sensory experience; it constituted a *qualitas occulta"* (84). Blumenbach's proposed formative power influenced organicists in the Romantic era, including Immanuel Kant and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who viewed life as a power. Palti explains how aesthetics and naturalist philosophy came to be intertwined by organic theory when he posits:

> The capacity of self-generation and self-production, which allegedly distinguished living organisms from inanimate matter, defined the model of a form of being which contained its center within itself, and, therefore, was in full possession of the laws presiding over its own generation. Epigenesis thus became the condition of possibility of every attempt to recover an absolute foundation, both for philosophy and literature (84).

Organicism provided philosophers a framework to think about wholes and the parts that make them up, for everything from organisms to poems; it proved to be an all-encompassing doctrine.

The transition from Enlightenment rationality to organicism in science is illustrated in the work of Erasmus Darwin. One of the members of the Lunar Society, an informal group of well-known intellectuals, Darwin was a well-known and respected inventor, philosopher, and physician, who wrote poetry to describe his scientific discoveries and ideas. In *The Botanic Gardens,* Darwin attempts to write an epic poem about plants. Rather than calling upon Muses to assist him, Darwin calls upon nature:

> But Thou! whose mind the well-attemper'd ray
> Of Taste and Virtue lights with purer day;
> Whose finer sense each soft vibration owns
> With sweet responsive sympathy of tones;
> So the fair flower it expands it's lucid form
> To meet the sun, and shuts it to the storm; –
> For thee my borders nurse the fragrant wreath,
> My fountains murmur, and my zephyrs breathe;
> Slow slides the painted snail, the glided fly
> Smooths his fine down, to charm thy curious eye;
> On twinkling fins my pearly nations play,
> Or win with sinuous train their trackless way;
> My plumy pairs in gay embroidery dress'd
> Form with ingenious bull the pensile nest,
> To Love's sweet notes attune the liftening dell,
> And Echo founds her soft symphonious shell (2-3).

Although it is written in couplets, like the epic poems that were written by the Neoclassicists, Darwin does not keep a consistent meter, reflecting how the ideal of perfect balance shifted in the Romantic era. Isobel Armstrong intimates how the Neoclassical ideal was highly structured, even in seeming randomness:

> The ostensible principle of organization in such passages is the random psychological order of visual and perceptual experience as the eye 'roams', loops, sweeps backwards and forwards over the landscape. But this is a superficial impression: a quite different ordering activity is going on – the arrangement of items from the phenomenological surface of the landscape into categories and classes, carefully arranged line by line as discrete self-contained groups and made contiguous according to likeness and similitude (Thomson) or according to a principle of contrast (Cowper) (262).

The Neoclassical desire for perfect order and balance was reflected in the heroic couplets that were prevalent throughout their works, particularly in their epic poems. The Romantic imagination, however, did not seek out such a neat order. Armstrong argues that Romantic perception, "is a fusion of imaginative creation, memory, and spatial and temporal projection. There is an alertness of the whole mind implied here, and an alertness, too, to its sense of the vanishing point of perception in the hint of the unreached sea" (262). Romantic poets tried to surpass the boundaries of form and perception in an attempt to find an overarching order and understanding, leading to the organic ideal in poetry. Darwin's *The Botanic Gardens* explores biological subject matter using a lofty and artistic form, perfectly encapsulating organicism's effects on both science, literature, and the interconnections between them.

Aesthetics can also be viewed in an organic way, demonstrated in Chapter 1 of *Experimental Life*, where Robert Mitchell outlines the idea of an "Art-network" to describe how Art progresses while also retroactively considering what "Art" is and allowing for evolution of new series of art, as opposed to "the arts" which are compartmentalized by media. Mitchell explains:

> We can perhaps best capture the peculiar shape and dynamics of Art through the figure of a *heterogeneous network,* for the concept of Art names not only parallel series of media-specific practices that had existed for centuries (poetry, painting sculpture, etc.) but also the virtual links between elements of these series that enable new series (abstract art, conceptual art, etc.), but also experiments in "multimedia" art (e. g. painting-sculptures), and series yet to be invented by means of future experiments. (39)

Mitchell's understanding of modern art is reminiscent of the organic understanding of life and how it evolved: non-serial and insular. Just as Mitchell asserts that, "One can *link* Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancyent Marinere,* for example to the work of 'elder poets,' but Coleridge's *Rime* does not represent an improvement on (or falling away from) this earlier verse; it is simply a different link" (39), organicists do not claim the life of animals is an improvement on the life of

plants, it is simply a different manifestation of it. Mitchell's description of an "Art-network" is a strikingly organic view of art, and it is easier to imagine how a single framework was applied to both biology and aesthetics. In the next section, I will investigate how the Romantic understanding of organicism was applied to both aesthetics and biology by Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Coleridge's Theoretical Work: Unity in Multeity

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, one of the founding members of British Romanticism, wrote extensively on matters of biological and aesthetic form, and his work contributed greatly to the uniquely Romantic understanding of organicism that came about in the early 19th century. In *Biographia Literaria,* published in 1817, Coleridge describes both his inspirations for writing and his ideas about life and aesthetics. It is in these essays that he first expresses his idea of "unity in multeity", or "unity in difference". In his essay *On Poesy or Art,* Coleridge specifies:

> In order to derive pleasure from the occupation of the mind, the principle of unity must always be present, so that in the midst of multeity the centripetal force may never be suspended, nor the sense be fatigued by the predominance of the centrifugal force. This unity in multeity I have elsewhere stated as the principle of beauty. It is equally the source of pleasure in variety, and in fact a higher term including both. (262)

For Coleridge, striking a balance between unity and difference is the ideal definition of beauty. Charles Armstrong, in *Romantic Organicism: From Idealist Origins to Ambivalent Afterlife,* illustrates how Coleridge's definition is the very essence of Romantic idealism when he posits that: "the internal tensions of this structure-including those between individual autonomy and totalising unity, and between full unity and mere balance-as they are evident in a wide spectrum of romantic texts and problems" (9). Tensions between autonomy and unity for the parts of wholes forms the basis of the power that allows for the creation of things.

