

## A Psychoanalytical Hermeneutics of John Keats's Verse Epistle *To John Hamilton Reynolds* through Julia Kristeva's Theory of 'Semiotic' vs. 'Symbolic' Orders

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### Abstract

*My readings of John Keats' s verse epistle To John Hamilton Reynolds (1819) have allowed me to gather the poet's underlying wonder at the vertiginous number of visions his imagination induces whenever he succumbs to rest. The noticeable surfeit of these visions is suggested not simply to hinder the poet from enjoying the bodily and spiritual relaxation he needs. More importantly, the poet seems to be much perplexed and even is led to deplore the sheer remoteness of these visions from the world of reality. While enumerating these visions, the poet stresses the way they keep not abiding by the terms of logic, whether temporal or spatial. Therefore, the epistle documents, as well, the vain wrestles within the poet to subject these innumerable visions deterring his equanimity to the precepts of reason and to orchestrate them to order.*

*This paper seeks to apply Julia Kristeva's psychoanalysis in reading Keats's epistle. Much concentration is going to be put on the relevance of Kristeva's psychoanalytical views in the text of the epistle. Thus, this study requires going through the theoretical elucidations of Kristeva's notions of the 'semiotic' versus 'symbolic' orders, where the former is pre-linguistic and, therefore, maps out the child's early life and the latter coincides with the development of language. The clash between both orders is manifested in the frequent disruption of the 'semiotic' (which is regulated by fluidity and absence of prohibitions whatsoever) to the seamy fabrics of the 'symbolic' (which is governed by the law of 'binarism' that requires the subject to be enlisted to a whole set of do's and don'ts).*

**Keywords:** chora, écriture, imagination, material sublime, organic whole, semiotic vs. symbolic orders

## Introduction

John Keats's verse epistle *To J. H. Reynolds* (1818) is a space in which the poet is presented as a helpless victim to the innumerable visions besieging him from every corner from within. From the beginning, then, we understand that the poet's psyche represents the pivot around which the whole texture of the epistle revolves. This means that Keats's interior world becomes the battleground on which the fight of the poet against his visions and his wrestles with conceptualizing them are minutely staged before his readers. Such an underlying dramatization of what is going on in the poet's psyche makes the text of the epistle constitute a concretization of what Stuart. M. Sperry referred to as "that sense of mist and clouds, the feeling of the 'burden of the Mystery' oppressing the poet." (118)

The sense of inability to orchestrate one's visions ought to be read within Keats's frequent dramatization of the destructive potential of the poetic imagination. In reality, pointing to the negative outcome of following the limitless vagaries of imagination is unconventional within a romantic mode of apprehension. Indeed, it is very common to find romantic poets extol imagination and assess its creative divine-like capacity that acknowledges no boundary whatsoever. Keats himself had written one year before this epistle: "I am certain of nothing but the holiness of the Heart's affection and the truth of Imagination. What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth – whether it existed before or not." (Appendix 6. *John Keats. The Complete Poems.* 535)

The question which imposes itself, then, concerns the change wrought to 'imagination' with respect to its position for the poet. If we were to admit that the epistle marks a deviation from the romantic itinerary, we would certainly be invited to ponder over the causes, manifestations and results of such an abrupt and romantically unconventional negative view the poet comes to hold about 'imagination.'

## Research objectives

The aim of this paper is to cover the following objectives:

- To adopt Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytical approach (namely her differentiation between the 'semiotic' vs. the 'symbolic' orders) while trying to delineate the causes that lead to the eventual appropriation of these visions of irritating aspects to the poet.
- To stress the superseding might of these visions and their tenacious defiance against the poet's efforts to subjugate them to the laws of reality and commonsensical logic. This is going to be read within Kristeva's view of the supremacy of the pre-linguistic fluidity and unrestrained freedom and mobility governing the 'semiotic' order over the regularities and severe control and boundaries set around the linguistically-bound individual in the 'symbolic' one.
- To frame the poet's recognition of his inability to control his fecund imagination (which is constantly begetting further visions) within the context of Kristeva's insistence on the rhetoric of the individual's search for self-disaffiliation from the 'semiotic' in favor of embracing the 'symbolic.' Hence, this emphasis on the 'rhetoric' side of such an effort implies the weak-grounded nature of that disaffiliation – a deduction that is going to be shown through highlighting the pernicious role the poet's imagination keeps playing in the epistle despite his explicit linking it with the 'purgatory blind.'

- To heighten the interspersed of both orders (the 'semiotic' and the 'symbolic') in the whole texture of the epistle and the impossibility to sever each from the other. This fact is going to be studied in relation to the effects produced out of that dialectical link, while focusing on the underlying sense of indeterminacy governing the epistle and coloring the poet's mood.

### Research Questions

The study will concentrate on the following questions:

- How is Julia Kristeva's psychoanalysis relevant to the text of John Keats's epistle *To J. H. Reynolds*?
- What are the major insights we can gather into Keats's view of imagination (which, as we said, he broached unconventionally with reference to its usual estimation among romantic poets) out of such a psychoanalytical spectrum?

### Research Methodology

This study will be based on analysis and inference, supporting each idea from the text of the epistle and finding indices telling of the centrality of Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytical views in it. The textual references are given as evidence to support the arguments of this research. The key Kristevian concepts of 'semiotic vs. symbolic' orders, along with *chora* and *écriture* are going to be studied in relation to the text of the epistle. This entails that the notion of 'imagination,' which represents the main controversial issue in the epistle, is going to be subjected to a Kristevian psychoanalytical hermeneutics. The list of cited sources is given under the heading of References at the end of this paper.

### Literature Review

It is true that the verse epistle *To J. H. Reynolds* (1818) does not seem to achieve the same canon as Keats's other works like his romance *Endymion* (1817) which precedes it and his epic *Hyperion* and the six famous odes (*To Autumn*, *To a Nightingale*, *On Indolence*, *On a Grecian Urn*, *To Psyche*, and *On Melancholy*), written after it (1819). This may explain the small amount of criticism the epistle has received, inasmuch as it has not been extensively written about. Still, I find that the importance of the epistle should not be devalued under the pretext of being relegated to other major works. To a considerable extent, the epistle gains its valor through the turning point it marks in the poet's career, as far as his view of 'imagination' is concerned. As Walter Evert ascertains "no poetic agonist created after the Reynolds epistle succeeds in assimilating both worlds (the imaginative vs. the real) to his own spirit." (281)

Referring back to the whole body of criticism written about and on the epistle (no matter how small it may be), I found out that most of it address the intellectual and aesthetic questions the poet grapples with in his epistle. I could cite such works as Stuart M. Sperry's *Keats the Poet* (1994), Albert Gérard's article "Romance and Reality: Continuity and Growth in Keats's View of Art" that appeared in *Keats-Shelley Journal* XI (pp. 17-29), Mary Visick's article "'Tease us out of Thought': Keats's *Epistle to Reynolds* and the Odes" in *Keats-Shelley Journal* XV (pp. 87-98), along with Walter Evert's discussion of the epistle in *Aesthetic and Myth in the Poetry of Keats* (pp. 194-211).

