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NEGATIVE CAPABILITY AND WISE PASSIVENESS

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By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of the relationship between Keats's concept of Negative Capability and Wordsworth's concept of "wise passiveness". Since the poets' ideas on imagination, reason, sensation, and philosophy are related to their thoughts on Negative Capability and "wise passiveness", they are also examined. The final chapter is an attempt to show how Keats's ideas concerning Negative Capability are worked out in his Odes.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

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

Keats's phrase "Negative Capability" has long been of interest to scholars and has been given various interpretations. H. W. Garrod first pointed out that the concept is closely linked to Keats's longing "for a life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts" and that similar ideas are dominant in the poetry and prose of Wordsworth. He claims that Negative Capability is "a quality not essentially different . . . from what Wordsworth calls 'wise passivity' [sic]"² Garrod does not develop the idea in any detail, however, and it was left for J. Middleton Murry, in his study of Keats, to carry the comparison further. Murry devotes a long chapter to "Keats and Wordsworth", dwelling mainly on the similarities between the two poets. I will return to Murry's study later on, but for the moment it is important to note that, like Garrod, he claims that "there can be no doubt . . . that for Keats -- in spite of a temporary reaction -- Wordsworth was eminently gifted with Negative Capability. There was no irritable

reaching after fact and reason in this teacher of a wise passiveness."³

W. J. Bate rejects Garrod's and Murry's contention and claims that "'Negative Capability' is not objectivity nor yet Wordsworth's 'wise passiveness,' although it is indeed objective and passive in nature."⁴ Bate's book was the first, and, I think, only, full-length study of Negative Capability, and although almost every critic of Keats has dealt with the concept since then, they have almost all been influenced to some extent by Bate's study. Thus the book merits a fairly close examination.

Bate's study makes many valuable points. He gives a close analysis of some of Keats's letters and emphasizes the importance to Keats of sensations rather than thoughts, of the poet's imaginative perception of the world rather than 'consequitive reasoning', of intuition rather than logic:

This passage [the letter of November 22, 1817 to Bailey] contains Keats's first distinction between the logical element of the intellect and the imaginative, intuitive faculty, and his insistence not merely that the use of the Imagination is the more efficacious means of arriving at truth but that it is actually the only way by which truth can be grasped.⁵

From the "Negative Capability" letter of 27(?) December, 1819, however, Bate jumps to the letter to Woodhouse of 27 October, 1818 in which Keats discusses his concept of the Poetical Character and draws the distinction between the Shakespearean poet and the Wordsworthian or "egotistical sublime" poet. The Shakespearean poet has no identity of his own, Keats claims; he lives in and through the identities of the objects he contemplates. Bate suggests that this ability of the poet to identify sympathetically, through his imagination, with the objects he contemplates is the same as Negative Capability. Negative Capability becomes, then, the poet's ability to annul self. The fallacious logic behind Bate's argument

seems to run thus: Negative Capability is an intuitive or imaginative approach to life; sympathetic identification depends upon the poet's imaginative approach; therefore, by inference, Negative Capability is the same as sympathetic identification. It seems to matter little to Bate that the "Negative Capability" letter and the letter on the Poetical Character were written ten months apart and that neither letter makes mention of the other topic whatsoever. He, not Keats, makes the connexion between the two letters, and he seems to establish it through the figure of Shakespeare, who, Keats claims, possessed Negative Capability and lacked identity. I have no doubt that Keats felt that any great poet should possess Negative Capability and the ability for sympathetic identification, and I have no doubt that they are both linked to the imagination, but this does not mean that they are one and the same concept.

In all fairness to Bate, it must be acknowledged that at the end of his study he states that Negative Capability is not "an implicit trust in the Imagination nor, even, the Shakespearean quality of annihilating one's own identity by becoming at one with the subject, although these too it includes within its scope."⁶ This nice detraction, however, does not eliminate his virtual equation of these three things throughout his study, and the equation, as we shall see, has passed on to other critics.

Bate also fails to point out that Keats was greatly influenced by Wordsworth during the period when the "Negative Capability" letter was written. Rather, he mentions Wordsworth only to draw his distinction between the Shakespearean poet and the Wordsworthian poet of the egotistical sublime. In fact, Keats wrote to Bailey on 8 October, 1817 that he was "quite disgusted with literary Men and will never know another except

Wordsworth".⁷ Keats had been studying Wordsworth diligently at Oxford with Bailey during September of 1817, and he was introduced to the elder poet by Haydon in early December 1817, just before the "Negative Capability" letter was written. On 28 December, 1817 Haydon's "immortal dinner" took place, attended by both Keats and Wordsworth, and during January 1818 Keats wrote with enthusiasm to both Taylor and Bailey that he had "seen a good deal of Wordsworth".⁸ Also in January, Keats wrote to Haydon that The Excursion was one of the "three things to rejoice at in this Age".⁹ There can be no doubt, then, that -- no matter what Keats's opinion of Wordsworth would become later -- when the "Negative Capability" letter was written Keats seems to have had little but admiration for the elder poet.

Bate also points out that Keats's concept of the characterless, selfless poet is influenced to a large extent by Hazlitt's views on Shakespeare, and that Hazlitt also dwells on the importance of the imagination. There can be no denying that Keats was friendly with Hazlitt by the time the "Negative Capability" letter was written, and he had read Hazlitt's book The Round Table with Bailey in September, 1817 at Oxford. Many of Hazlitt's ideas on Shakespeare are begun in The Round Table although his full-length lecture on Shakespeare was not delivered until 27 January, 1818 at the Surrey Institution, a month after Keats's letter was written. What is more important, however, is the fact that in a close literary circle like that to which both Keats and Hazlitt belonged, it is difficult to establish precisely with whom an idea originated and exactly how much one writer was influenced by another. Furthermore, there still remains the important point that the "Negative Capability" letter makes no reference to ideas concerning the Poet's lack of identity.

Perhaps my chief criticism of Bate's book is that he has presented Keats's ideas on Negative Capability, Imagination, and the Poetical Character as if they were a "philosophy",¹⁰ an already-developed ideal by which Keats lived and wrote, and hence his fusion of Keats's ideas into one concept, one "philosophy". Ironically enough, the concept of Negative Capability is precisely a rejection of set philosophies, of preconceived systems, and we are much too willing to force upon Keats the very thing he would have us reject and which he rejected himself. As he wrote later to George and Georgiana Keats: "I am however young writing at random -- straining at particles of light in the midst of a great darkness -- without knowing the bearing of any one assertion of any one opinion."¹¹ Negative Capability, then, is not a ready-made philosophy, a formula by which to judge good poetry, and it is interesting to note that, despite our readiness to make it into such, Keats never mentions the term again in his letters. Negative Capability is merely a starting point, an idea, a speculation from which Keats goes on to develop other ideas about poetry. His speculations may lead him, and did lead him, to his definition of the Poetical Character, but this does not mean that Negative Capability and the Poetical Character's ability to annihilate self are the same. Keats's ideas develop a great deal during the ten months between these two important letters, and it is this development, which owes much to the influence of Wordsworth, that I hope to trace. And I hope to trace it without ever claiming for Keats a formulated system of poetics.

As I stated above, Bate's definition of Negative Capability has tended to influence the ideas expressed on the topic by more recent critics. Jacob D. Wigod, in his article "Negative Capability and Wise Passiveness",

rejects Garrod's suggestion that the two concepts are similar and contends that, "in truth, the two are poles apart".¹² Like Bate, he defines Negative Capability as "the changing, chameleon nature"¹³ of the Shakespearean poet. Again like Bate, he claims that Wordsworth was too much of an egotistical systematizer for Keats to be in sympathy with him. This attitude to Wordsworth cannot be totally denied, but it develops after the "Negative Capability" letter and only after Keats has come under the strong influence of Hazlitt's attacks on Wordsworth. I also doubt that Keats ever felt as strongly antagonistic to Wordsworth as some critics would have us believe.¹⁴ Wigod acknowledges that Keats's concept of "diligent indolence"¹⁵ is similar to Wordsworth's concept of "wise passiveness", but contends that "diligent indolence" and Negative Capability, far from being similar, are near opposites for while the one involves passivity, the other involves the mind's active movement out of itself to participate in new forms.¹⁶

As I disagree with the idea that Negative Capability is the same as the poet's lack of identity, I, of course, disagree with Wigod's argument, and I hope to show that Negative Capability is closely linked to Keats's concept of "diligent indolence" and does involve a certain kind of passivity. The relationship of these two ideas will form a major portion of my argument. What Wigod has failed to realize -- or has conveniently dismissed -- is that Keats's discussion of "diligent indolence" in his letters begins in January, 1818 and thus it follows very closely upon the "Negative Capability" letter of 27 December, 1817. Wigod only draws attention to Keats's "1819 temper" of "indolence".

Bate's influence has extended to other critics as well. Alleen Ward, for example, states that Negative Capability, "this capacity for

suspending judgment in order to report faithfully on experience also involves the 'capability of submission,' the capacity for 'annulling self' and thereby entering into other identities."¹⁷ This is merely a reworking of Bate's argument.

One recent critic, M. A. Goldberg, who claims that Bate has confused the distinction between Negative Capability and "Sympathetic Identification", tries to clear up the confusion: "The imagination is the means by which a mortal can step into a oneness. 'Negative Capability' provides the manner through which the imaginative stepping can be creatively productive."¹⁸ This nice distinction is of little help, however, for it is still based upon the idea that Negative Capability is the poet's ability to annul self, which is achieved by means of his imagination and its ability for sympathetic identification. Furthermore, Goldberg agrees with Bate and Wigod that Keats's Negative Capability is "quite distinct" from Wordsworth's "wise passiveness". He claims that, while Keats's Negative Capability involves an acceptance of the world as it is, Wordsworth's "wise passiveness" "is intrinsically bound up with a search for epistemological truths";¹⁹ while Keats's Negative Capability is content with the concrete world of sensations, Wordsworth's "wise passiveness" leads him into the world of thoughts and universal principles. Such an extreme view of Wordsworth I find impossible to accept; the poet who distrusts the murdering intellect and brings concrete sensations back to poetry can hardly be categorized as exclusively a searcher after "epistemological truths" and abstract principles. Goldberg's study also fails to point out Wordsworth's belief in the importance of the imagination, which is so important to Keats as well. But Goldberg's observations are useful

and his distinctions between Keats and Wordsworth may need further consideration at a later time.

But Goldberg, perhaps more than most other critics, would burden Keats with a formulated system of poetics -- as the title of his book indicates -- when in fact Keats in his short life never arrived at what to him would have been a totally satisfying philosophy or system of poetics.

Only two recent critics have supported the idea that Negative Capability and "wise passiveness" are very similar concepts and have closely linked Negative Capability with the concept of "diligent indolence".

Kenneth Muir, in his excellent essay "The Meaning of the Odes", states the position concisely:

Between the middle of February 1819, when he laid aside 'The Eve of St. Mark', and the end of April, when he copied out the first of the odes, Keats wrote very little verse; and it is apparent from several remarks in his letters that he did not fully realize that his indolence was a necessary pause before another period of creation. It was closely linked with the Negative Capability he felt to be a characteristic of the best poets, alternating moods of activity and indolence being, in fact, the rhythm of the mind necessary for the exercise of Negative Capability. It is arguable, indeed, that since during the act of creation the poet must organize, choose, and reject, he can exercise Negative Capability only during his moods of receptive indolence -- what Wordsworth called 'a wise passiveness.'²⁰

Robert Gittings holds a similar point of view. He quotes a long passage on indolence from Keats's letter to Reynolds of 15 February, 1818 and claims that "Keats's philosophy of Negative Capability finds its most characteristic and perfect expression in this letter. . . . and at the same time [Keats] realizes that the 'wise passiveness' advocated by Wordsworth throughout his poetry was his own creative attitude too."²¹

But the nature of these studies -- the one is an introduction to the Odes through the "Ode on Indolence" and the other is a biography of

Keats -- prohibits lengthy analyses of the relationship between Negative Capability and "wise passiveness", and their brief comments must remain rather speculative. By a fairly detailed examination of Keats's letters I hope to show that Muir's and Gitting's assertions are correct, and to substantiate this point of view by showing how Keats's ideas concerning creativity and aesthetics are worked out in his poetry.

By now it is fairly obvious that the disagreement on the relationship between Negative Capability and "wise passiveness", whether by coincidence or by influence, comes down to a disagreement between English scholars and American scholars. It is also obvious that my sympathies lie on the other side of the Atlantic. But before leaving the critical opinions that surround Negative Capability, I would like to draw attention to an interesting observation made by George Watson in his edition of Coleridge's Biographia Literaria.

Watson suggests that Keats's term "Negative Capability" may have been adopted from Coleridge's term "negative faith" where Coleridge defines "negative faith" as "That illusion, contradistinguished from delusion, . . . which simply permits the images presented to work by their own force, without either denial or affirmation of their real existence by the judgment."²² Although there is no evidence that Keats ever read the Biographia -- which appeared five months before the "Negative Capability" letter -- it seems unlikely that, given the literary circle in which he moved, he would not have read and discussed it, and Coleridge's definition of "negative faith" as the imaginative acceptance of images as they are without subjecting them to rational or "absolute truth" seems close to Keats's concept of Negative Capability as being in "mysteries, doubts, uncertainties

without any irritable reaching after fact & reason." It is interesting also to speculate on the probability that it was precisely the Biographia, with its analytical approach to literature and its attempt to form a "philosophy", which led Keats to categorize Coleridge -- and not Wordsworth as some critics would have us believe²³ -- as a poet who does not possess Negative Capability, who is not "content with half knowledge". But interesting as Watson's suggestion is, the influence of Coleridge on Keats is beyond the scope of this study.

CHAPTER II

NEGATIVE CAPABILITY AND WISE PASSIVENESS

Before embarking upon a study of the influence of Wordsworth's concept of "wise passiveness" upon Keats's concept of Negative Capability, it is perhaps useful to recall Middleton Murry's warning:

In such a province of inquiry it is very difficult to be positive in one's judgments; difficult above all to distinguish between the inevitable fusion of two profound poetic influences in the critic's own mind and the direct influence of the one poet upon the other.¹

Bearing this in mind I will proceed with my study, which is based primarily upon a reading of Keats's letters. As I am tracing a development in Keats's thought, I will adhere, as far as possible, to a chronological analysis of the letters. Where such an approach would destroy the clarity of my argument, however, it will be necessary to trace the development of specific ideas through subsequent letters. But I hope that my division of topics into chapters will alleviate this problem to some extent and allow me, wherever possible, to stick to the chronological approach.

Before approaching either letters or poems, however, a brief definition of the terms Negative Capability and "wise passiveness" is called for, although I hope that a more precise understanding of their meaning will develop with my argument. Keats defines Negative Capability as that state "when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason".² This is fairly straightforward: it is a state of being "content with half knowledge", an acceptance of the world in all its diverse aspects without

having to analyze, rationalize, and categorize those aspects, without having to explain away every mystery and doubt, without having to fit everything into a neat, philosophical system. It is a state, then, that involves passive acceptance, and which demands that the poet be receptive rather than searching after fact and reason. It is also, we already notice, a state that involves anti-rationalist sentiments.

