

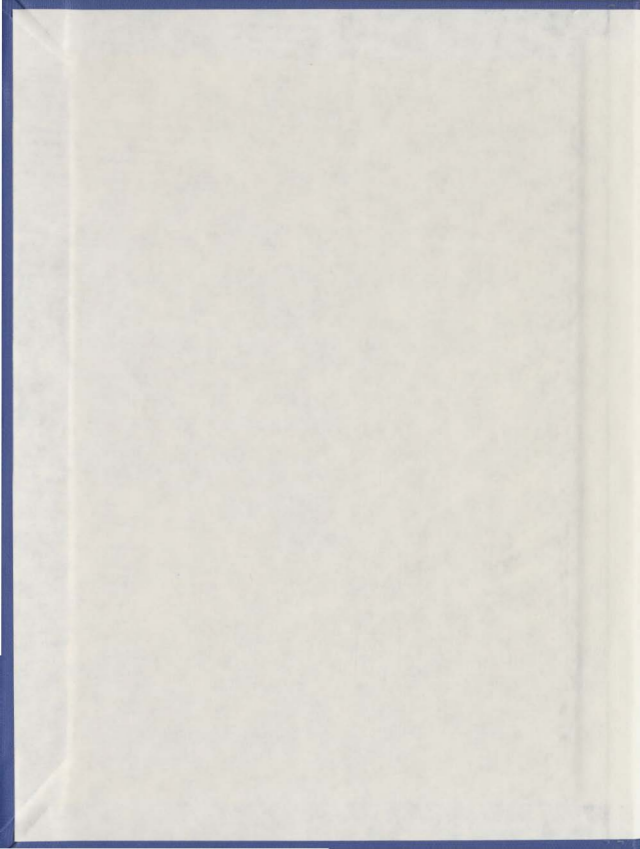
THE POETIC THEORY OF JOHN KEATS

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THE POETIC THEORY OF JOHN KEATS



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#### ABSTRACT

In the early years of his poetic career Keats regarded poetry primarily as a form of escape. The poet, he believed, fleeing from the painful realities of life, takes refuge in a dream world of enchanting beauty and unalloyed bliss. Keats held that this sensuous paradise conjured up by the poet's imagination ought to form the basis of poetry.

This juvenile conception of poetry gradually yields to a maturer view. Keats becomes convinced that a great poet, instead of turning his back on real life, has to draw sustenance from it. He should, he realizes, have an intimate, personal acquaintance with human sorrow. He must be educated in the school of life. This will enable the poet to explore and to shed light on the dark chambers of the mansion of human life. In short, Keats comes to regard the poet as an interpreter of human life.

In Keats's view, the distinguishing characteristic of a great poet is "negative capability." He considers a poet who has this quality as superior to one who does not have it. A poet who possesses "negative capability" does not, he believes, approach life with certain preconceptions or attempt to view it in the light of a personal philosophy. Unlike the philosopher who strives to arrive at absolute

certainty through intellectual reasoning, the poet fully trusts and faithfully records his intuitions, without attempting to fit them into a rational system of thought.

Keats believes that poetry should not teach, but merely "reveal" to the reader the poet's intuitions regarding the meaning of the universe. Keats's conception of poetry as revelation is intimately linked to his mature conception of poetic beauty. In his years of maturity Keats associates poetry with a "beauty" which is equal to "truth." The poet looks at the world in a state of detached imaginative contemplation. In such a state, the universe is seen as a harmonious whole. In Keats's view, what appears to the imagination as "beauty" in a disinterested state of contemplation constitutes the "truth" of things. The poet embodies in poetry the "truth" which his imagination has perceived as "beauty." The picture of life set forth in poetry stimulates the reader's imagination and excites deep speculation on the purpose and meaning of life. Such imaginative speculation on the part of the reader culminates in a greater insight into life.

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Sara S. Pothan



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## PREFACE

Keats wrote no formal treatise on poetry as did poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley. Yet, judging from the evidence of his poems and letters, he was as theory-conscious as these poets. Throughout his brief life Keats strove to gain a clear perception of the nature and function of poetry. In a few of his poems he directly explores the theoretical aspect of poetry. In a few others his view of poetry is implied. His random remarks on poetry scattered in his poems and letters have a profundity which belies his age. Some of these remarks are worth whole treatises. They reveal Keats's understanding of the nature and function of poetry. These pregnant remarks indicate that Keats had considerable critical talent. As T.S. Eliot observes, there is "hardly one statement of Keats about poetry, which, when considered carefully and with due allowance for the difficulties of communication, will not be found to be true; and what is more, true for greater and more mature poetry than Keats ever wrote."<sup>1</sup> This thesis is a study of the critical facet of Keats's genius. It is not an exhaustive study, but an examination of the core of Keats's critical thought.

In a study of Keats as a critic, chronology is of crucial importance. This is because Keats's ideas about poetry were not static, but in a process of change. He

described this development as a form of "moulting."<sup>2</sup> The gradual change in his view of poetry bears testimony to his deepening critical perception. In dealing with his ideas about poetry, I have endeavoured to follow a chronological scheme so far as possible, to be able to trace his critical development more precisely.

It is interesting to note that Keats has comparatively little to say about the style or manner of poetry, as distinguished from its matter or substance. We know that he had a passion for fine words and phrases. As he wrote to Benjamin Bailey, he looked upon fine phrases "like a Lover."<sup>3</sup> His marginalia in his copy of the Shakespeare Folio of 1808 and his notes on Milton's Paradise Lost reveal his sensitivity to the texture of words, phrases, and images. He disliked artificial diction and language and was a strong advocate of naturalness in expression. He found Miltonic verse too artful and gave up his Hyperion partly because "there were too many Miltonic inversions in it."<sup>4</sup> He wrote to J.H. Reynolds on 24 August 1819:

Miltonic verse cannot be written but in an artful or rather artist's humour. I wish to give myself up to other sensations. English ought to be kept up. It may be interesting to you to pick out some lines from Hyperion, and put a mark X to the false beauty proceeding from art, and one || to the true voice of feeling,

(Rollins, II, p. 167)

Again, he wrote to his brother and sister-in-law on

21 September 1819:

The Paradise lost though so fine in itself is a corruption of our Language--it should be kept as

it is unique--a curiosity. a beautiful and grand Curiosity. The most remarkable Production of the world--A northern dialect accommodating itself to greek and latin inversions and intonations. The purest english I think--or what ought to be the purest--is Chatterton's--The Language had existed long enough to be entirely uncorrupted of Chaucer's gallicisms and still the old words are used--Chatterton's language is entirely northern--I prefer the native music of it to Milton's cut by feet I have but lately stood on my guard against Milton. Life to him would be death to me. Miltonic verse cannot be written but it [for "in"] the vein of art--I wish to devote myself to another sensation.

(Rollins, II, p. 212)

One of Keats's axioms in poetry was that its "touches of Beauty should never be half way thereby making the reader breathless instead of content."<sup>5</sup> In his view, "the rise, the progress, the setting of imagery should like the Sun come natural natural too him [sic]--shine over him and set soberly although in magnificence leaving him in the Luxury of twilight."<sup>6</sup>

Keats's observations on the technical aspect of poetry are very few. Of course there is his sonnet on the sonnet (beginning "If by dull rhymes our English must be chain'd"), written in April 1819. Here he emphasizes the need for poetic brevity and concentration:

Let us inspect the Lyre, and weigh the stress  
Of every chord, and see what may be gain'd  
By ear industrious, and attention meet;  
Misers of sound and syllable, no less  
Than Midas of his coinage, let us be  
Jealous of dead leaves in the bay wreath crown.

In his letter of 16 August 1820 to Shelley, he once again stresses the need for artistic discipline and concentration. While discussing Shelley's Cenci, Keats advises him to be

on guard against poetic diffuseness and dilution. "You I am sure will forgive me," he writes, "for sincerely remarking that you must curb your magnanimity and be more of an artist, and 'load every rift' of your subject with ore.

The thought of such discipline must fall like cold chains upon you, who perhaps never sat with your wings furl'd for six months together."<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Bailey writes that Keats had his own theory about melody in verse. Recalling Keats's stay at Oxford with him during September 1818, he writes:

One of his favourite topics of discourse was the principle of melody in Verse, upon which he had his own notions, particularly in the management of open & close vowels. . . . Keats's theory was, that the vowels should be so managed as not to clash one with another so as to mar the melody, -- & yet they should be interchanged, like differing notes of music to prevent monotony.<sup>8</sup>

Keats observes that "if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all."<sup>9</sup> This indicates that he, like Coleridge and the other Romantic poets, subscribes to an "organic" theory of poetry. In this respect, Keats is in the mainstream of Romanticism. The analogue of plant growth used by Keats suggests that he regards a poem as an organism. He believes that the unity of a poem is an organic one. One of the chief implications of the organic theory of poetry is that the style or manner of a poem is inseparable from its matter or substance. The form of a poem is not mechanically imposed from without. On the contrary, poetic imagination, as the seminal power, informs the poem from within, giving it its characteristic

form and structure. Far from being the "dress of thought," poetic language and diction are intimately linked to the thought processes of the poet. As such they are inseparable from the "meaning" or thought content of a poem.

Numerous attempts have been made to discover the real Keats. As a result, he is no longer regarded as a sensuous weakling or as a mere craftsman. Such views, which once prevailed, have been thoroughly discredited. Keats's place among the great English poets is now beyond dispute. He has not, however, gained much recognition as a theorist mainly because he wrote no formal treatise on poetry. The present study of Keats's contribution to poetic theory has convinced me that the real Keats, besides being a great poet, is also a noteworthy theorist.

The quotations in this thesis from Keats's poems are, unless otherwise indicated, from Keats: Poetical Works, edited by H.W. Garrod. For quotations from Keats's letters, I have used The Letters of John Keats 1814-1821, edited by Hyder Edward Rollins. In this edition, as the editor states, in the texts of all the letters "the spelling, capitalization, and punctuation of the originals are reproduced as exactly as possible, with a few slight exceptions designed for readability and typographical unobtrusiveness" (Vol. I, p. 16). As Rollins has pointed out, "Keats penned his sentences rapidly and spontaneously, not carefully and artfully. . . . He dashed off his sentences, ignoring unity and coherence, and seldom rereading what he had written."

(Vol. I, p. 17). As a rule, Rollins makes no attempt to correct Keats's numerous misspellings or his occasional grammatical slips. Nor has he, generally speaking, tampered with his idiosyncrasies in punctuation and capitalization. When Keats happens to use one word while intending to use another, Rollins' usual practice is to give the intended word in a footnote. In such cases, the word intended by Keats and given by Rollins in a footnote, has been placed by me, preceded by the word "for," in square brackets within the quotation itself, next to the word actually used by Keats. For instance, in his letter of 19 February 1818 to J.H. Reynolds, Keats writes: "Now it is more noble to sit like Jove that to fly like ~~Mercury~~--" It is clear that Keats intended to write "than to fly like Mercury."

Rollins gives the intended word "than" in a footnote. I have inserted the intended word in the quotation within square brackets, thus: "Now it is more noble to sit like Jove that [for "than"] to fly like Mercury--" Rollins uses curly braces to indicate letters or words inserted to fill gaps caused by holes, tears, frayed edges, and the like. Wherever Rollins uses curly braces, I have used square brackets. Whenever the cancelled readings of Keats (or of those in his circle) appear to be of interest or significance, Rollins gives them, if they are decipherable, in shaped brackets or records them in footnotes. I have ignored these cancelled readings. In all other matters I have followed Rollins. For quotations from Keats's essay

"On Edmund Kean as a Shakespearian Actor," his marginalia in his copy of the Shakespeare Folio of 1808, and his notes on Milton's Paradise Lost, I have depended on The Complete Works of John Keats, edited by H. Buxton Forman, Vol. III. For all factual information concerning Keats's life, I have relied on Walter Jackson Bate's biography of Keats.

August 1982

S.S.P.



## CHAPTER I

### POETRY AS ESCAPE

But there are times, when those that love the bay,  
Fly from all sorrowing far, far away;  
A sudden glow comes on them, naught they see  
In water, earth, or air, but poesy.

Keats, "To My Brother George" (August 1816)

Keats's early theory of poetry is based on two main postulates. First of all, he regards poetry as a form of escape. Secondly, he believes that poetry has its origin in moments when the poet's senses receive maximum stimuli. Poetry which originates thus will, in Keats's view, provide a feast to the reader's senses. The poet, fleeing from the tragic realities of life, takes refuge in the delightful world of sensuous pleasures. His imagination, stimulated by ecstatic sensuous experiences, conjures up a dream-world of perfect beauty and bliss. He is transported to this sensuous paradise on the wings of imagination. In the early years of his poetic career Keats thus attributes to poetic imagination mainly the power to conjure up an airy, insubstantial world of sensuous beauty and the power to transport the poet thither. At this stage Keats believes that this world of enchanting beauty and unalloyed bliss conjured up by the poet's imagination, and not the real world of pain and sorrow, must form the basis of poetry. Many of Keats's early poems either express or suggest this

view. This "escapist" view of poetry is indeed a far cry from the mature poetic creed associated with the last few years of his short life. In his years of maturity, Keats regards poetry not as something which is completely out of touch with the real world, but as something which draws sustenance from the rich soil of human life.

The sonnet, "Written on the Day that Mr. Leigh Hunt Left Prison" (February 1815) gives us an inkling of Keats's early notions about poetry and the poet's nature. The poet Leigh Hunt and his brother John Hunt had been sentenced to a prison term of two years for their bold attack on the Prince Regent in their periodical, the Examiner. The poem celebrates Leigh Hunt's release from prison after having paid his penalty for libel. The gist of the poem is that prison walls cannot restrain the free flight of a true poet's spirit. Leigh Hunt, whom Keats regards as a representative of the poetic Brotherhood, is eulogized for his ability to take "happy flights." The image of flight, developed in this poem, is crucial in understanding Keats's early conception of poetry. The sonnet begins on a lofty note:

What though, for showing truth to flatter'd state,  
Kind Hunt was shut in prison, yet has he,  
In his immortal spirit, been as free  
As the sky-searching lark, and as elate.

The underlying view is that the poet is an "escapist" who lives in a delightful world of his own, which has very little similarity to the real world of pain and sorrow. It is significant that he associates poetry with "bowers fair"

and "enchanted flowers." Though Keats does not actually use the word "imagination" in this sonnet, his early conception of imagination can be inferred from it. There is little doubt that at this time imaginative power is, for Keats, the power to take "happy flights." The epistle "To George Felton Mathew," written in November 1815, is another poem which sheds light on Keats's early conception of poetry. In this poem he does not directly set forth his views on poetry. But since it is a passionate outpouring from an aspiring poet to one who is in his eyes an established poet, Keats's views on poetry and poets are implicit in the poem. It would be surprising if Keats did not concern himself in this poem with his and Mathew's common field of interest. Carried away by his enthusiasm for poets in general, in this poem Keats ascribes to Mathew (the only poet he has met so far) every possible poetic virtue.

Keats's early attitude to poetry, which is implicit in the poem, is "escapist" in the main. But the poem also contains the germ of a more mature conception of poetry which becomes predominant later in his career. The middle part of the poem (lines 53-71), which is a pointer to Keats's later view, will be dealt with in a later chapter. It is sufficient to say here that even in the very early days of his poetic career Keats did not fail to realize what the undercurrent of great poetry should be. For the time being, however, it is the "pleasures" rather than the "ardours" of

song which engage his mind most of all.<sup>1</sup>

Many of Keats's early notions about the art of poetry and the attributes of the poet can be inferred from the rest of the poem. First of all, poetry deals with pleasant things; it is mainly something pleasurable. It is associated with everything that is beautiful and pleasant:

Too partial friend! fain would I follow thee  
Past each horizon of fine poesy;  
Fain would I echo back each pleasant note  
As o'er Sicilian seas clear anthems float  
'Mong the light skimming gondolas far parted,  
Just when the sun his farewell beam has darted.  
(ll. 11-16)

The very first line of the poem is significant:

Sweet are the pleasures that to verse belong

The words which Keats uses as synonyms for poetry shed a flood of light on his early notions about poetry. For him poetry is "song" or "anthem."<sup>2</sup> It has the soothing effect of "Lydian airs." The words are suggestive not only of spontaneity, but also of careless rapture. The musical metaphors also suggest that Keats subscribes to the expressive rather than the mimetic theory of poetry. He believes at this stage that poetry is more akin to music than to painting.<sup>2</sup> The epithets employed by him to describe the attributes of poetry are also significant. Poetry is "sweet"; it is like "soft" Lydian airs; its notes are "pleasant." In short, poetry is something soft, gentle, and soothing. It is therefore not surprising that the thought of a brotherhood in song, of the type exemplified by Beaumont and Fletcher, gives him an exultant feeling of

"all that's high, and great, and good, and healing."

We can also infer from the poem Keats's notions about the poet's nature and temperament. He seems to hold the view that the poet lives in a world of his own, which is peopled by Naiads, sylphs, and elves. This world of enchanting beauty is conjured up by the poet's imagination, under the stimulus of the beautiful sights of Nature. A resplendent sunrise gives him a vision of Phoebus in his glory. A bright dawn brings before his eyes "flushed Aurorâ." He has the power to see "a white Naiad in a rippling stream" and "a rapt seraph in a moonlight beam." The dew drops seen at dawn have been

by fairy feet swept from the green,  
 After a night of some quaint jubilee  
 Which every elf and fay had come to see:  
 When bright processions took their airy march  
 Beneath the curved moon's triumphal arch.  
 (ll. 26-30)

The underlying view seems to be that the poet has more contact with this imaginary world peopled by mythical beings than with the actual world of men and women. It is interesting to note that in the last part of the poem Keats pictures Mathew (who, he supposes, is a worthy poet) as "a floweret blooming wild," as "a fish of gold," and as a "black-eyed swan upon the widening stream." But he does not fail to recognize that there comes a stage in every genuine poet's career when he begins to trace the "placid features of a human face." At this time, however, Keats seems to be more fascinated by

thy travels strange,  
 And all the wonders of the mazy range  
 O'er pebbly crystal, and o'er golden sands;  
 Kissing thy daily food from Naiad's pearly hands.  
 (ll. 90-93)

The poem reveals Keats's idea of a congenial atmosphere for poetic creation. In his view, the cares and preoccupations of the real world hamper the free flights of the imagination. These hold a poet's faculties in thrall. The Muse, in his view, favours the quiet, beautiful countryside rather than the congested city:

But might I now each passing moment give  
 To the coy muse, with me she would not live  
 In this dark city, nor would condescend  
 'Mid contradictions her delights to lend.  
 (ll. 31-34)

If ever he is to be favoured by the Muse, he feels that he must find some "flowery spot, sequester'd, wild, romantic, / That often must have seen a poet frantic" (ll. 37-38). But Keats shows a momentary awareness that even the gloomy aspects of Nature can stimulate poetic imagination:

There must be too a ruin dark, and gloomy,  
 To say 'joy not too much in all that's bloomy.'  
 (ll. 51-52).

In the poem beginning "I Stood tip-toe upon a little hill" once again Keats describes how, under the stimulus of the beautiful sights of Nature, poetic imagination transports the poet to a delightful world of its own "creation." Poetry written in such ecstatic moments of transportation, in its turn, gives the reader a glimpse of the same world of beauty (ll. 125-40). Keats gives an example of a poem which has this effect. It is a poem

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based on the delightful myth of Endymion. He describes the long-lasting beneficial influence such a poem is likely to have on the reader. As he wanders by moonlight, "that sweetest of all songs" will bring to him

Shapes from the invisible world, unearthly singing  
From out the middle air, from flowery nests,  
And from the pillowy silkiness that rests  
Full in the speculation of the stars.

(ll. 186-89)

A poem of this kind, he feels, cannot be written unless the poet's imagination is stimulated by the beauty of Nature and he becomes oblivious of the real world of pain and sorrow. It is significant that the tales which Keats considers to be suitable themes for poetry are all mythological--the tales of Cupid and Psyche, of Pan and Syrinx, of Narcissus and Echo and of Endymion. The world peopled by these mythological figures has very little to do with the actual world of men and women.

In the epistle "To My Brother George" (written in August 1816) a poet is pictured by Keats as one who turns his back on the tragic aspect of life and takes refuge in the delightful world of sensuous beauty. He is portrayed as one who takes delight in star-gazing. Keats seems to think that a man is a poet by virtue of his ability to draw inspiration from sensuous beauty and break into song. In moments when Keats is unable to do this he is gripped by the disheartening feeling that he is not destined to be a poet:

Full many a dreary hour have I past,  
 My brain bewilder'd, and my mind o'er-cast  
 With heaviness; in seasons when I've thought  
 No sphereray strains by me could e'er be caught  
 From the blue dome, though I to dimness gaze  
 On the far depth where sheeted lightning plays;  
 Or, on the wavy grass outstretch'd supinely,  
 Pry 'mong the stars, to strive to think divinely:  
 That I should never hear Apollo's song,  
 Though feathery clouds were floating all along  
 The purple west, and two bright streaks between,  
 The golden lyre itself were dimly seen:  
 That the still murmur of the honey bee  
 Would never teach a rural song to me:  
 That the bright glance from beauty's eyelids slanting  
 Would never make a lay of mine enchanting,  
 Or warm my breast with ardour to unfold  
 Some tale of love and arms in time of old.

(11. 1-18)

He feels that a true poet, on the other hand, will be carried away to a celestial world where the sorrows of the sublunary world are unknown:

But there are times, when those that love the bay,  
 Fly from all sorrowing far, far away;  
 A sudden glow comes on them, naught they see  
 In water, earth, or air, but poesy.

(11. 19-22)

Keats goes on to enumerate the "living pleasures" offered by this celestial demesné, which is inhabited by the poet:

It has been said, dear George, and true I hold it,  
 (For knightly Spenser to Libertas told it,)  
 That when a Poet is in such a trance,  
 In air he sees white coursers paw, and prance,  
 Bestriden of gay knights, in gay apparel,  
 Who at each other tilt in playful quarrel,  
 And what we, ignorantly, sheet-lightning call,  
 Is the swift opening of their wide portal,  
 When the bright warder blows his trumpet clear,  
 Whose tones reach naught on earth but Poet's ear.  
 When these enchanted portals open wide,  
 And through the light the horsemen swiftly glide,  
 The Poet's eye can reach those golden halls,  
 And view the glory of their festivals:  
 Their ladies fair, that in the distance seem  
 Fit for the silv'ring of a seraph's dream;



Their rich brimm'd goblets, that incessant run  
 Like the bright spots that move about the sun;  
 And, when upheld, the wine from each bright jar  
 Pours with the lustre of a falling star.  
 Yet further off, are dimly seen their bowers,  
 Of which, no mortal eye can reach the flowers;  
 And 'tis right just, for well Apollo knows  
 'Twould make the Poet quarrel with the rose.  
 All that's reveal'd from that far seat of blisses,  
 Is, the clear fountains' interchanging kisses,  
 As gracefully descending, light and thin,  
 Like silver streaks across a dolphin's fin,  
 When he upswimmeth from the coral caves,  
 And sports with half his tail above the waves.

(ll. 23-52)

The description offers a feast to the senses. At this stage Keats believes that a poet's head is pregnant not with the knowledge of life, but with "poetic lore." As a result he is able to see "wonders strange." If the poet happens to wander out on a beautiful evening, he will see much more than a starry sky; he will see the "revelries and mysteries" of night. As for himself, Keats declares that if he were to see these, he would tell "such tales as needs must with amazement spell you."

We get some idea of Keats's notions about the proper content of poetry when he dwells on a poet's influence on posterity. Some of his poems will inspire the patriot to fight heroic battles. When the patriot thunders out the poet's numbers, princes will be startled from their "easy slumbers." The sage will use the poet's "happy thoughts sententious" to give weight to his moral exhortations. The poet's delightful lays will be sung by maids on their bridal night. The May queen, after her coronation, will take delight in reading his "tale of hopes,

and fears." The dear babe upon its mother's breast will be lulled to sleep by the poet's songs. Keats's description of a poet's influence on posterity gives us the impression that he has in mind a kind of poetry which skims the surface of life, without plumbing its tragic depths. The writing of such poetry as he has in mind requires little knowledge of the world. A congenial place for the writing of such poetry would be one which is sheltered from the "heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks / That flesh is heir to." It is interesting to note that as he scribbles these lines to his brother, Keats is "lillow'd on a bed of flowers / That crowns a lofty clift, which proudly towers / Above the ocean-waves" (ll. 123-25). He feels that by surrounding himself with breath-taking natural beauty, a poet will be able to draw the necessary inspiration to write poetry which will have a delightful dream-like quality. Such poetry will be lovely, gentle, and soothing. At this stage Keats does not believe that poetry should undertake any serious criticism of life; he seems to believe that the main function of poetry is to give sensuous pleasure. It is worth noting that it is the sensuous aspect of life and Nature which engaged his attention above everything else at this time. There is no gainsaying the fact that this kind of preoccupation with the senses is a disguised form of escapism.

In the epistle "To Charles Cowden Clarke," written in September 1816, once again Keats gives us the impression

that he views poetry as something dealing mainly with pleasant things and offering a feast to the senses. He uses sensuous terms to refer to poetry and to describe its effect on the reader. Of special significance is the metaphor of wine used by him while confessing to Clarke the reason for his not having written a poem to him before:

By this, friend Charles, you may plainly see  
 Why I have never penn'd a line to thee:  
 Because my thoughts were never free, and clear,  
 And little fit to please a classic ear;  
 Because my wine was of too poor a savour  
 For one whose palate gladdens in the flavour  
 Of sparkling Helicon.

(ll. 21-27)

Keats pictures Cowden Clarke approvingly as a man who lives in a world of delightful fancies, luxuriating in the sensuous delights of poetry. He goes on to describe the sensuous pleasures which poetry offered to a man of Clarke's temperament. According to Keats, Clarke was one

Who had on Baiæ's shore reclin'd at ease,  
 While Tasso's page was floating in a breeze  
 That gave soft music from Armida's bowers,  
 Mingled with fragrance from her rarest flowers.

(ll. 29-32)

He had a close association with Leigh Hunt who had told him stories of "laurel chaplets, and Apollo's glories; / Of troops chivalrous prancing through a city, / And tearful ladies made for love and pity" (ll. 45-47). One gets the feeling that at this stage the sensuous and sentimental aspects of poetry had the greatest attraction for Keats himself.

In the course of the poem Keats implies that the sensuous beauty of Nature is the richest source of poetic

inspiration. He therefore expresses his longing to steep himself in natural beauty. He has "warm desires"

To see the sun o'erpeep the eastern dimness,  
 And morning shadows, streaking into slimmess  
 Across the lawny fields, and pebbly water;  
 To mark the time as they grow broad, and shorter;  
 To feel the air that plays about the hills,  
 And sips into freshness from the little rills;  
 To see high, golden corn wave in the light  
 When Cynthia smiles upon a summer's night,  
 And peers among the cloudlets jet and white,  
 As though she were reclining in a bed  
 Of bean blossoms, in heaven freshly shed.

(ll. 86-96)

It is quite consistent with Keats's present theory of poetry that as soon as he imaginatively steps into these pleasures, he begins "to think of rhymes and measures." The implication is that poetry is associated with pleasant things and that it has more to do with sensuous beauty than with anything else. At this stage Keats holds the view that sensuous experiences are more conducive to poetic creation than a knowledge of real life in all its tragic complexity.

"Sleep and Poetry," written in the autumn of 1816, has an important place in the study of the evolution of Keats's theory of poetry, for in this poem we find a strange jostling of his earlier and later notions about poetry. Though his allegiance here seems to be mainly to a sensuous and "escapist" view of poetry, he recognizes the paramount importance of an entirely different kind of poetry which derives its strength from a sympathetic understanding of "the agonies, the strife / Of human hearts" and which concerns itself with the "dark mysteries of human souls."

The title of the poem suggests Keats's early notion of poetry as something which is as gentle, soothing, and refreshing as sleep. He associates it with the pleasures of the senses. It is described as something which is "fresher than berries of a mountain tree," more strange, beautiful, smooth, and regal than wings of swans, than doves, and dim-seen eagle. Poetry, in his view, is of so ethereal a nature that the very thought of it "is awful, sweet, and holy, / Chasing away all worldliness and folly." He goes on to describe it as a kind of intoxicant which stimulates the imagination, thereby bringing to one "the fair / Visions of all places" and opening up "vistas of solemn beauty." He gives a sensuous description of these fair visions: bowery nooks, the playing of nymphs in woods and fountains, enchanted grotts and green hills overspread with chequered dress of flowers.