These books and articles are very interesting in illuminating us to focal facets that need to be known about the poet, related mainly to the philosophizing tendency he reveals in this epistle (the intellectual side) and the original style he adopts in it which verges on surrealism (the aesthetic dimension). However, no psychoanalytical study is offered in these works. My Ph.D on Keats (Ben Amor 2012) makes use of psychoanalysis, but it does not delve much into Kristeva's works and seeks, rather, to frame Keats's view of imagination within the dialectics the poet exhibits between the 'real' and the 'ideal.' The present study undertakes the task of providing a hermeneutical reading of the epistle, using Julia Kristeva's psychoanalysis as a reference, in the hope of deciphering new results that may complete the intellectual and aesthetic handlings of it.

### **I. The 'Semiotic': between immanence and elusiveness**

In her book *Desire in Language. A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, Julia Kristeva maintains that the 'semiotic' "refers to the actual organization, or disposition, within the body, of instinctual drives as they affect language and its practice." (18) Elucidating more the nature of these drives, Kristeva adds in her book *Revolution in Poetic Language* that "drives involve pre-Oedipal functions and energy discharges that connect and orient the body to the mother." (27)

What could be derived from these quotes are the following five points:

1 - The anchorage of the 'semiotic' in 'the body,' which highlights its close affinity to man's biological constitution that is empirically-verifiable and, therefore, apt to be studied scientifically.

2 - The association of the 'semiotic' with 'instinctual drives,' linking it, thus, with what is innate, rather than acquired, that is, what we are born with. By implication, the world of the senses represents the bedrock of the 'semiotic,' which means that the 'semiotic' pertains to man's 'instinctual drives' to grant the senses full satisfaction of all that is desired.

3 - There is a discernible effect of the 'semiotic' on the course of 'language and its practice.' This certainly serves:

a + To extend the tempo-spatial appearance of the 'semiotic' as to be stretched beyond the pre-linguistic phase, generally considered to be lavished with unrestrained freedom from inhibitions, whether moral, social, religious, or institutional at large. All these forms of inhibition are usually held to fatally regulate the individuals' lives departing from the moment they start to use language. By implication, the tempo-spatial extension of the 'semiotic' beyond its own phase is suggested to make that so-called 'fatal regulation' in the symbolic order void of sense.

b + To present the 'semiotic' as capable of invading the internal fabrics of the 'symbolic order' – a fact that is clear in 'language,' the hitherto-held to be the most explicit indicator of one's severance from the pre-linguistic unconfined realms of the 'semiotic.' Actually, the 'practice' of language, in itself, (including artistic productions) could be revelatory of the presence of the 'semiotic.' As Julia Kristeva ascertains in one of her interviews, "What we call 'art' is characterized by more patent immanence of the semiotic to the symbolic. Art transforms language into rhythms and transforms 'aberrations' into stylistic figures." (Guberman 109)

4 - The existence of 'pre-Oedipal' facts within the structure of language, despite the anchorage of these facts in the individual 'unconsciousness.' This is what Kristeva puts

forward in her book *New Maladies of the Soul*: “within the semiotic activity, sensory vectors such as sound, color, smell carry the sense of the drive and of affect and are organized within the primary process (unconscious).” (159) What happens, after the individual enters the ‘symbolic’ order of language, is his/her retaining of these very ‘sensory vectors’ that, originally, inhabit the ‘semiotic,’ rather than the ‘symbolic.’ As Sylvie Andrea Gambaudo puts it, “Kristeva interprets the presence of semiotic contents as the marker of the subject’s re-actualization of a time anterior to language, that is, a return of the subject to maternal time and a re-actualization of maternal time within the subject.” (32)

5- The metaphorical link of the ‘semiotic’ with the image of the ‘mother’ – the receptacle of all that is desired for the child in the pre-linguistic phase. Through endorsing the possibility of ‘re-actualization’ of such a phase at any time, Kristeva is implicitly sanctioning the return of pre-Oedipal contents (that is, the time before the child’s severance from its mother occurs, which is the ‘semiotic’) into symbolic production. In fact, Kristeva announces, in her book *Against the National Depression*, her outright commitment to the project of “rehabilitating pre-Oedipal and psychic latencies of the unconscious.” (27) This project constitute but an attempt “to return to pre-Oedipal contents in order to verbalize it again.” (Gambaudo 93)

It is this attempt to ‘verbalize’ these ‘pre-Oedipal contents,’ while being immersed in the symbolic order, which proves the eventual imprisonment of the ‘semiotic’ in the darkly labyrinthine realms of inexpressibility. This is what Julia Kristeva ultimately seems to find out as a main challenge in her psychoanalytical enterprise. Rather than being a transparent medium of revealing the tacit multiple layers of the presence of the ‘semiotic’ in it, language often remains inapt to formulate the non-verbalized body’s needs and longings. As she observes in her book *Against the National Depression* “many do not manage to represent their conflicts psychically (in sensations, words, images, thoughts), and consequently expose themselves to vandalisms, psychosomatic disorders, drugs.” (69) As a matter of fact, no longer are ‘sensations, words, images and thoughts’ transmissible of and representative to one’s psyche. If ever a perturbed psyche that is living in ‘conflicts’ were to express itself, it would be through self-destroying neurotic forms of compensation that share in common ‘disorder.’

Implicitly, the stiff divide between the ‘semiotic’ and the ‘symbolic’ is retrenched, for the ‘semiotic’ harks back to its non-expressive essence that none can get insights into. This is what led Kristeva to disagree with Freud who posited the possibility to arrive at the truth of one’s ‘unconscious’ through paying attention to one’s use of language. Confirming her disagreement with Freud in this point, while highlighting her view of the inexpressibility of the ‘semiotic’ by a psyche that is suffering, Kristeva opines: “My major disagreement with Freud in this field lies in the attention that I pay to language. In certain cases, the discourse of the melancholic is so impoverished that one wonders on what could one base an analysis. The language of the depressed is not psychotic. But it rests upon a denial of the signifier which results from the dissociation of the affect from language. *It speaks, but does not touch me.*” (Julia Kristeva. *Aesthetic, Politics, Ethics*. 16, italics mine)

In front of that implied state of paralysis of expression, ‘imagination’ remains the sole soothing balm for the individual to let the ‘semiotic’ survive within the moulds of the ‘symbolic,’ despite its inexpressibility. In other words, when the imagination ‘speaks’ from within the individual, it ‘does touch’ him/her greatly now. This pertains to Kristeva’s notion

of the 'chora.' In her book *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva defines the 'chora' as "a non-expressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated. The 'chora' precedes and underlies figuration and is analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm." (25 - 6) The space the 'chora' occupies may underpin, chiefly, an underlying paradox translated in its amalgamation of 'stasis' and 'motility,' dynamic 'movement' and 'regulation,' and temporal 'precedence' of 'figuration' as a sign system and its 'underlying' it. This may be added to the paradoxical association of the 'chora' with the 'vocal and kinetic rhythm (which appeals both to the auditory and visual sensory responses) and 'non-expressive totality' (which is suggested to elude the auditory sense, for it transcends the scope of language altogether, out of its 'non-expressive' nature).

