

John Keats Vs. The Enlightenment



The Granger Collection

by
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John Keats

between”—while, being mortals, we keep still the visible and sensible Nature, being transformed in our mind at the same time.

This genius of poetry, Lyndon LaRouche shows and fully defines as “Metaphor,” in articles appearing in *Fidelio* magazine.¹ In “How Hobbes’ Mathematics Misshaped Modern History,” LaRouche, early in his discussion of classical poetry, says:

The form known as the classical strophic poem, provides the poet, thus, a medium whose potential is a nest of paradoxes: within the stanza, among the stanzas, and in the poem taken as a unit-whole.

As in the idea of curvature of the meridian, in [the ancient Greek scientist] Eratosthenes’ measurements, the solution to the paradox of what is explicitly stated, lies outside any individual sense perception, any mere symbolism. Until the Twentieth-century development of rockets and supersonic jet-aircraft, led by Hermann Oberth’s team, the idea of curvature of the Earth’s surface existed only in the domain of metaphor. The distinction between non-living and living processes, is measurable in its effects, but has primary existence only in the domain of metaphor. The idea of the poetic stanza, of the poem as a whole, exists only in the domain of metaphor, but in neither sense-perception nor symbolism.

Saint Augustine, the founder of Western Christian civilization, wrote, of poetry:

The purpose of it is to lead young people of ability, and perhaps older people too, gradually, with Reason for our guide, from the things of sense, to God, in order that they may cling to Him who rules all and governs our intelligence, with no mediating Nature between. . . . It is the ascent from rhythm in sense, to the immortal rhythm which is in truth. (*De Musica*)

Great poetry describes what is visible and sensible, emotional, in such a way that we think—ascend—to the invisible, the eternal—“with no mediating Nature

The quality of Metaphor in the greatest classical poetry and tragic drama, has been under conscious attack by the deniers of universal truth, ever since Aristotle, who, in his *Poetics*, called Metaphor “strange or extravagant speech,” and bragged that by his time, “poetry has given up all those words not used in ordinary speech, which decorated the early drama” of the great Aeschylus.

After the passing of William Shakespeare and his fellow Elizabethan poets of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries, this attack upon Metaphor erupted viciously from the evil Thomas Hobbes, then from the arrogant British Royal Society and the fraudulent Sir Isaac Newton. The quality of Metaphor was virtually completely extinguished—outlawed—from English poetry for more than a hundred years, until a counterattack was led by John Keats.

John Keats made a transformation in English poetry and wrote some of its most beautiful works, in a lifetime of only twenty-five years (October 1795 to January 1821). Although not a very “religious” man, Keats, in a letter of 1817, expressed the same, concerning poetry and truth, as had St. Augustine:

What the imagination seizes as Beauty, must be Truth—whether it existed before for us or not. . . . I am the more zealous in this, because I have never yet been able to perceive how anything can be known for truth by consecutive reasoning—and yet Truth must be. . . . Have you never, by being surprised with an old Melody, felt over again your very speculations and surmises at the time it first operated on your soul? Do you not remember forming to yourself the Singer’s face—more beautiful than it was possible, and yet, with the elevation of the moment, you did not think so? Even then, you were mounted, on the wings of imagination, so high that the prototype must be hereafter—that delicious face you will see.

Keats was the son of a modest English tradesman, an orphan by his early teens, sent to an ordinary school by a guardian who apprenticed him to a surgeon; he never showed anyone a poem of his own composition until he was eighteen, and he was on his death-bed with tuberculosis, too ill to compose any longer, by age twenty-four. Yet, in his very few years, he composed potent poems in virtually every form, style, and construction that Irish and English (and Italian) poets had invented over the thousand years before him. He showed ways of developing poetic stanzas, like movements of a musical composition, which had not been heard in English before, especially in his five great Odes, including the “Ode on a Grecian Urn” and “Ode to a Nightingale.”

Keats was distinctly a republican, an enthusiast of America and its War of Independence, like his great contemporary Percy Bysshe Shelley—who was said to have

died with a volume of Keats’ poetry in his hand.

By the time Keats was twenty-one, this beautiful soul was under vicious attack by the British Establishment literary reviews, which called him “Cockney vermin” and many other like insults. Even his friends reprimanded him for his “intemperate” criticisms of Sir Isaac Newton’s influence upon thought and language, for his assertions that Newton had mathematically removed the colors from the rainbow. Keats frequently made a toast: “To Newton’s health, and confusion to his mathematics.”

Of course, Keats had not made a study of the crucial issues of mathematics or physics; nor, judging from his library, did he know the work of G.W. Leibniz, against which Newton had directed his frauds. But Keats *did know*, that poetry in the English language had been destroyed since the Seventeenth century by what Keats called, in another letter the same year, “the mathematizing of language”; and he knew that this destruction had come from the direction of the influence of Newton and Descartes.

Keats’ *English* poetry survived twenty-five years of *British* attack and obscurity, many more years of misprintings and “editings,” and ranks amongst the most beautiful, truthful, and Metaphorical of all poetry in the English language. His Odes are a beautiful means of showing how Metaphor in poetry works.

Why Go Back to Keats?

Most Americans, remembering much less of Shakespeare than older Germans do of Schiller or Italians of Dante, have come to think that poetry means simply to express merely their own “true emotions,” or “inner thoughts,” with some rhymes perhaps added in. Children, in their early school years, may be encouraged to write poetry this way: “Write what *you* feel, just as you feel it.” And so, when hearing something about great classical poetry, they say earnestly, “Hamlet’s problems don’t really relate to me,” or “I don’t care about no nightingale in Egypt somewhere.”

Great poetry lifts a listener or reader away from his or her own thoughts and imaginations, to be able to look at them “from above,” and to *compare* them to those of others: to the thoughts of a beloved; or to the general or universal thoughts and emotions of fellow men and women; or to the foolish delusions of a crowd. Great poets do this, not in the simple way of describing “far-off times and places,” but by the beauty of Metaphor.

In its simplest sense, Metaphor is created when a poet uses the sense and music of poetry to cause the listener to form two distinct thoughts at once, connected to the same subject; two inner voices speaking about the same

thing—one in immediate time, like the “Melody” Keats referred to in his letter; the other coming from memory, like his “Singer’s face, more beautiful than it was possible,” and “your very speculations and surmises when it first operated on your soul.” These ideas “compare themselves to one another,” and, from the sticking irony between them, they form still another distinct thought, about the emotionally exciting possibility of *change*. Uplifting change, change to greater dignity and power, as when the prophet said, “And we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.”

Perhaps the best-known example in all of English poetry, of such *simple* metaphor, begins with the words of Romeo and Juliet in her garden, in the middle of the night:

But soft—what light from yonder window breaks?
It is the East, and Juliet is the Sun!
Arise, fair Sun, and kill the envious Moon,
Who is already sick and pale with grief,
That thou her maid art brighter far than she. . . .

Can Juliet be both the fairest maiden of the Moon, and the Sun which eclipses the Moon? These young lovers meet only at night; throughout the tragedy they must part when dawn arrives; the day is ruled by their families’ bitter, “envious” feuding and killing. The lovers would change that whole universe, if they could, with their love. A second, even more famous passage of Metaphor follows and expresses this more strongly: Juliet talks Romeo out of his outward name, because their families are at war, and she was taught to think of his name with hate, but now of him with love:

O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?
. . . .
’Tis but thy name that is my enemy;—
Thou art thyself though, not a Montague.
. . . .
What’s in a name? That which we call a rose,
By any other name would smell as sweet;
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo called,
Retain that dear perfection which he owes. . . .

ROMEO:
I’ll take thee at thy word:
Call me but love, and I’ll be new baptized;
Henceforth I never will be Romeo.

