"On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" and Keats's poetic El Dorado

SIMONA BECCONE
Università di Pisa

Abstract

A thorough analysis of the sonnet's unique maritime imagery, within the broader context of Keats's early poems and the letters on the aesthetics and psychology of creative writing, along with the historical sources available to him at the time, as well as Burke's concepts of "Sublime" and "Beautiful", and recent cognitive psychological descriptions of the creative process (Sawyer, 2012; Kelley, 2013), reveals that the triad Balboa-Cortés-Peak in Darien is not the result of a historical mistake, nor a way to subconsciously express the young author's sense of poetic belatedness (Rzepka, 2002) and will of appropriation and emulation of traditional literary models, such as Homer and Chapman (Frosch, 2004). The triad is a metaphorical vehicle imaginatively anticipating, with the prodigious semantic density allowed by the opacity of the poetic sign, Keats's later theorisation of the tripartite poetic mind in "simple", "complex" and "philosophic" (*Letters*, I: 183-187) and deliberately foreshadowing the decision to compose his first significant "test of Invention" (*Letters*, I: 170), *Endymion*, with an independent artistic voice: his newly discovered and still unchartered poetic 'El Dorado'.

Keywords: British Romanticism, John Keats, "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer", psychology of creativity and literature, maritime imagery in literature, history of navigation, Age of Discovery and exploration, Homer in Anglophone literature.

Resumen

Un análisis detallado de la peculiar imaginería marítima del soneto, en el contexto más amplio de los primeros escritos de Keats sobre la estética y la psicología de la escritura creativa, de las fuentes históricas a las que tuvo acceso en su momento, así como de las nociones burkeanas de lo "Sublime" y lo "Bello", y de las teorizaciones más recientes del proceso creativo formuladas en el ámbito de la psicología cognitiva (Sawyer, 2012; Kelley 2013), revela que la famosa tríada Balboa-Cortés-Peak en Darien no es el resultado de un error histórico, ni la expresión inconsciente del joven poeta de su propio sentido de "belatedness" (Rzepka, 2002) hacia los modelos literarios del pasado (Homero, Chapman), ni siquiera un deseo de apropiarse de ellos y emularlos (Frosch, 2004). Por el contrario, la tríada es el vehículo metafórico a través del cual Keats prefigura, con la prodigiosa densidad semántica que permite la opacidad del signo poético, su posterior teorización de la mente poética tripartita en "simple", "complex" y "philosophic" (*Letters*, I: 183-187), con vistas a anunciar su decisión de componer su primer significativo "test of Invention" (*Letters*, I: 170), *Endymion*, expresión de una voz artística independiente: su 'El Dorado' poético, aún desconocido y recientemente descubierto.

Palabras clave: Romanticismo inglés, John Keats, "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer", psicología de la creatividad y literatura, imaginería marítima y literatura, historia de la navegación, Era de la Exploración y del Descubrimiento, Homero en la literatura anglosajona.

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Much have I travelled in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
That deep-browed Homer ruled as his demesne;
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold.
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific, and all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surmise –
Silent, upon a peak in Darien[1].

1. INTRODUCTION

Keats penned this sonnet in a little over an hour at dawn, one October morning in 1816, after a night spent at the Clerkenwell house of his friend and mentor, Charles Cowden Clarke. The two had been engrossed in reading some of the most renowned passages from the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of Chapman's *in folio* translation of Homer[2]. The impact on the young poet was profound. The vibrancy and power of Chapman's Elizabethan verse perfectly aligned with Romantic taste, surpassing the abstract and cold rhetoric of the heroic couplets in Pope's still widely used and read 1713 translation (Clarke, 1878: 128-130). Keats sent his completed poem to Clarke by messenger that same morning (Ward, 1963: 75). It was then published in Hunt's *Examiner* on 1 December 1816, and later in 1817, with few but significant changes[3].

"On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" is a work of rare beauty, formal perfection, and concise confidence of imagery; a proof of the talent of a young poet destined to achieve everlasting fame[4]. In just 14 Petrarchan lines, divided into an octave and a sestet, a then twenty-one Keats intertwines the themes of creative writing and maritime discovery to express his elated admiration for Chapman's "loud and bold" voice (l. 8). A voice which overcame the barriers of time and language to capture the everlasting perfection and formal balance of Homeric style, metaphorised here as the "pure serene" of l. 7. For a young author like him, an "ill-bred «Cockney poet»" (Pollack-Pelzner, 2007: 39), negotiating his poetic identity by seeking to establish a consistent and distinctive poetic authority in the challenging British literary landscape of the time, this discovery shows him the direction towards a New World of writing,

[1] The text of the poem comes from Allott's edition (Allott, 1970). The quotations from Keats's letters are taken from Rollins's edition (Rollins, 1958), hereinafter referred to as *Letters*, followed by the volume and page numbers. All italics in the quotations are mine, if not otherwise indicated. Sonnet composed on October 1816, so dated by Hunt in the *Examiner*, IX, 1 December 1816, pp. 761-762.

[2] According to Clarke's account, they red aloud some of Homer's "famousest passages" (Clarke, 1878: 129): the dialogue between the old senators and Helen on the wall of Troy (*Aeneid*, III: 178), the descriptions of Diomedes' shield and helmet (*Aeneid*, V: 4-8) and of the chariot of Neptune (*Aeneid,* III: 4, 29), and Ulysses' shipwreck on the Phaeacian shore (*Odyssey*, V: 580-587). See Clarke, 1878: 129-130 and Ward, 1963: 73.

[3] As Allott notes (Allott, 1970: 61), Keats's draft, fair copy and the 1816 version of the *Examiner* differ from the second publication in 1817. Some notable variants are in the title (*Fair copy*: "On the first…"), in line 7 (*Draft*, *Fair copy*: "Yet could I never judge what men could mean…") and 11 (*Fair copy*: "wond'ring eyes", later replaced by "eagle eyes"). The first draft (Harvard Keats Collection) is reprinted in Bate, 1963: 87.

[4] Vendler (2003: 67) argues that in this poem, Keats manifests his possession of an authentic poetic style for the first time in his career.

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a poetic 'El Dorado' , for form and substance. A route to consistency of style and literary fame, to be explored and finally conquered.

