

**John Keats and the Gothic Imagination**

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# **Abstract**

This thesis explores John Keats’s engagement with the Gothic literary aesthetic. Focusing on his last published collection *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes and Other Poems* (1820), I argue that Keats is both an appreciative reader and earnest writer of the Gothic, whose approach to ‘the literature of terror’ is characterised by sensory excess.[[1]](#footnote-1) As a gesture towards the sensory quality of the ‘Keatsian Gothic’, I have structured this thesis around four of the five human senses: touch, sight, taste and sound. Throughout, I use the senses as a lens through which to examine the Gothic elements in Keats’s oeuvre. While we do not know for certain whether Keats read classic Gothic novels such as Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Ann Radcliffe’s novels of the 1790s, or Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796), his familiarity with the conventions of the Gothic is clear from the ‘fine mother Radcliff [sic] names’ he uses for the narrative poems in the 1820 volume (letter to the George and Georgiana Keats, 14 February 1819).[[2]](#footnote-2) *John Keats and the Gothic Imagination* is the first sustained study of the influence of Gothic literature on Keats’s poetic imagination. As such, it is an original contribution to scholarship in the fields of both Romanticism and Gothic studies.

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# **Introduction**

The so-called ‘first wave’ of Gothic literature (circa 1764-1820) coincided with the brief life of ‘second-generation’ Romantic poet John Keats (1795-1821). By the time Keats was born - on Hallowe’en, no less - Ann Radcliffe had already published four of the five Gothic novels that would establish her reputation as ‘the great enchantress of that generation’.[[3]](#footnote-3) Keats’s familiarity with Radcliffe is documented in his letters, but his knowledge of the Gothic as a ‘shifting “aesthetic”’ is less clear.[[4]](#footnote-4)

In order to discuss Keats’s relationship with the Gothic, we must first determine what he understood by this elusive term. As Punter and Byron explain, ‘the Goths were one of several Germanic tribes instrumental in the fall of the Roman Empire’.[[5]](#footnote-5) Due to the myths surrounding this tribe, ‘‘Gothic’ became a highly mobile term, remaining constant only in the way it functioned to establish a set of polarities revolving primarily around the concepts of the primitive and the civilized.’[[6]](#footnote-6) From the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century, ‘Gothic’ referred to the revival of a medieval architectural style. As a historiographic category, it was associated with the barbaric, superstitious past. In E. J. Clery’s words, Gothic ‘signified anything obsolete, old-fashioned, or outlandish’.[[7]](#footnote-7) The Gothic was established as a literary mode when Horace Walpole added the subtitle *A Gothic Story* to the second edition of *The Castle of Otranto* in 1765.[[8]](#footnote-8) In his preface, Walpole describes the story as ‘an attempt to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern. In the former all was imagination and improbability: in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success.’[[9]](#footnote-9) Walpole’s aim to reconcile the fanciful elements of romance with the more naturalistic elements of the novel (the ‘modern’ kind of romance) anticipates Keats’s poetic experimentations within this literary mode, particularly in his final published volume *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes and Other Poems* (1820). Keats only uses the word ‘Gothic’ a handful of times in his oeuvre - most notably in the parodic poem ‘Lines Rhymed in a Letter Received (by J. H. Reynolds) from Oxford’ (1817), but, as Dale Townshend observes:

‘John Keats had little to say about the associations evoked by Gothic architecture beyond that ‘The Gothic looks solemn’. Inspired by a visit to the ruins of Lincluden Priory, Dumfries, in July 1818, however, Keats in the winter of 1819 would draft and rework *The Eve of St Agnes* (1820), a Spenserian poem about popular superstition and the defiant energies of young romantic and sexual love. Here, the imaginative appeal of Gothic architecture takes precedence. Pausing over such details as the sculptures of knights and ladies in the chapel, the ‘carved angels’ in the masonry, and the heraldry, stained glass, and ‘triple-arch’d’ casements in Madeline’s bedchamber, the persona ties Gothic architecture closely into the appeal of ‘old romance’ and ‘faery fancy’.[[10]](#footnote-10)

The appeal of the medieval past - or ‘old romance’ as Keats terms it in *The Eve of St Agnes* (V: 41) - is a key feature of early Gothic literature, though it is worth noting that the word ‘medieval’ was not in use until 1817.[[11]](#footnote-11) The words ‘Gothic’ and ‘romance’ have long been associated with the medieval in English writing. For example, in *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762), Richard Hurd loosely uses the phrases ‘Gothic Chivalry’ and ‘the spirit of romance’ in relation to ‘the barbarous ages’**.**[[12]](#footnote-12) As E. J. Clery notes, tales of terror were ‘universally referred to as “romances”’ in the mid to late 1700s.[[13]](#footnote-13) Keats never uses the word ‘medieval’ in his poetry or letters, but he evokes the period through his use of associated words such as chivalry and romance. For example, in the opening lines of ‘On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again’ the speaker tells ‘Golden-tongued Romance’ (1) to ‘Shut up thine olden pages, and be mute’ (4).[[14]](#footnote-14) Likewise, ‘Specimen of an Induction to a Poem’ begins with the line ‘Lo! I must tell a tale of chivalry’ (1). This early poem features typical medieval imagery such as ‘lone gothic arches’ (34) and a ‘gentle Knight’ (47), but it is the early modern poet Edmund Spenser who ‘come[s] like a clear sun-rise’ (50) to the speaker’s mind, not the likes of Chaucer or Boccaccio. This is consistent with Clare A. Simmons’s observation that ‘in Britain. . . knowledge of medieval romance was vague and tended to be shaped as much by Edmund Spenser’s Elizabethan allegory. . . as by reading medieval works’.[[15]](#footnote-15) This is unsurprising given that ‘relatively few medieval works were available in printed form’ in the early Romantic period.[[16]](#footnote-16) Like Hurd, whose ‘sense of the medieval was based largely on his reading of Spenser’, Keats’s main reference point for medieval romance was *The Faerie Queene* (1590-6).[[17]](#footnote-17) According to his close friend Charles Brown, ‘it was the “Faery Queene” that awakened [Keats’s] genius. In Spenser’s fairy land he was enchanted, breathed in a new world, and became another being.’[[18]](#footnote-18) Notable examples of its formal and thematic influence on Keats’s poetry include *Calidore. A Fragment* (thus named after Spenser’s knight Sir Calidore) and *The Eve of St Agnes*.[[19]](#footnote-19) Keats’s sense of the medieval is twice removed from the actual historical period because *The Faerie Queene* was not written during the Middle Ages, but in the early modern period. This, C. S. Lewis argues, ‘is the great paradox of Spenser’s poem’ and why he refers to him as ‘the last of the medieval poets and the first of the romantic medievalists’.[[20]](#footnote-20) Much has been written on Romantic medievalism, including Simmons’s chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Medievalism* (2016), Katie Garner’s chapter ‘Keats’s quest: Medievalism, romance and the Scottish tour’ in *John Keats and romantic Scotland* (2022) and Elizabeth Fay’s *Romantic Medievalism* (2002). Garner suggests that Keats’s walking tour of Scotland in the summer of 1818 ‘transformed a previously textual engagement with medieval romance into a set of material encounters with its landscapes, at a moment when medieval romance was beginning to be more clearly associated with the sublime.’[[21]](#footnote-21) Keats was accompanied on this tour by his close friend Charles Brown, whom he nicknamed ‘the Red Cross Knight’ in reference to his tartan outfit (*LJK*, I: 362).[[22]](#footnote-22) Garner states:

Keats’s invention of a Spenserian joke seems hardly surprising given that he had only finished correcting the proofs of *Endymion*, his Spenserian romance, two months before leaving for Scotland. But the spirit of the Redcrosse joke also reflects a longer pattern of ironic chivalric self-fashioning by members of the Cockney School in the years leading up to summer 1818.[[23]](#footnote-23)

This ‘ironic chivalric self-fashioning’ suggests that, although *The Faerie Queene* was not among the books Keats and Brown took with them on their Scottish adventure, the spirit of Spenserian romance haunted their imaginations. Fay’s *Romantic Medievalism* contains a chapter dedicated to Keats’s specific uses of the medieval in his writings, in which she argues that his medieval poems such as ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’ and *The Eve of St Agnes* can be read as a form of ‘troubadourism’ - that is, when the poet takes on the posture of the courtly lover in the troubadour love lyric tradition of the 12th-13th century.[[24]](#footnote-24) Fay emphasises the Janus-faced nature of Romantic medievalism, which is at once progressive and nostalgic. She also suggests that Keats’s medievalism is distinctive in that ‘the troubadourian ethos of the romances and odes spells out Keats’s realization of nostalgia’s dangers.’[[25]](#footnote-25) This is consistent with David Punter’s assessment of Keats’s engagement with the Gothic. In *The Literature of Terror* (2013), Punter acknowledges that ‘Blake, Coleridge, Shelley, Byron and Keats all played a part in shaping the Gothic, in articulating a set of images of terror which were to exercise a potent influence over later literary history’.[[26]](#footnote-26) However, he claims that Keats’s contributions are ‘the most marginal, not in that there was no Gothic influence, but in that Keats was largely interested in the 'white' Gothic of Spenser, Hurd and vanished chivalry’.[[27]](#footnote-27) Dale Townshend defines ‘white Gothic’ as ‘a nostalgic construction of the historical past that is based upon fantasies of chivalry, heroism, and splendour, the liberties enshrined in the Magna Carta, and literal and metaphorical forms of enlightenment’ which is ‘fundamentally opposed to the tyranny, ignorance and superstition of the ‘Dark Ages’ figured in Gothic romance and drama.’[[28]](#footnote-28) Ultimately, Punter surmises that although Keats is ‘capable of seeing the dark side of the old legends’, he is ‘not at home in such realms’, citing the narrator’s apology for the ‘wormy circumstance’ (XLIX: 377) in *Isabella, or The Pot of Basil* as an example of his uneasiness.[[29]](#footnote-29) While Punter is right in saying that Keats’s poetry ‘has much to do with Gothic in the sense of chivalry, of a vanished purity and beauty’, the aim of this thesis is to show that there is more to the Keatsian Gothic than his statement suggests.[[30]](#footnote-30) While poems such as *The Eve of St Agnes* and ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’ certainly evoke the lost chivalric past, Keats’s classical poems approach the Gothic in a different way.[[31]](#footnote-31) *Lamia*, for instance, does not conform to the conventions of the ‘white Gothic’ as laid out by Townshend, but it is nevertheless a Gothic poem in that it conveys an ‘aesthetic of fear’ (to borrow Joyce Carol Oates’s memorable phrase) through its depiction of the past as a perilous, enchanted realm.[[32]](#footnote-32) Indeed, the opening lines articulate a tension between the ancient past and the time of ‘King Oberon’:

Upon a time, before the faery broods

Drove Nymph and Satyr from the prosperous woods,

Before King Oberon's bright diadem,

Sceptre, and mantle, clasp'd with dewy gem,

Frighted away the Dryads and the Fauns

From rushes green, and brakes, and cowslip'd lawns (*Lamia*, I: 1-6)

In this passage, time and place are shrouded in ambiguity. The speaker tells us that the ancient world *will* be supplanted by the world of fairy, but the poem is set before this displacement, therefore, Keats transports the reader to a liminal space on the cusp of transformation. It is unclear to which realm the titular Lamia belongs. She is a creature of classical mythology, but Keats also aligns her with the ‘the faery broods’ when he compares her to a ‘penanced lady elf’ (I: 55). Lamia has ‘elfin blood’ (I: 147) and possesses the ability to ‘charm’ (II: 124) both people and places. I am thinking here of the fragile ‘faery-roof’ (II: 123) of ‘The glowing banquet-room’ (II: 121) in Part II, and, of course, the ‘purple-lined palace of sweet sin’ (II: 31) she embowers herself and Lycius in before their wedding. Just as Lamia is neither fully serpent nor woman, she does not belong fully to either world. Her very survival depends upon her ability to sustain a sense of enchantment. This tension between the ancient, Hellenistic age and the fairy realm of romance reflects Keats’s oscillation between the two worlds in his mature poetry.[[33]](#footnote-33) It is important to remember that Keats’s life and work belong to an age of disenchantment. The Enlightenment supplanted the ‘old ways’ with an ideology that emphasised progress, reason and empiricism. Keats addresses this explicitly through Apollonius’s demystification of the ‘rainbow-sided’ (I: 54) Lamia - an act that he critiques in the following passage:

Do not all charms fly

At the mere touch of cold philosophy?

There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:

We know her woof, her texture; she is given

In the dull catalogue of common things.

Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,

Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,

Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine—

Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made

The tender-person'd Lamia melt into a shade. (II: 229-238)

There is no room for ‘charms’ and ‘mysteries’ in Apollonius’s world, which is represented by the city of Corinth - a clear contrast to Lamia’s woodland abode in Part I of the poem. By seeing through Lamia, Apollonius succeeds not only in revealing the mystery she embodies, but unmaking it. His ‘cold philosophy’ conquers mystery, empties the ‘haunted air’, ‘unweave[s] the rainbow’ and ‘melt[s]’ Lamia’s physical form until all that remains of her is a ‘shade’. The fact that Lycius dies of disenchantment suggests that harsh reality is often more perilous than any supernatural or otherworldly enchantment. Lamia may be a ‘deceiving elf’, to borrow a phrase from ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ (74), but it is Apollonius’s ‘cruel’ gaze that ultimately seals the lovers’ fate.

A key component of the Keatsian Gothic is its emphasis on the senses.Keats believed that ‘axioms in philosophy are not axioms until they are proved upon our pulses’ (*LJK*, I: 279). In other words, for something to be ‘true’, it must be experienced on a visceral level.[[34]](#footnote-34) The effects of Gothic writing are similarly proved upon our pulses. As Ellen Moers notes, ‘the earliest tributes to the power of Gothic writers tended to emphasize the physiological.’[[35]](#footnote-35) She cites the following examples: Henry Tilney’s claim that reading Radcliffe made his hair stand on end in chapter 14 of Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* (1818), William Hazlitt’s praise of Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Gregory Lewis for their ‘art of freezing the blood’, and Mary Shelley’s intention to craft a story that would ‘curdle the blood, and quicken the beatings of the heart.’[[36]](#footnote-36) Indeed, as Moers asserts, Gothic writing ‘has one definite auctorial intent: to scare.’[[37]](#footnote-37) This, she argues, is distinct from tragedy, which arouses pity and terror. The Gothic ‘get[s] to the body itself, its glands, its epidermis, and circulatory system, quickly arousing and quickly allaying the physiological reactions to fear’.[[38]](#footnote-38) Although Gothic affect goes beyond the senses in that it refers primarily to the emotional and psychological impact of the text, Moers highlights the fact that the reader’s unease and terror is often piqued by sensory stimulation, such as a raised heartbeat. This relates to what Xavier Aldana Reyes calls an ‘affective approach’ to the literature of terror -that is, an approach that ‘acknowledges that gothic texts aim to generate, for example, fear, shock, and disgust’ and which ‘centres on aspects of fictional texts that work together to generate a series of intended feelings connected to the gothic’.[[39]](#footnote-39) As a gesture towards the Gothic’s emphasis on the senses, this thesis is organised into four chapters: touch, sight, taste and sound. Smell has been omitted because there are no distinctly ‘Gothic smells’ to speak of in Keats’s poetry. By structuring my thesis this way, I aim to draw attention to the ways in which the language of sensation informs the Keatsian Gothic.[[40]](#footnote-40) Separating the senses in this way may seem counterintuitive given the synaesthetic quality of Keats’s writing, and yet, the senses are not treated in isolation to one another, but as interconnected channels through which Keats heightens the Gothic mise-en-scène of his poems. Synaesthesia - that is, the technique of ‘blending or intermingling of different sense modalities’ - is a hallmark of Keats’s poetic style.[[41]](#footnote-41) Similar to William Hazlitt’s definition of ‘gusto’ in painting (‘where the impression made on one sense excites by affinity those of another’), synaesthesia heightens the reader’s experience by stimulating multiple senses simultaneously.[[42]](#footnote-42) For example, in the ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, the speaker blends auditory and visual sensory experience in the lines ‘In some melodious plot / Of beechen green, and shadows numberless’ (8-9). Through synaesthesia, Keats achieves the effect of *over*simulating (and sometimes distorting) the senses - an effect that can be compared to the tendency in Gothic literature towards sensory excess.[[43]](#footnote-43)

Sensation is a slippery word in Keats’s vocabulary, as he uses it to describe both sense perception and sensitivity. This plurality is best articulated in the phrase ‘the feel of not to feel it’ (‘In drear nighted December’, III: 21). As Stacey McDowell observes, Keats’s reputation as a ‘‘a poet of the senses’ . . . gained currency in the Victorian period, with critics by turns fascinated and disconcerted by his poetry’s luxuriating delight in sensory experience’.[[44]](#footnote-44) As early as 1831, Arthur Henry Hallam described Shelley and Keats as ‘poets of sensation rather than reflection’.[[45]](#footnote-45) Similarly, Matthew Arnold commented on: ‘the eminency, in Keats's poetry, of the quality of sensuousness. Keats as a poet is abundantly and enchantingly sensuous; the question with some people will be, whether he is anything else.’[[46]](#footnote-46) Of course, sensation and sensuousness have distinct but related meanings: the former refers to sense perception, while the latter refers to an aesthetic response to the sensory experience (e.g., finding beauty in the sound of birdsong). Keats’s poetry encapsulates both meanings. This is highlighted in Jane Campion’s biopic *Bright Star* (2009), in which the character of Keats declares:

A poem needs understanding through the senses. The point of diving in a lake is not immediately to swim to the shore but to be in the lake, to luxuriate in the sensation of water. You do not work the lake out. It is an experience beyond thought.[[47]](#footnote-47)

Keats may not have uttered or written these exact words, but the quotation captures the essence of his poetic philosophy. The perception of Keats as a poet of the senses is shaped by his letters as much as his poetry.[[48]](#footnote-48) For example, in a much-quoted letter to Benjamin Bailey, Keats famously declares ‘O for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts!’ (*LJK*, I: 185-186). What exactly did Keats mean by ‘a Life of Sensations’? According to Shahidha K. Bari, ‘the sensational life he imagines is one in which sensation is not mindless or purely epicurean but which constitutes, for him, a different, non-‘consequitive’ [sic. - Keats’s spelling] kind of thinking.’[[49]](#footnote-49) Bari’s words ‘mindless’ and ‘epicurean’ speak to the criticism Keats faced for his sensual writing style. Byron, for example, referred to Keats’s early verse as ‘the Onanism of poetry’ - an insult that implies a lack of restraint in regards to sensory pleasure.[[50]](#footnote-50) Byron’s characterisation of Keats’s poetry as masturbatory is misguided, not least of all because Keats was equally concerned with painful sensations, and indeed intermingled pain and pleasure. It is more accurate to describe Keats’s verse as the poetry of *heightened* sensations, whether pleasurable or displeasurable. In this respect, Keats’s poetry is Gothic in the sense that it is ‘a writing of excess.’[[51]](#footnote-51)

The emphasis on bodily sensation in Keats’s poetry is inextricably linked to his knowledge of medicine and human anatomy. In 1810, Keats was apprenticed to the surgeon and apothecary Thomas Hammond.[[52]](#footnote-52) Five years later, he enrolled as a medical student at Guy’s hospital and within a month, he was promoted to the prestigious role of surgeon’s dresser. In his biography, Nicholas Roe details the everyday horrors Keats would have been exposed to in this capacity:

As dresser, Keats would have had to participate in operations, witnessing harrowing scenes at the operating table and being required to put right any damage inflicted […] He lived in an age where excruciating agony was a fact of life: the horrific experience of surgery without anaesthetic – effectively human vivisection – was a routine reality.[[53]](#footnote-53)

Although Keats left medicine to pursue poetry shortly after receiving his apothecary’s licence in the summer of 1816, his experience at Guy’s stayed with him for the rest of his life and profoundly informed his writing. As such, the senses are an appropriate and useful organising principle for this thesis.[[54]](#footnote-54) Working in such close proximity to pain, sickness and death, even for a short time, undoubtedly gave Keats an understanding of what Edmund Burke famously defined as ‘horror’:

The ideas of pain, sickness, and death, fill the mind with strong emotions of horror; but life and health, though they put us in a capacity of being affected with pleasure, they make no such impression by the simple enjoyment […] Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable […] When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we everyday experience.[[55]](#footnote-55)

Burke does not explicitly differentiate between terror and horror, but he does set the parameters for determining when fear can be a ‘delightful’ sensation. Although the sublime pertains to strong *emotion*, our knowledge of the material world derives from the senses.[[56]](#footnote-56) This is emphasised by Burke’s evocation of touch in the image of ‘danger or pain press[ing] too nearly’. If we think of terror as a precipice and the sublime as an awe-inspiring vista, horror is the moment one almost loses one’s footing. When confronted with horror, one might shudder, feel nauseous, or physically recoil in disgust, all of which are somatic responses to stimuli. The sensation of horror, therefore, is visceral and embodied. Before I return to Keats, it is necessary to give a brief genealogy of the discourse surrounding terror and horror in the eighteenth century to contextualise Burke’s treatise and highlight how earlier (and indeed later) theories of fear and the sublime emphasise the senses.[[57]](#footnote-57) Firstly, in *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (1704), John Dennis proposes a theory of the sublime based on his reading of Longinus in which he describes terror as an ‘enthusiastic passion. . . which, if it is rightly managed, none is more capable of giving a great spirit to poetry’.[[58]](#footnote-58) He links terror to the senses when he argues:

It is very plain that it is the apprehension of danger which causes that emotion in us which we can terror, and it signifies nothing at all to the purpose whether the danger is real or imaginary; and it is as plain, too, that the soul never takes the alarm from anything so soon as it does from the senses, especially those two noble ones of the eye and the ear, by reason of the strict affinity which they have with the imagination; and the evil always seems to be very near when those two senses give notice of it; and the nearer the evil is, the greater still is the terror.[[59]](#footnote-59)

If Burke’s understanding of fear is linked to the idea of touch (the implied image of something ‘pressing’ too closely), then Dennis’s is linked to the sudden sight or sound of something terrible. Like Burke, Dennis emphasises the importance of proximity: when ‘evil’ is close at hand, the terror is ‘greater’, which triggers our instinct for self-preservation. Therefore, any pleasure we might derive from terror is contingent upon its sensory immediacy. The next key development in the theoretical discourse of fear is Joseph Addison’s ‘The Pleasures of the Imagination’, a series of eleven essays that appeared in the *Spectator* throughout 1712 (nos. 409, 411–21). In essays no. 412 and 418, Addison asserts:

There may, indeed, be something so terrible or offensive, that the Horrour or Loathsomeness of an Object may over-bear the Pleasure which results from its *Greatness, Novelty,* or *Beauty*.[[60]](#footnote-60) (no. 412)

When we look on such hideous Objects, we are not a little pleased to think we are in no Danger of them … so that the more frightful Appearance they make, the greater is the Pleasure we receive from the Sense of our own Safety.[[61]](#footnote-61) (no. 418)

Here, Addison acknowledges that there is a certain species of fear that is too overstimulating to be considered pleasing - an idea that clearly anticipates Burke’s argument that ‘When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible’. What Addison articulates in these passages is our innate, universal fear of bodily pain, from which the impulse for safety and self-preservation arises. If the anticipation of bodily pain is what separates intolerable fear from tolerable fear, then the senses are the arbitrators. After Burke, another key commentary upon the discourse on fear is ‘On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror’ by John Aikin and Anna Laetitia Aikin (later Barbauld).[[62]](#footnote-62) This theoretical essay is an accompaniment to the Gothic tale ‘Sir Bertrand, a Fragment’ and it is considered to be the first piece of writing to engage critically with Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). Although Aikin uses the terms terror and horror interchangeably, Eric Parisot observes that she ‘implies a distinction between emotional processes that produce ‘pure terror’ on the one hand – the essay’s primary focus – and the potential for ‘disgust and horror’ on the other.[[63]](#footnote-63) This differentiation pivots on the engagement of ‘moral feelings’.’[[64]](#footnote-64) For Aikin, ‘the apparent delight with which we dwell upon objects of pure terror [...] is a paradox of the heart’.[[65]](#footnote-65) Crucially, Aikin identifies two possible responses to pain and fear: if these unpleasant sensations are ‘softened and alleviated by the reflex sense of self-approbation attending virtuous sympathy’, then one may be compelled to revisit the ‘scene of misery’ again ‘instead of flying from them with disgust and horror.’[[66]](#footnote-66) The notion of ‘disgust’ implies a visceral, embodied response to fear, which is precisely what James Beattie emphasises in‘Illustrations on Sublimity’ (*Dissertations Moral and Critical*, 1783). Beattie’s emphasis on ‘the corporeal effects of horror’ is an important development in the theory of fear response.[[67]](#footnote-67) Despite ‘his struggle to distinguish a new form of horror from previous models of the sublime and terror, his emphasis upon somatic response advances a broad, emergent distinction between the sensory, visceral nature of horror and the psychological and imaginative mechanics of terror.’[[68]](#footnote-68) Although Beattie, Aikin, Burke, Addison and Dennis all contributed to dialectics of terror *versus* horror, Nathan Drake was ‘the first explicitly to contrast the two as separate species of Gothic fear’ in his essays ‘On Gothic Superstition’ and ‘On Objects of Terror’ (*Literary Hours,* 1798).[[69]](#footnote-69) According to Drake, the mark of genius in literature and art is the ability to bring readers to ‘the brink of horror’ where we can experience ‘the most delightful and fascinating sensation’.[[70]](#footnote-70) He names Shakespeare and Ann Radcliffe as two such writers who are capable of alleviating scenes of terror ‘by adjunctive and pictoresque [sic.] embellishment, by pathetic, or sublime emotion’.[[71]](#footnote-71) Radcliffe’s writing, he contends, ‘never degenerates into horror’ because fear is ‘softened’ by the quality of her writing.[[72]](#footnote-72) Drake argues that the skill with which a writer or artist renders scenes of terror determines whether the effect is sublime or horrifying. In doing so, he makes a hierarchical distinction between these two species of fear. The final destination in this journey through the critical discourse of fear in the long eighteenth century is, of course, Ann Radcliffe’s ‘On the Supernatural in Poetry’. Written in 1802 and published posthumously in 1826 as an essay in the *New Monthly Magazine*, this seminal work of aesthetic theory further distils the differentiation between terror and horror:

Terror and horror are so far opposite that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them. I apprehend that neither Shakespeare nor Milton by their fictions, nor Mr. Burke by his reasoning, anywhere looked to positive horror as a source of the sublime, though they all agree that terror is a very high one; and where lies the great difference between terror and horror, but in uncertainty and obscurity, that accompany the first, respecting the dreader evil?[[73]](#footnote-73)

Like Burke, Radcliffe emphasises the role of obscurity as a buffer to prevent the imagination from becoming overwhelmed and overstimulated. For example, Milton’s image ‘On his brow sat horror plumed’ is not productive of horror because ‘it is not distinctly pictured forth, but is seen in glimpses through obscuring shades’.[[74]](#footnote-74) Although the speakers focus their discussion on the effects of terror and horror on ‘the soul’ and ‘the faculties’, the senses are not precluded: *Cymbeline* elicits a ‘tremour of awe’ and the ghost’s appearance in Act 1 Scene 4 of *Hamlet* inspires ‘trembling curiosity’*.*[[75]](#footnote-75) These tremors and tremblings are indicative of Shakespeare’s ability to craft poignant scenes of terror that produce a ‘strange mixture of horror, pity and indignation’ which gradually gives way to ‘high curiosity and thrilling awe’.[[76]](#footnote-76) Keats was similarly affected by Shakespeare’s tragedies. In his famous ‘negative capability’ letter, Keats compares *King Lear* to Benjamin West’s painting ‘Death on the Pale Horse’ (1817 version). Although he concedes that the latter is ‘a wonderful picture’, Keats ultimately finds West’s painting lacking in ‘intensity’ (*LJK*, I: 192-193). This prompts the following reflection on ‘excellence’ in art and literature:

the excellence of every Art is in its intensity, capable of making all disagreeable evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth—Examine King Lear & you will find this exemplified throughout; but in this picture we have unpleasantness without any momentous depth of speculation excited*,* in which to bury its repulsiveness.

[...]

I had not a dispute but a disquisition with Dilke, on various subjects; several things dovetailed in my mind, & at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason—Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge. This pursued through Volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great Poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration. (*LJK*, I: 192-193)

West’s painting is generally considered to be a prime example of the sublime in British art, yet it failed to move Keats in the same way as the Elgin Marbles did the previous year. For Keats, the picture had ‘nothing to be intense upon; no woman one feels mad to kiss; no face swelling into reality’ (*LJK*, I: 192-193). Viewed alongside critical writings on terror and horror, Keats’s theory of ‘negative capability’ takes on a new significance. While it is important to point out that ‘negative capability’ is not analogous with the sublime, there are certainly parallels between Keats’s ideas and those put forward by Burke, Radcliffe, et al. Like Drake, Keats sees Shakespeare as the archetype of literary genius because he is ‘capable of being in ‘uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts’ - a quality that enables him to bring an audience to what Drake calls the ‘brink of horror’. For Keats, West’s painting is not only deficient in ‘intensity’, but obscurity; it has ‘unpleasantness without any momentous depth of speculation excited*,* in which to bury its repulsiveness’. It is, for Keats, ‘simply terrible’ (to paraphrase Burke). Keats developshis thoughts on mystery and obscurity further in his ‘simile of human life’, which he outlines in the following letter to J. H. Reynolds (3 May 1818):

I compare human life to a large Mansion of Many Apartments, two of which I can only describe, the doors of the rest being as yet shut upon me—The first we step into we call the infant or thoughtless Chamber, in which we remain as long as we do not think—We remain there a long while, and notwithstanding the doors of the second Chamber remain wide open, showing a bright appearance, we care not to hasten to it; but are at length imperceptibly impelled by the awakening of the thinking principle—within us—we no sooner get into the second Chamber, which I shall call the Chamber of Maiden-Thought, than we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere, we see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there for ever in delight: However among the effects this breathing is father of is that tremendous one of sharpening one’s vision into the ❬head❭ [Rollins suggests ‘heart’] and nature of Man—of convincing ones nerves that the World is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression —whereby This Chamber of Maiden Thought becomes gradually darken’d and at the same time on all sides of it many doors are set open—but all dark—all leading to dark passages—We see not the ballance [sic.] of good and evil. We are in a Mist—*We* are now in that state—We feel the “burden of Mystery” (*LJK*, I: 280-281)

In this letter, Keats builds upon his earlier concept of ‘negative capability’ when he declares that ‘An extensive knowledge . . . helps, by widening speculation, to ease the Burden of Mystery.’ Keats’s emphasis on mystery and speculation in both the ‘negative capability’ letter and his metaphor of life as a ‘Mansion of Many Apartments’ anticipate Radcliffe’s definition of terror as a state that ‘expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life’. Both Keats and Radcliffe’s speaker agree on the importance of uncertainty and obscurity, but Keats goes a step further by suggesting that ‘speculation. . . ease[s] the Burden of Mystery’ and lights our way through the ‘Mist’ towards the many ‘dark passages’.[[77]](#footnote-77) Where those ‘dark passages’ lead is, of course, another mystery. Of course, Keats could not have read Radcliffe’s ‘On the Supernatural in Poetry’ as it was not published until a year after his death, yet his familiarity with her novels is evident from his correspondence. Keats invokes Radcliffe twice in his letters, first in March 1818 and again in February 1819. Firstly, writing to his close friend John Hamilton Reynolds from Teignmouth on 14 March 1818, Keats jokes:

I am going among Scenery whence I intend to tip you the Damosel Radcliffe- I’ll cavern you, and grotto you, and waterfall you, and wood you, and water you, and immense-rock you, and tremendous sound you, and solitude you. (*LJK*, I: 245)

As Jane Stabler argues, these are not particularly Radcliffean words, and Keats’s attempt to ‘inventorise Radcliffe’s art’ by turning nouns into verbs betrays his insecurity about engaging seriously with the Radcliffean Gothic.[[78]](#footnote-78) Nevertheless, Keats’s ability to conjure – however inaccurately and parodically – the essence of Radcliffe’s landscapes suggests that he was more than just a casual reader of her novels. In Martha Hale Shackford’s words, ‘underneath this playfulness there is certainly evidence of a distinct acquaintance with the works of the lady.’[[79]](#footnote-79) His familiarity with her work is even more apparent in the following letter to his brother George:

In my next Packet [...] I shall send you the Pot of Basil, St Agnes Eve, and if I should have finished it a little thing call’d the ‘Eve of St Mark’ you see what fine mother Radcliff names I have. It is not my fault; I did not search for them. (*LJK*, II: 62)

It is ambiguous as to whether these epistolary mentions of Radcliffe are affectionate, as Hogle claims, or mocking.[[80]](#footnote-80) Interestingly, Radcliffe is conjured first as a ‘Damosel’ then as a ‘mother’. Either Keats’s esteem for Radcliffe grew in the year between these letters or there is a hint of misogyny in his transformation of the author from maiden to crone. If, as Anne Williams argues, ‘the “fathers” with whom Keats negotiates are the familiar trinity of Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton’, then ‘mother Radcliff’ is their maternal counterpart, whether Keats openly acknowledged it or not.[[81]](#footnote-81)Keats’s Radcliffean titles are just the beginning; many of his characters are also named after Gothic heroes and heroines: Isabella (*Isabella, or The Pot of Basil*) is the name of the heroine in Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764); Lorenzo (*Isabella, or The Pot of Basil*) is the name of the young male hero in Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796), and Madeline (*The Eve of St Agnes*) is the name of the heroine in Regina Maria Roche’s *Clermont* (1798). The name Madeline also bears a striking resemblance to Adeline, the name of the heroine in Ann Radcliffe’s *The Romance of the Forest* (1791). Keats’s defensiveness (‘It is not my fault’) suggests that ‘he is embarrassed to be caught imitating so voguish and low-brow an author’, and yet, his contemporaries did not share his insecurity.[[82]](#footnote-82) For example, in *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (1818), Byron ‘locates Radcliffe in the exalted company of male dramatists and story-tellers’:[[83]](#footnote-83)

Otway, Radcliffe, Schiller, Shakespeare’s art

Had stamped her image in me.[[84]](#footnote-84) (Canto IV, Stanza XVIII)

Byron was not alone in his admiration. Indeed, as early as 1798, Nathan Drake named Radcliffe ‘the Shakespeare of Romance Writers’.[[85]](#footnote-85) It is strange, then, that Keats is so reluctant to claim her as an influence. One possible answer is that he held Radcliffe’s novels in the same regard as West’s painting.[[86]](#footnote-86) As Stabler notes ‘It is worth drawing attention to Radcliffe’s appreciative male audience because her readership is often perceived as mostly female’.[[87]](#footnote-87) The question of whether Keats desired a female readership of his own does not have a straightforward answer. In a September 1819 letter to the publisher John Taylor, Richard Woodhouse insists that Keats ‘does not want ladies to read his poetry: that he writes for men’ (*LJK*, II: 163) and yet Keats’s own words on the matter contradict this statement. Reflecting on the sales of *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes and Other Poems* (1820), Keats writes:

The sale of my book is very slow, though it has been very highly rated. One of the causes, I understand from different quarters, of the unpopularity of this new book, and the others also, is the offence the ladies take at me. On thinking the matter over, I am certain that I have said nothing in a spirit to displease any woman I would care to please: but still there is a tendency to class women in my books with roses and sweetmeats—they never see themselves dominant. (*LJK*, II: 327)

Whether he was desirous of a female readership or not, Keats certainly recognised the lucrativeness of a market dominated by ‘ladies’. Moreover, he speculates that his ‘failure to attract a female audience’ is connected to his ‘tendency’ to present women in a particular way in his poems.[[88]](#footnote-88) As the title *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes and Other Poems* suggests, women characters dominate the collection, yet they frequently appear as muses and/or victims. That being said, several of Keats’s characters possess the moral ambiguity (Lamia) and fortitude (Isabella) to rival even Shakespeare’s most eminent heroines.[[89]](#footnote-89) The topic of Keats and gender is a recurring one throughout this thesis. As a favourite target of the conservative intelligentsia, Keats was intensely aware of the optics of being a male poet participating in ‘a genre [often perceived to be] dominated by women writers’, but his anxiety about perceived effeminacy does not necessarily indicate that Keats lacked respect for women writers.[[90]](#footnote-90) Rather, the rigid gendering of the writer goes against Keats’s conceptualisation of ‘the poetical Character’ (*LJK*, I: 386-7) as androgynous, chameleonic, and in a constant state of flux. If, as Walter Jack Bate declares, ‘negative capability’ can be defined as ‘The ability to negate one’s own identity, to lose it in something larger or more meaningful than oneself’, then Keats’s theory of subjectivity (as outlined in the following letter) is this quality in praxis:[[91]](#footnote-91)

As to the poetical Character itself (I mean that sort of which, if I am any thing, I am a Member; that sort distinguished from the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone) it is not itself - it has no self - it is every thing and nothing - It has no character - it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated - It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher, delights the camelion Poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things any more than from its taste for the bright one; because they both end in speculation. A Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity - he is continually in for - and filling some other Body - The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute - the poet has none; no identity - he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's Creatures. (*LJK*, I: 386-7)

Here, Keats conceives of ‘A self that continually overflows itself, that melts into the Other, that *becomes* the Other’ - not just the female, as Mellor posits, but *any* ‘Other body’.[[92]](#footnote-92) As Levinson argues, Keats’s model of subjectivity subverts the ‘masculinist construction of the self as bounded, unitary, complete and instrumental’, which he associated with the ‘wordsworthian or egotistical sublime’.[[93]](#footnote-93) His shapeshifting ‘poetical Character’ is unstable and disembodied; it transgresses boundaries and refuses to be pinned down. This spectrality is an early indication of Keats’s predilection for gothic imagery - a predilection that only increased as his writing matured. I do not wish to suggest that Keats’s poetry is divided into the ‘immature’ early works and the ‘mature’ later works; on the contrary, this linear reading of Keats’s poetic development is arguably reductive and outmoded. Similarly outmoded is the idea that Keats elevated the Gothic - an idea borne out of a tendency to view the Gothic as less respectable than Romantic literature. As Michael Gamer notes, many of the so-called ‘first generation’ Romantic writers were quick to condemn the Gothic as low culture.[[94]](#footnote-94) For example, in his Preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1802), William Wordsworth is pointedly dismissive of what he calls ‘the public taste’ for ‘frantic novels’ and ‘sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse’.[[95]](#footnote-95) This elitist attitude towards the Gothic persists in twentieth-century scholarship. For instance, Martha Hale Shackford opines that Keats ‘transfigured horror to a finer meaning’.[[96]](#footnote-96) As Anne Williams remarks, ‘It is easier to assume that Keats . . . somehow transmuted Gothic dross into poetic gold, “transcending” the base origins of their materials’ than it is to meaningfully engage with his contributions to the genre.[[97]](#footnote-97) Like Williams, I resist the notion that Keats’s use of gothic conventions is purely ironic. Keats negotiates his misgivings about the genre with his desire to participate in and experiment with its conventions. Rather than dismissing his ‘affinity for Gothic . . . as a matter of youthful enthusiasm’, I argue that Keats’s engagement with the genre is a subject worthy of serious scholarship.[[98]](#footnote-98) According to Beth Lau, Keats’s poems ‘abound in Gothic atmosphere and convention at the same time that they call attention to the genre’s absurdities and limitations. In particular, *Isabella*, *The Eve of St Agnes*, and *The Eve of St Mark* caution against a too complete immersion in the world of romance, which causes one to mistake fictional marvels and horrors for the joys and problems of actual life.’[[99]](#footnote-99) Keats is not critical of the Gothic *per se*, but of what he perceives as a tendency in supernatural writing to neglect ‘reality’. As Jack Stillinger argues, the poems in the 1820 volume highlight Keats’s ‘growing dissatisfaction with “romance”’, which he reads as a change of heart reflecting his devotion to ‘truth’.[[100]](#footnote-100) In his influential essay ‘The Hoodwinking of Madeline: Skepticism in *The Eve of St Agnes*’ (1971), Stillinger suggests that Keats came to believe ‘that an individual ought not to lose touch with the realities of this world’.[[101]](#footnote-101) Hence, many of the poems composed in 1818-1819 share a preoccupation with enchantment and disenchantment, illusion and disillusionment, romance and reality.

The Gothic is a vein that runs through Keats’s body of work, but it is most pronounced in his final published collection *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes and Other Poems* (1820). As such, my thesis restricts itself to the major poems within this volume, with two notable exceptions: the posthumously published fragment ‘This living hand, now warm and capable’ (written circa December 1819) and the abandoned epic The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream (a reworking of ‘Hyperion, A Fragment’). I have chosen to include these fragments because they were composed within the same time frame as the poems collected in *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes and Other Poems* and they share its Gothic aesthetic. Published by Taylor and Hessey in the summer of 1820, *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes and Other Poems* (hereafter referred to as the 1820 volume) was met with mixed reviews in the mainstream press. One anonymous critic writing for the *Monthly Review* (July 1820) opines: ‘it displays the ore of true poetic genius, though mingled with a large portion of dross.’[[102]](#footnote-102) The author’s objections to Keats’s ‘peculiarities of expression’ (which he ascribes to Keats’s association with the much-maligned ‘Cockney School of Poetry’) are mitigated by his ‘fine and striking ideas’, but his overall impression of the volume is decidedly unenthusiastic.[[103]](#footnote-103) Similarly, the *Literary Chronicle and Weekly Review* (29 July 1820), the *London Magazine and Monthly Critical and Dramatic Review* (August 1820) and the *London Magazine* (Baldwin’s) express disappointment, though they acknowledge Keats’s talent.[[104]](#footnote-104) In contrast, Leigh Hunt praises Keats’s ‘calm power’ in a detailed review published in *The Indicator* (2 August 1820) which he concludes by asserting that ‘Mr. Keats undoubtedly takes his seat with the oldest and best of our living poets.’[[105]](#footnote-105) This sentiment is echoed by the author of an unsigned review in *New Monthly Magazine* (1 September 1820) who writes: ‘These poems are very far superior to any which their author has previously committed to the press. They have nothing showy, or extravagant, or eccentric about them; but are pieces of calm beauty, or of lone and self-supported grandeur.’[[106]](#footnote-106) However, this belief in the superiority of the 1820 volume in comparison to Keats’s previous publications is not the consensus among contemporary reviewers. The majority of critics regarded *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes and Other Poems* as a continuation of the faults they perceived in Keats’s earlier endeavours. Although Keats’s friends and acquaintances within the ‘Hunt circle’ praised *Poems 1817* and *Endymion* (1818), the critical reception from the Tory press was decidedly hostile.[[107]](#footnote-107) The most vitriolic attacks came from ‘Z’, the anonymous reviewer for *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, who ran a series of articles denigrating the so-called ‘Cockney School of Poetry’.[[108]](#footnote-108) In the first of these articles, Lockhart lambasts Hunt for his ‘extravagant pretensions’ (literary and political), ‘bad taste’ and ‘extremely vulgar modes of thinking’.[[109]](#footnote-109) As Gregory Leadbetter observes, ‘Lockhart spoke for a Tory establishment’ and his ‘charges of bad taste, vulgarity and poor education’ were politically-motivated; he wanted to ‘discredit Hunt and his associates’.[[110]](#footnote-110) By 1817, Hunt had established his reputation as ‘an outspoken opponent of the social, political and economic *status quo*, having served two years in prison ‒ albeit in surprisingly lenient conditions ‒ for libelling the Prince Regent’.[[111]](#footnote-111) Keats saw him as ‘an authentic champion of liberty’, even referring to him as ‘Libertas’ in some of his letters and poems.[[112]](#footnote-112) The respect was clearly mutual; not only did Hunt publish Keats’s first poem ‘To Solitude’ in the *Examiner* (May 1816), he also publicly singled him out as a poet of great promise.[[113]](#footnote-113) However, Hunt’s endorsement was something of a double-edged sword. As Gregory Leadbetter explains, ‘the social, intellectual and artistic support network [Keats] entered was of lasting importance to his career ‒ but also cast a critical shadow across his work, both during and after his life.’[[114]](#footnote-114) As I discuss in chapter 3, Keats became Lockhart’s target in the fourth instalment of his tirade against the ‘Cockney School’. The vitriol aimed at Keats for associating with Hunt did not go unnoticed by other reviewers. The author of the aforementioned review of the 1820 volume in the *London Magazine and Monthly Critical and Dramatic Review* declares: ‘We do not think the poetical merits of Mr Keats have been duly estimated; and that apparently for the worst of all reasons—because he is said to be a disciple of Leigh Hunt’s’.[[115]](#footnote-115) He goes on to lament the ‘malicious hostility’ Keats endured at the hands of his critics and vows to offer a measured, unbiased review of the 1820 volume in the hope that ‘his uncharitable enemies may learn from our extracts to repent them of their enmity, and see the value on his labours’.[[116]](#footnote-116) The review that follows can hardly be considered positive, yet neither is it pernicious. It is merely tepid.[[117]](#footnote-117)

Overall, the 1820 volume fared slightly better than *Poems 1817* and *Endymion* (1818), but even the more charitable reviews share a patronising tendency to emphasise Keats’s youth. For example, the critic and editor Francis Jeffrey reminds his readers of the *Edinburgh Review* that ‘Mr Keats . . . is still a very young man; and his whole works, indeed, bear evidence enough of the fact. They are full of extravagance and irregularity, rash attempts at originality, interminable wanderings, and excessive obscurity.’[[118]](#footnote-118) Although Jeffrey found it ‘impossible to resist the intoxication’ of Keats’s poetic ‘enchantments’, he also found them ‘too dreamy’ and complained that ‘He deals too much with shadowy and incomprehensible beings’.[[119]](#footnote-119) This objection to Keats’s ‘obscurity’ recurs in the previously-quoted review of the 1820 volume which appeared in the July 1820 issue of the *Monthly Review*, in which the anonymous author complains ‘He is often laboriously obscure’.[[120]](#footnote-120) It seems odd that obscurity - the quality Edmund Burke deems necessary for the sublime - is used as a criticism in connection with Keats’s poetry. As his conception of ‘negative capability’ demonstrates, Keats saw obscurity not merely as a strength in poetry, but a mark of literary genius. Suffice to say, most critics did not know what to make of the 1820 volume, so they deemed it ‘too dreamy’ and too ‘obscure’

Although much has been written on the relationship between Romanticism and the Gothic, Keats’s contributions tend to be overlooked. For example, in Michael Gamer’s seminal *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception and Canon Formation* (2000) – the ‘first full-length study to examine the links between high Romantic literature and [...] the Gothic’ – there is no mention of Keats whatsoever.[[121]](#footnote-121) Nevertheless, Gamer’s argument - that ‘the gothic perpetually haunts, as an aesthetic to be rejected, romanticism’s construction of high literary culture’ - is pertinent to this thesis, which is concerned with Keats’s complex relationship with his Gothic influences.[[122]](#footnote-122) Similarly, Keats is only briefly discussed in Punter and Byron’s *The Gothic* (2004) and, as I have already noted on p. 10, his contributions to the Gothic are described as marginal.[[123]](#footnote-123) Another important contribution to the study of the Gothic-Romantic relationship is Tom Duggett’s *Gothic Romanticism: Architecture, Politics, and Literary Form* (2010). Following on from Gamer, Duggett argues that Romanticism and Gothicism should not be seen as distinct genres and states: ‘from the mid-1790s until at least the early 1830s, British culture was self-consciously ‘Gothic’, and that Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey were instrumental in making it so.’[[124]](#footnote-124) The fact that Duggett omits Keats from his study suggests that, in comparison to the self-consciously Gothic writings of the Lake Poets, Keats is less interested in architecture and its relation to national identity, despite his taste for the medieval past.