These playful words carry, in a Metaphor, the thought of the entire transformation which could end the Capulet-Montague civil war that is destroying their city. These lovers are not just expressing “their inner emo-

tions,” but rather the entire world which they would change with their love.

LaRouche, in his demonstrations of “the Hamlet problem,” shows that Metaphor becomes much more powerful than these, most simple examples. Metaphor in tragic, dramatic poetry, creates in the minds of the spectators both the potential, and the *urgent necessity*, to change their entire hypotheses of understanding and acting in life. Thus, at the conclusion of *Julius Caesar*, after Brutus has unwittingly set loose the Roman mob, ignited civil war, brought upon Rome the very dictatorship he wanted to prevent, and then killed himself in despair: his enemy Marc Antony comes to Brutus’ funeral bier and says,

This was the noblest Roman of them all:
All the conspirators, save only he,
Did what they did in envy of great Caesar;
He only, in a general honest thought
And common good to all, made one of them.

Then, the spectators feel the entire tragedy pass again before their memory, searching once more their own surmises and speculations about those who lead: “What should Brutus have done?” Should they see the tragedy performed again, it will unfold with Antony’s words in their memory throughout. In the most famous of all Shakespeare’s complex Metaphors, the case of Hamlet, LaRouche shows that Shakespeare makes Hamlet flee from the necessity to choose, between two completely opposed ways of thinking and acting in the world, so that the audience, in dialogue with Hamlet’s thoughts, cannot flee that necessity.

‘Sleep and Poetry’

John Keats’ first major published poem, in 1816, “Sleep and Poetry,” was on the power of poetry, as Metaphor, to lead from images of sensuous beauty in the mind, away from the senses (“in sleep”), to the invisible beauty of truth. It begins by evoking something unnameable, invisible:

What is more gentle than a wind in summer?
What is more soothing than the pretty hummer
That stays one moment in an open flower,
And buzzes cheerily from bower to bower?
What is more tranquil than a musk-rose blowing
In a green island, far from all men’s knowing. . . .

And then:

But what is higher beyond thought than thee?



Lord Byron (George Gordon). The aristocratic poet wrote an entire pamphlet defending Alexander Pope from Keats' "drivelling idiotism."

Author and critic Leigh Hunt called Keats "the most unselfish of human creatures." But, although imprisoned for his own writings, he nonetheless defended Newton's mathematics against Keats' polemics.



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Fresher than berries of a mountain tree?
More strange, more beautiful, more smooth, more regal,
Than wings of swans, than doves, than dim-seen eagle?
What is it? And to what shall I compare it?
It has a glory, and naught else can share it.
The thought thereof is awful, sweet, and holy,
Chasing away all worldliness and folly;
Coming sometimes like fearful claps of thunder,
Or the low rumblings earth's regions under;
And sometimes like a gentle whispering
Of all the secrets of some wondrous thing
That breathes about us in the vacant air;
So that we look around with prying stare,
Perhaps to see shapes of light, aërial limning,
And catch soft floatings from a faint-hearted hymning,
To see the laurel wreath, on high suspended,
That is to crown our name when life is ended.
Sometimes it gives a glory to the voice,
And from the heart up-springs, "Rejoice, Rejoice!"
Sounds that will reach to the Framers of all things,
And die away in ardent mutterings.

As to what this poem expresses, there is a letter Keats wrote eighteen months later:

[A]t once it struck me what quality went to form a man of achievement, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean Negative Capability . . . capable of being in Uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable searching after fact . . . with a great poet, the sense of beauty overcomes every other consideration. . . . Poetry should strike the reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a remembrance.

Keats wrote directly into the teeth of the Enlightenment's definition of "poetry" for the British Isles. "Sleep and Poetry" was met with a hail of venomous abuse; from the aristocratic poet Lord Byron ("No more Keats—flay him alive; . . . there is no bearing the drivelling idiotism of the Mankin."); the Tory *Edinburgh Quarterly* ("his bookseller will not a second time venture £50 upon anything he can write"); the Whigs' *British Critic*; the Tory *Scots and Edinburgh Magazine* ("another of the Cockney school, an unclean school . . . his poetry is nothing but the most flagrant excess and exaggeration"); the Tory *Blackwood's Magazine*, encouraged by Sir Walter Scott ("It is quite ridiculous to see how the vanity of these Cockneys makes them overrate their importance, even in the eyes of us, that have always expressed such plain unvarnished contempt for them."). By warning Keats about his friend Leigh Hunt, recently imprisoned for one of his writings, the reviews intimated the same fate threatened Keats. This may seem farfetched—prison for writing metaphorical poetry—but a year later occurred a grotesque "duel," in which a publishing friend of Keats, John Christie, was shot and killed by an agent for one of the Tory "literary reviewers," whose target had been Keats himself! ("His bookseller will not a second time venture £50 upon anything he can write.")

The *Edinburgh Quarterly* stated its outrage that "there is hardly a complete couplet enclosing a complete idea in the whole book."

This strange statement marked the very heart of the battle: Keats was at war with the "closed couplet" rule of Alexander Pope's "Heroic verse," or "Augustan verse," which he detested and wished to overthrow. Pope was

the reigning literary god of the Enlightenment, whose style had been imitated by all poets and *required* by the critical establishment for a hundred years. Pope represented a literal formula for composing poetry, outlawing Metaphor, and arisen precisely from Hobbes', Newton's, and Descartes' mathematics. It was Keats and Shelley who finally overthrew this formula. Keats' battle standard was, "I have not the slightest feeling of humility towards anything in existence but the Eternal Being, the principle of Beauty, and the memory of great men" And Shelley wrote, "It is the misfortune of this age that its writers, too thoughtless of immortality, are exquisitely sensible to temporary praise or blame. They write with the fear of reviews before their eyes. This system of poetry sprang up in that torpid interval when poetry was not. Poetry, and the art which proposes to regulate and limit its powers, cannot subsist together."

The "torpid interval when poetry was not," was the descent from Shakespeare and Marlowe, to the "closed couplets" of Alexander Pope and his many imitators. This descent was the result of the attack upon Metaphor, by Thomas Hobbes and the Seventeenth-century British Royal Society.

True Couplets

Not only the greatest poetry and drama leads our thoughts from the images of the senses to the "immortal rhythm which is Truth." For thousands of years, both the greatest of epics and tragedies, and the simplest of strophic poems have done this. They evoke simultaneously with each couplet and stanza both new thought, and memory; and from these two inner voices, an underlying sense of change or surprise, called irony. Take a simple Fifteenth-century English ballad, "The Unquiet Grave," typically of seven stanzas [SEE Box].

The ballad's first stanza, like each one following to the ballad's conclusion, has two couplets, the comparison of which by the listener, generates an idea which is above both, and not in either couplet. Essential to this, is that the second couplet *echoes the first musically*—that is, the words of the second couplet may partly repeat, and partly vary those of the first; the proportional length of the two lines, the meter, the rhythm, are the same, and the couplets also "echo" by their ending rhymes. Here, the echoing couplets are clearly two different voices. In the first couplet, the young man speaks to his beloved in her grave, of the wind and rain of her funeral day; in the second couplet, we hear him speak to himself, of his sorrow in his memory of his love, alive. Between the young man's love and his thoughts of death, a Metaphor is already generated which evokes a question above both. The ballad was sung, and the singer would change into-

THE UNQUIET GRAVE

(Fifteenth Century Ballad)

The wind doth blow today, my love,
And a few small drops of rain;
I never had but one true love,
In the cold grave, she was lain.

I'll do as much for my true-love
As any young man may;
I'll sit and mourn all at her grave
For a twelve-month and a day.

The twelve-month and a day being up,
The dead began to speak:
"Oh, who sits weeping on my grave,
And will not let me sleep?"