Keats expresses his reaction to Chapman's Homer in three excellent passages, each corresponding to an image metaphorically representing the emotional state of the poetic self. In the octave, through the well-known analogies 'navigation-reading' and 'gold-literature', the poetic self is equalled to a hero of discovery and exploration, who has travelled a lot by sea, to explore rich and distant lands ("realms of gold", "goodly states", "kingdoms", ll. 1-2). These latter correspond to the works of Western culture (referred to as the "western islands" in line 3), among which stands out the supremacy of Homer. Homer's superiority in breadth and purity ("wide expanse", "pure serene", ll. 5, 7) establishes him as a ruler over these works "as his demesne" (l. 6). Keats here recurs to the traditional trope of Homer-ocean[5], to convey the implied seme of material and literary ORIGINALITY, to whom the young poet, who did not read Greek, had access indirectly, through secondary sources ("had I been told", l. 5), and now through Chapman's translation[6].

In the sestet, a double simile, introduced by "Then felt I like" (l. 9) expresses the mood of the Keatsian poetic self in front of this discovery. The first simile introduces an astronomical image in which the poetic self feels like an explorer and discoverer of the sky ("Then felt I like some watcher of the skies/ When a new planet swims into his ken", ll. 9-10). The second simile introduces, instead, an image of conquest: the poetic self feels like a tenacious and energetic *conquistador*, a "stout Cortez when with eagle eyes/ He stared at the Pacific" (ll. 11-12) in the company of "all his men" (l. 12). The sonnet closes with a third and final metaphorical reshaping of the speaker's poetic identity. In the last line, the astronomer and *conquistador* have left the place to an introspective hero, engaged in deep and calm contemplation of the Pacific from Darien ("Silent, upon a peak in Darien", l. 14).

As many scholars have signalled so far, the poem's evident inaugural character involves issues of authority and poetic vocation (Hecht, 1994: 103-120), the relationship with the literary tradition (Bewell, 2022), not exempt from a good dose of poetic rivalry (Rzepka, 2002: 39) and a certain anxiety of influence (Bloom, 1973: 32). However, other issues remain unsolved or only partly solved.

First, there is a famous, as alleged, historical error in line 14 as noted since Tennyson's remark in 1861 and endorsed by many critics[7]: it was Balboa, not Cortés, who first sighted the Pacific from Darien on September 25, 1513. The problem has been partly solved by Rzepka and Frosch, who read it as a deliberate identification by Keats with Cortés (Rzepka, 2002: 39) and a Freudian slip (Frosch, 2004: 146-150), respectively, to manifest the author's sense of "belatedness" (Rzepka, 2002: 68) against Chapman's discovery of the Homeric magnitude and his ambition to be in place of him[8]. As Cortés comes late to the magnitude of the Pacific if compared to Balboa, the oceanic expanse of the Homeric work comes late to Keats's knowledge –

[5] As Power (2000: 365) reminds us, in antiquity, Homer was often associated with *Okeanos*, the stream that encircled the world and was the source of all creatures and gods, since this author was considered the oldest and greatest writer, the ultimate source of all subsequent literature. On the ancient accounts of Homer as Ocean, see Brink, 1972: 553-556; Williams, 1978, 98-99; Morgan, 1999: 32-39; and Hunter, 2018: 2-4.

[6] On the questions of dependence-originality, secondariness and authority in Keats's relationship with the literary sources through reading, see Wolfson, 2022: 17-74 and Sun, 2019: 178-181.

[7] In Francis Palgrave's *The Golden Treasury*, Tennyson coldly notes that "history requires here Balboa" (Palgrave, 1861: 298). Rzepka (2002: 36, notes 3-7) has reconstructed the critical debate thus far.

[8] See also Wagner, 1996: 89, who interprets the sonnet as generated by Keats's "awareness of literary belatedness and inadequacy". A sense of inadequacy that Keats will anyway express later, in the opening of the other sonnet exploring the Homeric theme, "To Homer" (1818), when he addresses the ancient author by saying: "Standing aloof in gigantic ignorance, / Of thee I hear" (ll. 1-2).

if compared to other Romantic classics-informed authors, such as Byron and Shelley – and, what is more, mediated through a translation[9]. Like Cortés, Keats has developed a strong desire for the conquest of this new territory, which he feels is full of great and opulent promises for his future, in the form of literary appropriation[10]. According to Rzepka and Frosch, the alleged error then demonstrates a blend of humility and ambition in this young and talented poet, who seeks to establish himself in the challenging British literary world of the early 1800s, despite initial limitations.

However, there are still two important open questions which have not been addressed or, in other cases, have not yet been answered by the critics. First, we know that Keats was familiar with William Robertson's *The History of America* (1777)[11], which devotes several pages to the navigation and exploration enterprises of Balboa and Cortés in the New World, and clearly states that Balboa was the first to sight the Pacific at Darien, not Cortés (*HoA*, I.202-207). Therefore, the young poet had enough historical knowledge to name Balboa instead of Cortés in his sonnet; however, he does not. Moreover, the use of the fierce *conquistador* Cortés as a metaphorical image for the ideal poetic genius could be seen as controversial, in sharp contrast with the radical and libertarian political ideology of Romanticism and its audience: why him, then? Evidence suggests, as we will see in section 2, that this choice, far from being unconscious, is instead deliberate and that Keats inserted this pseudo-error in the closure to highlight an important metaliterary issue to the attentive reader. An issue not only related to the externalised dimension of writing (fame, public, poetic identity), as indicated by critics so far, but also to the most internalised and psychological aspects of it. These latter occupy a great number of metaliterary reflections by Keats during this period and in the months after writing the poem, as evidenced in the letters and poetic works of the years 1816-1817. Hence, any reference to these issues requires careful and thorough consideration.

The second question concerns the nature of the mysterious unnamed emotion expressed by the speaker in the sestet in front of his discovery of Chapman's Homer. In ll. 9-13, this emotion is likened, through a double simile, to that of an astronomer and a *conquistador* (Cortés) when facing a significant and unexpected discovery. The text indicates that the speaker feels like them, but it does not provide a name for this emotion, which, therefore, remains unspecified, as in the case of "undercoding" (Eco, 1975: 135-136), when the speaker does not possess the code to describe the object of his utterance and provisionally assumes a semantically vague expression to communicate it. Furthermore, the semantic indeterminacy of the double simile is heightened because the astronomer is not named, nor is the new planet that "swims into his ken" (l. 10), and because of the use of "swim" (a maritime term) instead of a verb related to sight which would be more appropriate for indicating sky observation[12]. The same can be stated for the substitution of Balboa with Cortés, as it further complicates the

[9] See Aske, 2005 and Evert, 2015 for an up-to-date reconstruction of Keats's knowledge of the classics and current critical debate on the issue.