But there still remains the question of why Keats chose the particular term "Negative Capability". By this I understand him to mean "the capability of being negative". His choice of "capability" is perfectly understandable as the Oxford English Dictionary defines the word as "The quality of having room for any thing; ability to receive or contain". This receptive quality is precisely what Keats thinks is desirable in the poet. The choice of the word "negative" is rather more difficult to explain. I believe that Keats has chosen the term from his scientific knowledge of electricity, an idea that may, at first, seem far-fetched, but which becomes perfectly possible when we remember that Keats was a medical student, and we know for a fact that he attended at least two courses in Chemistry while studying at Guy's Hospital in 1816.³ The early nineteenth century was a time of pioneer discoveries in the field of electricity, especially the chemical agencies of electricity, led by such eminent scientists as Sir Humphry Davy -- who was also well known in literary circles -- and his student Michael Faraday. Their discoveries were widely acclaimed in England by the Royal Institution, and it would seem impossible that Keats could attend two courses in Chemistry without acquiring at least a basic knowledge of the properties of electricity.⁴ And one of the most basic concepts in the field of electricity is that current electricity

flows from the positive pole to the negative pole. In his Bakerian Lecture "On Some Chemical Agencies of Electricity", delivered in 1806, Sir Humphry Davy defined the positive wire as "the wire transmitting the electricity" and the negative wire as that receiving the electricity.⁵

In Keats's metaphor of electricity, then, the negative pole becomes the ideal representation of the negatively capable poet: like the negative pole, the poet is passive, receptive, and as the negative pole receives the current of electricity from the positive pole, so the poet receives impulses from the world around him, a world that is full of mysteries and doubts that the poet cannot explain, but which in his passive state of receptivity he does not feel the need to explain. That poetic impulses are like an electric current is a simile that would, I think, have pleased Keats.

My tracing of the term Negative Capability to a scientific source is, of course, speculative; we have no way of knowing for certain that this is what Keats had in mind when he dashed off the phrase. But I will say that nowhere have I met with a more satisfactory explanation of the term.

By now the connexion between Negative Capability and "wise passiveness" should be almost self-apparent. Wordsworth's phrase comes from his poem "Expostulation and Reply" in which the poet is berated by a friend for sitting on an "old grey stone" and dreaming his time away. The friend suggests that he read books instead, to which the speaker replies:

'The eye it cannot chuse but see,
'We cannot bid the ear be still;
'Our bodies feel, where'er they be,
'Against, or with our will.

'Nor less I deem that there are powers,
'Which of themselves our minds impress,

'That we can feed this mind of ours,
'In a wise passiveness. (ll. 17-24)⁶

Like the state of Negative Capability, "wise passiveness" is a state of calm receptivity during which the mind and body receive impulses from the external world although the rational, intellectual part of the mind is laid asleep. In the next stanza the speaker questions his friend:

'Think you, mid all this mighty sum
'Of things for ever speaking,
'That nothing of itself will come,
'But we must still be seeking?
(ll. 25-28)

For Wordsworth, too, there must be no "irritable reaching after fact & reason", no need to analyze and explain everything rationally. There must be a passive acceptance of things as they are, and wisdom is transmitted to the poet intuitively, through the senses. By "wise passiveness" I understand Wordsworth to mean that wisdom comes to the poet in a state of passivity, which makes "wise passiveness" a portmanteau word rather than simply a noun and adjective. Even if the phrase is simply a noun and an adjective, the meaning at least indicates that it is wise to be passive. The emphasis in the poem on the dream-like state in which such wisdom is transmitted is also important to Keats, as we shall see.

This anti-intellectual idea of "wise passiveness" is repeated in "The Tables Turned" in which the speaker entreats his friend to give up his books and instead learn wisdom intuitively through listening to the linnet and the throstle:

And hark! how blithe the throstle sings!
And he is no mean preacher;
Come forth into the light of things,
Let Nature be your teacher.

She has a world of ready wealth,
 Our minds and hearts to bless --
 Spontaneous wisdom breathed by health,⁷
 Truth breathed by cheerfulness.

(ll. 13-20)

Wisdom, or truth, is not something that can be sought after and analyzed; it comes spontaneously through man's senses and imagination in communion with the natural world, which is how, I think, it comes to Keats in a state of Negative Capability. The choice of the verb "breathed", meaning inhaled, emphasizes the unconscious and organic nature of this process. Wordsworth goes on to state that "Our meddling intellect / Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things; / -- We murder to dissect." Man's dissecting rationalism is totally distrusted; instead one should "Come forth, and bring with you a heart, / That watches and receives". It is with the heart, rather than with the head, that man learns.⁸

It is possible, of course, that Keats was not thinking of Wordsworth at all when he wrote his letter on Negative Capability. We do know, however, that he had studied Wordsworth's poetry at Oxford with Bailey in September, 1817, and that he was meeting Wordsworth in London that winter. Also, on 29 October, Keats wrote to Bailey defending Wordsworth's poem "The Gypsies" from Hazlitt's attack which he and Bailey had read in The Round Table at Oxford. Keats's comments on "The Gypsies" have often been praised as excellent criticism, but few critics have bothered to examine Hazlitt's remarks which are, to say the least, interesting:

Mr. Wordsworth, who has written a sonnet to the King on the good that he has done in the last fifty years, has made an attack on a set of gypsies for having done nothing in four and twenty hours. 'The stars had gone their rounds, but they had not stirred from their place.' And why should they, if they were comfortable where they were? We did not expect this turn from Mr. Wordsworth, whom we had considered as the prince of

poetical idlers, and patron of the philosophy of indolence, who formerly insisted on our spending our time 'in a wise passiveness.'⁹

In his letter Keats says that, had "Wordsworth though[t] a little deeper at that Moment he would not have written the Poem at all", a critical appraisal somewhat superior to Hazlitt's and which not only points to the weakness and triviality of the poem, but also indicates a belief that Wordsworth should not have condemned the gypsies for their passivity. Indolence, after all, becomes a prime topic in Keats's letters by early 1818 and he must have been thinking about it from at least as early as this letter. Hazlitt's essay, in fact, continues to deal with the topic of indolence in quite some detail.¹⁰

The related themes of passivity, idleness and indolence become of increasing interest to Keats during the early months of 1818, immediately after the "Negative Capability" letter was written. On 23 January he writes to Bailey:

Things have happened 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 a 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 he insensibly draws you towards him then you have no Power to break the link.¹¹

In dealing with men, as in dealing with life, one must passively accept people with their faults as well as their virtues, and accept "things . . . of great Perplexity" without having to explain them rationally. These ideas echo the concept of Negative Capability, but apply that concept

specifically to social relationships. The acceptance of the good and the bad, the light and the dark, in men and in life also becomes of major importance to Keats, and such acceptance is only possible through the practice of Negative Capability.

Also on 23 January Keats writes to George and Tom that Hunt and Shelley "appear much disposed to dissect & anatomize, any trip or slip I have made in Endymion."¹² Whether or not Hunt and Shelley were so inclined is debatable, but Keats shows a definite Wordsworthian disdain for such dissecting analysis. Continuing his letter, he writes: "I cannot bear to be uninterested or unemployed, I, who for so long a time, have been addicted to passiveness -- Nothing is finer for the purposes of great productions, than a very gradual ripening of the intellectual powers." His attitude to indolence and passivity is, no doubt, ambivalent here and he longs to be studying and writing industriously once again, but he recognizes that the "gradual ripening of the intellectual powers" which has taken place during the state of passivity is not only desirable, but necessary for the growth of his mind. A period of indolence is necessary before creativity can go forward, an idea that will need further examination later on.

Not long after these letters Keats writes one of his two most famous passages on indolence and passivity in his letter of 19 February, 1818 to Reynolds, and well-known as the passage is, I will quote it at length:

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 -- untill 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 a 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. . . . 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 f[l]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 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 us for Meat and dew for drink -- I was led into these thoughts, my dear Reynolds, by the beauty of the morning operating on a sense of Idleness -- I have not read any Books -- the Morning said I was right -- I had no Idea but of the Morning and the Thrush said I was right -- seeming to say --

'O thou whose face hath felt the Winter's wind;
 Whose eye has seen the Snow clouds hung in Mist
 And the black-elm tops 'mong the freezing Stars
 To thee the Spring will be a harvest-time --
 O thou whose only book has been the light
 Of supreme darkness which thou feddest on
 Night after night, when Phoebus was away
 To thee the Spring shall be a tripple morn --
 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.'¹³

Although it may seem reverse procedure, I will begin my analysis of this important letter with the sonnet on what the thrush said. Long ago G. L. Flinney noted that "The sonnet was inspired by the song of the thrush operating upon a mood of mental exhaustion and recalling Wordsworth's

principle of 'wise passiveness,'"¹⁴ and Thora Balslev writes that "Without the Lyrical Ballads in the background, the sonnet would never have been written, or would have been written very differently."¹⁵ In listening to what the thrush says, there can be little doubt that Keats is adhering to Wordsworth's advice to learn wisdom from the linnet and the throstle, and the emphasis on sensations, along with the repeated "O fret not after knowledge" -- which is an echo of the "Negative Capability" idea -- is very similar to Wordsworth's "Lines Written at a Small Distance From my House", a poem from Lyrical Ballads. Like Keats's sonnet and letter, Wordsworth's poem dwells on the joy to be found in a day given to idleness in which "the hour of feeling" (l. 24) is totally appreciated and all rational thought processes are forgotten. The connexion between Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads which dwell on "wise passiveness" and the letter's emphasis on being passive and receptive like a flower rather than actively searching after knowledge like a bee, is also obvious.¹⁶ Keats's very image of the flower as a representative of passivity may have been influenced by Wordsworth's numerous poems -- for example, "To the Daisy", "To the Celandine" -- which praise flowers for their passive receptivity to all aspects of life. In his "To the Same Flower" Wordsworth also uses the image of a "Bee" feeding at the Celandine.

Finney's analysis of Keats's sonnet continues: "He was inclined . . . to accept Wordsworth's philosophy of natural education, according to which sensations or sensuous impressions, which are the primary sources of knowledge, inform man's mind, impress it with quietness and beauty, and feed it with lofty thoughts. These sensations, according to empirical philosophy, develop into complex ideas by means of the process of association."¹⁷ It is

precisely this process of association that Keats is describing at the beginning of this letter to Reynolds when he says that after reading poetry a man should "wander with it, and muse upon it, and reflect from it, and bring home to it, and prophesy upon it, and dream upon it". In this state of "delicious diligent Indolence", in which the rational part of man -- that part of the mind that deals with what Keats calls "consequitive reasoning" -- is laid asleep, man's Fancy and Imagination have free reign to roam into all realms of sensation and imaginative thought. The process begins with physical sensations -- "the prattle of a child", "the converse of middle age", "a strain of musick" -- which act as "ethereal finger-pointings" to set the imagination in flight. These sensations are transferred to the mind and from there the poet's thoughts move, by means of association, into the realm of imaginative speculation, musing, and reflecting upon any idea that catches its fancy. In this fluid state of association the imagination can play upon all kinds of diverse sensations and ideas without having to categorize or rationalize them into a system. As Keats tells George and Georgiana much later: "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."¹⁸ And it is in precisely this state of diligent indolence, when the fancy is most active, that the creative process of writing poetry begins. This is not how the creative process ends, selection and judgment being of importance too; but this is how it begins for Keats.

Keats himself gives the best description of how this process of association works in the same letter to Reynolds. He states that "almost any Man may like the Spider spin from his own inwards his own airy

Citadel -- the points of leaves and twigs on which the Spider begins her work are few and she fills the Air with a beautiful circuiting: man should be content with as few points to tip with the fine Web of his Soul and weave a tapestry empyrean -- full of Symbols for his spiritual eye, of softness for his spiritual touch, of space for his wandering of distinctness for his Luxury ---".¹⁹ The few solid points from which the Spider builds correspond to the poet's physical sensations, experienced in the real world -- and Keats, for all his flights of the imagination, never doubts the concrete reality of the material world -- from which the poet, by means of fancy's associative processes, weaves a beautiful "tapestry empyrean", an imaginary world in which poetry originates. Exactly how this associative, imaginative process is linked to Negative Capability has been well-demonstrated by Stuart Sperry in his excellent chapter on "Chemistry of the Poetic Process". Sperry points out that such association in a state of diligent indolence allows

a form of verification that proceeds not through the rules of logic but by means of that imaginative convergence -- the intersecting or 'dovetailing' of different insights -- that by itself leads to no final conclusion but to a deeper awareness of the 'Penetrarium of mystery' in its perpetually fascinating complexity. It suggests the imaginative perception of a series of interrelationships that lose their real vitality and significance once we attempt to abstract them from the flowing texture of sensations and speculations that embody them, once we seek to freeze them into the settled forms of 'fact and reason'. Keats's remarks on Negative Capability are more than anything an attempt to justify poetry as a kind of thinking we might consider unconscious or preconscious -- a form of apprehension proceeding by relationships and laws distinct from those of reason.²⁰

It is perhaps difficult to ascertain exactly how Wordsworth influenced Keats's ideas concerning the processes of the creative imagination apart from the initial stage of "wise passiveness". An examination of

Wordsworth's account of how the Greek myths were formed, given in The Excursion Book IV, however, reveals some interesting parallels between the two poets. The passage reads:

-- In that fair clime, the lonely herdsman, stretched
On the soft grass through half a summer's day,
With music lulled his indolent repose;
And, in some fit of weariness, if he,
When his own breath was silent, chanced to hear
A distant strain, far sweeter than the sounds
Which his poor skill could make, his fancy fetched,
Even from the blazing chariot of the sun,
A beardless Youth, who touched a golden lute,
And filled the illumined groves with ravishment.
(ll. 851-860)

Here Wordsworth is describing precisely the creative process that Keats has been discussing in his letters. The shepherd, in a state of "indolent repose" akin to "diligent indolence", experiences certain physical sensations -- in this case musical sounds -- which trigger off his fancy. His fancy in turn explores the imaginative realm and by means of association the myth of Apollo is created. We know from Bailey's account²¹ that this passage was of interest to Keats and so the parallels between the two poets are not surprising, especially when we remember that Keats, copying Wordsworth, wrote his own version of mythic creation in "I stood tip-toe . . .". Keats has a bard who, "In some delicious ramble" (l. 165) like the state of "delicious diligent indolence", saw a lonely flower drooping over the water; then "some fainter gleamings o'er his fancy shot" and the bard associated the lonely, pining flower with a love-lorn man, and hence the myth of Narcissus was born. The process is almost identical to that described by Wordsworth.²²

Passages describing such creative, imaginative processes are quite frequent in Wordsworth's poetry, but perhaps the best description of their

working is given in Tintern Abbey, another poem that was of particular interest to Keats.²³ Here Wordsworth describes the effect produced on him by the memory of the Wye Valley:

Though absent long,
These forms of beauty have not been to me,
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart,
And passing even into my purer mind
With tranquil restoration:
(ll. 23-31)

From this state the poet moves into:

that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame,
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul;
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.
(ll. 42-50)

No doubt, Wordsworth is here describing a near-mystical communion with objects that is a stage or stages beyond the associative processes of the fancy in a state of indolence, but it is interesting to notice that the process starts with sensations, or memories of sensations, experienced in the material world. These sensations enter into the mind creating a state of peace and calm (delicious indolence). From this mood the physical sensations are laid asleep and the imagination takes flight until it "sees into the life of things", that is, communes with all things and sees the inter-relationship between all things in life. This mystic state is not unknown to Keats also, and his sonnet "The Poet" describes it in terms that are reminiscent of Tintern Abbey:

At morn, at noon, at Eve, and Middle Night
 He passes forth into the charmed air,
 With talisman to call up spirits rare
 From plant, cave, rock, and fountain -- 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.
 Sometimes above the gross and palpable things
 Of this diurnal sphere, his spirit flies
 On awful wing; and with its destined skies
 Holds premature and mystic communings;
 Till such unearthly intercourses shed
 A visible halo round his mortal head.

