This story is mediated by a combination of simultaneous and prospective narration. The act of narration is situated immediately before the event of crossing the bar. The imminence of the event is emphasised and increased by having the same story told twice (each in two stanzas), with the time advancing from "sunset" (1) to "twilight" (9) and the moment of departure rapidly approaching ("evening bell", 9). While the situation prior to departure is rendered simultaneously, with no temporal gap between experience and speaking, as suggested by the exclamations evoking the immediately present situation ("sunset", "evening star" etc.), the actual movement towards and across the bar is narrated prospectively in the form of wishes ("may") and hopes (15). Each of the two renderings of the sequence (1–8 and 9–16) singles out the initial and final moments of the prospective narrative by coupling wish or hope with the particular point in time ("when"), anticipating the movement from "when I put out to sea" (4) to "turns again home" (8) and from "when I embark" (12) to "when I have crost the bar" (16). The prospective narration of the decisive, eventful transition has the obvious function of relieving anxiety and re-assuring the agitated mind. Parallel to the increasing imminence of the departure from the first to the second sequence, the quality of re-assurance with respect to the anticipated future state of the speaker is intensified as well: from the impersonal image of turning home (8) to the personal notion of meeting one's guide and saviour ("see my Pilot face to face", 15). The speaker re-assures himself vis-à-vis the unknown and completely new (see "the dark", 10) by re-conceptualising it in terms of the familiar and the known: coming home and directly meeting his personal pilot "face to face" (15). In addition, this consoling prospective narration has a more specifically religious dimension, too: It is a prayer addressed to Christ, to the Pilot to grant a safe and painless passage.

This strategy of coping with the uncertain and often frightening future by pre-structuring it through prospective narration can be seen in a great number of poems from all epochs. Typically, the act of narration is placed immediately before the decisive event with the attempt to negotiate the future movement narratively. One group of particularly elaborate examples are John Donne's "Valediction poems".

4.4 Discourse Events

As a rule, plot and event are ultimately located on the story level, though necessarily constituted by the structure of, and the operations on, the discourse level, in the text (through frames, scripts, selection and organisation of story elements and so on.). There are poems, however, where the decisive change in the plot development (or its anticipation) is essentially shifted to the discourse level, producing what will be called a discourse event. John Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" can serve as a particularly complex example.

Ode to a Nightingale

I

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

II

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

III

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

IV

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

V

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
or what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmèd darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild -
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast-fading violets covered up in leaves;
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

VI

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

VII

Thou wast not born for death, immortal bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft-times hath
Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in fairy lands forlorn.

VIII

Forlorn! The very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! The fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is famed to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu! adieu! Thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
fled is that music ... Do I wake or sleep? (Allott 523–32)

The existents and incidents of the poem comprise the nightingale, its song and its movement within the landscape on the one hand and the speaker, his acute awareness of human infirmity and mortality, his longing for an ideal immortal existence, on the other. These elements on the story level are transformed into a coherent sequence by activating the following schemata. The frame can be determined as the creative imaginative capacity of the mind for transcending the world of human transitoriness and suffering, specifically associated with the poetological concept of imagination developed in Romanticism. The script is then identifiable as the process of the mind transporting itself into the transcendent world of ideal nature through the power of imagination, particularly through poetry, as indicated by phrases like "Hippocrene" (16) and "on the viewless wings of Poesy" (33). The transcendent ideal quality of this world is constituted by the pervasive isotopies of the mythic (the classical Mediterranean world) and the fantastic in such words as "Dryad" (7), "Flora" (13), "Provençal" (14), "warm South" (15).