"'Tis I, my love, sits on your grave,
And will not let you sleep;
For I crave one kiss of your clay-cold lips,
And that is all I seek."

"You crave one kiss of my clay-cold lips,
But my breath is earthy-strong;
If you have one kiss of my clay-cold lips,
Your time will not be long.

"'Tis down in yonder garden green,
Love, where we used to walk,
The finest flower that ever was seen
Is withered to a stalk.

"The stalk is withered dry, my love,
So will our hearts decay;
So make yourself content, my love,
'Til God calls you away."

nation, and by the melody of the ballad, show this change of voice.

Each new stanza, by the irony between its two couplets, presents a changed image of the same Metaphor, as the young man's longing for her physical presence, is chided and corrected by her spirit. Look at the fifth stanza, where the first lines of the couplets differ only by a word—"crave" vs. "have"—yet the ironic shift between two thoughts, is very strong.

The final stanza evokes what LaRouche calls the "Metaphor of Metaphors," which unifies even so simple a succession of stanzas as this ballad: Ironically, merely to "make yourself content" with your lot, is a lower state than love, with its striving; but to "make yourself content" in God's will even unto death, is higher.

This form of ballad was universal, perhaps the most

common form of poetry in Europe until the Renaissance; in each stanza a couplet is sung and then ironically repeated and changed by another. The two couplets make a single, indivisible poetic unit of four lines, called a *quatrain*, which generates a metaphorical idea not contained in either couplet. The second line of each couplet is metrically shorter than the first, which increases the “mocking” ironic effect. Each four-line stanza musically repeats and recalls the previous ones in memory, and generates a new metaphor, a new form of the ironic or tragic idea through which the ballad is pulling its listeners, toward the final stanza’s “Metaphor of Metaphors.”

This stanza-form originated with the Irish Christian missionary movement from the Sixth-century, devoted followers of St. Augustine. The necessity that a poetic idea be generated by a “musical” *repetition* of a verse couplet, was established in St. Augustine’s book on poetry, *De Musica*. The “musical” repetition makes the listener hear again, in memory, the poetic idea of the first couplet, while hearing the new idea of the second couplet, generating the idea of change, the irony of each stanza.

The Un-Heroic ‘Closed Couplet’

The Seventeenth/Eighteenth-century Enlightenment, steered by Venice’s cultural agents against the Renaissance, was dominated by poets who wrote great volumes of cynical, tongue-in-cheek poetry, abandoning and essentially outlawing the simple principles of Metaphor. They stripped the ballad, sonnet, *canzone*, and other fruits of poetry’s horn of plenty, down to the single, so-called “closed couplet.” They called it “Heroic,” “Augustan” (after the Caesars) and other imperial names, to hide its barren literalness, the mathematical formulae by which the poet expressed his thoughts and sense impressions, one at a time, each phrase having one and only one “precise” meaning.

Keats, in his 1819 poem, “Lamia,” included what was understood to be, a metaphorical portrait of Isaac Newton as an evil and destructive figure; even Keats’ friends rushed into print to admonish him against this. But already in “Sleep and Poetry,” Keats had raised the aristocratic storm against himself, by denouncing a certain French Academician of the Seventeenth century, Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, and his “hard rules of poetry.” Boileau’s name is forgotten now, but at that time, it had been wielding power over the “Augustan Age of Poetry” for one hundred and fifty years.

The lines in Keats’ “Sleep and Poetry” which most drew Tory rage down upon his head, were the following (notice that in this poem, Keats was himself also composing in rhyming couplets, but they are not “closed”—as the reviewers shouted—but flowing continuously, and

metaphorically thrusting together two opposed ideas: poetry and mathematics):

. . . But ye were dead
 To things ye knew not of,—were closely wed
 To musty laws lined out with wretched rule
 And compass vile: so that ye taught a school
 Of dolts to smoothe, inlay, and clip, and fit,
 Till, like the certain wands of Jacob’s wit,
 Their verses tallied. Easy was the task:
 A thousand handicraftsman wore the mask
 Of Poesy. Ill-fated, impious race!
 That blasphemed the bright Lyrist to his face,
 And did not know it! No, they went about,
 Holding a poor, decrepit standard out,
 Marked with most flimsy mottoes, and in large
 The name of one Boileau!

This was understood to be an attack, by a young poet of genius, upon the Enlightenment’s gods of Olympus: Alexander Pope, John Dryden, Newton, and Hobbes themselves. For this, the aristocratic critical establishment set out to destroy this virtually unknown genius, whom they labeled “Cockney vermin.”

The aristocratic anarchist poet Goerge Gordon (Lord Byron), reacted to these “Boileau” lines, by writing an entire pamphlet defending Pope from Keats, although Keats had not mentioned him in any published writing. New and more furious attacks on Keats appeared in 1818, in both *Blackwood’s Magazine* and the *Edinburgh Quarterly Review*, signed “Z,” and written by Sir Walter Scott’s son-in-law, urged on by Scott himself. They charged that Keats was of “The Cockney School of Poetry”; that he wandered from thought to thought “at random,” rather than completing his images in closed couplets; that he coined new words with new meanings; and that “[h]e cannot indeed write a complete sentence, though he can spin a line.”

As to the “Cockney School,” Keats’ friend and first biographer, John Moncton Milnes, wrote: “Among the few, by 1819, not giving up the ideas of Liberty [the “Ideas of 1776”—PBG], were the men of letters, who were designated, in ridicule, the Cockney School. In art, they imitated the forms of the Renaissance and the Fifteenth century; thus, they were accused of ‘affecting archaisms.’ ” They were linked to the Weimar Circle of Germany, whose greatest member had been the Poet of Freedom, Friedrich Schiller. Percy Shelley was close friends with the “Cockney School” poets, especially the recently imprisoned Leigh Hunt. Hunt wrote that Keats “was the most unselfish of human creatures. . . . He was haughty, and had a fierce hatred of rank. He looked upon a man of birth as his natural enemy.”

But how had “closed couplets” and “complete sentences” become requirements for writing poetry?

In the years after Shakespeare’s death, while some who collaborated in the great poetry and drama of the Elizabethan period were still alive, Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes launched a “new poetic criticism,” which buried that poetry, and substituted the bald and barren rhyming of Enlightenment poets. Bacon was the Chancellor and controller of James I’s court. Hobbes began as Bacon’s secretary, and was trained as an agent of Venice’s growing cultural control of England; he dominated British political-economic doctrine with works like *The Leviathan*—claiming that all knowledge is derived of the senses, and all human morality is nothing but the

pursuit of pleasure and fear of punishment.³

Hobbes, and his literary epigones, also dominated British Enlightenment literary criticism. His dogma was, that the effect of poetry upon the mind was *not* based upon the interplay of thoughts and new ideas whose discovery it evokes; not upon universal ideas of Beauty and the Good; but upon the *sense images*, and their evocation of “the passions.”

Hobbes’ ideas and Boileau’s “rules” dominated English poetry for two hundred years: the so-called “Augustan Age.” With tragic suddenness, the great poetic beauty and laughter of the era from Chaucer to Marlowe and Shakespeare, gave way to the sterile rhyming of, by, and for aristocrats around the Stuart, Orange, and

Hobbes vs. Shakespeare, on Love

Thomas Hobbes’ first poetic sycophant was Sir William Davenant, whose long-forgotten, 6,800-line unfinished epic *Gondibert*, was praised by Hobbes as *at least* the equal of Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. According to Hobbes, Sir William’s ability to portray human love was such, that “there has nothing been said of that subject, neither by the ancient or modern poets, comparable to it.”

Let us put Hobbes’ judgment to the test, and compare a mere six-line song of William Shakespeare, with a song of Davenant, both being on the theme of the sorrow of betrayed love. Keep in mind that Davenant was born while Shakespeare still lived; witness what a falling off took place, in merely one generation, with the help of old Hobbes.