[10] According to Pollack-Pelzner (2007: 40), Keats's decision to change the adjective that he previously attributed to Cortés to describe this latter's attitude towards the discovery in l. 11 (from the "wond'ring eyes" of the first draft to the "eagle eyes" of Hunt's *Examiner*), is a sign of this confident, not anxious, apprehension of the discovery, from passive amazement to predatory ambition. See Pollack-Pelzner, 2007: 40. Liu (1989: 464) had previously described this attitude as manifesting a form of "imaginative imperialism" by the Keatsian speaker.

[11] I take the text from the 1777 edition, which will now be indicated with *HoA*, followed by volume and page numbers. All italics are mine, if not otherwise indicated.

[12] Critics (Allott, 1970: 62; Boitani, 2015; Hasted, 2017) assume that the reference is to F.W. Herschel's discovery of Uranus in 1781. Keats could have learnt about it from Bonnycastle's *Introduction to Astronomy* (1787), which he had possessed since his school years. However, this probable reference to the cultureme does not reduce the level of ambiguity in this section of the text, as there are no indisputable mentions of this discovery.

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reconstruction of the frame of reference. This latter passes from external, which is understandable through reference to historical facts, to internal to the text, as something that must be reconstructed hermeneutically by the reader, through textual understanding. Then what is the nature of this unnamed emotion? This central analytical question has not yet been formulated in these terms by any critic; however, it is crucial for understanding the text[13]. Yet, identifying this emotional response by the speaker will explain the reason behind Keats's choice to name Cortés instead of Balboa. Moreover, it will also be possible to clarify the speaker's attitude in the sonnet's closure ("Silent, upon a peak in Darien", l. 14) and its connections with the central issues of poetic identity and authority, creativity and navigation.

I will begin with the last of these questions, which is the most crucial and revelatory of the other open problems as well.

2. FELT I… HOW?

In *A History of America*, there are several descriptions of the expeditions of both Balboa and Cortés providing many details on the two historical figures: Balboa who on 25 September 1513, sighted the Pacific Ocean, then called Mar del Sur, and Cortés, who on November 8, 1519, finally sighted the capital of the kingdom of Moctezuma, Tenochtitlán, which marked the beginning of the conquest of the territories of Mexico[14]. Robertson's accounts of Balboa and Cortés are very similar when they portray the initial moments of discovering the two unknown territories, filled with unimaginable opportunities. However, if compared to each other, the two figures show significant differences in their attitudes and emotional responses to the discovery.

To start with the first in chronological order, Balboa, Robertson's account of the expedition to Darien and sighting of the Pacific on 25 September 1513 can be found in Volume I of his *History of America* (I: 202-207). Robertson portrays the man as a brave, unwavering and wise hero of exploration and discovery, respected by his comrades: he mentions his "intrepidity [...] for his expedition" (I: 202) and the fact that "he inspired [his men, who followed him] without murmuring" (I: 203). Moreover, he is compelled by the visionary enthusiasm and fervent determination of one who lives to achieve his goals, as "infinite toil" and "so long desired", referred to Balboa's attitude, suggest (I: 204). When Robertson describes the moment of the discovery, Balboa is portrayed as one who stands alone on the peak of Darien looking at the Pacific, as he hangs eagerly in a moment of inspired expectation of the incoming event (I: 204). Next, we have the details of Balboa and his men's emotional reaction upon seeing the ocean,

[13] To my knowledge, only Hayman (1994) and MacMaster (2009) have systematically examined the problem. The former has interpreted the poem's rhythmic and syntactic patterning as functional to "convey the experience of awe" in front of the newly found discovery. MacMaster, on the other side, interprets the last image as a representation of a reaction of "marveling" by the speaker who, like Homeric Priam entering the tent of Achilles (*Iliad*, 24.477-484), wonders at the sight of the discovery, and differentiates from his men, who "marvel at this sight second-hand, through the expression of his face". However, Hayman's accurate analysis does not explain the 'predatory' side of the speaker's attitude, as expressed through reference to Cortés' "eagle eyes", since *awe* is more related to religious reverence, being itself a feeling of overwhelming reverence elicited by the sacred (*OED*, n., 1.) not by the profane prospect of a material gain. As for MacMaster, there is no evidence of the fact that that October evening of 1816 Keats and Clarke read Priam's episode, whereas we are cognizant of the fact that they came across the others already mentioned in note 2 above. Recently, Ohkado (2013: 204-205) has clarified that the event is not even comparable to a "near-death experience", the feeling of surprise when "encountering the unexpecting and amazing sight of a deceased person thought to be still living", even if the idiomatic phrase "peak in Darien" is still used in current English to convey this meaning.

[14] See *HoA*, I: 202-207 and II: 263-294.

a mixture of "wonder", "transport of joy", "exultation", "gratitude" to God and understandably pride, as it was a "discovery so beneficial to his country, and so honourable to himself" (I: 204).

Psychologically, the emotional and behavioural reaction depicted here can be classified as a specific type of surprise: astonishment – an experience elicited by the "sudden presentation of something unlooked for or unaccountable", a "wonder temporarily overpowering the mind" (*OED*, n., 1.) the fact of being struck by something that appears to be extraordinarily significant. In the case of Balboa, the object was long desired and waited but anyway unexpectedly, thus unaccountably found. Furthermore, we can see the overwhelming impact on the explorer's mind in his initial reaction ("he fell on his knees, and, lifting up his hands to Heaven, returned many thanks to God", I: 204) and the ensuing emotions and behaviours he manifests with his men when they join him in the passage mentioned earlier ("transport of joy", "exultation", "gratitude", I: 204). When Balboa beholds "the South Sea stretching in endless prospect below him" (I: 204) and stands alone at the very moment of discovery as he "advanced alone to the summit" (I: 204), the presence of the keyword "prospect", attributed to the boundless spatial extension of the ocean, under the eyes of an exalted observer, suggests the lexicon of the Burkean sublime[15].

The passage would have strongly appealed to Keats. Here the Spanish *conquistador* indeed resembles the typical romantic visionary, similar to Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, and, as we will see in section 3, akin to Keats's idea of the archetypal poetic genius, as he stands on an elevated and isolated place, seeing in trepidation his desire fulfilled, contemplating the imagined ideal that has become a tangible reality, ready to take action. This same prospective attitude[16], both ocular (in terms of beholding spatial extension) and mental (in terms of looking at the future to come) reoccurs in the final line of the sonnet, in the portrayal of the speaker silently contemplating the discovery of "a peak in Darien" (l. 14) and the implied spatial boundlessness of the Pacific before him. The sonnet's closure also shows another analogy with the episode depicted in *The History of America*, where the explorer's companions manifest a similar utilitarian and calculated reaction in the face of the discovery. In Keats, the men "Looked at each other with a wild surmise" (l. 13), in Robertson, they are excited with "enthusiastic resolution" (I: 203), as Balboa had previously motivated them by offering a secure and generous gain, even "superior to the most successful of his countrymen", I: 203).