In his *Essay on Beauty,* Coleridge defines the two powers that must be balanced for something to be "beautiful" as follows:

> I am now using the term beauty in its most comprehensive sense, as including expression and artistic interest,—that is, I consider not only the living balance, but likewise all the accompaniments that even by disturbing are necessary to the renewal and continuance of the balance. And in this sense I proceed to show, that the beautiful in the object may be referred to two elements,—lines and colors; the first belonging to the shapely (*forma, formalis, formous),* and in this, to the law, and the reason; and the second, to the lively, the free, the spontaneous, and the self-justifying. (250-251)

Coleridge separates lines and colors of artistic objects, putting lines into the realm of reason and form, while giving color to the realm of the spontaneous. In addition, he allows either element to be "disturbing", without rendering the object not beautiful, so long as the elements remain in balance. Similarly, he allows "disagreeable" objects to be beautiful. Coleridge explicates, "It [beauty] may be present in a disagreeable object, in which the proportion of the parts constitutes a whole; it does not arise from association, as the agreeable does, but sometimes lies in the rupture of association…" (*On Poesy and Art,* 257). According to Coleridge, disagreeable images are not necessarily disagreeable because they lack balance or are disproportionate, rather their balance or proportions are unlike the original object or image, and even disagreeable images and objects can be considered "beautiful", at least philosophically. Coleridge believes that all art is a mimesis of nature, and defines two elements that constitute imitation—"likeliness and unlikeliness, or sameness and difference, and in all genuine creations of art there must be a union of these disparates" (*On Art or Poesy* 256)—opposites which distill into Coleridge's foundational idea of "unity in multeity". Coleridge's ideas of aesthetic form are firmly grounded in the union of and tension between opposite powers, which results in unity from difference, in a form which does not exhaust with its unity or difference. He applies his ideas of opposite powers which then result in a balanced form to biological form and offers his understanding of

organicism to the natural sciences, which he describes in the *Biographia Literaria* and *Theory of Life*.

In the final chapter of the first volume of *Biographia Literaria,* Coleridge describes how equal and opposite finite forces must result in neutralization of both forces; however, he then philosophizes:

> The counteraction then of the two assumed forces does not depend on their meeting from opposite directions; the power which acts in them is indestructible; it is therefore inexhaustibly re-ebullient; and as something must be the result of these two forces, both alike infinite, and both alike indestructible; and as rest or neutralization cannot be this result; no other conception is possible, but that the product must be a tertium aliquid, or finite generation." (198)

These two infinite and indestructible forces are the source of generation, and, thus, of life. In biological terms, this is demonstrated by the balance between signals of cell death and proliferation in every cell. The regulation of these signals allows cells to grow and replicate, but without the uncontrollable growth that causes cancer. Coleridge defines the result of these two forces in *Theory of Life,* when he says:

> But that there is a physiognomy in words, which, without reference to their fitness or necessity, make unfavorable as well as favorable impressions, and that ever unusual term in an abstruse research incurs the risk of being denominated jargon, I should at the same time have borrowed a scholastic *term,* and defined life *absolutely,* as the principle of unity in *multeity,* as far as the former, the unity to wit, is produced *ab intra;* but *eminently (sensu eminenti),* I define life as *the principle of individuation,* or the power which unites a given *all* into a *whole* that is presupposed by all its parts. (42)

Once again, "unity in multeity" gives rise to form—biological, in this case. Furthermore, he characterizes life as "the principle of individuation". Mitchell interprets his definition, "Thus, to be on the lookout for individuation meant to look beyond, or behind, those differences between beings and toward the processes of expansion and intensification that produced *new* kinds of 'individuals': individuation as a power of emergence, rather than of distinction" (92). Mitchell's interpretation of individuation is redolent of his explanation of the Art-network, in which each

node constitutes a new manifestation of "art", independent of those that came before. While every individual can be compared, they cannot be judged against each other.

Coleridge further delineates the mysterious opposite forces and how they come together in the process of individuation when he asserts, "Thus, in the identity of the two counter-powers, Life *sub*sists; in their strife it *con*sists: and in their reconciliation it at once dies and is born again into a new form, either falling back into the life of the whole, or starting anew in the process of individuation" (Coleridge, *Theory of Life,* 51-52). Coleridge calls these forces "polarity, or the essential dualism of Nature, arising out of its productive unity, and still tending to reaffirm it, either as equilibrium, indifference, or identity" (50). Charles Armstrong, in *Romantic Organicism,* explains that Coleridge's use of "polarity" echoes Schelling's writings, but he situates it as the basic reason for life (63). The organic wholes that result from the union of polarity are the living individuals, and life "is the power of binding" (Mitchell 91). Thus, according to Coleridge, the unification of opposite forces is the defining feature of "unity in multeity", and the result is a network of manifestations of life, each unique and new, and none better nor worse than any other.

Coleridge's organic life-network is in stark contrast to the taxonomic views of the Enlightenment, which attempted to classify individuals within a single, hierarchical framework. It is also antithetical to Darwinian evolution, in which every individual is competing to gain resources and mates, in order to produce a large number of viable offspring. Although Coleridge rejects the idea of hierarchies between individuals, he is not opposed to the idea of hierarchies altogether; rather, he sets up an organic hierarchy within each individual and the opposing forces that make life possible.

The hierarchy within each individual is based on the influence of each part on the whole. In *Theory of Life,* Coleridge explains, "For this spirit of the whole is most expressed in that part which derives its importance as an End from its importance as a Mean, relatively to all the parts under the same copula" (44). Each part is dependent on the whole for existence, and each part contributes to the whole, but some parts exert more influence. In addition, the more parts an individual has, the more intense its life is, as Coleridge intimates:

> Finally, of individuals, the living power will be most intense in that individual which, as a whole, has the greatest number of integral parts presupposed in it; when, moveover, these integral parts, together with a proportional increase of their interdependence, as *parts,* have themselves most the character of wholes in the sphere occupied by them. (44-45)

Although the power may be more intense for certain individuals, it is not necessarily better than another, which also holds true for the powers that Coleridge outlines as being necessary for different subsets of life force. Coleridge argues, "My hypothesis will, therefore, be thus expressed, that the constituent forces of life in the human living body are—first, the power of length, or REPRODUCTION; second, the power of surface (that is, length and breadth), or IRRITABILITY; third, the power of depth, or SENSIBILITY" (93). Coleridge also maintains that these powers exert certain amounts of influence in certain classes of living organisms. For example, he claims, "The insect world is the exponent of irritability, as the vegetable is of reproduction" (75), meaning that insects are governed by irritability, or movement, while plants are governed by reproduction. The magnitude that irritability influences insects is the same magnitude that reproduction influences plants. Furthermore, the combination of these various powers results in different individuals. The intensity of different powers and the effects of certain parts on wholes result in an organic hierarchy within individuals that results in unique biological forms.