The poet, as described in Tintern Abbey, experiences an imaginative flight to a mystical communion with the essence of objects. And in keeping with the idea of Negative Capability, Keats stresses that such intuitive insights into "the life of things", or what he calls the "Penetralium of mystery", cannot be achieved by "Learning", that "irritable reaching after fact and reason".

The importance that the idea of "diligent indolence" holds for Keats can be judged by one of his marginal comments in his copy of Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida. He claims that "The Genius of Shakespeare was an in[n]ate universality -- wherefore he had the utmost achievement of human intellect prostrate beneath his indolent and kingly gaze."²⁴ The important topic of Shakespeare's universality will be discussed in some detail in my next chapter, but here it is important to note that Keats attributes a state of indolence and calm repose to Shakespeare, who for him is the ultimate poet, his presiding spirit. And Shakespeare, we remember, is the supreme example of the poet possessed of Negative Capability, that calm repose in which numerous imaginative speculations dovetail without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.

Also, in Endymion, Keats states that he "would rather be struck

dumb, / Than speak against this ardent listlessness; / For I have ever thought that it might bless / The world with benefits unknowingly;" (Book I, ll. 824-827). The world is blessed because in this state of ardent listlessness, of calm repose and detachment, the imaginative mind is free to entertain all speculations and so begins the creative process.

The state of indolence is also linked in Keats's mind with states of dreaming, vision, and sleep for it is in these states, when the body is laid asleep, that the deep, unconscious levels of the mind in which the imagination dwells are released and the mind speculates on diverse ideas. As we saw in the sonnet on what the thrush said, "he's awake who thinks himself asleep"; we are awake in sleep because that is when the imagination is most active. Keats shares with the other Romantic poets a strong interest in dreams and visions as sources of poetic creativity and Goldberg has noted that "Even in his earliest verse, Keats had been exploring the role of easy indolence in invoking the powers of the imagination. Sleep, dreams, indolence, silence, quiet, awakening -- these chords resound with frequency throughout the labyrinth of the poet. . . . This is a state from which the creative act seems to arise and toward which it ultimately descends again."²⁵ The exact relationship between dreams, sleep, indolence, and poetry for Keats is a topic far too large to be handled within the scope of this study, but even a cursory reading of his early poem "Sleep and Poetry" will establish some of the connexions that he felt to be so important. There he defines poetry as "might half slumb'ring on its own right arm" (l. 237), an imaginative power that is released in a state of easy indolence and which is totally divorced from any "irritable reaching after fact & reason". The power is based on an imaginative acceptance of

the real world in all its mystery.

I stated earlier that there are two famous letters on the topic of "diligent indolence". The first I have already discussed; the second is written on 17 and 19 March, 1819 to George and Georgiana Keats.²⁶ The letter itself is not of great importance for throwing further light on the subject of indolence, for it states basically the same ideas as Keats expressed before. What is important about the letter is that it is written in the Spring of 1819, right around the time of the writing of the great Odes. Thus it goes a long way to showing that periods of "wise passiveness" are necessary for Keats's creative process, for the writing of his best poetry. "An indolent day", says Keats, "fill'd with speculations even of an unpleasant colour -- is bearable and even pleasant alone --",²⁷ And of the composition of the "Ode to Psyche" he writes: "The following Poem -- the last I have written is the first and the only one with which I have taken even moderate pains -- I have for the most part dash'd of 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 and healthy spirit."²⁸ Brown's account of the composition of the "Ode to a Nightingale", although of debatable accuracy, also stresses a similar tranquil and joyful state:

In the spring of 1819 a nightingale had built her nest near my house. Keats felt a tranquil and continual joy in her song; and one morning he took his chair from the breakfast-table to the grass-plot under a plum-tree, where he sat for two or three hours. When he came into the house, I perceived he had some scraps of paper in his hand, and these he was quietly thrusting behind his books. On inquiry, I found those scraps, four or five in number, contained his poetic feelings on the song of our nightingale.²⁹

The passivity that he discusses in his letters, then, is an integral part

of the writing of his great poetry. As the "Nightingale Ode" shows, in this state of "wise passiveness", the sensations produced by the bird's song trigger off a number of imaginative speculations in the poet's mind, and these are the source of the poem.

So influential is diligent indolence by this time in Keats's life that he writes to Sarah Jeffrey on 9 June, 1819: "You will judge of my 1819 temper when I tell you that the thing I have most enjoyed this year has been writing an ode to Indolence."³⁰ No doubt this is an exaggeration, especially when we compare the merits of that ode to the merits of the five great Odes, four of which had probably been written by this time, but the letter shows how important Keats has recognized indolence to be. The letter is also interesting for the mention of "my 1819 temper", a phrase that he probably borrowed from Wordsworth's "Lines Written at a Small Distance from my House", the theme of which is the benefit to be derived from days spent in idleness, just living on "feeling" or sensations. Two verses show the interest of the poem for Keats:

One moment now may give us more
Than fifty years of reason;
Our minds shall drink at every pore
The spirit of the season.

Some silent laws our hearts may make,
Which they shall long obey;
We for the year to come may take
Our temper from to-day.

(ll. 25-32)

The emphasis on receptive passivity and sensations, and the antipathy to "reason" are all aspects of the concept of Negative Capability.

But Keats's attitude towards indolence is not always positive, however, and there are many letters in which he criticizes himself for being idle and indolent. The distinctions Keats makes seem to be more

complex than a single contrast, however. On the one hand Keats draws a distinction between "an easy and an uneasy indolence",³¹ the first being the state of "diligent indolence" or "wise passiveness" in which sensations lead to imaginative speculations, the second, a state where one has "nothing to do . . . and not enough to interest or rouse one; is a capital punishment of a capital crime:". Balslev describes "uneasy indolence" as that state when "the mind is not in a 'healthful state of association,' indolence becomes torpitude, and beauty cold and lifeless."³² Keats himself describes the state in some detail to Bailey in May 1818 when he is feeling so depressed over the prospect of George's emigrating to America: "I have this morning such a Lethargy that I cannot write . . . I am now so depressed that I have not an Idea to put to paper -- my hands feel like lead -- and yet it is and [for an] unpleasant numbness it does not take away the pain of existence . . . I am in that temper that if I were under Water I would scarcely kick to come to the top."³³ Obviously such a state of mental and physical torpor, complete lifelessness, is very different from, virtually the antithesis of, that "delicious diligent indolence" in which the body is alive to all sensations and the imagination to all speculations.

But Keats makes another distinction, between indolence -- and here I understand him to mean "diligent indolence" -- and concentrated, active study and thought, and it is interesting to notice that such periods of active study and writing usually alternate with periods of indolence. For example, on 24 April, 1818, not too long after the first important letter on the virtues of indolence, Keats writes to Taylor that "cavalier days are gone by" and now he must turn to a "continual drinking of Knowledge" and attempt to do "some good for the world . . . through application study

and thought."³⁴ And on 31 May, 1819, shortly after his account of the leisurely writing of the "Ode to Psyche" he writes to Sarah Jeffrey that he "cannot resolve to give up my Studies" and that he "would rather conquer my indolence and strain my ne[r]ves at some grand Poem."³⁵ It is apparent from such comments that, although Keats may not be fully aware of it and does, at times, seem to contradict himself, alternating moods of passivity and activity, indolence and application, sensation and thoughtful study, are necessary for him to create good poetry. And I would suggest that it is in the moods of intense study and activity that he learns judgment and applies a process of selection to the numerous sensations and speculations that have gone on in his periods of indolence. The two moods then, are not contraries, but complementary aspects of a single creative process. As Wordsworth describes it so well in The Preface of 1800, "all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; but though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached, were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility had also thought long and deeply."³⁶ It is with the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" that the creative process begins, but thought is necessary for the application of judgment and selection.

These alternating moods are also very similar to Wordsworth's description of the creative process at the beginning of Book XII of The Prelude:

From nature doth emotion come, and moods
Of calmness equally are nature's gift,
This is her glory; these two attributes
Are sister horns that constitute her strength;
This twofold influence is the sun and shower
Of all her bounties, but in origin
And end alike benignant. Hence it is,
That Genius which exists by interchange

Of peace and excitation, finds in her
 His best and purest Friend, from her receives
 That energy by which he seeks the truth,
 Is roused, aspires, grasps, struggles, wishes, craves,
 From her that happy stillness of the mind
 Which fits him to receive it, when unsought.
 (ll. 1-14)³⁷

Unlike Wordsworth, Keats does not ascribe the production of such moods in the poet exclusively to nature, but the alternating moods are basically the same. It is these alternating moods of calm and struggling aspiration that lead to an apprehension of "truth", an insight into the mysteries of life, based, not on any rational argument, but upon an imaginative perception of reality. It cannot be sought after with fact and reason, but comes "unsought". The "happy stillness of the mind" that results from this process is the same as that Shakespearean "indolent and kingly" repose of the poet possessed of Negative Capability.

I stated above that it is perhaps in periods of thoughtful application that the process of selection and judgment so necessary to good poetry is carried on. Exactly how important Keats knew judgment to be is evidenced in his "own domestic criticism" of *Endymion*: "I have written independently without Judgment -- I may write independently & with judgment hereafter. -- The Genius of Poetry must work out its own salvation in a man: It cannot be matured by law & precept, but by sensation & watchfulness in itself -- That which is creative must create itself --",³⁸ That poetic creation cannot be matured by law and precept is in keeping with the doctrine of Negative Capability; what is needed, instead, is a combination of sensation -- appreciated in a state of "diligent indolence" -- and watchfulness or thoughtful judgment and selection. These together will allow "that which is creative" to "create itself".

The attributes that Keats feels are necessary for the production of good poetry are very similar to those listed by Wordsworth in The Preface of 1815. Wordsworth lists "the powers requisite for the production of poetry" as:

- (1) Observation (which, for Keats, takes place in a state of "wise passiveness");
- (2) Sensibility (or the capacity to feel sensations);
- (3) Reflection (Keats lists reflection and musing as what takes place in the mind during "diligent indolence");
- (4) Imagination and Fancy, which "modify, create, and associate" (It is precisely these powers that are at work speculating and associating during the state of "wise passiveness" or "diligent indolence");
- (5) Invention (which, no doubt, is the outcome of imaginative speculation, and which Keats claims is "the Polar Star of Poetry");
- (6) Judgment (which Keats comes to realize is of such vital importance in order to keep the imagination in check and to stop fanciful flights into a totally unrealistic world).³⁹

By demonstrating these similarities between Keats's idea of the creative process and Wordsworth's idea of that process, I am not by any means claiming that Keats borrowed wholesale from the older poet or even that Keats was conscious of Wordsworth's influence most of the time. As Kenneth Muir has said, "The value of Keats's axioms depends not on their originality, but on the fact that they flowered naturally from his own experience."⁴⁰ Keats claims that "Nothing ever becomes real till it is experienced -- Even a Proverb is no proverb to you till your life has illustrated it".⁴¹ Keats may be influenced by Wordsworth's poetry and

poetic theories, but all he thinks about poetry originates in his own mind, is native to himself; or if he adopts an idea he makes it native to himself by experiencing it. More than likely, Keats recognized in Wordsworth's writing ideas that he himself entertained concerning poetry.

A study of Keats's ideas on the poetic process would be incomplete without at least a brief examination of his three axioms on poetry which are the outcome of his comparison between his aims in poetry and his achievements in Endymion. Muir has called these axioms "a brilliant condensation of his thoughts about poetry during the past months"⁴² which makes them of special interest to my study as the letter of 27 February, 1818 to Taylor in which they appear follows closely upon the letter on Negative Capability and that on "diligent indolence".

The first axiom is that "Poetry should surprise by a fine excess and not by Singularity -- it should strike the Reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a Remembrance."⁴³ Clarence Thorpe has noted that "Such fine excess and strangeness Keats found in much of Shakespeare. It is associated in his mind with a freedom and a fullness of imagination that must carry the poet into a region of his own creation, into a state of disentanglement from the particular facts and accidents of life and history."⁴⁴ And many critics have noted that the concept of poetry appearing almost a remembrance to the reader is influenced by Hazlitt's ideas on poetry.⁴⁵ Thorpe has suggested that the idea "seems to echo Wordsworth's 'emotion recollected in tranquillity'",⁴⁶ but I disagree with him here because what Wordsworth is describing is the process that the poet goes through in creating poetry, while Keats is noting the effect that poetry has on the reader. The axiom is similar, however, to Wordsworth's

distinction between the Imagination and the Fancy. The Fancy, Wordsworth claims, pleases the reader by its odd or unusual images and associations; it surprises by singularity. Thus the Fancy deals with the temporal and transitory.⁴⁷ The Imagination, on the other hand, deals with the eternal and indestructible by presenting images and ideas of the highest quality; as Keats puts it, good poetry surprises by a fine, or excellent, excess, and thus it strikes the reader "as a wording of his own highest thoughts".⁴⁸

Keats's second axiom is that poetry's "touches of Beauty should never be half way thereby making the reader breathless instead of content: the rise, the progress, the setting of imagery should like the Sun come natural natural too him --- shine over him and set soberly although in magnificence leaving him in the luxury of twilight ---".⁴⁹ The stress on organic and natural imagery is, I think, influenced by Wordsworth's emphasis in The Preface to Lyrical Ballads on the need to return to natural images. Wordsworth states that "Poetry is the image of man and nature" and the poet "considers man and nature as essentially adapted to each other, and the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting qualities of nature."⁵⁰ The poet must choose his images from the fair and magnificent aspects of organic and natural life. Keats's disdain for the artificial imagery and poetry of the eighteenth-century poets can be seen in "Sleep and Poetry", and his attitude here is also strongly Wordsworthian.⁵¹

Keats's third axiom, "That if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all",⁵² is also perhaps influenced by Hazlitt, who says in his essay "On Posthumous Fame" that "It is, indeed, one characteristic mark of the highest class of excellence to

appear to come naturally from the mind of the author, without consciousness or effort. The work seems like inspiration ---".⁵³ But what Hazlitt is discussing is something akin to the Renaissance idea of "sprezzatura", the appearance of ease and natural creation, whereas Keats is claiming that this must actually be the case. Keats's idea of spontaneous creativity and probably Hazlitt's also, is indebted, I think, to Wordsworth's claim that "all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings."⁵⁴ The emphasis on "feelings" would also be of great interest to Keats.

Thus far I have dealt with Keats's concepts of Negative Capability and "diligent indolence" and Wordsworth's concept of "wise passiveness" in relation to the poets' ideas on the creative process, which constitutes a large part of the meaning and importance of these ideas. But with Keats the passive acceptance, the receptivity that is an integral part of these concepts, develops into, or becomes connected with, philosophical questions about human suffering, pain, evil, circumstance and how these aspects of the real world can be passively accepted. And in dealing with these questions Keats is again largely indebted to Wordsworth who, for him, is the supreme poet of the human heart. How the concepts of Negative Capability and "wise passiveness" broaden out into the wider philosophical questions of dealing with the real world will form the major topic of a later chapter, but before tracing the development of such ideas it is important to examine another facet of Wordsworth's character that was of interest to Keats, Wordsworth's 'egotism'.

CHAPTER III

THE POETICAL CHARACTER

In the previous chapter I examined some of Wordsworth's tenets about the poetic process towards which Keats was sympathetic and by which he was probably influenced. My stress was on Keats's favourable attitude towards Wordsworth. Parallel to this favourable attitude, however, there runs in Keats's mind a blatant dislike for what he feels to be Wordsworth's "egotism" and the influence of his egotism on his poetry. Thus we find in Keats two almost contradictory attitudes towards the older poet: on the one hand he feels Wordsworth is the greatest living poet in England, and on the other hand he hates any poetry that exhibits the "palpable design" he finds in much of Wordsworth's verse. The two attitudes exist in Keats's mind at the same time so that his opinion of Wordsworth is by no means clear-cut, and Keats himself fluctuates between his two views. His admiration for Wordsworth ultimately dominates, however, and even when Keats is most antagonistic towards Wordsworth I think he is still being unconsciously influenced by the older poet.