In the same poem Keats envisages the different stages of his poetic career. His description of the stages of his poetic development is highly reminiscent of Wordsworth's recollection of the growth of his own mind and the evolution of his attitude to Nature.<sup>3</sup> The main difference is that while Wordsworth is recalling the past, Keats is envisaging the future. In the first stage Keats hopes to pass through the realm of Flora and old Pan. In other words, at this stage he will write poetry which is mainly sensuous, thereby indulging his craving for poetical luxuries. Nature will of course be the chief source of

these luxuries. His poetry will at this time be concerned only with what is sensuously beautiful and delightful. This stage corresponds roughly to the first two stages of growth recalled by Wordsworth--the first stage characterized by the "coarser pleasures" of his "boyish" days and "their glad animal movements" and also the next stage of "aching joys" and "dizzy raptures" when Nature was "all in all" to him. As in the case of Wordsworth, Keats's attitude towards Nature at the first stage can be described as

a feeling and a love  
That had no need of a remoter charm,  
By thought supplied, nor any interest  
Unborrowed from the eye.  
("Tintern Abbey," ll. 80-83)

Perhaps the only difference is that for Keats all the senses are as important as "the eye." The poetry that he is to write in the first stage of his career must therefore give pleasure not only to the eye, but also to the other senses. This is the impression we get from Keats's sensuous description of the early days of his poetic career:

First the realm I'll pass  
Of Flora and old Pan: sleep in the grass,  
Feed upon apples red, and strawberries,  
And choose each pleasure that my fancy sees;  
Catch the white-handed nymphs in shady places,  
To woo sweet kisses from averted faces,--  
Play with their fingers, touch their shoulders white  
Into a pretty shrinking with a bite  
As hard as lips can make it: till agreed,  
A lovely tale of human life we'll read.  
And one will teach a tame dove how it best  
May fan the cool air gently o'er my rest;  
Another, bending o'er her nimble tread,  
Will set a green robe floating round her head,  
And still will dance with ever-varied ease,  
Smiling upon the flowers and the trees:

Another will entice me on, and on  
 Through almond blossoms and rich cinnamon;  
 Till in the bosom of a leafy world  
 We rest in silence, like two gems upcurl'd  
 In the recesses of a pearly shell.

(ll. 101-21)

Besides appealing to the senses, the poetry written at this stage will show decidedly "escapist" tendencies. It is worth noting that it is a "lovely tale of human life" that Keats hopes to read during this period. In other words, the tragic and sombre aspects of life and the philosophical problems raised by these will not be his concern as a poet at this time. However, Keats makes it clear that this will only be a temporary phase. He realizes that there will come a time in his poetic career when this kind of sensuous poetry, blissfully blind to the dark side of life, will have to yield place to a deeper and maturer poetry which will require of him an intimate and sympathetic understanding of "the agonies, the strife / Of human hearts." There is no doubt that Keats envisages this kind of gradual poetic development not only for himself, but for every genuine poet. This is corroborated by his letter of 3 May 1818, written to J.H. Reynolds. In this letter Keats introduces "a simile of human life" to measure himself against Wordsworth's poetic stature ("to show you how tall I stand by the giant"):

I compare human life to a large Mansion of Many Apartments, two of which I can only describe, the doors of the rest being as yet shut upon me-- The first we step into we call the infant or thoughtless chamber, in which we remain as long as we do not think--We remain there a long while, and notwithstanding the doors of the second Chamber remain wide open, showing a bright appearance, we

care not to hasten to it; but are at length imperceptibly impelled by the awakening of the thinking principle--within us--we no sooner get into the second Chamber, which I shall call the Chamber of Maiden-Thought, than we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere, we see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there for ever in delight: However among the effects this breathing is father of is that tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of Man--of convincing ones nerves that the World is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression--whereby This Chamber of Maiden Thought becomes gradually darken'd and at the same time on all sides of it many Goors are set open--but all dark--all leading to dark passages--We see not the ballance of good and evil. We are in a Mist--We are now in that state--We feel the "burden of the Mystery," To this point was Wordsworth come, as far as I can conceive when he wrote 'Tintern Abbey' and it seems to me that his Genius is explorative of those dark Passages. Now if we live, and go on thinking, we too shall explore them.<sup>4</sup>

It is worth noting that in this passage Keats recognizes the importance of the first two chambers of the mansion of human life, viz. the infant or thoughtless chamber and the chamber of maiden thought. These represent the stages when the poet will write poems which appeal mainly to the senses and which deal only with what is pleasant and delightful. These are necessary stages through which he has to pass before he can feel "the burthen of the mystery" and write poems dealing effectively with the vexing questions of life. Viewed in the light of this theory, the poems of Keats's early period, avowedly dealing in "luxuries," have their *raison d'être*.

In the course of the poem Keats condemns the Neo-classic poets for reducing poetry to a mere craft by being



"closely wed / To musty laws lined out with wretched rule /  
And compass vile." But he speaks nostalgically of the  
earlier poetry which, in his view, had given free rein to  
the imagination:

Is there so small a range  
In the present strength of manhood, that the high  
Imagination cannot freely fly  
As she was wont of old? prepare her steeds,  
Paw up against the light, and do strange deeds  
Upon the clouds?

(ll. 163-68)

The earlier poetry, he remembers, had "shown us all" from  
"the clear space of ether" to "the small / Breath of new  
buds unfolding," from "the meaning / Of Jove's large eye-  
brow" to "the tender greening / Of April meadows." In those  
days, he nostalgically recalls, the Muses had no other care  
than "to sing out and sooth their wavy hair." Here Keats  
undoubtedly evinces a partiality for a kind of "ivory tower"  
poetry. The image of flight (line 164) is significant. . .  
But it must be noted that what he opposes to this type of  
poetry is not poetry which is genuinely concerned with the  
harsh realities of life, but poetry which is devoid of  
imaginative splendour and glow because of the poets' obses-  
sion with technical perfection and their insensitivity to  
natural beauty.

Keats feels happy in thinking that the age that was  
barren of imaginative poetry has come to an end:

But let me think away those times of woe:  
Now 'tis a fairer season.

(ll. 220-21)

He gives us some idea of the kind of poetry that is being written in his own age--poetry which, he feels, is favoured by the Muses. Addressing the Muses, he exclaims:

[Y]e have breathed  
 Rich benedictions o'er us; ye have wreathed  
 Fresh garlands: for sweet music has been heard  
 In many places;--some has been upstirr'd  
 From out its crystal dwelling in a lake,  
 By a swan's ebon bill; from a thick brake,  
 Nested and quiet in a valley mild,  
 Bubbles a pipe; fine sounds are floating wild  
 About the earth: happy are ye and glad.

(ll. 221-29)

Keats leaves little doubt that this is a kind of poetry which is very much after his own heart. We get the impression that this poetry is entirely out of touch with the real world and that it caters only for the senses. Keats goes on to express his displeasure with poems whose themes are "ugly clubs, the Poets' Polyphemes / Disturbing the grand sea." He admits that such poetry may be powerful. But in his view,

strength alone though of the Muses born  
 Is like a fallen angel: trees upturn,  
 Darkness, and worms, and shrouds, and sepulchres  
 Delight it; for it feeds upon the burrs  
 And thorns of life.

(ll. 241-45)

Here Keats implies that it is against the very nature of poetry to deal with the dark side of life. He adheres to the tenet that poetry ought to be "a drainless shower / Of light" and that "it should be a friend / To sooth the cares, and lift the thoughts of man." At the first reading, it may seem that Keats is here emphasizing the human element of poetry. But the context makes it clear that he has in

mind a poetry of retreat, that is, a kind of poetry that will offer a delightful haven into which one can withdraw. He seems to believe that poetry should serve as an opiate to relieve the "weariness, the fever and the fret" of day-to-day life. Poems dealing with the pain and sorrow of life do not seem to him to comply with this tenet. He therefore foresees with delight the advent of an age when, as of old,

th' imagination  
 Into most lovely labyrinths will be gone,  
 And they shall be accounted poet kings  
 Who simply tell the most heart-easing things.  
 (ll. 265-68)

His only prayer is that such joys may be "ripe" in his own life time. At this stage Keats cannot associate poetry with anything unlovely or ungentle. As he observes later on in the poem, the poet is, in his view, one who "keeps the keys / Of pleasure's temple" (ll. 354-55).

"Sleep and Poetry" may be regarded as Keats's poetic manifesto of the early period. It must, however, be noted that though the main thrust of the poem is towards a sensuous "escapist" view of poetry, it also contains apparently antithetical ideas, destined to develop later into Keats's important critical tenets. Thus the poem sets forth his later view that poetry must have its roots in the soil of human life. It also suggests his mature conception of poetic imagination as an organ of insight and his later belief that poetry must offer "visionary gleam[s]."<sup>5</sup> These ideas will be considered in detail in

a later chapter.

In the Dedicatory sonnet to Leigh Hunt (Poems 1817), written in February 1817, Keats laments that the old world of idyllic beauty and joy has vanished. People no longer care to worship beauty as in the days of old and the pleasures of the imagination are now accessible to very few. In his essay "On Edmund Kean as a Shakespearean Actor" (December 1817) also Keats refers to the imaginative barrenness of his own age. He entreats his favourite actor to take the best care of his health, for he seems to him to be the sole representative of a bygone age in which pleasures of the imagination were possible. Keats cannot help lamenting that the progress of science has hampered the free play of imagination and thereby robbed the universe of its mystery:

Kean! Kean! have a carefulness of thy health, a nursing regard for thy own genius, a pity for us in these cold and enfeebling times! Cheer us a little in the failure of our days! for romance lives but in books. The goblin is driven from the hearth, and the rainbow is robbed of its mystery.<sup>6</sup>

In the Dedicatory sonnet, however, he expresses his pleasure in thinking that even in this prosaic age, insensitive to beauty and impervious to the pleasures of imagination, he is able to "feel a free, / A leafy luxury" and consequently to write poetry that can please a man of Leigh Hunt's sensitivity and power of imagination. In this context we are reminded of Keats's confession to Cowden Clarke (when the former was a student at Guy's

Hospital) that during a lecture on anatomy, when "there came a sunbeam into the room, and with it a whole troop of creatures floating in the ray," he was "off with them to Oberon and fairyland."<sup>7</sup> Keats implies in the Dedicatory sonnet that the ability to write good poetry is dependent on the ability to respond to beauty and to escape to a delightful world conjured up by the imagination. There is no hint in the sonnet that either a sympathetic understanding of the human heart or an intimate knowledge of life is necessary for the achievement of poetic excellence. The sonnet undoubtedly shows an "escapist" bias. It would hardly be wrong to say that the Dedicatory sonnet is suggestive of the view of poetry underlying most of the poems in the 1817 Volume. The phrase "a free, / A leafy luxury" strikes the key-note of the Volume. In fact the word "luxury" may be regarded as the key to an understanding of Keats's early theory of poetry.

The word "luxury"<sup>8</sup> is constantly used by Keats both in his poems and in his letters. Especially in his early poems Keats often associates the word or at least what it stands for with "poesy" in various ways. E.F. Guy, in his enlightening article, draws attention to the significance of this word and points out the various shades of meaning it holds for Keats.<sup>9</sup> Though he does not discuss the meaning of the word specifically in its relation to Keats's view of poetry, his study of the meaning of the word in various contexts helps us to understand its meaning

when it is used by Keats to convey his notions about poetry. As he has rightly pointed out, the word is descriptive both of scene and of mood. It is used in two main senses. Sometimes it is descriptive of external circumstances of pleasure; at other times it is suggestive either of an ecstatic sensuous (or emotional) experience or of a voluptuous response to things or circumstances. The sensuous activity implied in the word "luxury" is suggested better by the verbal form of the word, viz. "luxuriate." In the early period of his poetic career Keats held that poetry had very much to do with "luxury" in both the above senses. He held that poetry has its origin in moments when the poet's senses are glutted with "luxuries," that is, when he is surrounded by external circumstances of pleasure. He believed that on such occasions, the poet's imagination, responding ecstatically to the sensory stimuli, conjures up a world of enchanting beauty and unalloyed bliss into which he can flee from the painful realities of life. Poetry which draws inspiration from this delightful (though unsubstantial) world cannot but glut the reader's senses with "luxuries" and make him oblivious of the pain and sorrow of the real world. The reader responds rapturously to the sensuous beauty he finds so abundantly in poetry. In other words, he "luxuriates" in it. The way in which poetry originates and the way in which it affects the reader are described in the poem beginning "I Stood tip-toe upon a little hill." "For what

has made the sage or poet write," asks Keats. "But the fair paradise of Nature's light?" He continues:

In the calm grandeur of a sober line,  
 We see the waving of the mountain pine;  
 And when a tale is beautifully staid,  
 We feel the safety of a hawthorn glade:  
 When it is moving on luxurious wings,  
 The soul is lost in pleasant smotherings:  
 Fair dewy roses brush against our faces,  
 And flowering laurels spring from diamond vases;  
 O'erhead we see the jasmine and sweet briar,  
 And bloomy grapes laughing from green attire;  
 While at our feet, the voice of crystal bubbles  
 Charms us at once away from all our troubles:  
 So that we feel uplifted from the world,  
 Walking upon the white clouds wreath'd and curl'd.

(ll. 127-40)

E.F. Guy explains that "luxurious wings" are "wings necessary for the imagination's reach to fulfil itself in consummation with sensation."<sup>10</sup> Sensation is thus important for Keats mainly as a means to an end. It provides the poet's imagination with "luxurious wings" that will transport him to a world of beauty.<sup>11</sup> Such an experience, Keats believed, must precede actual poetic creation. This belief accounts for his well-known exclamation, "O for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts!"<sup>12</sup> In "Sleep and Poetry" the effect of pleasant sensations is referred to as "a death of luxury." As Guy explains, this is an ecstatic feeling experienced when the senses receive the highest degree of stimulation.<sup>13</sup> Usually (according to Keats) such an experience results in poetic creation. However, this kind of experience that leads to poetic creation is accessible only to one with a poetic sensitivity, that is, to one who can passionately respond to pleasant sensation. He

must be a person capable of "luxuriating" in sensuous beauty. In the Dedicatory sonnet to Leigh Hunt, Keats implies (as pointed out earlier) that he himself is a poet by virtue of his capacity to feel "a free, a leafy luxury." In other words, it is his ability to respond ecstatically to sensuous beauty that enables him to write poetry capable of pleasing a poet of Hunt's stature. As pointed out earlier, these ideas are expressed by Keats also in the epistles "To George Felton Mathew," "To My Brother George," and "To Charles Cowden Clarke," although in these poems he does not actually use the word "luxury" in relation to poetry. Though Keats believes that a congenial atmosphere for poetic creation is one of sensuous beauty, he also knows that a poet whose imagination has been nurtured on past poetry can "luxuriate" in the world of sensuous beauty offered by these poems and draw poetic inspiration from it. Thus in the epistle "To George Felton Mathew," Keats, after confessing that "the coy Muse" refuses to live with himself in the "dark city," speaks of Mathew as one who is favoured by the Muse, irrespective of the place where he is:

For thee, she will thy every dwelling grace,  
And make 'a sun-shine in a shady place.'

(ll. 74-75)

Again, in the sonnet "Written on the Day that Mr. Leigh Hunt Left Prison" Keats describes how, when external circumstances were far from congenial, Hunt took refuge in the delightful realms of sensuous beauty found in earlier



poetry. As pointed out before, Keats associates "luxury" not only with the circumstances of poetic creation. According to his early theory, poetry that draws inspiration from sensuous beauty will and ought to offer a feast to the reader's senses. In other words, poetry is itself a treasure-house of "luxuries."

In "Ode to May" (written in early May 1818), reminiscent of the Dedicatory Sonnet to Leigh Hunt, Keats speaks approvingly of "the ancient Greek bards who, turning their back on the pain and sorrow of human life, were content to be simple worshippers of sensuous beauty. They "died content on pleasant sward," leaving "great verse" although only to "a little clan." Keats cannot help desiring to acquire "their old vigour, and unheard / Save of the quiet Primrose, and the span / Of heaven and few ears." As in the Dedicatory Sonnet to Leigh Hunt, Keats here shows no interest in poetry which is concerned with the vexing questions posed by "the events of this wide world." He is here content to be a votary of sensuous beauty. The Greek goddess Maia, representing the spring season, seems to him to be an appropriate symbol of this beauty.

It is interesting to note that even in some of Keats's most mature poems of the later period, he occasionally associates poetry with the desire to escape. In "Ode to a Nightingale" (written in May 1819), for instance, poetry is referred to as an effective means of escaping

from the world of sorrow and "leaden-eyed despairs"--a more effective means than wine. In spite of the impediments caused by "the dull brain," "the viewless wings of poesy" enable Keats to fly up with the bird into the beautiful night sky where "the Queen-Moon is on her throne, / Cluster'd around by all her starry Pays" (stanza iv). Keats regards such flight as the privilege of a votary of poetry.

The "escapist" bias of Keats's early theory of poetry can, to a certain extent, be attributed to the tragic circumstances of his life. These, however, were by no means confined to his early years. This probably accounts not only for the recurrence of "escapist" sentiments in his later poems, but also for the fact that in one of these ("Ode to a Nightingale") he views poetry as a means of escape as he does in his early poems.

It is an undeniable fact that Keats had to endure more than his share of life's misfortunes within his short span of life. Illness and death of close relatives were common occurrences ever since John Keats was eight years old. First came his father's fatal accident in April 1804, when John was eight years old.<sup>14</sup> March 1805 saw the death of his maternal grandfather, John Jennings. In 1808 Keats's maternal uncle Lt. Midgley John Jennings died, probably of consumption. Keats's mother died in March 1810, after having been confined to bed for some time by what had been diagnosed as severe rheumatism or arthritis, but was probably consumption. After their maternal grandmother

Mrs. Jennings died in December 1814, the four Keats children had only each other to rely on. Soon, however, they were deprived even of the consolation of each other's company. The youngest child Fanny was virtually made a prisoner in the house of Richard Abbey, whom Mrs. Jennings had made the guardian of the four Keats children. The pressing need to earn a living forced George Keats and his wife to emigrate to America in June 1818. The most shattering blow came when Tom Keats died in December 1818, after a long fight with consumption. John Keats himself, when he returned home after his walking tour of Scotland, was suffering from a sore throat--the earliest symptom of consumption. To add to all this, he was constantly plagued by financial problems from the death of Mrs. Jennings until his own death in February 1821. His situation appears all the more pathetic when we remember his passionate attachment to the members of his family, especially to his brothers. He writes to Benjamin Bailey on 10 June 1818:

I have two Brothers one is driven by the 'burden of Society' to America the other, with an exquisite love of Life, is in a lingering state--My Love for my Brothers from the early loss of our parents and even for earlier Misfortunes has grown into a affection 'passing the Love of Women. . . .'  
I have a Sister too and may not follow them, either to America or to the Grave--

(Rollins, I, p. 293)

In these distressing circumstances, it would not be surprising had the young Keats come to see the world as a "vale of tears." As the sorrows of life multiplied, Keats

must have felt the need of some kind of opiate that would ease the pain. His growing conviction that happiness is impossible in the sublunary world undoubtedly strengthened his desire to escape into a superior world. This longing to escape remained with Keats almost up to the end of his life. Thus in "Ode to a Nightingale" he explores the different ways of escape that would allow him to

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 to-morrow.

In the sonnet "To Sleep" (written in April 1819) sleep is welcomed as a means of escape from the woes of day time.

It is a

soft embalmer of the still midnight,  
 Shutting with careful fingers and benign,  
 Our gloom-pleas'd eyes, embower'd from the light,  
 Enshaded in forgetfulness divine.

He knows that unless he is lulled by sleep, the day that is past will shine upon his pillow, "breeding many woes."

It is only sleep that can save him from "curious Conscience, that still lords / Its strength for darkness, burrowing like a mole." A similar longing for escape is expressed also in "Ode on Indolence" (May-June 1819):

O for an age so shelter'd from annoy,  
 That I may never know how change the moons,  
 Or hear the voice of busy commonsense!

(ll. 48-50)

It seems reasonable to believe that Keats's early conception of poetry as a refuge from pain and as a treasure-house of "luxuries" has a great deal to do with the tragic experiences of his life. Since life offered him nothing but pain, understandably it seemed to him only proper that poetry should serve as an opiate which would ease the pain.

The "escapist" bias of Keats's early conception of poetry can, to a certain extent, be attributed also to the influence of Leigh Hunt. Hunt's influence on Keats began long before the two had actually met each other. When Keats was in school at Enfield, John and Cowden Clarke had passed on to him their admiration of Hunt. It is significant that the first poem which Keats showed Cowden Clarke was the sonnet "Written on the Day that Mr. Leigh Hunt Left Prison." His meeting with Hunt in October 1816 marked the beginning of a close and long-lasting personal friendship. When we remember that Hunt had been admired by Keats ever since the latter was thirteen or fourteen and also when we consider that Hunt was the first poet of repute that Keats met, it is not surprising that this kindly, warm-hearted and generous man exerted a great deal of influence on the young Keats. Keats acknowledged his debt to his friend by dedicating his 1817 Volume of Poems to him in a sonnet. It is interesting to note that though Leigh Hunt was a man of the world, a professional prose-writer and journalist with a keen interest in politics, much of his non-satiric poetry shows escapist tendencies.

As James Thompson has pointed out, it was characteristic of the man to choose to live as an "esthetic recluse" rather than as a political martyr during his term of imprisonment.<sup>15</sup> In order to provide himself with an environment conducive to poetic creation, he converted his prison room into an artificial bower by having his ceiling painted to look like the sky and his walls covered with paper picturing roses twined about trellises.<sup>16</sup> This sort of withdrawal into a world of delightful fancies characterizes many of Hunt's poems. The old world of chivalry and romance had a great attraction for him. Many of his poems--for example, "Hero and Leander," "The Nymphs," and "Bacchus and Ariadne"--are characterized by a sensuous richness, which bears testimony to his love of "luxury" (in the Keatsian sense). Thanks to his admiration of Hunt, most of Keats's early poems (written up to the end of 1817) show Huntian influence to some degree. It does not, therefore, seem unreasonable to assume that Keats's thinking on the question of what poetry ought to be was influenced in the early years by what Leigh Hunt's poetry actually was.

## CHAPTER II

### POETRY AND HUMAN LIFE

I have of late been moulting: not for fresh  
feathers & wings: they are gone, and in their  
stead I hope to have a pair of patient sub-  
lunary legs. I have altered not from a  
chrysalis into a butterfly, but the Contrary.  
having two little loopholes, whence I may look  
out into the stage of the world. . . .  
(Keats, letter to John Hamilton  
Reynolds, 11 July 1819)

Though Keats was attracted to an "escapist" con-  
ception of poetry in the early stage of his poetic career,  
some of his early poems contain the germ of a more mature  
view of poetry.

As pointed out earlier, though the epistle "To  
George Felton Mathew" mainly expresses an "escapist" view  
of poetry, the middle part of the poem (lines 53-71) sets  
forth a more serious view. Here, dismissing for a moment  
a poetry of retreat, Keats reveals his interest in a more  
serious kind of poetry. He expresses his desire to put on  
"soft humanity" and to write poetry dealing with the  
serious aspects of life. The painful realities of human  
life--whether inherent in life or created by man--will  
find a place in this poetry. It will

mourn the fearful dearth of human kindness  
To those who strove with the bright golden wing  
Of genius to flap away each sting  
Thrown by the pitiless world.

(ll. 62-65)

The tragic fate of Chatterton, Milton's blindness and the pitiable conditions of Burns's life will be suitable themes for such poetry. It will speak reverently of all the sages who have "left streaks of light athwart their ages," of "those who in the cause of freedom fell" and of all those who in the past have conferred various benefits on their respective ages.

In "Sleep and Poetry" Keats sets forth his early conception of poetry as a means of escape. But this poem, which is a welter of floating thoughts, also contains ideas which suggest a more serious view. These represent Keats's momentary flashes of insight into the nature of great poetry.

It is true that in the course of the poem Keats asserts the legitimacy of a poetry of escape. At this stage he believes that the poet is perfectly at liberty to deal in "luxuries." Therefore he expresses his desire to write poems

About the leaves, and flowers--about the playing  
Of nymphs in woods, and fountains; and the shade  
Keeping a silence round a sleeping maid.

(ll. 66-68)

Elysian bowers and enchanted grotts will form a suitable setting for such poetry. But at the same time Keats realizes that ultimately he must outgrow this kind of "escapist" poetry, and begin to write on his tablets "all that was permitted, / All that was for our human senses fitted" (ll. 79-80). He must finally come to grips with



the labyrinthine complexities of human life. This will usher in the most important stage in his poetic career when he will seize "the events of this wide world" like "a strong giant." Keats believes that only the writing of poems dealing with the serious aspects of life can guarantee poetic immortality. A true poet has to meditate deeply on the significance of human life. Both the pleasant and the painful aspects of life must engage his attention. He must be acutely conscious of the brevity and sadness of life:

Stop and consider! life is but a day;  
 A fragile dew-drop on its perilous way  
 From a tree's summit; a poor Indian's sleep  
 While his boat hastens to the monstrous steep  
 Of Montmorenci.

(ll. 85-89)

At the same time he must not ignore the joy of being alive:

Life is the rose's hope while yet unblown;  
 The reading of an ever-changing tale;  
 The light uplifting of a maiden's veil;  
 A pigeon tumbling in clear summer air;  
 A laughing school-boy, without grief, or care,  
 Riding the springy branches of an elm.

(ll. 90-95)

It is interesting to note that in "Sleep and Poetry"

Keats envisages different stages in his poetic career. He recognizes the need to pass from the realm of Flora and Pan into the world of human sorrows and strifes:

And can I ever bid these joys farewell?  
 Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life,  
 Where I may find the agonies, the strife  
 Of human hearts.

(ll. 122-25)

In his view, a truly great poet cannot run away from the painful realities of human life. There comes a stage in his career when he must respond to the "still, sad music of humanity."<sup>1</sup> Keats makes it clear that poetry written in response to "the giant agony of the world"<sup>2</sup> is immeasurably superior to poetry of mere sensuous exuberance. It is a far "nobler" kind of poetry.

Though Keats sets down an intimate knowledge of life and a sympathetic understanding of the mind of man as important qualifications of a poet, he realizes how deficient he is in these respects. He confesses that he is "not wealthy in the dower / Of spanning wisdom" and that he does not know the "shiftings of the mighty winds that blow / Hither and thither all the changing thoughts / Of man." He has as yet no clear understanding of "the dark mysteries of human souls." Yet he sees a "vast idea" before him. He has a momentary flash of insight into the nature of true poetry. He can, he claims, clearly see the "end and aim of Poesy." Since at the same time Keats has a consciousness of his own deficiencies and limitations, he becomes fully aware of the magnitude of the task he has undertaken by choosing the vocation of a poet. The pursuit of poetic excellence seems to Keats to be as arduous an enterprise as the exploration of a vast ocean or the conquest of a huge mountain. Surely he does not regard the poet as a mere song-bird, pouring out his heart in "profuse strains of unpremeditated art."<sup>3</sup> Keats believes that no one can be

a great poet who has not mastered the secrets of the human heart and been educated in the school of life.