This thesis will explore how certain works in the Romantic era exemplify various aspects of organic theory in both form and content. *The Sensitive Plant,* by P. B. Shelley, describes the "dynamic equilibrium" of organicism. I will demonstrate how Romantic poets used the ode to encapsulate the organic ideal in poetry using Coleridge's "Dejection: An Ode" and John Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale".

Chapter 2: Dynamic Equilibrium in Organicism

An essential result of organicism is organizational structure, both within and between organisms. For Coleridge, this structure takes the form of a hierarchical network, bound together by the tensions between opposing forces, which also constitutes the generative force that allows life to flourish. Organicism involves an implicit overarching tension between order and chaos, which manifests as a kind of dynamic equilibrium (to borrow a term from the physical sciences), defined as a state in which the forward and backward processes of a reversible reaction occur at a rate that results in a constant amount of each substance in a closed system. In other words, the constant conversion of elements appears to be stagnant system. Similarly, in organicism, order arises from the chaos of opposition, allowing the formation of structural unity in both organisms and art. In *The Sensitive Plant,* P. B. Shelley investigates the underlying chaos and tensions that underlie order.

The eponymous subject is likely a plant known as a *mimosa,* which responds to tactile sensation by closing its leaves. Like the hydra, it fascinated natural-philosophers as it appeared to bridge the gap between the plant and animal kingdoms through its seeming sensibilities. Romantic poets became fond of using it as a metaphor for the same reasons. In "The Puzzling 'Mimosa': Sensitivity and Plant Symbols in Romanticism", Maniquis explicates how *mimosas* "often implied in sensitivity not only a state of feeling but also one of being" (129), meaning

that, in responding to touch, the plants appeared to manifest a kind of consciousness or awareness. Since the sensitive plant allowed for meditations on the intimate connections between feeling and being, as well as the interconnections between forms of life, it was a clear candidate for Romantic organic symbolism, as Maniquis explains:

> The sensitive plant was one form in which the possibilities of sensation, even of feeling, could be seen even below the animal realm. Perhaps what man knew as his 'life' was more nearly designed like everything around him than he suspected. The superficial boundaries of forms were not as important as the common powers in which all life shared. For the Romantics, sensation was of course primary power, and to find specific activity in nature like that in man was something to make symbols. (131)

Mimosas appeared to have a form of sentience, which serves as an example of the superficial boundaries imposed by taxonomic scientists and appealed to the epigenetic notion of internal "primary" powers. P. B. Shelley, who was heavily influenced by Darwin's work, was a poet who was well-aware of the implications of the plant to scientists, as well as the regular use of it as a metaphor. He expands and embellishes the established metaphor in this poem, using the sensitive plant to symbolize the poet's search for order.

In Part First of *The Sensitive Plant,* the plant is introduced, and the garden is described as follows:

> And the Spring arose on the garden fair,
> Like the Spirit of Love felt everywhere;
> And each flower and herb on Earth's dark breast
> Rose from the dreams of its wintry rest.
> But none ever trembled and panted with bliss
> In the garden, the field, and the wilderness,
> Like a doe in the noontide with love's sweet want,
> As the companionless Sensitive Plant. (II-III, 20)

In these stanzas, the narrator sets up the first dichotomy between the sensitive plant and the other plants residing in the garden, as the sensitive plant lacks true companionship, which all the other plants take part in automatically. Although it appears that the sensitive plant violates the natural

order, it is merely fulfilling a necessary role that no other plant can, that of the contemplative. This role is described in the following stanzas:

> For each one was interpenetrated
> With the light and the odour its neighbour shed,
> Like young lovers whom youth and love make dear
> Wrapped and filled by their mutual atmosphere.
> But the Sensitive Plant which could give small fruit
> Of the love which it felt from the leaf to the root,
> Received more than all, it loved more than ever,
> Where none wanted but it, could belong to the giver,
> For the Sensitive Plant has no bright flower;
> Radiance and odour are not its dower;
> It loves, even like Love, its deep heart is full,
> It desires what it has not, the beautiful! (XVII-XIX, 27-28)

The other plants in the garden are forever encompassed by and participating in communal love, while the sensitive plant is only able to look on and long for the same; however, this longing allows the plant to fulfill the contemplative role. János Barcsák, in his article "Marking, Consciousness, Fabulation: The Lady's Presence in Shelley's 'Sensitive Plant'", intimates that the plant's exclusion "does not prevent the Sensitive-plant (self-consciousness) from perceiving the ecstasy of this selfless sharing, or from feeling the raptures of this continuous love-making. In fact, its external position is precisely what makes it capable of really appreciating this blissful state…" (37). Similar to the sensitive plant, man stands apart from the rest of creation, unable to participate fully in the perpetual selfless love; however, this unique position results in the ability to analyze the outer world, which is not granted to the other members of creation. By juxtaposing the companionless sensitive plant with the rest of the garden "Part First delineates self-consciousness in contrast to nature" (Barcsák 36), and the analogy between the sensitive plant and the poet becomes more relevant, as the sensitive plant's reflections come to resemble those of a poet. The sensitive plant's analysis leaves it furtively wishing for a companion, which will

allow it to participate in the beautiful exchange, as the rest of the members of the garden do. Part First ends as follows:

> The Sensitive Plant was the earliest
> Up-gathered into the bosom of rest;
> A sweet child weary of its delight,
> The feeblest and yet the favourite
> Cradled within the embrace of night. (XXVIII, 33)

The formal change of the couplet to the ending triplet elongates the stanza and emphasizes the sensitive plant's shift to sleep. In addition, the triplet violates the perfect order of the preceding couplets; however, the shift is so gentle that it seems to be a natural part of the poem, similarly to how the plant's lack of a companion is part of the natural order of the garden. The elongation also allows an organic, though drastic, shift to Part Second.