There is, of course, a small but significant body of scholarship that locates Keats within the Gothic literary tradition. In *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (1995), Anne Williams argues that ‘“Gothic” and “Romantic” are not two but one’ and devotes an entire chapter to Keats’s Gothic poetics, in which she suggests that he experiments with both Male and Female Gothic modes.[[125]](#footnote-125) Additionally, much of

Jerrold E. Hogle’s work on the Gothic-Romantic relationship explores Keats’s specific contributions.[[126]](#footnote-126) Writing for the *Keats-Shelley Journal* in 2019, Hogle asks:

What authors in the *K-SJ*’s purview have yet to have their Gothic underpinnings thoroughly analyzed? [...] what about the Leigh Hunt circle, especially in Keats apart from what has been seen in his “Eve of St. Agnes” and “Lamia”?[[127]](#footnote-127)

An important question, to be sure, and one that this thesis aims to address. In recent years, there have been some developments in scholarship concerning Keats and the Gothic. A notable example isTownshend and Wright’s *Romantic Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion* (2015). In his chapter on ‘Gothic Science’, Andrew Smith explores the medical context of Keats’s engagement with the trappings of this genre. Although his discussion is principally about *Lamia*, Smith acknowledges that this isbut one of ‘many examples of Keats’s engagement with the Gothic’.[[128]](#footnote-128) Additionally, R. S. White acknowledges the Gothic sensibility of Keats’s poetry in his recent book *Keats’s Anatomy of Melancholy* (2022). In this pioneering study of Keats’s immersion in Robert Burton’s early-modern textbook, White argues that melancholy - a theme that runs through Keats’s final collection *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes, and Other Poems* (1820) - also captured the imagination of the graveyard poets and Gothic novelists.[[129]](#footnote-129)Although scholarship on Keats’s engagement with the Gothic mode does seem to be developing, there has not yet been a full-length study on the subject, hence the focus of this thesis.[[130]](#footnote-130)

It is worth pausing here to consider whether Keats is perceived as a Gothic writer outside of academia. In 2014, Keats’s ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ made an appearance in episode 1.05 of the horror drama TV series *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016). During a scene that could have been written by Matthew ‘Monk’ Lewis himself, the protagonist, a powerful medium named Vanessa Ives, experiences a vision while incarcerated in an asylum. In this vision, the devil appears to her in the guise of a family friend known as Sir Malcolm. During their exchange, he recites the following lines ‘Darkling I listen; and, for many a time / I have been half in love with easeful Death, / Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme, / To take into the air my quiet breath’ (‘Ode to a Nightingale’, 51-54). The writer’s choice to use this ode to heighten the Gothic atmosphere of the scene is testament to Keats’s legacy as an important contributor to the literature of terror. More recently, three of Keats’s poems appeared in the literature anthology *My Gothic Heart* edited by Charlie Castelletti (2023): ‘I cry your mercy, pity, love - ay, love!’, ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’ and ‘Bright Star’. Two of the three poems (‘I cry your mercy’ and ‘Bright Star’) are not obvious choices for an anthology of Gothic writing, and yet, the inclusion of these poems is testament to the perceived Gothic quality of Keats’s poetry. Castelletti places Keats among a coterie of established Gothic writers, including Ann Radcliffe, Bram Stoker, the Brontë sisters, Sheridan Le Fanu and Percy Bysshe Shelley. While this is an encouraging sign that Keats is now recognised as a Gothic poet as well as a Romantic one, there remains a gap in academic scholarship for a sustained, full-length study of Keats’s complex engagement with this literary aesthetic.

As I have already mentioned, this thesis comprises four chapters that loosely correspond to the senses. Chapter 1 focuses on the sense of touch and begins with an analysis of Keats’s tactile imagery in *The Eve of St Agnes*, which I relate to *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). I then read the uncanny fragment ‘This living hand, now warm and capable’ in the context of Keats’s anxieties about his own hands inadvertently causing harm in a medical context. This leads into a discussion of the significance of hands and touch in Keats’s letters. Finally, I discuss how Keats’s hands continue to haunt his friends long after his death and the extent to which this shapes his posthumous reputation. Chapter 2 focuses on sight, or, more specifically, the power dynamics of looking in *The Eve of St Agnes*, *Lamia* and ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’. Throughout this chapter, I draw parallels between Keats’s gazed-upon female protagonists in the 1820 volume and the persecuted heroines in popular Gothic novels of the 1790s who are similarly subjected to the violent, voyeuristic gaze of tyrannical men. Chapter 3 is concerned with taste, both in terms of aesthetic value and gustatory sensation. I begin by highlighting Keats’s reputation as a poet who privileged taste above the other senses. Ironically, this reputation is at odds with the contemporary critics who deemed Keats’s poetry vulgar and in bad taste. I compare this criticism of Keats’s poetry with the backlash against the Gothic novel in the 1790s before segueing into a discussion of the Gothic trope of dangerous consumption. This leads into an analysis of the relationship between consuming and enchantment in *The Eve of St Agnes*, ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’, *The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream*, ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ and ‘Ode on Melancholy'. Finally, chapter 4 explores the significance of sound in *Isabella, or The Pot of Basil*, *The Eve of St Agnes*, *The Eve of St Mark*, ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’, ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ and ‘Ode to a Nightingale’. Focusing on voice and music, this chapter examines the soundscape of Keats’s poetry in relation to the ‘sonic Gothic’. I revisit *The Eve of St Agnes* in every chapter because it is Keats’s ‘most sustained production in the gothic mode’ and an apt case study for his sensory evocation of fear.[[131]](#footnote-131)

**Chapter 1: Touch**

Gothic literature is replete with unsettling images of hands. From the ‘dead cold hand’ that grasps the titular protagonist of *Sir Betrand, A Fragment* (1773) to the ‘little, ice-cold hand’ that belongs to the ghost of Cathy in chapter 3 of *Wuthering Heights* (1847), this appendage has maintained a firm grip on the genre since its inception.[[132]](#footnote-132) Indeed, it may be said that the Gothic began with a hand; specifically an armoured one. In a letter to the Reverend William Cole in 1765, Horace Walpole relays the dream that ostensibly inspired *The Castle of Otranto* (1764):

I waked one morning in the beginning of last June from a dream of which all I could recover was that I had thought myself in an ancient castle (a very natural dream for a head filled like mine with Gothic story) and that on the uppermost banister of a great staircase I saw a gigantic hand in armour. In the evening, I sat down and began to write, without knowing in the least what I intended to say or relate. The work grew on my hands, and I grew fond of it – add that I was very glad to think of anything rather than politics – in short I was so engrossed in my tale, which I completed in less than two months, that one evening I wrote from the time I had drunk my tea, about six o’ clock, till half an hour after one in the morning, when my hand and fingers were so weary, that I could not hold the pen to finish the sentence, but left Matilda and Isabella talking, in the middle of a paragraph.[[133]](#footnote-133) (To the Reverend William Cole, 9 March 1765)

After attributing its ‘authenticity’ to a found manuscript in his first preface, Walpole finally reveals the novel’s ‘true’ origin. Despite his claim to be ‘glad to think of anything rather than politics’, Sue Chaplin argues that the novel is ‘a manifestation of precisely those political anxieties which Walpole attempts here to disavow. The giant hand of Walpole’s dream-text represents the remnants of an aristocratic power that still had sufficient presence in the mid-eighteenth century’.[[134]](#footnote-134) Far from unpolitical, ‘The novel is about how the universe reestablishes order following a politically disruptive usurpation.’[[135]](#footnote-135) If *Otranto* is about the reestablishment of order, then Keats’s narrative poem *The Eve of St Agnes* is about the disruption of it.In the poem, Porphyro is an intruder whose presence in Madeline’s ancestral fortress - much less her bedchamber - is an affront to the ‘hot-blooded lords, / Whose very dogs would execrations howl / Against his lineage’ (X: 86-88). Keats never reveals the circumstances of the mysterious family feud that provides the backdrop to the plot, but it is grave enough for the servant Angela to exclaim: ‘Get hence! get hence! There’s dwarfish Hildebrand – / He had a fever late, and in the fit / He cursèd thee and thine, both house and land’ (XI: 100-103). Porphyro seems to have no ambitions of usurping the Baron’s property or title, or taking revenge on the lords who would shun him, but his courtship and eventual seduction of Madeline (if we can call it such) is nevertheless an act that undermines his enemies. His penetration of the ancestral fortress and the acts that follow represent a sexual usurpation that threatens the status quo. The lovers’ flight into the storm at the end of the poem may represent the triumph of desire over oppressive tyranny and aristocratic power, yet the ominously cold atmosphere invoked in the opening stanzas is reproduced in the terminal lines, casting an ambiguous shadow over the their fate.

In *The Literature of Terror*, David Punter contends that ‘Terror [in Keats] is not a nightmare, but the freezing touch of reality.’[[136]](#footnote-136) In *The Eve of St Agnes*, reality is certainly a source of both terror and horror, but it is not always represented by a ‘freezing touch’. On the contrary, it is Porphyro’s ‘warm, unnervèd arm’ (XXXII: 280-281) that causes the ‘painful change’ (XXXIV: 300) Madeline experiences as her ‘midnight charm / Impossible to melt as icèd stream’ (XXXII: 283) does, in fact, melt at her suitor’s ‘burning’ touch (XVIII: 159). Throughout the poem, Keats contrasts the warmth and vitality of the lovers with the ‘bitter chill’ (I: 1) of their surroundings. In the first and second stanzas, the reader’s attention is drawn to ‘the Beadman’s fingers’ which are ‘Numb’ (I: 5) with cold and ‘The sculptured dead . . . Praying in dumb orat’ries’ (II: 14-16). As Hogle observes, the frozen effigies ‘recall the statue over the underground tomb of Alfonso in *The Castle of Otranto*’.[[137]](#footnote-137) This frieze (or perhaps we should call it a ‘freeze’) contrasts with the image of Madeline as she ‘Unclasps her warmèd jewels’ (XXVI: 228) and performs her evening prayers bathed in the ‘warm gules’ of ‘Rose-bloom’ glow of moonlight (XXV: 218-220). It is significant that the only time Keats describes Madeline’s hands in the poem is when they are ‘pressed’ (XXV: 220) in worship.

Throughout the poem, Keats pits the warmth of young desire against the coldness of ‘old romance’ (V: 41). Madeline’s ‘nest’ may be ‘chilly’ (XXVII: 235), but the lovers radiate heat. Even before he enters the fortress, Porphyro’s ‘heart [is] on fire / For Madeline’ (IX: 75-76) and when they are finally alone, he becomes so ‘flush’d’ with desire (XXXVI: 318) that he melts into her dream (‘Into her dream he melted’ - XXXVI: 320). After his ‘warm’, unsolicited touch breaks the spell, Porphyro describes himself as a ‘famished pilgrim’ who has come to ‘rest’ at her ‘shrine’ (XXXVIII: 337-339). This is an obvious allusion to Juliet’s sonnet in Act I Scene 5 of *Romeo and Juliet* in which she likens herself to a holy site and Romeo to a ‘pilgrim’ who has come to worship.[[138]](#footnote-138) However, as Jack Stillinger argues, Porphyro is no Romeo, and no amount of figurative language can disguise his ‘stratagem’ (XVI: 139) as an act of devotion, or ‘make blessèd [his] rude hand’ (*Romeo and Juliet*, 1.5.50). As Keats suggests when he refers to his ‘fine mother Radcliff names’ (*LJK*, II: 62), *The Eve of St Agnes* is as profoundly indebted to *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) as it is to *Romeo and Juliet*. Indeed, Martha Hale Shackford identifies numerous similarities between the novel and Keats’s poem, including: the midnight scene in the chapel, old servants, journeys through winding passages, descriptions of the heroine’s apartment, the lover’s pleas, the storm, and the lovers’ flight.[[139]](#footnote-139) More recently, R. S. White suggests that Keats’s reading of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* ‘contributed especially to the air of radical ambiguity that hangs over Porphyro’s actions and motives’.[[140]](#footnote-140) He compares Keats’s poem to the scene in volume 2 chapter VI in which Count Morano attempts to rescue (abduct) Emily by entering her room in the middle of the night. White examines the striking similarities in language and imagery (e.g., rusty bolts, groaning hinges, anthropomorphism) and notes that Morano is morally ambiguous, even if he is not the villain of the novel. The same can be said of Porphyro, whose actions mirror those of Morano when he gazes upon Madeline’s bed. Keats’s emphasis on hands in *The Eve of St Agnes* also echoes *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. Throughout the aforementioned scene, Count Morano repeatedly reaches for and grasps Emily’s hand, while she vehemently resists his attempts to touch her:[[141]](#footnote-141)

‘[Morano] besought her to fear nothing, and, having thrown down his sword, would have taken her hand’ (p. 261)

[...]

‘The Count, who still held her hand, led her back into the chamber’ (p. 261)

‘Her silence, though it was that of agony, encouraged the hopes of Morano, who watched her countenance with impatience, took again the resisting hand she had withdrawn, and, as he pressed it to his heart, again conjured her to determine immediately.’ (p. 263)

‘he [Montoni] had no right to dispose of my hand’ (p. 264)

‘‘It is! it is so; —you—you—love Montoni!’ cried Montano, grasping Emily’s wrist’ (p. 265)

Morano’s persistent attempt to seize Emily’s hand echoes his equally persistent solicitation of her hand in marriage. Manfred’s pursuit of Isabella in *Otranto* is similarly centred around the heroine’s hand: ‘he seized the cold hand of Isabella, who was half dead with fright and horror. She shrieked, and started from him’.[[142]](#footnote-142) Therefore, in both *Udolpho* and *Otranto*, the heroine’s hand becomes a symbol of consent.[[143]](#footnote-143) In *The Eve of St Agnes*, Keats approaches the issue of consent with characteristic ambivalence.[[144]](#footnote-144) In *Udolpho*, Radcliffe makes it clear that Emily is ‘Determined not to undress’ for bed due to her ‘prophetic apprehension’ (p. 260-261), whereas Madeline appears untroubled as she ‘Loosens her fragrant bodice’ (XXVI: 229). By presenting Madeline as unencumbered by the ‘apprehension’ that troubles Emily, Keats allows the reader to make up their own mind about Porphyro’s intentions. This brings us back to the image of his ‘warm, unnervèd arm’ (XXXII: 280) sinking into Madeline’s pillow. It is an oxymoronic phrase, to be sure, as ‘warm’ implies vitality, while ‘unnervèd’ suggests weakness. Indeed, Porphyro is seized by sudden drowsiness after preparing the banquet: ‘I shall drowse beside thee, so my soul doth ache’ (XXXI: 278-278). We know he falls asleep beside Madeline because stanza XXXII begins thus: ‘Awakening up, he took her hollow lute’ (289). Porphyro’s spell of drowsiness suggests that he is overwhelmed by the excessive heat of his own desire. Keats’s use of the word ‘arm’ instead of ‘hand’ to fit the rhyme scheme does not detract from the impression of touch evoked by the adjectives ‘warm’ and ‘unnervèd’. For the sleeping Madeline, this dream-touch is profoundly uncanny, in that it is at once familiar and unfamiliar: she recognises Porphyro at once, and yet she is shocked at the strangeness of his appearance: ‘How changed thou art! How pallid, chill, and drear!’ (XXXV: 311). Madeline anticipates the ‘bliss’ (VIII: 72) of her dream lover’s ethereal touch, but the palpable sensation of a real hand is overwhelming. As Burke states, when danger presses too close, it is ‘incapable of giving any delight’, therefore Madeline’s response to finding a man in her bedchamber is, unsurprisingly, one of horror: ‘He ceased – she panted quick – and suddenly / Her blue affrayèd eyes wide open shone [...] fair Madeline began to weep, / And moan forth witless words with many a sigh’ (XXXIII: 295-296 and XXXIV: 302-303).[[145]](#footnote-145) With this in mind, I propose a modification to David Punter’s claim that ‘Terror [in Keats] is not a nightmare, but the freezing touch of reality’. In *The Eve of St Agnes*, terror - and indeed its bedfellow horror - is not a nightmare, but the ‘warm’ touch of reality.[[146]](#footnote-146)

Keats conjures another warm hand in his posthumous fragment ‘This living hand, now warm and capable’. Buried within the manuscript of his unpublished play ‘The Cap and Bells’, the poem ‘conjures a spectral subject whose determined revivification endangers the addressee and the reader in place of the addressee, who may be ‘conscience-calm’d’ but is also perilously bloodless from the transfusion required’.[[147]](#footnote-147) The unsettling final line provokes a physiological response from the reader. We are compelled to flinch as the poet’s hand reaches out from the page to touch us:

This living hand, now warm and capable

Of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold

And in the icy silence of the tomb,

So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights

That thou would wish thine own heart dry of blood

So in my veins red life might stream again,

And thou be conscience-calm’d–see here it is–

I hold it towards you. (‘This living hand’, 1-8)

Brooke Hopkins states that ‘the poem's uncanniness comes from the demands it makes upon its reader in the act of reading itself, the way it forces its reader into a kind of direct engagement with the words that make it up.’[[148]](#footnote-148) Like Hopkins, Ross Woodman emphasises the ‘gothic relationship between Keats and his reader’.[[149]](#footnote-149) The speaker initiates a deathly handshake that imparts a terrible bargain: one life in exchange for another. As in *The Eve of St Agnes*, Keats makes use of warm and cold imagery to heighten the contrast between the warmth of the ‘living’ hand (1) and the ‘icy silence of the tomb’ (3). Although the hand threatens to ‘haunt’ (4) from beyond the grave, the speaker to whom the hand belongs is more vampiric than ghostly in that he threatens to make the addressee wish their ‘own heart dry of blood’ so that ‘red life’ might ‘stream again’ in his veins (5-7). It is significant that Keats’s ‘last serious lines’ describe a hand that wishes to inflict harm and ebb life away, as this is the antithesis of what a physician’s hands are meant to do.[[150]](#footnote-150) As a medical student, Keats was anxious about the damage his hands could inflict and despite passing his medical exams in the shortest possible time, he had surprisingly little faith in his aptitude for surgery. In his biography, Michael William Rossetti speculates:

Keats indeed always denied that he abandoned surgery for the express purpose of taking to poetry: he alleged that his motive had been the dread of doing some mischief in his surgical operations. His last operation consisted in opening a temporal artery; he was entirely successful in it, but the success appeared to himself like a miracle, the recurrence of which was not to be reckoned on.[[151]](#footnote-151)

This is reaffirmed by Keats’s own words on the matter: ‘I did it with the utmost nicety, but reflecting on what passed through my mind at the time, my dexterity seemed a miracle, and I never took up the lancet again.’[[152]](#footnote-152) Perhaps during the operation Keats found himself recalling the renowned surgeon Astley Cooper’s advice to students during his introductory lecture at Guy’s, which he then published in *Principles and Practice of Surgery* (1820):

In the *practice* of surgery, also, many essential qualities are requisite on the part of the surgeon. The first of which is neatness in the application of his remedies; awkwardness in this respect will frequently injure his professional prospects—the patient and his friends often judge a man’s skill by his manner of bleeding, or from the application of a bandage; and it sometimes happens that “the hand spoils the head.”[[153]](#footnote-153)

As Donald C. Goellnicht states ‘It was exactly this fear of the inability to make his hand obey his head that Keats later told Brown convinced him to give up medicine.’[[154]](#footnote-154) Keats may have given up *practising* medicine, but he never left medicine behind completely. On the contrary, medical imagery recurs in his poetry, most notably in his description of Lorenzo’s mouldering head as ‘vile with green and livid spots’ in *Isabella, or The Pot of Basil* (LX: 475) and his conception of the poet as ‘a sage; / A humanist, physician to all men’ in ‘The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream’ (Canto I: 189-190). Ultimately, Keats traded in the lancet for the pen, but as the author of *The London Dissector* suggests, these two instruments were not so dissimilar:

The position of the hand in dissecting should be the same, as in writing or drawing; and the knife, held, like the pen or pencil, by the thumb and the first two fingers, should be moved by means of them only; while the hand rests firmly on the two other fingers bent inwards as in writing, and on the wrist. (*The London Dissector*, 1811).[[155]](#footnote-155)

This is pertinent to Keats, as he used the pen as he might have used the lancet: as an instrument with which to cut life open and examine the entrails. Instead of dissecting bodies, he dissected ideas; instead of spilling blood, he spilled ink. Keats’s focus changed from healing wounds to healing words, and the page became a substitute for the operating theatre - a space wherein he could fulfil his ambition of ‘doing the world some good’ (*LJK*, I: 387) without worrying about the harm his hands might inadvertently cause. Nevertheless, unsettling images of hands continued to haunt Keats’s imagination long after he left the medical profession. Writing to his brother George in 1819, he muses:

Our bodies every seven years are completely fresh materiald [sic]- seven years ago it was not this hand that clench'd itself against Hammond ... 'Tis an uneasy thought, that in seven years time the same hands cannot greet each other again. (*LJK*, II: 208)

It is an uneasy thought indeed, as Keats would not live another seven years to see his body become ‘fresh material’. Despite acknowledging that ‘the same hands cannot greet each other again’, Keats insists that ‘Touch has a memory’ (‘What can I do to drive away’, 4). This idea of touch as a conduit takes on a more sinister tone when he writes to Fanny Brawne: ‘If through me illness have touched you (but I think it must be with a gentle hand) I must be selfish enough to feel a little glad at it’ (*LJK*, II: 129). Gentle or not, the hand Keats conjures here is not totally dissimilar to the one that threatens the addressee in ‘This living hand’.

Thoughts of hands continued to trouble Keats as his health deteriorated. Writing to Charles Brown in November 1820, he states:

I am afraid to write to her [Fanny Brawne] – to see her hand writing would break my heart – even to hear of her any how, to see her name written would be more than I can bear. (*LJK*, II: 351-352)

Similarly, in his last surviving letter, he writes again to Brown: ‘I cannot bear the sight of any hand writing of a friend I love so much as I do you’ (*LJK*, II: 360). The sight of handwriting is painful for Keats because it vividly recalls the hands that wrote the letter – the hands he could no longer reach out and touch. As Jonathan Ellis states:

This belief in epistolary presence is why Keats fears the very sight of another person’s “hand writing” [...] In reading a letter he sees two things simultaneously, a person’s handwriting on the page, and, through this sight, a literal hand, writing. Keats cannot touch Fanny when he reads her letters or sees her name, but he is merely an imaginative leap from doing so. The ink becomes not just a courier of language, a marker of words, but something live that bridges the distance between two people [...] Such letters feel like they are written on the very threshold between life and death, as if their termination might be timed with the actual termination of the person writing them.[[156]](#footnote-156)

Indeed, the feeling of urgency that characterises Keats’s final letters suggests that he was painfully aware of his life ebbing away. In his final letter, Keats describes himself as having ‘a habitual feeling of my real life having past [sic.], and that I am leading a posthumous existence’ (*LJK*, II: 360). Keats’s ‘posthumous existence’ was, of course, out of his hands. As readers, we rely heavily on the posthumous reputation of Keats that was crafted by his friends. For example, William Hazlitt, in an unintentionally eerie echo of ‘This living hand’, writes of Keats: ‘His mind was redolent of spring. He had not fierceness of summer, nor the richness of autumn, and winter he seemed not to have known, till he felt the icy hand of death!’.[[157]](#footnote-157) Hazlitt is not the only member of Keats’s circle whose memory of the poet is bound up with the idea of deathly touch. As the following anecdote suggests, Coleridge also connects his memory of Keats with ‘the icy hand of death’. In April 1819, Keats and Coleridge crossed paths in Highgate, conversed, and shook hands. The encounter itself is unremarkable; the two poets moved in similar circles, had several mutual friends and both lived in North London at the time, so it seems only natural that they should have encountered one another during their walks. However, Coleridge’s 1832 recollection adds a belatedly uncanny quality to the encounter. Coleridge specifically recalls the younger poet returning a few moments after they parted ways to say: ‘Let me carry away the memory, Coleridge, of having pressed your hand’ (dictated 11 August 1832 in *Table Talk*).[[158]](#footnote-158) As Shahidha K. Bari notes in *Keats and Philosophy: The Life of Sensation*, Keats’s gesture embodies more than a friendly handshake:

For Keats, some ritual of transference occurs in the hand-grasping process, conferring something that might be passed on as though it had form… Specifically, Keats asks Coleridge for the ‘memory’ of having pressed his hand, something intangible and so untouchable.[[159]](#footnote-159)

As Bari suggests, what makes this anecdotal meeting so extraordinary is the double exchange that takes place in the ephemeral meeting of hands. Keats carries away the memory of having pressed the elder poet’s hand, but for Coleridge, the touch yields something more foreboding: through the sensation of touch, Keats’s hand ostensibly conveys prophetic knowledge. This is evident in Coleridge’s reflection: ‘There is death in his hand’.[[160]](#footnote-160) Bari goes on to say:

Coleridge’s statement is unclear as to how the death-bearing hand contained death or embodied death, or perhaps was marked by death, but he indicates, nonetheless, the palpability of a supernatural intuition so compelling and sure that he purports to have sensed it in their fleeting meeting of hands.[[161]](#footnote-161)

Coleridge claims to know, through the fleeting greeting of hands, that Keats was marked for an early grave. Although the encounter occurred before Keats’s tuberculosis diagnosis, Coleridge retrospectively identifies Keats as being touched by death. Coleridge’s reading of the handshake reflects his own gothic preoccupations at the time: the year before he met Keats, he wrote the lectures ‘The Gothic Mind’ and ‘Gothic Literature and Art’. In addition, he had reviewed *The Monk* in 1797 and had begun to write *Christabel* (Part One was completed in 1797), therefore, his imagination was ‘filled . . . with Gothic story’ like Walpole’s had been the night he dreamed of a ‘gigantic hand in armour’. Interestingly, Keats’s own account of the meeting is decidedly less ominous. He writes to his brother George:

Last Sunday I took a Walk towards highgate and in the lane that winds by the side of Lord Mansfield’s park I met Mr Green our Demonstrator at Guy’s in conversation with Coleridge – I joined them, after enquiring by a look if it would be agreeable – I walked with him a[t] his alderman-after dinner pace for near two miles I suppose In those two Miles he broached a thousand things – let me see if I can give you a list – Nightingales, Poetry – on Poetical Sensation – Metaphysics – Different genera and species of Dreams – Nightmare – a dream accompanied by a sense of touch – a single and double touch. (*LJK*, II: 88-89)

Keats’s account reveals that there was another person present during his meeting with Coleridge: the surgeon and natural philosopher Joseph Henry Green, who had been a demonstrator of anatomy at Guy's hospital. Is it unclear if Green accompanied Keats and Coleridge on their two-mile walk, but he certainly greeted Keats and possibly shook hands with him. Green’s presence gives Coleridge’s anecdote a modicum of credibility: it is not quite as far-fetched to believe that a medical professional could identify the early signs of tuberculosis. Nevertheless, it is difficult to believe that either Green or Coleridge knew that Keats was marked for an early grave after such a fleeting encounter. While Coleridge’s account of the handshake is unreliable and hyperbolic, it is testament to the enduring significance of the poet’s hand in Keats’s posthumous existence.

Keats died in Joseph Severn’s arms on 23 February 1821, making Severn the last person to physically touch Keats when he was still alive. It is hardly surprising, then, that the memory of Keats’s hands returned to haunt him in fevered recollections:

As late as 1848, Severn associates the figure of the deathly hand with Keats’s memory. Struggling the lay the spectre of his friend to rest, he writes deliriously to William Haslam , remembering Keats: ‘my spirits are low – then comes Keats – Keats – to my mind I can see his poor face, his poor still hands and I am no longer master of myself.[[162]](#footnote-162)

As Grant F. Scott notes, Severn’s recollection of Keats’s ‘poor still hands’ summons the eerily desensitised hand of the dreamer in ‘The Fall of Hyperion’ - ‘when I clasp’d my hands I felt them not’ (I: 131) - and the buried yet ‘living’ hand of the speaker in ‘This living hand’. Moreover, the memory of the poet’s dead hands is ‘bound . . . to the unraveling of his own self possession. Just as Keats can no longer write, Severn is “no longer master” of himself to paint.’[[163]](#footnote-163) Dictated to Joseph Severn from his deathbed, the self-effacing epitaph inscribed on Keats’s gravestone in the Cemitero Acattolico of Rome reads: ‘Here lies one whose name was writ on water’. The image conjured by the verb ‘writ’ serves as a final reminder of the poet’s hand, which obstinately refuses to be laid to rest. While no longer ‘warm and capable / Of earnest grasping’ (‘This living hand’, 1-2), Keats’s posthumous hand continued to haunt his friends from ‘the icy silence of the tomb’ (3-4).

Images of warm hands and icy, silent, sepulchral spaces recur in the following chapter, in which I discuss looking in *The Eve of St Agnes* and *Lamia* in the context of the Gothic.

# **Chapter 2: Sight**

In *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (1995), Anne Williams contends that‘All of Keats’s mature poetry is concerned with seeing, the moment when Psyche lights her lamp and awakens to the reality of her situation.’[[164]](#footnote-164) Williams’s allusion to the myth of Cupid and Psyche is appropriate, given that Keats’s ‘Ode to Psyche’ is a vision poem *about* vision, and while I concur with this reading, it is important to distinguish between passive seeing and active looking.[[165]](#footnote-165) Keats, I argue, is more interested in the latter. This chapter examines the power dynamics of looking in *The Eve of St Agnes* and *Lamia* within the context of the Gothic trope of sexual violence, which is often accompanied by voyeuristic gazing. As Andrew Bennett writes: ‘To gaze is to look fixedly or intently, and it also involves bewilderment, astonishment, curiosity’.[[166]](#footnote-166) As we shall see, this is precisely what characterises Porphyro’s furtive peeping in *The Eve of St Agnes* and Apollonius’s cruel, penetrating stare in *Lamia*.

Through its deployment of tropes such as persecution, imprisonment, forced marriage and the threat of rape, the gothic novel gave expression to women’s fears about tyrannical and predatory men. As Kate Ferguson Ellis observes in *The Contested Castle*, ‘One of the real achievements of the Gothic tradition is that it conjures up, in its undefined representation of heroinely terror, an omnipresent sense of impending rape without ever mentioning the word.’[[167]](#footnote-167) A key example of this can be found in *The Castle of Otranto* when Manfred resolves to take Isabella without her consent, thereby securing his legacy: ‘I will use the human means in my power for preserving my race; Isabella shall not escape me’ (p. 25).[[168]](#footnote-168) Ann Radcliffe also alludes to the possibility of rape in *The Italian* when the monk Schedoni relays his past crime: ‘I ventured to solicit her hand: but she had not yet forgotten my brother, and she rejected me. My passion would no longer be trifled with. I caused her to be carried from her house, and she was afterwards willing to retrieve her honour by the marriage vow.’[[169]](#footnote-169) By contrast, rape is explicitly depicted in Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* when Ambrosio, after several failed attempts, finally abducts and assaults Antonia:

He clasped her to his bosom almost lifeless with terror, and faint with struggling. He stifled her cries with kisses, treated her with the rudeness of an unprincipled Barbarian, proceeded from freedom to freedom, and in the violence of his lustful delirium, wounded and bruised her tender limbs. Heedless of her tears, cries and entreaties, He gradually made himself Master of her person, and desisted not from his prey, till He had accomplished his crime and the dishonour of Antonia.[[170]](#footnote-170)

Unlike his Gothic contemporaries, namely Radcliffe and Walpole, Lewis lingers on Antonia’s suffering and describes in graphic detail the violence inflicted on her body by Ambrosio. By making a spectacle of the crime that Walpole and Radcliffe only allude to, Lewis steered the Gothic novel into new territory. Indeed, *The Monk* came to represent a more virile type of Gothic romance characterised by horror rather than terror. If, as Anne Williams proposes, the Gothic has a male and a female genre, Lewis’s novel belongs firmly to the former.[[171]](#footnote-171) While it is useful to acknowledge these two distinctive traditions that emerged in the late-eighteenth century, (cis)gendering the Gothic is problematic in that it reinforces an essentialist binary, therefore excluding and marginalising voices within the genre that do not conform to either category. Furthermore, the Female Gothic ‘has become much contested’ since Ellen Moers first coined the term in 1976.[[172]](#footnote-172) Moers’s belief that the Female Gothic could be ‘easily defined’ as ‘the work that women have done in the literary mode that, since the eighteenth century, we have called the Gothic’ has been challenged by many scholars in the field.[[173]](#footnote-173) For instance, E. J. Clery argues that the ‘common-sense category’ of Female Gothic ‘encouraged certain assumptions’ about its writers. The ‘heroine-centred narrative’, Clery suggests, precedes Radcliffe and these narratives were written and consumed by both men and women.[[174]](#footnote-174) Indeed, Moers’s ‘fragile critical taxonomy […] has proved to be of value less for its argument than for the debates it continues to provoke’.[[175]](#footnote-175) Nevertheless, the idea that the Gothic has a ‘masculine’ and a ‘feminine’ mode is pertinent to Keats, whose relationship with the Gothic is heavily bound up with his anxieties about perceived effeminacy.[[176]](#footnote-176)

Keats’s epistolary mention of ‘the Damosel Radcliffe’ in March 1818 suggests that the Gothic was at the forefront of his mind when he composed *The Eve of St Agnes* and this is reaffirmed by his later reference to the ‘fine mother Radcliff names’ he uses for *Isabella, or The Pot of Basil*, *The Eve of St Agnes* and *The Eve of St Mark*.Keats certainly owes much to Radcliffe in *The Eve of St Agnes* beyond its title, yet the poem is also haunted by another influence.[[177]](#footnote-177) In *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*, Anne Williams observes the poem’s ‘strong affinities with *The Monk*’.[[178]](#footnote-178) She asserts:

The narrative of the Monk’s rape of Antonia eerily foreshadows Keats’s very different tale. The Monk’s is a rape in two senses, for the word is derived from the Latin *rapere*, which means to “to steal”. Ambrosio steals her away from her home and through his sexual attack steals her honor. This story makes sense only within the familiar patriarchal framework involving notions of women as property, and sexual honor as a synecdoche for her value. In this context, “The Eve” is clearly a very different kind of story. Keats’s version of this plot material is framed in such a way as to rewrite “rape” as “rapture” and to explore the spaces between the “belle dame” and the “beldame”. If “The Eve” is emphatically not in the in Male Gothic tradition, however, neither is it a Female, or Radcliffean, Gothic.[[179]](#footnote-179)

Williams acknowledges the influence of Lewis, but at the same time, her reading complicates the idea that the narrator's desire at the start of the poem to ‘wish away’ the ‘triumphs gay / Of old romance’ (V: 40-41) represents a shift towards a more virile, ‘masculine’ model of Gothic. Building upon the observation that it belongs to neither a ‘Male’ nor ‘Female’ Gothic tradition, I argue that in *The Eve of St Agnes*, Keats attempts to interrogate the patriarchal gaze of the so-called ‘Male Gothic’ from the inside by restaging key scenes from *The Monk* that involve predatory looking. In *The Monk*, Ambrosio’s rape of Antonia is foregrounded by two instances of voyeurism where Ambrosio secretly gazes upon Antonia while she is at her most vulnerable: the scene in which Ambrosio watches the bathing Antonia through an enchanted mirror, and the moment he attempts to rape her while she sleeps. In both scenes, Ambrosio’s gaze and Antonia’s powerlessness are emphasised.The magic mirror scene occurs shortly after Ambrosio tries to ‘seduce’ Antonia in her home. He is caught in the act by Elvira and flees before he can satisfy his lust. The passage below describes the moment that the frustrated monk beholds the image of Antonia in the glass:

She put the Mirror into his hand. Curiosity induced him to take, and Love, to wish that Antonia might appear. Matilda pronounced the magic words. Immediately, a thick smoke rose from the characters upon the borders, and spread itself over the surface. It dispersed again gradually; A confused mixture of colours and images presented themselves to the Friar’s eyes, which at length arranging themselves in their proper places, He beheld in miniature Antonia’s lovely form.

The scene was a small closet belonging to her apartment. She was undressing to bathe herself. The long tresses of her hair were already bound up. The amorous Monk had full opportunity to observe the voluptuous contours and admirable symmetry of her person. She threw off her last garment, and advancing to the Bath prepared for her, She put her foot into the water. It struck cold, and She drew it back again. Though unconscious of being observed, an in-bred sense of modesty induced her to veil her charms; and She stood hesitating on the brink, in the attitude of the Venus de Medicis. At this moment a tame Linnet flew towards her, nestled its head between her breasts, and nibbled them in wanton play. The smiling Antonia strove in vain to shake off the Bird, and at length raised her hands to drive it from its delightful harbour. Ambrosio could bear no more: His desires were worked up to phrenzy.[[180]](#footnote-180)

Upon seeing Antonia undress, Ambrosio finally agrees to Matilda’s plot to summon Lucifer. When Lucifer appears, he presents Ambrosio with a magic myrtle bough, which will allow him to open any door and therefore procure access to Antonia. Crucially, the myrtle bough will also enable him to ravish her without revealing his identity. Both the myrtle bough and the magic mirror allow Ambrosio to fulfil his desires without consequence. What is more, these objects ensure Antonia’s silence: the mirror makes her visible, but not audible, while the myrtle bough prevents her from naming her attacker. Unaware that she is being watched, Antonia is denied a choice and a voice. Reduced to a mute image, she is rendered utterly powerless. Ironically, Ambrosio sees himself as powerless to resist Antonia’s ‘charms’. His apparent lack of control (he ‘could bear no more’ and ‘His desires were worked up to a phrenzy’) when be beholds Antonia’s beauty suggest that his crime is impulsive, and yet, the reader knows it is premeditated: even before he consents to gaze into the mirror, Ambrosio tells Matilda: ‘Antonia shall be mine, but mine by human means.’ (p. 271). There is no ambiguity in the phrase ‘human means’: it is clear that, with or without the help of a supernatural assailant, Ambrosio intends to have his way with Antonia. The magic mirror materialises the monk’s desires; he sees what he has hitherto only imagined. His visions made flesh, Ambrosio’s hesitations about enlisting the help of Lucifer (and thus forfeiting his soul) evaporate and he finally agrees to the terms and conditions of the transaction. Problematically, Antonia’s beauty is presented as the catalyst for Ambrosio’s loss of control. The ‘magic mirror’ scene is re-enacted in *The Eve of St Agnes* when Porphyro ‘implores / All saints to give him sight of Madeline / But for one moment in the tedious hours, / That he might gaze and worship all unseen; Perchance speak, kneel, touch, kiss− in sooth, such things have been.’ (IX: 77-81). Like Ambrosio, Porphyro is not content to merely look; he must also ‘touch’ and ‘kiss’. His desire to ‘gaze and worship all unseen’ mirrors the mingled ‘Curiosity’ and ‘Love’ that induce Ambrosio to take the mirror. Both valorise their intentions with words of devotion: Porphyro’s voyeurism is a form of ‘worship’, while Ambrosio is driven by ‘Love, to wish that Antonia might appear.’ Like Antonia, Madeline is curiously silent, save for sighs and non-verbal gestures. Moreover, he procures access to Madeline by negotiating with the ‘agèd crone’ (xv: 129) Angela, who consents to lead him secretly to her bedchamber and conceal him inside her closet. Angela’s condition is that Porphyro must marry Madeline, ‘Or may [she] never leave [her] grave among the dead’ (XX: 180). This utterance is a threat: Angela warns Porphyro that she will haunt him from beyond the grave if he should ravish Madeline and not make her his bride. Angela’s concern for Madeline’s honour alerts the reader to the palpable threat that Porphyro poses. We know already that his ‘stratagem’ (XVI: 139) involves spying on Madeline while she performs the rites of St. Agnes’ Eve, which include sleeping fully undressed. We also know from the lines ‘All eyes be muffled, or a hundred swords / Will storm his heart’ (X: 83-84) that Porphyro is not welcome in the castle. Keats informs the reader that Madeline is ‘Hoodwinked with faery fancy’ (VIII: 70) as she expects her future husband to appear before her in a dream. Porphyro’s fantasies, on the other hand, are decidedly corporeal: ‘Sudden a thought came like a full-blown rose, / Flushing in his brow, and in his painèd heart / Made purple riot’. (XVI: 136-8). The highly eroticised image of a ‘full-blown rose[s]’ and a ‘flushing’ brow are uncomfortably intermingled with the violence implied in ‘painèd heart’ and ‘purple riot’. This foreshadows the ‘painful change’ (XXXIII: 300) Madeline experiences when she wakes to find her dream has melted into reality. Porphyro’s voyeurism is ultimately non-consensual and, as Jack Stillinger suggests in his description of the consummation as ‘an earthly repetition of spiritual pleasure […] in a grosser, rather than a finer, tone’, neither is what follows.[[181]](#footnote-181) An Ambrosio he is not, yet, as readers we should not distinguish between the lustful monk of Lewis’s tale and the young lover of Keats’s poem, as both characters violate the privacy and dignity of their victims. Hidden from sight, Porphyro watches as Madeline ‘Loosens her fragrant bodice’ in an echo of Antonia’s disrobement (XXVI: 229). Like Ambrosio, who has ‘full opportunity to observe the voluptuous contours and admirable symmetry’ of Antonia’s nude body, Keats’s Porphyro ‘gazed upon her [Madeline’s] empty dress’ (XXVIII: 245). Ambrosio surveys Antonia’s body as if she were a sculpture on display in an exhibition. From his perspective, she exists only to satisfy the male gaze. Similarly, Porphyro’s enthralment with Madeline’s ‘empty dress’ suggests that he is more aroused by the signifier of femininity than the woman herself. Both Ambrosio and Porphyro project their fantasies onto the unseen women and although Porphyro’s intentions may be ambiguous, he is nonetheless a predatory voyeur who sees without being seen. His ardent gaze contrasts with Madeline’s ‘maiden eyes divine / Fixed on the floor’ (VII: 57-58) when she performs the ‘ceremonies’ (VI: 50) of St. Agnes’ Eve. The ritual seems to revolve around *not* looking, or looking away: ‘As, supperless to bed they must retire, / And couch supine their beauties, lily white; / Nor look behind, nor sideways, but require / Of Heaven with upward eyes for all that they desire’ (VI: 51-55). Indeed, Madeline’s ‘vague, regardless eyes’ (VIII: 64) are blind to the impending threat because she is ‘Hoodwinked with faery fancy’ (VIII: 70). Like the bathing Antonia, Madeline is unaware that she is being watched.