The sonnet addressed to Haydon, beginning with the line "Great spirits now on earth are sojourning", (written in November 1816) shows, with what great seriousness Keats now regards poetry and allied arts like painting. Those of his contemporaries who have achieved excellence in the field of art are, in his view, "great spirits" who are "sojourning" on earth. Wordsworth, Hunt, and Haydon are singled out for special praise. Besides these there are "other spirits" who are "standing apart / Upon the forehead of the age to come." Keats believes that their artistic endeavours are not mere exercises in futility. Their works are bound to have a pervading and salutary, if silent influence on society. Through their works, these "great spirits" will ultimately "give the world another heart, / And other pulses." Keats is undoubtedly thinking of the humanizing influence of poetry and other arts. "Heart" and "pulses," besides suggesting vitality, signify the feelings. Keats is referring to the immense capacity of art, especially poetry, to influence people's feelings. He believes that poetry can sharpen the sensibility and foster qualities like sympathy, compassion, and tolerance. Surely a poetry of escape or of purely sensuous appeal cannot do this. It is obvious that Keats has in mind poetry with a human content and having a human appeal. No one can write such poetry who has not first studied human life and

explored the human mind. It is interesting to note that though Keats objects to poetry with "a palpable design" upon the reader,<sup>4</sup> he values the social influence of poetry. In one of his letters to John Hamilton Reynolds (19 February 1818) Keats expresses the view that "perhaps the honours paid by Man to Man are trifles in comparison to the Benefit done by great Works to the 'Spirit and pulse of good' by their mere passive existence." In the same letter he observes that when "Man has arrived at a certain ripeness in intellect any one grand and spiritual passage serves him as a starting post towards all 'the two-and thirty Pallaces.'" However, Keats believes that the insights or the soul-knowledge gained by one mind should be communicated to another mind without the least degree of obtrusiveness:

Man should not dispute or assert but whisper  
 results to his neighbour, and thus by every germ  
 of Spirit sucking the Sap from mould ethereal  
 every human might become great, and Humanity  
 instead of being a wide heath of Furze and  
 Briars with here and there a remote Oak or  
 Pine, would become a grand democracy of  
 Forest Trees.

(Rollins, I, p. 232)

This, undoubtedly, is the way in which Keats expects the great poets of his age to "give the world another heart / And other pulses."

Keats's ideas about poetry began to undergo a decisive change in the course of the year 1817. A number of factors may be held responsible for this gradual change.

Early in March 1817 Benjamin Robert Haydon took Keats to the British Museum to see the Elgin Marbles. This event may be regarded as a turning point in Keats's attitude toward art, including poetry. Keats had always been impelled by a vision of grandeur. Now, on coming into contact with a great collection of sculpture from the Parthenon, Keats's criteria of artistic greatness begin to change. It is not the outward, visible beauty of the Marbles that appeals to Keats. It is the vision of life embodied in these works of art that captivates his mind.<sup>5</sup>

The thoughts that crowded Keats's mind and the feelings that flooded his heart at the sight of these great works of art are expressed by him in the sonnet "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles." It becomes clear to Keats that the artist who created these sculptures was neither an escapist nor a purely sensuous man. He realizes that these works of art are the products of the artist's heightened awareness of life, his imaginative insight into it. It is significant that there is not a single line in the sonnet which refers to their beauty of form. What Keats essays to do in the sonnet is to translate into words the vision of life embodied in the sculptures and to describe his own response to it.

Such dim-conceived glories of the brain  
 Bring round the heart an undescribable feud;  
 So do these wonders a most dizzy pain,  
 That mingles Grecian grandeur with the rude  
 Wasting of old Time--with a billowy main--  
 A sun--a shadow of a magnitude.

(ll. 9-14)

In these sculptures the artist has succeeded in embodying Grecian grandeur, while suggesting at the same time the transience of human life when viewed against a background of eternity and infinity. Keats's imagination is stimulated to such a degree that he gets a vision of the endless cycles of history. Surely it is a vision that excites a "momentous depth of speculation"<sup>6</sup> on the meaning of human life and on man's place in the universe. Since Keats regards the Elgin Marbles as specimens of true art, it is probably not wrong to assume that Keats considers the response evoked in him by these as the kind of response that ought to be evoked by true art, whether it is poetry, painting, or sculpture. It is not a response to mere sensuous beauty that art should evoke, but a response to the vision of life embodied in it. On coming into contact with the Elgin Marbles, which are specimens of true art, Keats must have realized the fallaciousness of an "escapist" or purely sensuous view of art.

Keats's constant meditation on the subject of poetry during the spring of 1817, when he began writing Endymion, was another factor that contributed to the gradual change in his view of poetry. During this period (from mid-April to mid-June) Keats lived alone, first in the Isle of Wight and then at Margate. His solitude gave Keats ample time to ponder on the great questions regarding poetry. He writes to Leigh Hunt from Margate on 10 May 1817:

I went to the Isle of Wight--thought so much about Poetry so long together that I could not get to sleep at night. . . . Another thing I was too much in Solitude, and consequently was obliged to be in continual burning of thought as an only resource.  
(Rollins, I, pp. 138-39)

In the same letter he writes:

I have asked myself so often why I should be a Poet more than other Men,--seeing how great a thing it is,--how great things are to be gained by it--What a thing to be in the Mouth of Fame--that at last the Idea has grown so monstrously beyond my seeming Power of attainment. . . .

(Rollins, I, p. 139)

As Keats's critical perceptions begin to change, he begins to develop a dislike for his early poetry, especially for the lines in Endymion which he has written so far. He writes to Haydon from Margate on 10 May 1817:

. . . . I have been in such a state of Mind as to read over my Lines and hate them. I am "one that gathers Saphire dreadful trade" the Cliff of Poesy Towers above me. . . .

(Rollins, I, p. 141)

The change in Keats's attitude to poetry during the year 1817 may also, to a certain extent, be attributed to the influence of Shakespeare's plays, especially his tragedies. While he was preparing himself for the formidable task of writing Endymion and also when he was working on the poem, Keats was engaged in an intensive study of Shakespeare. His letters of the period are full of references to Shakespeare. In fact Keats regards Shakespeare as a godd genius presiding over him as he is engaged in poetic creation. He writes to Haydon from Margate (10 May 1817):

I remember your saying that you had notions of a good genius presiding over you--I have of late had the same thought. . . . Is it too daring to Fancy 'Shakespeare this Presider?

(Rollins, I, pp. 141-42)

In the same letter he writes:

I never quite despair and I read Shakespeare-- indeed I shall I think never read any other Book much. . . . I am very near Agreeing with Hazlitt that Shakespeare is enough for us--

(Rollins, I, p. 143)

Keats then goes on to discuss certain passages in Antony and Cleopatra. It is significant that these are passages with great human interest. Human character is beginning to engage Keats's interest more and more. In his letter to Leigh Hunt written on the same day, Keats discusses the question of Shakespeare's attitude to Christianity as revealed in his plays.

The influence of Wordsworth was probably another factor which contributed to bringing about a change in Keats's early view of poetry. His references to Wordsworth occur mostly in the letters written in 1818. But the influence of this great contemporary of his may have begun much earlier. In fact as early as in November 1816 Keats speaks of his "reverence" for Wordsworth. When Haydon wrote to Keats that he would send his (Keats's) sonnet beginning "Great Spirits now on earth sojourning" to Wordsworth, Keats replied that the idea of his sending it to Wordsworth had put him "out of breath." "[Y]ou know," he wrote to Haydon, "with what Reverence--I would send my Wellwishes to him--". Some of Keats's remarks about



Wordsworth show that he was impressed by the human content of his poetry. He considers Wordsworth to be deeper than Milton in so far as the former is able to explore and to shed light on the "dark passages" leading beyond the Chamber of Maiden Thought in the Mansion of Human Life (letter to Reynolds, 3 May 1818). In Keats's view, Wordsworth's poetry reveals his deep knowledge of the human heart. It must be noted that Wordsworth sees poetry as something firmly rooted in the soil of human life. His views on the nature and function of the poet are set forth in his "Observations prefixed to 'Lyrical Ballads.'"

"What is a Poet?" he asks, and answers:

He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the Universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them. To these qualities he has added a disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present; an ability of conjuring up in himself passions, which are indeed far from being the same as those produced by real events, yet (especially in those parts of the general sympathy which are pleasing and delightful) do more nearly resemble the passions produced by real events, than anything which, from the motions of their own minds merely, other men are accustomed to feel in themselves. . . . <sup>8</sup> (emphasis added)

About the poet's task Wordsworth remarks:

What then does the Poet? He considers man and the objects that surround him as acting and reacting upon each other, so as to produce an

infinite complexity of pain and pleasure; he considers man in his own nature and in his ordinary life as contemplating this with a certain quantity of immediate knowledge, with certain convictions, intuitions, and deductions, which from habit acquire the quality of intuitions; he considers him as looking upon this complex scene of ideas and sensations, and finding everywhere objects that immediately excite in him sympathies which, from the necessities of his nature, are accompanied by an overbalance of enjoyment.

Keats began his Endymion (April-November 1817) with the intention of making it a test of his powers of invention. He also saw in the poem an opportunity to indulge his craving for poetical luxuries. In his letter of 8 October 1817 to Benjamin Bailey, Keats copies out an extract from a letter which he had written to George and Georgiana Keats, in the previous spring:

"It [Endymion] will be a test, a trial of my Powers of Imagination and chiefly of my invention which is a rare thing indeed--by which I must make 4000 Lines of one bare circumstance and fill them with Poetry; and when I consider that this is a great task, and that when done it will take me but a dozen paces towards the Temple of Fame--it makes me say--God forbid that I should be without such a task! I have heard Hunt say and may be asked--why endeavour after a long Poem? To which I should answer--Do not the Lovers of Poetry like to have a little Region to wander in where they may pick and choose, and in which the images are so numerous that many are forgotten and found new in a second Reading: which may be food for a Week's stroll in the Summer? Do not they like this better than what they can read through before Mrs. Williams comes down stairs? a Morning work at most. Besides a long Poem is a test of Invention which I take to be the Polar Star of Poetry, as Fancy is the Sails, and Imagination the Rudder. Did our great Poets ever write short Pieces? I mean in the shape of Tales--This same invention seems indeed of late Years to have been forgotten as a Poetical excellence[.]"

(Rollins, I, pp. 169-70)

Though Endymion is a poem about love, there are many indications that it is much more than a modernized version of the ancient myth about the mortal who pined for the moon goddess. First of all, there is the letter which Keats wrote to his publisher John Taylor on 30 January 1818, requesting him to alter the first four lines of the passage about happiness (lines 777-80) in Book I. The original version was:

Wherein lies happiness? In that which beck  
 Our ready minds to blending pleasurable:  
 And that delight is the most treasurable  
 That makes the richest Alchemy. Behold  
 The clear Religion of heaven--fold &c--

About this version Keats writes to Taylor:

These lines, as they now stand about Happiness,  
 have rung in my ears like a 'chime a mending'.  
 see here,

Behold

Wherein Lies happiness Poena? fold--  
 This appears to me the very contrary of blessed.  
 (Rollins, I, p. 218)

He requests Taylor to alter these lines to

Wherein lies Happiness? In that which beck  
 Our ready Minds to fellowship divine;  
 A fellowship with essence, till we shine  
 Full alchymized and free of space. Behold  
 The clear Religion of heaven--fold &c--

Keats hopes that these lines will make the passage about happiness more intelligible. He writes:

You must indulge me by putting this in for setting aside the badness of the other, such a preface is necessary to the Subject. The whole thing must I think have appeared to you, who are a consecutive Man, as a thing almost of mere words--but I assure you that when I wrote it, it was a regular stepping of the Imagination towards a Truth. My having written that Argument will perhaps be of the greatest

Service to me of anything I ever did--It set before me, at once the gradations of Happiness even like the kind of Pleasure Thermometer--and is my first Step towards the chief Attempt in the Drama--the playing of different Natures with Joy and Sorrow.

(Rollins, I, pp. 218-19)

The fact that Keats found it necessary "to amend the first four lines of the passage about happiness in order to make it more intelligible seems to indicate that there is much more in Endymion than appears on the surface. There are also other lines in the poem which suggest this. In the hymn to Pan at the beginning of the poem the god is addressed as the "dread opener of the mysterious doors / Leading to universal knowledge" (Book I, lines 288-89):

The shepherds pray to him:

'Be still the unimaginable lodge  
For solitary thoughts; such as dodge  
Conception to the very bourne of heaven,  
Then leave the naked brain.

(Book I, ll. 293-96)

The elderly shepherds, when they retire for rest after performing the rites of Pan, choose to discourse upon "the fragile bar / That keeps us from our homes ethereal" (Book I, lines 360-61). Then there are Keats's serious observations on human life and on the workings of the human mind, scattered throughout the poem. Above all, there is Keats's description of the Cave of Quietude (Book IV, lines 513-45) which testifies to his profound knowledge of the human mind. In this passage Keats proclaims his belief in the infinite and never-failing resources of the human mind. Such passages in the poem, which reveal Keats's profound

psychological insight and knowledge of human life, indicate that Endymion is much more than a tale of love.

It must be remembered that Endymion was begun at a time when Keats was trying to sort out his ideas about poetry and to determine his poetic goals. It would not, therefore, be surprising if he used this poem to explore some of the questions that preoccupied him at this time. We are led to believe that Keats did just this. Parts of the poem seem to suggest that Endymion represents not only the lover, but also the poet. This is not to say that Endymion is a "mathematical" allegory about poetry. The poem was meant mainly as a test of Keats's power of invention. As he wrote to Benjamin Bailey, his intention was to "make 4000 Lines of one bare circumstance and fill them with Poetry." Keats's obsession with the length of the poem is responsible for the plethora of incidents in it, many of which seem to be used as mere filler. There are, however, a few incidents and episodes which stand out and which seem to have an allegorical significance.

Endymion is the poet in quest of an ideal of goal (to a certain extent, the poet seems to be Keats himself). This ideal is symbolized by Cynthia, the Moon. Endymion's first enchanting dream of the moon in her resplendent beauty as he is asleep in the woods symbolizes the poet's momentary perception of his goal. What this goal is we can only infer. Endymion tells Peona (in Book I) that ultimate happiness consists in experiencing a "fellowship

divine," a "fellowship with essence." Keats probably means that true happiness consists in knowing the soul of the universe. This presupposes an understanding of the universal scheme of things. Viewed in this light, the goal of the poet, as it was momentarily perceived by Endymion (the poet), seems to be not only to gain an insight into things, but also to write poetry which will enable the reader to "see into the life of things."<sup>10</sup> Such poetry can help the reader to experience a "fellowship divine."

Though the poet has momentarily perceived his goal, the way to reach it is as yet not clear to him. Keats is of the view that in order to reach his goal a poet has to undergo a process of development. As pointed out earlier, he had recognized the need for poetic development as early as the autumn of 1816 when he wrote "Sleep and Poetry" where he outlines the stages of this growth. Endymion's long journey in search of his "love immortal" may be viewed as the poet's tireless pursuit of his ideal.

The beautiful female figure with "a paradise of lips and eyes, / Blush-tinted cheeks, half smiles, and faintest sighs" that sails down from the skies and appears before Endymion in Book I seems to stand for sensuous beauty.<sup>11</sup> Endymion's passionate response to her beauty seems to represent Keats's early devotion to sensuous poetry. It suggests that stage of his poetic career when he was to pass the realm of Flora and old Pan, "sleep in the grass, / Feed upon apples red, and strawberries, / And

choose each pleasure that my fancy sees."<sup>12</sup> It is the stage which corresponds to the infant or thoughtless chamber in the mansion of human life.

Endymion's experiences in Book II seem to represent the poet's intoxication with sensuous beauty in the earliest stage of his development. This may account for Keats's copious use of a glaringly sensuous vocabulary in this part of the poem. Endymion's rapturous meeting with Cynthia (in a dream) towards the close of Book II may be taken to represent a higher sensuous stage, an advanced stage in the "thoughtless Chamber." In the words of Thorpe, it represents the poet's "communion with, a complete penetration into, the spirit of the sensuous."<sup>13</sup> This enriching experience paves the way for "the awakening of the thinking principle"<sup>14</sup> and with it, of human sympathy. Endymion's pity for Alpheus and Arethusa and his prayer to Diana for their happiness may be viewed as the first manifestation of the poet's newly awakened human sympathy. Keats seems to have in mind an experience similar to the one described by Wordsworth in his "Tintern Abbey Lines," where a total and passionate response to the sensuous beauty of Nature leads the poet, by degrees, to an intense awareness of "the still, sad music of humanity."

The events in Book III may be viewed as more active manifestations of the poet's human sympathy and friendship. Journeying through Neptune's kingdom, Endymion comes upon the old man Glaucus, condemned by

Circe to a thousand-year-long death-in-life at the bottom of the ocean. The aged man who has to suffer not only the physical torments of a paralyzed and senile existence but also the acute pangs of his unfulfilled love for dead Scylla, is an apt representative of suffering mankind. Impelled by pity, Endymion helps not only to release the old man from the spell of Circe, but also to bring back to life the numerous lovers lying drowned on the ocean bed. These acts of Endymion may be seen as manifestations of the poet's human sympathy, love, and friendship.

Endymion's experiences in Book IV may be taken to denote a more advanced stage in the poet's development. His relationship with the Indian Maid is weighted with symbolic significance. It is much more than a sensual passion. Endymion is drawn to the Indian Maid not merely by her physical beauty, but also by her sorrow and sufferings and her present state of desolation. She is a personification of human sorrow. Her sad song of sorrow emphasizes the fact:

To Sorrow,  
I bade good-morrow,  
And thought to leave her far away behind;  
But cheerly, cheerly,  
She loves me dearly;  
She is so constant to me, and so kind:  
I would deceive her  
And so leave her,  
But ah! she is so constant and so kind.  
(Book IV, ll. 173-81)



The song ends with a total acceptance of human sorrow:

'Come then, Sorrow!  
Sweetest Sorrow!  
Like an own babe I nurse thee on my breast:  
I thought to leave thee  
And deceive thee,  
But now of all the world I love thee best.

'There is not one,  
No; no, not one  
But thee to comfort a poor lonely maid;  
Thou art her mother,  
And her brother,  
Her playmate, and her wooer in the shade.'

(Book IV, ll. 279-90)

Endymion's love for the Indian Maid may be taken to represent the poet's love of humanity. His relationship with her symbolizes the poet's intimate, personal experience of human sorrow, as distinguished from a mere awareness of it. It seems to denote that stage in the poet's development when he begins to feel on his pulses that "the World is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression."<sup>15</sup>

Endymion now has to endure the most agonizing mental conflict--the conflict between his love for Cynthia the Moon and his love for the Indian Maid. However, the conflict is abruptly resolved towards the close of the poem, when, before his very eyes the Indian Maid is transformed into Cynthia. This signifies that the poet must have an intimate, personal experience of human sorrow and suffering before he can attain his goal. As pointed out earlier, Keats believed that the ultimate goal of the poet is to write poetry which will enable the reader to "see into the life of things" and ultimately to experience "fellowship divine."

In his letter of 29 October 1817 to Benjamin Bailey, Keats discusses Wordsworth's poem "Gipsies."<sup>15</sup> In this poem Wordsworth rebukes a group of gipsies for having remained idle for a whole day. Besides strongly condemning their idle life, he accuses the gipsies of being insensitive and unresponsive to the beauty of nature. In a note to his essay "On Manner" Hazlitt takes exception to Wordsworth's attitude to the gipsies:

Mr. Wordsworth, who has written a sonnet to the King ["November 1813"] on the good that he has done in the last fifty years, has made an attack [in "Gipsies," 1807] on a set of gipsies for having done nothing in four and twenty hours. . . . And why should they, if they were comfortable where they were? . . . What had he himself been doing in these four and twenty hours? Had he been admiring a flower, or writing a sonnet? . . . They [the gipsies] are a better answer to the cotton manufactory than Mr. W. has given in the Excursion. . . . We should be sorry to part with Mr. Wordsworth's poetry, because it amuses and interests us: we should be still sorrier to part with the tents of our old friends, the Bohemian philosophers, because they amuse and interest us more.<sup>16</sup>

After recalling Hazlitt's comment on Wordsworth's poem, Keats attempts to evaluate the poem independently. In Keats's view, neither Wordsworth nor the gipsies had been idle. He observes:

[T]hey in the visible world had been as picturesque an object as he in the invisible. The Smoke of their fire--their attitudes--their Voices were all in harmony with the Evenings--It is a bold thing to say and I would not say it in print--but it seems to me that if Wordsworth had though[t] a little deeper at that Moment he would not have written the Poem at all--I should judge it to have been written in one of the most comfortable Moods of his Life--it is a kind of sketchy intellectual Landscape--not a search after Truth--<sup>17</sup>

According to Keats, the weakness of Wordsworth's "Gipsies" lies in its superficiality, its lack of depth. He feels that while writing the poem Wordsworth failed to draw on his intimate knowledge of life or his sympathetic understanding of the human heart as he did when he wrote his great poems. The poem gives the impression that Wordsworth's deep feelings were not involved in it at all. It seems to be a product of the intellect alone. Moreover, it seems to Keats that Wordsworth was content with skimming the surface of life without plumbing its depths. In his view, Wordsworth's "Gipsies" gives no evidence of a whole-hearted "search after Truth." He seems to have violated his own rule that in order to be able to write a poem of any value, one has to think long and deeply.<sup>18</sup> Keats's comments on Wordsworth's "Gipsies" show how much his critical perceptions have deepened. He has outgrown his earlier "escapist" approach to poetry. Far from advocating a poetry of escape, he now finds fault with Wordsworth for his superficial treatment of life in "Gipsies":

Keats was tremendously impressed by Hazlitt's essay on Lear in which Shakespeare is lavishly praised for his powerful portrayal of human passions. In fact almost all of Keats's underscorings and comments in his personal copy of Hazlitt's Characters of Shakespeare's Plays (which he bought in December 1817 or early January 1818) are to be found in the chapter on Lear. He fully agrees with Hazlitt when he remarks:

The greatest strength of genius is shown in describing the strongest passions: for the power of the imagination, in works of invention, must be in proportion to the force of the natural impressions, which are the subject of them.<sup>19</sup>

Double-scoring this in the margin, Keats writes:

If we compare the Passions to different tuns and hogsheads of wine in a vast cellar--thus it is--the poet by one cup should know the scope of any particular wine without getting intoxicated--this is the Highest exertion of Power, and the next step is to paint from memory of gone self storms.<sup>20</sup>

Another passage marked by Keats has also to do with passions:

We see the ebb and flow of the feeling, its pauses and feverish starts, its impatience of opposition, its accumulating force when it has time to recollect itself, the manner in which it avails itself of every passing word or gesture, its haste to repel insinuation, the alternate contraction and dilatation of the soul.<sup>21</sup>

Beside this passage Keats writes:

This passage has hieroglyphic visioning.<sup>22</sup>

Keats is now beginning to recognize the poet's need to study the human passions.

In the poem "On Seeing a Lock of Milton's Hair," enclosed in a letter to Bailey written on 23 January 1818, Keats confesses his need to acquire knowledge and to study philosophy. He recognizes that knowledge gained through books and also from experience and thought is an indispensable part of the poet's equipment, without which it is impossible to produce great poetry:

But vain is now the burning and the strife,  
Pangs are in vain, until I grow high-rife  
With old Philosophy,  
And mad with glimpses of futurity!

(ll. 29-32)

The poet, he realizes, is no mere songbird. He is engaged in the serious task of interpreting life. Such a task demands knowledge gained through the intellect and reason. Keats feels that far from hampering the poet's visionary perception, such knowledge only strengthens it. Growing "high-rife/With old Philosophy" does not prevent the poet from becoming "mad with glimpses of futurity." This view marks a new stage in the development of Keats's thought.

Keats is aware that there are still elements in his poetry which may be described as "childish." These, he knows, must be got rid of. Moreover he must fully understand the human passions before he can hope to write poetry which can stand comparison with that of Milton:

When every childish fashion  
Has vanish'd from my rhyme,  
Will I, grey-gone in passion,  
Leave to an after-time  
Hymning and harmony  
Of thee, and of thy works, and of thy life.  
(ll. 23-28)

Keats's re-reading of Shakespeare's King Lear in January 1818 marks an important stage in his poetic development. The play had been haunting his imagination for some time. The sonnet "On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again" (written on 22 January) reveals what the re-reading of the play meant to Keats. To say the least, it was invested with a symbolic significance. Keats's decision to re-read King Lear is symbolic of his new attitude and approach to poetry. It symbolizes his awakening interest in poetry which plumbs the tragic depths of life

and his dissatisfaction with mere "romance." Keats decides to forswear allegiance to "Golden-tongued Romance, with serene lute." Romance now appears to him to be a "fair plumed Syren," tempting the aspiring poet to pursue and to rest content with the "pleasures of song." "Leave melodizing on this wintry day, / Shut up thine olden pages and be mute," he commands the enchanting temptress. Shakespeare's King Lear typifies for him poetry of an altogether higher order. According to Keats, the core of the play is "the fierce dispute / Betwixt damnation and impassion'd clay." The reader must "burn through" it. The sufferings of the aged Lear seem to Keats to be suggestive of man's tragic plight in this world where he has to be constantly engaged in a fierce fight against the evil forces that assail him from all sides. What Shakespeare's play offers is not the cloying sweetness of romance, but a "bitter" sweetness. The bitterness has to do with the human sufferings that are powerfully portrayed in the play. On coming into contact with the living poetry of King Lear at this stage, Keats realizes the serious limitations and the sad deficiencies of the poetry he had written so far. It becomes clear to him that till now he had been wandering through "the old oak Forest" of romance in a "barren dream." This stage, he realizes, will soon have to come to an end. But Keats does not want the end of this stage to mark the end of his poetic career. He wishes to pass on to a higher stage which he had

envisaged as early as in the autumn of 1816 when he wrote "Sleep and Poetry"--the stage when he will concern himself with "the agonies, the strife / Of human hearts." Keats undoubtedly has the advent of this stage in mind when he prays to Shakespeare:

When through the old oak Forest I am gone,  
Let me not wander in a barren dream,  
But, when I am consumed in the fire,  
Give me new Phoenix wings to fly at my desire.

Keats is here expressing his desire to put away "every childish fashion" and to attain poetic maturity. He turns to Shakespeare's King Lear at this point in his career with the certainty that this play in which "the fierce dispute / Betwixt damnation and impassion'd clay" is so powerfully presented will provide the necessary stimulus for his poetic growth.

The need for poetic development had been recognized by Keats as early as the autumn of 1816 when "Sleep and Poetry" was written. In January 1818 we find him still holding on to this belief. In a letter to his brothers George and Tom (23 January 1818) he observes that "nothing is finer for the purposes of great productions than a very gradual ripening of the intellectual powers."<sup>23</sup> It is in this letter that he encloses the sonnet "On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again" which expresses his desire to develop into a poet of the highest order--a poet who is genuinely concerned with the serious questions of life.

In the sonnet beginning "Spenser! a jealous honourer of thine" (probably written between late January and the end of April 1818) Keats speaks of the poet's need to know life to the core. To be able to write great poetry a poet must, in his view, study the various facets of human life. He must endeavour to gain an intimate knowledge of the world in which we live:

The flower must drink the nature of the soil  
Before it can put forth its blossoming.

Such knowledge and experience cannot, of course, be gained without toil.

In his letter of 3 May 1818 to J.H. Reynolds Keats wonders whether "Miltons apparently less anxiety for Humanity proceeds from his seeing further or no than Wordsworth" and whether "Wordsworth has in truth epic passion and martyrs himself to the human heart, the main region of his song." It is significant that Keats attempts to judge Milton and Wordsworth on the basis of the human concern of their poetry. In the same letter he remarks:

He [Milton] did not think into the human heart  
as Wordsworth has done--Yet Milton as a  
Philosopher. [sic] had sure as great powers as  
Wordsworth--

(Rollins, I, p. 282)

Keats recognizes the importance of first-hand experience.

While discussing Wordsworth, he remarks:

In regard to his genius alone--we find what he says as far as we have experienced and we can judge no further but by larger experience--for axioms in philosophy are not axioms until they are proved upon our pulses: We read fine things but never feel them to thee [sic] full until



we have gone the same steps as the Author.--I know this is not plain; you will know exactly my meaning when I say that now I shall relish Hamlet more than I ever have done--Or, better--You are sensible no man can set down Venery as a bestial or joyless thing until he is sick of it and therefore all philosophizing on it would be mere wording. Until we are sick, we understand not.

(Rollins, I, p. 279)

Keats tries to determine Wordsworth's poetic stature on the basis of his understanding of human life and his "vision into the heart and nature of Man." He points out that Wordsworth is a poet who did not tarry in the first two chambers ("the infant or thoughtless Chamber" and "the Chamber of Maiden-Thought") of the mansion of human life. According to Keats, when we are in the second chamber, "we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere, we see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there for ever in delight." But for a man of thought this is impossible. Keats continues:

However among the effects this breathing is father of is that tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of Man--of convincing ones nerves that the World is full of Misery, and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression--whereby This Chamber of Maiden Thought becomes gradually darken'd and at the same time on all sides of it many doors are set open--but all dark--all leading to dark passages-- We see not the ballance of good and evil. We are in a Mist--We are now in that state--We feel the "burden of the Mystery."