The multifarious aspect of the 'chora' and its malleability to fit any shape may link it with the unrestrained freedom granted to the child during the pre-linguistic phase, that is, in the 'semiotic' order. Actually, Kristeva emphasizes the intrinsic tie that binds both the 'semiotic' and the 'chora' in her *Desire in Language. A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*: "the semiotic process relates to the *chora*, term meaning 'receptacle.' It is also anterior to any space." (6) Rather than being just another variable of the 'semiotic,' the specific nature of the 'chora,' as a 'receptacle' of contrarities, ensures the ever-existent potential of the 'semiotic' to spread its wings and to allow it to invade the established logic and rules of the 'symbolic.' In other words, the 'chora' is a dynamism from within the individual which keeps seeking to blur the boundaries separating the 'semiotic' order from the 'symbolic.' However, far from setting a permanent bridge between both orders, the 'chora' is just capable of establishing a brief and intermittent union that does not exceed the subjective repertoire of 'imagination.'

Interestingly, these 'intermittent' moments of union constitute the repository from which creative works feed. In fact, Kristeva considers that poets, for example, imbibe their inspiration from the 'chora.' In her *Revolution in Poetic Language*, she maintains that "the *chora* can transform ideation into an 'artistic game,' corrupt the symbolic through the return of drives, and make it a semiotic device, a *mobil chora*." (53) The act of 'corrupting the symbolic,' which is taken as necessary for the operation of the 'chora,' may point to the falsification and, therefore, the fakeness of blurring the boundaries between the 'semiotic' and the 'symbolic.' By extension, any 'artistic game,' including the poetic imagination itself, is suggested to derive its sources from deceit. This deduction must be much perplexing to John Keats, for it seems to posit a moral dilemma for him. Keats seems to grow poignantly aware of "the devilishness of the poetic imagination" (Ben Amor 315) which casts him in an endless whirl of a vain imposing of the 'semiotic' on the 'symbolic' in his epistle *To J. H. Reynolds*.

### **The relevance of the 'semiotic' in Keats's epistle**

Originally, Keats's purpose of writing his epistle was just "a playful attempt to provide some humorous distraction for his friend Reynolds who was ill at the time." (Sperry 118) Actually, Keats begins his epistle with underlying that sense of 'playfulness' and mental and bodily relaxation he is cocooned in while composing it. This is what we gather from the first line of the epistle "Dear Reynolds, as last night I lay in bed." His mentioning of the tempo-spatial context of his composition might be read as a deliberate attempt to emphasize the states of easiness and rest, which are, in Kristeva's psychoanalytical enterprise, chief qualities

of the 'semiotic' order. In reality, stressing that measure of relaxation to which the poet peacefully succumbs is a conventional image that we find in Keats's poetry. In his poem *Sleep and Poetry*, for example, the poet extols the fruitful aspect of rest: "The pleasant day, upon a couch at ease. / It was a poet's house who keeps the keys / Of Pleasure's temple." (353 - 5) The capitalization of the initial letter of 'Pleasure' may pertain to the completeness it possesses and, therefore, its perfection, which certainly holds much echo to the infinite and unrestrained pleasure that Kristeva grants to the 'semiotic' order.

Inhabiting the same semiotic-like 'temple of Pleasure,' the poet establishes, in the epistle, a close connection between his rest and the profuseness of images coming to his mind: "as last night I lay in bed, / There came before my eyes that wonted thread / Of shapes, and shadows, and remembrances." (1-3) Inferably, there is built an 'organic whole' between 'pleasure,' 'rest' and 'imagination,' while all are tinged with a sacred aura since they are made to share the same 'temple.' Accordingly, the poet seems to begin his epistle with underlining the boon he was in 'last night.' We may even derive that such a boon provides him with enough stamina and the needed impetus to write his epistle. In Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytical hermeneutics, the poet's perfect rest represents a moment in which the 'chora' exercises its presence and the poet hastens to profit from it through documenting his experience. In fact, the main levels associated with the 'chora' (receptivity, unity and creativity) are strongly suggested in these first three lines of the epistle.

Receptivity can be derived from the poet's self-lavishing of the set of images passing 'before his eyes' while succumbing to rest. Unity may be insinuated from the amalgamation of 'shapes, shadows and remembrances' that, despite their differences, seem to visit him all at once in a 'wonted thread.' Meanwhile, 'creativity' is suggested through the poet's implied subjection of all these images to an artistic context whereby his simple act of 'laying in bed' enshrines that 'thread' of associations and gives free rein to his 'imagination' to weave it. What is shared, throughout, is to voice the unrestrained realm of the 'semiotic' the poet is psychoanalytically retrieving thanks to his being visited and lulled by the 'chora.' The loose structure of the epistle, in itself, may be telling of the 'semiotic' anchorage of its genesis. As Stuart M. Sperry observes, "the poem as a whole seems strangely disjointed and even at times incoherent." (117) Through its immersion in the 'semiotic,' the 'unity' that is achieved in the epistle is not structural, but mental, for the poet manages to relate between discrete objects and put them in the same bundle, transgressing, thus, the commonsensical order. Sylvie Andrea Gambaudo, while expounding on Kristeva's differentiation between the 'semiotic' and the 'symbolic,' summarizes it in the following formula: "language is made of two dimensions, symbolic and semiotic, the one classifiable, the other exceeding order." (38)

Becoming a 'semiotic' space in which the poet 'exceeds order,' the epistle possesses different turns that keep resisting orchestration and, therefore, take the poet's imagination far into idyllic realms that are highly etherealized. His imagination leads him, for example, to envision "the Enchanted Castle – it doth stand / Upon a rock, on the border of a lake / Nested in trees." (26 - 8) The qualification of this 'castle' as 'enchanted' may serve to highlight its imaginary aspect, as if the poet were narrating a fairy-tale. Moreover the use of capitalization of the initial letters of 'Castle' and 'Enchanted' may point to its uniqueness and therefore its mystery. Psychoanalytically, that measure of mysterious singularity might have to do with the real nature of the 'semiotic' which "breaks the repressive laws of phallo-centric logic at the

level of the subject.” (C. W. 84) The poet, while undergoing such a semiotic-like affiliation, affirms his ‘breaking’ of any ‘repressive logic’ through anchoring the castle his imagination induces in a dream-like context while underscoring the highly inexpressible superb ‘enchantment’ of it. Invoking his muse (in the name of the god Phoebus), the poet says: “O Phoebus! that I had thy sacred word / To show this castle, in fair dreaming wise, / Unto my friend, while sick and ill he lies!” (30 - 2)