As for Cortés, Robertson portrays him in the second Volume of his *History* (II: 263-294) as he approaches the gates of Tenochtitlán, the capital of Moctezuma's reign, whose magnificence he can admire for the first time in the history of the West. In this passage, we have the description of the man, who has crucial elements of differentiation from Balboa. Cortés's mind

[15] Burke, in his treatise on the Sublime and the Beautiful, Section II, chapter 2 ("Terror"), says that "[...] to things of great dimensions, if we annex an adventitious idea of terror, they become without comparison greater" (Burke [1757], 1990: 53). Then, few lines further he illustrates this abstract notion by providing concrete examples taken from the vastness of nature, and, among them, the ocean: "A level plain of a vast extent on land, is certainly no mean idea; the prospect of such a plain may be as extensive as a prospect of the ocean: but can it ever fill the mind with any thing so great as the ocean itself?" (Burke [1757], 1990: 53). The recourse by Robertson of Burke's conceptual categories is unsurprising, as the two thinkers were friends and protagonists of the Scottish Enlightenment, thus sharing the same cultural and intellectual milieu. Moreover, Robertson sent a copy of the just published *HoA* to Burke, who appreciated the work with enthusiasm; see Skjönsberg (2021: 309, 315-316) for more historical details on the event.

[16] I take the term from Berger (1964: 7-10). See also Van Kooy 2015 for a detailed analysis of the poem as a reformulation of the eighteenth-century prospect poem.

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is illumined by a "ray of light and hope" at the thought of Moctezuma's riches (II: 265), combined with cunning[17], iron will and an ardent desire to conquer[18].

This image of Cortés is different from the inspired, almost anti-utilitarian desire for discovery of the visionary Barboa as in Robertson's descriptions of Volume I of the *History*. Instead, it is very close to the "stout Cortés when with eagle-eyes" who "stared at the Pacific" (ll. 11-12) in Keats's sonnet. Furthermore, the differences between Balboa and Cortés in front of discovery emerge in a passage of Robertson's account in which the keyword "prospect" reoccurs. The passage describes Cortés and his men while gaining first sight of Tenochtitlán: "they first beheld this prospect, one of the most striking and beautiful on the face of the earth; [...] they observed fertile and cultivated fields, stretching farther than the eye could reach; [...] they saw a Lake resembling the sea in extent, encompassed with large towns, and discovered the capital city rising upon an island in the middle, adorned with its temples and turrets" (II: 293). The use of "beautiful" and the ordered detail and poise through which the eye of the *conquistadores* observe, with a contemplative attitude, the newly found territory makes the prospecting view of Tenochtitlán reminiscent of what Burke says in his *Philosophical Enquiry* on the aesthetic category of "Beauty" as contemplative and self-satisfactory, and differentiates it from the "Sublime" aesthetics which instead was presupposed in Balboa's discovery on Darien[19]. However, this is just a passing moment of fascination for the object of the Spaniard's sight, as soon the character of the *conquistador* emerges through his calculator and utilitarian attitude of measuring and weighing the space before him, when he and his men foreshadow imminent material gain ("ample recompence for all their services and sufferings", II: 294). As well as Burke differentiates "Beauty" from "desire or lust" in that the latter is a utilitarian passion motivated by the desire to possess the object of perception,[20] analogously here, Cortés passes, in a few lines, from fascinated contemplation of the beautiful "prospect" to strong motivation to conquer it. Moreover, he is very far from the visionary explorer of the unknown, caught by the sublime view of the Pacific, as in the image of the ecstatic Balboa provided in Volume I.

Differences between the two historical figures also emerge in their respective emotional responses in front of the discovery, as described by Robertson. Similarly to Balboa, Cortés shows a kind of surprise, but of a different nature. He has just found an unexpected treasure, not imagined before, as in the case of Balboa, and whose opulence is so great as to leave him and his men baffled at first: "the country was rich beyond any conception which they had formed of it" (II: 293). Robertson adds that the "scene [...] exceeded their imagination" (II: 293), then states that "some believed the fanciful descriptions of romance were realized, and that its enchanted palaces and gilded domes were presented to their fight; others could hardly persuade themselves that this wonderful spectacle was any thing more than a dream" (II: 293). Unlike Balboa's amazement, Cortés and his men are responding to an unexpected event that

[17] See, for instance, when he gains the favour of the inhabitants of the villages on the way to Quiabislan, by "artfully insinuat[ing], that one great object of the Spaniards in visiting a country so remote from their own, was to redress grievances, and to relieve the oppressed" from Moctezuma's alleged tyranny (*HoA*, II: 266).

[18] As exemplified in the passage where Robertson dwells on the "resolution with which he himself was animated, either to conquer or to perish" (*HoA*, II: 273) or when the *conquistador* is ready to face any reaction by the natives: "to receive him as a friend, or to oppose him as an enemy" (*HoA*, II: 294).

[19] As Burke states in Section III, chapter 1 ("Of Beauty"): "By beauty I mean, that quality or those qualities in bodies by which they cause love, or some passion similar to it". The emotion related to "beauty" is "love", a kind of "satisfaction which arises to the mind upon contemplating any thing beautiful" (Burke [1757], 1990: 83). Thus, implicitly, Burke associates the reception of the beautiful with the anti-utilitarian attitude of the subject.

[20] "[D]esire or lust; which is an energy of the mind, that hurries us on to the possession of certain objects, that do not affect us as they are beautiful, but by means altogether different" (Burke [1757], 1990: 83).

is so unusual to seem unreal. The reaction reminds us of the perplexity of the observer of Todorov's fantastic, as they are at first uncertain of either the reality or fictionality of what they are observing (Todorov, 1973: 24).

Here Robertson comes to our aid, calling by name this communal reaction towards this startling discovery: "As they advanced, their doubts were removed, but their *amazement* increased" (II: 293). The emotion at stake here is thus amazement, that is, in the 18th-century sense, the "loss of one's wits or self-possession; mental stupefaction; perplexity; bewilderment" (*OED*, n., 1). The inverse proportionality between the gradual lessening of the initial cognitive perplexity ("As they advanced, their doubts were removed") and the corresponding increase of amazement, described by Robertson ("their amazement increased"), is due to the insurgence of another emotion, which completes this collective psychological picture: satisfaction for the wealth in which they already glimpse the future loot, and which will constitute their reward: "They were now fully *satisfied* that […] they should obtain an ample recompence for all their services and sufferings" (III: 294).