Keats's first attack on Wordsworth's poetry comes in a letter to Reynolds on 3 February, 1818, very close to the time that he was admiring Wordsworth's idea of "wise passiveness". He writes:

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. Sancho will invent a Journey heavenward as well as any body. 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! 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 antients 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" --¹

Many critics have recognized the influence of Hazlitt in the ideas expressed here,² and no doubt Keats was struck by such passages on Wordsworth in The Round Table when he read it at Oxford with Bailey:

An intense intellectual egotism swallows up every thing. Even the dialogues introduced in the present volume are soliloquies of the same character, taking different views of the subject. The recluse, the pastor, and the pedlar, are three persons in one poet. . . . the evident scope and tendency of Mr. Wordsworth's mind is the reverse of dramatic. It resists all change of character, all variety of scenery, all the bustle, machinery, and pantomime of the stage, or of real life, -- whatever might relieve, or relax, or change the direction of its own activity, jealous of all competition. The power of his mind preys upon itself. It is as if there were nothing but himself and the universe.³

Keats, I think, was probably also influenced by Reynolds's own attitude towards Wordsworth which, although more favourable than Hazlitt's in that he does not condemn egotism outright, still views Wordsworth as an egotist. Wordsworth's poetry forms a major portion of Reynolds's article

"On Egotism in Literature", and in his article on "Wordsworth's Thanksgiving Ode" he states that:

Every thing that proceeds from him is an emanation of himself: -- he creates it in his own image, -- and, without meaning to suggest any improper analogy, we would say, that he it is who sees that it is good. This is the proper exercise and sole province of genius, -- which exists, in quality of its divinity, in itself and for itself.⁴

Hazlitt, I think, may also have been influenced by Reynolds who published his articles in 1816, before The Round Table or Lectures on the English Poets were published. But the question of who influenced whom is of little importance; what matters is that Keats at this time sympathizes with his friends in his attitude towards Wordsworth. Keats, as he states, cannot tolerate poetry that sells a certain preconceived philosophy, a certain system of morals, that has a palpable design.

Precisely where Keats found such moral theorizing in Wordsworth's poetry is debatable, but this attack on Wordsworth is important because it helps Keats to clarify his own ideas on how poetry should affect the reader, and in this respect his ideas are quite different from those of Wordsworth. In analyzing Wordsworth's ideas in this regard W. J. B. Owen's comments are very useful:

The reader is evidently supposed to follow a path parallel to the poet's: to have his feelings⁵ excited by the poet's description of "objects" and by his utterance of "sentiments"; and he will, presumably, arrive at a sense of the "importance" of the subject with which these feelings [influxes to the mind] are connected; especially "if he be in a healthful state of association", that is, if his associative trains are normal and similar to the poet's.⁶

It is exactly this idea of Wordsworth's that the reader should go the same steps as the poet, that he should agree with the poet's moral judgments, that he should follow the same process of association, that he should

agree with the poet on what is important, to which Keats objects so vigorously. For Keats, the experience of poetry must be as much a process of individual self-discovery for the reader as for the poet. He does not expect any uniform reactions and he writes to Reynolds that:

the Minds of Mortals are so different and bent on such diverse Journeys that it may at first appear impossible for any common taste and fellowship to exist between two or three under these suppositions -- It is however quite the contrary -- Minds would leave each other in contrary directions, traverse each other in Numberless points, and all [for at] last greet each other at the Journeys end -- A old Man and a child would talk together and the old Man be led on his Path, and the child left thinking -- 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 . . . ?

Keats realizes that the sensations, associations and speculations that go into the poet's creative process will not be the same as those triggered off in the reader's mind; also, no two readers will ever have identical reactions to a given piece of poetry. This is not something to be bewailed, however; it is both desirable and healthy that readers have diverse reactions, that they bring their own subjective emotions, their own identity, to the poem. It is, of course, desirable that the various readers "greet each other at the Journeys end", that they be transported by the poet to a similar understanding, an insight into life's mystery, in the end, but each will have travelled on a unique journey in the process. In the readers' trains of association and their resultant speculations there will also be common points where minds overlap in their thoughts so that there will be an overall kind of unity, but every man must find his own path, create his own identity from this mass of possibilities. And the best kind of poetry is that which offers the greatest number of possibilities and allows for the greatest amount of give-and-take between the poet and the reader. As

Sperry has described it in dealing with this aspect of Keats's thought, works of genius act "like a catalyst; they serve to stimulate activity but without determining the nature or course of any individual reaction. They work impersonally, for the energies from which they derive and which they express in concentrated form are not merely their own but those of life itself."⁸

This is precisely what Keats means when he says that "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." And this is what he means by his first axiom on poetry, that "Poetry should surprise by a fine excess and not by Singularity -- it should strike the Reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a Remembrance." Poetry must appear to be the reader's remembrance, his own imaginative effort, not some foreign idea imposed on him by the Poet. That is why poetry must be "great", "a fine excess", so that each and any reader can find in it a starting point for his own series of associations and speculations, which, however similar they may be to the poet's, will never be the same. Great poetry must give what Keats calls "ethereal finger-pointings", suggestive connexions, usually taken from nature, that set the reader on his own poetic journey; it must act as a stimulant rather than as a coercive, bullying force. It should by no means have any preconceived goal or solution or system that the reader is expected to follow. Instead, poetry is at its best when it allows the greatest amount of individual speculation and association, when "As the concentrated product of imaginative experience, . . . it constitutes a form of communication, the way different minds progressively corroborate, assimilate, and extend the

primitive experience they share in common."⁹

It is apparent, then, that Keats's quarrel with Wordsworth centres not on Wordsworth's idea of the poet's creative process -- we have already seen how similar their ideas are in this respect --, nor on Wordsworth's being a rigid moralist; rather he disagrees with Wordsworth on how poetry should strike the reader. For Keats, poetry should whisper its results and he feels that Wordsworth's poetry shouts them. And more than this, Wordsworth's poetry must be too narrow in scope, too restrictive, to allow the free trains of association and speculation that Keats thinks so necessary to great poetry.¹⁰ Wordsworth is trying to direct his reader to a preconceived goal rather than allowing him to follow his own journey. He is not allowing his reader to exist in the state of "wise passiveness" -- or what Keats calls Negative Capability -- that he feels is necessary to the poet. He is not allowing the reader to participate imaginatively in the poetic process. Instead of allowing the reader to entertain multiple speculations which will eventually dovetail into his own intuitive understanding of life's mystery, Wordsworth spells out his reader's course, forcing him to see his, Wordsworth's, speculations, to find his goal. As Hazlitt says, he "paints the outgoings of his own heart, the shapings of his own fancy. He may be said to create his own materials; his thoughts are his real subject."¹¹ He is thus forcing the reader into a search for a goal, or what Keats calls an "irritable reaching after fact & reason". He will not allow the reader to be content with "half knowledge", but must impose on him the poet's own final conclusions.

Whether or not Wordsworth's poetry actually does this is, of course, debatable, and Keats's attitude is, no doubt, coloured at this time by his

personal reaction to Wordsworth the man. On 21 February, 1818 he writes to George and Tom that "Wordsworth has left a bad impression wherever he visited in Town -- by his egotism, Vanity and bigotry -- yet he is a great Poet if not a Philosopher."¹² By this I understand Keats to mean that he still greatly admires Wordsworth as a poet, as an artist with whose creative technique he himself sympathizes, although he cannot accept the philosophical goals and ideas towards which Wordsworth's poetry tries to push him. He resists this philosophical obtrusiveness, but still clings at the same time to Wordsworth's concept of "wise passiveness".

But exactly what kind of poet can produce that "Elizabethan" poetry that surprises "by a fine excess"? It is in the answer to this question that we can see how Keats's idea of Negative Capability grows -- as I said in my introduction it does -- into the concept of the Poetical Character, although the two concepts never become one and the same. The development from the one idea to the other takes place in Keats's ideas concerning how the poet gains his own sensations and knowledge, and how he forms such sensations and knowledge into poems that have no "palpable design". As I stated in the previous chapter, the poet experiences his sensations in a state of "wise passiveness" or Negative Capability, a state of passive receptivity in which sensations lead, by means of association, to diverse speculations which eventually dovetail into an intuitive understanding of the Mystery, an imaginative understanding divorced from explanations of "fact & reason", but based, rather, on "half knowledge", on acceptance of life as it is. This is true wisdom and it is in this state that the poetic process begins and is carried on. In order to allow his reader the same speculative and associative freedom, however, the poet must ensure that,

in writing the poem, his own identity, his own goals and conclusions, play as little part as possible. In order to allow his reader to experience poetry in a state of Negative Capability, to accept perplexities with half knowledge, to find his own intuitive understanding of the Mystery, the poet must, as far as possible, annihilate himself from his poetry. Such annihilation of self is by no means the same as Negative Capability; it is rather a necessary convenience to allow the reader to appreciate a state of Negative Capability, to allow poetry to be truly "great and unobtrusive".

Keats wishes to avoid at all times imposing any theory of poetics on his reader; his poems must have no didactic purpose. Whatever the reader gains from his poetry must be gained by a combination of the poet's imaginative expression and the reader's personal, imaginative reaction. Just as certain sensations trigger off speculations and reflections in the poet's mind in a state of "diligent indolence", so a poem must trigger off personal speculations and reflections in the reader's mind. What Keats feels holds true for the poet's creative process, also holds true for the reader's reaction. "That which is creative must create itself"; the poem must be independent of the poet in order to create itself anew in the reader's mind. The poem must give a few fixed points from which the reader's imagination can weave its own "tapestry empyrean". In this way, Poetry will "work out its own salvation in a man" and will not force its own philosophy on the reader. Thus poetry becomes a means of cognition, an intuitive way of gaining understanding, knowledge, wisdom that is in a constant state of progress, reaching ever new heights as each reader or generation of readers brings to it new speculations, associations, ideas. This is the "grand march of intellect" that Keats says has occurred since the time of Milton.

And it is only possible for poetry to achieve this if the poet is as unobtrusive as possible.

Keats's ideas on the Poetical Character are first expressed in his letter of 22 November, 1817 to Bailey in which he draws a distinction between "Men of Genius", who "are great as certain ethereal Chemicals operating on the Mass of neutral intellect -- by [~~for~~ but] they have not any individuality, any determined Character", and "Men of Power", whom he "would call the top and head of those who have a proper self".¹³ The distinction is based on the poet's ability, or lack of ability, to exorcise himself from his poetry. The poet of genius, who for Keats is the better poet, acts on "the Mass of neutral intellect", or the reading public, like "certain ethereal Chemicals";¹⁴ that is, he acts like a catalyst or stimulant, giving "ethereal finger-pointings" while withholding his own identity, and its accompanying values and philosophy, from the poetry. In this way the poet allows the reader to bring his own imaginative response to the poem and so to form his own values and philosophy. It is exactly for this reason that Keats, much later, says that he admires certain Italian engravings he saw at Hayden's; he says that they were "even finer to me than more accomplish'd works -- as there was left so much room for Imagination."¹⁵ In this sense he found them as great as Shakespeare's plays, for, like the plays, they allowed the viewer's imagination to travel on its own journey, to form its own speculations and values, to find its own identity and so to find its own "Penetralium of mystery". In this respect Keats is anticipating many modern theories about art, that art is as much the creative and imaginative response of the viewer as it is the creative production of the artist.

In contrast to the poet of genius is the poet of power, the poet who cannot withhold his identity from his work, but must coerce his readers into an acceptance of his values, his speculations, his philosophy. This is the work of an egotist, and it is under this category that Keats, at least during 1818, feels Wordsworth belongs.

It is basically this dichotomy -- between "Men of Genius" and "Men of Power" --- that Keats expands on in his letter of 27 October, 1818 to Woodhouse;

As to the poetical Character itself, (I mean that sort of which, if I am any thing, I am a Member; that sort distinguished from the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone) it is not itself -- it has no self -- it is every thing and nothing -- It has no character -- it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated -- It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous 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. A Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity -- he is continually in for -- and filling some other Body -- The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute -- the poet has none; no identity -- he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's Creatures.¹⁶

From his idea that the poet must withhold his identity from his work, Keats traces the concept back to the creative process itself and so develops the thought that the truly great poet must not only withhold his identity from his poetry, but he must be able to identify sympathetically with any person or thing that he contemplates. In this sense the poet has no identity, he totally annuls himself, and instead he lives in and through the identities of the objects he contemplates and with which he empathically identifies. And, because he has no identity, and so no set values or system of morals, the poet is amoral; he delights in the dark

and the light sides of life, the foul and the fair, an Iago as much as an Imogen. He is not afraid to present either side of life "because they both end in speculation." The poet must not present his reader with a set moral or philosophical standpoint, but must present his reader with numerous images from all aspects of life that will lead the reader into his own speculations and so to his own conclusions. Instead of this, however, the poet of the "egotistical sublime" is constantly philosophizing and moralizing, which is, in Keats's mind, virtually an insult to the imaginative and creative independence of the reader. This is why Keats came to dislike Hunt, whom he calls "vain" and "egotistical": "instead of giving other minds credit for the same degree of perception as he himself possesses -- he begins an explanation in such a curious manner that our taste and self-love is offended continually."¹⁷ Instead of leaving beautiful images alone for the reader to speculate and muse and reflect upon, Hunt makes them hateful by imposing on them his own identity and values. He will not allow the reader any creative independence to form his own values from the poetry.

The Shakespearean or Elizabethan poet, on the other hand, is totally selfless; he can sympathetically identify with any object he contemplates or any character he is creating. In this, he is truly dramatic: he can appreciate the feelings and thoughts of any number of diverse characters and present them to the reader impartially.

It has often been recognized that here again Keats was probably influenced by Hazlitt, who in The Round Table and in his lecture "On Shakespeare and Milton" praises Shakespeare for his lack of identity and his ability to identify sympathetically with his characters.¹⁸ No doubt Keats was influenced by Hazlitt, but in keeping with my belief that Hazlitt may

sometimes be credited with ideas that do not originate with him, I would like to point out that as early as June 1816, Keats's close friend Reynolds published an article in The Champion "On Egotism in Literature" in which he uses Shakespeare and Wordsworth as examples of the characterless and the egotistical poet respectively. Of Shakespeare Reynolds writes:

Shakespeare certainly was no egotist. He never shines through his characters. All his persons speak like real men and women, and their conversation seems to spring up from their circumstances of the moment. In all other dramas, except his, we can perceive the author through the scene, and hear him prompting; -- but Shakespeare, after the plays were written, would seem to have no claim to them.¹⁹

Of course, both Reynolds and Hazlitt were in the Hunt circle, so it is difficult to say with whom an idea might have originated. Furthermore, whether these ideas are Hazlitt's or Reynolds's is of little importance, for what Keats is expressing in this letter is the outcome of his own thoughts as they have developed through the year 1817-1818 from the letter on Negative Capability to this statement about the Poetical Character. And while Hazlitt and Reynolds are describing their critical opinions about the merits of certain poets, Keats is describing his own view of the creative process from the point of view of a practising poet. His speculations begin with consideration of the poet's creative mood, his state of Negative Capability or "wise passiveness", and from there he goes on to consider the effect poetry should have on its readers and how much of himself the poet should allow to intrude into the dramatic images and characters he presents. Out of these speculations comes the idea of the Poetical Character, the characterless poet, and its resultant conclusions about suitable subjects for poetry. Since the poet is amoral and impartial, any aspect of life becomes a suitable subject for poetry so long as it allows

the reader freedom for speculation. Keats's development of thought is entirely his own.