Shakespeare’s song is sung by a forlorn character in the play *Measure for Measure*. Although short, it joins in metaphor the distinct and bitter sadness of a lover’s betrayal, with the clear and true praise of the remembered beauty of the unfaithful one; hence, past and present are joined into a single idea.

Take, O take those lips away,
That so sweetly were forsworn;
And those eyes, the break of day,
Lights that do mislead the morn:
But my kisses, bring again, bring again;
Seals of love, but seal’d in vain, seal’d in vain.

The power of Metaphor is concentrated in the second couplet, wherein the painful beauty of this little song, the pain of constant remembrance of beauty which passes, is generated. This poem is definitely guilty of violating the Hobbesian standard, by

“expressing more than is perfectly conceived.”

Davenant’s song, which conforms perfectly to Hobbes’ rules against the use of Metaphor—a standard which continues to dominate poetry to this day—does, indeed, convey one and only one emotional image, one single, “true inner feeling.” It is the true feeling of maudlin self-pity:

Roses and pinks will be strewn where you go;
Whilst I walk in shades of willow, willow.
When I am dead let him that did slay me
Be but so good as kindly to lay me
There were neglected lovers mourn,
Where lamps and hallow’d tapers burn,
Where clerks in choirs sad dirges sing,
Where sweetly bells at burials ring.

My rose of youth is gone,
Withered as soon as blown.
Lovers, go ring my knell.
Beauty and love, farewell.
And lest virgins forsaken
Should perhaps be mistaken
In seeking my grave, alas! Let them know
I lie near a shade of willow, willow.

Put away your hankies, readers. The beginning “closed couplet,” shows that Sir William thought himself a poet worthy of Hobbes’ praise. The song as a whole, is the kind of “true passion” which the great Renaissance author Miguel Cervantes put into the mouth of his poor Don Quixote, in order to demonstrate, with great humor and compassion, that the poor Don had utterly lost his mind!

—PBG

Hanover/Windsor courts. To this day, Hobbes' doctrines about poetry are still the dominant theory of poetry taught in schools, magazines, etc.—which accounts for their being believed by nearly everyone.

Hobbes and Boileau's dogmas were exactly the same, although Boileau acknowledged them to come from Aristotle and the Roman oligarchs Longinus and Quintillian, while Hobbes' admirers claimed he had newly invented them, himself. All that poetry aims at, they claimed, is to paint perfect sense-images of objects or beings; to transport the reader, as nearly as possible, "as if" the very objects or beings themselves, were physically present to his sense; and thus to stir "the passions" (or, as we are taught today, "my true inner feelings").

But what of the relationships, which the reader's or listener's mind perceives among these "object images"? Those were governed, according to Hobbes, Boileau, *et al.*, by strict logical rules of consistency, Aristotelean syllogisms. Any of the perceived relationships among object-images in poetry, while possibly involving unusual sights and sounds from faraway times and places, etc., had nonetheless to appear logically consistent and *probable* to the "better quality" of readers.

Hobbes' theories are well represented by the following comments, drawn from his 1650 essay on poetry, "The Answer to the Preface to Gondibert" and his 1648 *Elements of Philosophy*:

Poetic Imagination, then, is nothing but *decaying sense*. This *decaying sense*, when we would express the thing itself (I mean the *phantasm* itself), we call *Imagination*, . . . Imagination being only of those things which have been formerly perceived by Sense.

But you will say, by what Sense shall we take notice of Sense? I answer, by Sense itself, namely, by the Memory which for some time remains in us of things sensible.

For Memory is the world, though not really, yet so in a looking-glass, in which the Judgment, the severer sister, busieth herself in a grave and rigid examination of all the parts of Nature, and in registering by letters their orders, causes, uses, differences, and resemblances; whereby the Fancy, when any work of Poetry is to be performed, finds her material at hand and prepared for use, . . . copious images discreetly ordered, and perfectly registered in the Memory

The Fancy combines its phantasms, not according to an idea of beauty implanted in the mind from above, . . . but from principles derived from the habit of proceeding from causes to their effects. [emphasis added]

On such a foundation, these anti-poets constructed a schema, with two qualities of the poet: Fancy (also called Imagination, or Wit), the synthetic quality which puts

sense images together, in striking or unusual combinations; and Judgment, the analytic quality which finds the distinctions between images, and their logical, cause-and-effect relations. For two hundred years, critics judged poets, by whether they "had more of Wit, or more of Judgment," or even "combined a good Wit, with a good Judgment." Hobbesian "Wit" was said to produce lively sense images, to stimulate the inner emotions and passions; Boileau's rules of "poetic Judgement" were used to cut and clip these images, (as Keats denounced the process), and fit them into a Procrustean bed of rhyming "closed couplets," formed as nearly as possible into complete, logical sentences.

The core of Hobbes' dogma was that poetic imagery, and memory, must be "decayed"—that is, less powerful, less moving—relative to the original sense experience. Poetry, therefore, is nothing but an inferior copy of life; the best it can attain, is to move our "inner feelings" and passions, "almost as if" we were having the sensual experiences themselves "right now"—not merely reading or reciting a poem.

This dogma is completely false. It is the opposite of the truth which great poets prove by Metaphor; for, in Keats' phrase, the singer's face is "*more beautiful than it was possible*." The face and words of Shakespeare's Juliet Capulet in her garden, after we have watched the Montagues and Capulets murder one another through the streets of Verona, are beautiful: not because, by "Fancy," it is "as if" we had become fourteen years old again; but, because we are seeing and hearing the *potential for a great and beautiful change*, as Juliet and Romeo joke the names of Montague and Capulet, into the name of love.

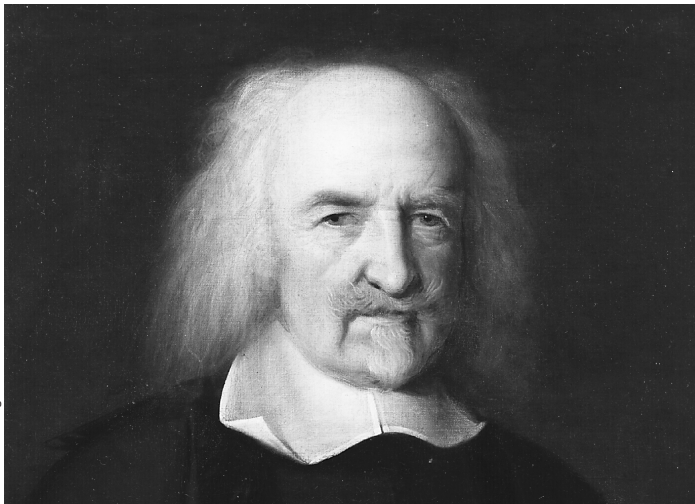
To Hobbes, "metaphors" in poetry, were summed up by this example: "Old men are stubble." All the characteristics of "stubble," he said, call to mind all of the ways, in which old men are like "stubble." This is an efficient, logical way, he thought, for one simple sense-image, to be the *symbol* for another. In his essay, "The Virtues of an Heroic Poem," he re-emphasized: "A metaphor is a comparison contracted into a word." But if a poet evoked the interplay of ideas, the *process of change and discovery of a new idea*, in just a few words, Hobbes denounced it, as

the ambitious obscurity of expressing more than is perfectly conceived; or perfect conception in fewer words than it requires. Which expressions, though they have the honor to be called strong lines, are indeed no better than riddles, and not only to the reader, but . . . to the poet himself, dark and troublesome.

Hobbes lavished praise on the puerile, now long-forgotten verses of contemporary sycophants like Sir William Davenant, whose 6,800-line unfinished epic

Thomas Hobbes (right).
Philosophical agent of
Venice's Paolo Sarpi at the
court of James I, he wrote
tracts attacking poetic
Metaphor, in favor of
Aristotelean sense certainty.