In *The Monk*, looking is a harbinger of rape. Directly after seeing Antonia through the enchanted mirror, Ambrosio uses the magic myrtle bough to enter her domain. There, he induces a ‘death-like slumber’ that prevents Antonia from resisting his advances:

Ambrosio advanced with precaution. He took care that not a board should creak under his foot, and held in his breath as He approached the Bed. His first attention was to perform the magic ceremony, as Matilda had charged him: He breathed thrice upon the silver Myrtle, pronounced over it Antonia's name, and laid it upon her pillow. The effects which it had already produced permitted not his doubting its success in prolonging the slumbers of his devoted Mistress. No sooner was the enchantment performed than He considered her to be absolutely in his power, and his eyes flamed with lust and impatience. He now ventured to cast a glance upon the sleeping Beauty. A single Lamp, burning before the Statue of St. Rosolia, shed a faint light through the room, and permitted him to examine all the charms of the lovely Object before him. The heat of the weather had obliged her to throw off part of the Bed-cloathes: Those which still covered her, Ambrosio's insolent hand hastened to remove. She lay with her cheek reclining upon one ivory arm; The Other rested on the side of the Bed with graceful indolence. A few tresses of her hair had escaped from beneath the Muslin which confined the rest, and fell carelessly over her bosom, as it heaved with slow and regular suspiration. The warm air had spread her cheek with higher colour than usual. A smile inexpressibly sweet played round her ripe and coral lips, from which every now and then escaped a gentle sigh or an half-pronounced sentence. An air of enchanting innocence and candour pervaded her whole form; and there was a sort of modesty in her very nakedness which added fresh stings to the desires of the lustful Monk.

He remained for some moments devouring those charms with his eyes which soon were to be subjected to his ill-regulated passions. Her mouth half-opened seemed to solicit a kiss: He bent over her; he joined his lips to hers, and drew in the fragrance of her breath with rapture. This momentary pleasure increased his longing for still greater. His desires were raised to that frantic height by which Brutes are agitated. He resolved not to delay for one instant longer the accomplishment of his wishes, and hastily proceeded to tear off those garments which impeded the gratification of his lust. (p. 232)

Keats echoes this passage in stanzas xxviii-xxxiv. Porphyro’s ‘Noiseless’ (XXVIII: 250) and ‘silent’ (XXVIII: 251) approach recalls how ‘Ambrosio advanced with precaution’ and ‘took care that not a board should creak under his foot’. What is more, Porphyro wishes for ‘some drowsy Morphean amulet’ (XXIX: 258) to keep his own sleeping Beauty sedated while his ‘glowing hand’ (XXXI: 271) loads the banquet table with decadent fruits. The ‘candied apple’ (XXXI: 265) carries connotations of temptation and deception, and the ‘quince, and plum, and gourd’ (XXXI: 265) hint suggestively at ripeness and fullness, like the swollen gourds and plump hazel shells in the ode ‘To Autumn’, also published in the 1820 volume. Moreover, the sensuous feast Porphyro provides is full of foods that have been altered in some way: the fruits are ‘candied’ or turned into ‘jellies’ and the ‘lucent syrups’ are ‘tinct with cinnamon’ (XXX: 265-268). The words ‘lucent’ and ‘tinct’ (an abbreviation of tincture) have magical connotations, as does the ‘Manna’, which echoes the ‘manna dew’ (26) that the lady feeds to the knight before he slips into a deathly slumber in ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’. These preserved and exotic fruits, which are left curiously untouched, are not merely ornaments to heighten the poem’s sensuality – they draw attention to the artificiality of the scene. They also draw attention to Madeline’s soon-to-be consumed body. In proximity to the feast of ‘cinnamon, / Manna and dates / in argosy transferred / From Fez; and spicèd dainties, every one, / From silken Samarkand to cedared Lebanon’, Porphyro’s description of himself as a ‘famished pilgrim’ who has journeyed to Madeline’s ‘silver shrine’ has colonialist connotations. There is a hidden cost to these delicacies, just as there is a hidden cost to Madeline’s immersion in ‘pale enchantment’. The exotic feast is a form of window-dressing that Porphyro uses to create a scene of enchantment that ultimately tricks Madeline into believing that she is participating in a fantasy of her own making. Neither Madeline nor Porphyro enjoy the feast, but another appetite is certainly sated. While the images of Porphyro’s ‘glowing hand’ (XXXI: 271) and ‘warm, unnerved arm’ (XXXII: 280) are less sinister than the image of ‘Ambrosio’s insolent hand’ as he removes Antonia’s bedclothes, there is something unsettling about the ‘woofed phantasies’ (XXXII: 289) he indulges in while Madeline sleeps. Keats’s self-referential nod to an ‘ancient ditty, long since mute, / In Provence called, ‘La Belle Dame sans Mercy’’ (xxxiii: 291-292) also raises suspicion, as consent is also ambiguous in this poem if we accept Karen Swann’s reading of the encounter as harassment (I discuss her interpretation later in this chapter).[[182]](#footnote-182) Furthermore, Madeline’s reaction to the sight of her dream lover in the flesh is unmistakably one of terror: her ‘blue affrayed eyes’ (XXXIII: 296) - the same colour as Antonia’s - express the shock she experiences as her dream melts into reality. Keats foregoes the lewdness of Lewis’s tale and concludes with Madeline and Porphyro eloping, and yet, the imagery of coldness, terror and death in the final stanza creates a sense of foreboding that harks back to the ‘bitter chill’ (I:1) of the opening stanza:

And they are gone – ay, ages long ago

These lovers fled away into the storm.

That night the Baron dreamt of many a woe,

And all his warrior-guests, with shade and form

Of witch, and demon, and large coffin-worm,

Were long be-nightmared. Angela the old

Died palsy-twitched, with meagre face deform;

The Beadsman, after thousand aves told,

For aye unsought for slept among his ashes cold. (XLIII: 370-378)

Ending the poem with an image of the Baron’s nightmare subtly recalls Elvira’s premonitory dream of Antonia ‘on the verge of a precipice’ (p. 233) – the ‘witch, and demon, and large coffin-worm’ that haunt his dreams all gesture towards the fate of Antonia, which, this allusion implies, Madeline might share. What is more, Angela’s demise, whether actual or dreamt, echoes Ambrosio’s murder of Elvira – the only character who bears witness to his defilement of Antonia. This cold and ominous dénouement leaves the fate of the lovers uncertain; they seem to evaporate once they escape the confines of the castle (and indeed the confines of the Spenserian stanza). Once the spell of St. Agnes’ Eve is broken, their story is, perhaps, no longer a subject fit for romance.

The echoes of Lewis in *The Eve of St Agnes* do not begin and end with Porphyro’s clandestine peeping: the title of the poem recalls the character Agnes and the ‘ancient Beadsman’ who hears a ‘prelude soft’ (IV: 28) echo through a space in which ‘many a door was wide’ (IV: 29) brings to mind the scene in which Lewis’s eponymous Monk awaits Matilda’s return after she unveils the magic mirror. Moreover, the ‘carvèd angels’ with their ‘hair blown back’ and ‘breasts’ evoke the statue of ‘Venus de Medici’ that Antonia is compared to. These images show Keats’s conscious and deliberate appropriation of *The Monk*’s aesthetic and story, yet it is important to acknowledge that the lewder aspects of Lewis’s novel are toned down in *The Eve of St Agnes*. Any objections readers may have had to the sensuality of the poem are mitigated by Keats’s ambiguity. In spite of this, Richard Woodhouse was taken aback by the sexual explicitness of Keats’s third revision of the poem, particularly the fact that Porphyro ‘acts all the acts of a bonâ fide husband, while she fancies she is only playing the part of a Wife in a dream’ (*LJK*, II: 163). As Nicholas Roe observes, the passage below ‘caused Woodhouse genuine disquiet’:[[183]](#footnote-183)

See, while she speaks his arms encroaching slow,

Have zoned her, heart to heart, - loud, loud the dark winds blow!

For on the midnight came a tempest fell;

More sooth, for that his quick rejoinder flows

Into her burning ear: and still the spell

Unbroken guards her in serene repose.

With her wild dream he mingled, as a rose

Marrieth its odour to a violet.

Still, still she dreams, louder the frost wind blows . . .[[184]](#footnote-184)

In this draft, Madeline is under a ‘spell’ that keeps her ‘in serene repose’ while Porphyro’s ‘encroaching’ embrace ‘zones’ her. The language is more sinister than in the published version: to encroach is to trespass and ‘zoned’ implies entrapment. We might think here of the ‘fragrant zone’ (V: 18) the knight makes for the titular lady of ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’ before he ‘shut[s] her wild wild eyes’ (VIII: 31) and question the motives of Keats’s male heroes. It is not surprising that Richard Woodhouse feared that it was ‘unfit for ladies & indeed scarcely to be mentioned to them’ (to John Taylor, 19 September 1819 - *LJK*, II: 163). With more emphasis placed on Madeline’s enchantment, similarities with *The Monk* are more striking in this revision, so it is possible that Woodhouse wished to protect Keats – who was already a source of contempt in the Tory press - from similar notoriety. Woodhouse’s objection to the unsuitability of the poem to a female audience has a similar tone to the censorious reviews of *The Monk* twenty years earlier, which centred on the novel’s (im)morality and the effect on impressionable readers. In his 1797 review, Coleridge objects to *The Monk* on the grounds that it is offensive to Christian sensibilities. He argues that ‘the Monk is a romance, which if a parent saw in the hands of a son or daughter, he might reasonably turn pale.’[[185]](#footnote-185) The failure of Lewis’s novel, according to Coleridge, is that it is not didactic. He sees *The Monk* as dangerous to impressionable readers, when it ought to be instructive. Writing in defence of the novel’s ‘moral lessons’, the anonymous author of ‘An Apology for The Monk’ (1797) argues that ‘this beautiful romance is well calculated to support the cause of virtue’.[[186]](#footnote-186) The author contends that Lewis’s writing has a tendency to incite sensations of horror and disgust in the reader when they observe Ambrosio’s conduct, thereby discouraging any thoughts of vice that may arise from reading about his lascivious deeds. He writes:

The critics themselves seem aware of this tendency of the work, and therefore endeavour to deprive the author of the defence, by roundly asserting that ‘a romance is incapable of exemplifying moral truth; and that he who could rise superior to all earthly temptation, and whom the strength of the spiritual world alone would be adequate to overwhelm, might reasonably be proud, and would fall with glory.’ As applied to the Monk, there are two errors in this assertion. The reader of this romance has no reason to imagine, till the greater part of the mischief has been done, that any but earthly temptations are used against the hero. The fall of Ambrosio is precisely that which would happen to any man of a similar character, assailed as he was by the fascinating arts of a woman, skilled in exciting the strongest passions, and endowed with the most attractive charms. We see the gradual progress she makes in undermining his virtue by merely human means. His feeling, his gratitude, and finally the strong desires of human nature are all combined to ensure his fall. But still the temptations appear to be no more than human […] Matilda appears to be merely a woman, though a woman of the greatest charms, and of an extraordinary character; but still there is nothing improbable or unnatural in the means of temptation, nothing that a man of a strong mind and pure virtue would not have resisted. The lesson therefore is taught and deeply imbibed before the discovery of supernatural agency is made, and that discovery does not and cannot eradicate the morality before inculcated.

Nor is it true in general that moral truth cannot be conveyed in romance […] The religion itself which these gentlemen profess inculcates the notion that Lucifer is the author of all our vicious propensities, and that he is the continual seducer of man […] We do not the less blame Eve, because we are told that she yielded to the temptation of the serpent.[[187]](#footnote-187)

His main complaints are Coleridge’s misreading and censoring of Lewis’s novel, and the idea that ‘romance is incapable of exemplifying moral truth’, but the letter also offers a more nuanced interpretation of Matilda’s role in Ambrosio’s downfall. Where Coleridge asserts that Matilda is ‘the chief agent in the seduction of Antonio [sic for Ambrosio]', the author of this letter acknowledges that Ambrosio is the author of his own destruction.[[188]](#footnote-188) Coleridge claims that Ambrosio is ‘seduced to the perpetration of rape and murder, and finally precipitated into a contract in which he consigns his soul to everlasting perdition’ – a statement that unequivocally positions Ambrosio as a hapless victim of Matilda’s wiles.[[189]](#footnote-189) The defendant takes a different view and observes that ‘Matilda appears to be merely a woman, though a woman of the greatest charms’ who uses only ‘earthly temptations’ to seduce the ‘hero’. This highlights Ambrosio’s complicity in his temptation: Matilda offers ‘nothing that a man of strong mind and pure virtue would not have resisted.’ However, like Coleridge, the author still leans heavily on biblical notions of blame. The line ‘We do not the less blame Eve, because we are told that she yielded to the temptation of the serpent’ gestures towards patriarchal narratives that present women as inherently guilty. By emphasising ‘the fascinating arts’ and ‘attractive charms’ of Matilda’s womanly guise, the author of ‘An Apology for The Monk’ reinforces the idea of original sin and casts Matilda in the role of both Eve and the serpent – a double temptress, and the ultimate femme fatale. In doing so, he exonerates Ambrosio of any real blame. Ambrosio is presented as morally weak, rather than predatory. In contrast, a feminist critical reading of *The Monk* recognises Ambrosio’s assault of Antonia as an abuse of power that prefigures his dealings with the supernatural. His crimes are calculated and any guilt he feels is easily assuaged by the knowledge that he has complete authority over both Antonia and Elvira: ‘He believed that his fame was too firmly established to be shaken by the unsupported accusations of two unknown Women’ (*The Monk*, p. 292). Ambrosio’s confidence that ‘two unknown Women’ will not be believed still resonates today. His status as a respected and admired monk opens almost as many doors for him as the magic myrtle bough. Before he spies on Antonia through the magic mirror, Ambrosio abuses the privileges afforded by his status and reputation to gain private access to her. By preying on Antonia’s innocence and taking advantage of Elvira’s physical weakness, Ambrosio infiltrates their home with ease, just as the young lover in *The Eve of St Agnes* enters his beloved’s chambers by taking advantage of ‘old beldame, weak in body and soul’ (X: 90). Ambrosio may be weak in soul, but he is powerful, even without Matilda’s influence. In his restaging of ‘looking scenes’ from *The Monk* in *The Eve of St Agnes*, Keats suggests that the predatory gaze does not only belong to mad Monks and tyrannical patriarchs, but to the ‘heroic’ young lovers of romance, too.

***Lamia***

The echoes of *The Monk* in *The Eve of St Agnes* prefigure a much more in-depth interrogation of looking in *Lamia*. As the title of Keats’s 1820 volume suggests (*Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes and Other Poems*), fair maidens and femmes fatales recur in his poetry and these archetypes finally converge in the character of Lamia. Like the Gorgon Medusa, Lamia is identified with snakes in Greek mythology.[[190]](#footnote-190) Robert Graves offers the following description of her origins:

‘Belus had a beautiful daughter, Lamia, who ruled in Libya, and on whom Zeus, in acknowledgment of her favours, bestowed the singular power of plucking out and replacing her eyes at will. She bore him several children, but all of them except Scylla were killed by Hera in a fit of jealousy. Lamia took her revenge by destroying the children of others, and behaved so cruelly that her face turned into a nightmarish mask.’[[191]](#footnote-191)

Like Medusa, the once-beautiful Lamia is punished by a jealous goddess. Her ‘singular power’ of removing her eyes can be compared to Medusa’s power of turning men to stone with her stare. Moreover, Lamia’s vampiric propensity for ‘lying with young men and sucking their blood while they slept’ suggests that, like Medusa, she poses a threat to the patriarchal order.[[192]](#footnote-192) Keats’s Lamia does not resemble the monstrous, predatory description offered by Graves. On the contrary, she is described as ‘tender-person’d’ (II: 238) her fate is likened to clipping an ‘Angel’s wings’ (II: 234):

Do not all charms fly  
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?  
There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:  
We know her woof, her texture; she is given  
In the dull catalogue of common things.  
Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,  
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,  
Empty the haunted air, and gnomèd mine—  
Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made  
The tender-person'd Lamia melt into a shade. (II: 229-238)

In this passage, Keats appears to echo Charles Lamb’s complaint that Newton, in his book *Opticks* (1704), ‘had destroyed all the poetry of the rainbow, by reducing it to prismatic colours’.[[193]](#footnote-193) Indeed, Keats’s scepticism of optics is a useful starting point for contextualising the ‘rainbow-sided’ subject of *Lamia*, but there is more to this poem (and its titular subject) than meets the eye.[[194]](#footnote-194) Beyond optics, *Lamia* is about ways of looking. More specifically, it is concerned with the power dynamics of gazing and what it means to look/be looked at. Lamia’s fate at the end of the poem sends a clear message: ‘perceant’ gazing, which is embodied by Apollonius, will ‘Conquer all mysteries’ and ‘Unweave [the] rainbow’ (II: 235-237). In Keats’s poem, the Lamia figure sheds her serpentine form and transforms into a victim of destructive looking, gaining the reader’s sympathy in the process. In this sense, *Lamia* can be read as a reworking of the Medusa myth. As Ann DeLong observes, Medusa is ‘both victimized and made monstrous by patriarchy’.[[195]](#footnote-195) Once a beautiful priestess in Athena’s temple, Medusa is raped by Poseidon and punished for the transgression. Athena transforms Medusa into a monster, who then turns her mesmeric gaze defiantly back on those who would oppress her. This punishment is arguably consolatory, as her frightening new form protects her from further assault. Emancipated by her monstrousness, her gaze petrifies the patriarchy. For Freud, the head of Medusa represents the ‘terror of castration that is linked to the sight of something’[[196]](#footnote-196) (the genitals of the Mother) while for Cixous, she is ‘beautiful’ and ‘laughing’ in the face of phallogocentrism.[[197]](#footnote-197) In her revision of Freud’s essay and the mythology behind it, Cixous transforms Medusa from a deadly, emasculatory threat into a subversive feminist icon. Kristeva asks: ‘Does Medusa return the caustic, decapitating look, with maleficence added, that the man, the fierce hero, turned on her? Who is looking at whom? Who is killing whom?’[[198]](#footnote-198) These questions are also relevant in *Lamia*, in that Keats encourages the reader to look again at the ‘rainbow-sided’ monster, whose snaky body recalls the image of Medusa’s head, and consider the ways in which a certain type of looking can function as a tool of oppression. If Medusa is ‘the victim made monstrous’, then Lamia is the monster made victim.[[199]](#footnote-199) Lamia embodies many of the archetypal attributes of the fatal woman: she is a shape-shifting, serpent-woman who lures both Hermes and Lycius with her beauty and her words of ‘bubbling honey’ (I: 65). Yet Keats resists the familiar trappings of fatal women narratives by portraying her as a complex and sympathetic character who is perpetually at the mercy of male voyeurs. The fact that Lamia’s ability to remove her eyes is omitted from Keats’s retelling of the myth suggests that we are not dealing with a monster who is endowed with gifts from the Gods, but rather, an otherworldly heroine whose love has obscured her vision, leaving her unable to see the dangers in front of her.

The figure of the femme fatalegained traction towards the turn of the eighteenth century, with the publication of Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796), Charlotte Dacre’s *Zofloya* (1806) and *The Passions* (1811)and Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *Christabel* (Part One composed in 1797, Part Two in 1800, published in 1816), all of which associated the femme fatale with a voracious sexual appetite. It is not known how well acquainted Keats was with these sources; however, the references to Ann Radcliffe in his letters demonstrate his familiarity with her work and the Gothic mode more generally. Moreover, Keats’s various epistolary mentions of Coleridge indicate that he knew the poet and his poems well. Keats’s primary source for *Lamia* was of course an excerpt from Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), which adapts the lamia story from Philostratus’s *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*. However, Keats not only responds to Burton’s representation of the lamia figure as a dangerous seductress, but the misogynistic discourses at work in narratives about fatal women. Prior to *Lamia*, Keats depicts such figures himself, for example: the ‘cruel enchantress’ (Book III: 415) Circe in *Endymion* and the titular lady of his chivalric ballad ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’ both conform to the femme fatale archetype in that they represent an emasculatory threat to the male hero. However, in *Lamia*, Keats attempts to confront this problematic representation of female sexual desire by re-presenting the fatal woman as a victim of an oppressive patriarchal gaze. Keats was acutely aware of his sexual immaturity and conflicting feelings about women before he began composing *Lamia* in 1819. In a letter to Benjamin Bailey dated 18 July 1818, Keats writes:

‘I am certain I have not a right feeling towards Women – at this moment I am striving to be just to them but I cannot – Is it because they fall so far beneath my Boyish imagination? When I was a Schoolboy I though[t] a fair Woman a pure Goddess, my mind was a soft nest in which some one of them slept though she knew it not – I have no right to expect more than their reality. I thought them etherial above Men – I find them [*for* them] perhaps equal – great by comparison is very small…

…Is it not extraordinary? — when among men, I have no evil thoughts, no malice, no spleen — I feel free to speak or to be silent — I can listen, and from every one I can learn — my hands are in my pockets, I am free from all suspicion and comfortable. When I am among women, I have evil thoughts, malice, spleen — I cannot speak, or be silent — I am full of suspicions and therefore listen to nothing — I am in a hurry to be gone. You must be charitable and put all this perversity to my being disappointed since my boyhood. […] I must absolutely get over this — but how? the only way is to find the root of the evil, and so cure it “with backward mutters of dissevering power”— that is a difficult thing; for an obstinate Prejudice can seldom be produced but from a gordian complication of feelings, which must take time to unravel, and care to keep unravelled. I could say a good deal about this, but I will leave it, in hopes of better and more worthy dispositions — and also content that I am wronging no one, for after all I do think better of womankind than to suppose they care whether Mister John Keats five feet high likes them or not.’ (*LJK*, I: 341)

In this revealing letter, Keats confesses that his unrealistic expectations of women are responsible for his disappointment and discomfort. Crucially, he acknowledges that he has ‘no right to expect more than their reality’ and, in a flash of performative self-awareness, rejects his ‘Boyish’ ideal of the female as a ‘pure Goddess’. Moreover, he affirms that he ‘must absolutely get over’ his ‘evil thoughts’, ‘suspicions’ and ‘perversity’, but fails to say how he will achieve this. Keats’s use of the term ‘gordian’ to describe his ‘complication of feelings’ clearly anticipates the language of *Lamia*. Therefore, we can infer that the poem became a space for him to work through these feelings and subvert misogynistic archetypes of womanhood in literature. Keats’s self-effacing joke that women do not care ‘whether Mister John Keats five feet high likes them or not’ is more revealing than he might have intended. As Anne K. Mellor and others have shown, Keats was self-conscious about his perceived effeminacy – a label assigned to him by critics due to his lower class status and ‘masturbatory’ imagination.[[200]](#footnote-200) His small stature did little to challenge this perception and he was anxious to distance himself from the infantilising charge that he was little more than ‘a boy of pretty abilities’.[[201]](#footnote-201) This is evident from Richard Woodhouse’s letter to John Taylor (19 September 1819), in which Woodhouse insists that Keats ‘does not want ladies to read his poetry: that he writes for men’ (*LJK*, II: 163). Keats’s anxiety about a female readership speaks to a general sense of discomfort concerning his reputation as a writer of romance, which ‘embodied a feminine and apprentice aesthetic’.[[202]](#footnote-202) As Jeffrey Cox observes, ‘Keats and his publishers sought to present him as a narrative poet on a literary scene dominated by popular writers of romances, such as Scott and Byron’ who ‘subjected “old romance” (as Keats called it in *Isabella*) to modern critiques and new purposes’.[[203]](#footnote-203) However, Keats’s anxiety ‘about his participation in a genre dominated by women writers’ prompted a deliberate turn towards ‘a less “smokeable” or more virile romance’ in which the woman is finally silenced.[[204]](#footnote-204) Karen Swann argues:

a feminist critic listening to the knight's tale picks up threads of another story: the hint of physical compulsion ("I made a garland"), the suggestion of interpretive violence ("And sure in language strange she said—/ I love thee true"); this critic might wonder if certain signs—moans, sighs, tears—don't indicate resistance more than love or duplicity. She might conclude that ''romance" is at least as fatal to the lady as the knight. Not only does its logic work toward her disappearance from the scene, romance blinds most readers to the woman's point of view—a point of view from which the exchange between lady and knight looks less like a domestic idyll or a fatal encounter and more like a scene of harassment.[[205]](#footnote-205)

In this reading of the poem, chivalry takes on a dark hue: the knight becomes an oppressive figure who overcomes his otherworldly, female victim and ‘shut[s] her wild, wild eyes’, blinding both the dame and the reader to his true aim. Echoing Swann, Rachel Shulkins states: ‘by depicting La Belle as an innocent maiden under her lover’s rule, the wight’s devotion is more a form of rape than love.’[[206]](#footnote-206) Swann goes on to suggest that, by centring the knight’s experience, Keats screens the reader from his position of privilege as both subject and storyteller: ‘Focusing on his loss, we fail to notice what he gains at the end of the poem – accession to an all-male community. Could this community, and not the ideal or even the fatal woman, be the true object of his quest?’[[207]](#footnote-207) Not only does the knight ascend to an exclusive, all-male community, he gets to tell *his*tory. The titular character’s only utterance, besides inarticulate moans, is ‘I love thee true’ (VII: 28) and even that is the knight’s translation of her ‘language strange’ (VII: 27). Even in death, the knight asserts his power by controlling the narrative and omitting the dame’s perspective. By silencing her, Keats assumes an aggressively masculine poetic voice that reinforces the patriarchal conventions of romance. ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’ is by no means the only site of such silencing and harassment. Indeed, this is a recurring theme throughout the 1820 volume. As Jack Stillinger has shown, Madeline’s heart is compared to a ‘tongueless nightingale’ in *The Eve of St Agnes*, which conjures a troubling image of the mutilated Philomela.[[208]](#footnote-208) Like Medusa, Philomela endures a physical transformation after Tereus rapes her, though she at least gets revenge on her attacker. By invoking the violent tale of Philomela, Keats forces the reader to confront the ambiguity surrounding consent in the poem, particularly in lines such as ‘There was a painful change’ (XXXIV: 300) and ‘Into her dream he melted’ (XXXVI: 320), which hint at the irreversible consequence of Porphyro’s deception.[[209]](#footnote-209) Similarly, one might interpret the ‘mad pursuit’ (9) and ‘struggle to escape’ (9) in ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ as a scene of attempted harassment. Just as the narrator silences his female subject in ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’, so does he silences the female-coded object in ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ by addressing it thus: ‘Thou still unravished bride of quietness, / Thou foster-child of silence and slow time’ (1-2). Insisting on the urn’s silence allows the male speaker to control the ‘legend’ (5) depicted on its surface. The recurring suggestions of sexual violence in Keats’s poetry occur amidst two notable ‘sex scandals’ within the circles he moved in. By 1819, Keats was lodging at Wentworth Place and therefore knew of Charles Brown’s affair with his house servant Abigail O’Donahue. O’Donahue may have reciprocated Brown’s attentions, but this does not negate the power imbalance that exists between a middle-class, English employer and an Irish, working-class woman in his employ. Keats is quiet about these liaisons in his correspondence, aside from a reference to Brown’s ‘indecencies’ in a letter to Fanny Brawne dated August 1820 (*LJK*, II: 312). Nevertheless, many of his poems - including *Lamia* - were written in the shadow of this knowledge, while he was living under the same roof as Brown and his mistress. Furthermore, Keats was surely aware of his friend and mentor William Hazlitt’s reputation as ‘a sexual predator, whose frustration could rapidly turn to violence’.[[210]](#footnote-210) Hazlitt’s record of sexual misconduct – most notably his hasty departure from Keswick in 1803 following allegations that he assaulted a local girl - led Coleridge to accuse him of being ‘addicted to women, as objects of sexual Indulgence’.[[211]](#footnote-211) Henry Crabb Robinson later recorded Wordsworth’s account of the incident, which mentions the populace’s angry response to Hazlitt’s ‘gross attacks on women’ (diary entry, 15 June 1815).[[212]](#footnote-212) Benjamin Robert Haydon also recounts a later conversation with Wordsworth in 1824, in which he relates ‘Hazlitt’s licentious conduct to the girls of the Lake, & that no woman could walk after dark, for ‘his Satyr and beastlyappetites’’ (29 March 1824).[[213]](#footnote-213) Interestingly, this comparison between Hazlitt and the Satyrs recalls ‘the love glances of unlovely eyes, Of Satyrs, Fauns and bleared Sileneus’ sighs’ (I: 102-3) that the nymph is ‘veiled’ (I: 100) from in *Lamia*. Although the Keswick episode embarrassed Hazlitt, it did not deter him from other inappropriate pursuits, as his obsession with 19-year-old Sarah Walker attests. It is plausible that the scandals Hazlitt and, to a lesser extent, Brown were entangled in offer additional context for Keats's depictions of predatory men in *The Eve of St Agnes* and *Lamia*.

Anne Mellor’s claim that ‘In each of the great odes, a male poet seeks to penetrate and possess the power of the female object’ is just as applicable to *Lamia* as it is the odes, though it is the male *characters* (Hermes, Lycius and Apollonius) rather than the narrator who seek to penetrate and/or possess her power.[[214]](#footnote-214) As the passage quoted at the start of this chapter suggests, the narrator encourages the reader to sympathise with Lamia and condemn the penetrative gaze that causes her to vanish at the end of the poem. Divided into two parts that mirror the transition from the realm of Gods to the mortal world of Corinth (and indeed Lamia’s transition from serpent to woman), the poem begins with ‘ever-smitten’ (I: 7) Hermes’s quest to find a hidden nymph and ends with Lamia’s retreat from the ‘watching eyes’ (II: 226) of Apollonius. Keats signposts his debt to Burton by printing a passage from *The Anatomy of Melancholy* at the end of the poem in the 1820 volume. In this excerpt, Burton, via Philostratus, relays the tale of Menippus Lycius – a youth who is beguiled by ‘a phantasm in the habit of a fair gentlewoman’ on his way to Corinth.[[215]](#footnote-215) The lovers arrange to marry, but the wedding is interrupted by the philosopher Apollonius, who reveals the bride to be a lamia. Upon discovery, she disappears along with her material possessions. Keats’s poem follows a similar trajectory, except he introduces a prelude to the main narrative: Hermes’s quest for the hidden nymph. By embedding his interpretation of the tale of Lamia and Lycius within a frame narrative, Keats foregrounds the relationship between sight, power and knowledge in the poem. As Paul Endo observes, ‘In *Lamia*, power consists of silently controlling what another sees without this other ever knowing that he or she is being watched and controlled.’[[216]](#footnote-216) Lamia silently controls who can and cannot see the nymph she has concealed, but she forfeits this power in exchange for ‘a sweet body fit for life, / And love, and pleasure’ (I: 39-40). This suggests that the only way that she can profit from her limited quota of power is to enter into a transaction with someone who has more power than she does. When Lamia enters into a bargain with Hermes, she is already at a disadvantage: Hermes is a God, and Lamia’s ambiguous magic is no match for Olympian power. Moreover, Hermes’s secret surveillance of Lamia emphasises the unequal power relations between the gazer and the object of his gaze:

‘The God, dove-footed, glided silently

Round bush and tree, soft-brushing, in his speed,

The taller grass and full-flowering weed,

Until he found a palpitating snake,

Bright, cirque-couchant in a dusky brake.

She was a gordian shape of dazzling hue,

Vermilion-spotted, golden, green and blue;

Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard,

Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson barred;

And full of silver moons, that, as she breathed,

Dissolved, or brighter shone, or interwreathed

Their lustres with the gloomier tapestries –

So rainbow-sided, touched with miseries,

She seemed, at once, some penanced lady elf,

Some demon’s mistress, or the demon’s self.’ (I: 42-58)

Hermes approaches Lamia unseen; he is ‘dove-footed’, he glides ‘silently’, gently brushing the surrounding flora, so as not to alert her to his presence. From this vantage point, Hermes can secretly gaze upon Lamia’s ‘gordian shape’. Thus, Hermes is a conduit for the reader’s gaze: we ‘see’ as Hermes sees. Through his eyes, Lamia’s body is a site of instability and contradiction – a ‘place where meaning collapses’, to quote Julia Kristeva.[[217]](#footnote-217) Abjection, as defined by Kristeva, is that which ‘disturbs identity, system, order […] does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.’[[218]](#footnote-218) Lamia, whose tangled body refuses to fit into ‘the dull category of common things’ (II: 234) transgresses borders between human and animal (she is both ‘a palpitating snake’ and a ‘lady’) and confounds the onlooker with her radical ambiguity. Through the repetition of ‘like’, Lamia’s identity is endlessly deferred; by comparing her to a zebra, a pard and a peacock, Keats draws attention to her impossibility. What Lamia ‘is’ cannot be articulated, therefore the speaker can only describe how she *seems*, which is ‘*at once*, some penanced lady elf / Some demon’s mistress, or the demon’s self’. The term ‘penanced lady elf’ implies that her abject, ‘gordian’ body is a curse or punishment, similar to the fate of Medusa. Moreover, by likening her to ‘some demon’s mistress or the demon’s self’, Keats draws a comparison between Lamia and the demon lovers of the Gothic. As Adriana Craciun posits, Lamia bears a strong resemblance to Charlotte Dacre’s femmes fatales in *Zofloya* and *The Passions.*[[219]](#footnote-219) The resemblance between Lamia and Dacre’s femmes fatales is complicated by the final line of the third stanza, in which Keats compares Hermes to ‘a stooped falcon ere he takes his prey’ (I: 67). If the nymph is not yet visible, then Lamia must be ‘his prey’. This begs the question: who is preying on whom? When Lamia speaks in the stanza following this metaphor, she reveals that she has foreseen Hermes’s arrival: ‘I dreamt I saw thee… Strike for the Cretan isle; and here thou art!’ (I: 76-79). This foresight links Lamia with Medusan clairvoyance and suggests that she sees more than Hermes does. Certainly, she sees enough to understand that her best chance of escaping from the ‘wreathed tomb’ (I: 38) of her body is to strike a deal with the God of trade and boundaries. In the following passage, Lamia secures her end of the bargain by getting Hermes to swear an oath:

‘Free as the air, invisibly, she strays

About these thornless wilds; her pleasant days

She tastes unseen; unseen her nimble feet

Leave traces in the grass and flowers sweet;

From weary tendrils, and bow’d branches green,

She plucks the fruit unseen, she bathes unseen:

And by my power is her beauty veil’d

To keep it unaffronted, unassail’d,

By the love glances of unlovely eyes,

Of Satyrs, Fauns and blear’d Sileneus’ sighs.

Pale grew her immortality, for woe

Of all these lovers, and she grievèd so

I took compassion on her, bade her steep

Her hair in weïrd syrops, that would keep

Her loveliness invisible, yet free

To wander as she loves, in liberty.

Thou shalt behold her, Hermes, thou alone,

If thou wilt, as thou swearest, grant my boon!’

Then, once again, the charmèd God began

An oath, and through the serpent’s ear it ran

Warm, tremulous, devout, psalterian.

Ravished, she lifted her Circean head,

Blush’d a live damask, and swift-lisping said,

I was a woman, let me have once more

A woman’s shape, and charming as before.

I love a youth of Corinth – O the bliss!

Give me my woman’s form, and place me where he is.

Stoop, Hermes, let me breathe upon thy brow,

And thou shalt see they sweet nymph even now.’ (I: 94-122).

Although the nymph is ‘free’ to roam the woods ‘unseen’ and unmolested, she cannot fully disappear, as her ‘nimble feet / Leave traces in the grass’. This implies that the protective spell that veils the nymph from ‘unlovely eyes’ is limited and temporary. By trading the nymph’s whereabouts for her own freedom, Lamia not only relegates the nymph to object status, but plays into the femme fatale stereotype, as she is motivated by self-interest and desire. The ‘wreathed tomb’ of Lamia’s serpent body restricts her ability to partake in the ‘love, and pleasure, and the ruddy strife/ Of hearts and lips’. Aware of her sexuality, Lamia desires to have ‘once more/ A woman’s shape, and charming as before’ so that she can pursue a ‘youth of Corinth’. Keats further emphasises Lamia’s femme fatale qualities by comparing her to Circe (in addition to ‘her Circean head’, the ‘weïrd syrops’ are a nod to the witch-goddess’s vast knowledge of herbs and potions) and by having her ‘breathe’ upon Hermes’s brow, which recalls the fairy magic of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Both Keats’s poem and Shakespeare’s play deal with hoodwinked dreamers, the transgression of boundaries and the subjugation of women, and Lamia’s protection of the nymph is comparable to Titania’s fierce, maternal refusal to give up the Indian changeling. Although Keats’s poem is set ‘Before King Oberon’s bright diadem, / Sceptre and mantle, clasp’d with dewy gem, / Frighted away the Dryads and the Fauns’ (I: 1-5), the woodland setting of *Lamia* is no less magical, and no less dangerous, particularly for women. What is significant about both Lamia and Titania is that, despite their magical abilities, they are disempowered by the patriarchal societies that they inhabit. Lamia may have enchanted Hermes and persuaded him to grant her boon, but the power balance errs in his favour and she is still ‘Ravished’. His predatory hunt for the hidden nymph, the voyeuristic way he gazes upon Lamia’s body and his exploitation of her powers for his own sexual gain reveal the ‘ever-smitten’ (I: 7) god to be more of a threat than Lamia. Although Lamia willingly enters into a bargain with Hermes, she does so with the understanding that refusing the Gods is not only dangerous but futile. The story of Medusa is proof of this. The nymph is the price Lamia pays for her own freedom (or, at least, the illusion of it).[[220]](#footnote-220) Just as Titania surrenders the changeling boy at the end of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* to appease Oberon and restore the status quo, Lamia gives up the nymph to escape her ‘serpent prison-house’ (I: 203). Undoubtedly, Keats presents Lamia as morally ambiguous in this transaction; by unveiling the nymph to Hermes, Lamia assumes a similar role to that of the crone Angela in *The Eve of St Agnes*, who enables Madeline’s ravishment by giving Porphyro access to her private chamber. Like Madeline, the nymph is weary of her lover’s advances and has to be coerced into ‘[giving] up her honey’:

So done, upon the nymph his eyes he bent

Full of adoring tears and blandishment,

And towards her stepped: she, like a moon in wane,

Faded before him, cowered, nor could restrain

Her fearful sobs, self-folding like a flower

That faints into itself at evening hour:

But the God fostering her chillèd hand,

She felt the warmth, her eyelids opened bland,

And, like new flowers at morning song of bees,

Bloomed, and gave up her honey to the lees. (I: 136-143)

The nymph is silent, but her body language (‘cowered’) and ‘fearful sobs’ speak volumes. Lamia’s role in the nymph’s fate makes her a morally grey character, though she arguably has no choice but to perform the role of femme fatale. Her choices are as follows: disobey a God and suffer the consequences, or obey and be rewarded. It seems that these are the only options available to women in the world of Keats’s poem, even if they possess magic.

Lamia’s painful metamorphosis from snake to woman is one of the only times in the poem where she is not being watched. Yet, despite being ‘Left to herself’ (I: 146), images of ravishment still haunt the description of her changing body: she writhes in ‘scarlet pain’ (I: 154), her silver mail is ‘Spoilt’ (I: 158) and she is ‘undressed’ (I: 161) of her colours. Lamia’s ‘woman’s shape’ renders her as powerless as the ravished nymph. When Lycius first beholds her, he does so ‘Orpheus-like at an Eurydice’ (I: 248). Keats invokes the legend of Orpheus and Eurydice to convey the dangerous power of looking. Like Orpheus in the underworld, Lycius is compelled to ‘look back’ (I: 246) at her, which foreshadows Lamia’s vanishing at the end of the poem. Lamia’s mesmeric allure is emphasised in the line ‘Her soft look growing coy, she saw his chain so sure’ (I: 256) and yet, the chains of desire that bind Lycius bind her too. Lycius may be ‘tangled in her mesh’ (I: 295) and ‘harboured’ in her ‘purple-linèd palace of sweet sin’ (II: 31) but it is he who muses how to ‘entangle, trammel up and snare’ Lamia’s soul in his and ‘labyrinth’ her there (II: 52-53). Indeed, Lycius’s possessive love for Lamia takes a violent turn in Part II:

[…] He thereat was stung,

Perverse, with stronger fancy to reclaim

Her wild and timid nature to his aim:

Besides, for all his love, in self despite,

Against his better self, he took delight,

Luxurious in her sorrows, soft and new.

His passion, cruel grown, took on a hue

Fierce and sanguineous as ‘twas possible

In one whose brow had no dark veins to swell.

Fine was the mitigated fury, like

Apollo’s presence when in act to strike

The serpent – Ha, the serpent! certes, she

Was none. She burnt, she loved the tyranny,

And, all subdued, consented to the hour

When to the bridal he should lead his paramour. (II: 69-84)

Lycius’ ‘perverse’ desire to ‘reclaim’ Lamia’s ‘wild and timid nature to his aim’, his taking ‘delight’ in her ‘sorrows’, his ‘cruel grown’, ‘fierce’ and ‘sanguineous’ passion, and the comparison between his ‘mitigated fury’ and Apollo’s slaying of Python (which foreshadows Lamia’s fate), all point towards a desire on Lycius’s part to subjugate Lamia.[[221]](#footnote-221) She may ‘love’ the ‘tyranny’, but her willingness to submit can be interpreted as a performance of internalised masochism.[[222]](#footnote-222) In her book *In the Name of Love: Women, Masochism and the Gothic*, Michelle A. Massé contends that masochism is a learned behaviour and a key aspect of feminine identity in the Gothic novel. The Gothic, Massé argues, ‘stage[s] what Freud calls the beating fantasy in which a spectator watches someone being hurt by a dominant other’.[[223]](#footnote-223) The reader bears witness to the ‘tyranny’ inflicted on Lamia, but Lamia is also a complicit spectator to her own ‘beating’. In addition to the sexual subordination of Lamia, Lycius controls who looks at her and, ironically**,** his desire to show off his ‘prize’ (II: 56) to the ‘common eyes’ (II: 149) of the Corinthian public is the act that causes her to vanish. His insistence on Lamia’s visibility, despite her obvious reluctance, exposes her to Apollonius’s ‘demon eyes’ (II: 289) in the poem’s denouement:

Then Lamia breath’d death breath; the sophist’s eye,

Like a sharp spear, went through her utterly,

Keen, cruel, perceant, stinging: she, as well

As her weak hand could any meaning tell,

Motion’d him to be silent; vainly so,

He look’d and look’d again a level—No!