Also, Keats's idea of the poet's ability to identify sympathetically with objects is entirely native to his personality. His capacity for empathy is evidenced from as early as 22 November, 1817 when he writes to Bailey that "if a Sparrow come before my Window I take part in its existence and pick about the Gravel."²⁰ But Keats does not mention the subject again until about a year later, although it must have been in his mind. On 21 September, 1818 he writes to Dilke: "I wish I could say Tom was any better. His identity presses upon me so all day that I am obliged to go out".²¹ And in his letter on the Poetical Character he explains to Woodhouse:

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 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;²²

Keats seems to have had a remarkable ability to participate in the thoughts and feelings, the very life, of not only people but animals as well. He achieves this effect of annulling self by imaginatively projecting himself into the character or characters he contemplates. And so intense is his imagination and its capacity for empathy that he does not even have to will himself into the identity of other people; their identities press upon him without his own active involvement, even to the point that he sometimes dislikes the feelings he gains from sympathetic identification. And it is in connexion with this unpleasant aspect of the characterless poet that Keats eventually links these ideas about identity to the concept

of "diligent indolence".

On 17 March, 1819 Keats writes to George and Georgiana:

On Sunday I went to Davenports' were [for where] I dined -- and had a nap. I cannot bare a day anihilated in that manner -- there is a great difference between an easy and an uneasy indolence -- An indolent day -- fill'd with speculations even of an unpleasant colour -- is bearable and even pleasant alone -- . . . but to have nothing to do, and to be surrounded with unpleasant human identities; who press upon one just enough to prevent one getting into a lazy position; and not enough to interest or rouse one; is a capital punishment of a capital crime; for is it not giving up, through goodnature, one's time to people who have no light and shade a capital crime?²³

Far from Negative Capability being the same as the poet's lack of identity or his ability to identify sympathetically with objects, as Bate and others have claimed, here such empathy destroys the state of "easy indolence", or "delicious diligent indolence", in which the exercise of Negative Capability is possible. Keats is prevented from getting into a state of "easy indolence" or "wise passiveness" in which the fancy begins to follow trains of association; instead, unpleasant identities press upon him destroying such speculation. Of course, if the persons had "light and shade", had interesting facets about their character, identification with them would become desirable and they might become the source of interesting speculation in a state of "diligent indolence", and this is how Keats's idea about the Poetical Character becomes linked to his concept of Negative Capability, although the two ideas are never one and the same. They never can be the same, because while sympathetic identification involves active imaginative participation in the lives of others, the mood of Negative Capability involves passive acceptance of sensations and the resulting speculations. The two cannot be carried on at the same time as we see from this letter. Also, the capacity for empathy is often linked with unpleasant feelings

for Keats, whereas "diligent indolence" or the state of Negative Capability is intrinsically connected with pleasure.

After consideration of Keats's view of the Poetical Character, there remains the question of whether he could put his ideas into practice; can he be the Shakespearean poet who withholds his identity entirely from his poetry? Keats does seem to achieve this goal in some of his romances, notably The Eve of St. Agnes, but here the achievement is aided by the development of character being kept to a minimum and by the poem's being largely descriptive rather than dealing with ideas. In any poem that does deal with ideas rather than simply narrating a story Keats's personality begins to intrude and the recast of Hyperion as The Fall of Hyperion shows him moving, at the end of his poetic career, towards an even more personal type of poetry than he had written before. The Fall is narrated in the first person and it concentrates on ideas about the role of the poet and poetry that have great personal importance to Keats. The whole poem is given in the form of a personal dream and there can be no doubt that we are dealing with the workings of Keats's own mind, with his personal questions and the answers which he is formulating for himself and other poets. Middleton Murry suggests that The Fall "was 'the egotistical sublime' in a different sense from that in which Keats applied the phrase to Wordsworth, and it involved him in an intense inward struggle -- a desperate questioning of his own purpose and significance, which . . . came to him with a Wordsworthian background".²⁴ The Fall, then, although it deals with the question of the lot of poets in general, is still a very personal, egocentric (in no derogatory sense) poem. No doubt, the ideal of the Shakespearean poet is still a goal to which Keats is aspiring, and his "greatest ambition"

is always to write "a few fine Plays".²⁵ He hopes that a few poems with "Character and Sentiment", along with the "drapery" of St. Agnes Eve, will nerve him up for writing those plays, but he does not continue to write such dramatic poems. Instead he turns to personal problems and values in The Fall. Keats seems to realize that, if he is to write great drama he must first go through a Wordsworthian attempt to clarify his purpose as a poet and his values in the world of circumstance, for in nineteenth-century England there are no common values on which he can rely as a framework for drama in the way that Renaissance playwrights relied on accepted values; he must find his own. As Middleton Murry points out, in a world where all faith in any system has been shattered, the only hope for emulating the work of a poet like Milton is to go about it in the way Wordsworth does, "by attempting to create an epic of the rediscovery of vital religion in the experience of a prophetic man."²⁶ This is what Keats must do for himself, and in going about it he is as much indebted to Wordsworth as he is to Shakespeare.

Keats, in considering these moral questions, develops his concept of the Poetical Character into his social and ethical idea of "disinterestedness". If the poet can truly annul self and sympathetically identify with other objects, he must be totally selfless; if he has no self-interest whatsoever he can be truly charitable, understanding, forgiving, loving, or what Keats calls "disinterested". This concept is formulated in the same letter of 19 March, 1819 to George and Georgiana in which he discusses his state of indolence. He writes:

Very few men have ever arrived at a complete disinterestedness of Mind: very few have been influenced by a pure desire of the benefits of others -- in the greater part of the Benefactors

[of] & to Humanity some meretricious motive has sullied their greatness -- some melodramatic scenery has facinated them ---²⁷

He strives towards the state of "disinterestedness", selflessness, the "pure desire of the benefits of others", as the ideal moral state, but he seriously wonders if he will ever be able to achieve such a state because of his interest in his own problems. It is one thing to become the Shakespearean amoral, characterless poet, but it takes an even greater effort to become "disinterested", to be able to practise the Christian ideal of charity. Far from being amoral, this is the top of moral states, and in these questions Keats is dealing as much, or more, with the realm of Wordsworth as he is with the realm of Shakespeare. It is precisely for his ability to be disinterested and to identify sympathetically with others that Wordsworth praises the Wanderer in Book I of The Excursion:

Unoccupied by sorrow of its own,
His heart lay open; and, by nature tuned
And constant disposition of his thoughts
To sympathy with man, he was alive
To all that was enjoyed where'er he went,
And all that was endured; for, in himself
Happy, and quiet in his cheerfulness,
He had no painful pressure from without
That made him turn aside from wretchedness
With coward fears. He could afford to suffer
With those whom he saw suffer.

(ll. 362-371)

This is the state that Keats wishes to achieve for himself, although he questions whether anyone except "Socrates and Jesus"²⁸ have ever truly been "disinterested". What is more, he begins to worry that if true disinterestedness existed in all creatures, the laws of survival on which the whole natural realm exists would collapse and "in wild nature the Hawk would loose his Breakfast of Robins and the Robin his Worms The Lion must starve as well as the swallow".²⁹ He concludes, however, that both men and

animals have too much instinctive self-interest to warrant such fears:

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 --30

There are even admirable qualities, Keats claims, in the self-interested aspiration towards their own "purpose" in men and animals because of the intensity of the emotion; but for him the state of "disinterestedness" remains the best state for man and he urges all men to carry it "to its highest pitch".

This concept of "disinterestedness" throws some light on that difficult passage in Book I of Endymion:

But there are
Richer entanglements, enthrallments far
More self-destroying, leading, by degrees,
To the chief intensity; the crown of these
Is made of love and friendship, and sits high
Upon the forehead of humanity.

(ll. 797-802)

This "love and friendship" is true altruism, and it is only possible when a man destroys his "self", his ego and its self-interests, so allowing him to identify sympathetically with the joys and sorrows of others and to aid his fellows wherever possible. But such an ideal is not always possible and Keats bewails the fact that there must almost always be "The journey homeward to habitual self!" (Endymion, Book II, l. 276).

The concept of the Shakespearean Poetical Character, then, is an ideal to which Keats always aspired in his short career as a poet, but in working out his thoughts concerning that ideal he found that it was first necessary to answer important questions concerning his role as a poet and as a man. In his attempts to answer these questions he is indebted for help as much, or more, to Wordsworth as to anyone else.

CHAPTER IV

"SENSATION" AND IMAGINATION

In the preceding chapters I have discussed some of Keats's ideas about the process of writing poetry in which the terms "sensation" and "imagination" have cropped up again and again. In order to avoid a lengthy digression, I have until now delayed attempting to define these terms in any detail, but such definitions are necessary in order to understand fully Keats's ideas concerning Negative Capability.

Any examination of Keats's use of the terms "sensation" and "imagination" must begin with his important letter of 22 November, 1817 to Bailey:

I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination -- What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth -- whether it existed before or not -- for I have the same Idea of all our Passions as of Love they are all in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty -- 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 ---¹

"Sensation" is a word that Keats uses loosely and with various meanings, and it has been defined in various ways. Clarence Thorpe, for example, states that "By 'sensations' Keats here means feelings or intuitions, the pure activity of the imagination, as Ernest de Selincourt, and

later Sidney Colvin have pointed out."² W. J. Bate, on the other hand, claims that "Hazlitt's constant use of the word 'sensations' in the traditional empirical sense -- as virtually equivalent to concrete experience -- added a new term to Keats's own habitual vocabulary (hence the remark at the moment about the 'Life of Sensations')".³ As contradictory as these two definitions seem -- the one sees "sensation" originating in the poet's mind and the other sees it originating in the external world -- they are both correct, I think.

That Keats uses "sensation" with the empirical meaning of sensory impressions received from the material world is evidenced in his definition of the word in his medical notes:

Physiology of the Nervous System. The 1st office is that of Sensation -- it is an impression made on the Extremities of the Nerves conveyed to the Brain.⁴

This definition limits the term to physical sense impressions. But in discussing one of Fanny Brawne's friends, he states that she "plays the Music without one sensation but the feel of the ivory at her fingers".⁵ Here he implies that sensory perception is not all that there is to "sensation"; this woman lacks the sensibility, the feeling, that is also part of the experience. He also uses "sensation" with the meaning of emotion or feeling when he asks George and Georgiana: "With what sensation do you read Fielding?"⁶

From these various uses of the word, it is apparent that Keats does not limit "sensation" to either an external or an internal phenomenon; rather he is using it to mean, in Sperry's words, "a process, an assimilation of outer stimulus and inner response that proceeds through time".⁷ The physical sensation is transported to the brain where it elicits an

emotional response, a feeling, combinations of which constitute a person's sensibility. It is in this way that sensations become linked with the imagination.

Garrod has observed that Keats's interest in sensations was probably largely influenced by Wordsworth and Coleridge, who, with Lyrical Ballads, had put the senses back into poetry.⁸ Wordsworth's emphasis on sensation is amply evident in Tintern Abbey, where he states that he is "well pleased to recognize / In nature and the language of the sense, / The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse, / The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul / Of all my moral being." (ll. 108-112). It is to the sensations experienced in nature that Wordsworth attributes the building up of his "moral being", an idea that implies a process, a continuum, that begins with sense stimuli which in turn evoke responses in the mind and emotions of the poet. Such a continuum from the senses to the mind and heart, from the external world to the poet's inner being, is even more explicitly expressed earlier in Tintern Abbey:

But oft, in lonely rooms, and mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart,
And passing even into my purer mind
With tranquil restoration.

(ll. 26-31)

For Wordsworth, then, as for Keats, "sensation" has no simple, clear-cut meaning, but involves a complex process that has various aspects, both external and internal. It involves the physical forms of nature from which stimuli come to the senses, but it also involves a molding of these stimuli from within the poet's inner being. As Wordsworth would say, it involves "action from within and from without".⁹ The action from within

involves the imagination acting as a unifying agent; it takes mere sense impressions and arranges and interprets them into our perception of reality.¹⁰ It is a complex process, sensory, mental, and emotional that altogether constitutes the poet's consciousness, his overall mode of perception. It is integrally linked with the poet's emotions, what Keats in this letter calls "the Heart's affections", and with his mind, especially the imaginative part of the mind. Hence Keats's cry of "O for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts!" The process does not involve the rational, analytical part of the mind, that which deals with abstract ideas and theories. Rather, it is a process based on the imaginative perception of the concrete realities of the material world; the sensory aspect can never be ignored and all ideas must be empirically "proved on the pulses". As Keats tells Bailey, the heavenly state of having one's "happiness on Earth repeated in a finer tone and so repeated . . . can only befall those who delight in sensation rather than hunger as you do after Truth."¹¹ In keeping with the concept of Negative Capability, truth cannot be irritably sought after with fact and reason; truth is perceived through an openness to the life of sensations, the process of perception that we have been discussing. And, as we have seen, it is in this state of Negative Capability that poetry is born and creativity proceeds.

But to say that truth is perceived through an openness to a life of sensations is not to claim that this intuitive perception is in any way transcendental, or extra-sensory, and I think that those critics, like de Selincourt and Colvin, who have stressed only the intuitive aspect of "sensation" have distorted Keats's meaning by emphasizing only one aspect -- the internal -- of the process. They have forgotten that Keats's perception

of the world is always strongly rooted in the sensory, even if sensory experience leads to wild flights of the imagination. Keats would always agree with Wordsworth that the sensations must be "felt in the blood" before they can pass into the "purer mind".

It is perhaps misleading even to say that it is with an openness to a life of sensations that truth is perceived, for strictly speaking, Keats claims that it is the imagination that apprehends truth. But it is difficult to say where, in the complex process, sensory experience ends and the imagination and emotions take over, and Keats himself never tries to analyze the process in this fashion; for him, the process always remains a continuum.

Keats clings tenaciously throughout his poetical career to his faith in the "authenticity of the Imagination", his certainty of "nothing but the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination". It is the Romantic belief that imagination can intuitively comprehend reality, the truth of things, in a direct understanding that does not involve analytical rationalism, for the reason cannot understand what the imagination can. The origin of knowledge, then, is experience shaped by the imagination, or what is commonly called "imaginative intuition" or "imaginative insight".

This type of imaginative apprehension of truth is again emphasized in Keats's letter of 30 January, 1818 to Taylor in which he discusses the "pleasure thermometer" passage in Endymion:

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.¹²

It is the imagination that apprehends truth, and Taylor may not be able to understand this because he is "a consecutive Man", by which I understand Keats to mean a reasoning man.

Like Keats, Wordsworth too has great faith in the Imagination and its ability to perceive truth, and, although Keats's ideas concerning the imagination are entirely his own, they were probably bolstered by Wordsworth's views on the subject. Wordsworth's faith in the imagination's ability to grasp truth is many times displayed in The Excursion, much of which is taken up with the topic of the superiority of the imagination over reason. In Book IV the Wanderer goes to great lengths to show that it is "well to trust / Imagination's light when reason's fails" (ll. 771-772). And Wordsworth goes on to emphasize that it is in the imagination that permanent truth, as opposed to ephemeral opinion, lies:

Access for you
Is yet preserved to principles of truth,
Which the imaginative Will upholds
In seats of wisdom, not to be approached
By the inferior Faculty that moulds,
With her minute and speculative pains,
Opinion, ever changing!