(Rollins, I, p. 281)

Keats remarks that Wordsworth had reached this point when he wrote "Tintern Abbey" and that "his Genius is explorative of those dark Passages" leading beyond "the Chamber of Maiden-Thought." In his view,

Wordsworth's greatness lies in his ability to "make discoveries, and shed a light in them." As for himself, Keats admits that he is able to describe only the first two chambers of the mansion of human life, the doors of the rest being as yet shut upon him. But he looks forward to a time when he hopes to explore, like Wordsworth, "those dark Passages" leading beyond "the Chamber of Maiden-Thought." The essence of the whole passage about the mansion of human life is that a truly great poet must pass beyond the "thoughtless Chamber" and the "Chamber of Maiden-Thought" to a stage in which he feels the "burthen of the mystery." This stage must, he believes, lead to another in which "the burthen of the mystery," that is, "the heavy and the weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world" is lightened.<sup>24</sup> A great poet must, like Wordsworth, "make discoveries and shed a light in them." Keats has indeed come a long way from his early belief that "those that love the bay" have to "fly from all sorrowing far, far away" and take refuge in a realm of pleasant wonders. Now he clearly sees that a true poet, instead of fleeing from reality, has to pass from awareness to understanding.

In "Lines Written in the Highlands after a Visit to Burns's Country" (July 1818) Keats goes so far as to assert that the real world is man's proper habitat not only in the physical but also in the psychological sense. He holds that an imaginative flight into another world for more than a short time is neither healthy nor

desirable:

Scanty the hour and few the steps beyond the bourne  
of care,  
Beyond the sweet and bitter world,--beyond it unaware!  
Scanty the hour and few the steps, because a longer  
stay  
Would bar return, and make a man forget his mortal way.

In the ode beginning "Bards of Passion and of  
Mirth" (December 1818) Keats speaks approvingly of the  
human content of the great poetry of the past. Addressing  
the great poets of old, he says:

Here your earth-born souls still speak  
To mortals, of their little weep;  
Of their sorrows and delights;  
Of their passions and their spites;  
Of their glory and their shame;  
What doth strengthen and what maim.  
(11. 29-34)

He recognizes the salutary influence of these poets on  
posterity:

Thus ye teach us every day,  
Wisdom, though fled far away.  
(11. 35-36)

In "Ode to Psyche" (written in late April 1819)  
Keats makes a solemn commitment to write poetry devoted to  
Psyche, the "latest born and loveliest vision far / Of all  
Olympus' faded hierarchy." In his view, this late-born  
goddess is fairer than "Phoeb's sapphire-region'd star, /  
Or Vesper, amorous glow-worm of the sky." By asserting  
that Psyche is more beautiful than Diana or Venus, Keats  
is proclaiming the superiority of the human mind over mere  
sensuous beauty. Psyche is the latest-born of all gods and  
goddesses because she stands for the human mind with all

its complex phenomena unlike the earlier gods and goddesses who were personifications of simple ideas like beauty or love. She is

too late for antique vows,  
 Too late for the fond believing lyre,  
 When holy were the haunted forest boughs,  
 Holy the air, the water, and the fire.  
 (ll. 36-39)

She was born in an age "far retir'd/From happy pieties." Keats admits that the ancient days when everything in Nature was regarded "holy" were indeed happy days. But this happiness was, to a large extent, the result of a lack of knowledge. The grandeur and confidence of classical and Renaissance poetry can be attributed to certain "seeming sure points of Reasoning"<sup>25</sup> which were then taken for granted. In those days Apollo was worshipped with "the fond believing lyre." In other words, the ancient poets were little perplexed by doubts or uncertainties. But the steady march of intellect has deprived man of the "seeming sure points of Reasoning" which ancient poets relied on. Modern man is plagued by uncertainties and doubts. A modern poet who wishes to be true to life and experience has therefore to adopt these very "uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts"<sup>26</sup> as the theme of his poetry. He must study and deal with the various ways in which the human mind responds to 'this unintelligible world.' This is what Keats now wishes to do. He desires to become a true votary of Psyche. He knows that this will mean sacrificing epic grandeur. He may, like Wordsworth, have to "martyr"

himself. But he is convinced that this is the only desirable course open to a modern poet.

In the last stanza of the poem Keats reveals how he intends to make good his commitment to Psyche:

Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane  
 In some untrodden region of my mind,  
 Where branched thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain  
 Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind:  
 Far, far around shall those dark cluster'd trees  
 Fledge the wild-ridged mountains steep by steep.  
 (ll. 50-55)

He will study the human mind as it explores the dark passages leading beyond the second chamber ("the Chamber of Maiden-Thought") of the mansion of human life. His poetry will henceforth be reflective in nature. The thoughts set forth in his poetry will be the result of a combination of pleasure and pain. The "pleasant pain" probably has to do with the "sweet and bitter" nature of the world which the human mind attempts to comprehend. He will attempt to conquer the "wild-ridged mountains" of the human mind. He expresses his intention to build for Psyche a "rosy sanctuary," dressed

With the wreath'd trellis of a working brain,  
 With buds, and bells, and stars without a name,  
 With all the gardener Fancy e'er could feign,  
 Who breeding flowers, will never breed the same.  
 (ll. 60-63)

What Keats means is that his poetry will be not only reflective, but also original. It will offer "all soft delight / That shadowy thought can win." Thought can only be "shadowy" because certainty is well-nigh impossible in a complex world. Nevertheless, he will attempt to shed

light on the dark crevices of the human mind.

In Keats's view, a poet must know human life to the core. He believes that a poet is more likely to gain a sympathetic understanding of the human heart if he has personally experienced the sorrows and sufferings of humanity than if he has had an easy life. In his letter of 9 June 1819 to Sarah Jeffrey, Keats writes:

One of the great reasons that the English have produced the finest writers in the world; is, that the English world has ill-treated them during their lives and foster'd them after their deaths. They have in general been trampled aside into the bye paths of life and seen the festerings of Society. They have not been treated like the Raphaels of Italy. And where is the Englishman and Poet who has given a magnificent Entertainment at the christening of one of his Hero's Horses as Boyardo did? He had a Castle in the Appenine. He was a noble Poet of Romance; not a miserable and mighty Poet of the human Heart.

(Rollins, II, p. 115)

He goes on to point out that Shakespeare, the greatest poet of the human heart, had himself been miserable:

The middle age of Shakespeare was all clouded [probably for "clouded"] over; his days were not more happy than Hamlet's who is perhaps more like Shakespeare himself in his common every day Life than any other of his Characters--

(Rollins, II, pp. 115-16)

Hyperion shows Keats's belief that in order to be a great poet, one has to gain a thorough knowledge of human life, which includes an intimate acquaintance with human sorrow and suffering. This view is symbolically expressed through the story of Apollo, who is meant by Keats to represent the poets. Apollo has a yearning for knowledge and insight. He is acutely conscious of his

"aching ignorance." This makes him melancholy:

'For me, dark, dark,  
'And painful vile oblivion seals my eyes:  
'I strive to search wherefore I am so sad,  
'Until a melancholy numbs my limbs;  
'And then upon the grass I sit, and moan,  
'Like one who once had wings,--O why should I  
'Feel curs'd and thwarted, when the liegeless air  
'Yields to my step aspirant? why should I  
'Spurn the green turf as hateful to my feet?  
'  
'Are there not other regions than this isle?  
'What are the stars? There is the sun, the sun!  
'And the most patient brilliance of the moon!  
'And stars by thousands!

(Book III, ll. 86-99)

"Point me out the way," he begs Mnemosyne, the goddess  
of memory and the mother of the Muses,

'To any one particular beauteous star,  
'And I will flit into it with my lyre  
'And make its silvery splendour pant with bliss.  
'I have heard the cloudy thunder: Where is power?  
'Whose hand, whose essence, what divinity  
'Makes this alarum in the elements,  
'While I here idle listen on the shores,  
'In fearless yet in aching ignorance?'

(Book III, ll. 99-107)

This thirst for knowledge proves to be the first step  
towards actual acquisition of it. Mnemosyne, being the  
goddess of memory, here stands for the history of mankind.  
By gazing at her silent face Apollo (who represents the  
poets) gains "knowledge enormous":

'Names, deeds, grey legends, dire events, rebellions,  
'Majesties, sovran voices, agonies,  
'Creations and destroyings, all at once  
'Pour into the wide hollows of my brain,  
'And deify me, as if some blithe wine  
'Or bright elixir peerless I had drunk,  
'And so become immortal.'

(Book III, ll. 113-20)

A major ingredient of the knowledge acquired by Apollo is a knowledge of human sorrow and suffering. Naturally this knowledge brings with it excruciating pain. The poet's whole being responds to the sum total of human misery. He "burn[s] through" an agonizing experience, very like death. It is, however, not death, but death "into life":

Soon wild commotions shook him, and made flush  
 All the immortal fairness of his limbs;  
 Most like the struggle at the gate of death;  
 Or liker still to one who should take leave  
 Of pale immortal death, and with a pang  
 As hot as death's is chill, with fierce convulse  
 Die into life: so young Apollo anguish'd;  
 His very hair, his golden tresses famed  
 Kept undulation round his eager neck.

(Book III, ll. 124-32)

"Death" suggests the poet's feeling in his own person "the giant agony of the world" and "life" suggests the intuitive insight which, Keats believes, is gained by the poet after this experience. The moment of Apollo's death into-life is the actual moment of his deification. He is now the god of poetry. He has the godlike power to "see into the life of things." Apollo's acquisition of knowledge, his suffering, and his deification are symbolic. Through this episode Keats seems to be attempting to convey the idea that if a poet is to gain the godlike power to "see into the life of things" he must first gain a thorough knowledge of human life, including a knowledge of human sorrow and suffering. But he also suggests that a mere intellectual awareness of human sorrow is not enough, although this is the starting point. The poet



must "feel" in his own person the whole weight of human sorrow. Since Hyperion is left incomplete at this point, this idea, which is suggested through the episode of Apollo's death into life, is not elaborated. The same idea is, however, taken up in The Fall of Hyperion.

The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream (written during July-August-September 1819) contains Keats's mature poetic creed. However, since his views on the nature of poetry and the role of the poet are presented symbolically in the poem, they are not easy to grasp. Moreover, Keats's use of some crucial words like "dream," "dreamer," "vision," and "visionary" with various meanings gives rise to ambiguities and apparent contradictions. Nevertheless, the general drift of the poem is clear.

In the course of the poem Keats explores a number of questions concerning poetry which are of paramount importance. Keats deals a severe blow to the conception of poetry as escape or retreat. He is also concerned with the way in which a modern poet can develop into a "miserable and mighty poet of the human heart." Above all he touches on the place and destiny of the poet in the universal scheme. Forming a background for the discussion of all these questions, is the Greek legend about the overthrow of the Titans by the Olympian gods.

The poem is cast in the form of a dream. The poet finds himself in an Eden-like garden full of "trees of every clime," enjoying the soothing sound of fountains

and the smell of roses. Near him is "an arbour with a drooping roof / Of trellis vines, and bells, and larger blooms, / Like floral censers, swinging light in air." The place offers a feast to the poet's senses. Before the wreathed doorway of the arbour a feast of summer fruits is spread on a mound of moss. Symbolically, this beautiful garden represents that stage of his poetic development which he had described as "the Chamber of Maiden-Thought" in his letter of 3 May 1818 to J.H. Reynolds. He had pointed out to Reynolds how we are impelled by the awakening of the thinking principle to enter the "Chamber of Maiden-Thought" from the "infant or thoughtless Chamber."

"[W]e no sooner get into the second chamber, which I shall call the Chamber of Maiden-Thought," he had written, "than we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere, we see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there for ever in delight." It is the realm of Flora and Pan, that is, the stage when Keats wrote "escapist" poetry, meant to give mainly sensuous pleasure. The garden satisfies the mind's longing for a perfect world free from pain and unpleasantness. It is a world which is free from the limitations of the sublunary world. It must be noted that the trees in the garden are "of every clime." The "feast of summer fruits" spread on the mound of moss is found to be "refuse of a meal / By angel tasted or our Mother Eve." The implication is that a poetry of retreat is the legacy of a comparatively innocent age of the

remote past. The yearning appetite which drives Keats to partake of the feast is symbolic of his early passion for poetical "luxuries" that resulted in the writing of sensuous and "escapist" poetry. The abundance that characterizes the feast spread before him suggests the sensuous richness of his early poetry. The drinking of the transparent juice contained in the cool vessel is symbolic of Keats's growing awareness of the real world of mortal men and women. He drinks it, "pledging all the mortals of the world, / And all the dead whose names are in our lips." This is no heavenly drink, but a drink that savours of mortality. The draught of this liquid corresponds to the darkening of the "Chamber of Maiden-Thought." As Keats wrote to Reynolds, one of the effects of breathing the air of this chamber is the sharpening of "one's vision into the heart and nature of Man--of convincing ones nerves that the World is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression--whereby This Chamber of Maiden Thought becomes gradually darken'd and at the same time on all sides of it many doors are set open--but all dark--all leading to dark passages." The moment the poet drinks the transparent juice he falls down in a swoon. When he regains his senses he finds himself in a sombre atmosphere. He looks around upon

the carved sides  
Of an old sanctuary with roof august,  
Builded so high, it seem'd that filmed clouds  
Might spread beneath, as o'er the stars of heaven.  
(Canto i, ll. 61-64)

It is the temple of some ancient religion which seems to him to be older than the oldest buildings he has seen. At his feet he finds in a mingled heap a store of "strange vessels and large draperies." Lifting his eyes from these, Keats surveys the embossed roof of the temple and its "silent massy range / Of columns north and south, ending in mist / Of nothing." Towards the east are black gates "shut against the sunrise evermore." In the west he sees

An image, huge of feature as a cloud,  
At level of whose feet an altar slept,  
To be approach'd on either side by steps,  
And marble balustrade, and patient travail  
To count with toil the innumerable degrees.

(Canto I, ll. 88-92)

Beside the shrine a priestess stands ministering, and from the altar arises a flame, sending forth Maian incense. For a moment Keats is tempted to seek "forgetfulness of everything but bliss" in the genial warmth of this sacrificial fire and the fragrance that emanates from it. Suddenly an awful voice is heard, which seems to rebuke him for his momentary desire to "escape" and to luxuriate. The female figure ministering beside the altar utters a warning:

'If thou canst not ascend  
'These steps, die on that marble where thou art.  
'Thy flesh, near cousin to the common dust,  
'Will parch for lack of nutriment--thy bones  
'Will wither in few years, and vanish so  
'That not the quickest eye could find a grain  
'Of what thou now art on that pavement cold.  
'The sands of thy short life are spent this hour,  
'And no hand in the universe can turn  
'Thy hourglass, if these gummed leaves be burnt  
'Ere thou canst mount up these immortal steps.'

(Canto I, ll. 107-17)

The temple represents man's ceaseless attempts to "guess at Heaven," his efforts to solve the mystery of the universe. In Keats's symbolism, it is the temple of consciousness.<sup>27</sup> Viewed in this light, the priestess's words warn the poetic aspirant that if he is unwilling to make an effort to enter the temple of consciousness, he will have to face poetic extinction.

In answer to the terrible summons, Keats makes a painful effort to ascend the steps in spite of the palsied chill that rises through his limbs, causing numbness in his whole body. One minute before death his iced foot touches the lowest step. The moment this happens, life seems "to pour in at the toes." It is indeed a narrow escape from death. Keats asks the veiled ministrant why he was so miraculously saved from death. She answers:

'Thou hast felt  
'What 'tis to die and live again before  
'Thy fated hour, that thou hadst power to do so  
'Is thy own safety; thou hast dated on  
'Thy doom.'

(Canto i, ll. 141-45)

When Keats expresses his bewilderment, she clarifies the meaning of her words. "None can usurp this height," she explains,

'But those to whom the miseries of the world  
'Are misery, and will not let them rest.  
'All else who find a haven in the world,  
'Where they may thoughtless sleep away their days,  
'If by a chance into this fane they come,  
'Rot on the pavement where thou rottedst half.'

(Canto i, ll. 148-53)

What the Priestess means is that Keats has outgrown the stage when he tried to escape from consciousness. He has, learnt to face and accept the pain that consciousness brings with it. Facing the pain of consciousness is an experience very like death. The Priestess tells Keats that if he had refused to face the pain of consciousness, he would have ceased to be a poet. Poetic success is beyond the reach of all those "who find a haven in the world, / Where they may thoughtless sleep away their days." Escapist tendencies and poetic aspirations are incompatible. Now that Keats has faced the pain of consciousness, he is to receive the poet's supreme reward. What this reward is becomes clear as the poem proceeds.

Keats fails to perceive that the Priestess's words are meant only for poets. Surprised to find himself alone on the altar steps, he asks the veiled figure why it is that ~~thousands of~~ poets who "love their fellows even to the death," "feel the giant agony of the world," and "labour for mortal good" like "slaves to poor humanity" have been excluded from the temple. There ensues a dialogue between the two, which turns out to be a discussion of the nature and role of the poet. Keats uses the occasion also to examine himself in the light of his own conceptions of the nature and role of a genuine poet.

"Those whom thou spak'st of are no visionaries," the veiled figure replies to the poet. She explains:

'They are no dreamers weak,  
 'They seek no wonder but the human face;  
 'No music but a happy-noted voice--  
 'They come not here, they have no thought to come--  
 'And thou art here, for thou art less than they--  
 'What benefit canst thou, or all thy tribe,  
 'To the great world? Thou art a dreaming thing,  
 'A fever of thyself--think of the Earth;  
 'What bliss even in hope is there for thee?  
 'What haven? every creature hath its home;  
 'Every sole man hath days of joy and pain,  
 'Whether his labours be sublime or low--  
 'The pain alone; the joy alone; distinct:  
 'Only the dreamer venoms all his days,  
 'Bearing more woe than all his sins deserve.  
 'Therefore, that happiness be somewhat shar'd,  
 'Such things as thou art are admitted oft  
 'Into like gardens thou didst pass erewhile,  
 'And suffer'd in these temples: for that cause  
 'Thou standest safe beneath this statue's knees.'

(Canto i, ll. 161-81)

Through the mouth of the veiled Priestess, Keats is articulating his own uncertainties, doubts, and fears about the usefulness, value, and importance of his vocation. He knows that in a sense it is better to lead a practical life, attempting to alleviate the pain of suffering humanity by direct action, than to lead a contemplative life, nurturing poetic aspirations. Those people who have opted for a life of action are not "visionaries" or "dreamers weak." The Priestess's words carry the implication that Keats is a "visionary" and a "dreamer." The two words seem to be used almost as synonyms. Keats is confronted with the challenging question:

'What benefit canst thou, or all thy tribe,  
 'To the great world?'

(Canto i, ll. 167-68)

The Priestess describes him as a dreamer who "venoms all his days, Bearing more woe than all his sins deserve."

Keats attempts to answer the Priestess's pointed question. He thinks that she is condemning poets as a whole. "Majestic shadow, tell me," he insists,

'sure not all  
'Those melodies sung into the World's ear  
'Are useless: sure a poet is a sage;  
'A humanist, physician to all men.'

(Canto i, ll. 187-90)

The three terms "sage," "humanist," and "physician" enlighten us on Keats's conception of the poet's nature and of his social role and function. The poet is a sage by virtue of his power to "see into the life of things." He may be regarded as a humanist because of his keen and abiding interest in humanity and his sympathetic understanding of the human heart. The appellation "physician" emphasizes the practical nature of the poet's vocation. In Keats's view, poetry has a therapeutic effect on the reader. It conveys to the reader the poet's intuitive understanding of the nature and meaning of the universe. By this means it takes away his fret and fever and gives him philosophic calm and poise. In so far as poetry helps to ease the "burthen of the mystery" it may be regarded as a balm and the poet as a physician. A ruthless self-examination leads Keats to admit, if only for a moment, that he has failed to perform the rôle of sage, humanist, and physician adequately. After using these three appellations to elucidate his ideas of the poet's role in society, he confesses:



'That, I am none I feel, as vultures feel  
 'They are no birds when eagles are abroad.'  
 (Canto i, ll. 191-92)

He continues:

'What am I then: Thou spakest of my tribe:  
 'What tribe?'  
 (Canto i, ll. 193-94)

The Priestess makes it clear that she is not condemning poets, but those "dreamers" who usurp the poets' title. She alleges that Keats is one such dreamer and declares emphatically that the poet and the dreamer have nothing in common:

'Art thou not of the dreamer tribe?  
 'The poet and the dreamer are distinct,  
 'Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes.  
 'The one pours out a balm upon the World,  
 'The other vexes it.'  
 (Canto i, ll. 198-202)

The word "dreamer" seems to be used here not in the sense of "visionary," but in the sense of "escapist." The escapist poet, who comes within the category of "dreamers," is not a legitimate poet, according to the Priestess. That Keats is not opposed to the use of dream or vision in poetry is proved by the fact that The Fall of Hyperion itself is cast in the form of a dream. In fact the Induction to the poem reveals that though Keats is opposed to the use of "dream" in poetry as a means of escape, he approves of its use for the revelation of truths. In his view, the distinguishing mark of the poet's dream (as opposed to that of the fanatic, the savage, or anyone else) is that it contains and reveals truths. This is undoubtedly

the distinction he has in mind when he writes concerning the poem he is about to begin:

Whether the dream now purpos'd to rehearse  
 Be poet's or fanatic's will be known  
 When this warm scribe my hand is in the grave.  
 (Canto i, ll. 16-18)

The true poet can comfort the world by revealing to it the truths which he has intuitively apprehended. The dreamer (that is, the escapist poet) is one who lives in a world of make-believe and creates for others such a world. He cannot comfort the world. All he is able to do is to offer a temporary refuge from pain and sorrow. Since fancy is only a "deceiving elf" who cannot "cheat so well / As she is fam'd to do," it is impossible either for him or for his readers to escape the sadness of the "journey homeward to habitual self."<sup>28</sup> Perhaps this is what the Priestess means when she describes the "dreamer" as one who "venoms all his days, / Bearing more woe than all his sins deserve." The contrast between the illusory world of beauty and bliss conjured up by the "dreamer" and the real world of pain and sorrow makes it all the more difficult for suffering men and women to put up with the latter. The dreamer, therefore, only "vexes" the world. The poet comforts the world by offering it the philosophic calm that comes from seeing all. The dreamer, by attempting to give the world the temporary bliss that results from seeing nothing, ultimately leads it to disillusionment. The Priestess declares that the "dreamer" (or

escapist), therefore, has no right to call himself a poet. Becoming convinced of the truth of her words, Keats joins her in condemning "all mock lyrists, large self worshippers / And careless Hectors in proud bad verse."

Lines 187-210 are taken from a manuscript that belonged to Richard Woodhouse. In this MS Woodhouse had deleted the above lines in pencil, with the remark that Keats seems to have intended to erase them. It is significant that these lines did not appear in the printed version of the poem published by Lord Houghton. This means that Keats had cancelled them in his own copy.<sup>29</sup> Two things must have led Keats to cancel these lines. First of all, in these lines Keats practically admits that he is a mere "dreamer" or "escapist," whereas he knew that he had finally outgrown his early escapist tendencies. Secondly, the lines do not fit in with the rest of the poem. Keats could not be a mere "dreamer" and at the same time one of "those to whom the miseries of the world / Are misery, and will not let them rest."

Though lines 187-210 of The Fall of Hyperion are out of place in the poem, they are invaluable to those interested in studying Keats's poetic development and the evolution of his theory of poetry. When Keats remarks that "a poet is a sage; / A humanist, physician to all men," he means what he says. The lines reveal Keats's mature views on the poet's nature and on the question of his role and function in society. So also the view that "the poet

and the dreamer are distinct, / 'Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes," expressed by the Priestess, is Keats's own. It amounts to an emphatic recantation of his early "escapist" theory of poetry.

In the rest of the poem Keats symbolically delineates a poet's death "into life." He shows how a poetic aspirant develops into a great poet after passing through the agonizing experience of taking upon him and feeling in his own person "the miseries of the world." This is done by making use of the classical legend of the Titans and the Olympian gods who overthrew them. The apparently unmerited and therefore meaningless suffering of the defeated Titans is symbolic of the tragic destiny of mankind.

When Keats asks about the place where he is, about the altar and the image, the Priestess replies:

'This temple, sad and lone,  
'Is all spar'd from the thunder of a war  
'Foughten long since by giant hierarchy  
'Against rebellion: this old image here,  
'Whose carved features wrinkled as he fell,  
'Is Saturn's; I Moneta, left supreme  
'Sole Priestess of this desolation.

(Canto i, ll. 221-27)

Moneta promises to grant Keats a boon:

'My power, which to me is still a curse,  
'Shall be to thee a wonder; for the scenes  
'Still swooning vivid through my globed brain,  
'With an electrical changing misery,  
'Thou shalt with those dull mortal eyes behold,  
'Free from all pain, if wonder pain thee not.

(Canto i, ll. 243-48)

As the first step in fulfilling her promise, she parts the veils hiding her face. Keats describes the face that he saw:

Then saw I a wan face,  
 Not pin'd by human sorrows, but bright-blanch'd  
 By an immortal sickness which kills not;  
 It works a constant change, which happy death  
 Can put no end to; deathwards progressing  
 To no death was that visage; it had past  
 The lilly and the snow; and beyond these  
 I must not think now, though I saw that face--  
 But for her eyes, I should have fled away.  
 They held me back, with a benignant light,  
 Soft mitigated by divinest lids  
 Half-closed, and visionless entire they seem'd  
 Of all external things;--they saw me not,  
 But in blank splendour, beam'd like the mild moon,  
 Who comforts those she sees not, who knows not  
 What eyes are upward cast.

(Canto i, ll. 256-71)

The poet cannot help wondering

what things the hollow brain  
 Behind enwombed: what high tragedy  
 In the dark secret chambers of the skull  
 Was acting that could give so dread a stress  
 To her cold lips, and fill with such a light  
 Her planetary eyes; and touch her voice  
 With such a sorrow.

(Canto i, ll. 276-82)

He entreats Moneta to let him behold "[w]hat in thy brain so ferments to and fro." No sooner have these words passed his lips than Keats finds Moneta and himself standing side by side

Deep in the shady sadness of a vale,  
 Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn,  
 Far from the fiery noon and eve's one star.

(Canto i, ll. 294-96)

Beneath the gloomy boughs he sees what seems to him to be a huge image similar to the one pedestaled high in Saturn's temple. But Moneta's voice explains:

'So Saturn sat  
When he had lost his Realms--'  
(Canto i, ll. 301-02)

Then comes the climactic moment of the poem. As soon as  
Moneta utters this brief sentence the meaning of the whole  
universal scheme of things dawns on Keats:

whereon there grew  
A power within me of enormous ken  
To see as a god sees and take the depth  
Of things as nimbly as the outward eye  
Can size and shape pervade.

(Canto i, ll. 302-06)

Keats goes on to unfold the story of the defeated Titans  
which he had already done in the first Hyperion.

The scene in which Keats finds himself bears ample  
testimony to the sorrow and despair of the defeated Titans:

No stir of life  
Was in this shrouded vale, not so much air  
As in the zoning of a summer's day  
Robs not one light seed from the feather'd grass,  
But where the dead leaf fell there did it rest:  
A stream went voiceless by, still deaden'd more  
By reason of the fallen divinity  
Spreading more shade; the Naiad 'mid her reeds  
Prest her cold finger closer to her lips.

(Canto i, ll. 310-18)

In this secluded spot sat Saturn, the very picture of  
despair:

Along the margin-sand large footmarks went  
No farther than to where old Saturn's feet  
Had rested, and there slept, how long a sleep!  
Degraded, cold, upon the sodden ground  
His old right hand lay nerveless, listless, dead,  
Unsculptured; and his realmless eyes were clos'd  
While his bow'd head seem'd listening to the Earth.  
His ancient-mother, for some comfort yet.

(Canto i, ll. 319-26)

Thea (Hyperion's spouse) who comes to him has no words of  
consolation to offer him. She presses "her fair large

forehead to the earth, / Just where her fallen hair might  
 spread in curls, / A soft and silken mat for Saturn's feet."  
 Keats stands there for a long time, looking upon the  
 "frozen God still bending to the earth, / And the sad  
 Goddess weeping at his feet, / Moneta silent." The poet  
 feels with every fibre of his being the agony of these  
 suffering divinities:

Without stay or prop,  
 But my own weak mortality I bore  
 The load of this eternal quietude,  
 The unchanging gloom, and the three fixed shapes  
 Ponderous upon my senses, a whole moon.  
 For by my burning brain I measured sure  
 Her silver seasons shedded on the night,  
 And ever day by day methought I grew  
 More gaunt and ghostly.--Oftentimes I pray'd  
 Intense, that Death would take me from the Vale  
 And all its burthens--gasping with despair  
 Of change, hour after hour I curs'd myself.