Here, the shift between the Burkean categories of "Beauty" and "desire or lust", *i.e.* between pure contemplation and spur to conquest, is thus mediated by this third emotional response, amazement, which in turn rushes the minds of the *conquistadores* towards the just discovered object of fascination. Moreover, as in the description of Balboa's men occurring in Volume I, the mindset described by Robertson again overlaps with the "wild surmise" (l. 13) displayed by Cortés's men in Keats's sonnet. In front of the discovery, they look at each other in agreement (l. 13), revealing their calculating and predatory nature, perhaps even more so than in Robertson's account, due to the use of "wild", which in turn confers a nuance of slight aggressiveness and hastiness to the general psychological picture, as it often happens in Keats[21]. Unlike what happens in Robertson's descriptions of Balboa and Cortés, these men feel and behave similarly in the two passages of *HoA*, a detail that Keats certainly did not miss and which he inserted in his poem, to bring the two episodes closer together in the mind of the reader and highlight the analogies and differences between the two historical figures.

On one hand, we then have Balboa, the prototype of the explorer and discoverer: an intuitive and imaginative individual whose efforts are rewarded when his most optimistic expectations become a reality. He experiences, with astonishment, the ecstasy of discovering a New World with infinite possibilities for realisation. On the other hand, we have Cortés, the prototype of the explorer-conqueror. He is a calculating and utilitarian individual who shares his reactions with his companions. Even if he faces a discovery that exceeds his most optimistic expectations, his initial amazement is immediately weighed opportunistically in consideration of practical and economic factors related to the certainty of the impending gain.

The difference between the respective attitudes of Balboa and Cortés in the face of discovery reveals the nature of the mysterious emotion experienced by Keats's speaker when reading Chapman's Homer. It is in this same difference that lies the poet's choice of naming Cortés instead of Balboa. As we will now see, the latter is implicitly included in the former, and this becomes apparent through the intertextual relation with Robertson's book.

3. SO WHY CORTÉS (AND BALBOA)?

Balboa and Cortés should be intended as metaliterary images suggesting two complementary aspects of Keats's idea of poetic genius. This emerges in the young poet's many reflections on

[21] For instance, Keats will use again the adjective in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" (1819), to connote the upsetting ontological alterity of the seducing elfish lady (ll. 16, 31).

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the issues of poetry, the poetic self and the creative process which constitute a dominant theme in his letters.

The 'Balboa' personality is implied in the letter on Adam's dream, written to Bailey on 22 November 1817 (*Letters*, I: 183-187). In a well-known passage, Keats quotes Book VIII of Milton's *Paradise Lost* (VIII.452-490), where Adam's dream of Eve becomes unexpectedly true at his awakening when he discovers that she is next to him and he is overpowered by bliss: "I, overjoyed, could not forbear aloud" (*PL*, VIII.490). Keats uses this episode as a metaphor for his radical idealistic conception of the poetic genius as one who can bring the objects of imagination into reality through the force of creativity ("he awoke and find it truth", *Letters*, I: 185) and to propound the "strong alliance", as Haskell (2000: 31) has termed it, between intuitive vision ("Imagination"), aesthetic fascination and the emotions elicited by it ("Beauty") and extratextual reality ("Truth"), according to which "[w]hat the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth – whether it existed before or not" (*Letters*, I: 184).

As can be seen from the comparison between the two hypotexts, Milton and Robertson are describing, despite the many cultural and contextual differences, the same archetypal emotional experience. Both Adam and Balboa, in fact, are confronted with the object of their desire (Eve, the Pacific) that they have previously imagined or dreamed of, but that now presents itself to their eyes unexpectedly. Moreover, and as we have seen, the emotional response of both figures is one of strong euphoria and joy ("I overjoyed" in *PL*, VIII.490; "wonder", "transport of joy", "exultation", and "gratitude" in *HoA,* I: 204), to the point of making them temporarily alter their rational consciousness. This unexpected combination of surprise and extreme happiness is once again attributable to the conceptual field of astonishment.

The 'Cortés' personality, on the other side, is implied in the same letter to Bailey when Keats explains the different strata of the poetic genius's mind required to initiate, develop and complete the process of artistic creation. First, he mentions the "simple imaginative Mind" (*Letters*, I: 185), which is typical of the young and inexperienced poet. When this aspect dominates, the poet's mind is oriented towards introversion and is captivated by the vision, filled as it is with wonder for the creations of imagination. He has not yet turned ideas into poetic words, so the creative process is still in the initial phases of finding the ideas and processing them unconsciously to generate new unexpected associations. According to one of the most accepted models of creativity, the eight-stage model, the two phases correspond to "problem finding" (the *inventio* of Latin rhetoric) and the mostly unconscious phase of "incubation"[22].

Then Keats refers to the "complex Mind" (*Letters*, I: 186). This latter enables the poet to navigate the creative process in its most advanced and public stage, which we currently call "externalisation"[23], where writing involves considering literary conventions, the composition and anticipated reception by the public, and the demands of publishers. In other words, it refers to the contextual and pragmatic dimension of literary communication. As Keats points out through a conventional organicistic metaphor, this aspect of the poet's mind is "imaginative", but at the same time "careful of its fruits". In other words, the poet maintains a connection with the ideal that has been intuitively grasped with the internal senses, while also adopting a more rational, thought-based, utilitarian approach, as it "exists partly on sensation partly on thought" (*Letters*, I: 186). This involves contemplating his ideas pragmatically to transform them into texts written for the public, and ultimately to achieve a practical, tangible, concrete purpose, such as publication, fame, or profit. In the "complex Mind" the polar opposites of

[22] See Sawyer, 2012: 20, 87-104 for a thorough explanation of creativity as a psycho-cognitive process.
[23] This is the concluding step of the creative process when the best ideas are selected, refined and implemented to be communicated to the public (Kelley, 2007 [2001]: 103-13).

'love' vs. 'fame' (erotic attraction for the ideal vs. utilitarian desire for popularity), characteristic of Keats's idealistic idea of creativity, is thus perfectly balanced and functional to the process, not in *aut aut*, as it occurs in "When I have fears..." (1818). In this latter sonnet, the speaker is indeed initially disturbed by them and has to overcome the dyad by cognitively and affectively detaching himself from it, as expressed through the metaphoric sinking of "love and fame" (l. 14) into the sea of "nothingness" (a metaphor for the unconscious), under his now untroubled, steady gaze[24].