(Book IV, ll. 1126-1132)

One last example from The Excursion cannot be overlooked. Wordsworth claims "That to the imagination may be given / A type and shadow of an awful truth", a claim that not only demonstrates his faith in the authenticity of the imagination's perception, but which may have been at the back of Keats's mind when, in discussing the imagination, he says that it is "a Shadow of reality to come". Here Keats is discussing his concept of heavenly beauty as having one's earthly happiness repeated in a finer tone, and by "a Shadow of reality to come" he means that sensations experienced in this life are a prefiguration, in a lower or grosser tone, of that

heavenly state. But since that heavenly state of beauty is the ultimate reality that is attainable to man, then for Keats that heavenly beauty must be the ultimate truth, "an awful truth".

No doubt Keats was impressed by these passages in The Excursion, but Wordsworth's strongest claim for the Imagination's capacity for apprehending truth is given in Book XIII of The Prelude, a poem whose virtual subject is the growth of the poet's imagination:

This Love more intellectual cannot be
Without Imagination, which, in truth,
Is but another name for absolute strength
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
And Reason in her most exalted mood.
(ll. 166-170)

This "Love more intellectual" is Wordsworth's equivalent to Christian charity, or what Keats calls "disinterestedness", true altruism, and it is integrally linked with the Imagination, that faculty that has the "clearest insight" and which perceives eternal truths. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that in discussing the Imagination, Keats says: "I have the same Idea of all our Passions as of Love they are all in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty". Keats too links the Imagination with sublime Love, "caritas", which itself creates the essence of beauty in life and in art.

More generally, both Keats and Wordsworth link their faith in the Imagination with their great faith in man's emotions, his feelings, passions, and affections. Keats's belief in a connexion between the imagination and man's emotions is pointed out in the letter to Bailey where he speaks of "the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination". For Keats, the emotions are holy; they are truthful and honest, and it is an intuitive, emotive knowledge that he follows, a knowledge that cannot

be comprehended with the reason. Similarly, he praises Shakespeare for being a "mighty Poet of the human heart".¹³

Wordsworth also links the imagination with the emotions and, like Keats, he has a strong faith in man's passions, his feelings. We have already seen the link between the imagination and the heart in Tintern Abbey, and in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads he tells us that the subject of "Low and rustic life was generally chosen because in that situation the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity."¹⁴ It is the passions he is interested in and "the heart within the heart, the seat / Where peace and happy consciousness should dwell" (Excursion, Book IV, ll. 627-628). The emotive and imaginative knowledge of life is truly valid, and

The estate of man would be indeed forlorn
If false conclusions of the reasoning power
Made the eye blind, and closed the passages
Through which the ear converses with the heart.
(Excursion, Book IV, ll. 1152-1156)

Sense impressions must travel to the heart and so be linked with the imagination. Poetry itself is "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." It is "the most philosophic of all writing: it is so: its object is truth, not individual and local, but general, and operative; not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion."¹⁵ Such a claim is very similar to Keats's ideas in Book I of Endymion where Pan, the god of passion and emotion as well as the symbol of the creative imagination, is praised as the "Dread opener of the mysterious doors / Leading to universal knowledge" (ll. 288-289). It is really surprising that, upon hearing Keats recite this hymn to Pan, Wordsworth said it was "a Very pretty piece of Paganism",¹⁶ surprising because Keats's ideas are so

similar to the older poet's.

In considering Wordsworth's ideas on the imagination in comparison to Keats's, some attention should be given to the concept that the imagination is a unifying force in contrast to the reason which dissects. According to Christopher Wordsworth's Memoirs, Wordsworth claims that the imagination "is that chemical faculty by which elements of the most different nature and distant origin are blended together into one harmonious and homogeneous whole."¹⁷ The imagination reconciles all opposites and brings order out of confusion. It gives meaning and beauty to objects and ideas and events by forming sensory impressions, emotions, and thoughts into a unified whole that is pleasing to the reader. And this is one of its chief functions.

Keats does not lay nearly so much stress on the unifying power of the imagination, which is in keeping with his idea that poetry should be "grand and unobtrusive", "a fine excess" that presents a profusion of images and allows diverse ideas and speculations to be held in juxtaposition. Any unifying force might endanger the eclectic nature of great poetry, might not allow Iagos and Imogens to exist side by side. But Keats does suggest that the imagination gives an overall direction to poetry, if not a unity, when he states that "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."¹⁸ The fancy entertains many ideas and speculations, and the imagination gives them direction, form. In discussing West's painting Keats also states that "the excellence of every Art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty & Truth."¹⁹ Art, which is created by the imagination, makes "disagreeables evaporate", makes the dark and unpleasant side of life as

beautiful and acceptable as the light side, makes an Iago as delightful as an Imogen. The imagination, then, accepts life in all its bitter-sweetness, its pleasure and its pain, as beautiful. It beautifies truth, or reality, not by ignoring or passing over the pain and darkness, but by viewing them as integral to an overall unity that is itself beautiful. This is why "What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth"; the imagination must (in the sense of "can only") grasp truth, reality, as beautiful, "whether it existed before or not". Whether reality existed in the minds of others as beautiful or not before, the imagination now makes it beautiful, presents it as beauty. That is why "all our Passions" -- pain as well as pleasure, sorrow as well as joy, -- are "in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty". In their sublime form as art all passions dwell in beauty. This is why Keats "can never feel certain of any truth but from a clear perception of its Beauty."²⁰ Reality must be seen in its inherent beauty, and it is the real world that constitutes Keats's "mighty abstract Idea . . . of Beauty in all things."²¹ Such thoughts concerning the imagination are closely related to the concept of Negative Capability, the calm acceptance of life with all its uncertainties and mysteries, in all its diverse aspects, without having to explain them rationally. Once life's mystery, the mystery of reality or truth, has been accepted, the imagination grasps it as beautiful.

Finally, there remains the consideration of the imagination as a creative force for both Keats and Wordsworth. As Clarence Thorpe puts it in reference to Keats, "First, the imagination as an instrument of intuitive insight is the most authentic guide to ultimate truth; second, the imagination in its highest form is a generative force, in itself creative

of essential reality."²² We have already seen Keats's ideas on how the creative imagination works in the metaphor of the spider spinning his web in the letter of 19 February, 1818 to Reynolds.²³ The imagination works on concrete sensations and materials of the real world and re-creates them into a world of new forms that is beyond the world of sense experience but still strongly rooted in concrete reality. Keats never forgets that concrete reality and physical sensations are the starting point of the imaginative journey, no matter how remote the realms are to which the flights of imagination carry him. As he explains it in another letter, he looks "upon the Sun, the Moon, the Stars, the Earth and its contents, as materials to form greater things -- that is to say ethereal things -- but here I am talking like a Madman -- greater things than our Creator himself made!"²⁴ With his imagination he can create greater things than God himself, but such creations are not built on airy fantasies; rather, he uses the concrete materials of the real world -- the Earth and its contents -- and shapes them into imaginative creations, poetry.

Again, in Endymion, Keats describes this creative process:

'Be still the unimaginable lodge
For solitary thinkings; such as dodge
Conception to the very bourne of heaven,
Then leave the naked brain: be still the leaven,
That spreading in this dull and clodded earth
Gives it a touch ethereal -- a new birth:
(Book I, ll. 293-298)

Imagination can journey to "the very bourne of heaven", the height of imaginative fancy, the point where the imagination leaves the brain in the form of poetry. But it can only make that journey by giving "a touch ethereal", "a new birth", to "this dull and clodded earth", the real world. The imagination can create things, events, ideas anew, but only by beginning

with reality and re-shaping it into more ethereal, sublime, ideal forms.

It transcends the world of sense but is rooted in that world.

So vivid is Keats's imagination that he claims in his letter of 31 December, 1818 to George and Georgiana that he can imaginatively participate in the life of any society:

Yet you are very little more removed from general association than I am --- recollect that no Man can live but in one society at a time --- his enjoyment in the different states of human society must depend upon the Powers of his Mind -- that is you can imagine a roman triumph, or an olympic game as well as I can. We with our bodily eyes see but the fashion and Manners of one country for one age --- and then we die --- Now to me manners and customs long since passed whether among the Babylonians or the Bactrians are as real, or even [for even] more real than those among which I now live --²⁵

Here Keats goes so far as to claim that the world his imagination creates is in fact more real to him than the society in which he lives. This is so because of the intensity with which his imagination and emotions participate in the created world, and it is the imagination and emotions that perceive truth, or reality.

This passage is very similar to lines in Wordsworth's "Prospectus" to The Recluse, which would have interested Keats not only for their ideas, but for their very vocabulary with its emphasis on Beauty:

-- Beauty -- a living Presence of the earth,
Surpassing the most fair ideal Forms
Which craft of delicate Spirits hath composed
From earth's materials -- waits upon my steps;
Pitches her tents before me as I move,
An hourly neighbour. Paradise, and groves
Elysian, Fortunate Fields -- like those of old
Sought in the Atlantic Main -- why should they be
A history only of departed things,
Or a mere fiction of what never was?
For the discerning intellect of Man,
When wedded to this goodly universe
In love and holy passion, shall find these
A simple produce of the common day.

(ll. 42-55)

"Beauty", says Wordsworth, is inherent in "the living Presence of the earth", in reality, an idea similar to Keats's "mighty abstract Idea . . . of Beauty in all things". And beauty, for Wordsworth as for Keats, is the proper subject and realm of poetry. Wordsworth also claims that when his "discerning intellect" -- Keats's "Powers of the Mind" -- works upon the real world with emotions of "love and holy passion" -- Keats's "Heart's affections" -- he can imaginatively participate in the life of remote societies. His imagination, working with his emotions, creates those societies so vividly that, for him, they are as real as the actual world. The imagination has remarkable creative powers.

But for Wordsworth, as for Keats, the imagination, for all its flights, is strongly linked to the material world, to the forms of nature and the physical sensations they produce. The whole object of The Recluse, its "high argument", is to show "How exquisitely the individual Mind / . . . to the external World / Is fitted: -- and how exquisitely, too -- / . . . The external World is fitted to the Mind; / And the creation (by no lower name / Can it be called) which they with blended might / Accomplish" ("Prospectus", ll. 63-71). There is a reciprocal relationship between man's imaginative mind and the universe, in which he receives sensory impressions from the material world -- in a receptive state of "wise passiveness" -- and his imagination, strengthened by his feelings, his passions, molds, unifies, arranges, those impressions into an imaginative perception of reality. Creativity is born out of this reciprocal relationship, this "balance, an ennobling interchange / Of action from within and from without; / The excellence, pure spirit, and best power / Both of the object seen, and eye that sees." (Prelude, Book XII, ll. 376-379). The imagination

and passions re-create these sensations into beautiful forms. As Keats would say, "all our Passions . . . are . . . creative of essential Beauty."

The molding, unifying, re-creative process of the imagination Wordsworth describes in some detail in the 1815 Preface:

Imagination . . . has no reference to images that are merely a faithful copy, existing in the mind, of absent external objects; but is a world of higher import, denoting operations of the mind upon those objects, and processes of creation or of composition, governed by certain fixed laws. . . . Fancy does not require that the materials which she makes use of should be susceptible of change in their constitution, from her touch . . . Directly the reverse of these, are the desires and demands of the Imagination. She recoils from every thing but the plastic, the pliant, and the indefinite.²⁶

The imagination does not merely copy objects from the material world, but shapes and creates, or composes, those objects into more sublime forms, into "a world of higher import". Thus it can only work with objects that are plastic and pliant. And Wordsworth never fails to associate these operations of the imagination with the senses, the passions. In the Essay Supplementary he writes:

The appropriate business of poetry . . . and her duty, is to treat of things not as they are, but as they appear; not as they exist in themselves, but as they seem to exist to the senses and to the passions.²⁷

W. J. B. Owen points out that, for Wordsworth, the imagination makes poems "rise above particularities of scene towards 'general truth,' or an idea; because, in Robinson's words, . . . 'imagination is the faculty by which the poet conceives and produces -- that is, images -- individual forms in which are embodied universal ideas or abstractions.'"²⁸ Out of the diverse sense impressions received from the external world, the imagination forms a universal truth or idea. This is very similar to the "etherializing" processes of the imagination described by Keats in which the

imagination gains "universal knowledge"; it is "a regular stepping of the Imagination towards a Truth." In the Many, the imagination perceives the One.

In this brief discussion of Keats's and Wordsworth's ideas concerning "sensation" and imagination I have dwelt upon the similarities between the two, for it is through the similarities that one can suggest that Keats was influenced by the older poet. There are, of course, many of Wordsworth's ideas concerning the imagination with which I have not dealt since my object is to show the possible influence of Wordsworth upon Keats rather than to make a detailed comparison between the two poets. Finally, I would again like to stress that in suggesting that Keats was influenced by Wordsworth, I am not suggesting that Keats simply borrowed or adopted the older poet's ideas wholesale. Keats's ideas concerning "sensation" and imagination are his own, developed by himself, but in developing his ideas he was probably aided, supported, and urged on by those of Wordsworth's ideas he found similar to his own.

CHAPTER V
REASON AND "PHILOSOPHY"

Keats's anti-rationalist sentiments have been mentioned briefly in previous chapters, but this topic is so important to him, and so closely linked with his thoughts on Negative Capability, that it deserves some detailed treatment. I believe also that Keats, in his reading of Wordsworth, must have found many of his own ideas on the topic to be very similar to those of the older poet.

Keats's anti-rationalism develops to a large extent out of his contrast between imaginative, intuitive insight and consecutive, analytic reasoning. We have already seen that he has great faith in an imaginative perception of truth and on 22 November, 1817 he writes to Bailey that he has "never yet been able to perceive how any thing can be known for truth by consecutive reasoning -- and yet it must be --".¹ Keats is prepared to concede that some people may arrive at truth through the laborious stages of analytic reasoning, but such a process is totally invalid for him. As he again writes to Bailey on 13 March, 1818:

Now my dear fellow I must once for all tell you I have not one Idea of the truth of any of my speculations -- I shall never be a Reasoner because I care not to be in the right, when retired from bickering and in a proper philosophical temper --²

Here Keats is suggesting that he can entertain numerous diverse speculations concerning life, but he must accept his speculations on faith; they cannot be proved by a system of analytic reasoning. Life is far too complex and involves too many opposing and contradictory forces to be rationally

explainable. True philosophy, then, is not rationalism, but the calm acceptance and intuitive understanding of the human condition in its totality. But while the imagination unifies, the reason dissects; while the one intuitively perceives, the other analyzes. Unlike the imagination, the reason cannot be content with half-knowledge; it cannot accept the mysteries of life, but must attempt to explain everything in minute detail; it cannot exist in a state of Negative Capability. Furthermore, reason demands that you come down on one side of a question which necessarily excludes many other aspects of that question. True philosophy, on the other hand, sees life steadily and sees it whole, sees unity in all the diversity through imaginative understanding.