The essence of the poet’s wish to share his semiotic-like attachment to the eminent singularity of the ‘Castle’ his imagination envisions is to heal his friend, Reynolds, who ‘sick and ill he lies.’ Hence, the therapeutic retreat to the ‘semiotic’ order is highlighted. In the words of Julia Kristeva, “in a sense, the semiotic order is pure musicality. It is rhythm, tonal difference, phonic change, movement of the body and of the limbs. This semiotic area, characterized as enigmatic indifferent to language, is a sort of orchestration of primary movements and functions.” (*Revolution in Poetic Language* 29) The healthy aspect of the rehabilitation of ‘primary movements and functions,’ which imagination when shielded by its ‘semiotic’ affiliation can ensure, is made an innate and, therefore, a universal boon which can be recovered by anyone. Thus, the poet addresses his ill friend, Reynolds, in the following terms: “You *know* it well, where it (‘the Enchanted Castle’) doth seem / A mossy place, a dream. / You *know* the clear lake, and little isles.” (33 – 5, italics mine) The reiteration of the cognitive verb ‘to know’ implies that the illness wrought to Reynolds is ascribed to his estrangement from the ‘semiotic’ – expressed metonymically through the image of the ‘enchanted castle’ – which is deep-seated within him and hence, he ‘knows’ it very well instinctively. Implicitly the poet is making a plea to his friend to heed to the voice of the ‘semiotic’ inhabiting him from within if he wants to be recovered from his illness.

Actually, the high measure of idyllic presentation of what we might call ‘semioticized castle’ is telling of the reinvigorating and, therefore, therapeutically healthy aspect of the poet’s call. The sensually appealing verdure suggested from ‘a mossy place’ and the ‘lake’ coupled with the metaphorical comparison of the castle to ‘dream’ may highlight the poet’s inscription of it in a pastoral-like context where there is a powerful overflow of imagination. Delineating the chief virtues of the ‘pastoral’ as “a literary form idealizing the lives of shepherds,” Edward Quinn notices that “implicit in the idea of ‘pastoral’ is the identification of happiness with simple, natural existence, associated in classical times with the Golden Age, and in modern times with images such as ‘the little house in the prairie’ or ‘Grover’s Corners,’ the locale of Thornton Wilder’s play *Our Town* (1938).” (240) The effect of this tacit metaphorical equation of the ‘semiotic’ voice from within to such a pastoral-like setting is to highlight the poet’s centralization of what is innate and, therefore, natural, as a healing agent to diseases that are, as the epistle suggests, made and constructed due to one’s alienation from one’s essence. What is innate, here, corresponds, in Kristevian psychoanalysis, to the ‘semiotic’ and what causes alienation from it (which effects illnesses, like the disease that is suggested to haunt Keats’s friend, Reynolds) corresponds to the ‘symbolic.’

In positing affiliation to the ‘semiotic’ as an efficacious cure to the diseases that plague the ‘symbolic’ (which are suggested to be mostly psychological), the poet seems to grow restless to find ways of expressing to Reynolds the real nature of such a ‘semiotic healing.’ At this juncture, the poet’s invocation of the god, Phoebus: (“O Phoebus! that I had thy sacred word / To show this castle, in fair dreaming wise, : Unto my friend, while sick and



ill he lies!" (30 - 2)) casts the wish in a 'fair dream' that, despite its inexpressibility, is qualified 'wise' since it defines the very locus of healing. However, as the epistle proceeds, we remark that the desire to verbalize dreams seems to assume a manic dimension. It leads the poet to hanker for extending the unrestrained pleasure, which dream may offer, to the objective world of reality in order to ensure the ever-healing process of psyches. In Kristeva's psychoanalytical model, this desire pertains to her project of "rehabilitating pre-Oedipal and psychic latencies of the unconscious" (*Against the National Depression* 27), that is, of reconciling the 'semiotic' with the 'symbolic. This involves the daring attempt to 'rehabilitate' the 'pre-Oedipal' within the fabrics of the 'symbolic,' which requires the poet, who engages in a lethal fight with expression to inscribe the 'wise dream' in his friend's mind, "to return to pre-Oedipal contents in order to verbalize it again." (Gambaudo 93) In other words, the poet's desire consists in extending that measure of infiniteness, which characterizes the complete sensual link that organically links the baby to its mother in the semiotic order, to the finiteness that corresponds to the 'symbolic' order where the gratification of the senses is highly controlled and framed within a phallogocentric context.

Deemed to be therapeutically beneficial, that desired extension of the 'semiotic' to the 'symbolic' which the poet seeks to verbalize as a 'wise dream' is reminiscent of Kristeva's 'chora' in its vibration and dynamism. We might recollect, here, Kristeva's view that "the process and practice of signification seeks to make the symbolic less opaque and 'real' by returning to the process of the semiotic. The *chora* returns to the point of the semiotic creation and to the seed crystal of polarity to find semiotic renewal." (*Revolution in Poetic Language* 66) This 'semiotic renewal,' which operates through 'making the symbolic less opaque and real' than it really is, points to the duplicitous mechanisms underlying that idealized process of 'returning to the pre-Oedipal' in order to be capable of doing such as acts as verbalization of dreams, an act which signifies the extension of the 'semiotic' to the 'symbolic.' In the epistle, that process of mystifying the 'symbolic' through infusing it with traits typifying the 'semiotic' could be derived from the poet's asking his friend, Reynolds, to "see what is coming from the distance dim." (55) The procession of sensually apprehensible phenomena the poet mentions afterwards are made, due to their subjection to such 'dimness,' hardly recognizable and, therefore, much etherealized as if they belonged to a dreamy, rather than tangible world. Among the things that Reynolds is pleaded to 'see' it 'coming from the distance dim' is the 'galley': "A golden galley all in silken trim" (56) where "three rows of oars are lightening" (57) side eventually "towards the shade, under the castle wall" (59) to cause the whole sight he seeks to envisage to be "hidden all." (60)

Symbolically, the movement of the scene from clarity to imperceptibility may echo the course the Kristevian 'chora' follows while making the 'symbolic less opaque' in the process of its being 'semioticized.' The same itinerary towards unclarity and difficulty of sensual apprehension characterizes the poet's description of the enchanting music: "An echo of sweet music doth create / A fear in the poor herdsman ... / He tells of the sweet music, and the spot, / To all his friends – and they believe him not." (62 - 3 / 65 - 6) There is a high measure of mystification surrounding this 'music' which causes it not to be 'believed.' Chiefly, its instilling of 'fear' and 'sweetness' renders it the locus of contrarities to the extent that it is introduced as being an enigmatically unidentifiable music that is hardly apprehensible acoustically, thus resembling the 'dimness' of shapes Reynolds is asked to heed. In reality, this amalgamation of 'fear' and 'sweetness' could be read in connection to Kristeva's

construction of the workings of the 'chora,' namely in the waning and waxing in the degree of its inducing the senses to apprehend objects properly. Such an implied instability attached to the 'chora,' from which the poet's 'imagination' feeds, is confirmed by Kristeva: "margins and boundaries will become less transparent, and anomalies will be more and more present. As this happens, the *chora* becomes more and more available, more and more mobile. It vibrates with instability and takes the role of meta-communication." (*Revolution in Poetic Language* 67)