Now, the sonnet's evident metaliterary nature leads us to interpret its figurative language as a tool used by Keats to represent a thematic cluster related to creativity, literature, and writing. This does not exclude the reference to Cortés and, for the reasons already stated, Balboa, via Robertson's account. According to this metaliterary reading, Balboa embodies the "simple imaginative Mind", while Cortés represents the "complex Mind". Indeed, the personality traits displayed by Balboa, in Robertson's account, are analogous to the "simple imaginative Mind" in terms of visionariness and introversion, while the "complex Mind", which is more pragmatic and introverted, is more akin to Cortés's character. Moreover, if both *conquistadores* share, as it occurs for the Keatsian ideal of the poetic genius, an equal dose of desire, will and imagination (Balboa in terms of desiderative projection towards the goal, Cortés in terms of meticulous planning and strategy), they differ in terms of practical utilitarianism. On the one side, Balboa is initially driven, according to Robertson's description, by the vocation to discover the unknown without personal, not economic interest, being material gain just an epiphenomenon of his enterprise of exploration and discovery. On the other side, Cortés acts precisely in the function of the latter: through his "eagle eyes", he rationally ponders, measures and weighs the gain that this experience will bring him. Similarly in the letter, although the "simple imaginative Mind" and the "complex Mind" are both based on the operations of imagination, the former is introverted, intuitive and anti-utilitarian, while the latter is extroverted, rational and utilitarian, "careful of its fruits".

Moreover, in the letter Keats does not explicitly intend these 'Minds' as subsequent steps in a linear process of the poet's development. They rather seem to be different aspects of the poet's psyche, which may intervene in different moments of the creative process, each with its specific functions and scope: the "simple imaginative Mind" in the initial more intuitive phases, such as *inventio* and incubation, and the "complex Mind" in the more conscious-biased phase of externalisation. Thus, if we project these theoretical issues on the metaphorical system of the sonnet, the Balboa personality and the Cortés personality coexist in the poet's mind, each of them manifesting itself in different moments of the speaker's apprehension of discovery. Better expressed: as the "complex Mind" presupposes the "simple imaginative Mind" since in the Romantic model of creativity, to which Keats adheres, writing cannot prescind vision, analogously, Cortés implies Balboa, this latter being the unconscious side of the *conquistador*-creative individual's personality. It is for this reason that only the former explicitly occurs in the sonnet, but at the same time, his presence makes the reader think, through the alleged historical mistake, about Balboa. An attentive and informed reader, one who is re-

[24] This has been argued by Beccone, 2020 and Weinfield in Lau *et al.*, 2022: 153-172.

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quired in Keats's poetry, does not overlook the fact that Balboa came first to the Pacific. Therefore, the reference to Cortés is not a mistake but a deliberate allusion, by discursive implication, to the other *conquistador*.

Now, it only remains to provide an explanation for the last image of the sonnet, the one that portrays the speaker "Silent, upon a peak in Darien", by relating it to the Balboa-Cortés personality model.

In the same letter of 22 November 1817, Keats mentions a third level of the creative mind, which he refers to as the "philosophic Mind" (*Letters*, I: 186). According to him, this latter appears in the more mature phases of poetic development, after "years" (*Letters*, I: 186) of practice. This is a stage in which the poet, now mature, has overcome all egotism and autobiographical projections, reaching a poetics of impersonality. Indeed, this state allows him to become a "thoroughfare for all thoughts" (*Letters*, I: 186), transcending personal limits to open to the universal. These ideas will later converge, in Keats's system of thought, in the doctrine of "Negative Capability"[25] and constitute one of the most striking innovations in this young author's poetics, as they push forward Romanticism to a more Modernist attitude[26].

As Keats is used to put into practice what he explains in theory, this third mental attitude, in which "the wisdom of maturity aris[es] from the preoccupation of youth" (Trilling, 1955: 21-22), is extensively depicted in his poetry. The author, in some cases, resorts to the Romantic Sublime to portray the poetic self alone, detached from the masses and ordinary life, in a liminal space, such as a peak or the seaside, while gazing at the vastness of nature. This moment represents the transition between deep imaginative reflection and the decisive action of bringing the visionary object into reality; it captures the fertile silence between preverbal, subconscious thought and the emerging *logos* as poetic utterance. For instance, both "I stood tip-toe..." (1816) and *Endymion* (1817) begin with the protagonist (a symbol for the poetic genius) on an elevated place (a hill, Mount Latmos, respectively) at the emotional apex between intuitive vision and practical action, imaginative insight and creation[27].

In other cases, Keats resorts to the aesthetic category of Burkean Beautiful to depict the speaker-poet in an analogous context (aloneness, silence, liminality, contact with nature, epiphanic experience), but with the significant difference of being in a state of calm and peaceful tranquillity, in front of the vastity of nature and the possibilities of the poetic word, not yet expressed but still fully grasped through imagination. An example of this is in the closure of "When I have fears...", another crucial metaliterary poem on the creative process and the poetic genius' mindset, where the speaker stands "alone", and depicts himself "on the shore/ Of the wide world" (ll. 12-13), while he "think[s]/ Till love and fame to nothingness do sink" (ll. 13-14). This is a metaphorical image of the process of cognitive and emotive detachment from what constitutes the utilitarian attachments ("love and fame", l. 13) that bind the poet's mind

[25] Letter to George and Tom Keats, 21, 27 (?) December 1817, in *Letters*, I: 191-194, 193.

[26] As Brown and Theodore (1989: 197, note 40) argue, "Keats's 'negative capability' represents one of the most striking pre-modern formulations of the centrelessness of self".

[27] In "I stood tip-toe...", the speaker enjoys the pleasures of imaginative contemplation of nature with the fresh wonder of a first looking, while he stands on a hill, and then activates fancy to evoke the mythological story of Cynthia and Endymion. Keats will later reenact this imagery in *Endymion*, where the protagonist's first appearance portrays him on Mount Latmos, as a smiling youth absorbed in his vision but at the same time shaken by bodily tensions, due to his lurking desire to unite with the ideal, now temporarily lost: "he seemed, / To common lookers on, like one who dream'd/Of idleness in groves Elysian:/But there were some who feelingly could scan/A lurking trouble in his nether lip, /And see that oftentimes the reins would slip/Through his forgotten hands" (I.175-181).

to the system of egotistic expectations, bringing it to a creative impasse, and without which he can instead finally start writing[28].