“A Serpent!” echoed he; no sooner said,

Than with a frightful scream she vanished (II: 299-306)

The repetition of ‘look’d’ and the emphasis on ‘again’ draws attention to Lamia, who can only weakly gesture at Apollonius to be silent as he places her in the symbolic order of language - the ‘dull category of common things’ - by naming her ‘A Serpent!’. This speech act dehumanises Lamia and reduces her to a single word. Unable to withstand his ‘Brow-beating’ (II: 248) Lamia vanishes, and Lycius dies of disenchantment. In death, Lycius’s ‘heavy body’ conjures an image of Medusa’s victims turned to stone by her stiffening gaze, which here belongs to Apollonius, not the serpent-woman Lamia. Apollonius’s ‘eye’ – phallic in its likeness to a ‘sharp spear’ - pierces Lamia like a stake, evoking imagery of the slain vampire. The image of Apollonius’s metaphorical staking of Lamia anticipates the destruction of Lucy Westenra’s undead body in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*. Lucy’s return from the grave represents a threat to the newly established homosocial bond shared by the suitors. Van Helsing. Arthur, Seward, Quincey and Van Helsing form a fellowship that is similar to the all-male community the knight ascends to at the end of 'La Belle Dame sans Merci'. Repelled by Lucy’s appetite, they are compelled to destroy her and their chosen method of decapitation starkly recalls Perseus’s slaying of Medusa. Indeed, Stoker makes the comparison between Lucy and Medusa explicit in chapter 16 of *Dracula*:

The beautiful color became livid, the eyes seemed to throw out sparks of hell fire, the brows were wrinkled as though the folds of flesh were the coils of Medusa's snakes, and the lovely, blood-stained mouth grew to an open square, as in the passion masks of the Greeks and Japanese. If ever a face meant death, if looks could kill, we saw it at that moment.[[224]](#footnote-224)

The ‘sparks of hell fire’ in Lucy’s eyes closely resemble Lamia’s during her transformation: ‘Her eyes in torture fix’d, and anguish drear, Hot, glaz’d, and wide, with lid-lashes all sear, Flash’d phosphor and sharp sparks, without one cooling tear’ (I: 150-152). The fiery gaze that emanates from Lucy’s eyes is a harbinger of evil, whereas Lamia’s eyes are ‘in torture fix’d’. Keats presents an image of a woman in pain, while Stoker, via Seward’s narration, portrays Lucy as a woman who wishes to inflict pain with her looks: ‘if looks could kill, we saw it at that moment’. As Mulvey-Roberts has shown, ‘Stoker employs the imagery of the Medusa in *Dracula* with the female vampire with blood-dripping fangs personifying the male terror of being castrated by a voracious female sexuality.’[[225]](#footnote-225) The ‘folds of flesh’ and ‘the lovely, blood-stained mouth’ (p. 225) Seward recalls in his diary entry ‘compounds the fears surrounding the *vagina dentate* with anxieties concerning the breaking of menstrual taboo.’[[226]](#footnote-226) Seward, the spurned suitor who finds solace in the company of his sexual competitors, now gazes upon her living corpse with horror and disgust. She has become abject, something that must be cast off. Arthur, the bridegroom, ‘pre-empts temptation by penetrating Lucy’s body with his phallic stake in a triumphal assertion of male virility’ and, in doing so, ceremonially seals the bond shared by the ‘Crew of Light’.[[227]](#footnote-227) This ‘image of eroticised rape’ follows Van Helsing’s inappropriate joke about ‘polyandry’ earlier in the novel in reference to the series of blood transfusions the men perform in an attempt to save Lucy from the effects of vampirism.[[228]](#footnote-228) These transfusions establish their pact, but it is Lucy’s death that cements it. Similarly, in *Lamia*, Apollonius’s penetrative gaze represents the triumph of conservative, patriarchal reason over uncertainty, mystery and doubt– the holy trinity of the negatively capable poet, which Lamia embodies.

The tragic climax of *Lamia* not only anticipates the fate of Lucy Westenra in *Dracula*, it also shows Keats’s engagement with the emerging figure of the Romantic vampire more broadly. The vampire looms large in British Romantic literature and manifests in a number of forms. Southey popularised the vampire-as-foreigner trope in *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801) and Byron continued this trend in his commercially successful poem *The Giaour* (1813) – an Oriental romance which owes much to William Beckford’s Gothic novel *Vathek* (1786). The vampire continued to gain currency during the first half of the nineteenth century, accelerated by the publication of Polidori’s *The Vampyre* and Byron’s ‘Fragment of a Novel’ in 1819, both of which grew out of the infamous ghost story competition at the Villa Diodati three years before. Polidori’s tale was heavily influenced by Lady Caroline Lamb’s roman à clef novel *Glenarvon* (1816) – a caustic attack on her former lover Lord Byron, whom she casts as a corrupt nobleman named Clarence de Ruthven. Although Lamb’s novel is not a vampire narrative *per se*, her presentation as Ruthven as nocturnal and dangerously alluring paved the way for the figure of the Byronic vampire. Polidori’s appropriation of Lord Ruthven in his own novel elevated the vampire to the ranks of the British nobility, which laid the groundwork for Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897). Polidori’s novel may not be the first vampire narrative in British Romanticism, but it is certainly the most influential, in that it was ‘the first story successfully to fuse the disparate elements of vampirism into a coherent literary genre.’[[229]](#footnote-229) The transmutation of the vampire into an alluring and articulate figure made him all the more terrible, as his ability to assimilate threatened to collapse the boundary between man and monster. Mary Shelley touches on this in *Frankenstein* when Victor considers his creation ‘nearly in the light of my own vampire, my own spirit let loose from the grave, and forced to destroy all that was dear to me’.[[230]](#footnote-230) Victor’s anxieties stem, in part, from the knowledge that he and the creature are bound by their similarities, not divided by their differences. The use of the word ‘nearly’ demonstrates Victor’s rejection of the paternal bond he shares with his creature, whom he relegates to the realm of phantoms by repeatedly referring to him as a ‘fiend’ (p. 138) , a ‘devil’ (p. 122), a ‘wretch’ and a ‘miserable monster’ (p. 104). However, the repetition of ‘my own’ suggests that, even as he rejects his creation, Victor recognises that he is bound to him. Like Polidori’s *The Vampyre*, Shelley’s novel is concerned with the idea of oaths. Nina Auerbach states that ‘Intimacy and friendship are the lures of Romantic vampirism’, citing Aubrey’s oath to Ruthven (an echo of the pact between the narrator and Darvell in ‘Fragment of a Novel’) as evidence of their homoerotic bond.[[231]](#footnote-231) The pledge between Victor and the creature is of a different order, in that it has nothing to do with intimacy or friendship: the creature has to threaten Victor before he agrees to create a bride for him. Ultimately, Victor breaks his promise, whereas Aubrey keeps his. Nevertheless, oaths prove fatal in both narratives, whether fulfilled or not. Significantly, both Elizabeth and Aubrey’s sister are dispatched on their wedding nights. This suggests that heterosexual marriage represents a threat to the homoerotic bond Auerbach describes. When in *Frankenstein* the creature tells Victor ‘I shall be with you on your wedding-night’ (p. 214), the underlying threat of rape is palpable. Victor takes this speech to mean that the creature will snatch him away from Elizabeth (‘I thought of my beloved Elizabeth, - of her tears and endless sorrow, when she should find her lover so barbarously snatched from her’ - p. 214) when in actuality, it is Elizabeth – the obstacle between these two men - who is snatched away in death. Likewise, in *Lamia*, Apollonius’s interruption of the wedding can be read as an attempt to remove the obstacle standing between him and his ‘young disciple’ (*Lamia*, II: 164).

While *The Vampyre* and *Frankenstein* feature male bonds at the centre of their narratives, Coleridge’s *Christabel* departs from this trajectory and offers a tale of erotic female kinship, casting a long shadow in its wake. Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* is its most eminent descendant, but *Lamia* owes much to *Christabel*, too. Exploring the distinction between male and female vampire stories, James B. Twitchell argues: ‘While the male vampire story was a tale of domination, the female version was one of seduction.’[[232]](#footnote-232) He goes on to list *Christabel*, *Lamia* and ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’ as examples of female vampire stories wherein the victim is drained and weakened (although the penetrative act of bloodsucking is absent) by ‘an older supernatural temptress’.[[233]](#footnote-233) In each of these encounters, ‘the young man is introduced to the perplexities of manhood’ and the threshold between boyhood and manhood is crossed. The thematic and aesthetic similarities between *Christabel* and *Lamia* are plentiful, yet Keats’s portrayal of the femme fatale diverges from Coleridge’s in that it is Apollonius, not Lamia, who possesses the demonic eyes. As Orrin N. C. Wang observes, appearances are deceiving: ‘Lamia begins in the poem as a snake with human eyes, while Apollonius has a petrifying serpentine stare… and a human form’.[[234]](#footnote-234) The image of Apollonius’s ‘juggling eyes’ (II: 277) evokes the moment in Coleridge’s *Christabel* when Geraldine ‘slowly rolled her eyes around’ (I: 246) as she reveals her frightful bosom.[[235]](#footnote-235) It is Apollonius, not the serpent Lamia, who shares Geraldine’s hypnotic, Medusan gaze. As Hogle has shown, the image of Geraldine’s eyes, which shrink in her head ‘to a serpent’s eye’ (II: 585) hark back to the eyes of the Bleeding Nun in Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk*, which are ‘endowed with the property of the Rattle-snake’s’ (p. 129). Hogle also draws comparisons between *Christabel* and the novels of Ann Radcliffe: for instance, the way that Geraldine watches the sleeping Christabel ‘reworks that moment in Radcliffe’s *The Italian* (1797) when the menacing Schedoni (a precursor of Geraldine in his penetrating eyes) approaches the sleeping Ellena with intentions, like Geraldine’s, finally torn between harming or saving the recumbent object of his voyeurism.’[[236]](#footnote-236) The similarity between Geraldine’s eyes and Schedoni’s gaze reinforces the idea that she is a sexual predator, yet her resemblance to the Bleeding Nun - a character who is constructed as evil yet does not actually pose a palpable threat to the heroine - emphasises the ambiguity of her character. Coleridge’s unfinished poem ‘is a genuine tug-of-war between views about women’, in that he struggles to resolve the Gothic’s tendency to file its female characters into mutually exclusive categories of good or bad.[[237]](#footnote-237) In *Lamia*, Keats shows that the female protagonist can be both: Lamia is ‘A virgin purest, yet in the lore Of love deep learnèd to the red heart’s core’ (I: 189-190); she is both woman and serpent, femme fatale and tragic victim.

By staging Lamia’s oppression by a destructive, patriarchal gaze embodied by Hermes, Lycius and Apollonius, Keats not only challenges fatal woman narratives, but his complicity in them. Like the lady in ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’, Lamia still disappears at the end of the poem, which seems to suggest that Keats does not fully overcome his ‘evil thoughts’ and ‘suspicions’ about women. On the other hand, her disappearance is an act of defiance: she makes herself invisible, thereby freeing herself from the destructive patriarchal gaze. The final word in *Lamia* is perhaps the key to unravelling its notorious knottiness: Keats’s use of the double entendre ‘wound’ is, like Lamia herself, deeply ambiguous. Within the line of verse, ‘wound’ is a verb that draws the reader’s attention to the ‘heavy body’ coiled within ‘its marriage robe’ (II: 311). It is worth noting here that the ‘heavy body’ in the robe could be Lamia’s after she has reverted back to snake form (in which case she is dehumanised and reduced to an ‘it’) or Lycius’s. The latter seems more likely, given that Keats tells us that Lamia has ‘vanishèd’ (II: 306). If the body is indeed Lycius’s corpse, then it is significant that Keats describes it as coiled (‘wound’) like a snake. The ambiguity of this final image, and indeed the elasticity of the all-important word this image hinges upon, prompts us to consider not just *what* we are seeing, but *how*. Isolated from the rest of the line, the word ‘wound’ connotes trauma, which gestures towards the physical and psychological injury Apollonius’s piercing gaze inflicts on Lamia, but it also refers to a gap, like the one left in the narrative by Lamia’s disappearance. Like the tragic heroine of the poem, the meaning of ‘wound’ is not fixed. By concluding the poem with Lamia’s disappearance, Keats invites us to consider the difference between seeing and looking. Apollonius ‘gaze[s] into her eyes’ (II: 256) - the supposed windows to the soul - but fails to see the humanity therein. His ‘sophist’s eye’ (II: 299) is incapable of recognising Lamia’s true nature; he only sees the embodiment of a ‘foul dream’ (II: 271). Keats makes this explicit in the line: ‘There was no recognition in those orbs’ (II: 260). By calling Apollonius’s eyes ‘orbs’, Keats highlights the inhumanity of his gaze. As readers, we are encouraged to judge Apollonius for his cruelty, yet we must also acknowledge our own position as complicit spectators: we *look* at Lamia, but do we ever truly *see* her? Our perception of Lamia is inextricably bound to her terrible beauty, and Keats writes in such a manner that we cannot look away from her Ovidian transformation or spectacular unravelling. Moreover, Lamia’s existence is wholly dependent upon how she is perceived by others. She ‘[throws] the goddess off’ (336) and becomes a woman so that Lycius will desire her, but by ‘playing woman’s part’ (337), she makes herself more vulnerable to Apollonius’s piercing gaze. Keats’s critical depiction of Apollonius suggests that Lamia must be understood aesthetically, not scientifically. To truly see Lamia, one must adopt an artist’s perspective, rather than a ‘sophist’s eye’ (II: 299).[[238]](#footnote-238) As Peter de Bolla observes, there was a flourishing of works on perspective in the eighteenth century, and John Brisbane’s *The Anatomy of Painting: or a short and easy introduction to anatomy* (1796) is particularly illuminating in reference to Keats’s exploration of looking in *Lamia*. Brisbane ‘explains that an anatomist should look upon the human body with the eye of a painter in order to duplicate what he terms ‘picturesque anatomy.’ The anatomist needs the drawing skills of the artist in order to represent the human body adequately, but what does the artist learn from the anatomist?’.[[239]](#footnote-239) As a poet-physician, Keats is uniquely positioned to see Lamia from both perspectives.[[240]](#footnote-240) Indeed**,** we might reverse de Bolla’s question and ask instead: what can the anatomist learn from the artist? Or, more specifically, what can the sophist learn from the poet? The difference between the artist’s way of looking and the anatomist’s way of looking is also pertinent to the next chapter, in which I use eighteenth-century theories of aesthetic taste as a contextual basis for my reading of Keats’s poems about Gothic consumption.**Chapter 3: Taste**

In his essay ‘The Poet as Hero: Keats in His Letters’, Lionel Trilling suggests that Keats differs from Wordsworth in his treatment of the senses. Wordsworth, he argues, privileges seeing and hearing, but Keats makes no such ‘distinction of prestige’.[[241]](#footnote-241) Despite Keats’s non-hierarchical approach to the senses, Trilling places particular emphasis on taste. He writes: ‘with Keats, the ingestive imagery is pervasive and extreme. He is possibly unique among poets in the extensiveness of his references to eating and drinking and to its pleasurable, or distasteful, sensations.’[[242]](#footnote-242) He even goes as far as declaring that ‘it is, of course, exactly the appetitive image and the frankness of his appetite that we cannot dispense with in our understanding of Keats. Eating and delicacies of taste are basic and definitive in his experience and in his poetry.’[[243]](#footnote-243) Keats’s emphasis on taste as a bodily sensation is the main focus of this chapter, but any discussion of taste in the Romantic period would be incomplete without reference to the theories of aesthetic judgement that emerged in the eighteenth century. Writing in the midst of what Denise Gigante calls ‘the Romantic revolution in taste’, Keats’s poetry coincides with the rise of gastronomical writing in the period, in which writers ‘reclaimed the term “gourmand” from its former associations with gluttony.’[[244]](#footnote-244) Gigante argues that ‘Romantic gastronomers embraced with gusto what Enlightenment taste philosophers had struggled to comprehend: the analogy inherent in the concept of taste between physical perception (with the tongue and the palate) and aesthetic appreciation.’[[245]](#footnote-245) The prominent Enlightenment philosophers of taste were Joseph Addison, David Hume, Hugh Blair and Edmund Burke. In ‘Taste and the Pleasures of the Imagination’ - a series of eleven papers published in *The Spectator* nos. 409 and 411-21 (1712) - Addison uses the metaphor of a tea connoisseur whose palate is refined enough to recognise the different leaves in a blend to describe how ‘A man of fine taste in writing will discern . . . not only the general beauties and imperfections of an author, but discover the several ways of thinking and expressing himself, which diversify him from all other authors’.[[246]](#footnote-246) According to Addison, some people are born with natural good taste, but ‘there are several methods for cultivating and improving it’, such as conversation and extensive reading, which exposes an individual to a greater variety of writing.[[247]](#footnote-247) Along with Richard Steele, Addison adopted the Kantian concept of ‘aesthetic disinterestedness’ in his assessment of aesthetic taste.[[248]](#footnote-248) Sanjeev Niraula explains: ‘This concept suggested that artworks had value on their own, separate from any moral or intellectual messages they conveyed. It meant that a work of art should be judged based on its structure and inherent meaning.’[[249]](#footnote-249) This view was shared by David Hume, who, in his essay ‘Of the Standard of Taste’ (1757) argues that all knowledge is derived from sensory experience. Keats echoes this empirical view in his statement ‘Nothing ever becomes real till it is experienced’ (*LJK*, II: 81). Like Addison, Hume argues that taste is improveable through ‘perfect serenity of mind, a recollection of thought, [and] a due attention to the object’.[[250]](#footnote-250) Keats echoes Hume again in his belief that ‘The Genius of Poetry’ is ‘matured . . . by sensation & watchfulness’ (*LJK*, I: 374). Similarly, Hugh Blair’s ideas on taste in his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783) - namely the view that taste (which he defines as the pleasure we received from the beauty of nature and art) derives from sensory experience (rather than reason) and can be improved through education, culture, attention and common sense.[[251]](#footnote-251) Central to Blair’s rationalist approach is the belief that taste is founded on sensibility - a view that is also espoused by Edmund Burke in the preface to *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1759). According to Burke, taste refers to ‘that faculty or those faculties of the mind, which are affected with, or which form a judgement of, the works of imagination and the elegant arts’.[[252]](#footnote-252) He proposes that we share common ‘principles of taste’[[253]](#footnote-253) when it comes to aesthetics: ‘there is in all men a sufficient remembrance of the original natural causes of pleasure, to enable them to bring all things offered to their senses to that standard, and to regulate their feelings and opinions by it’.[[254]](#footnote-254) His argument is grounded in the belief that we have a natural sense of pleasure of pain when it comes to the palate (e.g., most people agree that honey is sweet and vinegar is sour) and while it is possible to acquire a taste for bitter or sour things(e.g., tobacco, opium, or spirits), this is due to their pleasing *effects*. Burke surmises that ‘the pleasure of all the senses [...] is the same in all, high and low, learned and unlearned’.[[255]](#footnote-255) In other words, differences of taste are in fact differences of knowledge and experience. To illustrate this, he asks the reader to imagine an anatomist looking at a painting with a critical eye. The anatomist ‘observes what the painter has not’, but that does notmean that the painter lacks ‘natural good Taste’, only the anatomist’s knowledge of the human form.[[256]](#footnote-256) This example is particularly interesting with regards to Keats, whose medical knowledge and poetic imagination are intimately connected. Burke concludes that a want of taste arises when there is a defect of *sensibility*, whereas the ‘cause of wrong Taste is a defect of judgement’; therefore, ‘good’ taste can be cultivated with knowledge and practice.[[257]](#footnote-257) Burke’s ideas on taste paved the way for William Hazlitt’s essay on gusto in art (*The Examiner*, 1816). In this essay, Hazlitt proposes that ‘Gusto in art is power or passion defining any object’.[[258]](#footnote-258) As Gigante notes, this essay became ‘a manifesto, perhaps *the* manifesto, of the Romantic revolution in taste, for it gives a name to Romanticism’s gustatory aesthetics’[[259]](#footnote-259) For Hazlitt, John Milton is the ultimate ‘gourmand in the Romantic sense of the term’[[260]](#footnote-260) because ‘his imagination has a double relish of its objects’.[[261]](#footnote-261) Keats ‘eagerly devoured Hazlitt’s idea of gusto’[[262]](#footnote-262) and incorporated aspects of it into his definition of the ‘camelion Poet’ as one who ‘lives in gusto’ and ‘relish[es]’ the ‘dark side of things’ as much as the ‘bright’. Beyond this particular letter, Keats’s correspondence is replete with gustatory images. The nectarine Keats describes in a September 1819 letter to Charles Wentworth Dilke is perhaps the most iconic example of his palatal poetics:

Talking of Pleasure, this moment I was writing with one hand, and with the other holding to my Mouth a Nectarine – good God how fine. It went down soft, pulpy, slushy, oozy – all its delicious embonpoint melted down my throat like a large beatified Strawberry. (*LJK*, II: 179)

This image of the poet simultaneously writing and eating foregrounds the relationships between consuming, taste and the imagination in Keats’s writing. It is significant that he describes himself holding a pen in one hand and a nectarine in the other, as this suggests a causal link between the taste of the nectarine and his mouth-watering use of onomatopoeia. The ‘soft, pulpy, slushy, oozy’ nectarine is a symbol of the poet’s ripe and fruitful imagination, but it is also what sustains it. This passage conjures a vivid image of Keats literally feeding his imagination. The pleasure of taste gives way to the pleasure of language. The sensual enjoyment of food and drink characterises many of Keats’s epistolary entries. An example of this can be seen in a letter to the George Keatses on 19 February 1819 in which he declares a ‘palate-passion’ for claret and game:

I never drink now above three glasses of wine-and never have any spirits and water. Though by the bye the other day-Woodhouse took me to his coffee house-and ordered a Bottle of Claret-now I like Claret whenever I can have Claret I must drink it.-'t is the only palate affair that I am at all sensual in [...] For really 't is so fine-it fills the mouth one's mouth with a gushing freshness-then goes down cool and feverless-then you do not feel it quarrelling with your liver-no it is rather a Peace maker and lies as quiet as it did in the grape-then it is as fragrant as the Queen Bee; [...] Other wines of a heavy and spirituous nature transform a Man to a Silenus; this makes him a Hermes. (*LJK*, II: 64)

This passage suggests a sensible, even restrained approach to the affairs of the palate. His rule of ‘never’ drinking more than three glasses of wine supports Angus Graham-Campbell’s claim that Keats was a ‘moderate drinker’.[[263]](#footnote-263) His epicurean description of claret is, in his own words, deeply ‘sensual’, and he presents himself as a connoisseur of good taste, whose palate is too refined for the ‘quarrelling’ effects of lesser draughts that ‘transform a Man’ into a corpulent, ruddy Silenus.[[264]](#footnote-264) Keats’s association of claret with Hermes, the god of oratorship and language (among other things), suggests that he saw a certain level of intoxication as conducive to creativity. The ‘gushing freshness’ of claret recalls his rapturous response to the ‘soft, pulpy, slushy, oozy’ nectarine, which melts down his throat like the ‘cool’ and ‘fragrant’ wine.

As these passages show, Keats spares no detail when describing the sensory pleasures of eating and drinking, and some readers have found this excess unpalatable. As Gigante observes, Keats’s appetite was emphasised by later poets. Elizabeth Bishop took exception to ‘his unpleasant insistence on the *palate*’,[[265]](#footnote-265) Thomas Carlyle saw him as ‘a miserable creature, hungering after sweets which he can’t get’,[[266]](#footnote-266) and Yeats imagined him as a ‘coarse-bred’ school-boy with his ‘face and nose pressed to a sweet-shop window’.[[267]](#footnote-267) These last two images echo John Gibson Lockhart’s vicious attack on Keats in the fourth ‘Cockney School of Poetry’ essay for *Blackwood’s Magazine*. Like Carlyle and Yeats, ‘Z’ (John Gibson Lockhart) infantilises Keats by calling him a ‘youthful poet’, an ‘ignorant’ pretender, a writer of ‘juvenile’ poems, a ‘bantling’, and ‘a young Cockney rhymster’ who has ‘stooped to profane and vulgarise’ classical poetry and ‘lisp sedition’.[[268]](#footnote-268) Comparing Keats to Leigh Hunt, Lockhart continues: ‘Mr Hunt is a small poet, but he is a clever man. Mr Keats is a still smaller poet, and he is only a boy of pretty abilities, which he has done every thing in his power to spoil.’[[269]](#footnote-269) As Nicholas Roe has suggested, this comparison is a pointed swipe at Keats’s short stature as well as his perceived immaturity as a poet.[[270]](#footnote-270) Hunt is reviled, but he is at least ‘a clever man’. Keats, by contrast, is a ‘boy’ whose ‘pretty abilities’ are not only puerile and vulgar but coded as effeminate by his use of the adjective ‘pretty’.[[271]](#footnote-271) Lockhart’s contempt for the ‘Cockney School’ is shared by Byron, who describes their style as ‘soft and pamby’ and objects to ‘their vulgarity’:

By this I do not mean that they are *coarse*, but “shabby-genteel”, as it is termed [...] Far be it for me to presume that there ever was, or can be, such a thing as an *aristocracy* of *poets*; but there is a nobility of thought and of style, open to all stations, and derived partly from talent, and partly from education . . . which is nowhere to be perceived in the mock birds and bards of Mr. Hunt’s little chorus.[[272]](#footnote-272)

Byron’s obvious classism echoes Lockhart’s extended metaphor of disease to describe the ‘incurable’ affliction of ‘poetical mania’ - a ‘state of insanity’ he attributes to writers from less privileged socioeconomic backgrounds who have the audacity to write poetry (‘our very footmen compose tragedies’).[[273]](#footnote-273) He says of Keats:

This young man appears to have received from nature talents of an excellent, perhaps even of a superior order – talents which, devoted to the purposes of any useful profession, must have rendered him a respectable, if not an eminent citizen. His friends, we understand, destined him to the career of medicine and he was bound apprentice some years ago to a worthy apothecary in town. But all has been undone by a sudden attack of the malady to which we have alluded. Whether Mr. John had been sent home with a diuretic or composing draught to some patient far gone in the poetical mania, we have not heard. This much is certain, that he has caught the infection, and that thoroughly.[[274]](#footnote-274)

Lockhart’s message is clear: Keats’s poetic pretensions are the product of a diseased mind. He implies that poetry is not a ‘useful profession’, therefore an individual such as ‘Mr. John’ should have no business writing it. What seems to offend Lockhart is not the poetry itself (though he certainly criticises that, too) but Keats’s transgression of class boundaries. Lockhart’s attack concludes with a patronising piece of advice: ‘It is a better and a wiser thing to be a starved apothecary than a starved poet; so back to the shop, Mr. John’. Of course, Lockhart had a different shop in mind to the sweet-shop Yeats imagines Keats peering into, and yet, his comment carries the same implication: Keats is an outsider looking in, hungering after something he cannot get at. Yeats’s description of Keats as ‘poor, ailing and ignorant, / Shut out from all the luxury of the world’ also echoes Lockhart’s earlier rebuff. Keats’s economic situation was far from prosperous, but the question of his class status is more complex than the remarks from Lockhart and Yeats imply. Although he was ‘far down the social scale from the upper-class Shelley and aristocratic Byron’, he was hardly a starving artist.[[275]](#footnote-275) However, he *was* hungry for fame and knowledge. This is apparent in the sonnets ‘On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again’ and ‘When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be’. In the former, the speaker declares that he must once again taste ‘The bitter-sweet of this Shakespearian fruit’ (8) and in the latter, ‘high-pilèd books’ bear the ‘full ripened grain’ (3-4) of poetic achievement. Keats’s food metaphors remind us that the literary text is also a consumable; the act of reading is a form of ingestion. ‘On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again’ describes an encounter with great art that nourishes the poet’s imagination. The challenge of reading Shakespeare provides food for thought. If great art sustains the imagination, does ‘bad’ art impoverish or sicken it? Critics of the Gothic certainly believed so.

In the 1790s and early 1800s, anxieties about consuming Gothic literature abounded. The fervent appetite for Gothic novels in Keats’s lifetime was accompanied by a reactionary ‘anti-Gothic’ pushback, with critics of the genre emphasising its unpalatable and indigestible qualities. For example, John and Anna Laetita Aikin ‘The greediness with which the tales of ghosts and goblins, of murders, earthquakes, fires, shipwrecks, and all the most terrible disasters attending human life, are devoured by every ear, must have been generally remarked. Tragedy, the most favourite work of fiction, has taken a full share of those scenes; ‘it has supt full with horrors’[[276]](#footnote-276) Another notable example of this can be seen in Coleridge’s review of *The Monk*:

The horrible and preternatural have usually seized on the popular taste, at the rise and decline of literature. Most powerful stimulants, they can never be required except by the torpor of an unawakened, or the languor of an exhausted, appetite […] Figures that shock the imagination, and narratives that mangle the feelings, rarely discover *genius*, and always betray a low and vulgar *taste*.[[277]](#footnote-277)

The language Coleridge uses to describe the Gothic and its readers is distinctly gastrocentric: the words ‘taste’, ‘stimulants’, ‘torpor’, ‘languor’ and ‘appetite’ conjure an image of ingestion followed by indigestion. His suggestion that consuming the Gothic overstimulated the imagination reflects the popular belief of the time that reading too many Gothic novels was bad for one’s health.For Coleridge, the effects of reading *The Monk* (and, by extension, similar works of fiction) are visceral and embodied; these texts have the power to ‘shock’ the reader and ‘mangle the feelings’. Such a strong emotional reaction would surely cause havoc with one’s digestion and nervous system.. Although Coleridge’s review of *The Monk* is more measured than most, his tone is still contemptuous. Despite acknowledging Lewis’s flashes of genius, Coleridge regards this type of writing as indicative of ‘a low and vulgar *taste*’. Coleridge’s sentiments are echoed by the anonymous author of ‘Terrorist Novel Writing’ (1798), who complains of the ‘the great quantity of novels with which our circulating libraries are filled, and our parlour tables covered, in which it has been the fashion to make *terror the order of the day*’.[[278]](#footnote-278) This extended metaphor continues:

In the mean time, should any of your female readers be desirous of catching the season of terrors, she may compose two or three very pretty volumes from the following recipe:

*Take* – An old castle, half of it ruinous.

A long gallery, with a great many doors, some secret ones.

Three murdered bodies, quite fresh.

As many skeletons, in chests and presses,

An old woman hanging by the neck; with her throat cut.

Assassins and desperados ‘*quant suff*’.

Noise, whispers, and groans, threescore at least.

Mix them together, in the form of three volumes to be taken at any of the watering places, before going to bed.[[279]](#footnote-279)

Not only is the Gothic reduced to a simple recipe that anyone can follow, but it is also synonymous with illness. Like the flu, one can catch the ‘season of terrors’. The emphasis on ‘female readers’ echoes Thomas Gisbourne’s *An Enquiry Into the Duties of the Female Sex* (1797), in which he argues that novels ‘Devoured with indiscriminate and insatiable avidity’ inflamed the female ‘appetite’.[[280]](#footnote-280) However, as Clery and Miles note, there is a difference between sincere, censorious criticism and satire:

Whereas serious criticism holds that the fictions are dangerous, proposes their censorship and inadvertently promotes their consumption as ‘forbidden fruit’, squibs like ‘Terrorist Novel Writing’ depend on the easy availability of the target texts. Their humour is based on familiarity, with at most a vague intention to diminish the popularity of their object by ridicule.[[281]](#footnote-281)

There is a striking parallel between ‘Terrorist Novel Writing’ and the vitriol Lockhart aims at Keats in his ‘Cockney School’ essays: like the Gothic novel, Keats’s writing is deemed vulgar, low-brow, derivative and, crucially, indicative of bad taste. We might also note the similarity between Gisbourne’s pontificating and Woodhouse’s concern that *The Eve of St Agnes* was ‘unfit for ladies’ (*LJK*, II: 163).

Byron’s description of Keats’s poetry as ‘a Bedlam vision produced by raw pork and opium’ suggests that there is something unhealthy and excessive about Keats’s imagination.[[282]](#footnote-282) While there is no evidence to substantiate Byron’s claim that Keats induced poetic visions by consuming raw meat and using opium, he was certainly interested in the relationship between consuming and creativity, both in his correspondence and his poetry. Keats’s poems are full of opulent feasts and intoxicating draughts that enchant or anaesthetise the speaker/character. As Lucasta Miller observes ‘The idea of forbidden fruits – of luscious but dangerous eating – is a repeated image in Keats’s poetry’.[[283]](#footnote-283) Dangerous draughts are similarly ubiquitous. In *Lamia*, *The Eve of St Agnes*, ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’, ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ and ‘Ode on Melancholy’, food and drink - whether tasted or not - is a locus of anxiety. Food and drink are often highly suspect in Gothic narratives. As Zara-Louise Stubbs observes: ‘Gothic novels often play host to lavish tables accompanied by—often suggestively coloured—wine fetched from the best cellar of a mysterious, dark-haired count or countess.’[[284]](#footnote-284)For example, when Jonathan Harker arrives at Count Dracula’s castle, his host welcomes him with a supper of roast chicken and regional wine. His subsequent enslavement of Harker perverts the law of hospitality.[[285]](#footnote-285) A similar dynamic can be seen in Ann Radcliffe’s *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) when Adeline, having been abducted by the Marquis, finds herself in a richly decorated room with a table of delicacies at its centre:

In the middle of the apartment stood a small table spread with a collation of fruits, ices, and liqueurs. No person appeared. The whole seemed the works of enchantment, and rather resembled the palace of a fairy than any thing of human conformation.

Adeline was astonished, and inquired where she was; but the man refused to answer her questions; and having desired her to take some refreshment, left her […] What can this mean! said she: Is this a charm to lure me to destruction?[[286]](#footnote-286)

Adeline’s fear that this elaborate show of hospitality is a work of ‘enchantment’ and ‘a charm to lure [her] to destruction’ is partly prompted by the suspicious appearance of a ‘collation of fruits, ices and liqueurs’. The biblical symbolism of fruit hints at temptation and loss of innocence, while the ‘liqueurs’ suggest intoxication. Jakub Lipski argues that this ‘sensual stimuli’ of the scene leaves ‘little doubt as to the Marquis’ intentions.’[[287]](#footnote-287) The interior of the Marquis’ abode is designed in such a way as to hoodwink the heroine, yet Adeline ‘is not willing to succumb to the abundance of sensual pleasure at hand’.[[288]](#footnote-288) Her defiance is clearly shown in this passage:

He now led her, and she suffered him, to a seat near the banquet, at which he pressed her to partake of a variety of confectionaries, particularly of some liqueurs of which he himself drank freely: Adeline accepted only of a peach. (*The Romance of the Forest*, p. 156-157).

Adeline’s refusal to drink the liqueur, even when ‘pressed’, is a sign of her virtue in contrast with the Marquis’ licentious appetite. While the Marquis drinks ‘freely’, Adeline shows restraint by accepting only a peach (and it is unclear whether she eats it). Adeline reluctantly acknowledges that it is in her interests to play along with the Marquis’ deception (‘she thought it not improper, upon an occasion in which the honour and peace of her life was concerned, to yield somewhat to the policy of dissimulation’), yet she does not risk partaking of the banquet. Food and drink therefore signify danger and trickery. This is also true of the feasts in *The Eve of St Agnes* and *Lamia*, and the otherworldly nourishment in ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’. Keats alludes to *The Romance of the Forest* in *The Eve of St Agnes*, firstly through his use of the name (M)adeline, and secondly through Porphyro’s attempt to seduce the heroine with a scene of sensual enchantment. Porphyro uses similar techniques to the Marquis in Radcliffe’s novel to hoodwink Madeline: he prepares a feast of fruits and wine, and plays an ‘ancient ditty’ on his lute, just as the Marquis arranges for ‘soft music’ to be played at his banquet table to ‘enchant’ Adeline’s mind ‘in sweet delirium’. The pleasures of the palate are even more pronounced in the fair copy of *The Eve of St Agnes*:

'Twas said her future lord would there appear

Offering, as sacrifice–all in the dream–

Delicious food, even to her lips brought near,

Viands, and wine, and fruit, and sugar'd cream,

To touch her palate with the fine extreme

Of relish: then soft music heard, and then

More pleasures follow'd in a dizzy stream

Palpable almost: then to wake again

Warm in the virgin morn, no weeping Magdalen.

In this cancelled stanza, situated between the present stanzas VI and VII, Keats explains how the ritual is supposed to play out according to the lore of St. Agnes’ Eve.[[289]](#footnote-289) Instead of bringing the ‘Delicious food’ tantalisingly close to Madeline's lips so that she can ‘in embalmèd darkness, guess each sweet’ (to borrow a phrase from ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, 43), Porphyro hastily heaps the provisions on the table with a ‘glowing hand’ (XXXI: 271) that burns with desire.[[290]](#footnote-290) This detail suggests that he is less committed to Madeline’s sensual experience than his own gratification. Keats uses the adjective ‘glowing’ again in Part II of *Lamia* when the titular character calls upon her ‘subtle servitors’ to ‘charm’ the banquet room in preparation for the ‘marriage feast’:

There was a noise of wings, till in short space

The glowing banquet-room shone with wide-arched grace.

A haunting music, sole perhaps and lone

Supportress of the faery-roof, made moan

Throughout, as fearful the whole charm might fade.

Fresh carved cedar, mimicking a glade

Of palm and plantain, met from either side,

High in the midst, in honour of the bride:

Two palms and then two plantains, and so on,

From either side their stems branch'd one to one

All down the aisled place; and beneath all

There ran a stream of lamps straight on from wall to wall.

So canopied, lay an untasted feast

Teeming with odours. (*Lamia*, II: 120-133)

Like the marquis in *The Romance of the Forest,* Lamia assumes the role of host; only here, the ‘work of enchantment’ is unambiguously supernatural. Everything about this scene suggests ephemerality, as if Lamia’s magic is fading. The ‘noise of wings’ suggests that her ‘viewless servants’ are not of this world; they are evanescent and insubstantial as ghosts. This is compounded by Keats’s personification of ‘haunting music’ as the ‘lone / Supportress of the faery-roof’. This image of a female figure groaning (‘made moan’) under the weight of a ‘charm’ that could ‘fade’ at any moment draws our attention to Lamia’s struggle to maintain the illusion she has created. The uncanny details of the banquet room also testify to this struggle. For example, the ‘Fresh carved cedar, mimicking a glade of palm and plantain’ suggests that Lamia is trying to conjure a bower-like environment that resembles her forest home, but the symmetrical canopy of ‘Two palms and then two plantains, and so on’ is obviously unnatural. The artifice of the banquet room is similar to Porphyro’s scene-setting in *The Eve of St Agnes*. In particular, the ‘untasted feast’ recalls the untouched meal of spiced fruits Porphyro prepares in Madeline’s bedchamber. These scenes of artful subterfuge draw attention to the characters’ intentions: both Lamia and Porphyro want to maintain an illusion and keep their lovers in a state of enchantment. However, Lamia's ‘charm’ is fragile and liable to ‘fade’, whereas Madeline’s ‘midnight charm’ is ‘Impossible to melt as iced stream’ (XXXII: 283-4). Lamia’s magic is more precarious than Porphyro’s ‘stratagem’ (XVI: 139). Indeed, Keats foreshadows Lamia’s fate in the following lines:

Approving all, she faded at self-will,

And shut the chamber up, close, hush’d and still,

Complete and ready for the revels rude,

When dreadful guests would come to spoil her solitude. (*Lamia*, II: 142-145)

Keats describes the ‘dreadful guests’ in disparaging terms: they are a ‘herd’ (II: 150) with ‘busy brain[s]’ (II: 150) who immediately become inebriated and rowdy: ‘for scarcely was the wine at flow; But when the happy vintage touch’d their brains, / Louder they talk [...] Flush’d were their cheeks, and bright eyes double bright’ (II: 202-214). The ‘bright eyes’ of the drunken guests contrast with Apollonius’s inhuman ‘orbs’, which are ‘without a twinkle or stir’. Like Coleridge’s ‘bright-eyed Mariner’ (*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, 20), who imposes himself on every third wedding guest, Apollonius’s unwelcome presence transgresses the rules of hospitality.[[291]](#footnote-291) He acknowledges his intrusion when he addresses Lycius thus: ‘“Tis no common rule, Lycius,” said he, “for uninvited guest / To force himself upon you’. Uninvited and unwelcome guests proliferate in Gothic literature, for example, in chapter V of Radcliffe’s *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), the Duke de Luovo stumbles upon a monastery in the mountains, where he requests shelter for the night. At first, he is ‘refused, and reprimanded for disturbing the convent at the hour sacred to prayer’, but when he pushes past the ‘thin shivering figure’ at the door, he is astonished to find ‘a company of friars, dressed in the habit of their order, placed round a table, which was profusely spread with wines and fruits’.[[292]](#footnote-292) Once inside, the Duke is once again rebuked for interrupting the festivities:

the Superior, dropping the goblet from his hands, endeavoured to assume a look of austerity, which his rosy countenance belied. The duke received a reprimand, delivered in the lisping accents of intoxication, and embellished with frequent interjections of hiccup. He made known his quality, his distress, and solicited a night's lodging for himself and his people. When the Superior understood the distinction of his guest, his features relaxed into a smile of joyous welcome; and taking him by the hand, he placed him by his side. (p. 90)

The Superior is clearly agitated by the Duke’s intrusion and only welcomes him when he recognises ‘the distinction of his guest’. He then orders for the table to be ‘covered with luxurious provisions’ and proceeds to offer his guest ‘a variety of the finest wines’ (p. 90). The Duke retires ‘highly elevated by monastic hospitality’ (p. 90), his initial trespass forgotten. A later example of the uninvited guest trope in the Gothic can be seen in chapter two of Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847) when Lockwood encounters the ‘churlish inhospitality’ of Heathcliff and his household.[[293]](#footnote-293) Unlike the vampire, who must be invited in, the living can turn up unannounced. In the Gothic, the presence of a stranger in one’s home – or indeed at one’s dinner table – is often fraught with anxiety. As Carmel Cedro and Lorna Piatti-Farnell observe, ‘food, eating and appetite can persuasively act as “Othering” devices’ in Gothic narratives such as *Dracula*, *Great Expectations* and *Jane Eyre*.[[294]](#footnote-294) Another example of this can be found in Daphne DuMaurier’s *Rebecca* (1938). Throughout the novel, the second Mrs de Winter’s dining experiences draw attention to her perceived inadequacies and her status as an interloper at Manderley. Every mealtime is a reminder that she does not belong and ought to be grateful just to have a seat at the (actual and metaphorical) table. The loaded dining tables in *The Eve of St Agnes* and *Lamia* are similarly fraught with anxiety, but they serve a different purpose: rather than highlighting the characters’ estrangement, they serve as harbingers that alert the reader to the heroines’ status as prey. The feasts remain uneaten, but Madeline and Lamia are consumed by a voracious male gaze. The provision of food and drink is no less ominous in ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’, which Gigante calls ‘Keats’s ballad on taste’.[[295]](#footnote-295) In this poem, food and drink are associated with erotic arousal. The supernatural seductress appears to feed the knight ‘roots of relish sweet, / And honey wild, and manna dew’ (VII: 25-26) before taking him to the bower of her ‘Elfin grot’ (VIII: 29). These syrupy refreshments, which recall the ‘candied’ fruits and ‘lucent syrops’ (XXX: 265-267) of *The Eve of St Agnes*, as well as the fruits and liqueurs in *The Romance of the Forest*, combine with the sound of the ‘faery’s song’ to create a heady atmosphere that captivates the knight and overwhelms his senses.[[296]](#footnote-296) This scene is redolent of Titania’s instructions to her fairy ministers in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*: ‘Feed him with apricocks and dewberries, / With purple grapes, green figs, and mulberries; /The honey-bags steal from the humble-bees […] And pluck the wings from painted butterflies / To fan the moonbeams from his sleeping eyes’ (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, 3.1.156-160). In fairyland, the provision of nourishment and comfort is part of an elaborate scheme to seduce and imprison an unwitting lover. Titania's intentions are explicitly sinister (‘Tie up my love's tongue. Bring him silently’ – 3.1.193), whereas the Belle Dame’s intentions are more ambiguous. If we accept the knight’s testimony and his characterisation of the Belle Dame as a merciless temptress, then we assume that the meal of roots and honey is poisonous. However, if we consider ‘the possibility that his sickened condition predates the proffered meal’, then we cannot say with certainty that feasting on fairy food is responsible for turning the knight’s dream of romance into a Gothic nightmare.[[297]](#footnote-297) In Gigante’s words ‘The knight may eat between the lines of the poem, but, as in “The Eve of St Agnes”, one never knows for certain whether any food has been consumed.’[[298]](#footnote-298) In this reading, the fairy is not a dangerous seductress intent on poisoning the knight, but a lover who nourishes him the only way she knows how.[[299]](#footnote-299) According to Gigante, the knight wastes away because ‘he is in no position to “taste”, or aesthetically to appreciate, the beauties that are presented to him.’[[300]](#footnote-300) He is ‘paradoxically, too hungry to experience taste.’[[301]](#footnote-301) Although Gigante is right to point out that we never actually see the knight eat the food, I would argue that the description of the roots as ‘relish sweet’ implies that he has tasted them. Roots are typically bitter, therefore, the fact that he is able to discern that these particular roots are ‘sweet’ suggests imbibement. The sweetness of the roots the knight ‘relish[es]’ suggests that they are not of this world, but rather, morsels of fairy enchantment.[[302]](#footnote-302) In Keats, food is often closely connected to sexuality. Not only is this evident in ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’, but also in a letter of 1818, in which he fantasises about a beautiful woman offering him food: ‘Sometimes when I am rather tired, I lean rather languishingly on a Rock, & long for some famous Beauty to get down from her Palfrey … & give me—a dozen or two capital roast-beef Sandwiches’ (to Mrs. Wylie, 6 August 1818 - *LJK*, I: 360). Keats’s fantasy features a decidedly less esoteric meal than ‘honey wild and manna dew’. Nevertheless, the image of the poet being offered an excessive amount of food (a dozen or two sandwiches, no less) by a ‘famous Beauty’ is erotically charged. The image of the women upon a ‘Palfrey’ anticipates the line ‘I sat her on my pacing steed’ (VI: 21) in ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’, only in Keats’s fantasy, the action is reversed: the lady dismounts, which suggests that she has more agency than the Belle Dame who is placed upon the horse by the knight. In Keats’s fantasy, the woman is not supernatural; she is simply a ‘famous Beauty’ who feeds him a decidedly human meal. In the poem, this innocent fantasy is transmuted into a horror story wherein the hero wastes away. Helen B. Ellis writes: ‘In poem after poem, and in his letters as well, feasting and sexuality are closely equated, so much so that eating and drinking become persistent metaphors for the hero’s relationship to his mistress’.[[303]](#footnote-303) Furthermore, she highlights the mother/infant dynamic in the knight’s relationship with the fairy - a dynamic that also characterises the relationship between Glaucus and Circe in Book III of *Endymion*, Isabella and Lorenzo in *Isabella, or The Pot of Basil*, and Moneta and the speaker in ‘The Fall of Hyperion’. Ellis surmises that Keats’s ‘maternal mistresses’ can be ‘destructive’ as well as nurturing; they can provide sustenance, but they can also take it away.[[304]](#footnote-304) The titular lady of ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’ offers the knight nourishment and comfort then leaves him to wander in a barren dream. Similarly, in *The Fall of Hyperion*, the poet-narrator wakes to find himself in the nightmarish lair of the Titans after enjoying the remnants of an unearthly feast. According to Kristeva, ‘Food becomes abject only if it is a border between two distinct entities or territories.’[[305]](#footnote-305)  In both ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’ and *The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream*, encounters with otherworldly food and drink allows the protagonists to cross over into another territory: the fairy realm of deathly kings and warriors in the former, and the realm of the faded Titans in the latter. The knight’s punishment for eating fairy food in ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’ is a living death; he is imprisoned within an eternal nightmare, where he must bear witness to the suffering of the ‘pale kings’, ‘princes’ and ‘warriors’ (X: 37-38) who have erred before him. Like the knight in ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’, imbibing unearthly food and drink enables the poet-narrator of *The Fall of Hyperion: Dream* to access supernatural knowledge, but this comes at a price. Gustatory transgression signals the end of the hero’s quest in ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’, but the feast in *The Fall of Hyperion*: A *Dream* is just the beginning.