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Oligarchical poets John
Dryden (bottom left) and
Alexander Pope (bottom
right). Followers of Hobbes'
poetic dicta, by banning
Metaphor from poetry, they
banished creative thought.



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"Gondibert," was the subject of Hobbes' essay quoted above [SEE Box]; the Hon. Edward Howard, author of the heroic poem "The British Princess"; Walter Charlton; John Dennis; John Wilmot (Earl of Rochester); Abraham Cowley, whose "Pindaric Odes," included in its "Ode to Mr. Hobs," the thoroughly "closed couplet,"

From words, which are but Pictures of the Thought,
To things, the Mind's right Object, he it brought.

Thomas Shadess; and, finally, John Dryden ("Imaging is, in itself, the very height and life of Poetry."). Hobbes' dogma of "Wit" and "Judgment" was exactly carried over by John Locke into his 1690 *Essays on Human Understanding*. When all of them, joined by Newton, Boyle, and others, had formed the British Royal Society, that society pronounced (in 1687):

We glory in the plain Style, not in all these seeming Mysteries, this vicious abundance of Phrase, this trick of Metaphors, which makes so great a noise in the world. . . . We would have Reason set out in plain undeceiving expressions.

In Jonathan Swift's famous 1724 satire, *Gulliver's Travels*, Gulliver observes on the floating island of Laputa, a committee of crazed scientists, trying to agree on a reform of the language so that each word will have one, and only one, precise meaning. As far as possible, they wish to eliminate verbs and adjectives, leaving only nouns—exact names. These geniuses' ultimate aim is to eliminate words entirely, such that people will converse by carrying objects around and showing them to each other!

In the 1680's, a committee of Sir Isaac Newton's British Royal Society had been formed for precisely such "reform of the language," to abolish Metaphor in favor of precise word-meanings modelled on mathematics (although not, as in Swift's creative embellishment, to abolish human speech entirely!). It was headed by John Dryden, the poet laureate of the Stuart Restoration courts, and the exemplar of Nicolas Boileau's rules of poetry.

By the late Seventeenth century, the "closed couplet" ruled, and through the Eighteenth century it ruled

absolutely, with Alexander Pope the dictator of style, not only in English but in other languages; an astounding thirty editions of his complete works were published during that century. The “closed couplet” was an isolated unit of two rhyming lines, which were to express a precise, literal thought or image, which had to be completed within the couplet, preferably with a period at the end. Even between the two lines, there was to be a break or pause; long poems became merely a succession of indicative statements. There were many rules too tiresome to relate; the best way to see the *abolition of Metaphor*, is look at examples of Pope:

In poets as true genius is but rare,
 True taste as seldom is the critic's share;
 Both must alike from heaven derive their light.
 Those born to judge, as well as those to write.
 Let such teach others who themselves excel.
 And censure freely who have written well. . . .

No couplet shows any ironic or metaphorical connection to those before and after, no musical counterpoint—the relation among successive couplets is one of *purely logical* reinforcement, like a series of axioms of mathematics. Here is Pope writing about himself:

That not in fancy's maze he wandered long,
 But stooped to truth, and moralized his song;
 That not for fame, but virtue's better end,
 He stood the furious foe, the timid friend,
 The damning critic, half-approving wit,
 The coxcomb hit, or fearing to be hit.
 Laughed at the loss of friends he never had,
 The dull, the proud, the wicked, and the mad. . . .

“Stooped to truth,” indeed!

Chapman's Homer

John Dryden, in 1670, had arrogantly published a “translation” of works of the great *English poet* Geoffrey Chaucer, into “heroic” closed couplets. Alexander Pope, in the 1720's, published translations of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* into the same: “as he felt sure Homer would have written them had he lived in England in our century.” Here, at least, Pope was “freely translating” from Greek. In 1725 he went further, and brought out “a new Shakespeare,” amended and rewritten by Pope to contemporary taste! This did not quite prevail, but Pope's “Homer” became the standard English translation.

While Keats was still twenty, he wrote his most famous sonnet, on his discovery of George Chapman's

older, 1611 translation of Homer into real English poetry. Keats was astounded and delighted by Chapman's Homer, and here is why. Compare the two translations of a few lines from the *Odyssey*, describing Odysseus after his shipwreck and near-drowning. First, Chapman:

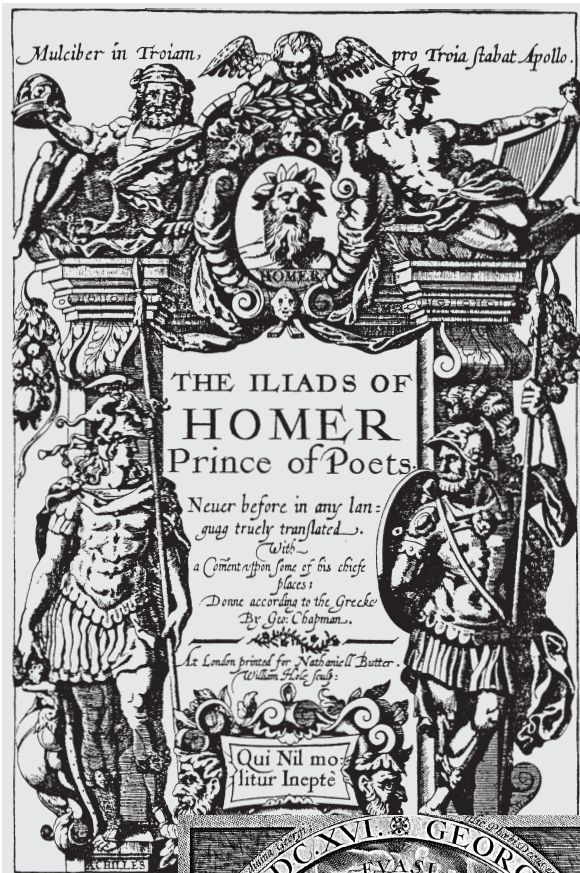
Then forth he came, his both knees faltering, both
 His strong hands hanging down, and all with froth
 His cheeks and nostrils flowing, voice and breath
 Spent to all use, and down he sank to death.
 The sea had soaked his heart through; all his veins
 His toils had wracked t'a labouring woman's pains.

Now, Pope, who had “freely translated” Homer's lines into a single closed couplet:

From mouth and nose the briny torrent ran,
 And lost in lassitude lay all the man.

Chapman's couplets, full of life and near-death, actually create, together in the reader's mind, the opposed thoughts that Odysseus has both drowned and survived! These thoughts rise away from, and absolutely defy, any precise, literal “meaning” of the phrases. Pope's deadly couplet, on the other hand, is virtually in literal Latin; yet it is also nonsensical. His whim to have “torrents” run from one human nose, comes from his intention to use words according to the precise conventions coming from Boileau's Rules and the Royal Society's formulae: salt=“briny”; flow of water=“torrent”; weakness=“lassitude”; the sea=“the surge”; and so many others, which became sickeningly familiar in poetry from the late Seventeenth century onwards.

George Chapman had been Shakespeare's contemporary, and Christopher Marlowe's friend and collaborator. Alexander Pope was the reigning poet of Europe in the Eighteenth century. Thus, we are seeing here, how far English poetry had been destroyed from within, by the “mathematizing of language” of Hobbes, the Royal Society, Descartes, Boileau, Newton, Locke, *et al.*: exactly what young John Keats was inspired to overthrow. Look now, at the end of Book II of Homer's *Odyssey*, when Odysseus' young son, Telemachus, sails for Sparta, to begin searching for his long-lost father. These fourteen lines of Chapman's translation, clearly express the two active forces at work: the seamen, and the goddess Pallas Athena, “grey-eyed seed of Jove,” the patroness and guide to Odysseus' wisdom, who holds the ship in her care. Additionally, Chapman achieves in strong detail the work of sailing, closely following the Homeric original. In so doing, Chapman's running and rhyming couplets are anything but “closed”:



Right: George Chapman, friend of Marlowe and contemporary of Shakespeare, he translated the Homeric epics into true English verse.