(Canto i, ll. 388-99)

Saturn's lamentations bring out the tragedy of the Titan's  
 downfall. Their sufferings are apparently unmerited.

Saturn recalls that as gods they did not lack benignity:

'Moan, brethren, moan; for we are swallow'd up  
 'And buried from all Godlike exercise  
 'Of influence benign on planets pale,  
 'And peaceful sway above man's harvesting,  
 'And all those acts which Deity supreme  
 'Doth ease its heart of love in.

(Canto i, ll. 412-17)

The tone of his lamentations reveals that he has indeed  
 been changed from "a god into a shaking Palsy":

'Moan, brethren, moan, for I have no strength left,  
 'Weak as the reed--weak--feeble as my voice--  
 'O, O, the pain, the pain of feebleness.  
 'Moan, moan, for still I thaw--or give me help;  
 'Throw down those imps, and give me victory.

(Canto i, ll. 427-31)

He speaks in such a feeble and pitiable voice that it seems to Keats as if he is listening to "some old man of the earth / Bewailing earthly loss." Canto i of the poem comes to an end as Thea leads Saturn to "the families of grief, / Where roof'd in by black rocks they waste, in pain / And darkness, for no hope."

In Canto ii of the poem Keats was to unfold the story of the downfall of Hyperion, one of the Titans who "still keeps / His sov'reignty, and rule, and majesty." Moneta tells the poet that though Hyperion is still un-fallen, he is frightened by the signs and omens which presage his impending doom. As a result, instead of resting on his "exalted couch" after his diurnal journey across the sky, he "paces through the pleasant hours of ease" with "strides colossal, on from hall to hall" (Canto ii, ll. 38-39). As his minions stand amazed and full of fear, he proceeds to the threshold of the west, leaving twilight in the rear. Moneta takes the poet thither. He sees Hyperion rushing by, his "flaming robes stream'd out beyond his heels." At this point the poem is abandoned.

The heart of the poem is the poet's encounter with Moneta. The whole episode is symbolic. Saturn, Moneta, and Saturn's temple are weighted with symbolic significance. The overthrow of the Titans by the Olympian gods is meant to suggest symbolically the remorseless mutability which characterizes the human world. The fall of the chief Titan Saturn is symbolic of the tragic destiny of mankind.



Satura's temple is the temple of consciousness because consciousness means an acute awareness of the tragic destiny of mankind. Moneta, being the priestess of Saturn, is one of the chief victims of the tragedy of his downfall. She seems to be meant by Keats to symbolize the human world become conscious of its own tragic destiny. As John Middleton Murry explains, if we can "imagine all humanity from the dark backward and abysm of time to the extreme of the indecipherable future as one single being, then Saturn is its body and Moneta its mind."<sup>30</sup> On Moneta's face is written not only the tragic destiny of mankind, but the meaning of this destiny. She is one who has not only known "the giant agony of the world," but also understood its meaning. This accounts for the mysterious quality of her face. John Middleton Murry comments on Keats's lines describing Moneta's face:

They contain a vision of the soul of the world, an apprehension of an ultimate reality. No more perfect or more wonderful symbol of the unspeakable truth has ever been imagined. There is unity, there is calm, there is beauty; it is a vision of a single thing. Yet in that single thing what strange elements are combined? Pain, an eternity of pain; change, an eternity of change; death, an eternity of death; terror, yet no terror; instead, measureless benignity; yet this infinite of love touches no person; it is eternal and impersonal, 'comforting those it sees not.' That, if the word be accepted, is a great poet's vision of God--but of a godhead immanent in the changing and enduring reality of the world.<sup>31</sup>

It is difficult to give a better "interpretation" of Moneta's face. What is written on her face is the tragedy of the Titans which symbolizes the tragedy of mankind.

When Keats entreats Moneta to let him behold the scenes "still swooning vivid" through her brain with "an electrical changing misery," what he is granted is a vision of the fallen Saturn as he sits "beneath the gloomy boughs" in "the shady sadness of a vale," far away from "the healthy breath of morn." It is a symbolic picture of suffering mankind. Through a sight of Moneta's face and an understanding of its meaning Keats gains soul-knowledge, by virtue of which he becomes a great poet. He gains the power to "see as a god sees, and take the depth / Of things as nimbly as the outward eye / Can size and shape pervade." He acquires an intuitive insight into the nature of reality. This, in Keats's view, is the supreme reward of the poet. What he attempts to convey through this episode is his belief that it is possible to achieve poetic excellence only if the poet has passed through the agonizing experience of death in life, which is really a death "into life." This supreme poetic experience consists not merely in realizing that "the World is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression," but in feeling the weight of human sorrow. A mere intellectual awareness of the sorrows of the world is not enough. What is needed is soul-knowledge. The poet must feel in his own person the sum total of human misery. The experience envisaged by Keats implies not only an intimate knowledge and experience of human sorrow, but also the acceptance of its inevitability. This, of course, includes an acceptance of death

(one's own and that of others), the most painful of all human experiences.<sup>32</sup> Keats accepts the tragic destiny of mankind (symbolized by the tragedy of the Titans) which is written on Moneta's face. Every fibre of his body feels the pain which such an acceptance involves, before he receives the poet's supreme reward, viz. the power to, "see as a god sees, and take the depth / Of things as nimbly as the outward eye / Can size and shape pervade."

The Fall of Hyperion was left incomplete by Keats for two main reasons. Both are mentioned by John Middleton Murry. First of all, though Keats is able to reach the height of comprehension and to look upon the agony of suffering mankind (revealed through Moneta's face) without pain for a moment, he is unable to remain at that height for long. This is because his own share of this agony is too real and too great to be borne with equanimity. He is forced to betray his vision in the latter part of the poem where he writes lines which reveal a mood of despair:

Oftentimes I pray'd  
Intense, that Death would take me from the Vale  
And all its burthens--gasping with despair  
Of change, hour after hour I curs'd myself.  
(Canto i, ll. 396-99)

In such a mood it was impossible for Keats to continue the poem.<sup>33</sup> Secondly, the poet has already seen the soul of the world through the face of Moneta. What he saw has been revealed to the reader. What remains to be revealed is the body, the story of the fall of the Titans, which has already been dealt with in the first Hyperion. Now that the soul

has already been revealed, the revelation of the body cannot but constitute an anti-climax. Knowing this, Keats chooses to abandon the poem.<sup>34</sup> However, though the poem is incomplete, The Fall of Hyperion may be regarded as Keats's final word on the nature of the poet and on his role and function in the universal scheme.

If Keats regarded the poet as an "escapist" in the early days of his poetic career, he later came to regard him as a "sage," a "humanist," and a "physician to all men." If in the beginning poetry was for Keats something out of touch with the real world, later it came to be something firmly rooted in the real world and drawing sustenance from human life.

The change in Keats's theory of poetry can, to a certain extent, be attributed to his keen interest in human nature and character in the last few years of his life. His letters of this period testify to his growing interest in men and women. "Scenery is fine," Keats writes to Benjamin Bailey (13 March 1818), "but human nature is finer--The sward is richer for the tread of a real, nervous, english foot--the eagles nest is finer for the Mountaineer has look'd into it--"<sup>35</sup> In his letter of 17 November 1819 to John Taylor he writes:

As the marvellous is the most enticing and the surest guarantee of harmonious numbers I have been endeavouring to persuade myself to untether Fancy and let her manage for herself--I and myself cannot agree about this at all. Wonders are no wonders to me. I am more at home amongst Men and women. I would rather read Chaucer than Ariosto--  
(Rollins, II, p. 234)

Concerning the plan he has had for some time of taking up a job as Surgeon aboard an Indiaman he writes to Sarah Jeffrey on 9 June 1819:

Your advice about the Indiaman is a very wise advice, because it just suits me, though you are a little in the wrong concerning its destroying the energies of Mind: on the contrary it would be the finest thing in the world to strengthen them--To be thrown among people who care not for you, with whom you have no sympathies forces the Mind upon its own resources [sic], and leaves it free to make its speculations of the differences of human character and to class them with the calmness of a Botanist. An Indiaman is a little world.

(Rollins, II, p. 115)

Keats shows a keen interest in the character of his own friends. His reaction to the quarrels among his friends reveals his sympathetic understanding of human nature. He writes to Benjamin Bailey on 23 January 1818:

Things have happen'd lately of great Perplexity-- You must have heard of them--Reynolds and Haydon retorting and recriminating--and parting for ever--the same thing has happened between Haydon and Hunt--It is unfortunate--Men should bear with each other--there lives not the Man who may not be cut up, aye hashed to pieces on his weakest side. The best of Men have but a portion of good in them--a kind of spiritual yeast in their frames which creates the ferment of existence--by which a Man is propell'd to act and strive and buffet with Circumstance. The sure way Bailey, is first to know a Man's faults, and then be passive, if after that he insensibly draws you towards him then you have no Power to break the link. Before I felt interested in either Reynolds or Haydon--I was well read in their faults yet knowing them I have been cementing gradually with both--I have an affection for them both for reasons almost opposite--and to both must I of necessity cling--supported always by the hope that when a little time--a few years shall have tried me more fully in their esteem I may be able to bring them together--the time must come because they have both hearts--and they will recollect the best parts of each other when this gust is over-blown.

(Rollins, I, pp. 209-210)

The gradual change in Keats's attitude to life, which brought about significant changes in his view of poetry, is tellingly described by him in his letter of 11 July 1819 to J.H. Reynolds:

I have of late been moulting: not for fresh feathers & wings: they are gone, and in their stead I hope to have a pair of patient sub-lunary legs. I have altered, not from a chrysalis into a butterfly, but the Contrary having two little loopholes, whence I may look out into the stage of the world.

(Rollins, II, p. 128)

What Keats means is that he no longer attempts to fly to an imaginary world of bliss when confronted with the sorrows and sufferings of human life. He is learning to accept and face life, whatever prospect it offers. He is learning, moreover, to take delight in the varying human drama that is perpetually enacted on the stage of the world.

Just as Keats gradually came to recognize the vital connection between poetry and human life, he also came to recognize the important role played by intellect, judgment, and thought in poetic creation. He came to realize that knowledge gained through the intellect is an indispensable part of the poet's equipment.

In his letter of 3 May 1818 to J.H. Reynolds, Keats writes about the importance and advantage of acquiring a general knowledge. "Every department of knowledge," he writes, "we see excellent and calculated towards a great whole."<sup>36</sup> He is glad at not having given away his medical books, as he hopes to make use of them later. In the same letter he also expresses his desire to acquire a knowledge

of law. "An extensive knowledge," he writes, "is needful to thinking people--it takes away the heat and fever; and helps, by widening speculation, to ease the Burden of the Mystery: a thing I begin to understand a little. . . ."

He continues:

The difference of high Sensations with and without knowledge appears to me this--in the latter case we are falling continually ten thousand fathoms deep and being blown up again, without wings and with all [the] horror of a bare shouldered Creature--in the former case our shoulders are fledged [for "fledged"], and we go thro' the same air and space without fear.

(Rollins, I, p. 277)

Realizing that he is deficient in knowledge, experience, and wisdom which he now considers necessary for achieving poetic excellence, Keats endeavours to acquire these. He writes to John Taylor on 24 April 1818:

I know nothing, I have read nothing and I mean to follow Solomon's directions of 'get Wisdom--get understanding--I find cavalier days are gone by. I find that I can have no enjoyment in the World but continual drinking of Knowledge--I find there is no worthy pursuit but the idea of doing some good for the world--some do it with their society--some with their wit--some with their benevolence--some with a sort of power of conferring pleasure and good humour on all they meet and in a thousand ways all equally dutiful to the command of Great Nature--there is but one way for me--the road lies though [for "through"] application study and thought. . . . I have been hovering for some time between an exquisite sense of the luxurious and a love for Philosophy--were I calculated for the former I should be glad--but as I am not I shall turn all my soul to the latter.

(Rollins, I, p. 271)

Keats expresses his intention to retire for some years to prepare himself for the vocation of a poet..

In his letter to J.A. Hessey (8 October 1818) Keats, while admitting that he had written Endymion "independently without Judgment," proposes to write in future "independently & with judgment."<sup>37</sup> He recognizes a poet's need to temper his imagination with judgment.<sup>38</sup> On 8 March 1819 Keats writes to B.R. Haydon:

. . . I have come to the resolution never to write for the sake of writing, or making a poem, but from running over with any little knowledge and experience which many years of reflection may perhaps give me--otherwise I will be dumb.

(Rollins, II, p. 43)

About his sonnet beginning "Why did I laugh tonight," Keats writes:

. . . it was written with no Agony but that of Ignorance; with no thirst of any thing but knowledge when pushed to the point though the first steps to it were through[h] my human passions--they went away, and I wrote with my Mind. . . .

About his "Lamia" Keats writes to J.H. Reynolds that he has great hopes of success because in this poem he is making use of his judgment more deliberately than he has yet done.<sup>39</sup> By making deliberate use of his judgment Keats hopes to be "a little more of a Philosopher" than he was and consequently "a little less of a versifying Petrarch."<sup>40</sup>

Keats came to realize that in order to be a great poet he had to develop from a mere dreamer into a profound thinker. He also realized that in this process of development his poetic ardour and fire would have to yield to a more sedate power. In his letter of 21 September 1819 to his brother and sister-in-law, he wrote:



Some think I have lost that poetic ardour and fire  
't is said I once had--the fact is perhaps I have:  
but instead of that I hope I shall substitute a  
more thoughtful and quiet power.

(Rollins, II, p. 209)

Keats's recognition that poetry can and must have an  
intellectual substratum indicates a major shift from his  
early view that it appeals mainly to the senses.

7  
CHAPTER III

NEGATIVE CAPABILITY

In the previous chapter it was shown how Keats came to view the poet as a "sage," a "humanist," and a "physician to all men"; it was shown how he came to believe that the poet should help to lighten our "burthen of the mystery" by enabling us to "see into the life of things." The question remains how the poet is to carry out the task of interpreting life. The answer to this question centres upon Keats's notion of "negative capability" and his conception of the relationship between Beauty and Truth.

The phrase "negative capability" is used by Keats in his letter of 21, 27 (?) December 1817 to his brothers George and Tom. He tells his brothers how this notion towards which he had been groping for months suddenly took definite shape while he was engaged in a "disquisition" with his friend Charles Wentworth Dilke:

Brown & Dilke walked with me & back from the Christmas pantomime--I had not a dispute but a disquisition with Dilke, on various subjects; several things dovetailed in my mind, & at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously--I mean Negative Capability, that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason--Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetrallium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge. This

pursued through Volumes would perhaps take us no further than this; that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration.

(Rollins, I, pp. 193-96)

From a remark made by Keats in a letter written to his brother and sister-in-law in September 1819,<sup>1</sup> it becomes clear that in his view, whether or not a person has the capacity to be "in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason" depends on whether or not that person has a desire to have a "personal identity" and if he has, on his notion of "personal identity." The remark is a part of Keats's reflections on the character of his friend Charles Dilke. Dilke, he writes, is "a Man who cannot feel he has a personal identity unless he has made up his mind about every thing." The notion of "negative capability" is thus very much related to the question of personal identity. In fact, as a term of criticism, "negative capability" has reference to the nature and character of a poet as well as to the manner in which he interprets life.

The poetical character was of utmost interest to Keats. A considerable portion of his critical thought is devoted to this subject. In Keats's view, some of the marks of a truly poetical character are selflessness, empathy or the capacity for sympathetic identification with people and objects, disinterestedness, receptivity, acceptance, a strong faith in intuitive imagination, and a distrust of "consecutive

reasoning."<sup>2</sup>

In Keats's view, selflessness is not only a religious virtue, but also an important poetic virtue. Quite early in his poetic career he came to realize that in order to be a great poet one must learn to "annihilate self."<sup>3</sup> As it was pointed out in the previous chapter, Keats seems to have believed that the ultimate goal of the poet was to attain (and help the readers to attain) the "happiness" that consists in "a fellowship divine," a "fellowship with essence". (Endymion, Book I, lines 777-80). In his view, such an experience presupposes a total annihilation of the poet's self or individuality. He thinks that this is possible only after the poet has passed through a number of stages, all of which involve the negation of the self in varying degrees.<sup>4</sup> First comes the stage when the poet enjoys the pleasures of the senses. This is followed by the stage which is characterized by the pleasures of fancy. This stage leads to stages of "richer entanglements, enthrallments far more self-destroying." Of these the first is the stage of friendship, followed by the stage of love. All these stages lead by degrees to "the chief intensity"--the final stage characterized by "fellowship divine," a "fellowship with essence."

Keats regards an excessive preoccupation with the self and with personal identity as a serious flaw in a poet. It is interesting to note that for all his admiration for Wordsworth, he dislikes his egotistical nature. Keats

admits that Wordsworth's is a "sublime" egotism.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, it is, in his view, a serious drawback. Keats's strong feelings against an excessive subjectivity in poetry are expressed in The Fall of Hyperion, where he lashes out at the egoists who, in his view, have usurped the poet's title:

'Apollo! faded! O far flown Apollo!  
 'Where is thy misty pestilence to creep  
 'Into the dwellings, through the door crannies  
 'Of all mock lyrists, large self worshipers  
 'And careless Hectors in proud bad verse.  
 'Though I breathe death with them it will be life  
 'To see them sprawl before me into graves.'  
 (Canto i, ll. 204-10)

Keats believes that the ideal poet has no fixed character or individuality. He writes to Benjamin Bailey on 22 November 1817:

In passing however I must say of one thing that has pressed upon me lately and encreased my Humility and capability of submission and that is this truth--Men of Genius are great as certain ethereal Chemicals operating on the Mass of neutral intellect--by [for "but"] they have not any individuality, any determined character. I would call the top and head of those who have a proper self Men of Power--

(Rollins, I, p. 184)

There is little doubt that when Keats refers to "Men of Genius" he has in mind mainly those who have distinguished themselves in the literary field, especially in the field of poetry.

Keats holds that the poet's lack of a personal identity enables him to easily identify himself, by an act of sympathy, with other people and objects. In the poetic fragment entitled "The Poet," which Keats probably wrote in

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the autumn of 1817, he regards empathy as the distinguishing mark of a poet:

Where's the Poet? show him! show him,  
Muses nine! that I may know him!  
'Tis the man who with a man  
Is an equal, be he King,  
Or poorest of the beggar-clan,  
Or any other wondrous thing  
A man may be 'twixt ape and Plato;  
'Tis the man who with a bird,  
Wren or Eagle, finds his way to  
All its instincts; he hath heard  
The Lion's roaring, and can tell  
What his horny throat expresseth,  
And to him the Tiger's yell  
Comes articulate and presseth  
On his ear like mother-tongue.

In his letter of 27 October 1818 to Richard Woodhouse, while distinguishing his own poetical character from the "Wordsworthian or egotistical sublime," Keats once again dwells on the idea that the ideal poet has no fixed identity and that he is endowed with the power of identifying himself imaginatively with people and objects:

As to the poetical Character itself, (I mean that sort distinguished from the Wordsworthian or egotistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone) it is not itself--it has no self--it is every thing and nothing--It has no character. . . . A Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity--he is continually in for<sup>6</sup> and filling some other Body--The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute--the poet has none; no identity--he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's Creatures.

(Rollins, I, pp. 386-87)

He would have fully agreed with Hazlitt when he observed about Shakespeare:

He was the least of an egotist that it was possible to be. He was nothing in himself; but he was all.

that others were, or that they could become. . . . He had only to think of anything in order to become that thing, with all the circumstances belonging to it. . . . The poet may be said, for the time, to identify himself with the character he wishes to represent, and to pass from one to another, like the same soul successively animating different bodies.

Keats often refers to his own empathic power. In his letter of 22 November 1817 to Benjamin Bailey, he claims that when a sparrow comes before his window he can "take part in its existence and pick about the Gravel." "On

24 October 1818 he writes to his brother and sister-in-law:

I feel more and more every day, as my imagination strengthens, that I do not live in this world alone but in a thousand worlds--No sooner am I alone than shapes of epic greatness are stationed around me, and serve my Spirit the office which is equivalent to a king's body guard--then "Tragedy, with scepter'd pall comes sweeping by" According to my state of mind I am with Achilles shouting in the Trenches or with Theocritus in the Vales of Sicily. Or I throw my whole being into Triolus [for "Troilus"] and repeating those lines, "I wander, like a lost soul upon the stygian Banks staying for waffage. . . ."

(Rollins, I, pp. 403-04)

In his letter of 27 October 1818 to Woodhouse, after dwelling on the question of the poet's lack of a personal identity, he writes:

If then he [the poet] has no self and if I am a Poet, where is the Wonder that I should say I would write no more? Might I not at that very instant [have] been cogitating on the Characters of Saturn and Ops? It is a wretched thing to confess; but is a very fact that not one word I ever utter can be taken for granted as an opinion growing out of my identical nature--how can it, when I have no nature? When I am in a room with People if I ever am free from speculating on creations of my own brain, then not myself goes home to myself; but the identity of every one in the room begins to to [sic] press upon

me that, I am in a very little time annihilated--  
 not only among Men; it would be, the same in a  
 Nursery of children. . . .

(Rollins, I, p. 387)

The distinction drawn by Keats between himself and those of  
 the Wordsworthian school is explained by Richard Woodhouse  
 in a letter written to John Taylor on 27 October 1818:

There are gradations in Poetry & in Poets. One  
 is purely descriptive confining himself to  
 external nature & visible objects--Another describes  
 in add<sup>n</sup> the effects of the thoughts of wh: he is  
 conscious--& wh: others are affected by--Another  
 will soar so far into the regions of imagination  
 as to conceive of beings & substances in situations  
 different from what he has ever seen them but still  
 such as either have actually occurred or may  
 possibly occur--Another will reason in poetry--  
 another be witty.--Another will imagine things that  
 never did nor probably will occur, or such as can  
 not in nature occur & yet he will describe them  
 so that you recognize nothing very unnatural in  
 the Descriptions when cert<sup>n</sup> principles or powers  
 or cond<sup>ns</sup> are admitted--Another with [for "will"]  
 throw himself into various characters & make them  
 speak as the passions wo<sup>d</sup> naturally incite them to  
 do The highest order of Poet will not only possess  
 all the above powers but will have as high an  
 imag<sup>n</sup> that he will be able to throw his own soul  
 into any object he sees or imagines, so as to see  
 feel be sensible of, & express, all that the object  
 itself wo<sup>d</sup> see feel be sensible of or express--& he  
 will speak out of that object--so that his own self  
 will with the Exception of the Mechanical part be  
 "annihilated"--and it is the excess of this power  
 that I suppose Keats speaks,<sup>8</sup> when he says he  
 has no identity--As a poet, and when the fit is  
 upon him, this is true--And it is a fact that he  
 does by the power of his Imag<sup>n</sup> create ideal per-  
 sonages substances & Powers--that he lives for a  
 time in their souls or Essences or ideas--and that  
 occasionally so intensely as to lose consciousness  
 of what is round him.

(Rollins, I, pp. 388-89)

In the same letter he writes to Taylor that Keats has  
 affirmed "that he can conceive of a billiard Ball that it



may have a sense of delight from its own roundness, smoothness volubility. & the rapidity of its motion.--"

Keats is naturally drawn to empathic images and descriptions in poetry. His response to these testifies to his own empathic power. As Walter Jackson Bate has pointed out,<sup>9</sup> the image in Spenser's The Faerie Queene which, according to Keats's boyhood friend Charles Cowden Clarke, particularly appealed to Keats, is remarkable for empathy. On first coming across the expression "sea-shouldering whales" in The Faerie Queene, Keats "hoisted himself up, and looked burly and dominant," as he said, "what an image that is--'sea-shouldering whales!'"<sup>10</sup> Keats undoubtedly felt the weight of the heaving sea waves on his own shoulders. Shakespeare's lines (in Venus and Adonis) describing the withdrawal of a snail into its shell, about which Keats writes appreciatively in his letter of 22 November 1817 to J.H. Reynolds, are also characterized by a similar empathy:

As the snail, whose tender horns being hit,  
Shrinks back into his shelly cave with pain  
And there all smothered up in shade doth sit,  
Long after fearing to put forth again;  
So at his bloody view her eyes are fled,  
Into the deep dark Cabins of her head.

(ll. 1033-38, slightly misquoted by Keats)

About Book IX, lines 179-91 of Milton's Paradise Lost

Keats remarks:

Satan having entered the Serpent, and inform'd his brutal sense--might seem sufficient--but Milton goes on "but his sleep disturb'd not." Whose spirit does not ache at the smothering and confinement--the unwilling stillness--the "waiting close?"

Whose head is not dizzy at the possible speculations of Satan in the serpent prison? No passage of poetry ever can give a greater pain of suffocation.<sup>11</sup>

It is clear that Keats regards empathy as an important poetic virtue. This power (which is the basis of all altruistic actions)<sup>12</sup> is, according to him, an important part of the poet's mental make-up. It is this power which, in his view, enables the poet to understand the workings of the human mind and to master the secrets of the human heart.

Like empathy, Keats regards disinterestedness as an important poetic virtue. In his view, a disinterested state of mind--a state characterized by a total freedom from personal desires and preoccupations--is ideal for poetic creation. In a letter written to his brother and sister-in-law on 19 March 1819 Keats describes such a state of mind:

This morning I am in a sort of temper indolent and supremely careless: I long after a stanza or two of Thompson's [for "Thomson's"] Castle of Indolence-- My passions are all asleep [sic] from my having slumbered till nearly eleven and weakened the animal fibre all over me to a delightful sensation about three degrees on this side of faintness--if I had teeth of pearl and the breath of lillies I should call it languor--but as I am + I must call it Laziness--In this state of effeminacy the fibres of the brain are relaxed in common with the rest of the body, and to such a happy degree that pleasure has no show of enticement and pain no unbearable frown. Neither Poetry, nor Ambition, nor Love have any alertness of countenance as they pass by me: they seem rather like three figures on a greek vase-- a Man and two women--whom no one but myself could distinguish in their disguise. This is the only happiness; and is a rare instance of advantage in the body overpowering the Mind.

(Rollins, II, pp. 78-79)

The mental and bodily states described in this letter are later described in "Ode on Indolence" (May-June 1819):

Ripe was the drowsy hour;  
The blissful cloud of summer-indolence  
Benumb'd my eyes; my pulse grew less and less;  
Pain had no sting, and pleasure's wreath no flower.  
(ll. 15-18)

In this state he has no personal interest in any earthly pursuit, either Love or Ambition or Poesy:

What is love! and where is it?  
And for that poor Ambition! it springs  
From a man's little heart's short fever-fit;  
For Poesy!--no,--she has not a joy,--  
At least for me,--so sweet as drowsy noons,  
And evenings steep'd in honied indolence.  
(ll. 42-47)

Such a state of calm detachment which can be attained by a poet has much to do with his selflessness and the universality of his spirit. Keats had earlier (probably in the spring of 1817) written that the "genius of Shakespeare was an innate universality--wherefore he had the utmost achievement of human intellect prostrate beneath his indolent and kingly gaze."<sup>13</sup> He believes that such universality and disinterestedness form the essence of the poetical character. Keats himself strove to gain this serenity of mind. He wrote to George and Georgiana Keats on 21 September 1819:

Some think I have lost that poetic ardour and fire 't is said I once had--the fact is perhaps I have: but instead of that I hope I shall substitute a more thoughtful and quiet power. I am more frequently, now, contented to read and think--but now & then haunted with ambitious thoughts. Qui[eter] in my pulse, improved in my digestion; exerting myself against vexing speculations--scarcely

content to write the best verses for the fever they  
leave behind. I want to compose without this fever.  
I hope I one day shall. (emphasis added)

(Rollins, II, p. 209)

About his "Ode to Psyche" Keats wrote to his brother and sister-in-law on 30 April 1819 that of all the poems enclosed with the letter<sup>14</sup> (dated 14, 19 February, 3 (?), 12, 13, 17, 19 March, 15, 16, 21, 30 April, 3 May 1819) it was the only one with which he had taken even moderate pains. He continues:

I have for the most part dash'd of [sic] my lines in a hurry--This I have done leisurely--I think it reads the more richly for it and will I hope encourage me to write other thing[s] in even a more peacable [sic] and healthy spirit. (emphasis added)  
(Rollins, II, pp. 105-06)

Keats believed that the ability to write in a "peacable and healthy spirit" (by which he meant a detached state of contemplation) marked the height of poetic power. He also knew that only a disinterested person could hope to gain this supreme poetic power.