This fragmented epic may not immediately strike readers as Gothic and yet Keats is just as concerned with the perils of feasting here as he is in *The Eve of St Agnes* and ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’. In all three poems, luxurious food and drink are closely associated with dreaming. *The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream* opens with a lyrical argument in which the narrator suggests that the ensuing events in the poem could be either a vision or a dream. This is followed by a sequence in which the poet-narrator stumbles upon an abandoned feast:

Methought I stood where trees of every clime,

Palm, myrtle, oak, and sycamore, and beech,

With plantain, and spice blossoms, made a screen;

In neighbourhood of fountains, by the noise

Soft showering in my ears, and, by the touch

Of scent, not far from roses. Turning round

I saw an arbour with a drooping roof

Of trellis vines, and bells, and larger blooms,

Like floral censers swinging light in air;

Before its wreathed doorway, on a mound

Of moss, was spread a feast of summer fruits,

Which, nearer seen, seem'd refuse of a meal

By angel tasted or our Mother Eve;

For empty shells were scattered on the grass,

And grape stalks but half bare, and remnants more,

Sweet smelling, whose pure kinds I could not know.

Still was more plenty than the fabled horn

Thrice emptied could pour forth, at banqueting

For Proserpine return'd to her own fields,

Where the white heifers low. And appetite

More yearning than on earth I ever felt

Growing within, I ate deliciously;

And, after not long, thirsted, for thereby

Stood a cool vessel of transparent juice

Sipp'd by the wander'd bee, the which I took,

And, pledging all the mortals of the world,

And all the dead whose names are in our lips,

Drank. That full draught is parent of my theme.

No Asian poppy nor elixir fine

Of the soon fading jealous Caliphat,

No poison gender'd in close monkish cell

To thin the scarlet conclave of old men,

Could so have rapt unwilling life away.

Among the fragrant husks and berries crush'd,

Upon the grass I struggled hard against

The domineering potion; but in vain:

The cloudy swoon came on, and down I sunk

Like a Silenus on an antique vase. (Canto I: 19-57)

Keats evokes all five senses in this passage: the speaker hears a ‘noise / Soft showering in [his] ears’, experiences ‘the touch / Of scent, not far from roses’ (a quintessential example of Keatsian synaesthesia), sees the feast (‘nearer seen, seem'd refuse of a meal’) and eats ‘deliciously’. Of all the senses Keats evokes in this passage, taste is most significant. The ‘domineering potion’ ostensibly brings on the speaker’s ‘cloudy swoon’ and allows him to cross over into the realm of the Titans. In contrast with the untouched banquet in *The Eve of St Agnes*, this feast has already been enjoyed; the ground is scattered with ‘empty shells’, ‘half bare’ grape stalks, ‘remnants’, ‘fragrant husks’ and ‘berries crush’d’. Even the ‘cool vessel of transparent juice’ has already been ‘Sipp’d by the wander’d bee’. The state of this feast suggests that it was not intended for the speaker – he merely stumbles across the leftovers. The remains of this feast may be ‘refuse of a meal’, but there is still ‘plenty’ left. Unlike the harvest fruits of ‘To Autumn’, these ‘summer fruits’ have yet to spoil. Nevertheless, we may wonder at the speaker’s craving for ‘husks’ and ‘remnants’. Leftover food and drink hardly seem appetising, and yet, the speaker experiences ‘appetite / More yearning than on earth [he] ever felt’. His unearthly yearning reflects the unearthliness of the food and drink before him.[[306]](#footnote-306) This is clearly not a meal for mere mortals, but a sacramental spread tasted by ‘angels’ and ‘Mother Eve’. These biblical allusions, which are somewhat at odds with the pagan setting, remind us that encounters with food and drink in Western literature are inherently fraught due to our grand narratives about dangerous eating and ‘dietary trespass’.[[307]](#footnote-307) As Kristeva writes: ‘the biblical text insists on maintaining the distance between man and God by means of dietary differentiation’, and when this distance is closed, punishment usually follows.[[308]](#footnote-308) The references to Eve and Proserpine trigger a sense of foreboding, as these figures caution against transgressive eating. Moreover, the mysterious ‘vessel of transparent juice’ that causes the speaker to sink into a ‘cloudy swoon [...] Like a Silenus on an antique vase’ highlights the causal link between intoxication and transcendent knowledge, in that the figure of Silenus is associated with prophecy as well as drunkenness. Keats does not only allude to ancient texts in this passage, but contemporary Gothic novels, too. The lines ‘No Asian poppy nor elixir fine / Of the soon fading jealous Caliphat, / No poison gender'd in close monkish cell’ allude to William Beckford’s *Vathek* (1786) and Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796). We know that Keats was familiar with Beckford’s novel, as he mentions the titular character in a letter to J. H. Reynolds (13 July 1818), which he wrote after a whisky-fuelled visit to the birthplace of Robert Burns:

The Man at the Cottage was a great Bore with his Anecdotes—I hate the rascal—his Life consists in fuz, fuzzy, fuzziest—He drinks glasses five for the Quarter and twelve for the hour,—he is a mahogany faced old Jackass who knew Burns—He ought to be kicked for having spoken to him [...] I sho’d like to employ Caliph Vathek to kick him (*LJK*, I: 324)

Here, Keats refers to the scene in the novel when Caliph Vathek orders his eunuch to kick a group of protesting *santons* (eastern holy men), though it could just as easily allude to the earlier sequence in which Vathek kicks ‘the Indian’ / ‘the Giaour’ for out-eating and out-drinking him at his own table.[[309]](#footnote-309) As Robert Gittings argued persuasively in *The Mask of Keats: A Study of Problems*, ‘Keats was undoubtedly an appreciative reader of *Vathek*’ and both Hyperion poems owe much to Beckford’s novel.[[310]](#footnote-310) Expanding on Gittings’s reading, Ellen Brinks suggests that the Hyperion poems and *Vathek* share an ‘obsession with secret knowledge’.[[311]](#footnote-311) What Brinks does not explore is how this obsession is connected to the protagonist’s appetites. In ‘The Fall of Hyperion’, the feast is a gateway of sorts to the secret realm of the Titans. Eating and drinking allows him to cross over into their realm and there gain the knowledge he needs to prove himself worthy. Vathek’s insatiable thirst for knowledge mirrors his insatiable appetite for food, drink and other pleasures. From the start, Beckford presents the Caliph as a glutton of the most extreme kind, who ‘pique[s] himself on being the greatest eater alive’.[[312]](#footnote-312) The poet-narrator of ‘The Fall of Hyperion’ bears no resemblance to Beckford’s hedonistic Caliph, but his sudden thirst (40) echoes the insatiable thirst that torments Vathek at the beginning of the novel. Vathek is punished for his pursuit of ‘secret knowledge’ because he is motivated by greed. His trajectory is one of descent, whereas Keats’s poet-narrator undertakes a journey of literal and spiritual ascent.Turning back Keats’s description of the mysterious drink in lines 29-31, it is probable, given Keats’s allusion to *Vathek*, that the ‘close monkish cell’ is an allusion to the poison Ambrosio administers to Antonia in Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk*. These Gothic allusions suggest that intoxication experienced by the poet-narrator is different to the intoxication caused by elixirs in the Gothic novel. By making it explicit that the draught is *‘No* Asian poppy nor elixir fine / Of the soon fading jealous Caliphat, / *No* poison gender'd in close monkish cell’ (my emphasis), Keats suggests that there are two different types of intoxication: the dangerous kind and the visionary kind. At first, it seems as though the poet-narrator has imbibed the dangerous kind, as he seems destined for a similar fate as the knight in ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’. Moneta warns him:

. . . 'If thou canst not ascend

'These steps, die on that marble where thou art.

'Thy flesh, near cousin to the common dust,

'Will parch for lack of nutriment thy bones

'Will wither in few years, and vanish so

'That not the quickest eye could find a grain

Like the knight who wakes to find himself ‘on the cold hill side’ surrounded by ‘starved lips in the gloam’, the poet-narrator’s punishment for his gustatory transgression is, ironically, the prospect of starvation (‘lack of nutriment’) and death (‘thy bones / Will wither’). He narrowly escapes this fate by completing Moneta’s challenges, thereby proving himself worthy to witness the fallen Titans through a vision. Ultimately, consuming otherworldly food and drink is the catalyst that enables the poet-narrator to access this special knowledge, therefore, his intoxication is the visionary kind, rather than the dangerous kind we see in the Gothic novels of Beckford and Lewis. As I discuss in the next section, Keats explores the different types of intoxication further in ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ and ‘Ode on Melancholy’.

The question of whether the great odes of 1819 form ‘a unified sequence’ has long preoccupied Keats scholars.[[313]](#footnote-313) In *Keats the Poet*, Stuart M. Sperry contends that ‘the odes have most to tell us when they are taken not only together as a group but as an integral part of Keats’s total achievement, as a mature reflection of the particular concerns with which he wrestled throughout his career.’[[314]](#footnote-314) Robert Gittings takes a different view. While he acknowledges that the May odes (*Indolence, Melancholy, Nightingale*, and *Grecian Urn*) ‘were composed . . . as a unity’, he insists that the order is unimportant and ‘there is no progress of thought from one ode to the other.’[[315]](#footnote-315) In contrast, Helen Vendler asserts: ‘Each ode is generated out of previous odes in part by image-transformations […] the wine in *Nightingale*, the grape of Joy in *Melancholy*, and the last drops of apple juice in *Autumn* are transmutations of that elixir which also appears (as transparent juice) in *The Fall of Hyperion*’.[[316]](#footnote-316) As Vendler’s comment highlights, the odes are replete with ingestive imagery. Food and drink do not appear explicitly in ‘Ode to Psyche’, ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ or ‘Ode on Indolence’, but Keats’s language in these poems subtly recalls the sensations of the palate. He describes the sound of the choir in ‘Ode to Psyche’ as ‘delicious’ (30) and conjures a striking image of thirst in the ‘parching tongue’ (30) of ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’. Even ‘Ode to Indolence’ hints at taste through the words ‘ripe’ (II: 15) and ‘honeyed’ (IV: 37). These lexical choices whet the reader’s appetite for a richer exploration of taste in ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ and ‘Ode on Melancholy’.

‘Ode to a Nightingale' opens with an oxymoronic declaration of pain and ‘drowsy numbness’ (I: 1) which the speaker compares to the effects of drinking ‘hemlock’ (I: 2). This immediate image of intoxication and self-annihilation sets the tone for the rest of the poem. The ‘draught of vintage’ (II: 11) Keats’s speaker longs for may taste like ‘Flora and the country green’ (II: 13), but it is no healing tonic; on the contrary, the draught in question threatens to leave behind a bloody ‘purple-stained mouth’ (II: 18). The ‘beaker full of the warm south’ (II 15) brims with the promise of poetic inspiration (‘the true, the blushful Hippocrene’ - II: 16), but this gift comes at a price: drink too deeply and you may ‘leave the world unseen’ (II: 19) and ‘dissolve’ (III: 21) into nothingness.[[317]](#footnote-317) Unlike the knight of ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’, whose gustatory transgression has deadly consequences, the benumbed speaker of ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ only fantasises about emptying ‘some dull opiate to the drains’ (I: 3). The allure of oblivion is interrupted by the word ‘Forlorn’ (VIII: 71), which ‘tolls’ the speaker back to his ‘sole self’ (VIII: 72). The ‘fancy’ (VIII: 73) evaporates, leaving behind a bitter taste. Like many of Keats’s poems, this ode is concerned with the failure of illusion. Its uneasy ending echoes the terminal passages of *The Eve of St Agnes* when Madeline, no longer ‘Hoodwink’d with faery fancy’ (VIII: 70), recognises the perilous reality of her situation. Upon waking, she describes herself as ‘A dove forlorn’ – the very word that brings the speaker of ‘Nightingale’ back to reality – only in *The Eve of St Agnes*, it is not enough to dispel the illusion that hangs over Madeline’s gothic fortress. The images of ‘bloated wassaillers […] Drown'd all in Rhenish and the sleepy mead’ (XXXIX: 346-349) and ‘the Porter, in uneasy sprawl, / With a huge empty flaggon by his side’ (XLI: 364-365) draw attention to the perils of intoxication. In his drunken state, the Porter forgets his duties and unknowingly lets the lovers flee into the ominous storm. Keats explores the relationship between intoxication, torpor, and forgetfulness further in the opening stanza of ‘Ode on Melancholy’:

No, no, go not to Lethe, neither twist

Wolf's-bane, tight-rooted, for its poisonous wine;

Nor suffer thy pale forehead to be kiss'd

By nightshade, ruby grape of Proserpine;

Make not your rosary of yew-berries,

Nor let the beetle, nor the death-moth be

Your mournful Psyche, nor the downy owl

A partner in your sorrow's mysteries;

For shade to shade will come too drowsily,

And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul. (I: 1-10)

The references to ‘Lethe’ and poisonous elixirs echo the opening stanzas of ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, only here the speaker renounces their tranquillising effects and instead advises:

But when the melancholy fit shall fall [...]

Then glut thy sorrow on a morning rose, [...]

Or if thy mistress some rich anger shows,

Emprison her soft hand, and let her rave,

And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes. (II: 11-20)

Keats’s advice is clear: instead of drowning your sorrows in ‘poisonous wine’, feast your eyes on beauty and savour the sensation of all strong emotions - even ‘anger’ (13). A healthy appetite for ‘light and shade’ (another echo of the negative capability letter) is necessary to overcome the lethargy brought on by ‘melancholy fit[s]’. All emotions are sustenance to the poet, whether sweet, bitter, or bittersweet, like the ‘Shakespearean fruit’ of ‘On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again’.[[318]](#footnote-318) Keats engages the taste buds again in the final stanza with the image of ‘Joy’s grape’ bursting against ‘his palate fine’. This grape of joy is evidently not the same variety as the ‘ruby grape of Proserpine’, which causes forgetfulness, drowsiness and, ultimately, death. On the contrary, this grape must be ‘burst’ by a ‘strenuous tongue’. Only then can the devourer ‘taste the sadness’ of Melancholy’s ‘might’ (III: 27-30). No dreams or visions appear in ‘Ode to Melancholy’, however, the drowsiness the speaker cautions against in the opening stanza is the same kind that causes the speaker of ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ to sink ‘Lethe-wards’. As Keats writes: ‘For shade to shade will come too drowsily, / And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul (9-10). ‘Drowsiness’ becomes ‘drown’, and the repetition of elongated vowel sounds evokes the effect of slowly sinking - perhaps into oblivion. In both odes, the speaker cautions against the dangers of forgetful intoxication. In this regard, they echo the broader theme of perilous consumption in Keats’s poems about taste.

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# **Chapter 4: Sound**

In her study of the ‘sonic Gothic’, Isabella van Elferen observes that ‘Gothic writers extend a significant role to sound and music in their literary evocation of uncanny atmospheres and ghostliness’.[[319]](#footnote-319) Notable examples of this include the ‘deep sigh’ from the portrait in *The Castle of Otranto*, the mysterious music that seems to foreshadow St Aubert’s death in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the effect of Ambrosio’s voice on Elvira and Antonia in *The Monk*, and indeed the noisiness of the Bleeding Nun in Lewis’s novel. As these examples illustrate, ‘sonic Gothic’ – that is, the study of how sound shapes meaning in Gothic texts – encompasses both ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’ sound – a distinction that is often obfuscated by its invisible nature. This chapter is particularly interested in the role of voice and music, which proceed from the human body (or, occasionally, the nonhuman animal body) in the form of speech, sighs, and singing. Gothic writers also create atmospheres of fear and unease through eerie silences; for example, Isabella’s descent into subterranean passages of the castle in *Otranto* is accompanied by an ‘awful silence’ punctuated by ‘blasts of wind’ and the sound of ‘rusty hinges’ (p. 53). As Angela M. Archambault observes, from the 1790s onwards, Gothic literature shifted from a predominantly ocular experience to an ‘auditory experience’.[[320]](#footnote-320) She argues that the novels of Radcliffe, Maturin and Lewis are ‘underscored by a sort of audio soundtrack of noise, music and voice’ that elicit strong sensations and heighten mystery.[[321]](#footnote-321) I argue that the same is true of Keats’s poetry. Like the Gothic genre itself, sound is an ungovernable force that ‘knows no real barrier’.[[322]](#footnote-322) While it may be possible to look away from objects of terror, ‘we cannot really soundproof ourselves from the triple threat force of music, voice and noise.’[[323]](#footnote-323)

When Keats writes of Radcliffean scenery in his letter to Reynolds on 14th March 1818, he conjures hollow spaces where acoustics are typically amplified: ‘I am going among scenery whence I intend to tip you the Damosel Radcliffe—I’ll cavern you, and grotto you, and water-fall you, and wood you, and water you, and immense-rock you, and tremendous-sound you, and solitude you’ (*LJK*, I: 245). Keats’s list of ‘tremendous’ sounds suggests that he was acutely aware of the aural soundscape of the Radcliffean Gothic. His own writing is similarly noisy: strange voices, haunting music and eerie silences proliferate throughout his oeuvre, amplifying sensations of terror and horror. The poems I focus on in this chapter demonstrate Keats’s engagement with the ‘sonic Gothic’. By listening attentively to Keats’s poetry, we can tune in to its Gothic frequencies.

***Isabella, or The Pot of Basil***

In *Gothic Voices*, Matt Foley delineates a new subgenre within the field of Gothic sound studies: ‘vococentric Gothic is an auditory experience; if we listen attentively to Gothic texts, even literature, we realise that the voice can often take precedence over visual Gothic motifs.’[[324]](#footnote-324) This term ‘refers to the moments in Gothic fiction when the voice produces sublimity, terror, horror, awe, mystery, seduction and more.’[[325]](#footnote-325) As I demonstrate in this section, *Isabella, or The Pot of Basil* is dominated by voices that cry out for justice. In *Gothic Pathologies: The Text, the Body and the Law*, David Punter contends that Gothic fiction is obsessed with the law and its relationship to the body.[[326]](#footnote-326) In response to Punter’s argument, Archambault proposes that ‘the Gothic novel’s tendency to depict sound as being an ungovernable power connects it with the notion of the uncontrollable body’.[[327]](#footnote-327) She goes on to say that ‘If the quality of the voice of justice is distorted, so too are the voices that would challenge the *status quo* [...] Groans, chants and voices of the dead are the manifestation of opposition to injustice.’[[328]](#footnote-328) Although this comment relates specifically to *Melmoth the Wanderer*, the same argument can be applied to Keats’s narrative poem *Isabella, or The Pot of Basil*. Much like *Hamlet*, *Isabella, or The Pot of Basil* is concerned with the voice of justice. In both texts, foul deeds demand to be heard.[[329]](#footnote-329) Adapted from a tale in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, the plot centres on a pair of star-crossed lovers who, like Madeline and Porphyro in *The Eve of St Agnes*, are kept apart by familial animosity. Their romance subverts the status quo, as Lorenzo is an employee in the service of Isabella’s brothers, and therefore a disadvantageous suitor. Lorenzo’s courtship of Isabella threatens the brothers’ wealth and status, so they conspire to murder him and marry Isabella to ‘some high noble’ (XXI: 168). As Beth Lau observes, ‘the brothers resemble the gloomy, tyrannical Gothic villain’ typified by Manfred in *The Castle of Otranto,* Montoni in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and Ambrosio in *The Monk*.[[330]](#footnote-330) In Boccaccio's tale, the brothers are reputable merchants who murder Lorenzo because they believe he has seduced their sister, but in this Gothicised reimagining, ‘Keats transforms these respectable businesses into proud, avaricious tyrants whose mercantile empire is founded upon the sweat and blood of thousands of exploited labourers’.[[331]](#footnote-331) Ultimately, their crimes refuse to remain buried. ‘Like Manfred, Ambrosio and a host of other Gothic tyrants’, the brothers are haunted by their despicable deeds: ‘Their crimes / Came on them, like a smoke from Hinnom’s vale; / And every night in dreams they groan’d aloud, / To see their sister in her snowy shroud.’ (XXXIII: 261-262). Foley argues: ‘In the early Gothic novel, a moan [or groan] may act as a demand or call for justice [...] In Walpole, the groan is a sign that the ‘time is out of joint’, and that fate itself has been affronted by Manfred’s usurpation of the throne. In Radcliffe [*A Sicilian Romance*], the mother’s moans indicate, too, an injustice from the past that remains hidden in the present.’[[332]](#footnote-332) Interestingly, the only groan in *Isabella* is uttered by the perpetrators, not the victim. It is also worth noting that Keats does not give the brothers any direct speech in the poem. This act of poetic silencing is their punishment for murdering, and thus silencing, the innocent Lorenzo. By writing their voices out of the story, Keats ensures that the wronged lovers get the final word. In contrast to the brothers, Lorenzo’s ghost is eloquent, even if the quality of his voice is distorted. In this memorable passage, he appears to Isabella in a ‘vision’ to reveal the unlawful cause of his death:

XXXV

It was a vision. – In the drowsy gloom,

The dull of midnight, at her couch’s foot

Lorenzo stood, and wept: the forest tomb

Had marred his glossy hair which once could shoot

Lustre into the sun, and put cold doom

Upon his lips, and taken the soft lute

From his lorn voice, and past his loamèd ears

Had made a miry channel for his tears.

XXXVI

Strange sound it was, when the pale shadow spake;

For there was striving, in its piteous tongue,

To speak as when on earth it was awake,

And Isabella on its music hung.

Languor there was in it, and tremulous shake,

As in a palsied Druid’s harp unstrung;

And through it moaned a ghostly under-song,

Like hoarse night-gusts sepulchral briars among.’ (XXXVI 281-288)

Like the knight in ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’, ‘Lorenzo is diminished by love, not only in his decapitation, but in the pared down, disembodied voice to which he is reduced in the poem.’[[333]](#footnote-333) Lorenzo’s voice, which Keats initially describes as ‘pleasanter / To her [Isabella] than noise of trees or hidden rill’ (II: 13-14), has taken on a different pitch in death. No longer akin to the gentle sound of trees and trickling streams, his voice has become ‘strange’ and ‘tremulous’, as if the effort of communicating from beyond the grave has disrupted its natural harmony. Isabella still hangs on the ‘music’ of his voice, but the sound it produces is now out of tune. Death has ‘taken the soft lute’ from his voice (or ‘mellow lute’ in the cancelled line) and transformed it into ‘a palsied Druid’s harp unstrung’, rendering its once-pleasing sound dissonant and unnatural. His voice now resembles a man-made instrument (and a broken one at that) rather than the gentle, harmonious sounds of nature. The shift from ‘soft lute’ to ‘unstrung’ harp reinforces the uncanny quality of Lorenzo’s spectral return, in that both instruments are ancient and belong to the same family, yet they produce different sounds: the lute has a fretted fingerboard which allows the player to press down on the strings and thus produce different pitches. This is significant because when Lorenzo appears in Isabella’s vision, his voice sounds ‘strange’, yet it is still recognisable, like a familiar tune played on a different instrument or in a different key. The verb ‘unstrung’ conjures a gruesome image of severed or damaged vocal cords, which echoes the violence of his murder and hints at symbolic castration. By killing Lorenzo in the bloom of his love affair with Isabella, the brothers ensure that their love remains physically and spiritually unconsummated. In this passage, Lorenzo’s voice functions as a synecdoche for his body; untethered from the mortal realm, his spirit exists in a liminal space where ‘the little sounds of life’ are ‘strange’ to him, just as his voice is ‘strange’ to Isabella (XXXIX). In death, Lorenzo’s voice is a broken instrument that is only capable of uttering a ‘ghostly under-song’. Defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as ‘a subordinate or subdued song or strain, especially one serving as an accompaniment or burden to another’, the word ‘undersong’ suggests that death has transformed Lorenzo’s voice into an auxiliary part in the main melody.[[334]](#footnote-334) The brothers have succeeded in muffling Lorenzo’s voice, but not silencing it completely. Isabella is the conduit through which Lorenzo’s ghostly voice reverberates. The words ‘striving’, ‘shake’, ‘palsied’, ‘languor’ and ‘hoarse’ suggest that speech no longer comes naturally to the ‘pale shadow’. Lorenzo’s ‘piteous tongue’ finds it difficult ‘to speak as when on earth it was awake’, which echoes his struggle to articulate his love for Isabella at the start of their courtship: ‘And to his heart he inwardly did pray / For power to speak; but still the ruddy tide / Stifled his voice’ (VI: 43-45). Just as ‘his erewhile timid lips grew bold’ (X: 69) in life, his ghost musters the strength to ‘unthread the horrid woof’ (XXXVII: 292) of his murder. Lorenzo’s death may have been silent – ‘without any word, from stabs he fell’ (XXXVII: 296) – but his spirit refuses to remain so, even when death has put ‘cold doom / Upon his lips.’ Lorenzo’s ‘ghostly under-song’ evokes the tradition of lyric poetry – the genre for expressing personal emotions and experiences – which takes its name from the Greek for lyre. In *Isabella*, Keats literalises Aristotle’s definition of poetry as a kind of mimesis; Lorenzo’s voice in death is a pale imitation of his voice in life. As Aristotle indicates, lyric poetry can fuse with other genres, hence its presence in this narrative poem. Keats’s engagement with the lyric tradition is significant in that he suggests that, although Lorenzo’s voice has been reduced to a broken instrument, his song cannot be completely, finally silenced.Indeed, his ability to communicate with Isabella from beyond the grave, and her ability to hear his message, is testament to the transcendental, immortal power of their love. Keats brings this romantic ideal to the forefront in the following stanza:

The ancient harps have said,

Love never dies, but lives, immortal Lord:

If Love impersonate was ever dead,

Pale Isabella kiss’d it, and low moan’d.

‘Twas love; cold, - dead indeed, but not dethroned. (L: 396-400)

Once again, Keats uses harp imagery, only this time the instrument is not a metaphor for Lorenzo’s ‘unstrung’ voice, but a symbol of antiquity. By evoking the ‘ancient harps’ of Greek mythology, Keats places Isabella and Lorenzo among the great love stories of classical literature. When Keats alludes to Melpomene (the muse of tragedy) in stanza LVI, he foreshadows a tragic conclusion for Isabella. This is compounded by the image of a ‘bronzed lyre’, which invokes the figure of Orpheus. As Robert Graves explains, Orpheus inherited his golden lyre from Apollo ‘and the Muses taught him its use, so that he not only enchanted wild beasts, but made the trees and rocks move from their places to follow the sound of his music.’[[335]](#footnote-335) It is significant that the lyre in Keats’s poem is ‘bronzed’ rather than golden, as this lesser metal is prone to tarnishing. This subtle image suggests that the once-pleasing quality of Lorenzo’s voice has been corroded by death. Nevertheless, Isabella’s love for Lorenzo is stronger than any precious metal. Like Orpheus, she is determined to bring her beloved back from the abyss. Orpheus’s lyre features prominently in his descent to the underworld to retrieve his wife Eurydice. Once there, his music ‘not only charmed the ferryman Charon, the Dog Cerberus, and the three Judges of the Dead with his plaintive music, but temporarily suspended the tortures of the damned; and so far soothed the savage heart of Hades that he won leave to restore Eurydice to the upper world.’[[336]](#footnote-336) Natalie Haynes gives a more comprehensive overview of Orpheus’s descent as told by Virgil in *Georgics*:

Orpheus enters the Underworld, playing his lyre. The shades of the dead appear from the very darkest regions of Hades to hear him play. Even the Furies stop to listen, and Cerberus – the three-headed dog who guards Hades – stands with his three mouths agape. Ixion – who is tormented in the Underworld by being bound to a fiery wheel which never stops moving – comes to rest because the wind that blows him unceasingly is suddenly still.[[337]](#footnote-337)

The power of Orpheus’s music to ‘suspend the tortures of the damned’ is not without irony; his own emotional torment persists and he seems to be the only person, living or dead, who is impervious to the lyre’s magic. In this story, the lyre is a potent symbol of love triumphing over death.[[338]](#footnote-338) Even though Eurydice remains in the underworld, Orpheus’s love - which he expresses through music - is powerful enough to convince the gods of the underworld to let her return to the world of the living.For Virgil, the *katabasis* is the ‘most interesting’ part of the story.[[339]](#footnote-339) As Haynes writes: ‘The detail he paints [...] tells us this is the really important scene’.[[340]](#footnote-340) Although no *katabasis* occurs in *Isabella*, the heroine of the poem does bring her lover – or at least a part of him – back from the dead. As we see in the following stanza, Isabella goes to great lengths to retrieve Lorenzo’s head from the mire, and Keats devotes a significant portion of the poem to graveyard musings. What we witness in stanza XLV is an imagined, psychological descent into the subterranean realm of the dead which nods to the tradition of *katabasis*:

XLV.

Who hath not loiter’d in a green church-yard,

And let his spirit, like a demon-mole,

Work through the clayey soil and gravel hard,

To see skull, coffin’d bones, and funeral stole;

Pitying each form that hungry Death hath marr’d,

And filling it once more with human soul?

Ah! this is holiday to what was felt

When Isabella by Lorenzo knelt.

XLVI.

She gaz’d into the fresh-thrown mould, as though

One glance did fully all its secrets tell;

Clearly she saw, as other eyes would know

Pale limbs at bottom of a crystal well;

Upon the murderous spot she seem’d to grow,

Like to a native lily of the dell:

Then with her knife, all sudden, she began

To dig more fervently than misers can. (353-368)

As ever, Keats does not shy away from the material reality of death; the ‘coffin’d bones’, ‘pale limbs’ and ‘fresh-thrown mould’ may be the stuff of gothic nightmares, but these details remind us that all that remains of Lorenzo is his bodily remains. These stanzas bear a striking resemblance to Thomas Gray’s ‘Elegy Written in a Country Church-yard’ (1751) in which the speaker contemplates ‘The short and simple annals of the poor’ (32).[[341]](#footnote-341) Gray’s poem is an elegy for a voiceless underclass whose deaths are seldom memorialised. The speaker laments that there are ‘no trophies’ (38) or ‘pealing anthem[s]’ (40) for the ‘useful toil’ (29) of ordinary people, and ponders whether their lives would have been different if they had been born into wealth. Like Gray, Keats highlights the fate of workers whose lives (and deaths) are bound to an exploitative class system. Isabella’s ‘covetous and sly’ (XVIII: 141) brothers profit from the labour of men like Lorenzo who ‘swelt / In torched mines and noisy factories’ (XIV: 107-8) and feel the ‘stinging whip’ (XIV: 110) at their backs. As punishment for ‘straying from his toil’ (XVIII: 140), the brothers murder Lorenzo and bury him in an unmarked grave where nobody – including Isabella – can mourn him. Like Gray, Keats articulates an anxiety about ‘th’ unhonour’d Dead’ (*Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, 96) in *Isabella*. Lorenzo’s unquiet spirit is able to communicate with Isabella because he is still tethered to her by memory, whereas the ‘neglected’ (45) dead of Gray’s poem remain unmourned and therefore silent (‘noiseless tenor’ - 76). Gray’s lines ‘On some fond breast the parting soul relies, /Some pious drops the closing eye requires’ (89-90) take a literal turn in Keats’s poem, as Isabella’s tears – those ‘pious drops’ – sustain the basil plant that contains Lorenzo’s ‘essence’ (XL: 320). Isabella’s devotion to the grisly task of exhuming Lorenzo – and indeed ‘her continued fidelity to the corpse’ – is framed as a heroic deed, no less worthy of poetry than Orpheus’s journey into Hades.[[342]](#footnote-342) Like Orpheus, Isabella is willing to transgress the laws of death to retrieve her beloved. Once exhumed and lovingly tended to, Lorenzo’s head begins to show signs of vitality, which is another nod to the Orpheus and Eurydice myth. According to Haynes, Orpheus ‘refuses to remarry’ after losing Eurydice for a second time and ‘the women of Thrace are so incensed by this rejection that, during one of their Bacchic revels, they tear him apart. His severed head floats down the River Hebrus, crying, “Poor Eurydice! Eurydice…”’.[[343]](#footnote-343) The image of Orpheus’s head calling out for his beloved anticipates the vitality of Lorenzo’s severed head in *Isabella*. In Virgil’s version, Orpheus sings, but does not speak ‘until he has been dismembered, and his disembodied head only cries out for Eurydice’[[344]](#footnote-344). However, in Ovid’s version, Orpheus gives a powerful speech to Hades and Persephone accompanied by lyre music so beautiful it makes the dead weep.[[345]](#footnote-345) Keats nods to both versions of the myth in *Isabella* through his imagery of musical instruments, resurrection and decapitation, but the following detail from Ovid is the most striking parallel of all: when Orpheus returns from the underworld without Eurydice, Ovid writes that ‘Sorrow, troubled thought, and tears were his food’ (*Metamorphoses*, Bk X:1-85 Orpheus and Eurydice). Of course, the image of Isabella watering the basil plant with her tears comes directly from Boccaccio, but it is possible that Keats also had Ovid in mind when he wrote ‘she ever fed it with thin tears’ (LIV: 425).

I have discussed Lorenzo’s voice at length, but what of Isabella’s? In the Gothic novel, a pleasing voice typically signals the heroine’s sensibility and virtue, for example: ‘In *The Italian* (1797) and *The Monk: A Romance* (1796) the first descriptions we receive of the heroines Ellena and Antonia are of their voices. That they are pleasing in tone establishes the girls’ upright character and confirms their attractiveness.’[[346]](#footnote-346) Indeed, when Vincentio di Vivaldi hears Ellena’s voice, it is ‘love at first sound’.[[347]](#footnote-347)Isabella is characterised in a similar way; her gentle voice (‘lisped tenderly’, ‘timid quest’ - VII: 54-55) corresponds with her chasteness (‘untouched cheek’ - V: 33). Before Lorenzo’s death, Isabella barely speaks, except to say into her pillow ‘O may I never see another night, / Lorenzo, if thy lips breathe not love’s tune’ (IV: 29-30).[[348]](#footnote-348) However, Keats emphasises the musicality of her voice throughout the poem. Firstly, he tells us that ‘Her lute string gave an echo of his name’ (II: 15) when describing the lovers’ courtship – an image that is darkly echoed in Isabella’s vision when the ‘soft lute’ (XXXV: 278) of Lorenzo’s voice becomes ‘a palsied Druid’s harp unstrung’ (XXXVI: 286). Secondly, Keats employs sensual, musical imagery when describing the lover’s first kiss: Lorenzo’s lips ‘poesied with hers in dewy rhyme’ (IX). Thirdly, Isabella vows to find Lorenzo’s body ‘And sing to it one latest lullaby’ (XLII) – a line which hauntingly echoes the knight’s remembrance of being ‘lullèd’ (IX: 33) asleep in ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’. Finally, Keats compares Isabella’s voice to a string instrument in the penultimate stanza: ‘And with melodious chuckle in the strings / Of her lorn voice, she oftentimes would cry / After the Pilgrim in his wanderings, / To ask him where her Basil was’ (LXII). Like Orpheus, Isabella is defined by her ‘melodious’ mourning. Keats’s use of the onomatopoeic verb ‘chuckle’ – a word that describes suppressed laughter – is surprising, as there is nothing remotely funny about what Isabella discovers in her vision. This is not the only instance of surprising laughter in the poem. Isabella’s laughter is literal music to Lorenzo’s ears at the start of the poem: as he prepares to leave with the brothers, he hears ‘a laugh full musical aloft’ (XXV: 198) causing him to look up and see Isabella’s ‘features bright / Smile through an in-door lattice’ (XXV: 199-200). However, after Lorenzo’s death, Isabella’s laugh becomes jarring and discordant:

XLII.

“Ha! ha!” said she, “I knew not this hard life,

I thought the worst was simple misery;

I thought some Fate with pleasure or with strife

Portion’d us - happy days, or else to die;

But there is crime - a brother’s bloody knife!

Sweet Spirit, thou hast school’d my infancy:

I’ll visit thee for this, and kiss thine eyes,

And greet thee morn and even in the skies.” (329-336)

This is an unsettling moment as laughter is a shocking and inappropriate response to the situation. Isabella’s laughter is an example of ‘Comic deflation’, which Curran describes as ‘inherent’ in ‘traditional romance’.[[349]](#footnote-349) Like Lorenzo’s ‘unstrung’ (XXXVI: 286) voice, her emotions are out of tune and harsh, to paraphrase Ophelia’s Act 3 Scene 1 monologue in *Hamlet***.[[350]](#footnote-350)** Isabella’s bitter, hysterical and grotesque laugh is indicative of unresolved grief. She cannot openly mourn Lorenzo’s death without revealing her knowledge of the secret murder plot carried out by her brothers; therefore she has no choice but to repress the true source of her sorrow.[[351]](#footnote-351)It is worth noting here that Keats’s use of the word ‘morn’ is a homophone of ‘mourn’. Although Isabella weeps lavishly, her grief is displaced onto the basil pot:

LIII:

And she forgot the stars, the moon, and sun,

And she forgot the blue above the trees,

And she forgot the dells where waters run,

And she forgot the chilly autumn breeze;

She had no knowledge when the day was done,

And the new morn she saw not: but in peace

Hung over her sweet Basil evermore,

And moisten’d it with tears unto the core. (417-424)

Isabella’s response to the loss of Lorenzo is to obsessively tend to the basil plant, which becomes a surrogate love-object, or, in Diane Long Hoeveler’s words, ‘a substitute child that she feeds with the milk of her tears.’[[352]](#footnote-352) Beth Lau compares Isabella’s mothering of the basil plant to Agnes’s refusal to part with the corpse of her newborn baby in *The Monk*: ‘much like Isabella with Lorenzo’s head, she coddles and comforts the revolting, putrefying object.’[[353]](#footnote-353) Isabella’s devotion is so absolute that she becomes oblivious to the passage of time. She ‘forgets’ everything but the depth of her grief. The lines ‘For seldom did she go to chapel-shrift, / And seldom felt she any hunger-pain’ (LIX: 467-8) highlight Isabella’s total denial of reality. Her withdrawal from society and lack of appetite suggest that she has ceased to care about her own wellbeing – a trait that is consistent with Freud’s ideas on melancholia. Freud describes this affliction as a ‘disturbance of self-regard’ and an ‘impoverishment’ of ego, characterised by ‘turning away from reality [...] and a clinging to the object through the medium of a hallucinatory wishful psychosis’[[354]](#footnote-354). Symptoms also include ‘sleeplessness and refusal to take nourishment’, both of which characterise Isabella’s strange behaviour.[[355]](#footnote-355) Unlike healthy mourning, melancholia involves ‘an overcoming of the instinct which compels every living thing to cling to life.’[[356]](#footnote-356) Isabella withers away through self-neglect until she becomes ‘a mere synecdoche of ‘her lorn voice’ (492). Symbolically, Isabella’s physical dwindling [...] points to her continued affinity for Lorenzo’, who is similarly diminished to a ‘lorn voice. (XXXV: 279)’[[357]](#footnote-357) By the end of the poem, ‘Isabella’s tragedy is reduced to ‘nothing’ more than a ‘sad ditty’ (LXIII: 501). Such tragedy is passed ‘From mouth to mouth’ (LXIII: 502) as a faintly receding echo of Isabella’s own ‘lorn voice’ and her persistently repeated maniacal refrain ‘“For cruel ‘tis… / To steal my basil-pot away from me”(495-6)’.[[358]](#footnote-358) Ultimately, the sad story of Isabella and Lorenzo becomes a folk song. Death may have separated Lorenzo and Isabella, but their love lives on through music, just as the ‘The ancient harps’ (L: 396) decreed.

Another sonic feature of *Isabella* that bears discussion is Keats’s form. The melodic ABABABCC rhyme scheme is a constant reminder that we are reading a ‘sad ditty’ (LXIII: 501-2) that has been passed down ‘from mouth to mouth’ in the tradition of oral storytelling. Oral storytelling is a way of bearing witness, and an act of collective remembering, therefore it is significant that Isabella’s ‘burthen’ is ‘Still [...] sung’ (LXIII: 503) throughout the country. In this context, ‘burthen’ likely refers to ‘the refrain or chorus of a song; a set of words recurring at the end of each verse’ (1598-); however, as an antiquated spelling of the word ‘burden’, it can also mean ‘That which is born in the womb; a child’.[[359]](#footnote-359) Pregnant with sorrow, Isabella bears the heavy burden of her grief and nurtures it like an infant until her vitality is spent. Despite her tragic death, the abrupt shift to present tense in the final two lines reinforces the idea that her love for Lorenzo will live on through the medium of folk song. To paraphrase the terminal line of Philip Larkin’s ‘An Arundel Tomb’: what will survive of [them] is love. That Isabella’s devotion to Lorenzo is immortalised in song – a form of oral history – testifies to the ungovernable power of voice in the poem. Keats’s decision to use ottava rima for this tale further emphasises its aural intensity, as this rhyming stanza form was originally used in troubadour songs. Although John A. Minahan argues that ottava rima is ‘perversely unsuited to the story’s gravity’, it was a popular choice for mock-heroic and satirical poems in the period (see Byron’s *Beppo* and *Don Juan*).[[360]](#footnote-360) Despite the grave subject matter, *Isabella* is a deeply unserious poem. Keats himself knew this to be true when he called it ‘too smokeable’.[[361]](#footnote-361) As Kelvin Everest notes, ‘Keats’s expression “smokeable” does not mean ‘easily exposed in its faults’ (as has been suggested), but rather ‘too easily made fun of’.’[[362]](#footnote-362) Keats’s concern that critics would (perhaps wilfully) misread ‘the self-consciously dark comedy and ironic framing’ of *Isabella* is bound up with his anxieties about writing within the ‘vulgar’, ‘feminine’ Gothic mode.[[363]](#footnote-363) It is understandable that Keats was apprehensive about publishing such an outlandish poem at a time when he was particularly vulnerable to hostile reviews. As Lucasta Miller writes, *Isabella* ‘has an almost absurdist ring’ that is ‘too sick for high tragedy, too outlandish for realism’, which no doubt made it a difficult poem to market, especially after the critical failure of *Endymion*.[[364]](#footnote-364) Today, we might even call it Camp. In Susan Sontag’s words ‘the essence of Camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration [...] Camp is art that proposes itself seriously, but cannot be taken altogether seriously because it is “too much”’.[[365]](#footnote-365) Sontag traces Camp taste back to the eighteenth century and lists the Gothic novel as an example, so it is not surprising that one of Keats’s most overtly Gothic poems also fits this description. The melodramatic aspects of *Isabella* temper the lurid, abject horror of Isabella’s vision and the subsequent grave scene. ‘Despite the horror of the situation, conscious bathos pervades Keats’s poetic tone’ in the moment when Lorenzo ‘unthread[s] the horrid woof’ of his murder.[[366]](#footnote-366) For all of its melodrama, we must not forget that *Isabella* is fundamentally about mourning, therefore, it bears some resemblance to elegiac poetry, not least of all because the term elegy is defined as a song or poem of lamentation.[[367]](#footnote-367) As Andrew Smith observes, ‘The elegy became progressively culturally supplanted (but not eradicated by) the elegiac’ in this period.[[368]](#footnote-368) *Isabella* sits uniquely between the Gothic and the elegiac, both of which Hogle notes ‘nearly always begin with one or more deaths’.[[369]](#footnote-369) As Andrew Smith explains, ‘Hogle also acknowledges an important difference: the elegy tries to lay, no matter how problematically, the past to rest, whereas the Gothic is more interested in resurrecting the past because its unresolved dramas have a continuing presence (which need to be engaged with before the past can ‘die’).[[370]](#footnote-370) In *Isabella*, Keats is more concerned with the latter (Lorenzo’s return), but Isabella’s unresolved grief positions the poem within the elegiac mode. Peter M. Sacks sees the elegy as ‘a working through of experience’ in which the mourner must replace the lost object with a substitutive, consolatory symbol of what he or she lacks.[[371]](#footnote-371) In *Isabella*, this ‘substitutive, consolatory symbol’ is the basil plant. The love object is replaced with a material object. In a successful resolution, the ‘elegiac token’ takes the place of the primary object of desire, thus enabling the mourner to move through the psychological process of detachment followed by reattachment (the ‘oedipal resolution’).[[372]](#footnote-372) In *Isabella*, this is complicated by the removal of the basil pot. The loss of this token leaves Isabella bereft and unable to complete the mourning process, hence her death at the end of the poem. In this respect, *Isabella* may be considered an anti-consolatory poem; like Orpheus, she dies without moving past the initial stage of grief. However, there is a consolation in the fact that her mourning song reverberates through the ages as a ‘sad ditty’ passed ‘from mouth to mouth’. If multiple voices continue to mourn the lovers and bear witness to the brother’s crimes, their story lives on. In death, their love is continually resurrected through the medium of song.