These ideas are expressed even more strongly in the letter of 24 September, 1819 to George and Georgiana in which Keats discusses Dilke's character:

Brown complained very much in his Letter to me of yesterday of the great alteration the Disposition of Dilke has undergone -- He thinks of nothing but 'Political Justice' and his Boy -- Now the first political duty a Man ought to have a Mind to is the happiness of his friends. I wrote Brown a comment on the subject, wherein I explained what I thought of Dilke's Character. Which resolved itself into this conclusion. That Dilke was a Man who cannot feel he has a personal identity unless he has made up his Mind about every thing. The only means of strengthening one's intellect is to make up ones mind about nothing -- to let the mind be a thoroughfare for all thoughts. Not a select party. The genus is not scarce in population. All the stubborn arguers you meet with are of the same brood -- They never begin upon a subject they have not preresolved on. They want to hammer their nail into you and if you turn the point, still they think you wrong. Dilke will never come at a truth as long as he lives; because he is always trying at it. He is a Godwin-methodist.³

Here Keats no longer speaks of reason per se, but of Godwinian, analytical reason. This discussion of Dilke as a Godwinian brings together a number of Keats's ideas. First, Godwin's utilitarianism with its stress on

self-interest is totally opposed to Keats's idea of "disinterestedness", true altruism, in which "a Man ought to have a Mind to . . . the happiness of his friends". Of course, Godwin is ultimately aiming at a kind of altruism similar to Keats's in many ways, but he claims that man can come at this through powers of reason, an idea which to Keats is anathema. Far from making men charitable and disinterested, rationalized, systematized viewpoints make them narrow-minded, "stubborn arguers" who "never begin upon a subject they have not preresolved on." They can "never come at a truth" because they are always searching after it with "an irritable reaching after fact & reason". Only the imagination, with its ability to hold many speculations in tension, can arrive at truth, which links these ideas to the concept of Negative Capability. Truth cannot be sought after by reason, or as Wordsworth says, we do not need to search; instead one needs to remain in a state of "wise passiveness" or "diligent indolence" in which "the mind is a thoroughfare for all thoughts", all diverse speculations, including their doubts and uncertainties, which eventually dovetail into an imaginative understanding and acceptance of life in its complexities. Instead of this, however, Dilke must search after truth and feels he has no identity unless he has made up his mind about everything. He can never be truly "disinterested". And more than this, he must always be trying to force his argument, his system, his reasoning, onto other people, which, as we have seen in dealing with Keats's ideas on the Poetical Character, is something that Keats hates.

Wordsworth's attitude towards rationalism is rather more complex than Keats's. As a young man he was an avid Godwinian and he had great faith in the Godwinian ideals of the French Revolution. These ideals were

based upon the belief that all men are rational beings and so all men are equal. His faith in these ideals was shattered by the aftermath of the French Revolution, however, and through the Solitary in The Excursion, Wordsworth traces his own gradual recovery from this shock. This topic is dealt with even more personally and in greater detail in The Prelude. After losing his faith in reason, he turned instead to the human affections and the imagination for support. This new view of life is evident throughout his poetry, and the poem entitled "A Poet's Epitaph" is a typical example. Here Wordsworth criticizes, among others, the analytical Philosopher and the rigid Moralist:

Physician art thou? -- one, all eyes,
Philosopher! -- a lingering slave,
One that would peep and botanize
Upon his mother's grave?

A Moralist perchance appears;
Led, Heaven knows how! to this poor sod:
And he has neither eyes nor ears;
Himself his world, and his own God;

One to whose smooth-rubbed soul can cling
Nor form, nor feeling, great or small;
A reasoning, self-sufficing thing,
An intellectual All-in-all!

(ll. 17-32)

These narrow-minded, rationalizing, analyzing people are totally egocentric and devoid of all emotion, all passion, all feeling. They can never be truly disinterested, they can never appreciate the mystery of life for they have lost all sense of wonder.⁴ In contrast to the Philosopher and the Moralist, he presents the Poet who lives in a state of "wise passiveness" or Negative Capability:

He is retired as noontide dew,
Or fountain in a noon-day grove;
And you must love him, ere to you
He will seem worthy of your love.

The outward shows of sky and earth,
Of hill and valley, he has viewed;
And impulses of deeper birth
Have come to him in solitude.

In common things that round us lie
Some random truths he can impart, --
The harvest of a quiet eye
That broods and sleeps on his own heart.
(ll. 37-52)

He lives in a state of passive receptivity, receiving his understanding of life from the sensations, or impulses, he gains from nature. For him there is no analyzing, no systematizing, no "irritable reaching after fact & reason"; instead he has an intuitive understanding of life's mystery, an appreciation of its wonder.

Modern science, which is a branch of analytical philosophy, also comes under strong attack from both Keats and Wordsworth, both of whom totally distrust its cold, calculating, rational approach to life. Wordsworth's contrast between Poetry and Science in the 1802 Preface is well known, but perhaps his best denunciation of cold, calculating, classifying science is given in Book III of The Excursion where he describes certain kinds of scientists:

He who with pocket-hammer smites the edge
Of luckless rock or prominent stone, disguised
In weather-stains or crusted over by Nature
With her first growths, detaching by the stroke
A chip or splinter -- to resolve his doubts;
And, with that ready answer satisfied,
The substance classes by some barbarous name,
And hurries on; or from the fragments picks
His specimen, if but haply interveined
With sparkling mineral, or should crystal cube
Lurk in its cells -- and thinks himself enriched,
Wealthier, and doubtless wiser, than before!
(ll. 178-189)

Such a man cannot be content with the wonder of life, with half-knowledge and its doubts and uncertainties; he must be constantly searching after

knowledge; he must explain everything and thinks he is wise although he has false wisdom.

Keats's dislike of science is equally strong and is evidenced from as early as 21 September, 1817 when he writes to Reynolds in a very sarcastic tone:

I have not time to elucidate the forms and shapes of the grass and trees; for, rot it! I forgot to bring my mathematical case with me; which unfortunately contained my triangular Prism so that the hues of the grass cannot be dissected for you --⁵

In this letter Keats also tells Reynolds that "we [himself and Bailey] have read Wordsworth", who probably influenced his attitude to science.

But Keats's most severe criticism of science is given in Lamia where he attacks "cold philosophy" which, through its connexion with Newton's prismatic reduction of the rainbow,⁶ is virtually equivalent to science:

Do not all charms fly
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?
There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:
We know her woof, her texture; she is given
In the dull catalogue of common things.
Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,
Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine --
Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made
The tender-person'd Lamia melt into a shade.⁷
(Part II, ll. 229-238)

This type of scientific analysis is the opposite of Negative Capability; it destroys the mystery of life and man's imaginative apprehension of that mystery.

Keats's attitude towards reason, knowledge, and philosophy is not static, however, and as he begins to mature poetically, he begins to realize that certain types of reason, knowledge, and philosophy are necessary if he is to write great poetry and if he is to serve mankind.

But in considering this movement of his towards reason, knowledge, and philosophy, it is important to remember two things: first, Keats never forgets that, for the poet, the imagination is of prime importance and it is the imagination that perceives truth; secondly, the type of reason, knowledge, and philosophy that he seeks is not to be confused with rationalism and science, those branches of philosophy that are preoccupied with analyzing, dissecting, explaining, classifying, theorizing, and systematizing. Rather, for Keats, true philosophy is concerned with the human heart and understanding the human condition in all its diverse and confusing elements, including its suffering, pain, and evil. What is more, his search for philosophy ultimately demands an acceptance of life rather than an explanation of it. And this knowledge is not opposite to his desire for a life of sensations and his belief in the truth of imagination as some critics have claimed;⁸ rather, it is an addition to those previous beliefs, a further development of his mind, to make his understanding of life and his poetry more stable, more human and less escapist. As Santayana has explained it:

In philosophy itself investigation and reasoning are only preparatory and servile parts, means to an end. They terminate in insight, or what in the noblest sense of the word may be called theory, *θεωρία*, -- a steady contemplation of all things in their order and worth. Such contemplation is imaginative. No one can reach it who has not enlarged his mind and tamed his heart. A philosopher who attains it is, for the moment, a poet; and a poet who turns his practiced and passionate imagination on the order of things, or on anything in the light of the whole, is for the moment a philosopher.⁹

Keats's movement towards an increase of knowledge, or what he calls 'philosophy', is linked to a number of other developments in his mind, some of which I have already dealt with, and all of which show a Wordsworthian influence.

First, this desire for knowledge is linked to those periods of "application, thought, and study" which alternate with periods of "diligent indolence" as we saw in chapter II. Such periods of thought and study, in which judgment is carried on, are necessary for the production of great poetry, Keats claims, and here, as we have seen, his ideas are probably indebted to Wordsworth. There is also much to be learnt from books and study generally, for all knowledge increases one's understanding of life. As Keats explains it to Taylor:

I was purposing to travel over the north this Summer -- there is but one thing to prevent me -- 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 -- . . . I have been hovering for some time between an exquisite sense of the luxurious and a love of 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.¹⁰

No longer may he write 'escapist' poetry that involves pure flights of fancy into totally unrealistic realms. Not only must his poetry be rooted in human sensations and the real world, but it must also be rooted in a wide understanding of the human condition. In order to gain this knowledge he sets up a plan of study for himself:

[I] shall learn Greek, and very likely Italian -- and in other ways prepare myself to ask Hazlitt in about a years time the best metaphysical road I can take.¹¹

And in his next letter to Reynolds he says that "Every department of knowledge we see excellent and calculated towards a great whole. I am so convinced of this, that I am glad at not having given away my medical Books, which I shall again look over to keep alive the little I know thitherwards."¹² All knowledge is important in order to appreciate the

organic unity of life. Even the scientific knowledge to be found in medical books is important, for the highest kind of science leads, after all, to philosophy, a unified and integrated view of life in its totality. This shows that Keats is not opposed to science in itself, but to the totally analytical, dissecting, and rational approach of many scientists who see no unity or mystery in life. They see only the parts, but never the whole.

For Keats, then, a certain amount of knowledge can be gained from studying and reading books, although he is quick to point out that "axioms in philosophy are not axioms until they are proved upon our pulses: We read fine -- things but never feel them to thee [for the] full until we have gone the same steps as the Author."¹³ It is not enough that knowledge be imparted to the reader in the abstract; he must experience in the real world what he learns from books. Furthermore, books are not only used to gain knowledge; they also act, like sensations experienced from nature, as a starting point for the poet's own ideas and trains of speculation: "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!"¹⁴

Wordsworth, too, feels that there is much to be gained "Through length of time, by patient exercise / Of study and hard thought" (Prelude, Book V, ll. 9-10) and he devotes a whole Book of The Prelude to "Books". Yet, like Keats, he too hates bookishness divorced from experience, intellect without sensation, theory without reality, and he strongly criticizes the educational system for concentrating entirely on the intellectual rather than integrating both aspects of man. Furthermore, like Keats, "he valued books chiefly as a source not of knowledge but of inspiration

and delight, of food for the imagination and the sense of wonder."¹⁵

Secondly, Keats's desire for knowledge is closely linked to his desire for experience in the real world. He must experience life in order to write about it; he must gain experiential knowledge for "Nothing ever becomes real till it is experienced".¹⁶ It is precisely for lack of experience that he criticizes the third Book of Endymion:

My Ideas with respect to it I assure you are very low -- and I would write the subject thoroughly again, but I am tired of it and think the time would be better spent in writing a new Romance which I have in my eye for next summer -- Rome was not built in a Day, and all the good I expect from my employment this summer is the fruit of Experience which I hope to gather in my next Poem.¹⁷

His next poem, Isabella, does attempt to deal with the very human experiences of love, death, and grief, and although he later criticizes it for being full of "inexperience", it is a step forward in coming to terms with human suffering after the mythical love of Endymion for a goddess.

Actual experience becomes to Keats as important as, or more important than, any knowledge that can be learnt from books, as we see in his comments on his walking tour of Scotland:

I should not have contented myself these four Months tramping in the highlands but that I thought it would give me more experience, rub off more Prejudice, use [me] to more hardship, -- identify finer scenes load me with grander Mountains, and strengthen more my reach in Poetry, than would stopping at home among Books even though I should reach Homer ---¹⁸

The walking tour would give him experience of life, particularly of the hardships of life, its pain and suffering -- which he saw in abundance on his brief visit to Ireland -- and this experience he intends to use for poetry.

For Wordsworth, the need for the poet to experience life in the real world is a commonplace. He strongly criticizes the eighteenth-century

poets for their artificiality and their abstractions that are divorced from reality. The main object of Lyrical Ballads is to deal with the everyday experiences of rustic folk and to express them in the real language of men. And in doing so the poet tends to dwell on the hardships and sufferings of the rural classes. For him, as for Keats, bookish, abstract theory is no good unless it can be worked out in human experience and much of The Excursion is devoted to the topic of how the Solitary comes to terms with the experiences of reality after his theoretical hopes in the French Revolution have been shattered.

Thirdly, Keats's desire for knowledge is closely linked to his growing need to appreciate and understand pain in relation to pleasure, sorrow in relation to joy, evil in relation to good. How can these opposites be reconciled in the real world? This question plagues Keats from the beginning of his career. In Sleep and Poetry he says that "First the realm I'll pass / Of Flora, and old Pan" (ll. 101-102), the realm of mythology where all is happiness, delight, and sensuous luxury. But then he asks himself the important question:

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. 121-125)

He must try to understand the "Shapes of delight, of mystery, and fear" that pass before him, made up of persons who weep and persons who laugh, "Some with their faces muffled to the ear / Between their arms; some, clear in youthful bloom, / Go glad and smilingly athwart the gloom;" (ll. 138-146). He must attempt to accept these diverse aspects of life, and to see them as an organic whole.

By the time he writes to Taylor on 30 January, 1818 about the "pleasure-thermometer" passage in Endymion, Keats has come to realize an "Attempt in the Drama" must involve "the playing of different Natures with Joy and Sorrow."¹⁹ In keeping with the concept of Negative Capability, drama must involve an appreciation and acceptance of both sides of life without having to explain them rationally or analytically. Later, as we have seen, Keats goes further than this and claims that the great dramatist must be able to identify with characters from both sides of life, Iagos and Imogens. The importance of Sorrow for Keats can also be seen in the song to Sorrow sung by the Indian Maid at the beginning of Book IV of Endymion. In her song the Maid tells of how she has learnt to appreciate sorrow and pain as well as pleasure and joy. She no longer searches for pleasure alone by pursuing Bacchus, but accepts melancholy as integral to the totality of life.

Such acceptance of both joy and sorrow as being equally important to life is also stressed by the speaker in Book III of The Excursion in a passage that I think was probably of interest to Keats:

'Your desolating sway,
Sheds,' I exclaimed, 'no sadness upon me,
And no disorder in your rage I find.
What dignity, what beauty, in this change
From mild to angry, and from sad to gay,
Alternate and revolving! He benign,
How rich in animation and delight,
With aught, as more desirable and fair,
Devised by fancy for the golden age;
(ll. 311-320)

For Wordsworth, as for Keats, true beauty lies in reality, in the harmony of all sides of life, in the appreciation of sorrow as well as joy, pain as well as pleasure. This beauty is far greater than the imagined beauty of the realm of "Flora and Old Pan", or what Wordsworth calls "the golden

age" of mythology.

But for Keats there still remains the problem of the evil and destruction on which the natural world seems to thrive and this problem comes to a head in his verse epistle to J. H. Reynolds. Here, as in Sleep and Poetry, he has a vision "Of shapes, and shadows, and remembrances, / That every other minute vex and please" (ll. 3-4). He explains to Reynolds that he has been having visions of delight and joy, but that his happiness has been destroyed by his awareness of the destructive forces in nature:

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 lesser feeds evermore. --
But I saw too distinct into the core
Of an eternal fierce destruction,
And so from happiness I far was gone.
.....
Still do I that fierce destruction see, --
The Shark at savage prey, -- the Hawk at pounce, --
The gentle Robin, like a Pard or Ounce,
Ravening a worm, --20

(ll. 86-105)

He has tried to create an imaginative realm of "Flora and Old Pan" in which all is happiness and bliss, but his imaginative perception of reality is so vivid that he cannot stop in this realm of fancy; instead, his imagination travels into the real world where the presence of destruction, pain, and evil destroy his happy vision. And, because he cannot yet accept this dark side of life, he laments that his happiness is spoilt. He points out that:

to philosophize
I dare not yet! Oh, never will the prize,
High reason, and the lore of good and ill,
Be my award! Things cannot to the will
Be settled, but they tease us out of thought;
Or is it that imagination brought
Beyond its proper bound, yet still confin'd,
Lost in a sort of Purgatory blind,
Cannot refer to any standard law
Of either earth or heaven? (ll. 73-82)

He does not yet have that philosophical detachment and repose that allows him to appreciate all sides of life. And in trying to settle the question logically he is only more confused, "teased out of thought", for any systematic answer must involve the rejection of certain aspects of life. Instead he needs "High reason". It is important to note that this "High reason" is not the low, dissecting and analyzing reason to which he has referred earlier. Quite the contrary, it is a synthezizing and unifying force that allows one to view life as an organic whole. It is what Wordsworth in Book XIII of The Prelude calls "reason in her most exalted mood" (l. 163), which he equates with Imagination and links to "love more intellectual", true altruism.