Negative capability involves an openness to experience. In his letter of 19 February 1818 to J.H. Reynolds, Keats dwells on the importance of receptivity. In his view, it is much more desirable to be passive, yet open and receptive than to fret after knowledge or to reach after fact and reason impatiently:

It has been an old comparison for our urging on--the Bee hive--however it seems to me that we should rather be the flower than the Bee--for it is a false notion that more is gained by receiving, than giving,--no the receiver and the giver are equal in their benefits--The fl[ower] I doubt not receives a fair guerdon from the Bee--its leaves

Blush deeper in the next spring--and who shall say  
 between Man and Woman which is the most delighted?  
 Now it is more noble to sit like Jove that [for  
 "than"] to fly like Mercury--let us not therefore  
 go hurrying about and collecting honey-bee like,  
 buzzing here and there impatiently from a  
 knowledge of what is to be arrived at: but let  
 us open our leaves like a flower and be passive  
 and receptive--budding patiently under the eye of  
 Apollo and taking hints from every noble insect  
 that favors us with a visit--sap will be given  
 for Meat and dew for drinks--

(Rollins, I, p. 232)

In the same letter Keats recommends a state of "diligent  
 indolence":

I have an idea that a Man might pass a very pleasant  
 life in this manner--let him on any certain day  
 read a certain Page of full Poesy or 'distilled  
 Prose and let him wander with it, and muse upon  
 it and reflect from it, and bring home to it, and  
 prophesy upon it, and dream upon it--until it  
 becomes stale--but when will it do so? Never--  
 When Man has arrived at a certain ripeness in  
 intellect any one grand and spiritual passage serves  
 him as a starting post towards all "the two-and  
 thirty Pallaces" How happy is such a "voyage of  
 conception," what delicious diligent Indolence!  
 A doze upon a Sofa does not hinder it, and nap  
 upon Clover engenders ethereal finger-pointings--  
 the prattle of a child gives it wings and the  
 converse of middle age a strength to beat them--  
 a strain of musick conducts to 'an odd angle of  
 the Isle' and when the leaves whisper it puts a  
 'girdle round the earth.

(Rollins, I, p. 231)

The ideas expressed in this letter are also expressed in  
 the sonnet beginning "O thou whose face hath felt" (February  
 1818), where the message is meant mainly for poets:

O fret not after knowledge--I have none,  
 And yet my song comes native with the warmth.  
 O fret not after knowledge--I have none,  
 And yet the Evening listens. He who saddens  
 At thought of idleness cannot be idle,  
 And he's awake who thinks himself asleep.

In the letter written to Richard Woodhouse on 27 October 1818, Keats points out that a genuine poet will show an openness to the diversity of experience, both pleasant and unpleasant. In his view, the bright and the dark aspects of life will engage his attention equally:

As to the poetical character itself, (I mean that sort of which, if I am anything, I am a Member; that sort distinguished from the Wordsworthian or egotistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone) it is not itself--it has no self--it is every thing and nothing--It has no character--it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated--It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosop[h]er, delights the camellion Poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things any more than from its taste for the bright one; because they both end in speculation.  
(emphasis added)

(Rollins, I, pp. 386-87)

In his letter of 24 September 1819 to his brother and sister-in-law Keats once again emphasizes the need to have an open and receptive mind. He finds his friend Charles Dilke wanting in this respect. Dilke, he writes, is "a Man who cannot feel he has a personal identity unless he has made up his Mind about every thing." Keats holds that "the only means of strengthening one's intellect is to make up one's mind about nothing--to let the mind be a thoroughfare for all thoughts. Not a select party."<sup>15</sup> He believes that no one can aspire to be a great poet unless he has a willingness to let his mind "be a thoroughfare for all [emphasis added] thoughts" rather than for "a select party." He found this willingness in

Shakespeare and he attributed to it the universality of Shakespeare's genius.

Negative capability implies a total acceptance of the world as it is. John Middleton Murry explains the spiritual quality of Acceptance as "a forgiveness which forgives not only men, but life itself, not only the pains which men inflict, but the pains which are knit up in the very nature of existence."<sup>16</sup>

In the letter written to his brothers on 27 (?) December 1817, Keats describes a "negatively capable" man (poet) as one who is "capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason."<sup>17</sup> The willingness to remain in "uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts" implies an acceptance of life as it is. Life is a mystery. It is complex and intricate and poses unanswerable questions. Problems and hardships are woven into its very texture. Moreover, it defies any attempt on our part to make it fit in with a dogma or philosophical system. It does not conform to any man-made law or system of thought. Life is too complex to allow us to generalize on it. It gives rise to uncertainties and doubts. The philosopher attempts to find a simple answer to the riddle of life. He is constantly engaged in a search for fact and reason. The search is, however, bound to be futile. No philosophical system can explain every phenomenon of life. "Can it be," Keats wrote to Bailey in November 1817, "that even the greatest Philosopher

eyer arrived at his goal without putting aside numerous objections[?].<sup>18</sup> The philosopher's task involves a deliberate and tireless "reaching after fact & reason." The poet, on the contrary, accepts life as it is. He does not approach life with certain preconceptions or attempt to view it in the light of a personal philosophy. He does not "fret" after knowledge. He is content to remain in "uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts." He is satisfied with "half knowledge"--the only knowledge possible in the finite world where "we see through a glass, darkly."<sup>19</sup> This knowledge is gained intuitively. It consists of "fine isolated verisimilitude[s] caught from the Penetralium of mystery."

In Keats's view, the province of the philosopher and that of the poet are separate. A true poet must not, in his view, encroach on the province of the philosopher. Coleridge, he believes, suffers as a poet because he desires to be a philosopher at the same time. He wastes his poetic intuitions unless they fit into his system of thought. He refuses to be satisfied with anything less than full knowledge. In other words, Coleridge (in Keats's view) lacks the quality of Acceptance which a great poet like Shakespeare pre-eminently possesses. The philosopher who tries to gain absolute certainty through "consequitive reasoning" fails in the attempt. He is sceptical about intuitively gained knowledge. The poet, on the contrary, fully trusts his intuitions. He is content with the



"half-knowledge" gained intuitively.

Keats holds that in the sublunary world it is impossible to attain certainty about anything. Refusing to accept this fact, we tend to hunger after the unattainable. Keats writes to James Rice on 24 March 1818:

What a happy thing it would be if we could settle our thoughts, make our minds up on any matter in five Minutes and remain content--that is to build a sort of mental Cottage of feelings quiet and pleasant--to have a sort of Philosophical Back Garden, and cheerful holiday-keeping front one--but Alas! this never can be: for as the material Cottager knows there are such places as France and Italy and the Ardes and burning mountains--so the spiritual Cottager has knowledge of the terra semi incognita of things unearthly; and cannot for his life keep in the check rein--  
(Rollins, I, pp. 254-55)

In Keats's view, the best course is to accept life in its totality and to be content with uncertainties. He regards the poet as one who is willing to accept life in its totality.

As pointed out in the previous chapter, in "Ode to Psyche" Keats expresses his intention to be a votary of Psyche by writing poetry in honour of the human mind. This will have to be poetry of a reflective nature. He knows, however, that his poetry can only offer "all soft delight / That shadowy thought can win" (emphasis added). Thought can only be "shadowy" because in this complex modern world it is impossible to be certain about anything. Modern man can no longer hold on to those "seeming sure points of Reasoning" which were once taken for granted. A modern poet must therefore (in Keats's view) be content to

deal with "shadowy thought." When Keats writes to his brother and sister-in-law that "the only means of strengthening one's intellect is to make up one's mind about nothing--to let the mind be a thoroughfare for all thoughts. Not a select party" he is recognizing the complex nature of life and emphasizing the need to come to terms with this complexity. The way to do this is to accept life as it is, with all its "uncertainties, mysteries, doubts." This involves a willingness "to let the mind be a thoroughfare for all thoughts."

Above all negative capability implies faith in intuition and a distrust of reason as a guide to truth. This is clear from the letter in which Keats first introduces this term. In this letter, after explaining what he means by "negative capability," Keats goes on to say that "Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge." In other words Coleridge, in Keats's view, lacks faith in intuition and so he does not care to record his flashes of insight. He cannot accept these unless they fit into his system of thought based on "consequitive reasoning." A negatively capable poet, on the other hand, has absolute faith in intuition. He, therefore, faithfully records for all time the "fine isolated verisimilitude[s]" caught by him from "the Penetralium of mystery." He will have no reluctance to "put down his halfseeing."<sup>20</sup>

As it was pointed out earlier, the term "negative capability" has reference not only to the nature and character of a poet, but also to the manner in which he interprets life. As a term relating to the way in which the poet interprets life, "negative capability" first of all implies a certain degree of objectivity or impersonality. At least in theory Keats is against a poetry of subjective self-expression. Though he admires Wordsworth for his knowledge of the human heart, he dislikes the obtrusive egotism of much of his poetry. He detects in Wordsworth's poetry a deliberate attempt on the poet's part to convert the reader to his own point of view. In Keats's view, a poet must refrain from imposing his personal views and beliefs on the reader. He must merely "put down his half-seeing." Wordsworth, in Keats's view, errs in this respect. On 3 February 1818 Keats writes to J.H. Reynolds:

It may be said that we ought to read our Contemporaries, that Wordsworth &c should have their due from us, but for the sake of a few fine imaginative or domestic passages, are we to be bullied into a certain Philosophy engendered in the whims of an Egotist--Every man has his speculations, but every man does not brood and peacock over them till he makes a false coinage and deceives himself--Many a man can travel to the very bourne of Heaven, and yet want confidence to put down his halfseeing.

(Rollins, I, pp. 223-24)

Keats believes that it is against the very nature of poetry to attempt to convert the reader:

We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us-- and if we do not agree, seems to put its hand in its breeches pocket. Poetry should be great & unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul,

and does not startle it or amaze it with itself but with its subject.--How beautiful are the retired flowers! how would they lose their beauty were they to throng into the highway crying out, "admire me I am a violet! dote upon me I am a primrose."21

In Keats's view, the poet should not only refrain from making his own self the subject of his poetry. He must make sure that his own "personality" does not, in any way, hinder the reader's response to the subject of his poetry. He brings out the contrast between Elizabethan poetry and the poetry of his own age in this respect, to the disadvantage of the latter:

Modern poets differ from the Elizabethans in this. Each of the moderns like an Elector of Hanover governs his petty state, & knows how many straws are swept daily from the Causeways in all his dominions & has a continual itching that all the Housewives should have their coppers well scoured: the ancients were Emperors of vast Provinces; they had only heard of the remote ones and scarcely cared to visit them.--I will cut all this--I will have no more of Wordsworth or Hunt in particular--Why should we be of the tribe of Manasseh, when we can wander with Esau? why should we kick against the Pricks, when we can walk on Roses? Why should we be owls, when we can be Eagles? Why be teased with "nice Eyed wagtails," when we have in sight "the Cherub Contemplation"?--Why with Wordsworths "Matthew with a bough of wilding in his hand" when we can have Jacques "under an oak &c"--The secret of the Bough of Wilding will run through your head faster than I can write it--Old Matthew spoke to him some years ago on some nothing, & because he happens in an Evening Walk to imagine the figure of the old man--he must stamp it down in black & white, and it is henceforth sacred--I don't mean to deny Wordsworth's grandeur & Hunt's merit, but I mean to say we need not be teased with grandeur & merit--when we can have them uncontaminated & unobtrusive. Let us have the old Poets, & robin Hood.

(Rollins, I, pp. 224-25)

Keats finds contemporary poetry obtrusive when compared to Elizabethan poetry.

In his letter of 27 February 1818 to John Taylor, Keats sets down his axioms about poetry. "I think Poetry should surprise by a fine excess," he writes, "and not by Singularity--it should strike the Reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a Remembrance." Here Keats is pleading for poetry which is unobtrusive, yet full of suggestive power. Such poetry does not ~~open~~ open the reader. In The Fall of Hyperion, as pointed out earlier, Keats speaks out against "self-worship" in poetry.<sup>22</sup>

Negative capability implies the ability to see the world (including human affairs) as it is, uncoloured by personal predilections or prejudices. It means looking at things from a certain distance and height, so as to be able to see them in their true perspective. It is such a view of the world (which, Keats believes, is conducive to the writing of poetry of the highest order) that gives rise to the following speculations:

The greater part of Men make their way with the same instinctiveness, the same unwandering eye from their purposes, the same animal eagerness as the Hawk--The Hawk wants a Mate, so does the Man--look at them both they set about it and procure on[e] in the same manner--They want both a nest and they both set about one in the same manner--they get their food in the same manner--The noble animal ~~Man~~ for his amusement smokes his pipe--the Hawk balances about the Clouds--that is (the only difference of their leisures. This it is that makes the Amusement of Life--to a speculative Mind. I go among the fields and catch a glimpse of a stoat or a fieldmouse peeping out of the withered grass--the creature hath a purpose and

its eyes are bright with it--I go amongst the buildings of a city, and I see a Man hurrying along--to what? The Creature has a purpose and his eyes are bright with it. But then as Wordsworth says, "we have all one human heart"--there is an electric fire in human nature tending to purity--so that among these human creature[s] there is continually some birth of new heroism--23

"May there not be superior beings," he writes in the same letter, "amused with any graceful though instinctive attitude my mind my [for "may"] fall into, as I am entertained with the alertness of a Stoat or the anxiety of a Deer?"

Viewed from such a height, all aspects of life appear merely as food for speculation. Consequently, the seemingly unpleasant elements of life cease to be so. The "disagreeables" of life become buried in a "momentous depth of speculation." Keats wrote to his brother and sister-in-law on 19 March 1819:

Though a quarrel in the streets is a thing to be hated, the energies displayed in it are fine; the commonest Man shows a grace in his quarrel--By a superior being our reasoning[s] may take the same tone--though erroneous they may be fine--This is the very thing in which consists poetry.

(Rollins, II, pp. 80-81)

The poetical character, as Keats wrote to Woodhouse on 27 October 1818, "does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things any more than from its taste for the bright one; because they both end in speculation." Whether a thing is "foul or fair," he had written to Woodhouse, the poet's chief concern will be to represent it with "gusto." The term "gusto," which Keats borrowed from Hazlitt, has to do with the poet's art. Hazlitt defines "gusto" in art

as "power or passion defining any object."<sup>24</sup> He explains the term as follows:

It is not so difficult to explain this term in what relates to expression (of which it may be said to be the highest degree) as in what relates to things without expression, to the natural appearances of objects, as mere colour or form. In one sense, however, there is hardly any object entirely devoid of expression, without some character of power belonging to it, some precise association with pleasure or pain; and it is giving this truth of character from the truth of feeling, whether in the highest or the lowest degree, but always in the highest degree of which the subject is capable, that gusto consists. (emphasis added)

Though Keats came to believe that great poetry ought to be objective as far as possible, he did not fully succeed in writing the kind of impersonal poetry which he aspired to write. Though he longed to look at life from the view point of a spectator rather than that of a participant, he was most of the time unable to do so because of his tragic lot in life. On account of the tragic circumstances of his life<sup>25</sup> that pressed upon him, he was unable to attain the ideal of complete disinterestedness. The picture of life that emerges from most of his poems is therefore (in spite of his contrary poetic ideal) one painted by a participant. The emotions expressed in most of his poems are poignant personal emotions. There are, however, exceptions. Poems such as the sonnet beginning "Four seasons fill the measure of the year" and the ode "To Autumn" give us a foretaste of the kind of impersonal poetry which Keats might have written if he had lived longer. Underlying these poems is a total acceptance of

things as they are. In the sonnet Keats accepts human life in its totality, including its winter of "pale misfeature":

Four seasons fill the measure of the year;  
 There are four seasons in the mind of man:  
 He has his lusty Spring, when fancy clear  
 Takes in all beauty with an easy span:  
 He has his Summer, when luxuriously  
 Spring's honey'd cud of youthful thought he loves  
 To ruminate; and by such dreaming high  
 Is nearest unto heaven: quiet coves  
 His soul has in its Autumn, when his wings  
 He furleth close; contented so to look  
 On mists in idleness--to let fair things  
 Pass by unheeded as a threshold brook.  
 He has his Winter too of pale misfeature,  
 Or else he would forego his mortal nature.

The ode ("To Autumn") is written in a detached, contemplative attitude, which suggests a total freedom from personal preoccupations and a perfect serenity of mind and spirit. But on the whole one has to admit that there is a considerable gap between Keats's theory and practice in the matter of poetic objectivity.

One of the central points of Keats's poetic creed is that poetry should not teach, but merely reveal. Revelation is, in his view, the proper function of poetry. He believes that this is the truly poetic method of communicating with the reader; the only method that is compatible with his conception of "negative capability." Poetry must "reveal" to the reader the poet's intuitions regarding the meaning of the universe. The poet does not attempt to fit these into a philosophical system of his own making, based on "consequitive reasoning." He is content to record his "halfseeing" which consists in "fine, isolated



verisimilitude[s] caught from the Penetralium of mystery." In Keats's view, it is these momentary flashes of insight, not "fact & reason," that constitute the true stuff of poetry.

Keats believes that moral judgment is not within the province of the poet. The poet has "as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher, delights the camelion Poet." The poet depicts both the bright and the dark sides of life with equal relish. His chief concern is to represent things in their truth of character. The poet's picture of life excites in the reader a "momentous depth of speculation" which culminates in insight. But he stops short of pronouncing moral judgments. In other words, though poetry does not attempt to teach, the reader nevertheless learns. As a result, he finds the "burthen of the mystery" lightened. Poetry thus fulfils its function quietly and unobtrusively. Keats holds that the poet ought to do through the medium of words what the sculptor who created the Elgin Marbles and the artist who created the Grecian Urn have done using different media. He must embody his intuitions in poetry in such a way that the reader will be able not merely to share his heightened awareness of life, but also to "see into the life of things." When a poet does this, his "negative capability" manifests itself.

## CHAPTER IV

### POETRY AS REVELATION

. . . that blessed mood,  
In which the burthen of the mystery,  
In which the heavy and the weary weight  
Of all this unintelligible world,  
is lightened

Wordsworth; "Tintern Abbey Lines"

As it was pointed out in the previous chapter, Keats came to believe that poetry should not teach, but reveal. It must reveal to the reader the poet's intuitions regarding the purpose and meaning of the universe and of human life. Such revelation, he realized, is the truly poetic method of communicating with the reader, the only method which is compatible with his conception of "negative capability." More than this, Keats came to think of revelation as the ultimate "end and aim of Poesy." Keats's conception of poetry as revelation is closely linked with his conception of the imagination and his view of the relationship between Beauty and Truth. It is therefore necessary to examine it closely in the light of these.

At first Keats regarded poetic imagination as the power of conjuring up a delightful (though unsubstantial) world of sensuous beauty. He associated it with reverie and fantasy. This juvenile conception of poetic imagination, which is akin to Coleridge's conception of fancy<sup>1</sup> is

associated with Keats's early "escapist" theory of poetry.<sup>2</sup> In his years of maturity poetic imagination is, for Keats, first of all mainly an intuitive faculty which can perceive "truth" as "beauty." Secondly, it is a creative faculty which can embody this "truth" as "beauty." This means that imagination can create poetry in which "truth" can be perceived as "beauty." Keats regards imagination as distinct from fancy. This conception of imagination as a perceptive and creative power, which brings to mind Coleridge's conception of imagination,<sup>3</sup> has a bearing on Keats's mature conception of poetry as revelation. There is, however, no clear chronological demarcation between the two views of poetic imagination. If the germ of the later view is found in "Sleep and Poetry" and in some of the early letters, in his later years he sometimes associates poetry with dreaming fancy rather than with intuitive imagination. Thus in "Ode to a Nightingale" Keats expresses his desire to fly to the bird "on the viewless wings of Poesy." The image of flight suggests that Keats is referring to the free play of fancy (in Coleridge's sense). All that can be said is that while one view of imagination (that which is akin to Coleridge's conception of fancy) predominates in the early years, the other view (that which brings to mind Coleridge's conception of imagination) is predominant in the later years.

The gradual change in Keats's conception of poetic imagination is, it is clear, related to the gradual change

in his idea of beauty in relation to poetry. In the beginning Keats regarded poetry as something concerned chiefly with sensuous beauty. But in his years of maturity he came to associate poetry mainly with a "beauty" which is equal to "truth." If in the early years poetic imagination was, for Keats, the power of conjuring up a world of sensuous beauty (in which the poet and the reader could take refuge), in the later years it is an intuitive and creative faculty, which can "seize" and embody "truth" as "beauty."

Though the conception of poetry as revelation is associated with Keats's later years, as early as the autumn of 1816, when "Sleep and Poetry" was written, he could see, as from a distance, this true "end and aim of Poesy." The idea appears in the poem as little more than a vague suggestion, which is all too likely to escape the reader's attention. Near the beginning of the poem, after describing poetry as something strange, beautiful, smooth and regal and capable of "chasing away all worldliness and folly," he pictures it as

Coming sometimes like fearful claps of thunder,  
Or the low rumblings earth's regions under;  
And sometimes like a gentle whispering  
Of all the secrets of some wond'rous thing  
That breathes about us in the vacant air.

(ll. 27-31)

When viewed in the light of Keats's later theory of poetry, "the low rumblings" are suggestive of the sense of the "mystery" of human life awakened by poetry in the reader.

Not only does poetry create in the reader an awareness of the mystery; by the imaginative insight which it offers, poetry helps to ease "the burthen of the mystery." This is suggested by Keats when he describes how poetry affects the reader as

a gentle whispering  
Of all the secrets of some wond'rous thing  
That breathes about us in the vacant air;  
So that we look around with prying stare,  
Perhaps to see shapes of light, aerial limning,  
And catch soft floatings from a faint-heard hymning;  
.....

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

(ll. 29-34, 37-40)

Surely this is not a poetry of retreat. Undoubtedly Keats has in mind a kind of poetry that offers visionary gleams and illuminates the dark crevices of sublunary life. In fact the above lines are vaguely reminiscent of Wordsworth's

that blessed mood  
In which the burthen of the mystery,  
In which the heavy and the weary weight  
Of all this unintelligible world,  
Is lightened.

("Tintern Abbey," ll. 37-41)

Poetry elevates the reader's soul and gives him an exultant feeling akin to the feeling experienced at the sight of the resplendent sun and the luminous clouds:

No one who once the glorious sun has seen,  
And all the clouds, and felt his bosom clean  
For his great Maker's presence, but must know  
What 'tis I mean, and feel his being glow.

(ll. 41-44)

After emphasizing the need for him to pass from the realm of Flora and Pan into the world of human sorrows and strifes in the course of his poetic development, Keats goes on to give us a vision of the shifting pageant of human life as seen through the eyes of a heavenly charioteer in a car driven by steeds with streamy manes. This heavenly charioteer represents poetic imagination. The kingly gaze of the charioteer spans the whole variegated spectacle of human life. What Keats means is that all facets of life grip the poet's attention and arouse his interest. These form the basis of poetry. The poet is interested in the primordial world of nature which forms an eternal backdrop to the varied drama of human life:

The charioteer with wondrous gesture talks  
To the trees and mountains.

(ll. 136-37)

Human passions in all their diversity offer him immense delight. These are represented by Keats as "shapes of delight, of mystery, and fear" which "murmur, laugh, and smile, and weep." Their diversity is effectively brought out by him:

Some with upturned hand and mouth severe;  
Some with their faces muffled to the ear  
Between their arms; some, clear in youthful bloom,  
Go glad and smilingly athwart the gloom;  
Some looking back, and some with upward gaze;  
Yes, thousands in a thousand different ways  
Flit onward--now a lovely wreath of girls  
Dancing their sleek hair into tangled curls;  
And now broad wings.

(ll. 143-51)

What Keats gives us through the vision is a panoramic view of the whole of human life from the vantage ground of detached imaginative contemplation, not a view of isolated fragments of life, as they affect particular individuals. When life is viewed thus, its disagreeable aspects cease to be disagreeable because they are seen not in isolation, but in relation to the whole spectrum of life. In other words, when life is viewed in the light of imagination, even its unpleasant aspects are seen to be part of a universal harmony. This constitutes imaginative insight. Keats is of the view that an intimate "knowledge" of life does not, by itself, provide the necessary stimulus for the creation of great poetry. It is necessary to view life in the light of poetic imagination. Only imaginative insight can save the poet from the disenchantment caused by a knowledge of the painful realities of human life. Without the light of imagination, a "sense of real things" is bound to engender pain and result in poetic paralysis. Keats makes this truth perfectly clear:

The visions are all fled--the car is fled  
 Into the light of heaven, and in their stead  
 A sense of real things comes doubly strong,  
 And, like a muddy stream, would bear along  
 My soul to nothingness: but I will strive  
 Against all doubtings and will keep alive  
 The thought of that same chariot, and the strange  
 Journey it went.

(ll. 155-62)

Through the picture which he presents, Keats also seems to indicate that in accordance with his imaginative insight into life, a great poet must paint an imaginative (which is

to say, universal) picture in which all the elements of life, both pleasant and painful, are seen in true perspective.

In his letter of 22 November 1817 to Benjamin Bailey, Keats writes:

I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination--What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth--whether it existed before or not--for I have the same Idea of all our Passions as of Love they are all in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty--<sup>o</sup> In a Word, you may know my favorite Speculation by my first Book and the little song I sent in my last--which is a representation from the fancy of the probable mode of operating in these Matters--The Imagination may be compared to Adam's dream--he awoke and found it truth. I am the more zealous in this affair, because I have never yet been able to perceive how any thing can be known for truth by consecutive reasoning--and yet it must be--Can it be that even the greatest Philosopher ever arrived at his goal without putting aside numerous objections--However it may be, O for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts! It is 'a Vision in the form of Youth' a Shadow of reality to come--and this consideration has further conv[i]nced me for it has come as auxiliary to another favorite Speculation of mine, that we shall enjoy ourselves here after by having what we called happiness on Earth repeated in a finer tone and so repeated--And yet such a fate can only befall those who delight in sensation rather than hunger as you do after Truth--Adam's dream will do here and seems to be a conviction that Imagination and its empyreal reflection is the same as human Life and its spiritual repetition. But as I was saying--the simple imaginative Mind may have its rewards in the repet[it]ion of its own silent Working coming continually on the spirit with a fine suddenness--to compare great things with small--have you never by being surprised with an old Melody in a delicious place--by a delicious voice, fe[l]t over again your very speculations and surmises at the time it first operated on your soul--do you not remember forming to yourself the singer's face more beautiful that [for "than"] it was possible and yet with the elevation of the Moment you did not think so--even then you were mounted on the Wings of Imagination so high--that the Prototype must be here after--that delicious face you will see--What a time! I am continually



running away from the subject--sure this cannot be exactly the case with a complex Mind--one that is imaginative and at the same time careful of its fruits--who would exist partly on sensation partly on thought--to whom it is necessary that years should bring the philosophic Mind--such an one I consider your's and therefore it is necessary to your eternal Happiness that you not only drink this old Wine of Heaven which I shall call the redigestion of our most ethereal Musings on Earth; but also increase in knowledge and know all things.