The primary subject of Part Second is not the sensitive plant, but a new character, introduced in the opening stanza:

> There was a Power in this sweet place,
> An Eve in this Eden; a ruling grace
> Which to the flowers, did they waken or dream,
> Was as God is to the starry scheme. (XXIX, 34)

The Lady orders the plants of the garden, and the narrator states,

> She lifted their heads with her tender hands,
> And sustained them with rods and osier bands;
> If the flowers had been her own infants she
> Could never have nursed them more tenderly. (XXXVIII, 39)

The Lady's care of the garden places her as a personified deity. She is not necessarily a member of the garden herself, rather she infuses all of it with her power, which results in order. Although she may be likened to a gardener, which was primarily the pastime of the wealthy in the 18th and 19th centuries in Britain, she does not order where the plants are or where they grow, which is

antithetical to the goal of Neoclassical gardening. In "Epistle IV", Alexander Pope, a poet and avid gardener in the 18th century, describes how to design a Neoclassical garden as follows:

> To build, to plant, whatever you intend,
> To rear the column, or the arch to bend,
> To swell the terrace, or to sink the grot;
> In all, let Nature never be forgot.
> But treat the goddess like a modest fair,
> Nor overdress, nor leave her wholly bare;
> Let not each beauty ev'rywhere be spied,
> Where half the skill is decently to hide.
> He gains all points, who pleasingly confounds,
> Surprises, varies, and conceals the bounds (Lines 47-53).

While the purpose of the Neoclassical garden was to present an idealized version of nature, the Lady's garden is a more perfect imitation of nature. Interestingly, the sensitive plant is not mentioned in this stanza; the entirety of it is devoted to the Lady. Richard Caldwell, in "'The Sensitive Plant' as Original Fantasy" posits "that Part Second is best interpreted as a dream, that dream which the Sensitive Plant commenced at the end of Part First" (240), which seems reasonable given Barcsák's argument that the Lady does not leave impressions in the garden, only order, and therefore:

> It [the Lady's presence] is not directly available to the Sensitive-plant, for the latter is self-conscious and nothing can enter consciousness without leaving a permanent mark. The Lady is, therefore, just a shadowy, dreamlike presence for the Sensitive-plant which it intuits rather than realizes. (40)

Although the Lady is not fully available or known to the sensitive plant, she resembles it in many ways, and may be either an imagined, ideal companion for or a corollary of the plant. The narrator describes:

> She had no companion of mortal race,
> But her tremulous breath and her flushing face
> Told, whilst the morn kissed the sleep from her eyes,
> That her dreams were less slumber than Paradise:
> As if some bright Spirit for her sweet sake
> Had deserted Heaven while the stars were awake,

As if yet around her he lingering were,
Though the veil of daylight concealed him from her. (XXXII-XXXIII, 36)

Like the sensitive plant, the Lady is companionless; however, it appears that she has a spiritual companion. If Part Second is the sensitive plant's dream (as Barcsák suggests), then the Lady acts as both a representation of the sensitive plant and the fulfillment of its longing for a companion. In this way, the Lady is a personification of the synthesized dichotomy between desire and fulfillment and is thus able to order the garden perfectly "by establishing and maintaining a distinction between what is harmless and what is harmful, between what is vital and what is opposed to life, between what is life-giving and what is parasitical" (Barcsák 39). The Lady and her order is one side of the reaction involved in the dynamic equilibrium of the seasons, as she is a manifestation of the equilibrium of desire and fulfillment. Part Second ends with the abrupt death of the Lady "ere the first leaf turned brown" (Line 4, XXXLII, 41). Whether the Lady's death is caused by the turning leaves or the turning leaves cause her death is never made apparent, but Part Third describes the garden once the ordering presence is removed.

The Part Third explicitly portrays the ruin of the garden, particularly in Stanza XLVIII, which says,

The garden, once fair, became cold and foul,
Like the corpse of her who had been its soul;
Which at first was lovely as if in sleep,
Then slowly changed, till it grew a heap
To make men tremble who never weep. (44)

Like the end of Part First, the use of the closing triplet serves to elongate the stanza and emphasize the shift from the ordered garden of the first two parts to the overgrown, decaying garden. The first rhyme, "foul/soul", is only an eye rhyme and denies closure or comfort, as it simultaneously makes a jarring connection between foulness and the soul of the attendant Lady, which is disconcerting, bordering on disturbing. The triplet rhyme of "sleep/heap/weep" creates a

sad, lulling effect that serves to increase the disturbing quality of the poem that will continue throughout the rest of Part Third. In "The Styles of Good and Evil in 'The Sensitive Plant'," Priscilla St. George intimates that the diction in Part Third "is shockingly precise, appealing to the eye and to the kinetic sense" (488), which is antithetical to the allusive, indistinct diction of the first two parts. For example, the descriptions in stanzas LVII-LVII are as follows:

> And thistles, and nettles, and darnels rank,
> And the dock, and henbane, and hemlock dank,
> Stretched out its long and hollow shank,
> And stifled the air till the dead wind stank.
> And plants, at whose names the verse feels loath,
> Filled the place with a monstrous undergrowth,
> Prickly, and pulpous, and blistering, and blue,
> Livid, and starred with a lurid dew. (49)

The intensely descriptive words, accompanied by the repetitive hard consonant sounds in the first stanza create a visceral reaction that is intensified in the second stanza, with the phrase, "And plants, at whose names the verse feels loath". Since the first stanza was so precise, the indication that there were other plants so "rank" the narrator will not name them is extremely disconcerting. Death reigns over Part Third, which reaches a climax in the final stanza:

> When winter had gone and spring came back
> The Sensitive Plant was a leafless wreck;
> But the mandrakes, and toadstools, and docks, and darnels,
> Rose like the dead from their ruined charnels. (LXXII, 56)

Just as Part Second ends with the Lady's death, Part Third ends with the sensitive plant's death; however, the plant's death is accompanied by the image of poisonous weeds rising like the dead, which shifts the focus from the titular subject. The end of Part Second and all of Part Third are seemingly thrown into doubt with the Conclusion, where the narrator suggests that none of the happenings occurred, but it is there that it is suggested that the rampant chaos is the second element of the dynamic equilibrium.