Above: Title page, Chapman's translation of Homer's *Iliad*.



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A beechen Mast then in the hollow base
 They put, and hoisted, fixt it in his place
 With cables, and with well-wreath'd halsers hoise
 Their white sails; which grey Pallas now employes
 With full and fore-gales, through the dark deep maine.
 The purple waves, (so swift cut), roar'd againe
 Against the ship sides, that now ranne and plow'd
 The rugged seas up. Then, the men bestow'd
 Their Armes about the ship, and sacrifice,
 With crown'd wine cups to th'endless Deities,
 They offer'd up. Of all yet thron'd above,

ON FIRST LOOKING INTO CHAPMAN'S HOMER

MUCH have I travelled in the realms of gold,
 And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
 Round many western islands have I been
 Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
 Oft of one wide expanse have I been told
 That deep-browed Homer ruled as his demesne;
 Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
 'Til I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:
 Then felt I like some watcher of the skies,
 When a new planet swims into his ken;
 Or like stout Cortez, when with eagle eyes
 He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
 Looked at each other with a wild surmise—
 Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

They most observ'd the grey-ey'd seed of Jove,
 Who from the evening till the morning rose,
 And all day long, their voyage did dispose.

By Pope's formulae, Homer's and Chapman's fourteen lines become ten; the details of ship-work become vague generalities; the presence of Pallas Athena as protectress disappears, leaving just a stylized ship-voyage. Pope was so careless, that he changed Athena's eye color ("blue-ey'd"), and made the voyage end at dawn, when it clearly goes on through the next day. The only thing that mattered to him, were his painted images and "heroic couplets"; the final one, as bald as a TV jingle:

High o'er the roaring waves the spreading sails
 Bow the tall mast, and swell before the gales;
 The crooked keel the parting surge divides,
 And to the stern retreating roll the tides.
 And now they ship their oars, and crown with wine
 The holy goblet to the powers divine:
 Imploring all the gods that reign above,
 But chief the blue-ey'd progeny of Jove.

Thus all the night they stem the Liquid way,
 And end their voyage with the morning ray.

Thus, Homer's great epics of Western civilization, were hidden under a sterile plastic cover, by Alexander Pope, and Pope's "Old Hobb."

Keats, now liberated from the Pope translation, was immediately moved, according to his friend Richard Cowden Clarke, by these very lines and others, to write his sonnet "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" [SEE Box]. It is a Metaphor of Metaphors, of *discovery of*

the unknown, surprise, change toward perfection.

In the sonnet, the characteristic units of Metaphor are quatrains, which work like the stanzas of strophic poems. The first quatrain sings of great voyages of discovery—but they are of poetry, of the beautiful isles ruled by poets under a common allegiance. The second quatrain evokes a greater, anticipated discovery: the “wide expanse” ruled by Homer, known to the voyager but unknown, never seen, until—Chapman’s Homer. It was Keats’ method to link the two quatrains together as musical echoes, by rhyming the last line of the first quatrain, with the first line of the next, so that the same rhymes are repeated, in the same way, in each quatrain. This had been developed by the great Dante in his *canzone* five hundred years earlier.

Thus the two quatrains are like the parts of a movement of a classical musical composition, consisting of a theme or musical idea, and its repetition and variation. But the last six lines comprise both a new development, and a final “Metaphor of Metaphors.” And these six lines, though marked as three couplets by their rhymes, are the antithesis of “closed couplets.” They are a continuous six-line succession of Metaphors, which suspend a single Metaphor, of the wordless amazement of discovery, of what eye has not seen, nor ear has not heard.

Keats intensified this effect, by making eight of the fourteen lines, especially the final two, begin with the surprise of a long, bold syllable (which was not how sonnet lines were supposed to begin by Enlightenment rules). In the two quatrains, such lines alternate; in the continuous sextet of lines, they dominate. In reciting the poem, one fairly shouts out “Then . . .,” the opening word of the sextet of lines, the new Metaphor. And at the final two lines, tremendous emphasis of the voice falls upon the opening syllable “Looked . . .,” and then even more upon the first syllable of “Silent . . .” Thus the poem does, in fact, end with a decisive musical couplet, even though that couplet begins right in the midst of a phrase, with “Looked. . . .”

This Metaphor—the silence of one “wild surmise” falling upon “all his men” at once, like shepherds when the angel of God appears to them in the heavens—is the sign marking the true subject of the sonnet.

Keats protested as well, against Dryden’s “translation” of Chaucer, whose poetry was one of Keats’ sources of musical inspiration, from the Middle English. Here are lines from Chaucer’s “Knight’s Tale,” in *The Canterbury Tales*:

“O chaste goddesse of the wodes grene,
To whom bothe hevene and erthe and see is sene,
Quene of the regne of Pluto derk and lowe,
Goddess of maydens, that myn herte hast knowe

Full many a yeer, and woost what I desire,
As keepe me fro they vengeaunce and thyn ire, . . .”

Rhymed couplets, but continuous in development of ideas and images. And, here is Dryden’s “translation” into “closed couplets” of precise decorative and “grammatically correct” formulations:

“O Goddess. Haunter of the Woodland Green,
To whom both Heav’n and Earth and Seas are seen;
Queen of the nether Skies, where half the year
Thy silver beams descend, and light the gloomy sphere;
Goddess of maids, and Conscious of our Hearts,
So keep me from the vengeance of thy Darts, . . .”

Denial of the Senses

John Keats wrote both poems and letters in passionate denunciation of what the Enlightenment British literary establishment had done, to drive into misery Scotland’s great national poet and composer, Robert Burns. From Burns, Keats learned a new construction for the old ballads, increasing their ironic power. Traditionally, the ballad’s quatrain varied the length of its lines in the proportion 4-3-4-3, the shorter lines “mocking” the longer. But in the “Burns Stanza,” the lines were in the proportion 4-4-4-2-4-2, packing all the “bite” of the foreshortening into the double ironies of the fourth and the last lines. Burns used this ironic power for humorous or, in the best sense, patriotic purposes; Keats was enraged that Burns had been prevented from writing tragic poetry, of the greatest metaphorical beauty, having been thrust instead by the British cultural mafia into the role of “satirist,” even while they abused and impoverished him.

Keats used Burns’ method in composing his powerful tragic ballad, “La Belle Dame sans Merci” [SEE Box]. Its Metaphors arise from the story of Circe in Greek mythology—although that is never referenced explicitly. Circe ensnared her victims in the most intense pleasures of the senses, until suddenly they found that she had turned them into swine, or chained them in a Hell of the most horrible sensual tortures. Keats, in reciting his own ballad, again according to his friend Cowden Clarke, recited the short, stanza-ending lines approximately as indicated below. He was using the half-length last line to create tragic, not humorous, irony. The first stanza of “La Belle Dame,”

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
Alone, and paly loitering?
The sedge has withered from the lake,
And___no___birds___sing___.

LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI: A BALLAD

I

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge has withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.

II

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
So haggard and so woe-begone?
The squirrel's granary is full,
And the harvest's done.

III

I see a lily on thy brow,
With anguish moist and fever-dew,
And on thy cheeks a fading rose
Fast withereth too.

IV

I met a lady in the meads,
Full beautiful—a faery's child,
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild.

V

I made a garland for her head,
And bracelets too, and fragrant zone;
She looked at me as she did love,
And made sweet moan.