(Rollins, *L*, pp. 184-86)

This passage in which the words "imagination," "beauty," and "truth" are used repeatedly, is often read as if it is Keats's final word on imagination and its relation to beauty and truth. But a close examination of the passage reveals that what is set forth here is not mainly Keats's mature view of imagination. Keats begins by declaring his belief in the authenticity of the imagination. The "holiness of the Heart's affections" and the "truth of Imagination" are two things, he writes, of which he is certain. Keats thus links "Heart's affections" with the "truth of Imagination." When Keats asserts that "what the imagination seizes as beauty must be truth--whether it existed before or not" he seems to be attributing to the imagination mainly a prefigurative power. The references to Book I of Endymion and to Adam's dream in Milton's Paradise Lost seem to suggest this. Endymion's love dream in Book I comes true before the close of the poem. In Book VIII of Paradise Lost Adam dreams that a "lovely fair" female form is being created. The dream is prefigurative, for when he opens his eyes he sees Eve standing by his side in the flesh, an exact replica of the beautiful form he had seen in his dream. The

illustrations from Book I of Endymion and Paradise Lost lead us to think that when used by Keats in association with prefigurative imagination, the word "beauty" means aesthetic or sensuous beauty and that the word "truth" means existential, as distinguished from conceptual truth. What Keats's observation (that "[w]hat the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth--whether it existed before or not") probably means is that the sensuously beautiful things which are conceived by the imagination now cannot but exist actually in the world to come. They must, in his view, be "a Shadow of reality to come." Their prototypes, he feels, "must be here after." Keats elucidates his theory by adding that he has "the same Idea of all Our Passions as of Love," that "they are all in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty." He thus associates the prefigurative power of imagination with strong passions such as love. It must be noted here that love is the theme of both Endymion's and Adam's dream.

In the rest of this oft-quoted passage Keats further illustrates the operation of prefigurative imagination. For all the fervour of his words, the wishfulness of his thinking is evident throughout this passage. Keats does not assert that what the imagination seizes as beauty is truth. He can only say that it must be truth. It is significant that he refers to the theory about the prefigurative power of imagination, which is set forth in this passage, as a "favorite speculation."

Though Keats deals mainly with the prefigurative power of imagination in this passage, we may not be entirely wrong if we see him here groping towards his mature conception of imagination as an organ of insight. This progress, as pointed out earlier, coincides with his progress towards his mature conception of poetic truth. Keats cites the song "O Sorrow" in Book IV of Endymion (besides Endymion's and Adam's love dreams) as an illustration of his theory that "[w]hat the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth--whether it existed before or not." This illustration is not easy to grasp. In the case of this Song, "truth" has a present, not a future reference. Newell F. Ford has explained how the Song illustrates Keats's proposition.<sup>4</sup> The gist of the poem, he points out, is that a law of aesthetic compensation operates in the universe. The sorrow of lovers helps to enhance the beauty of the physical world.<sup>5</sup> This "truth" has been perceived by the poet's imagination, that is, "he has 'seized' it in the guise of images, images of those parts of the natural world whose beauty derives from or is enhanced by the sorrowing of lovers."<sup>6</sup> In other words, this "truth" appeared to Keats as a vision of beauty. To Keats, the kind of aesthetic compensation described in the song "O Sorrow" is a law or a "truth." It is not hard to believe this when we consider the words of Oceanus in Hyperion. Oceanus explains to the fallen Titans that their downfall and the victory of the Olympian gods exemplify the operation of the universal law

of compensation. He advises his fellow Titans to find consolation in the thought that their sorrow is necessary for the advent of a "power more strong in beauty, born of us / 'And fated to excel us.'" It must, however, be noted that the beauty referred to by Oceanus is not sensuous beauty.<sup>7</sup> In the case of the Song 'O Sorrow' "truth" must be taken to have a conceptual meaning. It seems to be used to mean a "universal principle" or in Ford's words, "a truth about existence, a 'law' of the operation of the universe."<sup>8</sup> If so, Keats is feeling his way to his mature conception of imagination as a faculty of insight.

Keats's statement that "[w]hat the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth" (as also his confession that he has "never yet been able to perceive how any thing can be known for truth by consequitive reasoning") invites comparison with another statement made on 31 December 1818: "I never can feel certain of any truth but from a clear perception of its Beauty."<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting that in the latter case Keats is referring to the perceptive power of imagination. We must, however, bear in mind that both Endymion's dream<sup>10</sup> and Adam's dream, which are cited by Keats to elucidate the operation of imagination, have a prefigurative significance.

Keats gradually came to believe that the chief function of art is the revelation of "truth" as "beauty." It goes without saying that perception must precede revelation. In Keats's view, it is imagination that plays the

key role in both perception and revelation. First, of all, imagination perceives "truth" as "beauty." Secondly, through artistic creation it reveals this "truth" as "beauty." Keats's observations (in his letter of 21, 27 (?) December 1817 to his brothers George and Tom) on Benjamin West's picture Death on the Pale Horse<sup>11</sup> sheds a flood of light on his mature conception of "beauty" and "truth." In Keats's view, though Death on the Pale Horse is a wonderful picture in its own way, it has a serious defect. He points out that in this picture "there is nothing to be intense upon; no woman one feels mad to kiss; no face swelling into reality." This statement makes us think that by "intensity" Keats may mean something similar to what Hazlitt means by "gusto."<sup>12</sup> In his essay "On Gusto" Hazlitt explains why it may be said that Titian's paintings have "gusto":

Not only do his [Titian's] heads seem to think--his bodies seem to feel. This is what the Italdins mean by the morbidezza of his flesh-colour. It seems sensitive and alive all over; not merely to have the look and texture of flesh, but the feeling in itself. For example, the limbs of his female figures have a luxurious softness and delicacy, which appears conscious of the pleasure of the beholder. As the objects themselves in nature would produce an impression on the sense, distinct from every other object, and having something divine in it, which the heart owns and the imagination consecrates, the objects in the picture preserve the same impression; absolute, unimpaired, stamped with all the truth of passion, the pride of the eye, and the charm of beauty. Rubens makes his flesh-colour like flowers. Albano's is like ivory; Titian's is like flesh, and like nothing else. It is as different from that of other painters as the skin is from a piece of white or red drapery thrown over it. The blood circulates here and there, the blue veins just appear, the rest is distinguished throughout only by that sort of tingling sensation to the eye, which the body feels within itself. This is gusto.<sup>13</sup>

We are led to think that Keats may have this quality described by Hazlitt in mind when he speaks of "women one feels mad to kiss" and "face[s] swelling into reality." This quality of vitality may be what Keats finds wanting in West's picture. The sentences which follow, however, suggest that he has in mind much more than "gusto" in Hazlitt's sense. At least, Keats shows a greater understanding of the quality described by Hazlitt (whether one chooses to call it "gusto" or "intensity") than Hazlitt himself. Keats finds in it a solution to the problem of dealing with "disagreeables" in art. In his view, "the excellence of every Art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty & Truth." He cites Shakespeare's King Lear as a work of art in which there is such intensity. Contrasting King Lear with West's picture Death on the Pale Horse, he observes that in the latter "we have unpleasantness without any momentous depth of speculation excited, in which to bury its repulsiveness." The implication is that though in King Lear there is unpleasantness, it is buried in a "momentous depth of speculation" which is excited by the play in the spectator or reader. In Keats's view, King Lear is a play which has an "intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty & Truth." It is, therefore, true to say that Keats links the intensity of a work of art with its Beauty and Truth and these, in turn, with a "momentous depth of speculation" excited by the work of art.

"Truth" here signifies the artist's insights or to use Keats's own words, "fine isolated verisimilitude[s]" caught by the artist's intuitive imagination from "the Penetralium of mystery" and embodied in the work of art, whether it is a poem, a painting, or a sculpture. Keats refers to these as "verisimilitude[s]" probably because they cannot be intellectually verified. The picture of life set forth in a work of art stimulates the reader's imagination and excites a "momentous depth of speculation" on the meaning of life. Such imaginative speculation on the part of the reader always culminates in a greater insight into life or at least a heightened awareness of it. In other words, the reader imaginatively apprehends the universal "truth" originally apprehended by the intuitive imagination of the poet. This "truth" which is embodied in a poem was first seized by the poet's imagination as "beauty" and later it is perceived as "beauty" by the reader. "Beauty," which is the subjective aspect of "truth," suggests the pleasure that is involved in the perception of "truth." It brings to mind the feeling of delight that inundates the mind and heart at the moment of recognition of "truth." This inner thrill is distinct from mere sensuous pleasure. The reader who perceives the "truth" enshrined in a poem experiences the same feeling of pleasure and elevation which was experienced by the poet when he first perceived the "truth." In other words, "truth" is perceived by both the poet and the reader as "beauty."

The sestet of Keats's sonnet "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" describes his feelings of pleasure and awe on perceiving (through Chapman's translation) the "truth" embodied in Homer's epics. Keats believes that "truth" cannot but appear as "beauty." An overwhelming feeling of pleasure accompanies the perception of "truth." This pleasure is proof of the beauty of the truth embodied in a work of art.

To Keats "beauty" means much more than sensuous or aesthetic beauty. The requirement of beauty in a work of art does not, in his view, demand the exclusion of elements which are, in themselves, morally offensive, painful, or ugly. This is clear from the fact that he cites King Lear as a work of art which possesses "beauty" in the highest degree. No one can deny that King Lear is a play which abounds in seemingly disagreeable elements. The plot of the play comprises much that is unpleasant--senility, madness, and downright cruelty. The sufferings of Lear and Gloucester ("more sinn'd against than sinning"), Cordelia and Edgar, being largely undeserved, are potentially painful to the spectator (reader). Nevertheless, the play does not excite revulsion. Nor does it give unbearable pain. On the contrary, the abiding impression left by the play is one of "beauty," and "sublimity" (in the Longinian sense). It inspires awe in the spectator (reader) and he experiences an elevation of mind and soul. The play excites a "momentous depth of speculation" which culminates in insight. In other



words, the spectator (reader) perceives the universal "truth" embodied in the play. This imaginative perception of "truth" is a rapturous experience. This is another way of saying that "truth" is perceived as "beauty." The elevation of soul which the spectator (reader) experiences is the best proof of the "beauty" and the "truth" of what is perceived by his imagination. The disagreeable elements of the play are drowned in the pleasure that inundates the spectator's (reader's) soul. In Keats's view, the poet is free to make use of disagreeable elements (the painful, the evil, and the ugly) provided that these serve to embody his imaginative insights, which cannot but appear to the reader as "beauty." A work of art which embodies such insights has, in Keats's view, an "intensity" capable of making all "disagreeables" evaporate.

Towards the close of the same letter (letter to George and Tom Keats, 21, 27 (?) December 1817) Keats once again associates the "beauty" of a work of art with the insights embodied in it. While explaining what he means by "negative capability," Keats points out that unlike Shakespeare (who was "capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason"), Coleridge "would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetratim of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with the half knowledge." He adds:

This pursued through Volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the

sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration.

(Rollins, I, p. 194)

It is clear from the context<sup>4</sup> that Keats is not referring here to aesthetic or sensuous beauty. He associates poetic "beauty" with the imaginative insights embodied in poetry.

"I feel assured," Keats wrote to Richard Woodhouse on 27 October 1818, "I should write from the mere yearning and fondness I have for the Beautiful even if my night's labours should be burnt every morning and no eye ever shine upon them."<sup>14</sup> The same letter also contains Keats's description of his own type of poetical character:

[I]t enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated--It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosop[h]er, delights the camellion Poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things any more than from its taste for the bright one; because they both end in speculation.

(Rollins, I, p. 387)

It must, therefore, be assumed that Keats's concept of "beauty" in poetry is wide enough to allow and include representations of what is evil, painful, or ugly.

In his letter of 30 January 1818 to his publisher John Taylor, requesting him to alter the lines on happiness in Book I of *Endymion*, Keats claims that the four new lines<sup>15</sup> contain an imaginatively apprehended truth. The writing of these lines, he tells Taylor, "was a regular stepping of the Imagination towards a Truth." Keats is here expressing his faith in the intuitive power of imagination. It is clear that the word "truth" here signifies not

rational truth, but insights gained by the imagination. This does not imply that the imagination is irrational. But it is correct to say that poetic imagination is concerned with "truths" which lie beyond the realm of reason.

In Hyperion Keats develops the theme of the triumph of beauty through the Greek myth of the overthrow of the Titans by the Olympian gods. Oceanus, one of the Titans, explains to his companions in misfortune that they have fallen "by course of Nature's law, not force / 'Of thunder, or, of Jove." It is, he tells them, an eternal law that "first in beauty should be first in might." The "beauty" referred to by Oceanus is clearly not mere physical beauty. The Olympians could have hardly excelled the Titans in this respect. The "glow of beauty" in Apollo's eyes can be attributed to his imaginative insight into things. We must assume (though the poem is left incomplete at this point) that after his death-like experience Apollo, like the poetic aspirant in The Fall of Hyperion, gains the power to "see as a god sees, and take the depth / Of things as nimbly as the outward eye / Can size and shape pervade." Keats does indicate that Apollo's agonizing experience is actually a death "into life." He associates "beauty" with such imaginative insight as is gained by Apollo in Hyperion and the poetic aspirant in The Fall of Hyperion.

In one of his letters to his brother and sister-in-law<sup>16</sup> Keats states his view of the relationship between beauty and truth, especially in a work of art. "I never

can feel certain of any truth," he writes, "but from a clear perception of its Beauty." He goes on to tell them how his perceptive power is growing through contact with works of art. He confesses that at first he could not understand Raphael's cartoons. He could find in them no beauty at all. He began to appreciate them only after seeing some inferior pictures by Guido in which all the Saints had "both in countenance and gesture all the canting, solem, melodramatic mawkishness of Mackenzie's father Nicholas." Raphael's pictures offered a refreshing contrast to those of Guido. Raphael's Saints had a "heroic simplicity and unaffected grandeur" which left ample room for the viewer's imagination. Keats found in Raphael's pictures a "beauty" which was not in Guido's. He found the same kind of beauty in a Book of Prints taken from the fresco of the Church at Milan. He explains:

[I]n it are comprised Specimens of the first and second age of art in Italy--I do not think I ever had a greater treat out of Shakespeare--Full of Romance and the most tender feeling--magnificence of draperies beyond any I ever saw not excepting Raphael's--But Grotesque to a curious pitch--yet still making up a fine whole--even finer to me than more accomplish'd works--as there was left so much room for Imagination.

(Rollins, II, p. 19)

Keats associates the "beauty" of these paintings with their power to stimulate the imagination. In his view, these paintings enshrine visionary gleams caught by the artist's intuitive imagination "from the Penetralium of mystery." They have, moreover, the power to stimulate the beholder's imagination to such an extent that he too perceives the

"truth" originally perceived by the artist's imagination and embodied in them. It is this "truth" which, in Keats's view, constitutes the beauty of these paintings, not their superficial or sensuous appeal. The "beauty" of Raphael's paintings has also to do with the insights or universal truths embodied in them. These truths are perceived by the viewer's imagination as "beauty." The word "beauty" suggests the intense pleasure that accompanies the perception of "truth." This intense pleasure felt by the viewer confirms the veracity of the insights embodied in the paintings. This is probably what Keats means when he declares that he "never can feel certain of any truth but from a clear perception of its Beauty."

"Ode on a Grecian Urn," written in May 1819, contains Keats's final and most cryptic statement on the relation between beauty and truth not only in art, but also in life. The poem ends with an apostrophe to the urn:

O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede  
 Of marble men and maidens overwrought  
 With forest branches and the trodden weed;  
 Thou, silent form, does tease us out of thought  
 As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!  
 When old age shall this generation waste,  
 Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe  
 Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,  
 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,'--that is all  
 Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

While it is the Grecian Urn that declares that "'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,'" it is Keats himself who adds: "that is all / Ye know on earth and all ye need to know."<sup>17</sup> Keats knew, according to Matthew Arnold, that "to see things in their beauty is to see things in their truth."<sup>18</sup> To see

things in their truth, Keats knew, is to see things in their beauty. In the last one and a half lines of the poem he not only endorses what the Grecian Urn proclaims, but goes so far as to assert that a knowledge of the identity of beauty and truth is the highest knowledge possible to gain, and the only knowledge worth gaining. It is, in his view, the sum total of human knowledge. Surely, then, Keats must mean by "beauty" and "truth" much more than what is ordinarily meant by these words.

Since it is the Grecian Urn that asserts that "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," we must seek clues to the meaning of the assertion first of all within the poem itself. What, in Keats's view, constitutes the "beauty" of the urn?<sup>19</sup> There is scarcely a reference in the poem to its perfection of form. Nor is the poem concerned chiefly with the external or sensuous appeal of the pictures on it. Keats's main concern in the poem is with the speculations engendered by the scenes depicted on the Urn. These speculations have resulted in a heightened awareness of life and a greater insight into it. Herein lies the beauty of these scenes.<sup>20</sup> The imaginative insights embodied in the scenes depicted on the Urn constitute, in Keats's view, its "beauty." Many of the thoughts engendered by the scenes on the Urn are potentially painful. The felicity depicted on the work of art suggests, by contrast, the pain that is woven into the texture of real life. The scenes pictured on the Urn excite in Keats thoughts about the

transience and mutability of earthly life and all the related problems. The happiness that exudes from the scenes is "permanent" only because the scenes are frozen by the artist in a work of art. If the sensuous beauty of these scenes does not fade, it is because they have been immobilized by the artist. In the real world nothing is immune to mutability and decay. In the poem Keats shows an intense awareness of this fact:

Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave  
 Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;  
 Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,  
 Though winning near the goal--yet, do not grieve;  
 She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,  
 For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed  
 Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;  
 And, happy melodist, unwearied,  
 For ever piping songs for ever new;  
 More happy love! more happy, happy love!  
 For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,  
 For ever panting, and for ever young;  
 All breathing human passion far above,  
 That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,  
 A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.

The artist who created the Grecian Urn must have been equally aware of the mutability and decay which are characteristic of the sublunary world. The scene of sacrifice depicted on the Urn tells Keats the tale of a culture and way of life that have vanished from the face of the earth. Nevertheless, the work of art gives him intense pleasure. This is because the poet's "self" is not involved in his imaginative speculation on life. The work of art induces in him a state of mind totally free from personal desires and preoccupations. While describing such a state of mind

to his brother and sister-in-law,<sup>21</sup> Keats had referred to the figures on a Greek vase:

In this state of effeminacy the fibres of the brain, are relaxed in common with the rest of the body, and to such a happy degree that pleasure has no show of enticement and pain no unbearable frown. Neither Poetry, nor Ambition, nor Love have any alertness of countenance as they pass by me: they seem rather like three figures on a greek vase-- a Man and two women--whom no one but myself could distinguish in their disguisement.

(Rollins, II, pp. 78-79)

In such a state of detached imaginative contemplation, the universe is seen as a harmonious whole. Even the seemingly disagreeable elements of life appear "beautiful" when they are seen as parts of a harmonious whole. Such a view of the world cannot but give great pleasure. In Keats's view, the "beauty" which is seized by the imagination cannot but be "truth." "Truth" cannot but appear as "beauty."

"Beauty" confirms the "truth" of what is perceived by the imagination. For Keats, what appears to the imagination as "beauty" in a disinterested state of contemplation constitutes the "truth" of things. To know this, he believes, is to hold the key to "truth." The moment of perception of "beauty" is, in his view, the moment when we, in Wordsworth's phrase, "see into the life of things." It is this insight into things which makes it possible for us to accept life in its totality. This kind of acceptance is, in Keats's view, the greatest thing in life. The knowledge which makes such acceptance possible (the knowledge that what appears to the imagination as "beauty" in a disinterested state of contemplation constitutes the "truth" of



things) is, therefore, the highest knowledge which can be gained on earth and the only knowledge worth gaining. It is the sum total of all knowledge.

The Grecian Urn not only declares that "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," but also reveals "truth" as "beauty." The revelation of "truth" as "beauty" is, in Keats's view, the function of all art, especially poetry. The picture of life set forth by the poet induces in the reader a detached and disinterested state of imaginative contemplation in which he "arrives at that trembling delicate and snail-horn perception of Beauty."<sup>22</sup> This "beauty" cannot but be "truth." In other words, the reader's imagination perceives (as "beauty") the "truth" which the poet's imagination had seized as "beauty" and embodied in poetry.

Keats wrote to Fanny Brawne (probably in February 1820),<sup>23</sup> anguished by his debilitating illness and haunting thoughts about death:

"If I should die," said I to myself, "I have left no immortal work behind me--nothing to make my friends proud of my memory--but I have lov'd the principle of beauty in all things, and if I had had time I would have made myself remember'd."  
(emphasis added)

(Rollins, II, p. 263)

From this confession it is clear that Keats attaches utmost importance to his love of "the principle of beauty in all things." He regards it as something that could help him... to make himself remembered for ever, if only he could have some more time. It seems reasonable, therefore, to assume that by "beauty" Keats here means much more than sensuous

or aesthetic beauty, especially when this statement is considered in the light of Keats's earlier reflections on beauty. Keats had described his own type of poetical character as one which "lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated" and which relishes the dark side of things as well as the bright one. Keats's yearning for the beautiful does not prevent him from relishing the dark side of things as much as the bright one. We must, therefore, assume that what he has in mind is not just sensuous beauty, but a deeper beauty. It must be this deeper or higher beauty which Keats has in mind when he writes to Fanny Brawne that he has "lov'd the principle of beauty in all things."

As John Middleton Murry has pointed out,<sup>24</sup> the statement "I have lov'd the principle of beauty in all things" can be interpreted in three ways. It can be read as "I have loved the principle of beauty--in all things." When read thus, the word "principle" must be taken to mean "element." Even if this meaning of the word is accepted, the meaning of the sentence is not obvious. Keats could either be saying that he has loved the element of beauty in whatever thing he has found it or that he has found an element of beauty in all things and loved it. If Keats is saying either of these, what he has in mind is probably aesthetic beauty. If we take this sentence in the first sense, what Keats is saying is that he has loved all things which appeal to and satisfy the aesthetic sense. If we

take Keats's statement in the second sense, what he is saying is that even though there are ugly things, even these are not totally ugly; he has loved even these since there is an element of beauty in them. Keats could, however, mean something totally different if the statement was meant to be read as "I have lov'd the principle--of beauty in all things." When read thus, the word "principle" seems to mean "idea." If so, what Keats is saying is that he has always loved the idea of finding all things beautiful. Since all things are certainly not beautiful when judged by aesthetic standards, we must assume that what Keats has in mind is much more than aesthetic beauty. He must have in mind a beauty which is equal to truth. The whole trend and direction of Keats's mature thought on human life, on beauty, and on the role of the poet lead us to suppose that this third interpretation of Keats's statement in his letter to Fanny Brawne is the right one.

No one can see beauty in all things who has not gained an imaginative insight into them. Keats regards the poet as one who has such insight. He observes in his sonnet entitled "The Poet":

To his sight  
The husk of natural objects opens quite  
To the core; and every secret essence there  
Reveals the elements of good and fair;  
Making him see, where Learning hath no light.

The poet, in his view, is one who is endowed with the power to "see as a god sees, and take the depth / Of things as nimbly as the outward eye / Can size and shape pervade."

The expression "beauty in all things" recalls a similar expression used by Keats in the verse epistle "To J.H. Reynolds Esq." written on 25 March 1818--"the love of good and ill."<sup>25</sup> Keats laments:

Oh, never will the prize,  
High reason, and the love of good and ill,  
Be my award! Things cannot to the will  
Be settled, but they tease us out of thought.

(ll. 74-77)

Keats believed that it was possible not only to accept, but also to love "good and ill." But at the time of writing the epistle "To J.H. Reynolds Esq.," this seemed to be beyond his capability. The poem expresses Keats's feeling of disgust and shock on becoming aware of the cruelty inherent in Nature:

Dear Reynolds! I have a mysterious tale,  
And cannot speak it: the first page I read  
Upon a Lampit rock of green sea-weed  
Among the breakers; 'twas a quiet eve,  
The rocks were silent, the wide sea did weave  
An untumultuous fringe of silver foam  
Along the flat brown sand; I was at home  
And should have been most happy,--but I saw  
Too far into the sea where every maw  
The greater on the less feeds evermore.--  
But I saw too distinct into the core  
Of an eternal fierce destruction,  
And so from happiness I far was gone.  
Still am I sick of it, and tho', to-day,  
I've gather'd young spring-leaves, and flowers gay  
Of periwinkle and wild strawberry,  
Still do I that most fierce destruction see,--  
The Shark at savage prey,--the Hawk at pounce,--  
The gentle Robin, like a Pard or Ounce,  
Ravening a worm.

(ll. 86-105)

A love of the principle of "beauty in all things" is indeed a far cry from the sentiments expressed in this poem. To give an account of this change in Keats's attitude is to

give an account of his poetic development during the period extending from March 1818 when the epistle was written up to the time (probably February 1820) when he wrote the letter to Fanny Brawne. This development can be described as a progress towards the ideal of "negative capability." It had to do with Keats's clearer perception of the "end and aim of Poesy."

As pointed out in the previous chapter, negative capability implies disinterestedness. In Keats's view, great poetry has its origin in a disinterested state of mind--a state characterized by a total freedom from personal desires and preoccupations. In such a state of mind the poet sees the world (including human affairs) as it is, uncoloured by personal predilections or prejudices. He looks at things from a certain distance and height; consequently he is able to see them in their true perspective. At such a moment the imagination perceives the universe as a harmonious whole, working, as it were, toward a "far-off divine event."<sup>26</sup> It penetrates beneath the surface of things and grasps the hidden purpose and meaning of the universe. This is the moment when the poet arrives at "that trembling delicate and snail-horn perception of Beauty"<sup>27</sup>--in all things. It is the moment when his imagination seizes "truth" as "beauty." This moment is characterized by an intense feeling of pleasure. This pleasure impels the poet to embody in poetry the "truth" which his imagination has seized as "beauty." As a result

of the poet's revelation, the reader finds the "burthen of the mystery," the "heavy and the weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world" lightened. This, Keats believes, is the ultimate "end and aim of Poesy." Poetry helps the reader to see "beauty in all things" and to love "good and ill."<sup>28</sup> Keats thus accords poetry a place as high as or higher than philosophy. He regards poetry as something concerned with the very purpose and meaning of existence.

Many of Keats's odes, some of them written in April and May 1819, show that he did not actually attain his goal of seeing "beauty in all things." "Ode to a Nightingale," for instance, shows how difficult it is for Keats to be reconciled to the pain and suffering which are part of human life. No one had a greater awareness than Keats of the ills that flesh is heir to. He had felt on his pulses that "the World is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression." He wrote to his brother and sister-in-law on 21 April 1819:

I have been reading lately two very different books Robertson's America [William Robertson (1721-1793), The History of America] and Voltaire's Siecle de Louis XIV. It is like walking arm in arm between Pizarro and the great-little Monarch. In How lamentabl[e] [sic] a case do we see the great body of the people in both instances: in the first, where Men might seem to inherit quiet of Mind from unsophisticated senses; from uncontamination of civilisation; and especially from their being as it were estranged from the mutual helps of Society and its mutual injuries--and thereby more immediately under the Protection of Providence--even there they had mortal pains to bear as bad; or even worse than Bailiffs, Debts and Poverities of civilised Life--The whole appears to resolve into this--that Man is originally 'a poor forked creature' subject to the same mischances as the beasts of the forest,

destined to hardships and disquietude of some kind or other. If he improves by degrees his bodily accommodations and comforts--at each stage, at each accent there are waiting for him a fresh set of annoyances--he is mortal and there is still a heaven with its stars above his head. The most interesting question that can come before us is, How far by the persevering endeavours of a seldom appearing Socrates Mankind may be made happy--I can imagine such happiness carried to an extreme--but what must it end in?--Death--and who could in such a case bear with death--the whole troubles of life which are now frittered away in a series of years, would the[n] be accumulated for the last days of a being who instead of hailing its approach, would leave this world as Eve left Paradise--But in truth I do not at all believe in this sort of perfectibility--the nature of the world will not admit of it--the inhabitants of the world will correspond to itself--Let the fish philosophise the ice away from the Rivers in winter time and they shall be at continual play in the tepid delight of summer. Look at the Poles and at the sands of Africa, Whirlpools and volcanoes--Let men exterminate them and I will say that they may arrive at earthly Happiness--The point at which Man may arrive is as far as the parallel state in inanimate nature and no further--For instance suppose a rose to have sensation, it blooms on a beautiful morning it enjoys itself--but there comes a cold wind, a hot sun--it can not escape it, it cannot destroy its annoyances--they are as native to the world as itself: no more can man be happy in spite, the worldly elements will prey upon his nature--

(Rollins, II, pp. 100-01)

In spite of his intense awareness of human suffering, Keats, however, regards this world not as a "vale of tears," but as the "vale of Soul-making." In his view, the pain and suffering which are part of life are necessary to fashion individual human souls, each with its own identity. He writes in the same letter to George and Georgiana Keats:

Call the world if you please "The vale of Soul-making". Then you will find out the use of the world (I am speaking now in the highest terms for human nature admitting it to be immortal which I will here take for granted for the purpose of

showing a thought which has struck me concerning it). I say 'Soul making' Soul as distinguished from an Intelligence--There may be intelligences or sparks of the divinity in millions--but they are not Souls till they acquire identities, till each one is personally itself. I[n]telligences are atoms of perception--they know and they see, and they are pure, in short they are God--how then are Souls to be made? How then are these sparks which are God to have identity given them--so as ever to possess a bliss peculiar to each ones individual existence? How but by the medium of a world like this?