Essentially, the meta-communicative basis of the 'chora' might be ascribed to its metaphorical link with all that is sensually elusive in the world. Such elusiveness seems to pertain, not primarily to discarding the senses from the orbit of the poet's connection to the physical world, but to the fleetingness of the sensual stimuli which constantly dupes him into believing them to be a settled form, while they never stop changing. Actually, the definition of prefix 'meta' in dictionary is "a combining form of change, used in words like 'metamorphosis,' 'metabolism' etc." (*O.A.L.D*) Hence, the assumption of the 'chora' of 'the role of meta-communication' may signify the endless metamorphosis of the sensually apprehended objects into a state of inapprehensibility that can cause 'fear.' The meta-communicative basis of the 'chora,' then, may indicate the inextricable moment when "the illusion of mythic oneness is dissolved in the awareness of change." (Sperry 267) Being caught in such a poignant 'awareness of change,' the poet seems to be led to question the generally-considered perfect oneness of the 'semiotic' order (as a site not only of complete satisfaction of desires without restraint, but also a healing mine to be taken from whenever faced with annoying disturbances in the symbolic order). What mostly could nourish the poet's questioning of the 'semiotic' is his discernment of its remoteness from the idealized 'whole,' inasmuch as the 'chora' which bestows it energy never ceases evading the senses and thus keeps dangling between the 'sweet' and the 'fearful.' This is what might make the limitations of the 'symbolic' order more preferable to the duplicitous enticements of the 'semiotic.'

## II. The Symbolic: between impoverishment and appropriation

In Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytical enterprise, the 'symbolic' order maps out most of the subject's life, since it marks its presence right from the emergence of language use. In her book, *Strangers to Ourselves*, she defines the 'symbolic' as being "the proper of language, of its signs and its syntax." (26) However, while embarking on delineating the specificities of the 'symbolic' order, Kristeva comes up with several flaws in its composition that have to do mostly with its bases and methods of operation in relation to the pre-linguistic 'semiotic' order which precedes it. These 'flaws' deter considerably the working of the 'symbolic' and despicably shackle its mechanisms, affording thus much psychoanalytical space for Kristeva to reveal its fragile essence and its exposure to 'semiotic' transgressions. The following points will summarize the diverse difficulties facing the individual once s/he enters the 'symbolic' order.

1) The association of the 'symbolic' with repression. This means that the whole body of language used in communication is based on hiding facets of reality, problematizing, thus, the whole scope of communicability altogether. As a matter of fact, Kristeva discerns a stark dissociation between conscious representations of reality and what Sylvie Andrea Gambaudo

calls “the expression of affects.” (30) In Kristeva’s own words, “affect remains in suffering, so all I can do is weep.” (*Julia Kristeva. Aesthetic, Politics, Ethics.* 16)

2) The production of language without ‘affect’ draws attention to the incomplete nature of the ‘symbolic’ and its sheer deracination from the individual’s self-expression. Falling short of expressing real affective sides the individual lives entails the impoverished character of the ‘symbolic’ and, hence, the incapacity of language to provide an exhaustive account of some inner truths that are psychoanalytically speaking fundamental for understanding one’s motives and reactions. This means that “although many adults have successfully entered the symbolic sphere, an increasing number have done so at the expense of a disconnection language/affect.” (Gambaudo 34)

3) Once they enter the ‘symbolic’ order, individuals are made to indoctrinate a whole set of do’s and don’ts that have to be internalized prescriptively. In other words, one’s psyche is made to constitute a perpetual space of negotiation of what can be shown and said (conscious representation of reality) and what should remain hidden (unconscious repression of other facets of reality). In this respect, Kristeva insists on the necessity of the superiority of ‘unconscious repression’ over one’s ‘conscious representation,’ which implies the imminence of one’s laying bare of some sort of what is being repressed, no matter how much one tries to keep it immune from the ‘symbolic’ order. Thus, the layers of language in the ‘symbolic order’ remain not thick enough to hide what is sought to be repressed. For example, Kristeva finds in “pitch, intonations, silences, while conversing, proofs of the disruption of the symbolic chain.” (Lechte 60)

4) The ‘symbolic’ regularities remain, nevertheless, a prerequisite for being acknowledged socially as a member with whom to communicate, determining thus one’s identity as a social being. By implication, “for the individual, socialization means coming to terms with the loss of the pre-social or instinctive world of the infant and consenting to socio-cultural demands.” (Gambaudo 89) The essence of such ‘consent to socio-cultural demands’ pertains to the will to appropriate prescriptively the norms and etiquettes of society that are made, rather than born with. According to Kristeva, this is one form of containment of oneself in a false self-representation that gears towards achieving what we may call ‘social’ rather than personal ‘identity.’ The matter is verbalized in the following terms by Kristeva: “I am not contained in the symbol. ‘I’ do not connect what I am with its representation.” (*Strangers to Ourselves* 24)

5) One’s appropriation of the ‘symbolic,’ despite its divorce from ‘what I am,’ begets for Kristeva the psychic ills of modern life. Kristeva describes how one is led to speak a ready-made discourse “where dreams and fantasies have been replaced by operative fantasies.” (*Power and Limits of Psychoanalysis.* 126) These formulaic reductive ‘operative fantasies’ are presented as lethal to the innate creative potential of the individual, giving birth to what Kristeva chooses to label as “somatic body” which “is automatic, mindless and entirely impritable, a diseased body from which the ability to represent unconscious drives has been suppressed, and which produces non-organic diseases as an alternative ‘language’ to language which no longer carries individual desires.” (*New Maladies of the Soul* 69)

In front of such a deadlock where ‘language no longer carries individual desires,’ while being blindly yearned for in order to gain ‘social identity,’ there occurs a hazardous split within the individual’s psyche translated in an overwhelming incapability of compromising between the instinctual drives of the ‘semiotic’ and the prescriptive dictates of the ‘symbolic.’ According to Kristeva, the perpetuation of this implied irreconcilability between both orders yields eventually an exclusive discourse that is sanctioned scientifically

just to warrant the scale of normalcy built even in the use of language. As a consequence, “the investigation of an a-symbolic, that is, semiotic reality tends to be symbolically described as madness.” (Gambaudo 102) This means that even though it is paid attention and analyzed, any trace of the ‘semiotic’ in the fabric of the ‘symbolic’ (which represents for Kristeva an undeniable underlying truth) is judged negatively and sought to be remedied from through effacing it. In other words, the scale of normalcy demands that ‘semiotic’ characteristics be totally absent in order for the individual to be admitted as fit socially.