The Conclusion complicates the rest of the poem by intimating that everything past Part First never happened. It goes as follows:

> Whether the Sensitive Plant, or that
> Which within its boughs like a spirit sat
> Ere its outward form had known decay,
> Now felt this change, I cannot say.
> Whether that lady's gentle mind
> No longer with the form combined
> Which scattered love, as stars do light,
> Found sadness, where it left delight,
> I dare not guess; but in this life
> Of error, ignorance, and strife,
> Where nothing is, but all things seem,
> And we the shadows of the dream,
> It is a modest creed, and yet
> Pleasant if one considers it,
> To own that death itself must be,
> Like all the rest, a mockery.
> That garden sweet, that lady fair,
> And all sweet shapes and odours there,
> In truth have never past away:
> 'Tis we, 'tis ours, are changed; not they.
> For love, and beauty, and delight,
> There is no death nor change: their might
> Exceeds our organs, which endure
> No light, being themselves obscure. (LXXIII-LXXVIII, 57-60)

The assertions that death is a mockery and that the reader's perception of the garden changed rather than the garden changing perception seem to retroactively cast doubt on the events of the second part of the poem, destroying the substance of that part. If death is a fabrication, then the Lady, and the order she brings, is still present; in addition, the sensitive plant, who makes the Lady possible, is also present. However, the seasons cannot change unless the Lady dies, and cyclic renewal is necessary for the garden. I suggest that the narrator resolves this contradiction with a kind of dynamic equilibrium between order and chaos. In the poem, the ordering presence of the Lady allows Spring and Summer to occur, and her death is connected to the advent of Autumn and Winter. The chaos of Autumn and Winter balance the order of Spring and Summer,

which allows a transcendent order, held together by the tensions between organic order and chaos, as a system in dynamic equilibrium will appear static (ordered), although the elements inside of it are in a state of constant chaos. Bacsák argues:

> Not even we, self-conscious human beings, the creators of the fable, can escape the obscurity that is the foundation of the operations of these 'organs,' nothing can escape the ultimate obscurity of death – not even death itself. In a characteristically Shelleyan move, however, what this leads us to is not the passivity of ultimate despair, but rather the active (performative) affirmation of the transcendence that opens up within this negative movement. Not a transcendence that comes from the outside affecting our organs directly, but an immanent transcendence which – like Intellectual Beauty – exists only in the activity that the inner lack of the self-conscious human being inspires. A transcendence that exists only in and for a self-consciousness and is inscribed in the death-dealing operations of its organs. And yet, it is still a true transcendence, it is not *us*, not *ours* and is, therefore, not subject to time, change, or to any other law that the working of our organs necessarily entails. (53)

The transcendence that he describes is inescapable and impossible to understand, due to restrictive human faculties, though humans always strive to discover it, similarly to how the sensitive plant longed for the companionship of the Lady.

In conclusion, Shelley's *The Sensitive-Plant* demonstrates Coleridge's aesthetic ideal of generation from the tension between two opposing forces. Shelley achieves the imagination that Seamus Perry, in *Coleridge and the Uses of Division*, describes in the following passage:

> The imagination, that is to say, has the hallmark Coleridgean quality of trying to have things both ways: it is a faculty devoted at once to unifying *and yet* to particularising, ensuring that, 'in the midst of the multeity the centripetal force be never suspended, nor the sense be fatigued by the predominance of the centrifugal force' (Shawcross, II:262). (…) Nevertheless, while Fancy's alternative bringings-into-one appear heedlessly conscriptive here, at other points in Coleridge, as we shall see, a secretly very similar kind of absolute and unitary mental authority is claimed as the highest kind of poetic genius and named a kind of imagination too; and it is between these rival conceptions of power that Coleridge's literary philosophy makes its erratic progress. (34)

Both kinds of imagination are prevalent throughout the poem, which allow the formation of dynamic equilibrium within the garden. The overarching order that is constructed from the tensions between order and chaos is found in smaller scales throughout the poem, particularly in

the Lady, who represents both the desire and fulfillment of the Sensitive Plant's longing. Together, the tensions are what make the seasons, and the poem, possible, illustrating how generation results from the synthesis of dichotomies.

Chapter 3: Synthesized Dialectic – Organic Odes

The English ode has a particularly complex history, as it was inspired by both the classic odes and the hymn. In *Poetic Form and British Romanticism,* Stuart Curran details the result of the bewildering history of the ode as follows:

> Because the notion and therefore the nature of the ode alters with each succeeding epoch, it is all but impossible to write a normal history of the form (though that, of course, has not inhibited the attempts of a number of respected critics to do so). But there is a contrary paradox as well: the point in British literary history when the sense of traditional uses and conventions of the ode coalesces so that a body of poets can reasonably be charged with the fullness of that knowledge is the late eighteenth century. The Romantic ode owes much of its greatness to its bearing the burden of that collective history, whose accumulated weight may be safely be said to impinge—and inspirit—everywhere. (63)

The history of the ode is infused with paradox. The two types of classical ode are almost antithetical: Horatian odes, which were first written by the Roman poet Horace in the third century BCE, are generally solitary and meditative, while Pindaric odes, written by the Greek poet Pindar in the fifth century BCE, are typically communal and celebratory (63). In addition, Pindaric odes were more structured than Horatian odes, with a dialectical form comprised of a strophe, antistrophe, and epode. English poets in the eighteenth century frequently used a meditative Horatian voice with the Pindaric form, creating a self-reflexive poem that allowed the poet to contemplate ideas from multiple viewpoints. English odes are self-reflexive as a result of their relationship to the hymn, which, as Curran argues, "the impulse to hymn continually runs against the urge to understand the nature of hymning. The more the poet seeks identity with what he confronts, the more utterly insistent becomes the separation requisite to both analysis and poetic creation" (61). Although the standard reading of Romantic odes is dialectical, in

accordance with the Pindaric structure, I argue that there is far more unity and synthesis, and, therefore, the Romantic ode can be understood as an organic form.