(Rollins, II, pp. 101-02)

Keats calls the world "a School instituted for the purpose of teaching little children to read." He calls the human heart "the horn Book used in that School" and the child able to read "the Soul made from that school and its horn-book." He explains:

Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a soul? A Place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways! Not merely is the Heart a Hornbook, It is the Minds Bible, it is the Minds experience, it is the seat from which the Mind or intelligence sucks its identity--As various as the Lives of Men are--so various become their souls, and thus does God make individual beings, Souls, Identical Souls of the sparks of his own essence--

(Rollins, II, pp. 102-03)

Towards the close of the same letter Keats summarizes his thoughts on "Soul-making":

If what I have said should not be plain enough, as I fear it may not be, I will but [for "put"] you in the place where I began in this series of thoughts--I mean, I began by seeing how man was formed by circumstances--and what are circumstances?--but touchstones of his heart--? and what are touch stones?--but proofings of his heart?--and what are proofings of his heart but fortifiers or alterers of his nature? and what is his altered nature but his soul?--and what was his soul before it came into the world and had These



provings and alterations and perfectionings?--An intelligence without Identity--and how is this Identity to be made? Through the medium of the Heart? And how is the heart to become this Medium but in a world of Circumstances?--

(Rollins, II, pp. 103-04)

The soul which comes into being through and as a result of suffering is, in Keats's view, supremely beautiful. Keats's conception of the world as a "vale of Soul-making" leads us to believe that though he did not actually attain his cherished goal of seeing "beauty in all things," he at least came very near to seeing a grand design at work in the universe, contributing to unity and harmony. Moreover, as he tells Fanny Brawne, he "lov'd" the very notion of "beauty in all things." We must believe that if he had lived longer, Keats would have made himself remembered by revealing to others through his poetry "beauty in all things."

As pointed out earlier, poetic imagination is, for Keats, not only an intuitive faculty which can perceive "truth" as "beauty," but also a creative faculty which can embody this "truth" as "beauty." In Chapter II it was shown how Keats came to believe that poetry should draw sustenance from the rich soil of human life. This does not mean that he regards poetry as a servile imitation of life. He believes that the business of the poet is the imaginative transmutation of the stuff of life. This, for him, is the creative aspect of poetry. The poet paints life in such a way as to embody his imaginative insights--"fine isolated verisimilitude[s] caught from the Penetralium of mystery." In the words of Coleridge, the imagination of

the poet "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create: or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify."<sup>29</sup> Keats may have this process in mind when he writes to Haydon about the "innumerable compositions and decompositions which take place between the intellect and its thousand materials before it arrives at that trembling delicate and snail-horn perception of Beauty."<sup>30</sup> The context leads us to assume that Keats is referring here not to the perception of "beauty" which precedes artistic creation and which impels the artist to engage in artistic creation, but to the perception of "beauty" involved in the process of artistic creation.<sup>31</sup> Keats must have been thinking of the imaginative transmutation of life involved in the process of artistic creation when he describes himself and Haydon as people who look upon "the Sun the Moon the Stars, the Earth and its contents as materials to form greater things . . . greater things that [for "than"] our Creator himself made!"<sup>32</sup> He must have had the same process in mind when he summarizes the difference between Byron and himself as follows:

He describes what he sees--I describe what I imagine--Mine is the hardest task.<sup>33</sup>

In The Fall of Hyperion Keats describes the poet as a "sage," a "humanist," and a "physician to all men." As pointed out earlier, the appellation "humanist" suggests the poet's keen and abiding interest in humanity and his

sympathetic understanding of the human heart. In so far as poetry draws sustenance from the soil of human life, knowledge gained through the intellect is an important and indispensable part of the poet's equipment. The poet is a sage by virtue of his power to see "beauty in all things." He may also be regarded as a physician because of the therapeutic effect of poetry on the reader. By revealing to the reader "beauty in all things" poetry helps to ease "the burthen of the mystery." In Keats's view, it is imagination which plays the vital role in the supreme poetic task of perceiving and revealing "beauty in all things." As early as October 1817 Keats recognized imagination as the rudder of poetry.<sup>34</sup> But he also recognizes the need to temper the imagination with judgment.<sup>35</sup> In short, Keats is of the view that a poet's imagination and his intellect must function harmoniously, the latter being guided by the former and the former being tempered by the latter, if he is to be capable of performing the supreme poetic task of revealing "beauty in all things."

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Keats's view of poetry can be summed up as follows: The poet is an interpreter of human life. He sheds light on the dark chambers of the mansion of human life. Poetry is concerned with the eternal verities of existence. For Keats, "truth" has a universal significance. "Truth" is perceived by the intuitive imagination of the poet as "beauty." This is another way of saying that "beauty" is the subjective aspect of "truth." This "beauty" is distinct from aesthetic or sensuous beauty in that it gives not sensuous pleasure, but an inner thrill, an elevation of the soul that results from seeing "into the life of things." Such "beauty" appeals not to the senses, but to the heart, mind, and soul.

To be able to perceive "truth" as "beauty" a poet must be endowed with what Keats calls "negative capability." "Negative capability" refers to the nature and character of a poet, as well as to the manner in which he interprets life. Some of the marks of a poet endowed with "negative capability" are selflessness, empathy, disinterestedness, receptivity, acceptance, a strong faith in intuitive imagination and a distrust of "consequitive reasoning." As a term relating to the way in which a poet interprets life,

"negative capability" implies a certain degree of poetic objectivity or impersonality. The poet attempts to look at the world objectively, without being influenced by his personal predilections or prejudices. In this disinterested state of mind the universe is perceived by the imagination as a harmonious whole. For Keats, what appears to the imagination as beauty in a disinterested state of contemplation constitutes the truth of things. Poetry is thus a form of knowledge. It is, however, not intellectual knowledge, but intuitive knowledge. This intuitive or "soul-knowledge" helps to lighten our "burthen of the mystery." Thus it has a therapeutic effect on the reader. By revealing the inner harmony of the universe which is often concealed by its outer disarray, it helps the reader to see "beauty in all things" and to "love good and ill." Poetry is thus concerned with the very purpose and meaning of existence. In this respect, its function is akin to that of philosophy. In the universal scheme of things poetry thus holds a place which is as high as or higher than philosophy.

The truths with which poetry is concerned cannot be arrived at through "consequitive reasoning." Very often they do not fit into a rational system of thought. These are distinct from facts, which can be intellectually verified. This is not to say that the truths of poetry are irrational. The truths with which poetry is concerned lie beyond the realm of intellect and reason. These truths

are directly apprehended by the intuitive imagination of the poet. On coming into contact with these, one's whole being responds ecstatically, as though in assent.

Keats's early conception of imagination was almost the same as the prevalent eighteenth century conception of it, viz. as a picture-making faculty. In the early years he attributed to poetic imagination mainly the power of conjuring up a dream-world of sensuous beauty. In his final days, however, it is for Keats, as it is for Coleridge, mainly an organ of insight, which can apprehend "truth" intuitively. Poetic imagination not only perceives, but also reveals "truth" as "beauty." The revelation of "truth" as "beauty" is, in Keats's view, the ultimate "end and aim of Poesy." Like Coleridge, he regards poetic imagination also as a creative power which can embody in poetry the "truth" which it has apprehended. Like the former, he holds that the imagination of the poet "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create: or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify." In so far as poetic imagination is a creative power, poetry is not a servile imitation of life. The poet transmutes the stuff of life in such a way as to embody his imaginative insights.

It may be asked whether Keats's own practice as a poet exemplifies his theory of poetry. In the early days we notice practically no discrepancy between Keats's theory and practice. He believed that poetry was a form of escape;

therefore he wrote mainly escapist poetry. But gradually Keats's view of poetry changed. He came to recognize the vital link between poetry and human life. He came to believe that the poet must feel what Wordsworth calls "the heavy and the weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world." There are many poems which indicate that Keats did acutely feel "the burthen of the mystery."

In the epistle "To J.H. Reynolds Esq.," written in March 1818, Keats expresses his shock and revulsion at the cruelty inherent in nature. "On Visiting the Tomb of Burns" (early July 1818) reveals his acute awareness that in this world "pain is never done." In "To Ailsa Rock" he ponders on the unfathomable mysteries of nature. In the sonnet beginning "Read me a lesson, Muse" (August 1818) Keats deals with the serious limitations of human knowledge. His acute consciousness of mortality and other human limitations adds an extra dimension to the love story of Madeline and Porphyro which is unfolded in "The Eve of St. Agnes" (January 1819). The pain of human life, the evanescence of beauty and love, the mutability and decay which characterize the sublunary world--these are recurrent themes in Keats's odes.

Keats came to believe that a great poet must pass from the stage at which he feels "the burthen of the mystery" to a higher stage when he is able to "see into the life of things" and consequently, to write poetry which will help the reader to gain this insight. But unfortunately he

died before he was able to write such philosophic poetry. In Hyperion we find an attempt on his part to discover some kind of meaning in suffering. It must, however, be admitted that on the whole Keats's poetry does not help to lighten our "burthen of the mystery" by enabling us to "see into the life of things."

It now remains to consider whether Keats's poetry exhibits the quality of "negative capability." Keats certainly had most of the marks of one endowed with "negative capability." He had the capacity to negate his "self" and to identify himself imaginatively with people and objects. He showed an openness to the diversity of experience. Above all, he had a strong faith in intuitive imagination and a distrust of "consequitive reasoning." Nevertheless, it must be admitted that Keats's poetry does not, on the whole, manifest "negative capability." As pointed out earlier, as a term relating to the manner in which a poet interprets life, "negative capability" implies a certain degree of objectivity or impersonality. But in most of his poems Keats is anything but objective or impersonal. It cannot be gainsaid that there is a great deal of self-expression in his poems. Very often there is "a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings."<sup>1</sup> A poet endowed with "negative capability" views the world in a disinterested state of mind. In most of his poems, however, Keats is far from disinterested. Because of the pressure of the tragic circumstances of his life, Keats cannot, except in rare



instances, picture life as a disinterested spectator as his theory would require. Most often his view of the world is that of an active participant. A poet who possesses "negative capability" will, in Keats's view, accept the world in its totality. In practice, however, Keats cannot and does not do this (except in a few isolated instances) because of his tragic lot in life. It has to be admitted that his poems very rarely exhibit the quality of acceptance.

Keats's contribution to literary theory, though not entirely original, is certainly significant. First of all, he strongly believed in and helped to create an awareness of the importance of the poet's vocation. He viewed the poet as a "sage," a "humanist," and a "physician to all men." Poetry, he believed, is concerned with eternal verities. He attributed to it a serious function, akin to that of philosophy.

In his later years Keats did much to discredit the "escapist" theory of poetry to which he once subscribed. Time and again during this period he has emphasized the vital link between poetry and human life. His utterances on poetry at this time reveal his belief that the real world of men and women ought to form the substratum of poetry. They also suggest the view that the function of poetry is to illuminate and interpret human life, that is, to open the reader's eyes to its hidden purpose and meaning. The poet, Keats held, is not a mere songbird singing in blissful

ignorance, but one who is deeply concerned with the labyrinthine complexities of human life.

Keats ponders deeply on "truth" and "beauty" in relation to poetry. Although it cannot be said that he has explained "poetic truth" and "poetic beauty" once and for all, his pregnant remarks have shed considerable light on these terms which have baffled poets and critics of every age.

Above all, Keats advances the concept of "negative capability" as a criterion of poetic excellence. He asserts the validity of this criterion by citing the example of Shakespeare, who is universally acknowledged as the supreme poet. It must be acknowledged that "negative capability" is indeed a sound criterion of poetic greatness, although it cannot be applied indiscriminately to all kinds of poetry.

In spite of his significant contribution to literary theory, it must be admitted that Keats fails to attain the stature of a theorist of the highest order. The reasons are obvious. First of all, he does not care to expound his theories systematically. He refuses to resort to "consequential reasoning." Consequently most of his utterances on poetry have the appearance of sudden flashes of insight. Keats is content to leave to others the task of interpreting his chance remarks. Secondly, as pointed out earlier, Keats's theories of poetry are not, generally speaking, illustrated or illuminated by his own practice as a poet. Finally, Keats has left us practically no applied criticism,

which could have helped us to evaluate his theories. His marginalia on Shakespeare, his notes on Milton's Paradise Lost, his chance remarks on Wordsworth, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron, etc., and his essay "On Edmund Kean as a Shakespearian Actor" are hardly sufficient for this purpose.

Though Keats does not take pains to expound systematically his view of poetry, a cogent, coherent, logical theory of poetry can be built up from his random utterances. These utterances may not be enough to assure him a place among the greatest literary theorists. Nevertheless, Keats's contribution to literary theory is certainly valuable.

## NOTES

### Preface

<sup>1</sup>T.S. Eliot, "Shelley and Keats," in his The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (London: Faber and Faber Limited, MCMXXXIII), p. 101.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, 11 July 1819, in The Letters of John Keats 1814-1821, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins (1958; rpt. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1972), Vol. II, p. 128.

<sup>3</sup>Letter to Benjamin Bailey, 14 August 1819, Rollins, Vol. II, p. 139.

<sup>4</sup>Letter to J.H. Reynolds, 24 August 1819, Rollins, Vol. II, p. 167.

<sup>5</sup>Letter to John Taylor, 27 February 1818, Rollins, Vol. I, p. 238.

<sup>6</sup>Letter to John Taylor, 27 February 1818, Rollins, Vol. I, p. 238.

<sup>7</sup>Rollins, Vol. II, p. 323.

<sup>8</sup>The Keats Circle: Letters and Papers and More Letters and Poems of the Keats Circle, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965).

<sup>9</sup>Letter to John Taylor, 27 February 1818, Rollins, Vol. I, pp. 238-39.

### Chapter I

<sup>1</sup>Keats notes that Milton, in spite of his "exquisite passion" for "poetical luxury," devotes himself in Paradise Lost "rather to the arduous than the pleasures of Song, solacing himself at intervals with cups of old wine." "Notes on Milton's Paradise Lost," in The Complete Works of John Keats, ed. H. Buxton Forman (Glasgow, 1901; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1970), Vol. III, p. 256.

<sup>2</sup>It must be noted here that this typical Romantic view held by Keats at this time changes in his later years.

<sup>3</sup>William Wordsworth, "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798," ll. 65-111.

<sup>4</sup>Rollins, Vol. I, pp. 280-81.

<sup>5</sup>Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," Stanza iv, l. 21.

<sup>6</sup>Forman, Vol. III, p. 232.

<sup>7</sup>Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke, Recollections of Writers (1878), pp. 131-32, quoted by Walter Jackson Bate in John Keats (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 65.

<sup>8</sup>Sometimes he uses the plural "luxuries" and sometimes the adjective "luxurious."

<sup>9</sup>E.F. Guy, "Keats's Use of 'Luxury': A Note on Meaning," Keats-Shelley Journal, 13 (1964), pp. 87-95.

<sup>10</sup>p. 90.

<sup>11</sup>Keats's description of such an experience in the epistle "To My Brother George" has already been referred to.

<sup>12</sup>Letter to Benjamin Bailey, 22 November 1817, Rollins, Vol. I, p. 185.

<sup>13</sup>pp. 91-92.

<sup>14</sup>Thomas Keats had the misfortune to fracture his skull when the horse he was riding fell with him, having slipped on a cobblestone. Bate, p. 12.

<sup>15</sup>James R. Thompson, Leigh Hunt, Twayne's English Authors Series (gen. ed. Sylvia E. Bowman), No. 210 (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977), pp. 27-28.

<sup>16</sup>Walter Jackson Bate, John Keats (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 79.

## Chapter II

<sup>1</sup>Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey," l. 91.

<sup>2</sup>The Fall of Hyperion, Canto i, l. 157.

<sup>3</sup>Shelley, "To a Skylark," l. 5.

<sup>4</sup>Letter to J.H. Reynolds, 3 February 1818, Rollins, Vol. I, p. 224.

<sup>5</sup>This has been pointed out by Clarence Dewitt Thorpe in The Mind of John Keats (1926; reissued New York: Russell & Russell Inc., 1964), p. 129.

<sup>6</sup>Letter to George and Tom Keats, 21, 27 (7) December 1817, Rollins, Vol. I, p. 192.

<sup>7</sup>Letter to B.R. Haydon, 21 November 1816, Rollins, Vol. I, p. 118.

<sup>8</sup>"Observations Prefixed to 'Lyrical Ballads,'" in The Great Critics: An Anthology of Literary Criticism, comp. and ed. James Harry Smith and Edd Winfield Parks, 3rd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1951), pp. 506-07.

<sup>9</sup>"Observations," in The Great Critics, pp. 508-09.

<sup>10</sup>Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey," l. 49.

<sup>11</sup>Thorpe, The Mind of John Keats, p. 57. I am indebted to Thorpe for the following interpretation of Endymion's experiences on his way, before being finally united with his "love immortal."

<sup>12</sup>"Sleep and Poetry," ll. 101-04.

<sup>13</sup>Thorpe, p. 58.

<sup>14</sup>Letter to J.H. Reynolds, 3 May 1818, Rollins, Vol. I, p. 281.

<sup>15</sup>Letter to J.H. Reynolds, 3 May 1818, Rollins, Vol. I, p. 281.

<sup>16</sup>The Round Table, in The Round Table and Characters of Shakespear's Plays, Everyman's Library, No. 65 (1936; rpt. London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd.; New York: E.P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1951), pp. 45-46.

<sup>17</sup>Rollins, Vol. I, p. 174.

<sup>18</sup>"Observations," in The Great Critics, p. 501.

<sup>19</sup>Characters of Shakespear's Plays, in The Round Table and Characters of Shakespear's Plays, p. 271.

<sup>20</sup>Quoted by Walter Jackson Bate, John Keats, p. 262.

21. "Lear," in Characters of Shakespear's Plays, The Round Table and Characters of Shakespear's Plays, p. 259.

22. Quoted by Walter Jackson Bate, John Keats, p. 262.

23. Rollins, Vol. I, p. 214.

24. Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey," ll. 38-41.

25. Letter to J.H. Reynolds, 3 May 1818, Rollins, Vol. I, p. 282.

26. Letter to George and Tom Keats, 21, 27 (?) December 1817, Rollins, Vol. I, p. 193.

27. John Middleton Murry explains that it is "the temple of life become conscious of itself in man, and now in one man more than all others, the poet." Keats and Shakespeare: A Study of Keats' Poetic Life from 1816 to 1820 (London: Humphrey Milford, 1925), p. 174.

28. Endymion, Book II, l. 276.

29. Murry, Keats and Shakespeare, p. 178.

30. Keats and Shakespeare, p. 182.

31. Keats and Shakespeare, p. 183.

32. Murry, Keats and Shakespeare, p. 175.

33. Murry, Keats and Shakespeare, p. 186.

34. Murry, Keats and Shakespeare, p. 184.

35. Rollins, Vol. I, p. 242.

36. Rollins, Vol. I, p. 277.

37. Rollins, Vol. I, p. 374.

38. "[B]ut we must temper the Imagination as the Critics say with Judgment." Letter to George and Georgiana Keats, 21 April 1819, Rollins, Vol. II, p. 97.

39. Letter to J.H. Reynolds, 11 July 1819, Rollins, Vol. II, p. 128.

40. Letter to Sarah Jeffrey, 9 June 1819, Rollins, Vol. II, p. 116.

## Chapter III

<sup>1</sup>17-27 September. This remark occurs in that part of the letter written on 24 September.

<sup>2</sup>This phrase is used by Keats in his letter of 22 November 1817 to Benjamin Bailey. Rollins, Vol. I, p. 185.

<sup>3</sup>Keats uses this expression in his letter of 10 June 1818 to Benjamin Bailey. "I am not," he writes, "old enough or magnanimous enough to annihilate self." Rollins, Vol. I, p. 292.

<sup>4</sup>Endymion, Book I, ll. 781-811.

<sup>5</sup>Keats uses the expression "egotistical sublime" to describe Wordsworth's poetical character. Letter to Richard Woodhouse, 27 October 1818, Rollins, Vol. I, p. 387.

<sup>6</sup>Rollins points out in a footnote that George Beaumont, TLS, February 27, May 1, 1930, pp. 166, 370, emends "in for" to "informing."

<sup>7</sup>"On Shakespeare and Milton," in his Lectures on the English Poets, Lectures on the English Poets and The Spirit of the Age, Everyman's Library (gen. ed. Ernest Rhys), No. 459 (1910; rpt. London & Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd.; New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1928), pp. 47-50.

<sup>8</sup>Rollins explains in a footnote that Woodhouse first wrote "that Keats speaks" and that when he added "I suppose" and "to" he failed to change "speaks" to "speak."

<sup>9</sup>John Keats, p. 33.

<sup>10</sup>Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke, Recollections of Writers (1878), pp. 125-26, quoted by Walter Jackson Bate, John Keats, p. 33.

<sup>11</sup>"Notes on Milton's Paradise Lost," in Complete Works, ed. H. Buxton Forman, Vol. III, p. 265.

<sup>12</sup>It is worth recalling Christ's advice: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them" (Matt. vii, 12). To be able to do unto others as we would have them do unto us we need empathy, the capacity to place ourselves, by an act of imagination, in another's situation.

<sup>13</sup>The remark is part of the marginalia found in Keats's copy of Troilus and Cressida. Complete Works, ed. H. Buxton Forman, Vol. III, p. 254.



<sup>14</sup>The sonnet beginning "Why did I laugh tonight," "Character of Charles Brown," "A Dream, after Reading Dante's Episode of Paolo and Francesca," "La Belle Dame sans Merci," "Song of Four Fairies," two sonnets on Fame, "To Sleep," and "Ode to Psyche."

<sup>15</sup>Rollins, Vol. II, p. 213.

<sup>16</sup>Keats and Shakespeare, p. 48.

<sup>17</sup>Rollins, Vol. I, pp. 193-94.

<sup>18</sup>Letter to Benjamin Bailey, 22 November 1817, Rollins, Vol. I, p. 185.

<sup>19</sup>1 Cor. xiii, 12.

<sup>20</sup>Letter to J.H. Reynolds, 3 February 1818, Rollins, Vol. I, p. 224.

<sup>21</sup>Letter to J.H. Reynolds, 3 February 1818, Rollins, Vol. I, p. 224.

<sup>22</sup>Canto I, ll. 204-10.

<sup>23</sup>Letter to George and Georgiana Keats, 19 March 1819, Rollins, Vol. II, pp. 79-80.

<sup>24</sup>"On Gusto," in The Round Table, The Round Table and Characters of Shakespear's Plays, p. 77.

<sup>25</sup>These have been enumerated in Chapter I.

#### Chapter IV

<sup>1</sup>"FANCY, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definitives. The fancy is indeed no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space; while it is blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word Choice. But equally with the ordinary memory the Fancy must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association." Biographia Literaria, Everyman's Library (gen. ed. Ernest Rhys), No. II (1906; rpt. London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd.; New York: E.P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1934), p. 160.

<sup>2</sup>Keats's early view of poetic imagination was dealt with in Chapter I.

<sup>3</sup>The Imagination then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary Imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create: or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead." Biographia Literaria, p. 160.

<sup>4</sup>The Prefigurative Imagination of John Keats: A Study of the Beauty-Truth Identification and its Implications (1951; rpt. Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1966), pp. 74-76.

<sup>5</sup>As Ford has pointed out, the Song elaborates one of Keats's pet theories: that love "might bless / The world with benefits unknowingly." Endymion, Book I, ll. 826-27.

<sup>6</sup>Newell Ford, p. 76.

<sup>7</sup>I am indebted to Newell Ford for the above explanation of the connection between the song "O Sorrow" and Keats's idea of the relationship between Beauty and Truth. He, however, sees the sorrow of the Titans in Hyperion as leading only to "a new and increasing beauty in the physical world" (emphasis added). Prefigurative Imagination, p. 76.

<sup>8</sup>Prefigurative Imagination, p. 75.

<sup>9</sup>Letter to George and Georgiana Keats, 16-18, 22, 29 (?), 31 December 1818, 2-4 January 1819, Rollins, Vol. II, p. 19.

<sup>10</sup>Though Keats does not actually refer to Endymion's dream, we must assume that he has it in mind when he refers to Book I of Endymion.

<sup>11</sup>Rollins, Vol. I, p. 192.

<sup>12</sup>Hazlitt's definition of "gusto" was quoted in the previous chapter.

<sup>13</sup>"On Gusto," in The Round Table, The Round Table and Characters of Shakespear's Plays, p. 77.

<sup>14</sup>Rollins, Vol. I, p. 388.

<sup>15</sup>Wherein lies happiness? In that which beck  
Our ready minds to fellowship divine,  
A fellowship with essence; till we shine,  
Full alchemiz'd, and free of space.  
(ll. 777-80)

<sup>16</sup>Letters to George and Georgiana Keats, 16-18, 22, 29 (?), 31 December 1818, 2-4 January 1819. This statement occurs in that portion of the letter written on 31 December 1818. Rollins, Vol. II, p. 19.

<sup>17</sup>This is clear from the punctuation. The statement "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" is within quotation marks, whereas the remaining one and a half lines of the poem are not.

<sup>18</sup>"Keats," in his Essays in Criticism, 2nd Series, Macmillan's Colonial Library (London: Macmillan and Co., 1888), p. 116.

<sup>19</sup>The Grecian Urn of Keats's poem may be an actual urn or vase which Keats saw. Or else he may have garnered the scenes depicted on his Urn from a number of real urns (vases) or engravings of real urns. Even if Keats's Urn is wholly imaginary, we must assume that his response to this imaginary urn (as set forth in the ode) is based on his response to actual works of art. It would not be wrong to assume that Keats's Urn (if it is imaginary) conforms to and hence illustrates the artistic principles which formed the basis of great works of art with which he had actually come into contact.

<sup>20</sup>Thorpe, The Mind of John Keats, p. 135.

<sup>21</sup>Letter to George and Georgiana Keats, 19 March 1819. The passage was quoted in full in Chapter III.

<sup>22</sup>Letter to B.R. Haydon, 8 April 1818, Rollins, Vol. I, p. 265.

<sup>23</sup>There is some uncertainty regarding the date of this letter.

<sup>24</sup>Keats and Shakespeare, pp. 72-73.

<sup>25</sup>Garrod has the reading "the love of good and ill" (emphasis added). The context, however, does not seem to warrant such a change. H. Buxton Forman's reading "the love [emphasis added] of good and ill" accords better with Keats's thought.

<sup>26</sup> Tennyson, In Memoriam, the penultimate line.

<sup>27</sup> Letter to B.R. Haydon, 8 April 1818, Rollins, Vol. I, p. 265.

<sup>28</sup> According to John Middleton Murry (Keats and Shakespeare, p. 75), "Beauty in all things" was "Keats's great poetic intuition and the revelation of this beauty the great human purpose to which he dedicated himself and for which he was prepared to die."

<sup>29</sup> Biographia Literaria, pp. 159-60.

<sup>30</sup> Letter to B.R. Haydon, 8 April 1818, Rollins, Vol. I, p. 265.

<sup>31</sup> It must be noted that the observation is made by Keats while discussing the practical aspect of artistic creation ("the labyrinthian path to eminence in Art").

<sup>32</sup> Letter to B.R. Haydon, 11 May 1817, Rollins, Vol. I, p. 143.

<sup>33</sup> Letter to George and Georgiana Keats, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 25, 27 September 1819, Rollins, Vol. II, p. 200.

<sup>34</sup> "Besides a long Poem is a test of Invention which I take to be the Polar Star of Poetry, as Fancy is the Sails, and Imagination the Rudder." Letter to Benjamin Bailey, 8 October 1817, Rollins, Vol. I, p. 170.

<sup>35</sup> "[B]ut we must temper the Imagination as the Critics say with Judgment." Letter to George and Georgiana Keats, 21 April 1819, Rollins, Vol. II, p. 97.

#### Chapter V

<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth, "Observations," in The Great Critics, p. 501.

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