***The Eve of St Agnes***

Continuing to think about song and music, this section focuses on Porphyro’s ‘ancient ditty’ (XXXIII: 291) in *The Eve of St Agnes*. This poem is replete with contrasting moments of sound and silence; Keats opens with an image of a ‘silent [...] flock in woolly fold’ (I: 4) but this hushed atmosphere is swiftly shattered by the sound of ‘Music’s golden tongue’ (III: 20). What begins as a ‘prelude soft’ (IV: 28) soon reaches a crescendo of ‘snarling trumpets’ (IV: 31) as ‘a thousand guests’ (IV: 33) enter the chambers of Madeline’s ancestral home. Curiously, the din does not reach the heroine’s ears: ‘Full of this whim was thoughtful Madeline: / The music, yearning like a God in pain, / She scarcely heard’ (VII: 56-57). As Martha Hale Shackford identifies, Keats’s phrasing echoes Radcliffe’s when describing Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*: ‘she scarcely heard the low and dismal hooting of the night-bird’ (p. 495). This Radcliffean reverberation signals that Madeline, like Emily before her, is too preoccupied by her emotions to register the distant sounds of revelry. In ‘Eavesdropping on “The Eve of St Agnes”: Madeline’s Sensual Ear and Porphyro’s Ancient Ditty’, Heidi Thomson contends that this is an example of ‘Madeline’s “selective” hearing’, but I wish to suggest an alternative interpretation that problematises the suggestion that Madeline is complicit in Porphyro’s fantasy.[[373]](#footnote-373) The hyperbolic simile ‘The music, yearning like a God in pain / She scarcely heard’ to describe Madeline’s apparent obliviousness may suggest that she deliberately ignores the sounds that threaten to interrupt her ritual, just as she ignores the ‘amorous cavalier[s]’ (VII: 60) that come tiptoeing to her door, but, even if her muffled senses are the result of being too ‘deeply immersed in romantic lore’, Porphyro (with Angela as his accomplice) does everything in his power to ensure that she remains this way.[[374]](#footnote-374) Furthermore, it is possible that Madeline’s ‘selective hearing’ is in fact a sign of her virtue and self-discipline; that she is able to block out the din of drunken revelry suggests that she is as devoutly focused to her task as the Beadsman is to his – perhaps more so, given that the Beadsman hears the music while Madeline does not. It is also worth noting that the music fades as Porphyro approaches Madeline’s bedside: ‘The boisterous, midnight, festive clarion, / The kettle-drum, and far-heard clarinet, / Affray his ears, though but in dying tone; / The hall door shuts again, and all the noise is gone.’ (XXIX: 258-261). The fact remains that Porphyro does not hesitate before taking advantage of Madeline’s compromised senses.

Readers of the poem may ask: why is the lore associated with St. Agnes’ Eve so appealing to Madeline? Entrapped within the confines of her ancestral home, the ‘pale enchantment’ (XIX: 168) of ‘old romance’ (V: 41) offers Madeline a retreat from dreary reality. Her ‘high disdain’ (VII: 61) for the persistent suitors who try their luck is proof of Madeline’s virtue; she only has eyes (and ears) for her dream lover. In Radcliffe’s novels, ‘music is a poetic *topos* that is, as it were, disembodied. It intervenes to testify to important changes in the psychological situation of the heroines, or to give a moral portrait of the characters through an implicit analogy with their musical talent’.[[375]](#footnote-375) It is no coincidence that all of Radcliffe’s heroines are musical. As Pierre DuBois notes, ‘the main function of the representation of music in Radcliffe’s fiction is to define the heroine’s sensibility. Radcliffe’s heroines are not simply moved by music, but also happen to be proficient performers and singers’.[[376]](#footnote-376) The heroines’ natural musicality, along with their appreciation of the music of nature, shows that they are ‘creatures of feeling’ in possession of the appropriate accomplishments expected of ladies in the period.[[377]](#footnote-377) Like Emily in *Udolpho*, Madeline evidently plays the lute; the presence of this poetic instrument in her bedchamber tells us as much. As DuBois notes, the lute appears in all of Radcliffe’s novels and it is ‘ideally suited to the delicacy of her heroines and apt to suggest softness and melancholy’.[[378]](#footnote-378) That we only see Porphyro play Madeline’s lute in *The Eve of St Agnes* is significant, as it shows who is pulling (or, in this case, plucking) the strings. As we see in the following passage, music is integral to Porphyro’s ‘stratagem’ to seduce Madeline:

Awakening up, he took her hollow lute,—

Tumultuous,—and, in chords that tenderest be,

He play'd an ancient ditty, long since mute,

In Provence call'd, "La belle dame sans mercy":

Close to her ear touching the melody;—

Wherewith disturb'd, she utter'd a soft moan:

He ceas'd—she panted quick—and suddenly

Her blue affrayed eyes wide open shone:

Upon his knees he sank, pale as smooth-sculptured stone. (XXXIII: 289-297)

This echoes the moment in *Udolpho,* in which Morano serenades Emily with a lute: ‘The Count Morano, who sat next to Emily, and who had been observing her for some time in silence, snatched up a lute, and struck the chords with the finger of harmony herself, while his voice, a fine tenor, accompanied them in a rondeau full of tender sadness’ (p. 262). The violence with which Morano ‘snatches’ up the lute contrasts with the ‘harmony’ and ‘tender sadness’ of his song, showing the duality of his character. His love may be genuine, but his dogged pursuit of Emily (despite her indifference) makes him as much of a predator as his accomplice-turned-rival Montoni. In *The Eve of St Agnes*, Porphyro resembles both Morano and Valancourt at different moments in the narrative. Madeline clearly returns his affections (unlike Emily, whose cool attitude towards Morano betokens her enduring love for Valancourt) but Porphyro’s midnight visit can be read as an abduction rather than a rescue. Returning to the quotation, Porphyro’s performance is tactical and premeditated. Angela’s earlier instructions (‘Her own lute thou wilt see’ - XX: 175) make this explicit. According to Heidi Thomson, the ‘soft moan’ (XXXIII: 294) that Porphyro’s Provençal ditty elicits from her lips ‘breaks the rule of silence in Madeline’s virginal Agnes’ Eve ritual, expresses her desire, and ultimately leads to the consummation between her and Porphyro’.[[379]](#footnote-379) Silence is not the only thing that is broken by these sounds; so too is the ‘stedfast spell’ (XXXII: 287) that keeps Madeline blissfully unaware of the flesh-and-blood intruder who creeps into her bedchamber and melts into her dream. She is ‘asleep in lap of legends old’ (XV: 135) when the melody tolls her back to her sole self, to paraphrase ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ (VIII: 72). Madeline’s awakening anticipates the epiphanic moment in the ode when the poet-narrator laments that ‘the fancy cannot cheat so well / As she is fam’d to do, deceiving elf’ VIII: 73-74). Her ‘affrayed’ eyes express the terror she feels upon recognising the peril of her situation. As Anne Williams states:

The St. Agnes ritual is the enactment of a paradox— to allow the maiden to have all the pleasure of the wedding feast and wedding night without having to face the consequences. These consequences are, of course, the punishment patriarchy required of any woman who sought *jouissance* outside the Law of the Father— thus becoming “ruined,” “fallen,” a “Magdalen,” for whom tears are the only recompense. Madeline (whose name is an anglicized spelling of “Magdalen” in French— “Madeleine”) becomes herself a kind of embodied pun: “a weeping Madeline” who is, nevertheless, *not* the “weeping Magdalen” the ritual sought to avoid (as Keats put it in a canceled stanza).[[380]](#footnote-380)

The fantasy of St. Agnes’ Eve allows Madeline to gratify her desires (the ‘delight’ of ‘soft adorings from their lovers’ in the ‘honey’d middle of the night’ - VI: 47-49) without relinquishing her sacred maidenhead (an unmarried medieval woman’s only currency). In theory, the premise of the dream absolves her of blame, guilt and shame; she can return to the safety of innocence upon waking. The fact that such a dream can only happen on the eve of a saint’s feast day – the patron saint of virgins, no less – negates the risk of becoming a ‘weeping Magdalen’. It is no wonder, then, that Madeline responds to Porphyro’s presence with apprehension. He is not supposed to be there when she wakes up. By taking up Madeline’s lute, Porphyro subverts the conventions of the lover’s serenade.[[381]](#footnote-381) Instead of playing outside Madeline’s window, he places himself within her bedchamber, thereby transgressing the limits of respectable distance.[[382]](#footnote-382) In *The Monk*, Lorenzo serenades Antonia to reassure her of his love:

She was disturbed by hearing a strain of soft Music breathed beneath her window. She rose, drew near the Casement, and opened it to hear it more distinctly. Having thrown her veil over her face, She ventured to look out. By the light of the Moon She perceived several Men below with Guitars and Lutes in their hands; and at a little distance from them stood Another wrapped in his cloak, whose stature and appearance bore a strong resemblance to Lorenzo’s. She was not deceived in this conjecture. It was indeed Lorenzo himself, who bound by his word not to present himself to Antonia without his Uncle’s consent, endeavoured by occasional Serenades, to convince his Mistress that his attachment still existed. His stratagem had not the desired effect. Antonia was far from supposing that this nightly music was intended as a compliment to her: She was too modest to think herself worthy such attentions; and concluding them to be addressed to some neighbouring Lady, She grieved to find that they were offered by Lorenzo. (chapter VIII, p. 290-291)

That his serenade does not have ‘the desired effect’ only reinforces Antonia’s maidenly modesty and worthiness of ‘such attentions’. Interestingly, Lewis’s use of the word ‘stratagem’ anticipates Keats’s use of the word to describe Porphyro’s premeditated ‘seduction’ of Madeline. While Lorenzo’s ‘stratagem’ is presented as honest courtship, Porphyro’s is presented as a transgression of piety and propriety. Even his accomplice Angela is startled by his scheme:

Sudden a thought came like a full-blown rose,

Flushing his brow, and in his pained heart

Made purple riot: then doth he propose

A stratagem, that makes the beldame start:

"A cruel man and impious thou art:

Sweet lady, let her pray, and sleep, and dream

Alone with her good angels, far apart

From wicked men like thee. Go, go!—I deem

Thou canst not surely be the same that thou didst seem." (XVI: 136-144)

Despite her misgivings that he is ‘cruel’, ‘impious’ and wicked’, Angela eventually agrees to help Porphyro, but with the following caveat: ‘thou must needs the lady wed, / Or may I never leave my grave among the dead’ (XX: 179-180). Her ominous death at the end of the poem leaves the reader unsure whether Porphyro keeps his word after the lovers leave the castle. Despite calling Madeline ‘my bride’ when she wakes from her dream (XXXVI: 326), Porphyro proposes elopement, not marriage. Unlike Lorenzo, whose lute serenade shows his respect for Antonia and the customs of proper courtship (‘bound by his word not to present himself to Antonia without his Uncle’s consent’), Porphyro’s ‘ancient ditty’ is a seduction technique designed to maintain the illusion of the Madeline’s dream.[[383]](#footnote-383) Keats describes Porphyro’s playing as ‘Tumultuous’ (XXXIII: 290), which hints that his noisy ditty ‘disturb[s]’ (XXXIII: 294) Madeline’s hushed fantasy. His choice of music also raises alarm bells. The ‘ancient ditty, long since mute’ (XXXIII: 291) evokes a lost, chivalric past of noble knights and fair maidens, but it has a dark undertone. ‘La belle dame sans mercy’ is a tale of seduction gone wrong, therefore its presence in this scene is decidedly ominous. The thinly veiled double entendre implied in the image of Madeline’s ‘hollow lute’ (XXXIII: 289) highlights her sexual vulnerability. Given the impropriety of his unchaperoned presence in the lady’s bedchamber, and the fact that she is asleep for the majority of his visit, we might wonder whether Porphyro sees Madeline as little more than an instrument to be played to the tune of his lust. Thomson argues that ‘a greater understanding of “La belle dame sans mercy” and its well-timed use in the sequence of Madeline’s ritual and Porphyro’s stratagem reassesses the relationship between Madeline and Porphyro as one of mutual consent as opposed to either rape or a (non-sexual) idealized dream illusion’.[[384]](#footnote-384) I would like to suggest that analysing this sequence in the context of the Gothic problematises this reading. Like Thomson, I want to emphasise ‘aural perception’ in this reading of *The Eve of St Agnes*, but, in dialogue with my discussion of the significance of looking in chapter 2, I am sceptical of Thomson’s claim that we are ‘witnessing a “mutual hoodwinking” here’.[[385]](#footnote-385) Madeline may ‘yield [...] to her own desire’, but she does so under false pretences.[[386]](#footnote-386) Porphyro’s vague promise of marriage and a ‘home o’er the southern moors’ (XXXIX: 351) is, quite literally, cold comfort (cold being the final word of the poem). Thomson is right in that a reading of the poem that focuses solely on Porphyro’s scopophilia renders Madeline a passive victim, thereby robbing her of any agency, but it is possible to acknowledge Madeline’s desire whilst also finding Porphyro’s behaviour in the poem – and readings that frame it as seductive or romantic – deeply troubling. As Anne Williams has observed, there are parallels between Porphyro’s ‘seduction’ of Madeline and Ambrosio’s rape of Antonia in *The Monk*.[[387]](#footnote-387) Lau, too, acknowledges that Porphyro resembles ‘several seducers in Gothic novels’, comparing his wish for a ‘drowsy Morphean amulet’ to Ambrosio’s drugging of Antonia.[[388]](#footnote-388) However, she concludes that Porphyro ‘is neither an angelic sentimental hero nor a demonic Gothic villain. Instead, he behaves as a healthy young man “impassion’d far” (1. 316) would behave were he at the bedside of a young woman who believed he was part of her dream’ and concludes that ‘it is Madeline who is to blame for so engrossing herself in a fantasy world that she cannot respond as she ought to the dangers of actual life.’[[389]](#footnote-389) Emphasising ‘Madeline’s responsibility for her own seduction’ absolves Porphyro of blame and perpetuates myths that prop up rape culture.[[390]](#footnote-390) Madeline may play ‘the conjuror’ (XIV: 124), as Angela remarks, but it is Porphyro who assumes this role when he sets the scene for ‘seduction’. As Anne Williams notes, the name Porphyro echoes both Romeo and Prospero, suggesting that he is not just an ardent lover, but an enchanter capable of manipulating his surroundings.[[391]](#footnote-391) Porphyro’s ‘ancient ditty’ is a lullaby that lulls Madeline into a false sense of security. Like the elaborate feast of tempting fruits and sweets, his lute-playing is an act of window dressing designed to trick Madeline into believing that she is still dreaming. However, it has the opposite effect; instead of producing a soporific effect like the ‘faery’s song’ (VI: 24) in ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’, the melody ostensibly wakes Madeline and disturbs her dream. Lau’s comparison between the lute sequence in *The Eve of St Agnes* and chapter 8 of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is apt in that it highlights the effect of music on sensitive heroines. Emily’s disappointment when she realises that the mysterious lutanist in the castle is not Valancourt anticipates Madeline’s distress when she realises that ‘her fancy has tricked her into seeing and believing only what she wanted to see and believe.’[[392]](#footnote-392) Music is frequently associated with uncertainty and mystery in Radcliffe’s novels. For example, when Emily hears lute music coming from her father’s fishing-house in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, her response is characterised by apprehension and curiosity:

As she drew near the fishing-house, she was surprised to hear the tones of the instrument, which were awakened by the hand of taste, and uttered a plaintive air, whose exquisite melody engaged all her attention. She listened in profound silence, afraid to move from the spot, lest the sound of her steps should occasion her to lose a note of the music, or should disturb the musician. Everything without the building was still, and no person appeared. She continued to listen, till timidity succeeded to surprise and delight; a timidity, increased by a remembrance of the pencilled lines she had formerly seen, and she hesitated whether to proceed, or to return. (chapter IX, p. 50)

Played by an invisible hand, the ‘plaintive’ music causes Emily’s ‘timidity’ to give way to ‘surprise and delight’. Her desire to pause and listen suggests that pleasing music can have a dangerously disarming effect. The mysterious musician has trespassed on St Aubert’s private property, yet Emily is too captivated by the ‘exquisite melody’ to recognise the peril of being alone in the woods with a stranger. As DuBois states: ‘Music here is mysterious because the cause of its production is unknown […] Instead of being surprised or scared because of the intrusion of some stranger in her own place, Emily is moved by the music.’[[393]](#footnote-393) Porphyro attempts to use music in a similar way in *The Eve of St Agnes*, but the exquisite melody of Porphyro’s lute playing is not enough to keep Madeline under the ‘midnight charm’ all night (XXXII: 282). As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the Marquis in Radcliffe’s *The Romance of the Forest* attempts to use ‘soft music’ to ‘enchant’ Adeline’s mind ‘in sweet delirium’, but she responds with ‘contempt and displeasure’ (p. 136). Without the element of mystery and obscurity, music loses its ability to enchant the listener (‘the moment the strain ceased, the enchantment dissolved, and she returned to a sense of her situation’ - *Udolpho*, p. 133). In *The Eve of St Agnes*, music is mysterious and therefore seductive because the identity of the musician is obscured by the dream. Once Madeline wakes to find the real Porphyro touching the strings of her lute, she becomes frightened. As Edmund Burke explains in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, ‘When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible’.[[394]](#footnote-394) The dream provides the ‘necessary distance’ for pleasurable danger.[[395]](#footnote-395) A midnight encounter with a dream lover allows Madeline to yield to her desires and fantasies without facing any consequences. Hence, when she realises that the real Porphyro has melted into her dream, she responds as any maiden might if an intruder entered her bedchamber. Similarly, in *Udolpho*, Emily finds the mysterious lute music pleasing precisely because it is shrouded in mystery. Obscurity provides the ‘necessary distance’ required for pleasurable sensation.

As we see in the following passage from *Udolpho*, the allure of mysterious music is difficult to resist, even for the most fortitudinous of Gothic heroines:

“Who touches that guitar so tastefully? are there two instruments, or is it an echo I hear?”

“It is an echo, monsieur, I fancy. That guitar is often heard at night, when all is still, but nobody knows who touches it, and it is sometimes accompanied by a voice so sweet, and so sad, one would almost think the woods were haunted.” “They certainly are haunted,” said St. Aubert with a smile, “but I believe it is by mortals.” “I have sometimes heard it at midnight, when I could not sleep,” rejoined La Voisin, not seeming to notice this remark, “almost under my window, and I never heard any music like it. It has often made me think of my poor wife till I cried. I have sometimes got up to the window to look if I could see anybody, but as soon as I opened the casement all was hushed, and nobody to be seen; and I have listened, and listened till I have been so timorous, that even the trembling of the leaves in the breeze has made me start. They say it often comes to warn people of their death, but I have heard it these many years, and outlived the warning.”

Emily, though she smiled at the mention of this ridiculous superstition, could not, in the present tone of her spirits, wholly resist its contagion.

[...]

In a few moments the voice died into air, and the instrument, which had been heard before, sounded in low symphony. St. Aubert now observed that it produced a tone much more full and melodious than that of a guitar, and still more melancholy and soft than the lute.’ (p. 122)

Emily dismisses La Voisin’s foreboding comment as peasant superstition, and yet, she cannot ‘wholly resist its contagion’. The obscurity of the instrument (‘more full and melodious than that of a guitar, and still more melancholy and soft than the lute’) lends the music a supernatural quality, which arouses the listener’s awe and curiosity. As DuBois states: ‘the instrument played seems to conceal its true nature, being neither a guitar nor a lute, as though it were undergoing some sort of metamorphosis’.[[396]](#footnote-396) The strange, spectral quality of the music is reinforced by La Voisin’s comment ‘I never heard any music like it’. DuBois goes on to argue that ‘Music appears here to be of a hallucinatory, fantastic, even phantasmagoric nature, as though it proceeded from the mind of the hearer rather than from any physical source’.[[397]](#footnote-397) By the end of the novel, the source of the mysterious music is revealed and seemingly supernatural events turn out to have rational explanations. Nevertheless, music carries ‘a sense of foreboding that acts as a prelude to St. Aubert’s imminent death’.[[398]](#footnote-398) As DuBois points out, music ‘is often used as a sign that something is about to happen or be revealed, or that the characters are nearing a place where a change is likely to take place, which creates a sense of wonder and expectation.’[[399]](#footnote-399) St Aubert’s death is the catalyst for major changes in Emily’s life and the fact that it occurs soon after they hear the mysterious music causes her to form an association between the two events. Thus, the memory of St Aubert is tied to her memory of the music. This is especially evident in the following passage:

Retired to her lonely cabin, her melancholy thoughts still hovered round the body of her deceased parent; and, when she sunk into a kind of slumber, the images of her waking mind still haunted her fancy. She thought she saw her father approaching her with a benign countenance; then, smiling mournfully and pointing upwards, his lips moved, but, instead of words, she heard sweet music borne on the distant air, and presently saw his features glow with the mild rapture of a superior being. The strain seemed to swell louder, and she awoke. The vision was gone, but music yet came to her ear in strains such as angels might breathe. She doubted, listened, raised herself in the bed, and again listened. It was music, and not an illusion of her imagination. After a solemn steady harmony, it paused; then rose again, in mournful sweetness, and then died, in a cadence, that seemed to bear away the listening soul to heaven. She instantly remembered the music of the preceding night, with the strange circumstances, related by La Voisin, and the affecting conversation it had led to, concerning the state of departed spirits. (p. 141)

The ‘sweet music’ that accompanies St Aubert’s ghostly presence causes Emily to recollect the mysterious music of the preceding night, only this time, she does not try to ‘resist its contagion’. Certain that the music is ‘not an illusion of her imagination’, Emily listens intently and, although she is ‘chilled with superstitious awe’, she is able to ‘forg[e]t for a while her sorrows in sleep’. The music provides a sense of ‘wonder’ and solace for the mourning heroine, as its angelic tones seem to ‘bear away the listening soul [of St Aubert] to heaven’. In contrast, the moment when real music merges with a dream in *The Eve of St Agnes*, Madeline experiences ‘a painful change that nigh expell’d / The blisses of her dream’ (XXXIV: 300). Porphyro is ‘entoiled in woofèd fantasies’ (XXXII: 288) but Madeline is ‘disturb’d’ and ‘affrayed’ (XXXIII: 294-296). As in *Udolpho*, music inspires ‘superstitious awe’ in the listener, but Madeline’s awe tips over into horror when the touch of reality presses too near.[[400]](#footnote-400) The synaesthetic line ‘Close to her ear touching the melody’ (XXXIII: 293) describes the moment when Madeline realises that the music of her dream is, in fact, real. As the dream disintegrates, she articulates her desire to hold on to the harmony and innocence of her St Agnes’ Eve fantasy: ‘‘Ah Porphyro!’ said she, ‘but even now / Thy voice was at sweet tremble in mine ear, / Made tuneable with every sweetest vow; [...] Give me that voice again, my Porphyro’ (XXXV: 307-312) . It is not necessarily Porphyro’s voice she wants again, but the ‘tuneable’ voice of her dream lover. After all, the appeal of fantasy is that it can be modulated to suit the desires of the dreamer. The erotic fantasy of the St Agnes’ Eve ritual promises to bring Madeline to the precipice of desire, where she can delight in the danger of a midnight visit from a lover. As Burke explains, such dangerous liaisons are pleasurable ‘at certain distances, and with certain modifications’ – i.e. within the safe confines of a dream. If Madeline plays the conjuror (‘my fair lady the conjurer plays’ - XIV: 124) as Angela says, then she is in control of the fantasy. Porphyro’s intrusion, whether welcomed or not, dispossesses her of this agency. Ultimately, the fantasy becomes his, not hers. Madeline may be able to tune out the music of the revellers, but she cannot soundproof herself from the ominous tones of Porphyro’s ‘ancient ditty’ (XXXIII: 291) when the music is so palpably ‘Close to her ear’ (XXXIII: 293).

**Silence in *The Eve of St Mark***

In *The Eve of St Agnes*, the line ‘No uttered syllable, or, woe betide!’ suggests that silence is one of the rules Madeline must observe for her ritual to work. Similarly, in *The Eve of St Mark*, Keats draws our attention to the ‘silent streets’ and ‘whispers hush’ as the crowds gather in church porches to watch the ghostly procession. These details are consistent with John Brand’s summary of St. Mark’s Eve traditions in his *Observations on the Popular Antiquities of Great Britain* (1873):

It is customary in Yorkshire, for the common people to sit and watch in the church porch on St. Mark’s Eve, April 25th, from eleven o’clock at night till one in the morning. The third year (for this must be done thrice) they are supposed to see the ghosts of all those who are to die the next year, pass by into the church, which they are said to do in their usual dress, and precisely in the order of time in which they are doomed to depart.[[401]](#footnote-401)

Similarly, Dante Gabriel Rossetti writes to H. B. Forman:

I copy an extract which I have no doubt embodies the super-

stition in accordance with which Keats meant to develope his poem. It is much akin to the belief connected with the Eve of St. Agnes.

‘It was believed that if a person, on St. Mark's Eve, placed himself near the church-porch when twilight was thickening, he would behold the apparition of those persons in the parish who were to be seized with any severe disease that year, go into the church. If they remained there it signified their death; if they came out again it portended their recovery.'[[402]](#footnote-402)

Neither Brand or Rossetti mention the custom of keeping silent vigil. However, James Montogomery alludes to this in his poem ‘The Vigil of St. Mark’ when he describes the ghosts passing by ‘Amid the silence drear’ (36).[[403]](#footnote-403) In Keats’s own words, *The Eve of St Mark* captures ‘the spirit of Town quietude’ and ‘the sensation of walking about an old country Town in a coolish evening’ (*LJK*, II: 201). This hushed, sombre mood is reminiscent of Gray’s ‘Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard’: the ‘solemn stillness’ (6) and ‘the knell of parting day’ (1) are transmuted into ‘silent streets’ (14) and ‘Sabbath bell[s]’ (2 and 13) that summons the townsfolk to evening prayer. Unlike Gray’s speaker, Keats does not linger in the churchyard. Instead, he shifts the focus to Bertha, ‘a maiden fair’ (39) whose eyes are held ‘captive’ (27) by ‘A curious volume’ (25) containing ‘the legend of St. Mark’ (52). Bertha’s absorption in the legend echoes Madeline’s repose ‘in lap of legends old’ (XV: 135) in *The Eve of St Agnes*. This parallel leads Beth Lau to surmise that both heroines resemble the ‘deluded romance readers’ of satirical romance novels (e.g., Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*) whose utter immersion in fantasy renders them susceptible to real-life dangers.[[404]](#footnote-404)

It is worth pausing here to consider the affinity between the two poems. In a November 1819 letter to his publisher John Taylor, Keats expresses his intention to write another poem with ‘the colouring of St Agnes eve’ (*LJK*, II: 234). Although Keats never completed *The Eve of St Mark*, it clearly shares the topos and soundscape of *St. Agnes*. The imagery of religious devotion dominates both poems and the majority of sounds are associated with worship. Indeed, the only sounds in *The Eve of St Mark* are church bells, ‘even-song’(18), ‘whispers’ (21), hushed prayers and the music of ‘the organ loud and sweet’ (22). By line 57, all noise has ceased. Even the ‘clamorous daws’ (61) are silent in their ‘belfry nest[s]’ (64). This absolute quiet is deeply unnerving. As Nicholas Royle observes, the uncanny ‘comes above all [...] in the uncertainties of silence, solitude and darkness’.[[405]](#footnote-405) In *The Eve of St Mark*, we have all three: Keats tells us that ‘the dusk eve left her dark / Upon the legend of St. Mark’ (51-52) and ‘All was gloom, and silent all’ (57). The low light from Bertha’s lamp creates an eerie shadowplay, which Keats describes in the following passage:

Her shadow, in uneasy guise,

Hover’d about, a giant size,

On ceiling-beam and old oak chair,

The parrot’s cage, and panel square;

And the warm angled winter-screen,

On which were many monsters seen

Call’d doves of Siam, Lima mice,

And legless birds of Paradise,

Macaw, and tender Avadavat,

And silken-furr’d Angora cat.

Untir’d she read, her shadow still

Glower’d about, as it would fill

The room with wildest forms and shades,

As though some ghostly Queen of spades

Had come to mock behind her back,

And dance, and ruffle her garments black. (73-88)

The image of ‘some ghostly Queen of spades’ mocking Bertha behind her back suggests that she is one of the unfortunate souls marked for death in the forthcoming year. Ironically, her total immersion in the legend of St. Mark renders her unaware of her impending death. As David Luke explains: ‘While the spade is a traditional death symbol originating from the medieval weapon of that name, its mark on the playing card is also associated with the tool used for grave-digging’.[[406]](#footnote-406) Moreover, Luke suggests that Keats would have been aware of Cowper’s use of spades as ‘the emblem of untimely graves’ in *The Task* (IV, 219).[[407]](#footnote-407) Despite being surrounded by glowering, gigantic shadows, Bertha’s gaze remains fixed on ‘A curious volume, patch’d and torn’ (25). The condition of the book suggests that it has been read many times. One may wonder why a ‘maiden fair’ (39) like Bertha would take such an interest in the life, death and veneration of this particular saint. As Walter E. Houghton reminds us, ‘She is fascinated by a legend, but it is not the legend of St. Mark’s Eve; it is the legend “Of Sainté Markis life and dethe.”’[[408]](#footnote-408) Why, then, is Bertha so captivated by the legend of St. Mark that she is prepared to stay up all night to read about his ‘fervent martyrdom’ (116)? Like Madeline, she longs for revelatory experience, but she can only access it vicariously through reading. If we compare Bertha to the poet-speaker in ‘On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again’, it becomes clear that Keats differentiates between reading as escapism and reading as an intellectual activity:

O golden-tongued Romance with serene lute!

Fair plumed Syren! Queen of far away!

Leave melodizing on this wintry day,

Shut up thine olden pages, and be mute:

Adieu! for once again the fierce dispute,

Betwixt damnation and impassion'd clay

Must I burn through; once more humbly assay

The bitter-sweet of this Shakespearian fruit.

Chief Poet! and ye clouds of Albion,

Begetters of our deep eternal theme,

When through the old oak forest I am gone,

Let me not wander in a barren dream,

But when I am consumed in the fire,

Give me new Phoenix wings to fly at my desire. (1-14)

In this ekphrastic sonnet, the speaker bids ‘Adieu’ to ‘golden-tongued Romance’ and turns instead to Shakespeare, the ‘Chief Poet’ against whom Keats measures all poetic achievement. Romance is characterised as a ‘Syren’ – beautiful and seductive, but perilous to listen to.[[409]](#footnote-409) Keats’s identification of romance with sound (‘golden-tongued’, ‘serene lute’, ‘Syren’, ‘melodizing’) and Shakespeare with taste (‘bitter-sweet [...] fruit’) suggests that reading Shakespeare provides food for thought. It nourishes the imagination in a way that straightforward romance cannot. For Keats, *King Lear* is the pinnacle of negatively capable literature. As he writes in the famous negative capability letter: ‘[T]he excellence of every Art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty & Truth—Examine King Lear & you will find this exemplified throughout’ (*LJK*, I: 192-193). Lesser art is characterised by ‘unpleasantness without any momentous depth of speculation excited, in which to bury its repulsiveness’ (*LJK*, I: 192-193). For Keats, a work of art can only be considered great if it excites ‘depth of speculation’. In other words, truly beautiful art is art that makes one think. As the closing lines of ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ testify, beauty and truth are intimately connected for Keats.[[410]](#footnote-410) As early as 1817, he writes to Benjamin Bailey: ‘I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination - What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth - whether it existed before or not - for I have the same idea of all our passions as of love: they are all, in their sublime, creative of essential beauty’ (*LJK*, I: 184). Keats’s ideas about beauty and truth dovetail with Burke’s treatise on the sublime and beautiful. The experience on sitting down to read *King Lear* is sublime, as it mingles terror and delight (‘bitter-sweet’), whereas ‘golden-tongued Romance’ is akin to a ‘barren dream’; beautiful, pleasurable, but ultimately lacking in what Keats calls ‘truth’. Unlike Bertha, whose gaze is held ‘captive’ by the legend of St. Mark, the speaker-reader of ‘On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again’ has the good sense to tell the personified figure of Romance ‘Shut up thine olden pages, and be mute’. Perhaps if Bertha had done the same, she would be sensible of the ghostly shadow of death at her back. The speaker’s desire to ‘mute’ the siren-song of romance and turn ‘Once Again’ to Shakespeare reflects what Stillinger memorably calls Keats’s ‘growing dissatisfaction with “romance”’.[[411]](#footnote-411) *The Eve of St Mark* is perhaps Keats’s most powerful condemnation of straightforward romance, in that the reader is left uncertain of Bertha’s fate. The poem is unfinished, therefore we are denied a resolution (if indeed Keats intended to provide one in the first place).

**Silence in Ode on a Grecian Urn**

Continuing to think about silence, let us now turn to ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’. Before we begin, it is important to clarify that Keats’s urn is not a real historical artefact, but ‘an imaginary composite’ inspired by his engraving of the Sosibos vase and his reading of Greek literature.[[412]](#footnote-412) As Alice Oswald observes:

This is a poem about quietness [...] the quiet of missed beats and line ends, and the quiet of imagined stone; the carved quiet of the pipes and the look of their stopped music. There is the quiet of suspended questions, and the inscriptive quiet of the urn’s answer, and everywhere the shocked, stuck quiet of people in mid-gesture.[[413]](#footnote-413)

Although the urn is a symbol of death, the quietness in this poem is not the quietness of the grave. Nor is it the religious silence of *The Eve of St Mark* (though the urn does feature a scene of religious ceremony). Rather, Keats's concern in ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ is the silence of the remote, pagan past. Paradoxically, this silence is broken by the urn’s utterance at the end of the poem, but more on this later. This is not only a poem about quietness, but a poem about stillness. The static scenes depicted on the urn and the unanswered questions the speaker poses throughout suspend the reader in a prolonged state of negative capability (‘when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason’). This state is not unlike the position occupied by readers of the Gothic, who must be ‘content with half-knowledge’ until the mystery is revealed (e.g., in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the narrator withholds the secret of what lies beyond the black veil until late in the novel). The radical uncertainty and ambiguity that characterises ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ is akin to what Tzvetan Todorov calls ‘the fantastic’: a literary genre he defines as ‘a dividing line between the uncanny and the marvelous’.[[414]](#footnote-414) Todorov describes the uncanny as the ‘supernatural explained’, and the marvelous as ‘the supernatural accepted’.[[415]](#footnote-415) The fantastic effect arises when it is unclear whether an event has a natural or supernatural cause. Todorov explains: ‘The fantastic . . . lasts only as long as a certain hesitation: a hesitation common to reader and character who must decide whether or not what they perceive derives from “reality” as it exists in the common opinion.’[[416]](#footnote-416) In ‘Ode to a Grecian Urn’, the reader is confronted with such a moment of hesitation when the urn speaks, as it is ambiguous whether the urn’s utterance has a supernatural cause (like Lorenzo’s ghostly voice) or a natural cause (a rational explanation would be: this utterance is the speaker’s interpretation of what the urn *might* say, if it were to speak). This is not the only site of ambiguity in the poem; ‘Even the word ‘still’ in the opening line is semantically unstable, meaning both ‘motionless’ and ‘as yet’.’[[417]](#footnote-417) Lucasta Miller observes that the ode ‘reflects at a tangent Keats’s encounter with the Elgin Marbles’ and ‘refracts his complex response to the pagan past, which he uses as a springboard from which to interrogate – quite literally given the number of question marks that punctuate the poem – the relationship between art and reality, immutability and transience, past and present, death and life.’[[418]](#footnote-418) Keats’s encounter with the Elgin Marbles in 1816 produced two poems: ‘To B. R. Haydon, with a Sonnet Written on Seeing the Elgin Marbles’ and ‘On Seeing the Elgin Marbles’. Both poems reveal Keats’s ambivalent response to the ‘Grecian grandeur’ (12) of these relics. In the latter poem, the speaker experiences ‘an undescribable feud’ (10) around his heart and ‘a most dizzy pain’ (11). Uprooted from antiquity, the lifeless marbles take on an uncanny quality that disturbs and sickens the onlooker: ‘My spirit is too weak – mortality / Weighs heavily on me like unwilling sleep’ (1-2). The figures depicted on the Grecian Urn are just as motionless as those on the Elgin Marbles, but their stasis does not provoke the same sensation of ‘dizzy pain’ in the poet-speaker. On the contrary, their stillness suggests that pain can be indefinitely deferred. This absence of sensation also has the potential to be uncanny. As Brooke Hopkins reminds us: ‘The temporal structure of the uncanny [...] is that of *Nachträglichkeit*, or action deferred’.[[419]](#footnote-419) The lovers in the first scene cannot kiss, but they also ‘cannot fade’. They are locked in a moment of eternal ‘pursuit’ (9) and therefore immune to the effects of ‘slow time’ (2) and ‘human passion’ (28). However, the fantasy of remaining ‘For ever warm and still to be enjoyed, / For ever panting, and for ever young’ (26-27) is revealed to be as empty as the urn itself. As Keats reminds us in the final stanza, marble is cold, not warm, and the fantasy of remaining ‘for ever warm’ and ‘for ever young’ is exactly that. But before I address the poem’s conclusion again, let us examine the three scenes depicted on the urn in more detail. In the first stanza, the speaker personifies the urn using a triptych of cryptic metaphors: ‘Thou still unravished bride of quietness, / Thou foster-child of silence and slow time, / Sylvan historian’ (1-3). It is almost as if the speaker is turning the urn over and examining it from different angles. The image of a quiet, unravished bride resonates with Keats’s characterisation of Madeline in *The Eve of St Agnes*. She, too, is silent before Porphyro claims her as his ‘lovely bride’ (XXXVIII: 334). Like Madeline, the urn is the subject of a voyeuristic gaze. As Helen Vendler posits: ‘The opening address to the urn – grateful, but equilibrated and archeological **–** gives way to a mounting voyeuristic excitement, as the beholder surrenders to the orgiastic scene.’[[420]](#footnote-420) Only when ‘the speaker bends to the urn’ and ‘enters into the life of the religious scene’ in the penultimate stanza does he lose his ‘voyeuristic and narcissistic motives.’[[421]](#footnote-421) Only then can he become a ‘truly aesthetic spectator, viewing the scene with a speculative curiosity which is no longer idle or hectic.’[[422]](#footnote-422) Keats’s personification of the urn as female is in keeping with the ekphrastic tradition of a male speaker addressing a feminised work of art. The instability of Keats’s metaphors suggest that the urn resists any fixed definition. Like Pandora’s jar, this object contains secrets, and it is not willing to give them up (hence the descriptor ‘unravish’d’). All three metaphors emphasise the urn’s silence; even ‘Sylvan historian’ (3) evokes the quietude of forests and libraries. This is compounded by the heavy sibilance in the first four lines: ‘still unravished’, ‘quietness’, ‘foster’, ‘silence’, ‘slow’, ‘Sylvan’, ‘canst thus express’ (1-4). The effect of this is two-fold: firstly, it evokes the soft whistling sound of air moving through a hollow space, which reminds us that we are looking at an object that is physically empty, yet pregnant with meaning. Secondly, it recreates the effect of shushing, as if the speaker is bidding the reader to be silent, like the ‘unheard’ (11) melodies in the second stanza:

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard

Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;

Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,

Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:

Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave

Thy song . . . (II: 11-16)

The enjambed line ‘those unheard / Are sweeter’ mimics the effect of stopped music, as if someone has abruptly muted the sound of the instruments. The speaker bids the ‘soft pipes’ to ‘play on’, but their music takes on a spectral quality: these ‘spirit ditties of no tone’ cannot reach ‘the sensual ear’. Interestingly, the speaker addresses the pipes here, not their players, as if the instruments are capable of producing music without human assistance. This is not the only instance of animism in the poem, as we shall see. When the speaker turns to examine the scene of religious sacrifice in the fourth stanza, there is a tonal shift signalled by the replacement of exclamatory effusions of emotion (e.g., ‘happy, happy love!’ - 25) with another round of interrogative questioning. Keats genders the sacrificial heifer female and draws attention to her ‘silken flanks’ (34) - a detail that echoes the smoothness of the ‘marble [...] maidens’ (42) in the following stanza. We might also make a link between the female heifer and the maiden who ‘struggle[s] to escape’ (9) ravishment in the first stanza. In both the scene of pursuit and the scene of sacrifice, the urn captures a moment of silence and stillness before a moment of violence (noise and action). Keats draws our gaze away from the heifer’s imminent slaughter to the ‘peaceful citadel’ (36). Now ‘emptied’ (37) of its citizens, the ‘little town’ (35) is ‘silent’ (39) and ‘desolate’ (40), like the ‘silent streets’ (14) of the city in *The Eve of St. Mark*. The line ‘not a soul to tell / Why thou art desolate, can e’er return’ reminds us that the artist who rendered the urn’s scenes cannot answer our questions because the silence of death is final. Only the art remains. The poem’s final apostrophe - ‘Cold Pastoral!’ (45) - shows the speaker’s realisation that an eternity of silent inertia is a poor substitute for the warm mutability of human existence. The speaker recognises that there is something undeniably tragic about the fact that the urn’s marble figures will ‘remain’ (47) long after ‘old age’ has laid ‘waste’ to ‘this generation’ (46).

In the final stanza, Keats anthropomorphises the urn again when he addresses it thus: ‘O Attic shape! Fair attitude!’ (41). As Jeffrey Cox suggests, Keats’s phrasing here is a nod to Emma Hamilton’s ‘attitudes’ - a series of tableaux vivants depicting various figures from antiquity. The urn’s resemblance to Hamilton’s work as a living statue, and indeed the ‘marble . . . maidens’, brings to mind the myth of Pygmalion. In his article ‘Keats’s Urn and Ovid’s Pygmalion’, Steven Doloff contends that Keats’s ‘single inspiration for all of these aspects of the ode: theme, artefact and split frieze elements’ is Ovid’s the *Metamorphoses*.[[423]](#footnote-423) Like Pygmalion, who, ‘offended by the sexual wantonness of Cyprus’s female inhabitants . . . rejects the fleshly revelry he finds around him and chooses a ‘higher’ state of celibacy’, Keats’s speaker ‘regrets the self-defeating nature of the flesh and yearns for a suprahuman emotional state’ (here, Doloff quotes lines 28-30).[[424]](#footnote-424) Ultimately, both Pygmalion and the speaker of Keats’s ode find their cold, ‘unravished bride[s]’ wanting:

as the claims of nature inevitably reassert themselves upon Pygmalion, and his purely artistic vision, in his sculpture, of feminine perfection proves for him inadequate, he yearns for the warm, if mutable, reality of the flesh. And similarly, as the ode speaker’s eye eventually follows the cyclic curvature of the urn away from its vision of eternally joyous anticipation to its reverse side with its sacrifice scene, so do his reflections follow the natural trajectory, or dialectic, of the human heart, which must rise *and* fall, to dwell upon the scene’s evoked sense of endless *loss*.[[425]](#footnote-425)

The ‘sense of endless loss’ evoked by the scene of sacrifice is not the same kind of loss that is typically evoked in the elegy; the speaker is not mourning the death of an individual or a community, but the irretrievable past. He is also mourning the loss of an ‘aestheticised ideal’ of beauty, which is revealed to be remote and ‘Cold’ (45).[[426]](#footnote-426) By anthropomorphising the urn and endowing it with speech, Keats evokes a sense of the uncanny. In his 1919 essay ‘Das Unheimliche’, Freud explains that ‘when Pygmalion’s beautiful statue comes to life, this is hardly felt to be uncanny’ because transformations such as this one are commonplace in Greek myths.[[427]](#footnote-427) However, in an ekphrastic ode, one does not expect the work of art to talk back. The object, whether pictorial or a sculpture, is supposed to remain silent. Even the urn’s palindromic response has an uncanny quality, as the repetition of ‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty’ (49) is a form of linguistic doubling. Significantly, the urn ‘offers no definite answer’ and we are forced to be content with ‘half-knowledge’ (*LJK*, I: 193).[[428]](#footnote-428) This cyclical utterance mirrors the urn’s shape, drawing our attention to the fact that it is a material object – and a haunted one at that. Let us not forget that the purpose of an urn is to hold the ashes of the dead. The hitherto silent urn is haunted by secrets, history, the past, and the old ways. The womb-like urn gives birth to poetic inspiration. Its physical emptiness reflects the speaker’s anxiety that all art is empty if it cannot answer our questions. By the end of the poem, one wonders if the urn’s uncanny utterance is a secret that ought to have remained buried.