The ultimate result of that unanimous construct of what we might call ‘socially healthy identity’ is the fall of the individual into psychotic forms of illnesses. Here, it is worth-mentioning that psychotic signs are identifiable by “the subject’s keeping of what he knows it to be a truth from others.” (Cavell 67) According to Kristeva, there develops a double discourse from within the individual: one is a cover and serves to appear socially acceptable (which defines the ‘symbolic’), the other is severely muffled and subjected to invisibility through all means in order to evade being referred to as ‘mad’ in the constructed scale of normalcy. Implicitly, added to psychosis, there is built also neurosis which consists in “trying to have reason and strength to keep what one knows from oneself.” (Cavell 67) These psychotic and neurotic forms of disease wrought by one’s attempt to bury the ‘semiotic’ and to grant visibility only to the ‘symbolic’ result in drastic changes of certain mechanisms within the individual. Kristeva cites, in an interview, the example of the transformation of ‘phantasy’ into ‘fantasy’: “With language (that is the emergence of the ‘symbolic’ order), phantasy gives way to fantasy. ‘Fantasy’ is the metaphoric incarnation of ‘phantasy,’ a substitute where the combination sensation/affect with an object is now represented in a symbol.” (Guberman 110)

Kristeva seems well-aware that “the need to capture the symbolic identity” (Gambaudo 65) is an inevitable fact and a sanctioned necessity. Yet, she never seems to endorse such an exclusive discourse which engenders psychotic and neurotic forms of illnesses. Rather than contenting herself with just pinpointing to the way “the symbolic character of the human collapses into chaos” (*Strangers to Ourselves* 40), Kristeva works to find an outlet from that despicable solidification of modern life into formulaic moulds, or symbols regulating one’s conduct. Essentially, Kristeva’s corrective approach seems to operate from within the status quo, that is to depart from the result wrought to the world in the aftermath of subjugating it to ‘symbolic’ representations whereby to determine the scale of normalcy. With respect to ‘fantasy’ (which takes over ‘phantasy,’ on the passage from the ‘semiotic’ to the ‘symbolic’ order), Kristeva works to grant it more representativeness in the ‘symbolic’ sphere. In her *Power and Limits of Psychoanalysis*, she complains: “the new maladies of the soul are characterized notably by a slowing down, if not a destruction of the faculty of fantasy. We are swamped with images, some of which sound like our own fantasies and appease us, but which, due to a lack of interpretive discourse, did not liberate us. Moreover, the stereotypy of those images deprives us of the possibility to create our own imagery, our own imaginary scenarios.” (125)

What is being called for implicitly is to enliven and mobilize the workings of fantasies and to locate them in a private ‘interpretive discourse’ that is really ‘our own’ and free from ‘stereotypical’ ready-made fabrications. Thus there is a tacit mating, on Kristeva’s part, of symbolic activities (which are used to be approached as exclusive of the ‘semiotic’ in order to

translate a 'socially-healthy identity') and 'semiotic' aspects as regards the call for the non-stereotyping and, by implication, the non-standardization of 'the faculty of fancy' and its presentation to be ideally a private constitution. With that move, Kristeva works to rehabilitate the importance of the 'semiotic' in the make-up of the 'symbolic' and considers it as a healthy sign for the individual. As she argues, "the work of the analyst is to reconnect language and affect." (*Julia Kristeva. Aesthetic, Politics, Ethics.* 16) To effect that 'reconnection' between 'language and affect,' that is between the 'symbolic' and the 'semiotic,' Kristeva emphasizes their mutual interdependence as an ineluctable fact that is essential in the fabrics of each. As she remarks in her *Revolution in Poetic Language*, "because the subject is always both semiotic and symbolic, no signifying system s/he produces can be either exclusively semiotic or exclusively symbolic and is instead necessarily marked by indebtedness to both." (24)

This 'indebtedness' to both orders could be envisaged in writing, *écriture*. "*Écriture* can be defined as a type of literary practice which defies discursive pretensions, on the writer's part, to omniscience and neutrality; to the contrary, *écriture* carries within its own discourse the heterogeneity particular to human experience." (Gambaudo 84) Certainly, the challenge *écriture* bears against 'omniscience and neutrality' includes a complete refutation of the belief in the possibility of building a social identity that can be sheltered from the intruding visitations of the 'phantasies' of the 'semiotic' that tend to be associated within the symbolic order with 'madness.' Being the locus of 'heterogeneous discourse particular to human experience,' *écriture* is a method of ensuring and recognizing the organic link binding the 'symbolic' to the 'semiotic' and, by implication, 'fantasy' to 'phantasy.' In this way, *écriture*, as Kristeva points out in an interview, is but an attempt "to put the neutral surface of abstract words into contact with a whole dynamic of recollection of the most archaic sensations experienced at a pre-linguistic level." (Guberman 55) In a nutshell, then, *écriture* aims at producing a language that is, thanks to its inclusive thrust, 'speaks and touches me,' rather than a stultifying one, which Kristeva deplures, that 'speaks, but does not touch me.'

### **The Relevance of the Symbolic in the Epistle**

In the epistle, 'imagination' is introduced negatively as a disruptive force that slyly victimizes its pursuer, mainly through enticing profuse and infinite gifts while detaining them. The series of 'shapes, shadows, and remembrances' which pass before the poet's 'eyes' as he 'lay in bed' keep "every other minute vex and please." (4) As such, the contradictory effect of 'imagination' on the poet is highlighted, since just as it is apt to 'please' him, it can also 'vex' and irritate him and, therefore, deter the equanimity he succumbs to 'in bed.' This double effect may inscribe 'imagination' in a context similar to the 'symbolic' order, where desire fulfillment alternates with desire frustration, rather than with the 'semiotic' one, in which there is just desire fulfillment. Psychoanalytically, this implied displacement of 'imagination' from the 'semiotic' to the 'symbolic' might serve to anticipate the poet's adoption of a repressive discourse of the 'semiotic' effusive inducement of infinite 'thread' of 'shapes, shadows, and remembrances.' In the meantime, the corollary of repressing the 'semiotic' fabrications is the poet's appropriation of the lens of the 'symbolic' order while broaching 'imagination.'

Adopting 'symbolic' lens, the poet seems to do his utmost in the epistle to regulate the workings of 'imagination.' For this project to succeed, he sets out to ironize the essential fabrics of the 'semiotic' through parody, "imitation of a particular style or discourse for the purpose of satirizing it." (Quinn 239) If that parodic method of reading were to be followed, the epistle's purport would be understood, then, to show what Umberto Eco says about the 'semiotic' as being "in principle, the discipline of studying everything which can be used in order *to lie*." (7, italics mine) Of course, within a Kristevian psychoanalytical spectrum, such an underlying incrimination of the 'semiotic' is but a vain attempt to cut all ties with it, while seeking to build strong bonds with the 'symbolic' regularities even for 'imagination.' The poet's parodic thrust of 'satirizing' an imagination which chooses to feed from the 'semiotic' is envisaged in the playful style he adopts in the process of introducing its inducement and all that it begets. What we might call 'semioticized imagination' is conducive to a whirl of postulations that, despite their remoteness from reality, affect the sensory responses of its pursuer to such a considerable extent that the latter grows unable to maintain a usual enjoyment of the sensually-appealing objects in reality as they are.