The basic components of these poetic images (aloneness, silence, liminality, vastness of nature, epiphany) are already present in the last line of "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer", where the speaker stands apart, "[s]ilent, upon that peak in Darien" (l. 14), and which constitutes a generative model of the images that will appear in these later works, such as "I stood tip-toe" and *Endymion*. In contrast to other texts, where the moment of vision is portrayed as being filled with emotional intensity and almost frenzy, like a near-death experience,[29] in this case, the concept of the Beautiful triumphs over the Sublime, as the speaker's attitude is more akin to the serene and detached observer who will appear in the closure of "When I have fears...". Like this latter, the vastness of water (here the sea, in "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" the ocean) makes visually appreciable the poet's awareness of the grandiosity of the supreme imaginative impulse when it is accompanied by an equally acute perception of the dissolution of the private, autobiographical self, in an infinite breath towards the universal, the categorical, the absolute. Here, vision approaches action, intuition goes in the direction of the here-now of eventness, and the imagined ideal proceeds towards the coming into being. Romain Rolland would term it "oceanic feeling", that sensation of the eternal as something "without perceptible limits, and like oceanic"[30], a feeling which is characteristic of mysticism and can apply, for the reasons exposed here, to the experience of visionary imagination in Keats.

If this application of Keats's model of the poetic mind to "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" is correct, since Cortés presupposes Balboa, as the "complex Mind" presupposes the "simple imaginative Mind", thus the final 'oceanic' image depicting the speaker as "[s]ilent, upon a peak in Darien" is a metaphor for the operations of the "philosophic Mind", the impersonal part of the poet's psyche which is ready to realise the ideal, to put imagination into action, caught in the solemn, sacred moment of suspension between vision and word, *nous* and *logos*[31]. The last image of the poetic self can be thus seen as the apical manifestation, as detached and calm "philosophic Mind", of these stratifications of the consciousness of the Keatsian poetic genius, immersed now in the artistically fecund stasis of impersonality, ready to move towards writing, thus in the direction of the conscious and systematic realisation of vision.

Unlike what Rzepka and Frosch maintain, there is no anxiety for belatedness here, as the speaker is caught in a kind of *entr'acte*, potentially indefinite in time, between vision and action, imagination and the poetic utterance. Nor is this an instance of "peak experience", that altered state of consciousness during which emotional receptivity is accompanied by awe, as Tsur (2015: 72-74) notes in his analysis of "When I have fears...". Nor is Power totally on the right track, when he follows Keats's remarks on the ideal sonnet as "swelling loudly/ Up to its climax and then dying proudly"[32], and interprets the last line as anticipating a moment of silence, a kind of *aphasia* produced by the vision of an "unknown realm", a "new world opened

[28] See Beccone, 2020 for further details on the issues of impasse, problem solving and creativity in the sonnet's closure.

[29] See note 27 above.

[30] See Rolland's letter to Freud of 5 December 1927, qt. in Parsons, 1999: 36.

[31] As Johnson (2000: 106) points out, the poem ends with "the *only* word in any line which carries no stress on its final syllable", prosodically metaphorising this crucial experience. In addition to that, Hayman (1994) notes that rhythmic and syntactic patterns suddenly vary in the last eight lines, as the former is released after the compression of the first part of the poem and the latter passes from the "curious concentration of disordered clauses in the octave, followed by a concentration of ordered clauses in the sestet" (Hayman, 1994: 26).

[32] Epistle "To Charles Cowden Clarke", ll. 60-61. Vanna Gentili had already expressed this same interpretation in Gentili, 1983: 100.

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to him", as if the vastness of the discovery had taken away his word, with his breath (Power, 2020: 362). On the contrary, this 'oceanic' attitude shows that the poetic mind is preparing itself for imminent writing, which represents the apical moment of the internalised part of the creative process before externalisation, not before silence.

Keats's use of maritime imagery is again significant in this context. In this author's writings, the sea is indeed a recurrent metaphor for the poetic genius's mind. This happens, for instance, in "To the Sea", where it is depicted as full of intertextual echoes, secret currents and deep, mysterious movements. Moreover, it is in the depths of the sea (*i.e.* the unconscious mind) that Endymion, the personification of the Romantic poet, travels in search of the moon goddess Cynthia, the personification of the ideal Beauty (Bate, 1963: 172). Writing itself is often represented by Keats in terms of seafaring imagery, as in the letter to Benjamin Bailey of 8 October 1817, where he depicts his decision to finally embark on the writing of the first great work of his career, the long-narrative poem *Endymion*, as a sailing enterprise that is about to start (*Letters*, I: 168-171). In the letter, the writing of a long poem such as *Endymion* is "a test of Invention" (I: 170). This latter is a poetic function of the creative mind coinciding roughly with the *inventio* of classical rhetoric, the capacity of finding ideas before any written or oral communication, and here it is metaphorically equalled to the "Polar Star of Poetry" (I: 170). The seafaring image is later completed by the metaphor of "Fancy" as the "sails" of the ship of writing and "Imagination" as "the Rudder" (I: 170).

As it is customary in Keats – since he often puts into poetic practice what he later will explain in theory – in that inspired morning of October 1816, one year before these letters to Bailey, this young author had transcribed, in "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer", a forward-looking vision of his poetic mind on the brink of writing his "test of Invention". He represents himself as a naval hero, staring at the ocean as one who is aware he has just discovered a New World full of promises for the future and is about to sail to conquer it. This New World is not only a model of writing to imitate, as Chapmans' and before him Homer's. As the comparative analysis here provided between the sonnet and Robertson's hypotext suggests, this New World is also psychocognitive. It constitutes the content of an insightfully grasped truth, concerning the poetic functions of the creative mind and their respective roles during the writing process. The speaker on the peak of Darien is contemplating, within himself, the visionary enthusiasm of the "simple imaginative Mind", analogous to the anti-utilitarian explorer-discoverer Balboa; the strategic pragmatism of the "complex Mind", "careful of its fruits" as Cortés keeps under control his probable material gain, with his "eagle eyes"; the decision to break the tie and start the writing enterprise that would have engaged him for [months] to come, first with the completion of "I stoop tip-toe" in December 1816, and later with the composition of *Endymion*,[33] his "test of Invention", and which hopefully would have led him to experience the maturity of the "philosophic Mind". The New World of the *conquistadores* has turned into a mentalised 'El Dorado' of poetry, its gold into the poetic genius' opulence of will and determination to start writing.

The sonnet's maritime imagery is then an extensive spatial metaphor for the state of mind that the speaker has eventually reached after the fears, doubts, and uncertainties regarding his poetic talent and nascent writing career. From this perspective, "Pacific" is a metonymy

[33] Begun in April 1817 and finished on 28 November of the same year. See Allott, 1970: 116.

pointing at the tranquil serenity of a creative individual who has experienced a sudden realisation, inspiration, insight, self-recognition, or understanding of his ability to act poetically, not just of a literary model to imitate.