That the final lines of the ode continue to perplex readers is testament to Keats’s greatness in his own sense of the word: ‘with a great Poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration’ (*LJK*, I: 193). These words, which conclude his musings on ‘negative capability’ in the December 1817 letter, are the key to understanding the urn’s message. Beauty ‘obliterates’ all other considerations because, as the urn proclaims, beauty *is* *truth*, truth *is beauty* (my emphasis).

**‘Ode to a Nightingale’**

If ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ is a poem about quietness, then ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ is a poem about listening. There are no ‘unheard’ melodies (11) in this poem, only the heard melody of the nightingale’s unpremeditated song. Consider Joseph Severn’s painting *Keats Listening to a Nightingale on Hampstead Heath* (1845) in which the poet sits alone in a woodland clearing, an open book at his knee, and an expression of intense concentration on his delicately rendered features. Even without the title, it clearly depicts an act of Romantic listening. Something about Keats’s stance suggests that he is paying attention; the slightly raised hand, perhaps, or the way his gaze seems fixed on something just beyond the frame. This image captures the spirit of the ode, even if it fictionalises the circumstances of its composition. Severn is not the only member of Keats’s inner circle to mythologise the creation of ‘Ode to a Nightingale’. In his memoir of Keats, written long after the poet’s death, Charles Brown offers another account, which is as far-fetched as any found manuscript trope:

In the spring of 1819 a nightingale had built her nest near my house. Keats felt a tranquil and continual joy in her song; and one morning he took his chair from the breakfast table to the grass plot under a plum tree, where he sat for two or three hours. When he came into the house, I perceived he had some scraps of paper in his hand, and these he was quietly thrusting behind the books. On inquiry, I found those scraps, four or five in number, contained his poetic feeling on the song of our nightingale. The writing was not well legible; and it was difficult to arrange the stanzas on so many scraps. With his assistance I succeeded, and this was his ‘Ode to a Nightingale’.[[429]](#footnote-429)

The reliability of Brown’s recollection is a point of contention in Keats scholarship. Keats’s close friend and neighbour Charles Wentworth Dilke called Brown’s story ‘pure delusion’ - a sentiment that Judith Chernaik echoes in her recent article titled ‘Keats and Charles Brown’s Memoir: Was Keats’s Nightingale Really a Thrush?’. Whether Keats heard a nightingale or not, ‘it does not take a professional ornithologist to know that it is the male nightingale, not the female, who sings’; therefore, we can be sure that Keats is ‘not interested in reproducing the exact encounter with the bird’.[[430]](#footnote-430) Both Severn’s painting and Brown’s account offer valuable insight into Keats’s craft in that they capture the ‘sensation and watchfulness’ of poetic ‘Genius’.[[431]](#footnote-431) Significantly, both accounts foreground the act of listening, which is central in the poem. When the ode begins, the nightingale has already faded into the ‘forest dim’ (20). What remains is the memory of its song, and its effect on the devout listener. As I discuss in the previous chapter, Keats compares the nightingale’s song to the effects of drinking ‘hemlock’ (2) in the opening stanza. The bird’s music is like an opiate that induces a state of ‘drowsy numbness’ (1) and forgetfulness; it only takes ‘one minute’ (4) for the speaker to sink ‘Lethe-wards’ (4) into a trance. According to Lemprière’s classical dictionary (a favourite of Keats’s), Lethe is ‘one of the rivers of hell, whose waters the souls of the dead drank after they had been confined for a certain space of time in Tartarus. It had the power of making them forget whatever they had done, seen, or heard before’.[[432]](#footnote-432) By associating the bird’s song with death (the underworld) and the idea of fading away (spectrality), Keats immediately sets a gothic tone for his ode. The speaker addresses the nightingale in lines 7-10, but instead of calling the bird by its name, he describes it as a ‘Dryad of the trees’ (7). This suggests a certain slipperiness, as if the bird is capable of shapeshifting, or melting into the woodland landscape. Keats describes the scenery in musical terms: ‘In some melodious plot / Of beechen green, and shadows numberless’ (9). Note that it is not the nightingale’s song that is ‘melodious’ (8), but the landscape. It is almost as if the woods are haunted by the nightingale’s song. In the following stanza, Keats evokes another kind of music. Lucasta Miller writes:

In a moment of typically Keatsian synaesthesia, the draught of vintage tastes of ‘Provençal song’, an image which melds the senses of taste and hearing, and also the mouth-sensations of drinking and singing. In the phrase, Keats also self-alludes to the song played by Porphyro on Madeline’s lute in *The Eve of St Agnes*, which is described as a ‘ditty […] in Provence called, “La Belle Dame sans Mercy”.[[433]](#footnote-433)

‘Provençal song[s]’ appear in three of Keats’s poems during his ‘living year’: *The Eve of St Agnes*, 'La Belle Dame sans Merci' and ‘Ode to a Nightingale’).[[434]](#footnote-434) In all three poems, music is associated with sleep: Madeline is asleep when Porphyro plays his ‘ancient ditty’ (XXXIII: 291), the knight is lulled asleep by the ‘faery’s song’ (VI: 24), and the speaker of ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ begins to fade after drinking from a ‘draught of vintage’ (II: 11) that tastes like ‘Provençal song’ (II: 14).[[435]](#footnote-435) In chapter 2 of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, St. Aubert is advised by his physician to leave his home in La Vallée and journey to Provence and Languedoc for his health. Similarly, the speaker of ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ prescribes himself ‘a beaker full of the warm South’ (II: 15), only this is not a cure, but a poison that will enable him to ‘drink and leave the world unseen’ and ‘fade away into the forest dim’ (II: 19-20). This is, of course, not the only nod to Radcliffe in the poem. There are a number of parallels between Keats’s ode and Radcliffe’s poem ‘To a Nightingale’, which appears in *The Romance of the Forest* (1791):

Child of the melancholy song!

O yet that tender strain prolong!

Her lengthen'd shade when Evening flings,

From mountain-cliffs, and forests green,

And sailing slow on silent wings,

Along the glimmering West is seen;

I love o'er pathless hills to stray,

Or trace the winding vale remote,

And pause, sweet Bird! to hear thy lay

While moonbeams on the thin clouds float,

Till o'er the Mountain's dewy head

Pale Midnight steals to wake the dead.

Far through the heaven's ethereal blue,

Wafted on Spring's light airs you come,

With blooms, and flowers, and genial dew,

From climes where Summer joys to roam;

O! welcome to your long-lost home!

"Child of the melancholy song!"

Who lov'st the lonely woodland glade

To mourn, unseen, the boughs among,

When Twilight spreads her pensive shade,

Again thy dulcet voice I hail!

O pour again the liquid note

That dies upon the evening gale!

For Fancy loves the kindred tone;

Her griefs the plaintive accents own.

She loves to hear thy music float

At solemn Midnight's stillest hour,

And think on friends for ever lost,

On joys by disappointment crost,

And weep anew Love's charmful power!

Then Memory wakes the magic smile,

Th' impassion'd voice, the melting eye,

That wont the trusting heart beguile,

And wakes again the hopeless sigh.

Her skill the glowing tints revive

Of scenes that Time had bade decay;

She bids the soften'd Passions live—

The Passions urge again their sway.

Yet o'er the long-regretted scene

Thy song the grace of sorrow throws;

A melancholy charm serene,

More rare than all that mirth bestows,

Then hail, sweet Bird, and hail thy pensive tear!

To Taste, to Fancy, and to Virtue dear! (chapter XVIII, p. 248)

In addition to general echoes in imagery (references to the moon, the colour green, woodland, flowers, summer, Fancy, death and evening) there are several specific lines in Radcliffe’s poem which anticipate the language, imagery and scansion of Keats’s ode: ‘winding mossy ways’ (40) echoes ‘winding vale remote’ (8), ‘To cease upon the midnight’ (56) echoes ‘That dies upon the evening’ (24), and ‘plaintive anthem’ (75) echoes ‘plaintive accents’ (26). Moreover, as Jane Stabler observes, Keats’s line ‘To cease upon the midnight with no pain’ (56) recalls the lines ‘To hear, upon the midnight calm / Sweet Philomela pour her grief’(48) in another of Radcliffe’s poems - ‘Titania to Her Love’ (*The Romance of the Forest*, chapter XVII, p. 238-9).[[436]](#footnote-436) However, Keats’s nightingale is not a ‘Child of the melancholy song’ (1) like Radcliffe’s, but a creature who has ‘never known / The weariness, the fever, and the fret’ (22-23) of the world. In this sense, Keats’s ode is closer to Coleridge’s ‘The Nightingale’ (1798), in which the speaker criticises poets who project their own emotions onto the nightingale:

Most musical, most melancholy bird!

A melancholy bird? Oh! idle thought!

In Nature there is nothing melancholy.

But some night-wandering man whose heart was pierced

With the remembrance of a grievous wrong,

Or slow distemper, or neglected love,

(And so, poor wretch! filled all things with himself,

And made all gentle sounds tell back the tale

Of his own sorrow) he, and such as he,

First named these notes a melancholy strain.

And many a poet echoes the conceit; (‘The Nightingale’, 13-23)[[437]](#footnote-437)

Keats diverges from the conventional depiction of the nightingale in poems of the period. Untouched by melancholy, Keats’s nightingale is oblivious or indifferent to human suffering. His bird sings ‘of summer in full-throated ease’ (10) while the speaker sinks ‘Lethe-wards’ (4) into oblivion. The speaker claims that he does not ‘envy’ the bird’s ‘happy lot’ (5), but this is surely contingent upon his interpretation of the nightingale’s song as easeful (‘full-throated ease’ - 10) and ecstatic (‘pouring forth thy soul abroad / In such an ecstasy! - 57-58). He claims that the bird has ‘never known’ (22) suffering, but how can he be sure? In the sixth stanza, he refers to the nightingale’s song as a ‘requiem’ (60), which suggests lamentation rather than ‘happiness’ (6). Instead of reflecting the speaker’s melancholy, the nightingale represents his desire for immortality and a life without pain – a dream that he ultimately rejects in the final stanza. As I discuss in chapter one, dreams, nightmares and nightingales were among the subjects Coleridge and Keats broached when they crossed paths in Highgate in April 1819, so it stands to reason that their encounter influenced Keats’s thinking in this ode.[[438]](#footnote-438) Although Keats’s bird is coded as female (‘Dryad’ - 7), and therefore still evocative of Philomela, it is clear that he was persuaded by the older poet’s argument. Vendler contends that**:**

Keats’s ode . . . follows Coleridge’s injunction to the poet that he should refuse to be coerced away from natural perception by the inherited mythological legend of Philomela’s sorrows; instead he should “stretch his limbs . . . in mossy forest-dell” and “surrender his whole spirit” to nonrepresentational sensations . . . In this way, by echoing the true joyous sound that he actually hears, he will gain poetic authenticity from nature, and “his fame should share in Nature’s immortality.” Because the nightingale among the leaves has never known the sorrows of the world, Keats, obeying Coleridge, thinks that he too must sequester himself from the woes of the world, and, suppressing other senses in favor of hearing, listen raptly to the nightingale**.**[[439]](#footnote-439)

Sequestered among ‘verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways’ (40), the speaker’s eyes fail to adjust to the ‘embalmed darkness’ (43) and he must rely instead on hearing. Keats’s use of the word ‘embalmed’ conjures a Gothic image of premature burial, which changes how we read the preceding lines: ‘I cannot see what flowers are at my feet, / Not what soft incense hangs upon the boughs’ (41-42). It was customary in the nineteenth century for people to use flowers to mask unpleasant aromas before embalming cadavers. Similarly, incense has funerary connotations. Even the phrase ‘hangs upon the boughs’ takes on a sinister quality in the context of the ode’s pervasive death imagery. It is worth noting that capital punishment was carried out in public until 1868 and the most common method of execution in the period was hanging. Thoughts of death transform the innocent tree boughs into gallows in the speaker’s mind. Gallows were typically wooden and one such site in London was known as the ‘Tyburn Tree’. Although the last hanging at the Tyburn Tree was in 1783, hangings continued to take place at Newgate Prison. It is plausible that Keats would have encountered the cadavers of hanged men during his time as a medical student at Guy’s Hospital.[[440]](#footnote-440) Such conditions would certainly attract ‘The murmurous haunt of flies’ (50). As Lucasta Miller remarks, ‘the soundtrack is ominous, the ‘murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves’ evoking decay and death’.[[441]](#footnote-441) Keats evokes a similar sound in ‘To Autumn’ when he writes: ‘Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn’ (27). In both instances, Keats amplifies the sounds made by small insects to convey rapt listening. In the sixth stanza, this rapt listening turns to rapture as he contemplates his own death:

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time

I have been half in love with easeful Death,

Call'd him soft names in many a mused 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. (51-60)

The OED lists nine meanings for ‘darkling’. Here are the ones relevant to Keats:

1633–1929

darkling, n.¹

An evil person; (also) a person who lacks knowledge; an unenlightened person. Obsolete.

?c1450–1813

darkling, adv. & adj.

In the dark; in darkness. Also figurative. Obsolete.

1689–

darkling, adv. & adj.

Dark (in various figurative senses); hidden; obscure; unenlightened; unhappy.

1695–

darkling, adv. & adj.

Of, relating to, or associated with the dark or the night; carried out or occurring in the dark or at night.

a1718–

darkling, adv. & adj.

Growing dark or characterised by darkness; dark; dim, gloomy.

1801–

darkling, adv. & adj.

That darkens or obscures.[[442]](#footnote-442)

As these entries show, ‘darkling’ is now obsolete, but even in the Romantic period, the word was fading out of use.[[443]](#footnote-443) Keats was familiar with the word from his close reading of *Paradise Lost*, in which Milton reflects on his blindness and expresses his kinship with the blind poets and prophets before him whose ‘Harmonious numbers’ can still be heard in the darkness , just ‘as the wakeful Bird / Sings darkling, and in shadiest Covert hid / Tunes her nocturnal Note’ (3:37-40). Keats’s speaker - or, more accurately, listener - is not blind, but he is entombed in a darkness that is both literal and metaphorical. His use of the word ‘darkling’ also recalls the moment in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* when Demetrius abandons Helena in a darkening glade, causing her to exclaim: ‘O wilt thou darkling leave me?’ (2:2:92). This is not the only Shakespearean play Keats alludes to in the ‘Ode to a Nightingale’. R.S. White compares the terminal stanza to Caliban’s Act 3 Scene 2 speech in *The Tempest*:

Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises,

Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.

Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments

Will hum about mine ears; and sometime voices

That, if I then had waked after long sleep,

Will make me sleep again; and then in dreaming,

The clouds methought would open, and show riches

Ready to drop upon me, that when I waked

I cried to dream again.[[444]](#footnote-444) (*The Tempest*, 3.2.138-146)

White notes that ‘Caliban’s speech is certainly not the only time Shakespeare describes the experience of the ‘waking dream’ [...] but Keats’ heavy markings on this occasion must indicate a recognition that the passage itself is a powerful statement of one of his own poetic obsessions.’[[445]](#footnote-445)Unlike Caliban, the speaker of ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ does not ‘cry to dream again’; on the contrary, he bids ‘Adieu’ to ‘fancy’ and finally embraces the uncertainties, mysteries and doubts of reality, as we see in the ode’s final questions: ‘Was it a vision, or a waking dream? / Fled is that music; – Do I wake or sleep?’ (79-80). This tragic realisation that ‘The fairy enchantment of music can fade’ is what ‘tolls’ the speaker back to his ‘sole self’.[[446]](#footnote-446) He recognises, perhaps too late, that the nightingale’s song is a ‘plaintive anthem’ (75), not a joyful song of summer. I say too late because his death wish may have already come true; like the bird’s song, which is now ‘buried deep / In the next valley-glades’ (77-78), the speaker is fading out by the end of the poem. Minahan’s view that ‘In Keats’s poetry, music is associated either with the past or with the present’s liability to become the past’ is manifest in the nightingale’s fading song, the fading light, and the speaker’s uncertainty about whether he is awake or asleep.[[447]](#footnote-447) Perhaps more than any other poem in the period, ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ evokes the mood of the Romantic nocturne (French for ‘of the night’). The Irish composer John Field was the first to apply the title of nocturne to a musical composition in 1812. Of course, Mozart’s Notturno in D, K.286 and Serenata Notturna, K. 239 came before, but these pieces are not necessarily evocative of night; rather, they are performed in the evening, as per the custom of the Italian *notturno*. There is no record of Keats listening to Field’s nocturnes, but he was certainly familiar with Mozart’s music, as the following passage from Keats’s epistle ‘To Charles Cowden Clarke’ attests:

But many days have past since last my heart

Was warm’d luxuriously by divine Mozart;

By Arne delighted, or by Handel madden’d;

Or by the song of Erin pierc’d and sadden’d (109-112)

The nightingale’s song may bring to mind summer and the ‘warm South’ (15), but it does not warm the speaker’s heart like Mozart’s music warms Keats’s.[[448]](#footnote-448) On the contrary, listening to the bird’s nocturnal notes prompts the speaker to fantasise about suicide. This is suggested in the lines ‘Darkling I listen; and, for many a time / I have been half in love with easeful Death’ (51-52) and ‘To thy high requiem become a sod’ (60). To ‘become a sod’ is to return to the earth; to melt into the ‘quiet grave’ as Keats would later say as he lay dying in Severn’s arms.[[449]](#footnote-449) Seduced by the idea of an ‘easeful’ (VI: 52) death, the ode almost becomes a swan song. When the word ‘Forlorn’ tolls the speaker back to his ‘sole self’ (71-72), he is mere moments away from joining the knight of 'La Belle Dame sans Merci' who is ‘lullèd . . . asleep’ (33) only to wake ‘On the cold hill side’ (35), having dreamed his last dream. Incidentally, Mozart was one of the first composers to set Ludwig Christoph Heinrich Hölty’s poem ‘An die Nachtigall’ (1783) to music, but the most famous setting of the poem in the Romantic period is Franz Schubert’s in 1815 and 1816. As Lucasta Miller observes, Keats’s nightingale ode ‘approaches in language the bitter-sweet sound-world that Keats’s contemporary (and fellow syphilis sufferer) Schubert was developing at exactly the same period.’[[450]](#footnote-450) With its triplet broken chords, Schubert’s piano score captures the sonic essence of the nightingale’s lilting song.[[451]](#footnote-451) The piece is played in a minor key and set like a lament, which reflects the melancholy quality of the nightingale’s song that poets like Hölty emphasised, much to Coleridge’s chagrin. While Keats’s familiarity with Hölty’s work is not known, there is a striking resemblance between his ode and Hölty’s poem: ‘Country songs’ become a lone ‘Provencal song’; ‘the muffled sound of the evening bell’ becomes ‘the very word is like a bell’, and the ‘full throat’ of Hölty’s nightingale recurs in the ‘full-throated ease’ of Keats’s evoked birdsong.

If, as Brown recollects, Keats did feel ‘a tranquil and continual joy’ in the nightingale’s song, this is not readily apparent in his ode. The speaker’s delight in the nightingale’s happiness is undercut by his longing to ‘drink, and leave the world unseen’ and ‘Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget’ (19-20) what the nightingale has ‘never known’ (22). The ugly, human sounds of pain in ‘The weariness, the fever, and the fret / Here, where men sit and hear each other groan’ (23-24) cannot be completely drowned out by the nightingale’s song. Ultimately, the nightingale’s music cannot make the speaker forget about the conditions of his own mortality. The ‘immortal’ (61) nightingale’s song echoes through the ages, charming ‘emperor[s]’, ‘clown[s]’ (64) and ‘magic casements’ (69), but it cannot find a path through the sad heart of the speaker who is left to contemplate the silence that inevitably follows ‘Fled . . . music’ (80).[[452]](#footnote-452)

Like the poet-speaker in ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, who listens intently to the nightingale’s transcendent song, this chapter - and indeed the thesis as a whole - positions Keats as a poet whose ear was consciously attuned to the Gothic strains around him.

# 

# **Conclusion**

Throughout this thesis, I have endeavoured to present Keats as both an appreciative reader and earnest writer of the Gothic, whose innovatively embodied approach deserves more scholarly attention. One word that has come up time and time again in this study is *enchantment*. Defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as ‘the action or process of enchanting, or of employing magic or sorcery’ or, in the figurative sense, ‘Alluring or overpowering charm; enraptured condition; (delusive) appearance of beauty’, enchantment describes a sense of mystery so beguiling one may ‘Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget’ reality (‘Ode to a Nightingale’, 21).[[453]](#footnote-453) For Keats, the acceptance of mystery is what makes a ‘Man of Achievement especially in Literature’ (*LJK*, I: 193), therefore, we can surmise that the negatively capable poet is one who embraces enchantment in spite of its dangers.

Enchantment takes many forms in Keats’s oeuvre: it is the perilous fairy realm of ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’, the reverie brought on by the nightingale’s transient song in ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, Madeline’s ‘midnight charm’ in *The Eve of St Agnes*, the fragile spell the titular bride casts over the banquet room in *Lamia*, and so on. What is distinctive about Keats’s presentation of enchantment is its liability to fade. In his poetry, enchantment is precarious, and one’s susceptibility to its illusive power often has dire, if not fatal, consequences. This focus in Keats’s poetry on the perils of enchantment is similar to what Jack Stillinger calls ‘Keats's central preoccupation in his writings from *Endymion* on through 1819, his peculiar focus on the human heart’s capacity to invest in a “dream” (or dream-like illusion of some sort) and then, not invariably to replace it with a reality, but to experience the inevitable necessity of such a replacement.’[[454]](#footnote-454) While not analogous, dreaming and enchantment are intimately connected; dreams and dream-like illusions are one of the main ways in which enchantment manifests itself in Keats’s poetry. The dark side of enchantment is, of course, disenchantment: the moment when reality dispels fantasy. Thus, this thesis has come full circle; we are back to David Punter’s assertion that, in Keats, terror is not the dream itself, but the ‘freezing touch of reality’.[[455]](#footnote-455)

As I mention in the introduction, Keats lived in an age of disenchantment. The Enlightenment ushered in a set of values (namely reason, progress, rationalism, empiricism and secularisation) that demystified the magic of the world. Keats touches on this in lines 229-238 of *Lamia*. I have already discussed this passage in the introduction and chapter 2, but it bears repeating here:

. . . Do not all charms fly

At the mere touch of cold philosophy?

There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:

We know her woof, her texture; she is given

In the dull catalogue of common things.

Philosophy will clip an Angel’s wings,

Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,

Empty the haunted air and gnomèd mine ‒

Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made

The tender-personed Lamia melt into a shade. (229-238)

To say that this passage is a straightforward critique of Enlightenment values would be a gross oversimplification - not only of the complexity of Keats’s writing, but of his gordian feelings about scientific progress. Nevertheless, *Lamia* is certainly a poem about disenchantment and the destructive consequences of ‘cold philosophy’. Keats hints at this from the very beginning when the narrator tells us that the story is set ‘Upon a time, *before* the faery broods’ (my emphasis) occupied the ‘prosperous woods’ (1-2). The poem takes place in a world of mythological enchantment, but even here in this ancient woodland vale where nymphs, Gods and magical beings roam, mystery (represented by Lamia) is on the verge of collapse. In *Lamia* - and, indeed, in the other poems I have discussed from the 1820 volume - Keats expresses a disenchantment with enchantment.

I wish to conclude this thesis by proposing that enchantment - and, by extension, disenchantment - is *the* defining feature of the Keatsian Gothic. Most of the ‘major poems’ in the 1820 volume - namely *Isabella, or The Pot of Basi*l, *The Eve of St Agnes*, *The Eve of St Mark*, *Lamia*, ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, ‘Ode on Melancholy’, ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’ and *The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream* - are concerned with enchantment and its perils. As I have shown throughout this thesis, Keats’s scenes of enchantment rely heavily on sensory stimuli, which lulls the characters (and by extension, the reader) into a state of heightened suggestibility where they/we are at risk of becoming ‘Hoodwinked with faery fancy’ (*The Eve of St Agnes*, VIII: 70).

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**Radio:**

‘Alice Oswald on Ode on a Grecian Urn’, *The Essay*, BBC Radio 3, 28 September 2020, 22:45.

‘Sasha Dugdale on Ode to a Nightingale’, *The Essay*, BBC Radio 3, 1 October 2020, 22:45.

**Filmography:**

*Bright Star*, dir. by Jane Campion (2009; London: BBC Films)