With the help of these schemata the central narrative sequence of the ode can be constructed: the process of imaginatively entering the ideal world of the nightingale from the initial desire (1ff., esp. 6) and the impulse of self-stimulation (11ff.) through the momentary realisation of the imagination (35ff.) to its final collapse (71ff.) and the subsequent reflection on this experience (79f.). Into this overall sequence two short narrative segments are inserted, which contrast the immortal happiness of the nightingale's existence with the experience of human misery and suffering, the first ascribed to mortal humanity as the collective protagonist ("men", in 23-30), the second to various historical literary figures as single protagonists (e.g. Ruth, 63-70). The overall sequence is constituted in opposition to the two shorter ones: Whereas the first one provides the psychological motive and impetus for entering the imaginative realm, the second predates and signals the return to the world of the mortals. Finally, the last stanza reflects on the relation between the overall and the two shorter sequences, especially on the reality status of the imaginative narrative (real vs. unreal). The speaker feels unable, however, to decide this question – both with regard to his past imagination ("vision" vs. "waking dream") and to his present state of mind ("wake" vs. "sleep").

As for the function of narrating, the speaker tries to dissociate himself from the two shorter sequences by telling – and ascribing to himself – the central narrative and thereby re-defining his status in terms of a preferential affiliation with the ideal intransient world of imagination. His oppositional attitudes to these narratives show in the use of pronouns: the first-person pronoun is only used for the overall sequence, not for the two short ones. The longing for the world of the nightingale and its pervasive contrast with the human condition is accentuated by explicitly addressing the narrative to the nightingale as the narratee (and representative of the ideal existence). The final shift from second to third person ("that music", 80) parallels and corroborates the termination of the overall sequence of imagination. Moreover, the rise and fall in the development of this central narrative is mirrored in the spatial dimension by the opposition between proximity and distance, the highest achievement of the power of imagination being marked by (imagined) closeness to the bird ("already with thee", 35).

In a first approach to the definition of the ode's emplotment, one may locate the event on the story level as the unexpected and sudden fall out of the imaginative world, paradoxi-

cally triggered by the very attempt to perpetuate the affiliation to it. At the height of his imaginative achievement the speaker tries to make his presence in this world permanent through the (metaphorical) equation of this presence with dying (51ff.): "Now ... seems it rich to die, / To cease upon the midnight with no pain" (55f.). Death is characterised by the same attributes (and isotopies) of painlessness, harmony, timelessness, of mystic union as the existence of the nightingale: "ease" (10/52), "cease" / "fade away" / "dissolve" (20f./56), "no pain" (56 vs. 22ff.). However, the reference to his own death inadvertently brings back the awareness of the fundamental difference between the immortal nightingale and mortal humanity and throws him back on his human lot. This sudden awareness initiates a process of reflection which results in the disillusioned self-consciousness of the forlorn solitary self ("my sole self", 72), the disillusionment about the central romantic value of creative imagination and the regret about the failure of imagination to mask human misery ("the fancy cannot cheat so well / As she is famed to do, deceiving elf", 73f). Seen in this context, the event of the plot of this ode appears to consist in the modern destruction of the romantic re-enchantment of the world through the imaginative poet, its unmasking as illusion and self-deception. The undecided alternatives at the very end of the poem can then be interpreted as the speaker's desperate attempt to reduce the disillusionment through questioning the reliability of his perception and judgement.

Extending the analysis to the dimension of mediacy is apt to open up a broader perspective on the particular plot structure of the poem. The two positions of narrator and protagonist are identified both personally and temporally; i.e. the protagonist is also the autodiegetic narrator of the sequence and he presents his (mental) experiences simultaneously, at the same time as they occur, closing the distance between the narrating and experiencing self. This effect of immediacy is further enhanced by the marked emphasis on simultaneous internal focalisation, in its spatial, temporal, but also emotional facets, as is apparent in the deictics ("here", 38; "now", 55 etc.) as well as in the highly emotionalised references to the nightingale in accordance with the speaker's momentary mood ("melodious plot", 8; "thy high requiem", 60; "plaintive anthem", 75). Thus the poem suggests the spontaneity of narration and the immediacy and authenticity of the narrated through staging the simultaneity of experience, perception and narration.[17]