Actually, it is out of his pursuance of the vagaries of imagination that all graspable (and, therefore, real) elements of 'beauty' are distorted in the epistle and, eventually, metamorphosed into sensually appalling, rather than appealing. While inducing "things all disjointed (that) come from North and South" (5), such a 'semioticized imagination' bludgeons the poet into envisioning "two witch's eyes above a cherub's mouth." (6) The image of the 'witch's eyes' confers a tint of profanity on the sanctity of the 'cherub.' More importantly, the sharp dissonance between the 'cherub' as an angelic child with wings and the witch messes with the orderly nature of the chain of being and produces, ultimately, a sensually appalling image that denudes the cherub from its sensual appeal. As a matter of fact, the face, which that form of imagination begets, serves just to dislocate the implied 'beauty' of the cherub that is, by virtue of its angelic anchorage, the incarnation of ultimate form of perfection. The direct effect of such dislocation is the metamorphosis of the cherub in the epistle into a frightful image appalling the senses. Elliot Gilbert goes even further to hold how "the face of the cherub is fraught with the grotesque." (25) Delineating the characteristics of the 'grotesque,' Edward Quinn affirms that "it refers to a work in which abnormal or macabre characters or incidents are presented in a mix of comedy and pathos or horror. The incompatibility of this mix creates in the reader the kind of conflicted response that one makes to a 'sick joke': on the one hand funny; on the other, nauseating or horrifying." (142)

There is, actually, a sense of 'abnormality' mingled with contradictory effects on the reader's response in the image of the cherub. The distorted image of the cherub not only resists unification, but also alludes to Dionysus, the mythical figure who "is cut to pieces by the Titans." (Brunel 309) In the epistle, the face of the cherub seems to be 'cut to pieces,' too, by the poet's 'semioticized imagination' – pieces that bundle the divine with the beastly 'witchy.' Such a satirized form of imagination is further mocked in the epistle through the image of the so-called 'Enchanted Castle' it envisages. In its overall shape this 'castle' is introduced as a composite of dissociable structural components that yield a very queer setting which is no less grotesque than such a sensually-appalling face of the cherub. Although it is qualified as being "a chosen see" (41), that is, a perfect place (which might induce the reader to ascribe that to its being made by divine-like powers), this castle is peopled by evil forms, putting to the forefront the idea of bestiality instead. In this castle "the doors all look as if they

oped themselves, / The windows as if latched by fays and elves.” (49 - 50) This gothic-like image might transform this ‘Enchanted Castle’ into a prison that derives its specificity (got from the capitalization of its initial letters) from its being guarded by ‘fays and elves.’ Hence, the element of the ‘macabre,’ which is based on intensification of ‘horror,’ is strongly suggested and, consequently, helps nullifying the so-called ‘enchantment’ of this castle.

The responsibility of such a ‘semioticized imagination’ in sustaining ‘horror’ is envisaged more palpably in the scene of the sacrifice dramatized in the epistle. In this scene, the thrilling aspect of death is highlighted in a pitiless context through the image of the heifer being forcibly taken to the sacrifice in the altar, which brings the sensually appalling to its extreme degree. The spectacle of the “pontiff knife (which) / Gloams in the sun” (20 - 1) is followed by that of “the milk-white heifer lowing” (21), creating a sense of threat induced by the imagination, with respect to the awaited death of the heifer. Indeed the whole spectacle stimulates the imagination to envision the brutal slaughtering of the heifer. The expectation of the brutality of such an act may be accentuated by the modifiers attached to the ‘knife’ and the ‘heifer.’ Its ‘gloaming in the sun’ may stand for the knife’s being so honed that it sparkles on being exposed to the sun. Meanwhile, the adjectival modifier ‘white,’ attributed to the heifer, may personify that animal as an innocent victim who is about to meet a cruel torture. What is important, in this context, is the way the sensually appalling aspect of this scene is kept built up even before its actual occurrence. Certainly, this form of anachronism is ascribed to the unrestrained workings of imagination.

Underlying that unrestraint of imagination is its infusion of pain effect before its time, including the experience of death. That form of ‘semioticized imagination’ engenders what Roland Barthes calls ‘scenography of waiting’ which he dramatizes as follows: “I organize it (the waiting of a scene from certain external stimulants), manipulate it, cut out a portion of time in which I shall mime the loss of the loved object and provoke all effects of a minor mourning. This is, then, acted out.” (37) Through ‘acting out’ a scene before its occurrence, this form of imagination transgresses the limitations of reality. It leads the poet to “experiment with death while alive” (Ben Amor 336), though through the empathetic thrust with the heifer. This ‘experimentation with death’ prior to its time, seems to place imagination in a floating space which resembles the unrestrained freedom the semiotic order is said to grant. From thence comes the poet’s outright denunciation of that form of licentiousness set for the imagination. Through a rhetorical question, the poet assaults that form of ‘semioticized imagination’ in the following terms: “Or is it that imagination brought / Beyond its proper bound, yet, still confined, / Lost in a sort of purgatory blind, / Cannot refer to any standard law / Of either earth or heaven? (78 - 82)

It is inferred, then, that the poet is demonizing the infinite space of imagination. This demonization implies a correlative thrust of repudiating one’s retreat to the ‘semiotic’ while being caught in the ‘symbolic’ which, by implication, defines ‘the proper bound’ of imagination. In other words, there is built a tacit contrast between what we might call ‘semioticized’ and ‘symbolized’ forms of imagination whereby the former’s superabundant fecund potential leads just to labyrinthine ‘purgatory blind,’ whereas the latter, through its restriction to reality, ensures balance and ‘clear-sightedness.’ D. G. James goes a step further as he implies the necessity of having an imagination that is bound to the restriction of reality, in the way the ‘symbolized’ form of imagination operates: “imagination seeks to pass beyond

its 'proper bound' within the world, to try to see the world from outside, to see, as Keats says, in *The Fall of Hyperion* (I.303), 'as a God sees.' But it cannot succeed. It is still confined to its 'proper bound.'"(20) That 'proper bound,' set for the imagination, imposes on it to see 'as man sees,' not as 'God sees.' Implicitly, the poet might be seen as providing a corrective reading to the role of the imagination using logic and suggesting his predilection of an imagination that has been *disciplined* by the regularities of the 'symbolic' order to a 'semiotic' one that remains, inferably, *indulgent* and therefore *impetuous* in its operation.

Following the poet's logic, then, the imagination which places itself in an unlimited space is that which is duped into believing its ability "to impose eternity on the temporal; to reveal miracles by performing them." (Murry 131) Yet, the mere act of effecting that 'imposition' contains the seeds of its own destruction, for it leads to maiming the whole scheme of things and, ultimately, to one's alienation from the present moment. Indeed, the poet provides an explicit answer to his rhetorical question which deplores the 'semiotized' form of imagination as 'a sort of purgatory blind' due to its operation 'beyond its proper bound.' This explicit answer takes the form of a general truth: "It is a flaw / In happiness to see beyond our bourne - / It forces us in summer skies to mourn; / It spoils the singing of the nightingale." (82 - 5) The last two lines of the quote above provide tangible analogies to an unrestrained form of imagination that retards one's positive response to the present moment. The first image is that of someone who is 'mourning' and unable to apprehend the superb beauty and enchanting 'summer skies.' That despicable sort of dissonance between mood and reality is accentuated in the second image of the inability of acoustically enjoy the 'singing of the nightingale.'