VI

I set her on my pacing steed,
And nothing else saw all day long,
For sidelong would she bend, and sing
A faery's song.

VII

She found me roots or relish sweet,
And honey wild, and manna-dew,
And sure in language strange she said—
'I love thee true.'

VIII

She took me to her elfin grot,
And there she wept and sighed full sore,
And there I shut her wild wild eyes
With kisses four.

IX

And there she lullèd me asleep
And there I dreamed—Ah! woe betide!—
The latest dream I ever dreamt
On the cold hill side.

X

I saw pale kings and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
They cried—'La Belle Dame sans Merci
Thee hath in thrall!'

XI

I saw their starved lips in the gloam,
With horrid warning gapèd wide,
And I awoke and found me here,
On the cold hill's side.

XII

And this is why I sojourn here
Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.

immediately, by the contrast between its two couplets, generates a paradox of sense-impressions: Is it that the knight must flee at once, and not loiter by this desolate winter lake? Or has the knight's ominous ailment caused the desolation?

In the fourth stanza, the knight begins to tell of his dream of the senses. Each successive stanza, by its paired couplets, raises the tension between the knight's desperate, tragic striving to have the entrancing object of his senses, La Belle Dame, who has vanished; and the languid, ineffable behavior of the fairy maiden, which signals that she did not exist, except as the Metaphor of the knight's terrible mental illness. And in each stanza, the dramatic musical contrast between the two couplets—the

fact that the fourth line is half-length and is slowly tolled in the recitation—aids in giving the ballad its unusual, tragic quality. The final stanza,

And this is why I sojourn here
Alone and palely loitering;
Though the sedge is withered from the lake,
And ___no___birds___sing___.

shows that the opening stanzas, were merely variations of the concluding Metaphor. No companion, no grasses, no singing of birds, no color in his cheek, no will to flee from this soundless suspension; the falseness and powerlessness of the senses.

Compare Alexander Pope, even when he wrote, apparently, not in “closed couplets,” but in the *form* of the ballad; although he called this an ode, “Ode on Solitude”:

Happy the man whose wish and care
A few paternal acres bound,
Content to breathe his native air,
In his own ground.

Whose herds with milk, whose fields with bread,
Whose flocks supply him with attire;
Whose trees in summer yield him shade,
In winter fire. . . .

No question, but that it feels good to grow old with some wealth and property, wouldn't you say? No question, no paradox, no thought of change, no Metaphor—nor any poetry.

‘Ode to a Nightingale’

When Keats spent his two months in Scotland in 1818, he took with him only one book: an edition of collected works of Dante Alighieri. Dante had developed the full concept of composition of the poetic stanza, as a movement of a work of music, which can be seen in Keats' great odes, for which he has always been best known.

Dante also taught, that that poetic form which can express irony through the content of *tragic* Metaphor, is the highest, and this he called the *canzone*—“a composition in the Tragic style, of equal stanzas, without choral interludes . . . that, in which the whole art of the *canzone* is contained, should be called *stanza*, that is a room, or receptacle, for the whole art.”

What we saw was true of the quatrain stanza of the ballad, Dante developed further:

A stanza is a structure of lines and syllables, limited with reference to a certain musical setting. . . . Every stanza is set (musically) for the reception of a certain Ode. . . . Subsequent stanzas may only be clothed with the musical art of the first stanza.

In other words, the musical “odes,” set out in the first stanza of a *canzone*, must be repeated in each successive stanza, although the final stanza could be lengthened by a repetition after its last group of lines, which Dante called by the musical term “coda.” An “ode” was a group of poetic lines, which employed a certain pattern of meter, rhythm and rhyme, *and expressed a distinct thought-object*. The first ode of a stanza was to be repeated a second time, now expressing a second poetic idea; then, if the stanza continued, a new ode was heard (this was the

volta, or turning point of the stanza); then another; and the stanza would be concluded by a couplet which “summed up” the Metaphor of that stanza.

For example, in the simple ballad, the stanza presents only one ode—a couplet—which is then repeated ironically, as discussed earlier. In a sonnet such as Keats' on Chapman's Homer, the first ode is the opening quatrain, which is then linked by rhymes to its own repeat, the second quatrain, with its new thought-object. The *volta*, or turning point, is between the end of the repeated quatrains, and the beginning of the continuous sextet of lines, which is the second ode. This second ode concludes with a “coda,” the final couplet, the “Metaphor of Metaphors” of the sonnet.

In one of Dante's tragic *canzone*, this kind of development only completes the first stanza, of six. Each new stanza has the same musical odes. Each successive stanza begins by taking up anew, the thought-object which has just been restated, ironically, in the final couplet of the previous stanza, and beginning to change it. And so on, to the final stanza and its concluding couplet, which rise above the entire poem.

The stanzas of Dante's *canzone* function like the movements of a classical musical composition. John Keats composed his great odes in this way, including his famous “Ode to a Nightingale” [SEE Box]. Once again, it celebrates the renunciation of the senses and sense-certainty, to arrive at an invisible beauty of ideas, an immortal song of Truth, which is poetry.

Like all of Keats' odes, “Ode to a Nightingale” was composed in stanzas of ten lines, each stanza beginning with a quatrain—a couplet which is then musically repeated, evoking a definite thought-object. Then begins a second “ode,” or new development of the idea, consisting of a continuous flow of six lines with three rhymes. The “coda” is marked by Keats' placement of a short line, to be sung slowly and with emphasis, leading into the final couplet of the stanza. The ratio of the short line is three measures to five measures (3:5); the proportion which Dante had employed in his *canzoni*, and praised for its “excellence.”

The very first stanza opens with the senses put to sleep in the beginning quatrain, as if in death; and closes in complete contrast, with the lively joy of the nightingale singing, unseen, in the shadows. But the *volta*, the turning point, is at the beginning of the second “ode,” in lines five and six. Right there, a great irony is already created. *Read* the stanza silently and you will hear, in your mind, the sad, drowsy poet envying the happy songbird. But then, *recite* the stanza, and you will hear a totally different idea: The poet becomes more happy, in the evident joy of the bird's song, than is the bird! Keats' Metaphor is

ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE

I

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

II

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

III

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 grey 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.

IV

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards.
Already with thee! tender is the night,
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
Clustered around by all her starry Fays;
But here there is no light,
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

V

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

VI

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Called him soft names in many a musèd rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
To thy high requiem become a sod.

VII

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
Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

VIII

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

already beginning to appear. For now, it is in the paradoxical image of the full-throated ease of the singer, and the lethargic ease of the poet, whose heart aches, as the song begins to pour out, because he is too happy!

As the second stanza opens, the quatrain takes the first stanza's hemlock, and transforms it to delicious wine; the "full-throated ease" of the nightingale, from the end of stanza one, now takes over the mind. Through this stanza, another paradox for the senses. The quatrain is based upon images of sensual pleasure; then the ode even intensifies these, up through the slow line, "And purple-stained mouth." But the closing couplet makes a sudden change, as this wine makes the mortal body fade away, unseen. At the end of this "second movement" of the piece, the concluding "Metaphor of Metaphors" is now present.

It is evident how, as the stanzas progress, each opening couplet pushes, polemically, against the suspended Metaphor from the previous stanza. This can be shown by a shift of voice in recitation. In the fourth stanza—"Away!"—there is a greater transformation than any before it. The quatrain, against wine or any sensual pleasure, opposes the invisible power of poetry, and at the beginning of the ode—"Already with thee!"—the poet finds and joins the serene and secret nightingale. But! The bird's song is found in the mind alone; now come images of such black night that nothing can be found, even the shining of the Moon and stars are only guesses; and in the coda of this stanza comes the extraordinary and paradoxical image of heavenly light being blown by the wind through the forest, in complete darkness.