In a second approach to the analysis of the plotting in the ode this contrived and staged effect of unmediated authenticity in the dimension of mediacy can now be described in its specific function for the dimension of sequentiality. If one relates the authenticity effect on the discourse level to the theme on the story level, i.e. the precarious status of imaginative creativity and the constant threats to its operability posed by disillusioning consciousness, one can interpret the particular organisation of the discourse as the specific solution to the problem presented within the story. On the level of the poem as a work of art, the author succeeds in proving the power of imagination whose failure is being narrated and deplored within the overall sequence – if in a partly different respect, not as a permanent entry into the world of the nightingale but as an imaginative rendering of that very failure. In other

17 See Wolf, "Aesthetic Illusion" esp. 271-79, for a detailed analysis of the strategies of producing the aesthetic illusion of immediacy in poetry.

words: The "Ode to a Nightingale" is a successful imaginative narrative about the failure of imagination. This effect is enabled by the performativity in the mediation of the psychological story, which helps deflect attention from the elaborate artistic constructedness of the poem. One assistant factor supporting the interrelation between these two levels is the frequent use of poetological phrases ("melodious", 8; "singest", 10; "on the viewless wings of Poesy", 33 etc.). These phrases, while not directly self-referential to the poem but metaphors for the imaginative process enacted within it, signal the continuity of the frame of imagination between the story and discourse levels of the ode and thus motivate their connection in the form of poetic problem and solution.

Since the plot which results in failure on the story level is continued and successfully completed on the discourse level, one can call this a discourse event. The negative story event (disenchantment) is thus superseded by a positive discourse event (imaginative composition). In consequence, the function of the narrative act changes, too. While the speaker identifies himself through his narration as a potential imaginative poet who ultimately fails because of self-reflection, the author proves himself effectively as a successful poet in mediating this failure.[18]

This argument does not imply, of course, that every successful poem by its very nature necessarily constitutes a discourse event. The artistically perfect organisation of the discourse level in a poem does not normally have a specific function for its narrative setup. This is only the case where the discourse level as such can be seen to continue the story thematically, where, in other words, story and discourse share the same frame and script, as they do in Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale". Other romantic poems with a comparable setup come to mind, like Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn", Wordsworth's sonnet "The world is too much with us", Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" and "Dejection: An Ode". However, discourse events can also be produced by different means, e. g. by a sudden change of frame or script in the process of mediating the story, as in Shakespeare's Sonnet 107, where the frame is abruptly re-defined – from the friend's praise for his continued friendship and patronage to the speaker's assertion of his own superiority, on account of his immortalising poetic gift, over the friend, or in Yeats's "On Woman", where the script for the prospective re-enactment of the speaker's unrequited love-story suddenly changes from aiming at a happy ending to an unmodified repetition of the frustrating experience of the past.

These heuristic narratological analyses yield the following tentative conclusions about the forms and aspects of plotting in lyric poems. First, poems employ a wide variety of forms of narrative and techniques of narration to present and tackle mental or existential problems confronting the speaker. Second, within this narrative setup the concept of (gradable) eventfulness offers a differentiated method of defining the 'point' of poems and locating the decisive turning points in their development. Third, one important dimension of variation in the emplotment of poems concerns the temporal position of the act of narration within the mediated story. Frequently, this act is situated immediately before the event intending to negotiate the decisive transition of the plot. Fourth, the relation of narrator to story told is very variable – in terms of time and tense (retrospective, simultaneous, prospective) and mode or mood (negative, optative), with concomitant consequences for the

18 This is not meant as a statement about Keats's conscious intention when writing the poem.

function of narration. Fifth, the act of narration frequently has a specifiable function in poems, such as self-clarification, self-identification, overcoming a crisis or negotiating a necessary transition. Sixth, poems can utilise the poetic discourse level to complete (or re-define) the plot of the story level.

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