Following Kristeva's psychoanalysis, these forms of depressive moods with seemingly no external warrant pertain chiefly to the way the 'semiotic' profuse energy is kept denied and not provided representations in the 'symbolic' order. As Sylvie Andrea Gambaudo puts it, "in Kristeva, 'mood' is present within the symbolic, it is not an act of identification: it is not a symbol (that is, it is not represented and thus has not owned yet linguistic icons to represent itself). In the case of melancholia/depression, the presence of sadness (voice, gesture, etc) points to the thing of loss which does not evolve into its representation." (144) By implication, all of the poet's attempts to distance himself from the 'semiotic' (whether through satirizing it or via demonizing it through logic) are the very causes of such an inexplicable disjuncture between his own moods and the external world of reality, despite his full awareness and total conviction of the necessity to content himself with the regularities and confinements of the 'symbolic.' In other words, the poet's appropriation of a 'symbolized imagination,' which is based on excluding its 'semiotized' counterpart, engenders a depressive mood that remains inexplicable and, therefore, not capable of being represented through language, the supposedly distinguishing feature of the 'symbolic' order. So, rather than being hushed and buried, the poet seems to be led to acknowledge that the 'semiotic,' despite its going 'beyond the bounds' of reality, should be received as an essential component in the highly-restrained nature of the 'symbolic' order. Essentially, that acknowledgement of the 'semiotic' while seeking to fully adopt the tight regulations of the 'symbolic' is ascribed to the tenacious anchorage of his moods in an a-symbolic context that resists any sort of logic which governs the 'symbolic' order that the poet targets, initially, to fully inhabit himself in.



In reality, the burgeoning acknowledgement of the 'semiotic' within the fabric of the 'symbolic,' which entails the poet's gradual succumbing to a 'semiotized and symbolized' form of imagination, precipitates the presence of the Kristevian *écriture* in the epistle. Through its search to voice the pre-linguistic 'archaic energies' in the materials of writing, "*écriture* is not a totalizing mode of writing pretending to arrest its progression at perfect meaning; rather, it is an endless process in which homogeneity and heterogeneity interact in the production of a renewed identity, that is to say, an identity of multiplicity rather than sameness." (Gambaudo 86) Certainly, this 'identity of multiplicity' which *écriture* ensures defies the poet's hitherto search for elaborating a mere 'social' identity that builds its constructed scale of normalcy on hierarchical basis, whereby all that belongs to the 'semiotic' is excluded from the texture of the 'symbolic.' In the epistle, the manifestation of *écriture* is interspersed in instances like: "Things cannot to the will / Be settled, but they tease us out of thought." (76 - 7) This touching avowal may help present a poet who stands flabbergasted in front of the workings of imagination and its diverse pulls that escape his 'will' to orchestrate them to order. Implicitly, this statement includes the poet's recognition of the impossibility of subjecting imagination to representation, in the same way moods are presented previously, which highlights the tenacious inscription of imagination in the 'semiotic,' too. Out of that inextricable anchorage of his moods and imagination in the 'semiotic' and after the effort he exhibits in the epistle to give upper hand to the 'symbolic,' the poet seems to find nowhere to go but to cult what he calls "something of material sublime." (69)

Granting 'sublimity' to the 'material' may represent an oxymoronic harnessing of conventionally dissociable entities. However, when read within the context of the inclusive thrust of Kristeva's *écriture*, the effect of that oxymoron would be thwarted and replaced, rather, by that of the underlying harmony between the 'semiotic' and the 'symbolic' in shaping the poet's imagination and determining his moods. As Stuart M. Sperry observes, "a key phrase for elucidating Keats' meaning is 'material sublime,' expressing as it does the desire of the imagination to possess at once the best of worlds, the ethereal and the concrete." (126) The 'ethereal,' here, corresponds metaphorically, to Kristeva's 'semiotic' order, whereas, the 'concrete' to the 'symbolic' one. Both 'worlds' are kept given voice till the end of the epistle and remain intertwined together as to form ultimately an interwoven fabric resembling, to a large extent, the romantically idealized motif of 'the organic whole' that embodies perfect unity and beauty. Perhaps, the fruitful aspect of Kristeva's *écriture*, which underlies the eventual formation of that 'organic whole' between the 'semiotic' and the 'symbolic,' is best translated by the end of the epistle when the poet is suggested to move from the state of perplexity at the interconnection between both 'worlds,' or, in Kristevian model, 'orders' to that of jovial elation on gathering the 'beauty' of such an intertwining of them. The poet rounds off his epistle thus: "I'll dance, / And from detested moods in new romance / Take refuge." (110 - 12) Certainly, the 'new romance' in which the poet will 'take refuge' is going to derive its specificity from his self-willed immersion in the gleeful 'jouissance' Kristeva's *écriture* promises to achieve thanks to its inclusion of the 'semiotic' and 'symbolic' in its vessel.

## Conclusion

This study has shown the relevance of Julia Kristeva's psychoanalysis in the text of John Keats's verse epistle *To J. H. Reynolds*. Namely, Kristeva's notions of the 'semiotic'

versus 'symbolic' orders are chartered theoretically and their applicability in the epistle is evidenced afterwards. In either cases of enumerating the specificities of the 'semiotic' and the 'symbolic' evinces the whole gamut each concept covers, from one extreme to its opposite: from immanence to elusiveness for the 'semiotic' and from impoverishment to appropriation for the 'symbolic.' This reveals the subjection of each of the 'semiotic' and the 'symbolic' to contradictions from within its structure that influences to a large extent its operation and manifestation in reality and in the text of the epistle. In fact, the 'immanence' of the 'semiotic' order is shown to predicate mostly on the 'chora' as an inner mechanism allowing for the ever-regenerative potential of the poet's imagination. Yet, it is also the 'chora' which, due to its swift switching between opposites, begets that sense of 'elusiveness' whose tormenting effect on the poet is envisaged in his inability to maintain an adequate sensory response to objects as they are, which results in shattering the poet's imagination that becomes, eventually, unable to building any form of 'organic whole' the poet tends to idealize.

When it comes to the 'symbolic' order, its paradoxical structure could be revealed from its association with repression of deep-seated truths within the individual which, despite its impoverished impact on the individual's essence, remain a desired path to be appropriated. While seeking to appropriate the symbolic 'repressive' laws, there is built a mistaken belief in the possibility to bury the 'semiotic' in the shade of forgetfulness. This is envisaged in the clear-cut disaffiliation of the poet from what we have called 'a semiotized form of imagination' at the expense of adopting 'a symbolized' one, that is, to appropriate an imagination that is bound to the restrictions of reality. As this study reveals, the inexpressibility of moods and the poet's awareness of being 'teased out of thought' by the floating of imagination prove the impossibility to maintain such a division between both orders. As a matter of fact, the poet seems to endorse eventually Julia Kristeva's notion of *écriture* that purports to be inclusive of the 'semiotic' and the 'symbolic' within the same canon.

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