Keats' Metaphor of Metaphors is now working in mind as the fifth "movement" recreates the same paradox, of "guessing" at sense impressions of Nature, which, in the opening stanza, appeared so tangible and obvious. Keats is creating exactly what St. Augustine described: "from the things of sense, to God, in order that they may cling to Him who rules our intelligence, with no mediating Nature between. . . ."

And Keats is doing this, with a simple, everyday irony, known to anyone who has ever put a canary out on the back porch; a tiny bird, so small as to be virtually without substance, filling the forest with great, invisible, unfindable song. He had written a little song, which was like a study for the "Ode":

FAERY BIRD SONG

Shed no tear—O, shed no tear!
The flower will bloom another year.
Weep no more! O, weep no more!
Young buds sleep in the root's white core.
Dry your eyes! O, dry your eyes!

For I was taught in Paradise
To ease my breast of melodies—
Shed _____no _____tear.

Overhead! look overhead!
'Mong the blossoms white and red.
Look up, Look up. I flutter now
Upon this flush pomegranate bough.
See me! 'tis this silvery bill
That ever cures the good man's ill.
Shed no tear! O shed no tear!
The flower will bloom another year.
Adieu, Adieu—I fly, adieu,
I vanish in the heaven's blue—
Adieu, _____Adieu!

In the "Ode to a Nightingale," once the nightingale's song has been lifted, by these paradoxes, musical movement by movement, away from all sense impressions and sensual pleasures, the full Truth of the Metaphor appears in the sixth and seventh stanzas. Is this grasping of unknown, unseen, unheard melody, what awaits us in death? Keats, at about this time, wrote the epitaph for his own grave: "Here lies a man, whose name was writ in water."

Shakespeare's Hamlet appears, metaphorically: In the quatrain opening the sixth stanza, the poet wishes "not to be." The ode at first intensifies this, but then completely overturns it—this power of song is the reason for living. The "coda" of that stanza restates the same: The nightingale's song will live, though the poet die, and be his requiem. The seventh stanza opens with a quatrain suddenly opening into all of human history, and the immortal beauty of human art. From the quatrain of this stanza, to its ode, to its coda, there are startling shifts of the imagination, the joy of created beauty over and against the sadness of the mortal heart. The sixth and seventh stanzas are amazing, and a challenge to recite. By the end of stanza seven, the Metaphor is fully expressed. Keats' subject, was the great joy and love felt in composing a beautiful poem, no matter the state of mind or aching senses before the composing begins; the nightingale, metaphorically, is his own song. As the song has its joy, its creator is even happier. And this happiness is not of the senses, nor of the happiness of a life without care—as the Book of Ruth in the Old Testament was written to show—but the love of divinely given power of human creativity and love for God.

The slow final "movement" opens, even more strictly and musically than the others, by ironically restating the previous stanza's final couplet. The last stanza's conclusion of the Metaphor, is governed by Keats' idea, stated in letters, that a poem should rise to its most intense beauty just before the end:

Who read for me, the sonnet, swelling loudly
Up to its climax, and then dying proudly.

Or, as expressed in "Sleep and Poetry":

Sometimes it gives a glory to the voice,
And from the heart up-springs, "Rejoice, Rejoice!"
Sounds that will reach the Framer of all things,
And die away in ardent mutterings.

The "Ode to a Nightingale" is surely as beautiful a musical composition, as one of Dante's great *canzoni* from which came this method of composing in stanzas. What is said here about its content is only the simple and obvious. The purpose is to show the compositional method appropriate to the Metaphor: The opening movement as quatrain of repeated couplets; the *volta*, or turn, into the ode, or continuous sextet of lines; the "coda," or final couplet, which is both part of the ode, and a distinct recapitulation in itself. Keats did not use the form in just the same way in each stanza, nor the overall form in the same way in each ode; neither had Dante. Keats' long poems and sonnets had appeared to *break* the rules of Enlightenment poetry: his method in his odes and other stanza poems, is better said to have been *unknown* to those rules.

Throughout the Nineteenth century, biographers of Keats, while calling him a "genius," defended Boileau and the "rules" of Enlightenment poetry, against him. William Michael Rossetti's 1887 *Life of John Keats*, for example, denounced just that beauty of the seventh stanza of the "Ode to a Nightingale":

The nightingale itself is pronounced immortal. But this cannot stand the test of a moment's reflection. Man, as a race, is as deathless as is the nightingale as a race: while the nightingale as an individual bird has a life . . . still more fleeting, than a man as an individual.

Mr. Rossetti had made a syllogism: Old men are stubble; nightingales grow old much more quickly than men; therefore, nightingales are stubble.

'The Immortal Rhythm in Truth'

Keats' friend, Thomas Haydon, a young painter and archeologist, placed the heads of some well-known figures in his mural, "Christ's Entry into Jerusalem." Keats objected strongly when Haydon proposed to paint in Newton; Keats argued that Newton's influence had destroyed poetry, but Haydon went ahead, to brief critical praise. Keats' early friend Leigh Hunt felt constrained to defend Newton against Keats, in a review of

Keats' "Lamia" in Hunt's magazine, *The Examiner*, insisting poetry and Newton's mathematics must coexist. By 1819, British establishment reviews praising Shelley, still lacerated Keats, as *Blackwood's Magazine* in February, 1819:

We should just as much think of being wrath with vermin, unless they had entered our apartments, as with the Cockney poets. . . . Last of all, what should forbid us to announce our opinion, that Mr. Shelley, as a man of genius, is not merely superior, either to Mr. Hunt, or to Mr. Keats, but altogether out of their sphere.

By then Keats was trying to earn money to survive, by writing plays for London's Drury Lane theatre, and seeking work as a surgeon on a merchant vessel.

Haydon's mural, Hunt's *Examiner*, and *Blackwood's* are forgotten (except in Edgar Allan Poe's hilarious satires); not so Keats' poems, for which he battled the Enlightenment. Keats was firm in his judgment that "the lines of Pope's verse are like mice, compared to my own." When the reviews attacked his second volume, "Endymion," he wrote: "I was never afraid of failure; for I would rather fail, than not be among the greatest." And in another letter: "I find I can have no enjoyment in the world but the continual pursuit of knowledge. I find that there is no worthy pursuit, but the idea of doing some good to the world."

But after Keats, Shelley, and, later, the American Poe,⁴ poetry fell again under the dead weight of Hobbesian mathematics. It became the "true emotions" or "plain sense" of those poets who continued to write with stanza, meter, and rhyme; or the unmusical chaos of seeking "deeper meaning" in so-called free verse, beginning with the British literary establishment's promotion of Walt Whitman.

To restore Metaphor to English poetry, we must begin by returning to the music of John Keats.

NOTES

1. See the following works by Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., in previous issues of *Fidelio*: The "Metaphor" series: "On the Subject of Metaphor" (Vol. I, No. 3, Fall 1992, pp. 17-50), "Mozart's 1782-1786 Revolution in Music" (Vol. I, No. 4, Winter 1992, pp. 4-29), and "On the Subject of God" (Vol. II, No. 1, Spring 1993, pp. 17-48); "The Fraud of Algebraic Causality," in the *Symposium on the Creative Principle in Art and Science* (Vol. III, No. 4, Winter 1994, pp. 57-68,); and "How Hobbes' Mathematics Misshaped Modern History" (Vol. V, No. 1, Spring 1996, pp. 6-30).
2. *Op. cit.*
3. See Brian Lantz, "Thomas Hobbes: Fascist Exponent of Enlightenment Science," *Fidelio*, Vol. V, No. 1, Spring 1996, pp. 31-37, for further background on Hobbes and his attack on Metaphor.
4. See, for example, Poe's essay "Mellonta Tauta," with its soaring satire on the creeping and crawling methods of, respectively, Aries Tottle and Hog (F. Bacon).