Early Romantics, including Coleridge, received the English ode from Collins and Gray, who wrote primarily in the mid-eighteenth century and who took radically different approaches. As Curran states:

> The ode, as it enters British Romantic poetry, has been codified by a fully realized literary history. (…) the sacred ode, with all its antiquated enthusiasm, is a type to be resuscitated by a Coleridge or a Shelley with a sense of modernist revival. The sublime, worried over for the preceding half century and increasingly transposed from object to subject, similarly offered an age fascinated with psychology an arena for experimentation. And, by the mid-1790s, with all of Europe at war, there existed an urgent dialectical pressure—indeed, what would appear to be universal contraries—against which to test the mind brave enough to internalize its tensions. (71)

Simply put, the history of the ode and seemingly "universal contraries" made it an ideal form for the Romantics to write in, as they would be able to contemplate (and potentially resolve) certain issues. A. Harris Fairbanks explains, in *The Form of Coleridge's Dejection Ode*,

> The Romantics themselves, in the very process of revitalizing lyric poetry, threw lyric poetics into confusions which have not yet been resolved. Their ideal of the spontaneous, personal lyric with its concomitant ideal of organic form implies, if carried to its logical extreme, that every lyric is, or should be, formally sui generis. (874)

Although the use of a dialectical form seems at odds with an organicism that seeks a perfect synthesis, I believe that it is precisely the tensions that the dialectical form allows that makes it an organic form, because the exploration and balance provides a unity that permeates the work before the epode fully synthesizes the ideas.

Coleridge's" Dejection: An Ode" is "the first distinctly Romantic ode to be completed" (Fairbanks 874) and is one such organic ode. Like the English ode, it combines a meditative, self-reflexive speaker with a dialectical form; however, the speaker is more conversational than is traditionally associated with the Horatian ode and the form can be regarded as repeated

dialects that cycle throughout the poem. These characteristics lead Fairbanks to argue that Coleridge here integrates elements of the conversation poem, which adds another layer of complexity to this particular ode. As he explains:

> The first-generation Romantics conceived of the conversation poem (as well as the lyrical ballad) as an antithesis of the lyric type most clearly represented by the odes of Gray and Collins, while the Romantic ode is a synthesis of the magnitude and dynamics of the ode with the personal style and immediacy of the conversation poem. (875)

The synthesis of these two opposing styles in the Romantic ode is an organic goal, and Coleridge balances the artfulness of the ode with the frank style of the conversation poem as he contemplates the difficulty of creating art. Although he begins the poem with dry sarcasm, the poem is artfully constructed with complex images and structure, as demonstrated in the first lines of the first stanza:

> Well! If the Bard was weather-wise, who made
> The grand old ballad of Sir Patrick Spence,
> This night, so tranquil now, will not go hence
> Than those which mould yon clouds in lazy flakes,
> Or the dull sobbing draft, that moans and rakes
> Upon the strings of this Æolian lute,
> Which better far were mute. (Lines 1-8, p. 155)

The complex rhyme scheme throughout the poem, dense allusions, and rapidly changing images precludes "Dejection" from being classified as a conversation poem, since the artfulness of the poem is clear from the outset; however, the personal style and intimate subject matter are antithetical to the traditional ode. By investing personal feelings in the dialectical form of the ode, Coleridge is able to explore the interconnections between his thoughts and emotions. As Curran states:

> 'Dejection: An Ode' is a classic case of interpretive vexation: the numerous problems it raises can be compressed into a single large one, which is that a poem of such range, power, and artistic success should register a defeat and issue in a paralysis essentially unchanged from that with which it began. (73)

The “numerous problems” that “Dejection” raises are Coleridge’s feelings of dissatisfaction with his work, and with art in general. Coleridge creates a piece of art from his meditations on the failure of art, a paradox that can only be resolved with the self-generating organic power that allows the construction of works that hold antithetical themes in a unified structure. A particularly apt example of his use of dialectical form to reconcile his opposing ideas is stanzas IV-VI:

> O Lady! we receive but what we give,
> And in our life alone does nature live:
> Ours is her wedding-garment, ours her shroud!
> And would be aught behold, of higher worth,
> Than that inanimate cold world allow’d
> To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd,
> Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth,
> A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud
> Enveloping the Earth—
> And from the soul itself must there be sent
> A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,
> Of all sweet sounds the life and element!
>
> O pure of heart! thou need’st not ask of me
> What this strong music in the soul may be!
> What, and wherein it doth exist,
> This light, this glory, this fair luminous mist,
> This beautiful, and beauty-making power.
> Joy, virtuous Lady! Joy that ne’er was given,
> Save to the pure, and in their purest hour,
> Life, and Life’s Effluence, Cloud at once and Shower,
> Joy, Lady! is the spirit and the power,
> Which wedding Nature to us gives in dow’r
> A new Earth and new Heaven,
> Undreamt of by the sensual and the proud—
> Joy is the sweet voice, Joy the luminous cloud—
> We in ourselves rejoice!
> And thence flows all that charms or ear or sight,
> All melodies the echoes of that voice,
> All colours a suffusion from that light.
>
> There was a time when, though my path was rough,
> This joy within me dallied with distress,
> And all misfortunes were but as the stuff

Whence Fancy made me dreams of happiness:
For hope grew round me, like the twining vine,
But now afflictions bow me down to earth:
Not care I that they rob me of my mirth,
But oh! each visitation
Suspends what nature gave me at my birth,
My shaping spirit of Imagination.
For not to think of what I needs must feel,
But to be still and patient, all I can;
And haply by abstruse research to steal
From my own nature all the natural Man—
This was my sole resource, my only plan:
Till that which suits a part infects the whole,
And now is almost grown the habit of my Soul. (Stanza IV-VI, p. 156-157)

These stanzas contain a strophe which details Coleridge's soul in despair; an antistrophe, which describes a pure Joy that he feels is unattainable; and an epode, in which he attempts to reconcile the two, hoping to return to a state when the "joy within [him] dallied with distress". Although he ultimately ends with a failure to organically synthesize joy and despair, "This was my sole resource, my only plan:/ Till that which suits a part infects the whole,/ And now is almost grown the habit of my Soul", he connects the two through imagery in the strophe and antistrophe. The two most prominent images between the stanzas are the "fair luminous cloud" and a wedding, both of which are primarily joyful. This is striking, as the poem is primarily focused on dejection, and may be a reflection of the joy that can be found in sadness, particularly since these stanzas are in the middle of the poem. Paradoxically, the poem forms connections between disparate ideas, although it claims its failure to do so. The poem ends with Coleridge merely hoping that Sara will be joyful and "may this storm be but a mountain-birth" (Line 129, p. 158), which is a surprisingly hopeful ending for a poem entitled "Dejection: An Ode" and suggests that Coleridge was more successful in synthesizing joy and sorrow than he believed, which is allowed by the organic power with which a poem can sustain and resolve itself without the poet's effort. Fairbanks intimates:

> …it is easy to see that a genre that encourages a structure of long stanzas varying strikingly in thought, tone, and imagery and juxtaposed without logical transitions encourages the poignant contrasts that characterize 'Dejection.' No genre could conceivably be better adapted to Coleridge's ideal of 'unity in multeity'; in fact, this concept has clear precedents in descriptions and definitions of the ode throughout the eighteenth century and undoubtedly accounts in large measure for Coleridge's continuing fondness for the form. (879-880)

In other words, the ode provided an excellent form for Romantic poets to achieve Coleridge's organic ideal through exploring the connections between opposing ideas, including Coleridge himself.

The second generation of Romantics also embraced the ode as a prominent form, although they were also influenced by the earlier Romantics, as Curran details:

> The odes of the younger Romantics, fully conscious of the achievement of Wordsworth and Coleridge, tend to take the impulses evident in their earlier odes to an extreme, converting their antitheses into paradox, their paradoxes into self-cancelling irony. Extremes meet: strophe and antistrophe become almost indistinguishable. (79)

In essence, the younger Romantics created fully synthesized organic odes through the use of extreme irony. I believe that many poets were able to use Keats's notion of "negative capability", defined as being capable of "being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after facts & reason" (Keats 109), to create synthesis through self-cancelling irony, as negative capability does not require a poet to attempt to integrate antithetical ideas. Keats's description of Shakespearian negative capability precedes criticism of Coleridge's work for its seeming inability to synthesize ideas; however, it is complementary of (?) Coleridge's philosophy of organicism. If a poet does not try to reconcile a paradox, any resolution that manifests in a poem is truly organic, and a fully organic mode of writing has been achieved. As Perry suggests:

> When Keats defines Shakespearian negative capability it is against the example of Coleridge; but the criticism is being made in what are really Coleridgean terms, because Keats is anticipated in choosing Shakespeare as his hero of imaginative empathy by

> Coleridge himself. Coleridge honours Shakespeare's '*myriad-minded'* (*Biographia,* II:19) fluency of character very expressively: 'he projected his mind out of his own particular being, & felt and made others feel, on subjects no way connected with himself, except by force of Contemplation – & that sublime faculty, by which a great mind becomes that which it meditates on' (*Lectures,* I:80-I). (227-228)

Keats's negative capability in odes allows true "unity in multeity", as the interconnections between antithetical thoughts and feelings will form of their own accord within the dialectical structure of the ode, creating a unified whole from disparate parts.

Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" is one example of a second generation Romantic ode that is written with a degree of negative capability in mind. It has several similarities to "Dejection: An Ode", which will enable better comparisons between the two generations. The speaker of "Ode to a Nightingale", similarly to the narrator of "Dejection", contemplates a single aspect of nature, which brings him to meditations on feelings of inner turmoil. "Ode to a Nightingale" begins as follows:

> My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
> My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
> Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
> One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
> 'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
> But being too happy in thine happiness,—
> That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,
> In some melodious plot
> Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
> Singest of summer in full-throated ease. (Lines 1-10, p. 457-458)

Keats also tries to incorporate elements of other forms of poetry into this ode, most notably the rhyme scheme *ababcdecde,* which is a combination of a Shakespearian quatrain and Petrarchan sestet, allowing him to synthesize the two forms of the sonnet into the ode. Similar to a sonnet, he complicates the subject in the sestet; in this case, the nightingale which seems to contradict the poet's feelings of "heart ache" and a "drowsy numbness" by "being too happy in [its] happiness". The juxtaposition of the narrator's sorrow and the bird's song form the primary

tension of the poem, and the ode form allows him to explore the connections between his flights of fancy and the bird's song. Although the nightingale's song provides a counterpoint to the speaker's thoughts, it also serves as inspiration for his meditation; thus, it is both the means of escape for the speaker and embodies to what the speaker desires to escape. In "Dialectics and Reductionism: Keats Criticism and 'Ode to a Nightingale'", John Baker argues, "The 'Ode to a Nightingale' is a poem so transparently about escape that its escape motive becomes an accusation of want and its leave-taking from existence a measure of what is insufficient in existence" (126). The symbol of the poet's desire to escape and what he wishes to escape to becomes one and the same symbol, a complicated situation that is only possible in a self-generating poem that allows for one symbol to have such contradictory meanings. Both meanings are most easily seen in the third stanza:

> Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
> What thou among the leaves hast never known,
> The weariness, the fever, and the fret,
> Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
> Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
> Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
> Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
> And leaden-eyed despairs,
> Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
> Or new Love pine at them beyond tomorrow. (Lines 21-30, p. 458)

In this stanza, the speaker expresses his desire to escape his mortal body and become the nightingale, but then depicts "What [the nightingale] hast never known", which are the particular human sorrows of aging and death. Although the speaker wants to forget, he must remember in order to express his distaste, which leaves him unable to "fade far away" into a state like that of the bird. In the seventh stanza and second-to-last stanza, the speaker comes closest to losing his thoughts, inspired by the bird's song:

> 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 self-same song that found a path
> Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
> She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
> The same that oft-times hath
> Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn. (Lines 59-70, p. 459)

The speaker finally achieves a transcendent flight out of himself, and into an imagined history that connects him to the past through the "immortal Bird". Baker intimates:

> Undifferentiated sensation turns out to be nothing less than 'the thing itself,' what we know intuitively – and know intuitively about the poem as well – but cannot talk about (see Blackmur 901, 904). But what is at stake in Keats's poem is not such a revery-induced intuition of and reduction to a noumenal presence. What is at stake resembles much more Plato-Socrates' longing, or desire, for something else. (122)

In this stanza, the signifier and signified collapse into "nothing less than 'the thing itself'", that is, the speaker's desire, it's symbol, and its opposition: all of which are encompassed in the nightingale. Language loses the distance between signifier and signified, and, thus, an actual meaning, and the speaker is left only with inarticulable sensation and a collapsed symbol. The final stanza chronicles the speaker's abrupt return to language and thought:

> Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
> To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
> Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
> As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.
> Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
> Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
> Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
> In the next valley-glades:
> Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
> Fled is that music:– Do I wake or sleep? (Lines 71-80, p. 460)

The speaker's jarring entry into language is marked by the exclamation "Forlorn!", which ended the previous stanza, as if the speaker was surprised by it, which precipitated the change. In addition, the nightingale (and its song) departs, leaving the speaker without his inspiration,

leading him disoriented and questioning “Was it a vision, or a waking dream?” and “Do I wake or sleep?”. This stanza is also a structural reversal from the first stanza, which begun with focus on the speaker and only mentioned the nightingale in the sestet. The final stanza begins with a focus on the nightingale’s departure, and ends with focus back on the speaker, who has been markedly changed from the beginning of the poem. As Baker argues:

> Wherever the poem begins, it does not end in the same place. Instead, it is precisely the changeableness of the ode’s discourse from beginning to end which is compelling. In that discourse the ‘here’ of its beginning is not a vague, twilit consciousness, but a consciousness filled with intent and a consciousness which then gets changed and interpreted by its own words. By the end of the ode the ‘fading’ of the bird and its song over ‘In the next valley-glades’ is not only the remission of the bird’s song but equally the subject’s inevitable relinquishment on the hold he thought he had on the meaningfulness of the song. Where he thinks he has finally discovered the object of his desire he is confronted by a withdrawal. But this withdrawal does not first occur in the fading of the nightingale’s song. It has occurred all along in the ode’s rhythm of statement in which what seems ready to speak disappears each time with its utterance. It is this species of fading, or withdrawal, which makes the ode’s itinerary difficult to map, which makes it indeed a ‘viewless’ one. (119-120)

The changeableness of the ode’s discourse is the result of the extreme paradox inherent in using the symbol of escape as a means of escape, which causes it to collapse on itself and the speaker is left unable to discern the flight of consciousness he just chronicled. This is the ultimate result of negative capability in a dialectical, organic form: a synthesis that engenders the collapse of distinctions. Organic negative capability in its most extreme form leaves poetry vulnerable to dissolution, a darker side of organic art. As Tilottama Rajan argues in “Keats, Poetry, and ‘The Absence of Work’” Keats’ negative capability

> …remains unexplored in the early Keats for two reasons. First, attentiveness is diverted into a figuration of poetry as a leisure-class activity or, more accurately, attentiveness has yet to emerge from its first home in the discourse of “indolence” and “idleness” (*Letters,* 1:231-32). What is more, in Keats as in Schiller, aesthetic education occurs only in the domain of the beautiful and not in that of the sublime (344).

It is when negative capability happens in the sublime, as it does in "Ode to a Nightingale", that poetry risks dissolving into nothingness, because the sublime threatens to overwhelm the mysteries that the poet does not resolve. The speaker of "Nightingale" discovers that the sublime confounds his language, particularly when he achieves transcendence through his symbol of escape. Negative capability allows full synthesis, but it is one that ends in a sustained collapse of language.

First and second generation Romantics each used the dialectical form of the ode to explore universal contraries and tensions, like those between logic and emotion or joy and sadness. The early Romantics, such as Coleridge, deliberately tried to hold the opposing ideas in balance, and tried to achieve synthesis through a perfect balance and unity. Later Romantics, such as Keats, tried to achieve synthesis through self-canceling irony. This resulted in differences in the way each group of poets treated language, although they had the same ultimate goal, described by Mitchell:

> Language is always a matter of *articulation* for the romantics, and thus concerns the structuring of relations. In this sense, organicism describes a privileged model as to how language articulates things into a whole: it describes the manner in which language, to borrow the words of Charles Taylor, 'lays out the contours' of that which is spoken of. This sense of articulation as an intra-linguistic structural phenomenon of distribution does not, however, exhaust the matter. (3)

In "Dejection: An Ode", the speaker feels as if he has failed in bringing the work together into a structured whole, while in "Ode to a Nightingale", the speaker fails to fully articulate his ideas. Although the speakers of these poems are unable to reach the ideal organic form in the content of the poems, both poems reach an organic synthesis in form, through the movement between and in paradoxes, as they successfully hold them in a single poem. In this way, Romantic odes use the dialectical mode to reach an organic form, which exemplifies "unity in multeity."

Ch. 4- Romantic Science, Literature, and Modern Biology

The scientific work that supported the vitalism at the basis of organicism, such as Abraham Trembley's work with hydra, provide insights into the understanding and questions scientists had in the eighteenth century. Scientists' general acceptance of the self-generative power postulated by organicism indicates a willingness to acknowledge illogical, almost supernatural, hypotheses(?). This philosophy led to scientists, such as Erasmus Darwin, writing epic poems about plants, and poets, such as Coleridge, to use biological theories as a basis for aesthetics. Several Romantic poets embraced Coleridge's aesthetic ideal of "unity in multeity", and attempted to reach it in their work, all trying to use the vital spirit that will coalesce (?) antithetical ideas and feelings into a single structure. P. B. Shelley explored the "dynamic equilibrium" of organicism in *The Sensitive-Plant,* and odes provided a mode for both generations of Romantics to fully synthesize dialectics. Organicism allowed a union between philosophy, science, and literature in the eighteenth century, one which seems to have been lost over the years as science has become more empirical.

In addition to assisting students of literature understand Romanticism, I believe that organicism can help biologists interpret the philosophy behind scientific research. All of biological research is founded in the idea of discovering the sameness and differences between organisms, and the relationship of parts to wholes. For example, if a researcher discovers Protein X, the next step is to find the pathway that contains Protein X. If Protein X is part of a pathway with Proteins W, Y, and Z, it is likely that Proteins Z will catalyze a pathway with Proteins A, B, and C. Finally, a researcher may find that Protein C regulates a certain cellular response. This is the process of finding the relationships of parts to wholes. However, this would only be found in culture, and researchers would then try to explore the role of Protein X in various animal models.

Protein X may play a novel role in mice that was not in fruit flies nor culture. This is the process of discovering the sameness and differences between organisms. Therefore, the influence of organicism is not restricted to the analysis of Romantic poems, but is active in biological research to this day.

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