In aid of this line of interpretation comes Keats's recurse to "Darien" in the last line. The lexeme is not just a historical mention of the Central American promontory. It also suggests a pun with the verb "dare", creating a phonetic similarity activated through the trochaic emphasis on the first syllable of the toponym[34]. Once again, Keats strategically uses poetic opacity to convey additional meanings in the line. Here, he suggests that the speaker (and himself) is finally ready to sail into the enterprise of poetry, not only mentally but also emotionally. Now, he feels that he can 'dare' to do it.

This complex metaliterary imagery, through which the metaphor of navigation as enterprise, discovery and conquest conveys Keats's insights on his own creative possibilities and newly discovered powers, also clarifies and justifies the astronomical similitude that appears in ll. 9-10: "Then felt I like some watcher of the skies/ When a new planet swims into his ken". As it is widely known, the speaker recurs to this image to describe his emotions after the discovery of Chapman's Homer and to parallel the other simile, the one that involves Cortés (and Balboa) in ll. 11-14. Scholars generally agree that the reference here is to William Herschel's 1781 discovery of Uranus, the first planet found since ancient times[35]. We also know that the image's main source is Bonnycastle's *An Introduction to Astronomy* (1787), which Keats possessed since he won a copy of it (1807 edn.), as a school prize at Enfield (Bate, 1963: 26)[36]. However, critics are not surprised by the inclusion of this reference in a sonnet about maritime rather than astronomical exploration and discovery. Nor is it clear how the mention of the newly discovered planet connects with the overall metaliterary concern of the text, and why Keats uses "swims" (l. 10), an originally maritime lexeme, to depict the moment when the planet appears in sight.

These questions can be answered if we carefully read the pages dedicated to Herschel by Bonnycastle, as they contain a particularly clarifying detail. In the treatise, Uranus is regularly referred to by the author with the epithet of "Georgium Sidus"[37], the 'star of George', and classified as one of the "superior planets" of the solar system (Letter II: 28), and "highest" (Letter III: 37), due to the astronomical fact that the celestial body moves "at a farther distance from the sun than the earth" (Bonnycastle, 1787: 426, glossary). The name is celebratory of the English crown, as it is addressed to George III, the reigning monarch at the time. However, Keats's keen and observant mind, accustomed to phonetic allusions and wordplay, did not overlook, when composing these verses, the coincidence between the proper name "George" in Bonnycastle's book, as part of the epithet of Uranus, and Chapman's. This remembered onomastic correspondence may have been palpable to Keats so as to activate an equivalence between the astronomical plane of the imagery, in which Uranus-Georgium Sidus orbits the Sun, as one 'superior' and 'highest' planet among others attending the royal star in the solar system, and the metaliterary plane, in which (George) Chapman orbits around Homer (the incomparable original, a king who "ruled as his demesne" in Western literature, as we read in

[34] Punning is not rare in Keats, to whom he dedicated a consistent part of his writing, both in verse and in his letters (see Johnson, 2000: 98).
[35] See note 12 above.
[36] All quotations from the *Introduction to Astronomy* are taken from the 1787 edition (Bonnycastle, 1787); from now on indicated with the Letter number followed by the page or page numbers. Italics are mine if not otherwise indicated.
[37] Letter II: 23, 28; Letter III: 37, 50.

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l. 6) as his translator (himself nobler and superior if compared to others of his 'servants', like Pope).

The analogy indeed fits perfectly within the metaphor of writing as exploration, discovery and maritime conquest, which dominates the sonnet. The speaker, a hero of the sea of letters, is one who has integrated the three layers of his poetic personality (Balboa-simple imaginative Mind; Cortés-complex Mind; the Darien seraphic observer of the Pacific-philosophic Mind). Furthermore, and as all seamen would do in this situation[38], since he is ready to metaphorically set sail for writing he is looking at the sky to orient himself in search of his literary polar star (Chapman), to keenly and purposedly direct his enterprise towards an expectation horizon of writing, just discovered and full of promises for the immediate future. Accordingly, the "new planet swims into his ken" (l. 10) because he is mentally visualising the sky onto the sea surface (hence the pun on "swimming" as 'moving on a watering surface'), like how a sailor projects the constellations onto his navigational map before setting sail.

4. CONCLUSION

On that October night in 1816, a significant event occurred in Keats's creative development. The rapid, crystalline, lucid drafting of this poem testifies to something that goes beyond what critics have affirmed to date.

The sonnet is much more than a piece in which much is left to the unconscious, much more than an occasional moment of clarity in the process of growth of a young and still inexperienced poet. The alleged historical error does not simply demonstrate a blend of humility and ambition towards a literary prototype and writing model (Homer, Chapman), to which he comes second, as argued by Keatsian scholarship. Here, Keats is acutely aware of his secondary status, but at the same time, he also vindicates the clarity of his insightful apprehension of the uniqueness of his own creative mind in its making, and his growing capacity to show its subtle processes through the opacity of the poetic sign.

The issue at stake here is not simply the range of problems concerning the externalised side of authorship and poetic identity, that is, Keats's place in the Pantheon of poetry. More significantly, here the young author is presenting, with poetic means, the epiphanic and revelatory moment in which he has prefigured, in his fertile intuitive mind, the fruitful functioning of his way of thinking creatively, a route to follow confidently to accomplish his poetic task. The anticipatory character of this epiphanic vision of the things to come and of what kind of poet he could be in the immediate future is shown by the fact that, as it often happens in Keats, vision precedes theory, intuition heads reason. Indeed, the triad Balboa-Cortés-Peak in Darien – which, as we have seen, metaphorises three possible attitudes in front of discovery – precedes, even a year before, Keats's tripartite conception of the imaginative mind in simple, complex and philosophical, conceptually exposed in the letter to Bailey of 22 November 1817, and relative to the poetic genius's attitude towards the creative experience. In both cases, the subject is facing the uncharted regions of a New World; in metaliterary terms, he is contacting – first poetically, later theoretically – the territories of creative agency, an 'El Dorado' of poetry

[38] Keats presumably knew these habits well due to his family's shipmaster antecedents, as Robinson (1985) has intriguingly shown in an essay.

which constitutes, in turn, an unexplored land, largely unknown to him, but at the same time already 'his'.

Even if Keats did not know Greek, he was proficient in Latin (Bate, 1963: 10, 25). Perhaps then, it did not escape him that in this last language, "inventio" includes the semes of 'discovery' and 'gaining'[39]. Another, this time etymological, proof that Keats's notion of creativity is inherently connected with exploration and conquest, the ecstatic vision of beauty with the active apprehension of truth.

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[39] Marchant and Charles, 1953: entry "Invĕnĭo", B. Transf., 1., "to find out; 2. "to procure, acquire, get, earn".

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