1. The phrase ‘the literature of terror’ (as a definition of the Gothic) was coined by David Punter in his two-volume work *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions* (London: Routledge, 1996). I quote from the 2nd edition (2013) in this thesis. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. John Keats, *The Letters of John Keats, 1814-1818*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958) p. 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Thomas De Quincey, *The Works of Thomas De Quincey*, *Vol. II:* *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater, 1821-1856*, ed. Grevel Lindop (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2000) p. 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Michael Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception, and Canon Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p. 4. I discuss Keats’s epistolary mentions of Radcliffe on pp. 21-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. David Punter and Glennis Byron, *The Gothic* (Malden, MA, Oxford and Victoria: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004) p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid. p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. E. J. Clery, ‘The genesis of “Gothic” fiction’, *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The first edition was simply titled *The Castle of Otranto: A Story* (1764). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Horace Walpole, ‘Preface to the Second Edition’, *The Castle of Otranto*, ed. Nick Groom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 9-14 (p. 9). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Dale Townshend, *Gothic Antiquity: History, Romance, and the Architectural Imagination, 1760-1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019) p. 346. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The Oxford English Dictionary entry for ‘medieval’ lists T. D. Fosbrooke’s *British Monachism* (1817) as the first text to make use of this word. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Richard Hurd, *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* excerpted in *Gothic Documents, A Sourcebook: 1700–1820*, ed. E. J. Clery and Robert Miles (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 67-78 (p. 68). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Clery, ‘The genesis of “Gothic” fiction’, p. 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. John Keats, *The Complete Poems*, ed. John Barnard, 3rd edition (London: Penguin, 1988) p. 217. All poems cited are from this edition and line numbers are indicated in parentheses. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Clare A. Simmons, ‘Romantic medievalism’, *The Cambridge Companion to Medievalism* ed. Louise D'Arcens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016) pp. 103-118, p. 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Simmons, p. 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Simmons, p. 108. It is worth noting here that Walpole also had ‘a lifelong fascination’ with *The Faerie Queene* - the ‘epic romance to which the enchanted castle in Otranto alludes, and to which Walpole in his correspondence about Strawberry Hill continuously referred.’ - Townshend, *Gothic Antiquity*, p. 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Charles Armitage Brown, *Life of John Keats* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937) p. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. The following speech from Porphyro in *The Eve of St Agnes* evokes Spenser’s Knight of the Redcross: ‘My Madeline! sweet dreamer! lovely bride! / Say, may I be for aye thy vassal blest? /Thy beauty's shield, heart-shap'd and vermeil dyed?’ (XXXVIII: 334-336). For a detailed study of the influence of Spenser on Keats’s poetry, see: Greg Kucich’s *Keats, Shelley, and Romantic Spenserianism* (1991). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. C. S. Lewis, ‘On Reading *The Faerie Queene*’ in *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966) pp. 146-149, p. 147-148. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Katie Garner, ‘Keats’s quest: Medievalism, romance and the Scottish tour’, *John Keats and romantic Scotland* ed. Katie Garner and Nicholas Roe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022) pp. 139-157, p. 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. John Keats, *The Letters of John Keats, 1814-1818*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958). All subsequent citations of letters will appear in parentheses, e.g., (*LJK*, I: 362). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Garner, p. 140-141. Garner cites the essay column titled *The Round Table* in Leigh Hunt’s *The Examiner* (1808-1886) as one such example of this ‘ironic chivalric self-fashioning’. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Elizabeth Fay, *Romantic Medievalism: History and the Romantic Literary Ideal* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave, 2002) p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Fay, p. 110-111. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. David Punter, *The Literature of Terror. Volume 1, The Gothic Tradition : A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*, 2nd edition (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2013) p. 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, p 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Townshend, *Gothic Antiquity*, p. 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, p. 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, p. 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. By ‘classical poems’, I mean poems that have or evoke a classical setting (typically ancient Greece). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Joyce Carol Oates, ‘The Aesthetics of Fear’, *Salmagundi* No. 120 (Fall 1998) pp. 176-185 (p. 176). The crux of Oates’s argument is that gothic literature invites us to question our humanity and its proximity to monstrousness. This is pertinent to my discussion of *Lamia* in chapter 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. By ‘mature’ poetry, I mean the poems that appear in the 1820 volume *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes and Other Poems*. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. He also stated that poetry is ‘matured by . . . sensation and watchfulness’ (*LJK*, I: 374). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (London: Women’s Press Limited, 1986) p. 90-91. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, ed. Marilyn Butler (London: Penguin, 2003) p. 102; William Hazlitt, Lectures on English Comic Writer*s* VI: On the English Novelists in *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. A. R. Waller and Arnold Glover (London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1903) pp. 106-133; Mary Shelley, ‘Author’s Introduction to the Standard Novels Edition (1831) in *Frankenstein*, ed. Maurice Hindle (London: Penguin, 2013) p. 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Moers, *Literary Women*, p. 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Ibid. p. 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Xavier Aldana Reyes, ‘Gothic affect: An alternative approach to critical models of the contemporary gothic’, *New Directions in 21st Century Gothic: The Gothic Compass*, ed. Lorna Piatti-Farnell and Donna Lee Brian (Abington and New York: Routledge, 2025), pp. 11-23, p. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. This thematic structure also allows me to revisit certain poems throughout. For example, I discuss The Eve of St Agnes in all four chapters, as it is particularly rich in Gothic imagery and motifs. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. *Poetry Foundation*, Glossary of Poetic Terms <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/education/glossary/synesthesia>> [accessed 22 July 2025). For an in-depth analysis of Keats’s synaesthetic metaphors, see: Stephen de Ullman’s ‘Romanticism and Synaesthesia: A Comparative Study of Sense Transfer in Keats and Byron’, *PMLA*, Vol. 60, No. 3 (1945) pp. 811-827. Ullman concludes that Keats possessed ‘an inner urge impelling him to reflect in his poetry the interplay of sensations which was constantly taking place in his own mind.’ (p. 827). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. William Hazlitt, ‘The Round Table’, No. 40, *The Examiner*, Issue 439 (May 26 1816) pp. 332-333, p. 332. I return to this essay in chapter 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. I revisit this idea in Chapter 3 in my discussion of *The Eve of St Agnes* and Ann Radcliffe’s *A Sicilian Romance* (p. 199-121). In these texts, overwhelming the senses is a trick to enchant the heroines. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Stacey McDowell, ‘The Senses and Sensation’, *John Keats in Context*, ed. Michael O’Neill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) pp. 188-197, p. 189. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Arthur Henry Hallam, ‘The significance of Keats’s work’ in *Keats: The Critical Heritage*, ed. G. M. Matthews (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971) pp. 264-272, p. 267. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Matthew Arnold, ‘The Study of Poetry’, in *Essays in Criticism* (London: Macmillan, 1865), pp. 1-36, p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. *Bright Star*, dir. by Jane Campion (2009; London: BBC Films) [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. I return to the topic of Keats’s reputation as an overly sensual poet in chapter 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Shahidha K. Bari, *Keats and Philosophy: The Life of Sensations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012) p. xix. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Rowland Prothero, *The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals* (London: John Murray, 1880-1901; rpt. Octagon Books, 1966) VII, p. 217. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996) p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Hammond was the doctor of the Jennings family, including Keats’s mother, Frances Jennings. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Nicholas Roe, *John Keats: A New Life* (London: Yale University Press, 2012) p. 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. There is a wealth of scholarship on the ways in which Keats’s medical training influenced his poetry, such as Donald C. Goellnicht’s, *The Poet-Physician: Keats and Medical Science* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1984), Hermione De Almeida’s, *Romantic Medicine and John Keats* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), Alan Richardson’s *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), Noel Jackson’s *Science and Sensation in Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), *John Keats and the Medical Imagination* ed. Nicholas Roe (eBook: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017) and Hrileena Ghosh’s *John Keats’ Medical Notebook: Text, Context and Poems* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020). While this thesis touches upon details of Keats’s medical background where relevant, my focus is on sensory imagery and language as it pertains to the Gothic imagination. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Edmund Burke, ‘A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful’ excerptedin *Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook 1700-1820*, ed. E.J. Clery and Robert Miles (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) pp. 112-113. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. James T. Boulton declares that ‘sense experience is the groundwork of all’ in Burke’s essay ‘On Taste’ (I revisit this in chapter three). The same is true of *Enquiry*, as Burke ‘followed in a great tradition in holding his sensationist philosophy: the dependence of the mind, for its ideas, on the senses was fundamental to the work of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume.’ - Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. James T. Boulton (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2008) p. xxxii-xxxiii. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. The genealogy that follows is not exhaustive; rather, it is intended as an overview of *some* of the major developments in the discourse on terror and horror in the period. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. John Dennis, ‘The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry’ in *Gothic Documents, A Sourcebook: 1700–1820*, ed. E. J. Clery and Robert Miles (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 100-104, p. 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Dennis, ‘The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry’, p. 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Joseph Addison, ‘Essay no. 412 (23 June, 1712)’, in Donald F. Bond (ed.), *The Spectator*, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), vol. 3, p. 540. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Joseph Addison, ‘Essay no. 418 (30 June, 1712)’, in Donald F. Bond (ed.), *The Spectator*, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), vol. 3, p. 568. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. ‘On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror’ is usually attributed to Anna Laetitia Aikin and ‘Sir Bertrand, A Fragment’ to John Aikin. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Eric Parisot, ‘The Aesthetics of Terror and Horror: A Genealogy’, *The Cambridge History of the Gothic, Volume 1: Gothic in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Angela Wright, Dale Townshend (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) pp. 284-303, p. 288. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Parisot, ‘The Aesthetics of Terror and Horror: A Genealogy’, p. 288. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Anna Laetitia Aikin, ‘On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror’, in *Gothic Documents, A Sourcebook: 1700–1820*, ed. E. J. Clery and Robert Miles(Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 127–9, p. 127-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Parisot, p. 294. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Parisot, ‘The Aesthetics of Terror and Horror: A Genealogy’, p. 295. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Nathan Drake, ‘On Objects of Terror’, in E. J. Clery and Robert Miles (eds), *Gothic Documents, A Sourcebook: 1700–1820* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 160-163, p. 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Drake, ‘On Objects of Terror’, p. 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Drake, ‘On Objects of Terror’, p. 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Ann Radcliffe, ‘On the Supernatural in Poetry’, *Gothic Documents: A sourcebook, 1800-1820*, ed. E. J. Clery, Robert Miles (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007) pp. 163-171, p. 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Ann Radcliffe, ‘On the Supernatural in Poetry’, p. 169. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Ann Radcliffe, ‘On the Supernatural in Poetry’, p. 164-165. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Ann Radcliffe, ‘On the Supernatural in Poetry’, p. 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Keats states that Wordsworth’s ‘Genius is explorative of those dark Passages’ and cites ‘Tintern Abbey’ as evidence. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Jane Stabler, ‘Ann Radcliffe’s poetry: The poetics of refrain and inventory’ in *Ann Radcliffe, Romanticism and the Gothic*, eds. Dale Townshend and Angela Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) pp. 185-202, p. 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Martha Hale Shackford, ‘‘The Eve of St Agnes and the Mysteries of Udolpho’, *PMLA*, Vol. 36: 1 (March 1921), pp. 104-118, p. 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Jerrold E. Hogle, ‘The Gothic-Romantic Relationship: Underground Histories in “The Eve of St Agnes”, *European Romantic Review*, Vol. 14 (2003) pp. 205-223, p. 206. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 214. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Margaret Homans, ‘Keats Reading Women, Women Reading Keats’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 29:3 (1990) pp. 341-370, p. 360. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Stabler, p. 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Lord Byron, *Selected Poems*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson and Peter J. Manning (London: Penguin, 2005) p. 517. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Nathan Drake, *Literary Hours: or Sketches Critical, Narrative and Poetical*, vol. 1 of 2, 2nd edition (London: J. Burkitt, T. Cadell junior and W. Davies, 1800) p. 359. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. In each of Radcliffe’s novels, the reader is suspended in a prolonged state of uncertainty, mystery and doubt. However, the veil is eventually lifted and supernatural occurrences are revealed to have rational explanations. It is possible that Keats saw Radcliffe’s ‘explained supernatural’ in opposition to his own preference for ‘depth of speculation’. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Stabler, ‘Ann Radcliffe’s poetry: The poetics of refrain and inventory’, p. 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Homans, ‘Keats Reading Women, Women Reading Keats’ p. 346. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. I discuss Keats’s presentation of women in more detail in chapter 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (London: Routledge, 1993) p. 184. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Walter Jackson Bate, John Keats (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1963) p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) p. 175. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Marjorie Levinson, *Keats's Life of Allegory: The Origins of a Style* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. See: Michael Gamer, Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception, and Canon Formation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1802*, ed. Fiona Stafford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) p. 99-100. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Martha Hale Shackford, ‘‘The Eve of St Agnes and the Mysteries of Udolpho’, *PMLA*, March 1921, Vol. 36, No. 1 (March 1921), pp. 104-118, p. 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Williams, *Art of Darkness*, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Beth Lau, ‘Madeline at Northanger Abbey: Keats’s Antiromances and Gothic Satire’, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 84, No. 1 (Jan., 1985), pp. 30-50, p. 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Jack Stillinger, ‘Keats and Romance: The “Reality” of *Isabella*’, *The Hoodwinking of Madeline and Other Essays on Keats’s Poems* (Urbana, Chicago, and London: University of Illinois Press, 1971) pp. 31-45, p. 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Jack Stillinger, ‘The Hoodwinking of Madeline: Skepticism in *The Eve of St Agnes*’, *The Hoodwinking of Madeline and Other Essays on Keats’s Poems* (London: University of Illinois Press, 1971) pp. 67-93, p. 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. ‘Unsigned review, Monthly Review’ in *Keats: The Critical Heritage*, ed. G. M. Matthews (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Limited, 1971) pp. 159-163, p. 159. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Ibid., p. 161 and p. 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. ‘Unsigned notice, Literary Chronicle and Weekly Review’in *Keats: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 163-164, p. 164; ‘Unsigned review, *London Magazine and Monthly Critical and Dramatic Review* (Gold’s), *Keats: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 181-201. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. ‘Leigh Hunt displays Keats’s ‘calm power’’ in *Keats: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 165-177, p. 176 and p. 177. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. ‘Unsigned review, New Monthly Magazine’ in *Keats: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 216-218, p. 216. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. The ‘Hunt circle’ refers to the group of individuals associated with the poet, essayist and critic Leigh Hunt (19 October 1784 – 28 August 1859). Hunt co-founded *The Examiner* (1808-1886) - a radical, intellectual journal known for its radical politics and literary criticism. The ‘Hunt circle’ included: William Hazlitt, Charles Lamb, Benjamin Haydon, Charles Cowden Clarke, John Hamilton Reynolds, the Shelleys and, of course, Keats. For more context on the ‘Hunt circle’, see: Gregory Leadbetter, ‘The Hunt Circle and the Cockney School’, *John Keats in Context*, ed. Michael O’Neill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) pp. 89-98. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. ‘Cockney’ was used in a derogative way to undermine the Hunt circle for their lower-class origins and alleged vulgarity of expression. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. ‘On the Cockney School of Poetry No. I’ in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (October 1817) p. 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Gregory Leadbetter, ‘The Hunt Circle and the Cockney School’, *John Keats in Context*, ed. Michael O’Neill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) pp. 89-98 (p. 89). [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Ibid. Keats uses the alias ‘Libertas’ in two poems of 1816: ‘Specimen of an Induction to a Poem’ (line 61) and ‘To Charles Cowden Clarke’ (line 44). He uses it again in an untitled poem included in an August 1816 letter to George Keats (*LJK*, I: 105). [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. See: ‘Leigh Hunt announces a new school of poetry’ in *Keats: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 55-63. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Leadbetter, ‘The Hunt Circle and the Cockney School’, p. 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. ‘Unsigned review, *London Magazine and Monthly Critical and Dramatic Review* (Gold’s), *Keats: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 181-201, p. 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Ibid., p. 182 and p. 201. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. The *London Magazine*’s John Scott also defended Keats from Lockhart’s ‘vindictive’ attack in his September 1820 review. See: ‘Unsigned review, *London Magazine* (Baldwin’s), *Keats: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 219-227. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. ‘Jeffrey on Keats’ in *Keats: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 202-210, p. 202. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Ibid., p. 203 and p. 205. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. ‘Unsigned review, *Monthly Review*’, *Keats: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 159-163, p. 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Michael Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception and Canon Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p. i. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Ibid., p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. The brief discussion of Keats is on pp. 18-19 in the ‘Gothic and Romantic’ chapter. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Tom Duggett, *Gothic Romanticism: Architecture, Politics, and Literary Form* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. See: Jerrold Hogle, ‘The Gothic-Romantic Relationship: Underground Histories in “The Eve of St Agnes”’, *European Romantic Review*, Vol. 14 (2003) pp. 205-223. I quote from this article on pages 30 and 43. For further reading on the Gothic-Romantic relationship, see: Jerrold E. Hogle, ‘The Year of Reaction: 1816 as Janus-Faced’, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, Vol. 61 (2012) pp. 35-48 and *Mary Robinson and the Gothic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023). [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Jerrold E. Hogle, ‘Whither the Gothic-Romantic Relationship?’. *Keats-Shelley Journal*, Vol. 68 (2019) pp. 122-124, p. 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Andrew Smith, ‘Gothic Science’, *Romantic Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. Angela Wright and Dale Townshend (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016) pp. 306-321, p. 311. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. R. S. White, *Keats’s Anatomy of Melancholy: Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes and Other Poems (1820)* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022) pp. 74-79. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Keats is absent from Laura Kremmel’s recent book *Romantic Medicine and the Gothic Imagination: Morbid Anatomies* (2022), which is surprising, given his background as a medical student. Moreover, there is no discussion of Keats in *The Cambridge History of the Gothic* Vols. 1 and 2, ed. Angela Wright and Dale Townshend (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Jack Stillinger, *Reading The Eve of St Agnes: The Multiples of Complex Literary Translation* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) p. 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. John Aikin and Anna Laetitia Aikin, *On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror; with Sir Bertrand, A Fragment* (1773) in *Gothic Documents: A sourcebook, 1700-1820*, ed. E.J. Clery, Robert Miles (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005) p. 131; Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. Ian Jack and John Bugg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) p. 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Horace Walpole, *The Yale Edition of Horace Walpole’s Correspondence,* volume 1, ed. W.S. Lewis and A. Dayle Wallace (London: Oxford University Press, 1937) p. 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Sue Chaplin, ‘Spectres of Law in *The Castle of Otranto*’, *Romanticism*, vol. 12:3 (2006) pp.177-188. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Jonathan Sheehan, Dror Wahrman, *Invisible Hands: Self-Organization and the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015) p. 269. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. David Punter, *The Literature of Terror, Volume 1: The Gothic Tradition*, 2nd edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2013) p. 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Hogle, ‘’The Gothic-Romantic Relationship: Underground Histories in “The Eve of St Agnes”’, p. 210. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. ‘Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much, / Which mannerly devotion shows in this; / For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch, / And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.’ - William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, in *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. John Jowett, William Montgomery, Gary Taylor and Stanley Wells (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) pp. 369-400. All subsequent citations to the plays of Shakespeare are from this edition and will appear in parentheses, e.g., (*Romeo and Juliet*, 1.5.96-99). [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. See: Martha Hale Shackford, ‘‘The Eve of St Agnes and the Mysteries of Udolpho’, *PMLA*, Vol. 36:1 (March 1921) pp. 104-118. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. R. S. White, *Keats’s Anatomy of Melancholy*, p. 164-165. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, ed. Bonamy Dobrée (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) p. 261. All subsequent quotations will be from this edition and page numbers will be indicated in parentheses. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, ed. Nick Groom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) p. 24. All subsequent quotations are from this edition and page numbers are indicated in parentheses. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. This can also be seenwhen Emily is forced by Montoni to sign away her property rights. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. I discuss this further in chapter 2 with reference to scholarship that interprets Porphyro’s actions as sexual assault. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Burke, ‘A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful’ in *Gothic Documents*, pp. 112-113. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. David Punter, *The Literature of Terror, Volume 1: The Gothic Tradition*, 2nd edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2013) p. 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Shahidha K. Bari, *Keats and Philosophy: The Life of Sensations* (Oxon: Routledge, 2012) p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Brooke Hopkins, ‘Keats and the Uncanny: “This living hand”’, *The Kenyon Review*, Vol.11:4 (Fall, 1989) p. 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. Ross Woodman, ‘Nietzsche, Blake, Keats and Shelley: The Making of a Metaphorical Body’, *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 29:1 (Spring, 1990), pp. 115-149, p. 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. William Michael Rossetti, *Life of John Keats* (London: Walter Scott, 1887) p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. Charles Brown, *Life of John Keats*, ed. Dorothy Hyde Bodurtha and Willard Bissell Pope (London: Oxford University Press, 1937) p. 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Astley Cooper, *Principles and Practice of Surgery (*London: J. & A. Arch, 1820) p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Donald C. Goellnicht, *The Poet-Physician: Keats and Medical Science* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1984) p. 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Brooke Hopkins, ‘Keats and the Uncanny: “This living hand”’, *The Kenyon Review*, 1989, Vol.11(4), p. 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Jonathan Ellis, *Letter Writing Among Poets* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015) p. 233-234. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. William Hazlitt, ‘On the Effeminacy of Character’, *Table Talk; or, Original Essays* (1822), ii. 215-16 in *Keats: The Critical Heritage*, ed. G. M. Matthews (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Limited, 1971) p. 248. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘Table Talk’ in *Romanticism: An Anthology*, 3rd edition,ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2009) p. 713. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Shahida K. Bari, *Keats and Philosophy: The Life of Sensations* (Oxon: Routledge, 2012) p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘Table Talk’ in *Romanticism: An Anthology*, 3rd edition,ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2009) p. 713. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Bari*,* p. 1-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Bari, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Grant F. Scott, ‘Painting Words: Severn’s Visual Dialogue with Keats in *The Fountain* (1828)’, *Word & Image*, 31.3 (2015), pp. 288–304, p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) p. 213. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Despite the emphasis on vision (and indeed sound) in ‘Ode to Psyche’, I do not discuss it in this chapter, or elsewhere in this thesis, because it is not as overtly Gothic as *The Eve of St Agnes* and *Lamia*. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Andrew Bennett, *Keats, Narrative and Audience: The Posthumous Life of Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) p. 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. Kate Ferguson Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989) p. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, p. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. Ann Radcliffe, *The Italian*, ed. Nick Groom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017) p. 322. All subsequent quotations from *The Italian* are from this edition and page numbers will be indicated in parenthesis. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. Matthew Lewis, *The Monk*, ed. Howard Anderson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016)p. 294-295. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*, p. I. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Diana Wallace, Andrew Smith, ‘Introduction: Defining the Female Gothic’, *The Female Gothic: New Directions* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (London: The Women’s Press, 1978) p. 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. E. J. Clery, ‘Ann Radcliffe and D. A. F de Sade: thoughts on heroism’, *Women’s Writing*, 1:2 (1994) pp. 203-214, p. 203. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. Angela Wright, ‘Disturbing the Female Gothic: An Excavation of the Northanger Novels’, *The Female Gothic: New Directions* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) p. 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. Even after his death, Keats was associated with effeminacy. In 1822, William Hazlitt published an essay titled ‘On the Effeminacy of Character’, in which he states: ‘I cannot help thinking that the fault of Mr. Keats’s poems was a deficiency in masculine energy of style. He had beauty, tenderness, delicacy, in an uncommon degree, but there was a want of strength and substance [...] There is a want of action, of character, and so far of imagination, but there is exquisite fancy. All is soft and fleshy, without bone or muscle. We see in him the youth without the manhood of poetry [...] He had not the fierceness of summer, nor the richness of autumn, and winter he seemed not to have known till he felt the icy hand of death!’ [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Another source of inspiration for *The Eve of St Agnes* is, of course, Shakespeare. As Walter Jackson Bate observes, Keats’s description of Porphyro hiding in the closet and watching the sleeping Madeline recalls the scene in *Cymbeline* when Iachimo conceals himself in a chest in Imogen’s room. The poem has also been compared to *Romeo and Juliet*, as both texts feature young lovers thwarted by family feuds. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness*, p. 227. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness*, p. 229. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. Matthew Lewis, *The Monk*, ed. Emma McEvoy(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) p. 271. [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. Stillinger, ‘The Hoodwinking of Madeline: Skepticism in The Eve of St Agnes’, *The Hoodwinking of Madeline and Other Essays,* p. 72. Stillinger’s phrasing alludes to Keats’s ‘Life of Sensations’ letter to Benjamin Bailey (22 November 1817) in which he muses upon a ‘favorite [sic.] Speculation. . . that we shall enjoy ourselves here after by having what we called happiness on Earth repeated in a finer tone’ (*LJK*, I: 185). [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. See: Karen Swann, ‘Harassing the Muse’ in *Romanticism and feminism*, ed. Anne K. Mellor (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. Nicholas Roe, *John Keats: A New Life* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012) p. 343. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. The draft of ‘The Eve of St. Agnes’ can be found in *John Keats: Poetry Manuscripts at Harvard*, ed. Jack Stillinger (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990) pp. 95-132. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘Review of *The Monk*’, *Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook 1700-1820*, ed. E. J. Clery and Robert Miles (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000) pp. 185-189 (p. 188). [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. ‘A Friend to Genius’, ‘An Apology for The Monk’, *Monthly Mirror*, vol. 3 (April 1797), pp. 210-215, p. 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. ‘A Friend to Genius’, p. 194-195. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘review of *The Monk*’, *Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook 1700-1820*, ed. E. J. Clery and Robert Miles (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000) pp. 185-189. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘review of *The Monk*’, *Gothic Documents: A Sourcebook 1700-1820*, ed. E. J. Clery and Robert Miles (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000) pp. 185-189. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. For a detailed overview of the various Lamia myths, see: Daniel Ogden, *Drakon: Dragon Myth and Serpent Cult in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths: Volume 1* (London: Penguin, 1955) p. 205. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. Graves, p. 205. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. Benjamin Robert Haydon, *The Autobiography and Memoirs of Benjamin Robert Haydon, 1786–1846*, ed. P. D. Penrose (London: Bell, 1927) p. 231. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. Two key readings of *Lamia* in the context of science and medicine are: Denise Gigante, ‘The Monster in the Rainbow: Keats and the Science of Life’, *PMLA*, 117:3 (May 2002) pp. 433-448 and Philip Lindholm, ‘‘At the mere touch of cold philosophy’: science, sensation and synaesthesia in John Keats’s ‘Lamia’’, *European Journal of English Studies*, 22:3 (2018) pp. 258-272. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. Ann DeLong, *Mesmerism, Medusa and the Muse: The Romantic Discourse of Spontaneous Creativity* (New York: Lexington Books, 2012) p. 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. Sigmund Freud, ‘Medusa’s Head’ in *The Medusa Reader*, ed. Marjorie Garber and Nancy J. Vickers (New York: Routledge, 2003) p. 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. Hélène Cixous, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’ in *The Medusa Reader*, ed. Marjorie Garber and Nancy J. Vickers (New York: Routledge, 2003) p. 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. Julia Kristeva, *The Severed Head: Capital Visions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012) p. 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. DeLong, p.101. [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. Mellor explains that when John Gibson Lockhart of *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* assigned Keats to the ‘Cockney School of Poetry’ in 1818, he not only calls Keats’s masculinity into question, but assigned him to the class of the “shabby genteel” – members of the working-class who ‘asserted a false claim to… respectability’. Furthermore, Byron ‘called Keats’s masculinity into question by defining his work as “*piss-a-bed* poetry”, “a sort of mental masturbation” produced by “f[ri]gg[in]g his *Imagination*.” In describing Keats’s poetry as the erotic fantasies of an adolescent masturbator, Byron implicitly equated Keats with the puerile and unmanly (“the drivelling idiotism of the Mankin”) and the lower classes but also with the female.’ – Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (London: Routledge, 1993) p. 172-173. For further analysis of Keats and immaturity, see Pete Newbon, *The Boy-Man: Masculinity and Immaturity in the Long Nineteenth Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) and Richard Marggraf Turley, *Keats’s Boyish Imagination* (London: Routledge, 2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. Z, ‘Cockney School of Poetry. No IV’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (Aug. 1818), pp. 519-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. Paul Endo, ‘Seeing Romantically in Lamia’, *ELH*, Vol. 66, No. 1 (Spring 1999), pp. 111-128, p. 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. Jeffrey N. Cox, ‘Lamia, Isabella and The Eve of St Agnes’, *The Cambridge Companion to Keats*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) pp. 53-68, p. 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. Mellor, p. 184. [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. Karen Swann, ‘Harassing the Muse’ in *Romanticism and feminism*, ed. Anne K. Mellor (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998) p. 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. Rachel Shulkins, ‘Figures of Romance and Anti-Romance in ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’’, *Keats, Modesty and Masturbation* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 109-155, p. 126. [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. Swann, p. 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. Discuss the story of St Agnes’s martyrdom. Her punishment for rejecting her suitor was to be thrown into a public brothel. ‘According to one legend, all the men who attempted to rape her were immediately struck blind or paralyzed.’ - <https://www.historic-uk.com/CultureUK/Eve-of-St-Agnes/> [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. Stillinger, *The Hoodwinking of Madeline and Other Essays*, p. 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. Jon Cook, *Hazlitt in Love: A Fatal Attachment* (London: Short Books, 2007) p. 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. Samuel Taylor Coleridge to Thomas Wedgwood, 16 September 1803, in *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956-71) vol. II, p. 990. [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. *Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and their Writers*, ed. Edith J. Morley, 3 vols. (London: Dent, 1938) vol. I, p. 169-70. [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. *The Diary of Benjamin Robert Haydon*, ed. Willard Bissell Pope, 5 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960-3) vol. 2, p. 470. [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. Mellor, p. 183. [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Angus Gowland (London: Penguin, 2023) p. 1006. [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. Endo, p. 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
218. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
219. Adriana Craciun, *Fatal Women of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
220. The nymph is ‘near-smiling’ when Lamia reveals her, but this is not a sufficient gesture of consent, just as Madeline’s dream of Porphyro is not pre-emptive consent to the assault that follows. [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
221. John Barnard defines ‘sanguineous’ as ‘flushed with anger’ in his Notes for *John Keats: The Complete Poems*, 3rd edition, ed. John Barnard (London: Penguin, 2006) p. 695. [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
222. In a letter from Richard Woodhouse to John Taylor (19, 20 September 1819), Woodhouse writes of Lamia’s masochism: ‘for says K. — “Women love to be forced to do a thing, by a fine fellow— *such as this*”’. [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
223. Michelle A Massé, *In the Name of Love: Women, Masochism and the Gothic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992) p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
224. Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, ed. Maurice Hindle (London: Penguin, 2003) p. 226. All subsequent quotations are from this edition and page numbers will be indicated in parentheses. [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
225. Marie Mulvey-Roberts, ‘Menstrual Misogyny and Taboo: The Medusa, Vampire and the Female Stigmatic’, *Menstruation: A Cultural History*, ed. Andrew Shail, Gillian Howie (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) pp. 149-160, p. 159. [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
226. Mulvey-Roberts, p. 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. Mulvey-Roberts, p. 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
228. Marie Mulvey-Roberts, ‘Dracula and the Doctors: Bad Blood, Menstrual Taboo and the New Woman’, *Bram Stoker*, ed. William Hughes, Andrew Smith (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998) p. 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
229. Christopher Frayling, *Vampyres: Lord Byron to Count Dracula* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992) p. 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
230. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein*, ed. Maurice Hindle(London: Penguin, 2013) p. 122. All subsequent quotations from the novel will be from this edition and page numbers will be indicated in parenthesis. [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
231. Nina Auerback, *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995) p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
232. James B. Twitchell, *The Living Dead: A Study of the Vampire in Romantic Literature* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1981) p. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
233. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
234. Orrin N. C. Wang, *Romantic Sobriety, Sensation, Revolution, Commodification, History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2011) p. 278. [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
235. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Christabel* in *Selected Poetry*, ed. Richard Holmes (London: Penguin Books, 1996), pp. 101-120 (p. 108). All subsequent quotations from Coleridge’s poems are from this edition and line numbers will be indicated in parenthesis. [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
236. Hogle, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
237. Hogle, p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
238. It may be useful here to consider artistic depictions of Lamia in the period which emphasise her otherworldly beauty. For a discussion of artists’ engagement with *Lamia* in the nineteenth century, see: Sarah Wootton, *Consuming Keats: Nineteenth-Century Representations in Art and Literature* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
239. Peter de Bolla, *The Discourse of the Sublime: Readings in History, Aesthetics and the Subject* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989) p. 189. [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
240. ‘sure a poet is a sage; / A humanist, physician to all men’ - *The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream* (189-190). [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
241. Lionel Trilling, *The Opposing Self: Nine Essays in Criticism* (New York: Viking, 1955) 3-49, p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
242. Trilling, p. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
243. Trilling, pp. 15-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
244. Denise Gigante, ‘The Romantic Revolution in Taste’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Food*, ed. J. Michelle Coghlan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) pp. 44-57 (p. 45). [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
245. Ibid., p. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
246. Joseph Addison, ‘Taste and the Pleasures of the Imagination’, *The Spectator*, no. 409 (19 June, 1712), in *The Spectator*, 5 vols., ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965) vol. 3, pp. 570–3. p. 570. [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
247. Ibid., p. 571. [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
248. Keats uses the term ‘disinterestedness’ in a letter to George and Georgiana Keats (19 March 1819): ‘I perceive how far I am from any humble standard of distinterestedness’ (*LJK*, II: 79). In the same letter, he writes of ‘relish[ing]’ Milton’s poetry, which suggests that ideas of aesthetic taste could not have been far from his mind (*LJK*, II: 81). [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
249. Sanjeev Niraula, ‘Eighteenth-Century Notions of Taste: A Comparative Reading of Hume, Blair, and Burke’, *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, 10:1 (January 2025) pp. 107-112 (p. 109). [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
250. David Hume, ‘Of the Standard of Taste’, *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985) pp. 226-249 (p. 232). [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
251. Hugh Blair, *Essays on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (Edinburgh, 1783); ed. Harold F. Harding (2 vols., Carbondale, 1965). [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
252. Edmund Burke, ‘Introduction. On Taste’ in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas on the Sublime and Beautiful: With an Introductory Discourse Concerning Taste; And Several Other Additions*, Cambridge Library Collections - Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) pp. 1-40, p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
253. Burke, ‘Introduction. On Taste’, p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
254. Burke, ‘Introduction. On Taste’ p. 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-254)
255. Burke, ‘Introduction. On Taste’ p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-255)
256. Burke, ‘Introduction. On Taste’ p. 22. This comparison between the painter and the anatomist is echoed by John Brisbane in *The Anatomy of Painting*, which I mention in the conclusion of chapter 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-256)
257. Burke, ‘Introduction. On Taste’ p. 31-32. [↑](#footnote-ref-257)
258. William Hazlitt, ‘The Round Table’, No. 40, *The Examiner*, Issue 439 (May 26 1816) pp. 332-333, p. 332. [↑](#footnote-ref-258)
259. Gigante, p. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-259)
260. Gigante, p. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-260)
261. Hazlitt, ‘The Round Table’, p. 332. [↑](#footnote-ref-261)
262. Gigante, p. 47 [↑](#footnote-ref-262)
263. Graham-Campbell, Angus, ‘'O for A Draught of Vintage': Keats, Food and Wine’, *Keats-Shelley Review* (January 2003) 17:1, pp. 42-60 (p. 49). [↑](#footnote-ref-263)
264. In Greek mythology, the satyr Silenus was a companion and tutor to Dionysus, the god of wine-making, fruit, fertility, and religious ecstasy, amongst other things. When intoxicated, Silenus was said to possess special knowledge and the power of prophecy. In literature and visual art, Silenus is usually depicted as drunk (see Peter Paul Rubens: *The Drunken Silenus*, c. 1616). [↑](#footnote-ref-264)
265. Elizabeth Bishop, Letter to Robert Lowell, 30 March 1959, in *One Art: Letters, Selected and Edited*, ed. Robert Giroux (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1994) p. 372. [↑](#footnote-ref-265)
266. Quoted in *Keats: The Critical Heritage*, ed. G. M. Matthews (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971) p. 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-266)
267. William Butler Yeats, ‘Ego Dominus Tuus’, *Yeats’s Poems*, ed. A Norman Jeffares (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1989), p. 266. [↑](#footnote-ref-267)
268. ‘Z’, ‘Cockney School of Poetry. No IV’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (August 1818). This can be found in *Keats: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 97-110. [↑](#footnote-ref-268)
269. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-269)
270. Nicholas Roe, *John Keats: A New Life* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012) p. 265. [↑](#footnote-ref-270)
271. Byron echoed Lockhart’s infantilising comments when he referred to Keats as ‘the Mankin’ and a writer of ‘*piss-a-bed* poetry’. See: Rowland Prothero, *The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals* (London: John Murray, 1880-1901; rpt. Octagon Books, 1966), VII, 200-202. [↑](#footnote-ref-271)
272. ‘Observations upon ‘Observations.’ A Second Letter to John Murray, Esq,. on the Rev. W. L. Bowles’s Strictures on the Life and Writings of Pope’, in Rowland Prothero, *The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals* (London: John Murray, 1880-1901; rpt. Octagon Books, 1966), V, pp. 591-592. [↑](#footnote-ref-272)
273. Z, ‘Cockney School of Poetry. No IV’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (Aug. 1818), 519-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-273)
274. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-274)
275. Lucasta Miller, *Keats: A Brief Life in Nine Poems and One Epitaph* (London: Jonathan Cape, Penguin Random House, 2021) p. 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-275)
276. John Aikin and Anna Laetitia Aikin, ‘On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror; with Sir Bertrand, A Fragment’ (1773) in *Gothic documents: A sourcebook, 1700-1820* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) p. 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-276)
277. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘Review of *The Monk*’ in *Gothic Documents*, pp. 185-187. [↑](#footnote-ref-277)
278. Anon., ‘Terrorist Novel Writing’, *Gothic Document*, pp. 182-185 (p. 183). [↑](#footnote-ref-278)
279. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-279)
280. Thomas Gisbourne, *An Enquiry Into the Duties of the Female Sex*, 9th edition(London: Cadell and Davies, 1813) p. 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-280)
281. Clery and Miles, *Gothic documents*, p. 182. [↑](#footnote-ref-281)
282. Rowland Prothero, *The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals* (London: John Murray, 1880-1901; rpt. Octagon Books, 1966), VII, p. 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-282)
283. Lucasta Miller, *Keats: A Brief Life in Nine Poems and One Epitaph* (London: Jonathan Cape, Penguin Random House, 2021) p. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-283)
284. Zara-Louise Stubbs, ‘Introduction: An Aperitif’, *The Uncanny Gastronomic: Strange Tales of the Edible Weird*, ed. Zara-Louise Stubbs (London: The British Library, 2023) pp. 9-18, p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-284)
285. ‘the law of hospitality, the express law that governs the general concept of hospitality, appears as a paradoxical law, pervertible or perverting’ - Jacques Derrida, ‘On hospitality’, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000) p. 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-285)
286. Ann Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest*, ed. Chloe Chard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) p. 132-33. All subsequent quotations from *The Romance of the Forest* are from this edition and page numbers will be indicated in parenthesis. [↑](#footnote-ref-286)
287. Jakub Lipski, ‘The perils of aesthetic pleasure in Ann Radcliffe’s The Romance of the Forest and The Mysteries of Udolpho’, *Nordic journal of English studies*, 17:1 (2018), pp. 120-134, p. 123-124. [↑](#footnote-ref-287)
288. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-288)
289. For a discussion of the editorial changes made to The Eve of St Agnes, see: Jack Stillinger, 'The Text of "The Eve of St Agnes", *Studies in Bibliography*, Vol. 16 (1963), pp. 207-212 (p. 209). [↑](#footnote-ref-289)
290. Gigante suggests that the name Porphyro may be an allusion to Porphyry’s *On Abstinence from Animal Food* - ‘a major source for vegetarian argumentation during the romantic era’. Ironically, Porphyro consumes Madeline’s body (flesh) in the poem. See: Denise Gigante, ‘Keats’s Nausea’, *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 40: 4 (Winter, 2001), pp. 481-510, p. 494. [↑](#footnote-ref-290)
291. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *Selected Poetry*, ed. Richard Holmes (London: Penguin, 1996) pp. 81-100 (p. 82). [↑](#footnote-ref-291)
292. Ann Radcliffe, *A Sicilian Romance*, ed. Alison Milbank(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) p. 90. All subsequent quotations from *The Romance of the Forest* are from this edition and page numbers will be indicated in parenthesis. [↑](#footnote-ref-292)
293. Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. Ian Jack and John Bugg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) p. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-293)
294. Carmel Cedro and Lorna Piatti-Farnell, ‘Food, Eating, Appetite and Otherness’ in *The Palgrave Handbook of Steam Age Gothic* (eBook), ed. Clive Bloom (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021) <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-40866-4>, p. 321. [↑](#footnote-ref-294)
295. Denise Gigante, ‘Keats’s Nausea’, *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 40: 4 (Winter, 2001), pp. 481-510, p. 488. [↑](#footnote-ref-295)
296. I discuss the role of music in more depth in Chapter 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-296)
297. Gigante, ‘Keats’s Nausea’, p. 490. [↑](#footnote-ref-297)
298. Gigante, ‘Keats’s Nausea’, p. 494. [↑](#footnote-ref-298)
299. I see Keats’s Belle Dame as a precursor to Angela Carter’s reluctant, love-starved vampire in ‘The Lady of the House of Love’, who is compelled to feed out of necessity, not cruelty. [↑](#footnote-ref-299)
300. Gigante, ‘Keats’s Nausea’, p. 495. [↑](#footnote-ref-300)
301. Ibid., p. 488. [↑](#footnote-ref-301)
302. This trope of eating or being presented with delicious, otherworldly food is consistent across many fairy abduction narratives. For an overview, see: ‘The Perils of Fairy Food’, *British Fairies* <<https://britishfairies.wordpress.com/2020/02/17/the-perils-of-fairy-food/>> [accessed: 28 July 2025) [↑](#footnote-ref-302)
303. Helen B. Ellis, ‘Food, Sex, Death, and the Feminine Principle in Keats’s Poetry’, *English studies in Canada*, 6:1 (1980) pp. 56-74, p. 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-303)
304. Ibid., p. 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-304)
305. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) p. 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-305)
306. The speaker’s sudden, prodigious appetite and subsequent gorging anticipates Laura’s yearning for forbidden fruit in Christina Rossetti’s *Goblin Market* (1862). [↑](#footnote-ref-306)
307. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-307)
308. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-308)
309. William Beckford, *Vathek*, ed. Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) p. 114; p. 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-309)
310. Robert Gittings, *The Mask of Keats: A Study of Problems* (London, William Heinemann, 1956) pp. 101-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-310)
311. Ellen Brinks, ‘The Male Romantic Poet as Gothic Subject: Keats’s Hyperion and The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream’, *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 54:4 (2000), pp. 427-454 (p. 447). [↑](#footnote-ref-311)
312. Beckford, *Vathek*, p. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-312)
313. John Holloway, *The Charted Mirror* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960) p. 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-313)
314. Stuart M. Sperry, *Keats the Poet* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973) p. 243. [↑](#footnote-ref-314)
315. Robert Gittings, *John Keats* (London: Heinemann, 1968) p. 311. [↑](#footnote-ref-315)
316. Helen Vendler, *The Odes of John Keats* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1983) p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-316)
317. In Greek mythology, Hippocrene is the name given to the sacred spring on Mount Helicon. The OED entry reads: ‘The Hippocrene spring (see the etymology) was sacred to the Muses, and its waters were said to imbue the drinker with poetic inspiration.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-317)
318. Interestingly, Gareth Evans suggests that Keats is not referring to the deadly nightshade in ‘Ode on Melancholy, but the woody nightshade, which is also known as ‘bittersweet’. See: Gareth Evans, ‘Poison Wine – John Keats and the Botanic Pharmacy’, *The Keats-Shelley Review*, 16:1 (2002), pp. 31-55, p. 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-318)
319. Isabella Van Elferen, *Gothic Music: The Sounds of the Uncanny* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012) p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-319)
320. Angela M. Archambault, ‘The Function of Sound in the Gothic Novels of Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis and Charles Maturin’, *Études Épistémè*, vol. 29 (2016) <https://doi.org/10.4000/episteme.965>. [↑](#footnote-ref-320)
321. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-321)
322. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-322)
323. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-323)
324. Matt Foley, *Gothic Voices: The Vococentric Soundworld of Gothic Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023) p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-324)
325. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-325)
326. David Punter, *Gothic Pathologies: The Text, the Body and the Law* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998) [↑](#footnote-ref-326)
327. Angela M. Archambault, ‘The Function of Sound in the Gothic Novels of Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis and Charles Maturin’, *Études Épistémè*, vol. 29 (2016) <<https://doi.org/10.4000/episteme.965>> [↑](#footnote-ref-327)
328. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-328)
329. There are several parallels between *Hamlet* and Keats’s poem: firstly, Hamlet’s father and Lorenzo both die by ‘a brother’s hand’ (though in Lorenzo’s case, the perpetrator is not *his* brother, but Isabella’s). Secondly, both victims are doomed to linger in a liminal space until their crimes are known. Thirdly, Isabella’s brothers and Claudius profit from the murder of their victims. Finally, Hamlet’s father is murdered in an orchard and Lorenzo is murdered in the forest. [↑](#footnote-ref-329)
330. Beth Lau, ‘Madeline at Northanger Abbey: Keats’s Antiromances and Gothic Satire’, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology,* Vol. 84, No. 1 (Jan., 1985), pp. 30-50, p. 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-330)
331. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-331)
332. Foley, p. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-332)
333. Shahida Bari, ‘Mortality’, *John Keats in Context*, ed. Michael O’Neill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) p. 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-333)
334. 'Undersong’, Oxford English Dictionary (2025) [online] <<https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=undersong>> [accessed 28 July 2025] [↑](#footnote-ref-334)
335. Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths Vol. I* (London: The Folio Society, 1999) p. 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-335)
336. Ibid. p. 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-336)
337. Natalie Haynes, *Pandora’s Jar* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2020) p. 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-337)
338. The lyre motif would later take on a personal significance for Keats. From Christmas 1818, he began sealing his letters with a ‘Tassie gem’ depicting a lyre with several broken strings and bearing the motto ‘Qui me neglige, me désole’ (‘By neglect, thou ruinest me’). Aileen Ward speculates that this may have been a gift from Fanny Brawne. See: Aileen Ward, *John Keats: The Making of a Poet* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1963) and John Curtis Frankland, ‘Once More the Poet: Keats, Severn, and the Grecian Lyre’, *The Keats-Shelley Review,* 18:1 (2004) pp. 104-122. [↑](#footnote-ref-338)
339. Haynes, *Pandora’s Jar*, p. 178 [↑](#footnote-ref-339)
340. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-340)
341. Gray emphasises aural sensation throughout his ‘Elegy’ in lines such as ‘The curfew tolls the knell of parting day’ (1), ‘swallow twitt’ring’ (18), ‘The cock’s shrill clarion, or the echoing horn’ (19), ‘The pealing anthem swells the note of praise’ (40), ‘wak’d to ecstasy the living lyre’ (48) and so on. Thomas Gray, ‘Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard’ in *The Graveyard School: An Anthology*, ed. Jack G. Voller (Virginia: Valancourt Books, 2015) pp. 143-148. [↑](#footnote-ref-341)
342. Katey Castellano, ‘”Why Linger at the Yawning Tomb So Long?”: The Ethics of Negative Capability in Keats’s *Isabella* and *Hyperion*’ in *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, Vol. 8:1, (January 2010) p. 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-342)
343. Haynes, p. 177. [↑](#footnote-ref-343)
344. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-344)
345. The story appears in Book X and XI. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Mary Innes (London: Penguin, 1955), pp. 225-267. [↑](#footnote-ref-345)
346. Archambault, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-346)
347. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-347)
348. She says Lorenzo’s name (VII: 47), bids him ‘Good bye!’ (XXVI) and murmurs ‘Where? O where?’ (XXX) but these are her only utterances prior to the vision. [↑](#footnote-ref-348)
349. Stuart Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) p. 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-349)
350. ‘And I, of ladies most deject and wretched, / That suck'd the honey of his music vows, / Now see that noble and most sovereign reason, / Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh’ (*Hamlet*, 3.1.158-161). [↑](#footnote-ref-350)
351. ‘The uncanny has to do with the sense of a secret encounter: it is perhaps inseparable from an apprehension, however fleeting, of something that should have remained secret and hidden but has come to light’ - Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003) p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-351)
352. Diane Long Hoeveler, ‘Decapitating Romance: Class, Fetish, and Ideology in Keats's *Isabella*’, *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (Dec., 1994), pp. 321-338 (p. 329). [↑](#footnote-ref-352)
353. Lau, p. 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-353)
354. Sigmund Freud, ‘Mourning and Melancholia’, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume XIV (1914-1916),* ed. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1856-1939) p. 244-246. [↑](#footnote-ref-354)
355. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-355)
356. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-356)
357. Mark Sandy, *Romanticism, Memory, and Mourning* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013) p. 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-357)
358. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-358)
359. ‘Burthen’, Oxford English Dictionary (2025) [online], <<https://www.oed.com/dictionary/burden_n?tab=meaning_and_use#11910199>> [accessed 28 July 2025] [↑](#footnote-ref-359)
360. John A. Minahan, *Word Like a Bell: John Keats, Music and the Romantic Poet* (Kent, Ohio and London: The Kent State University Press, 1992) p. 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-360)
361. Letter to Richard Woodhouse, July 11, 1819, in John Keats, *The Letters of John Keats: 1814-1821*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, 5 vols. (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1958), ii, 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-361)
362. Kelvin Everest, ‘Isabella in the Marketplace: Keats and Feminism’, *Keats and Shelley: Winds of Light* (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2021) online edn., p. 42 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780192849502.003.0004>> [accessed 12 March 2024] [↑](#footnote-ref-362)
363. Mark Sandy, *Romanticism, Memory, and Mourning* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013) p. 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-363)
364. Lucasta Miller, p. 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-364)
365. Susan Sontag, *Notes on Camp* (London: Penguin, 2018) [↑](#footnote-ref-365)
366. Mark Sandy, *Poetics of Self and Form in Keats and Shelley : Nietzschean Subjectivity and Genre* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016) p. 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-366)
367. 'Elegy', Oxford English Dictionary (2025) [online], <<https://www.oed.com/dictionary/elegy_n?tab=meaning_and_use#5628297>> [accessed 28 July 2025] [↑](#footnote-ref-367)
368. Andrew Smith, *Gothic Death 1740-1914: A Literary History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016) p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-368)
369. Jerrold E. Hogle, ‘Elegy and the Gothic: The Common Grounds’, *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*, ed. Karen Weisman (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2012) p. 566. [↑](#footnote-ref-369)
370. Smith, p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-370)
371. Peter M. Sacks, *The English elegy: studies in the genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1987) p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-371)
372. Sacks, *The English elegy: studies in the genre from Spenser to Yeats*, p. 7-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-372)
373. Heidi Thomson, ‘Eavesdropping on “The Eve of St Agnes”: Madeline’s Sensual Ear and Porphyro’s Ancient Ditty’, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 97.3 (1998), pp. 337–51 (p. 341). [↑](#footnote-ref-373)
374. Lau, p. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-374)
375. Pierre Dubois, ‘Music and the Feminine Sublime in Ann Radcliffe’s *Mysteries of Udolpho*’, *Études Anglaises* 67-4 (2014) pp. 457-469 (p. 463). [↑](#footnote-ref-375)
376. DuBois., p. 464. [↑](#footnote-ref-376)
377. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-377)
378. DuBois., p. 459. [↑](#footnote-ref-378)
379. Thomson, p. 337. [↑](#footnote-ref-379)
380. Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness*, p. 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-380)
381. Anne Williams argues that Porphyro’s phrase “Awake, my love, arise” ‘echoes the aubade tradition (to which Shakespeare also alludes in *Romeo and Juliet* when the lark signals that they must part after their one night together). The aubade conventionally implies a coming separation, however. The night has passed, day has come, and lovers must part. This is the outcome Madeline clearly fears when she is finally awake. But that is not what happens. Instead, Madeline and Porphyro leave together, perhaps to live happily ever after.’ (*Art of Darkness*, p. 231) [↑](#footnote-ref-381)
382. Edmund Burke, ‘A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful’in *Gothic documents: A sourcebook 1700-1820*, ed. E.J. Clery and Robert Miles (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 200) pp. 112-113. [↑](#footnote-ref-382)
383. In *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990)*,* Stuart Curran draws a parallel between Madeline and Lucy in Walter Scott’s *The Bridal of Triermain*: ‘whether or not Lucy is as “Hoodwink’d” as Keats’s Madeline in “The Eve of St Agnes”, both young women testify to the seduction of song and the centrality of the minstrel in the revived chivalric ethos.’ (p. 137). [↑](#footnote-ref-383)
384. Thomson, p. 338. [↑](#footnote-ref-384)
385. Thomson, p. 341 and p. 345. [↑](#footnote-ref-385)
386. Thomson, p. 339. [↑](#footnote-ref-386)
387. Williams, p. 229. [↑](#footnote-ref-387)
388. Lau, p. 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-388)
389. Lau, p. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-389)
390. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-390)
391. Williams, p. 232. [↑](#footnote-ref-391)
392. Lau, p. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-392)
393. DuBois, p. 461. [↑](#footnote-ref-393)
394. Edmund Burke, ‘A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful’in *Gothic documents: A sourcebook 1700-1820*, ed. E.J. Clery and Robert Miles (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 200) pp. 112-113. [↑](#footnote-ref-394)
395. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-395)
396. DuBois, p. 460. [↑](#footnote-ref-396)
397. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-397)
398. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-398)
399. DuBois, p. 461. [↑](#footnote-ref-399)
400. See chapter 1 for a more in-depth discussion of touch in *The Eve of St Agnes* and its relation to Burke’s ideas on terror, horror, and the sublime. [↑](#footnote-ref-400)
401. John Brand, *Observations on the Popular Antiquities of Great Britain*, *Vol. 1* (Frankfurt: Verlag, 2023)pp. 192-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-401)
402. *The Poetical Works and Other Writings of John Keats*, ed. H. B. Forman (London, 1883), 2. 320-1. Forman published part of the letter he received from Rossetti in this volume. [↑](#footnote-ref-402)
403. James Montgomery, ‘The Vigil of St. Mark’, *The Wanderer of Switzerland and other Poems* (London: Vernor and Hood, 1806) pp. 137-146. [↑](#footnote-ref-403)
404. Lau, p. 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-404)
405. Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003) p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-405)
406. David Luke, ‘“The Eve of Saint Mark”: Keats's “Ghostly Queen of Spades” and the Textual Superstition’, *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Summer, 1970), pp. 161-175, p. 171. [↑](#footnote-ref-406)
407. William Cowper, *The Task, and Other Poems* (London, Paris, New York and Melbourne: Cassell & Company, 1899) <<https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/3698/pg3698-images.html>> [Accessed 28 July 2025] [↑](#footnote-ref-407)
408. Walter E. Houghton, ‘The Meaning of Keats’s Eve of St. Mark’, *ELH*, Vol. 13:1 (Mar., 1946), pp. 64-78, p. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-408)
409. In Homer’s *Odyssey*, Odysseus orders his men to tie him to the mast so that he can listen to the siren’s song without becoming their prey. [↑](#footnote-ref-409)
410. The urn breaks her silence with the utterance: “Beauty is truth, truth beauty,– that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.” (V: 49-50). [↑](#footnote-ref-410)
411. Jack Stillinger, ‘Keats and Romance’ *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 8, No. 4, Nineteenth Century (Autumn, 1968), pp. 593-605 (p. 593). [↑](#footnote-ref-411)
412. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard(New York: Cornell University Press, 1973) p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-412)
413. ‘Alice Oswald on Ode on a Grecian Urn’, *The Essay*, BBC Radio 3, 28 September 2020, 22:45. [↑](#footnote-ref-413)
414. Todorov, p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-414)
415. Todorov, p. 41-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-415)
416. Todorov, p. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-416)
417. Miller, p. 244. [↑](#footnote-ref-417)
418. Miller, p. 229 and p. 234. [↑](#footnote-ref-418)
419. Hopkins, p. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-419)
420. Vendler, p. 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-420)
421. Vendler, p, 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-421)
422. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-422)
423. Steven Doloff, ‘Keats's Urn and Ovid's Pygmalion’, *The Keats-Shelley Review* (2003) 17:1, pp. 95-97, p. 95-96. [↑](#footnote-ref-423)
424. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-424)
425. Doloff, p. 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-425)
426. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-426)
427. Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, (London: Penguin, 2003) p. 201. [↑](#footnote-ref-427)
428. Lucasta Miller, p. 250. [↑](#footnote-ref-428)
429. Charles Armitage Brown, *The Life of John Keats,* ed. by D .H. Bodurtha and W. B. Pope (London: Oxford University Press, 1937) pp. 53–4. [↑](#footnote-ref-429)
430. Judith Chernaik, ‘Keats and Charles Brown’s Memoir: Was Keats’s Nightingale Really a Thrush?’, *The Keats-Shelley Review* 36:1 (2021) pp. 56-63, p. 58; Sasha Dugdale on ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ for BBC R3 *The Essay* (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0001yjy>) [↑](#footnote-ref-430)
431. ‘The Genius of Poetry must work out its own salvation in a man: It cannot be matured by law & precept, but by sensation & watchfulness in itself – That which is creative must create itself’ - Keats to James Hessey, 8 October 1818 (*LJK*, I: 374). [↑](#footnote-ref-431)
432. John Lemprière, *A Classical Dictionary* (London: George Routledge and Sons Ltd., 1904) <<https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/68769/pg68769-images.html>> [↑](#footnote-ref-432)
433. Miller, p. 221. [↑](#footnote-ref-433)
434. See: Robert Gittings, *John Keats: The Living Year: 21 September 1818 to 21 September 1819* (Melbourne and London: Heinemann, 1954). [↑](#footnote-ref-434)
435. The nightingale motif reverberates throughout Romantic and Gothic literature. For example, nightingales appear at various moonlit intervals in *Udolpho* and *The Monk*, often punctuating moments of melancholy silence and reverie. Even Coleridge’s poem ‘The Nightingale’, while refuting the notion that the nightingale is melancholy, relies on stock gothic imagery in his description of a ‘castle huge, Which the great lord inhabits not’ secluded in a grove that has grown ‘wild with tangling underwood’ (50-53). See: Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Selected Poetry*, ed. Richard Holmes (London: Penguin, 1996) pp. 56-58. [↑](#footnote-ref-435)
436. Stabler, ‘Ann Radcliffe’s poetry: The poetics of refrain and inventory’, p. 197. [↑](#footnote-ref-436)
437. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘The Nightingale’ in *Selected Poetry*, ed. Richard Holmes (London: Penguin, 1996) pp. 56-58. [↑](#footnote-ref-437)
438. For an in-depth discussion of this encounter, see: Chris Murray, ‘“Death in his hand”: Theories of Apparitions in Coleridge, Ferriar, and Keats’, *Nineteenth Century Literature*, 78.3 (2023), pp. 179-210. [↑](#footnote-ref-438)
439. Helen Vendler, *The Odes of John Keats* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003) pp. 81-82. [↑](#footnote-ref-439)
440. ‘In 1752 Parliament passed the Murder Act which allowed for the corpses of executed murderers to be taken to the Company of Surgeons in London for study and teaching.’ - 'Body snatching', UK Parliament, n.d. <<https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/death-dying/dying-and-death/bodysnatching/>> [accessed 28 July 2025] [↑](#footnote-ref-440)
441. Miller, p. 222. [↑](#footnote-ref-441)
442. ‘Darkling’, Oxford English Dictionary (2025) [online], <<https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=darkling>> [accessed 28 July 2025] [↑](#footnote-ref-442)
443. Here, I am indebted to Dr. Mina Gorji (University of Cambridge), who delivered a paper on sound and the poetics of fading in ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ at the 2024 Keats Foundation Conference. I have been granted permission by Dr. Gorji to refer to her unpublished research in this chapter. Dr. Gorji observed that Keats underlined the words ‘fade’, ‘fading’ and ‘faded’ in his copy of *Paradise Lost*. Furthermore, she suggested that Keats’s preoccupation with fading is linked to the ephemerality of sound. What we have in this ode is a poetic mode of lyric listening associated with fading and time; a listening so intense that the speaker fades away. Gorji compared the darkening evening to the elegiac mood of Thomas Gray’s ‘Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard: ‘Now fades the glimmering landscape’ (5). Keats tunes into a melancholy, elegiac mode of Lyric listening in the poem. [↑](#footnote-ref-443)
444. William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* in *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, 2nd edition, ed. John Jowett, William Montgomery. Gary Taylor and Stanley Wells (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) pp. 1221-1244. [↑](#footnote-ref-444)
445. R.S. White, *Keats as a Reader of Shakespeare* (London: Athlone Press, 1987) p. 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-445)
446. John A. Minahan, *Word Like a Bell: John Keats, Music and the Romantic Poet* (Kent, Ohio and London: Kent State University Press, 1992) p. ii. [↑](#footnote-ref-446)
447. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-447)
448. The composer Mark Bradshaw acknowledges Keats’s familiarity with Mozart’s music in his score for the 2009 biopic *Bright Star* (dir. Jane Campion). The film features a vocal duet which is based on Mozart’s Adagio from his Serenade K361 for winds. The ‘Human Orchestra’ is also based on this piece. [↑](#footnote-ref-448)
449. ‘I shall soon be laid in the quiet grave­—thank God for the quiet grave—O! I can feel the cold earth upon me—the daisies growing over me—O for this quiet—it will be my first’ -Letter from Joseph Severn to John Taylor, 6 March 1821 (*LJK*, II: 378). [↑](#footnote-ref-449)
450. Miller, p. 223-224. [↑](#footnote-ref-450)
451. Schubert’s engagement with the Gothic is the subject of a recent study by Joe Davies. In his book *The Gothic Imagination in the Music of Franz Schubert* (2024) Davies considers ‘the prominence of death (whether real or imagined) in Schubert’s music’ in the context of the Gothic, which ‘ captivated the late eighteenth-and-early-nineteenth-century imagination’. Focusing on ‘hearing gothic necropoetics in Schubert’s music’, Davies explores themes of spectrality, the grave, uncanny doubling, songs of the night, dreams and the grotesque throughout his book. Surprisingly, there is no mention of Keats, despite their stylistic similarities and overlapping timelines (1797-1828 for Schubert, 1795-1821 for Keats). Source: Joe Davies, *The Gothic Imagination in the Music of Franz Schubert* (Suffolk and New York: The Boydell Press, 2024) p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-451)
452. Keats’s epithet ‘Immortal bird’ carries an additional note of melancholy today, as nightingale numbers have fallen by 91% in just 40 years according to the British Trust for Ornithology. Now more than ever, this songbird is ‘unseen’ and unheard by most. [↑](#footnote-ref-452)
453. 'Enchantment', Oxford English Dictionary (2025) [online], <<https://www.oed.com/dictionary/enchantment_n?tab=meaning_and_use#5569484>> [accessed 28 July 2025] [↑](#footnote-ref-453)
454. Jack Stillinger, ‘“The Heart and Nature of Man” in Hyperion, Lamia and The Fall of Hyperion’, *The Hoodwinking of Madeline and Other Essays on Keats’s Poems* (Urbana, Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press, 1971) pp. 46-66, p. 47. Stillinger notes that this theme is absent in the two Hyperion fragments. [↑](#footnote-ref-454)
455. Punter, *The Literature of Terror, Volume 1: The Gothic Tradition*, p. 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-455)