Thora Balslev has drawn attention to the similarity between the questions Keats asks in the Epistle and the questions concerning good and evil, reason and philosophy, in Book V of The Excursion.²¹ The Wanderer asks:

Are we a creature in whom good
Preponderates, or evil? Doth the will
Acknowledge reason's law? A living power
Is virtue, or no better than a name,
Fleeting as health or beauty, and unsound?
(ll. 469-473)

The Priest answers that, because of our involvement in life itself, we cannot reach "That speculative height" of objective detachment in which we can appreciate a balance of good and evil, joy and sorrow:

'Spite of proudest boast,
Reason, best Reason, is to imperfect Man
An effort only, and a noble aim;
A crown, an attribute of sovereign power,
Still to be courted -- never to be won.
(ll. 501-504)

Keats is not prepared to accept this answer, however, and he continues to strive towards that detached state of objectivity, of "High reason" or

"best Reason", in which the calm acceptance of life is possible. And in gaining this state he is again indebted to Wordsworth as we see in his long letter of 3 May, 1818 to Reynolds in which he compares the merits of Wordsworth and Milton.

I will consider the beginning of the letter last as it states a conclusion that is the result of his numerous "Branchings out" in the body of the letter. One of these "Branchings out" involves

the consideration of Wordsworth's genius and as a help, in the manner of gold being the meridian Line of worldly wealth, -- how he differs from Milton. -- And here I have nothing but surmises, from an uncertainty 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 --²² In regard to his genius alone -- we find what he says true 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: . . . Until we are sick, we understand not; -- in fine, as Byron says, "Knowledge is Sorrow"; and I go on to say that "Sorrow is Wisdom" --²³

Keats has found Wordsworth's poetry to contain truth because it deals with the human mind and the human heart. As he himself is discovering, the true poet must have a vital understanding of the human condition, which is more important to Keats than Milton's epic grandeur with its focus on God. Keats is realizing, like Wordsworth, that there is knowledge to be gained from accepting sorrow, pain, suffering and that this appreciation of sorrow brings true wisdom. He is fast moving towards the true state of Negative Capability, that calm acceptance of life in its totality. And in gaining this state he is greatly aided by his understanding of Wordsworth's poetry. The elder poet, he feels, has gone through the same stages as he is going through in order to gain that state of philosophical calm that involves true knowledge, true wisdom; and Keats traces these stages of development

in his letter. The account is a virtual recapitulation of his own development as a poet and as a man.

The first stage in this development is the infant chamber:

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 not withstanding 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 --²⁴

This infant or thoughtless Chamber involves a life of sensation alone, enjoying all sensual delights for themselves without any thought of responsibility or morality. It corresponds, as many critics have pointed out,²⁵ to the earliest stage described by Wordsworth in Tintern Abbey, in which he enjoys "glad animal movements . . . in the hour / Of thoughtless youth" (ll. 75-91). Keats's very vocabulary in describing the chambers of life is influenced by Wordsworth's poem.

Upon leaving the thoughtless chamber one enters into the second chamber of life where the thinking principle is awakened:

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 doors are set open -- but all dark -- all leading to dark passages -- We see not the balance 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.²⁶

The "Chamber of Maiden-Thought" is the poet's imaginative world, what Keats earlier refers to as "the realm of Flora and Old Pan" where imagined perfection and beauty exist. To remain in such dream-like and mythic worlds is tempting, but Keats realizes that in order to become, like Wordsworth, a poet of the human heart, he must pass into the dark chambers, must come to terms with the suffering, pain, and evil that bothered him so much in the "Epistle to J. H. Reynolds". He must attempt to find a balance of good and evil, and to attain the third stage that Wordsworth describes in Tintern Abbey where he can appreciate "The still, sad music of humanity" (l. 92). Such an attempt to understand life, however, does not involve logically analyzing and scientifically explaining every aspect of life. Rather, it is an appreciation of life's mystery, an acceptance of the human condition as it is without being able to explain it logically. This is the supreme exercise of Negative Capability. And such an attempt to understand life involves an acute balance of intense involvement in life itself and calm, philosophical detachment in which the poet can see life steadily and see it whole. This is the "kingly and indolent" state that Keats feels Shakespeare had reached, and which he desires to attain. And for both Keats and Wordsworth, this insight into life's mystery is based ultimately upon an imaginative apprehension of life and not upon any rational system.

But by now Keats realizes that knowledge plays an important part in attempting to understand, or appreciate, life's mystery, although knowledge for him must always be experiential and not merely theoretical. As he explains to Reynolds near the beginning of the letter:

An extensive knowledge 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, and which weighed upon you in the most gloomy and true

sentence in your Letter. 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, and we go thro' the same air and space without fear.²⁷

Knowledge, or what Keats at other times calls philosophy, is important and helpful in his attempt to appreciate life's mystery -- Wordsworth's "Burden of the Mystery" -- because it allows him to understand many varied facets of life. Thus he has a greater insight into seeing life as a whole, as a totality in which every aspect, dark or light, has its place. Knowledge helps him to attain that state of calm detachment that is the ultimate outcome of the practice of Negative Capability. And it does this, not by usurping his imagination, but by strengthening his imagination as the metaphor about flying -- interestingly evocative of Milton -- demonstrates. The poet does not cease to have imaginative flights of fancy into dream-like worlds, but his imaginative visions are strengthened and informed by knowledge of the real world. As Clarence Thorpe explains it so well:

the poet would no longer go through the old oak forest 'in a barren dream'; rather he would carry into that dream the sober wisdom of human thought and knowledge, and the steadying influence of a sympathetic understanding of the heart of man; the apparent break with the world would never be real, for always the dream would be enriched by the living presence of the palpitating actuality of the earth in a soul made wise by fellowship with its grief and pain.²⁸

Keats's mature attitude towards knowledge and 'philosophy' and its relationship to the imagination is best exemplified in Book III of Hyperion where Apollo, the symbol of the poet, attains godhead or poetic maturity:

'Knowledge enormous makes a God of me.
'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.'

(ll. 113-120)

Knowledge comes to Apollo because he has experienced the pain and suffering, as well as the joy, of the human condition; he has "Die[d] into life" (l. 130). And this knowledge strengthens and informs his imaginative insight into life's mystery so that he appreciates all aspects of life, its "Creations and destroyings", its joy and pain, as parts of its total unity and ultimate beauty. But this knowledge has not come to him through analytical processes and an "irritable reaching after fact & reason". Rather, he has remained in a receptive state of "wise passiveness", or Negative Capability, in which intuitive insight has come to him through his imaginative perception of the real world. It is this state of Negative Capability that allows the poet to apprehend the highest kind of truth and to achieve that calm detachment in which "'to bear all naked truths, / 'And to envisage circumstance, all calm, / 'That is the top of sovereignty.'" (Hyperion, Book II, ll. 203-205). This mature vision of life is the final outcome of the speculations that begin with the early concept of Negative Capability. And in attaining this mature vision Keats owes much to Wordsworth and his concept of "wise passiveness".

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION --- THE ODES

Thus far my study has dealt almost exclusively with Keats's letters for it is here that his ideas concerning Negative Capability are most explicitly expressed. I have attempted to show that the concept of Negative Capability is, if not identical to, at least strongly influenced by Wordsworth's idea of "wise passiveness" as expressed in Lyrical Ballads and some of his later poetry.¹ The probability of the influence of Wordsworth's idea upon Keats's is heightened by the fairly large amount of biographical information that shows Keats's great interest in, and admiration for, Wordsworth the poet at the time that Keats's ideas on Negative Capability were developing. But the similarity between the two ideas themselves is, I think, enough to claim that Keats's idea was influenced by Wordsworth's, a claim that is by no means new, as we have seen, but which has often been refuted. I hope that my re-examination of this topic has gone some way to settling the question, especially with my new approach to the term "Negative Capability" itself.

Throughout my study I have strongly maintained that the concept of Negative Capability is not a systematic philosophy by which Keats lived and wrote, but is rather a developing idea that grows as he adds to it from his new experiences. The original letter on Negative Capability is, after all, more speculative than conclusive; it is a starting point for a number of ideas concerning poetry. From the beginning the idea of Negative Capability is linked to Keats's belief that truth is perceived intuitively

by the imagination and not by the reason. And truth is perceived in a passive and receptive state of "diligent indolence" or "wise passiveness". From there the idea of Negative Capability becomes linked with Keats's thoughts on the workings of the creative imagination and the poetic process itself. In this way Negative Capability becomes linked with the nature of the ideal poet, the Poetical Character. Through each developing stage of these ideas I have shown how Keats's ideas were probably influenced by Wordsworth's ideas on the perception of truth, the creative imagination, the poetic process, rationalism, and the importance of emotions. In order to give a balanced view, however, I have also shown where Keats's ideas have strongly differed from Wordsworth's, namely on how poetry should affect the reader. And throughout I have maintained that even when Keats's ideas are strongly influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by Wordsworth's, he does not borrow wholesale from the older poet; anything he adopts must be experienced in order to be real, so that all his ideas are, in the end, his own.

Keats's concept of Negative Capability is not confined to his letters, however, and the best conclusion I can give to this study is to show how his ideas on Negative Capability and "diligent indolence" are worked out in some of his poetry. Keats is, after all, a poet first and foremost. I will proceed, then, with a reading of Keats's five great Odes: "Ode to Psyche", "Ode to a Nightingale", "Ode on a Grecian Urn", "Ode on Melancholy", and "To Autumn". I have chosen these poems because they are, I believe, the culmination of his work and as such they contain his most mature thoughts.

Now, to talk of "the Odes" as a group, is, naturally, to assume that these five poems share certain themes, ideas, and attitudes, an

assumption that is not new, but which by no means has universal critical support.² I intend to go further than this, however, and claim that the Odes are a progression of thought, each Ode taking up where the previous one leaves off.

My reading of the Odes, as well as being based upon an understanding of Negative Capability, is also based on an understanding of Keats's theory of soul-making which is the final outcome of his thoughts concerning "philosophy", suffering, pain, evil, and the other topics dealt with in the last chapter, all of which are closely linked to the exercise of Negative Capability. This idea of soul-making is his attempt to find a meaning in a world that contains so many contradictory forces, so many inexplicable elements. And the meaning that he finds is not one based on an analytical and rational approach to life, but one that involves the calm acceptance of life, that involves a faith in life itself. As he explains it to George and Georgiana in his letter of 14 February-3 May, 1819:

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? This point I sincerely wish to consider because I think it a grander system of salvation than the chrysean religion -- or rather it is a system of Spirit-creation -- This is effected by three grand materials acting the one upon the other for a series of years --- These three Materials are the Intelligence -- the human heart (as distinguished from intelligence or Mind) and the World or Elemental space suited for the proper action of Mind and Heart on each other for the

purpose of forming the Soul or Intelligence destined to possess the sense of Identity. . . . 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!³

I begin my study of the Odes with the "Ode to Psyche" because it was probably the first written of the group,⁴ and because it gives us in a nutshell the stages of the soul from its creation to its attainment of immortality in a type of heaven where earthly happiness is "repeated in a finer tone and so repeated".⁵

Keats probably developed his idea of the goddess Psyche as representing the soul from Lempriere's Classical Dictionary, which states that Psyche "is a nymph whom Cupid married and conveyed to a place of bliss. . . . The word signifies the soul, and this personification of Psyche, first mentioned by Apuleius is consequently posterior to the Augustan age, though it is connected with ancient mythology".⁶ Keats must have realized the appropriateness of this goddess as a symbol to embody his concept of soul-making, especially as she had only fairly recently been viewed as a goddess by Apuleius. Furthermore, she had gone through tremendous suffering in her search for Cupid before she was immortalized. Let, then, Psyche be the intelligence, or the spark of divinity, which becomes a soul after experiencing "a World of Pains and troubles" in her long, agonized search for Cupid. An examination of the poem will show how Keats develops this theme.

The Ode opens with the poet's statement of the mood he was in when he saw Psyche and Cupid:

Surely I dreamt to-day, or did I see
The winged Psyche with awakened eyes?
I wander'd in a forest thoughtlessly,
And, on a sudden, fainting with surprise,

Saw two fair creatures, couched side by side
(ll. 5-9)

John Holloway suggests that this mood is similar to that expressed in "Ode on Indolence", a mood of "inertia and oblivion and suspension between sleeping and waking".⁷ It is a visionary state of "diligent indolence" or "wise passiveness" in which an intuitive understanding of truth is gained.

In this state of reverie the poet sees Psyche and her Cupid coupled in amorous embrace "'Mid hush'd, cool-rooted flowers, fragrant-eyed, / Blue, silver-white, and budded Tyrian," (ll. 13-14). In this sensuous setting the immortals seem to have achieved that heavenly state in which they enjoy "what we call happiness on Earth repeated in a finer tone and so repeated." They have achieved a state of perfect bliss in which their consummated love never becomes cloying; a paradoxical state of being and yet becoming.

But how did Psyche achieve this "happy, happy" state? The answer to this is probably inherent in stanza III where the poet addresses Psyche as:

O latest born and loveliest vision far
Of all Olympus' faded hierarchy!
(ll. 25-26)

But despite the fact that she is the loveliest of all goddesses, she is not worshipped, has no temple, no choir, no musicians to celebrate her and there is a hint that she has suffered in "a World of Pains and troubles". This world has reacted with her heart to form her soul. Kenneth Allott comes close to what Keats is getting at here when he says that she "is the 'loveliest vision far', lovelier than the Moon or Venus, because she is a love-goddess with an understanding of troubled human experience, because she has known in her own person -- as no true Olympian can ever know --

suffering and seemingly hopeless longing."⁸

In stanza IV the poet proclaims that he will be Psyche's choir, her musicians, her shrine, her poet-priest. At this point the poet takes on a mood of activity -- "I see, and sing, by my own eyes inspir'd" (l. 43) -- and finds a balanced tension between his previous drowsy reverie and his present excitement at worshipping the goddess. This inspired mood also involves something of an insight into, an intuitive understanding of, the goddess's situation.

This mood becomes more creative in stanza V, although the creativity is closely linked to that paradoxical state of active indolence, the "working brain" actively creating "in the midst of this wide quietness". The poet emphatically proclaims:

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:
(ll. 50-53)

The fact that the temple is built in an "untrodden region" of the mind, where "shadowy thoughts" create, suggests that this is a part of the mind where clear, cut-and-dried reasoning does not tread; an area that has not been desecrated by analytic thought, and where the poet will be able to preserve the visionary temple from the invasion of scientific logic.⁹ In this area only the imagination works: Fancy is the gardener. And this creation in the poet's mind is the outcome of speculations that began in a state of "diligent indolence".

In this area of the mind the poet creates a virtual heaven for Psyche and her lover:

And there by zephyrs, streams, and birds, and bees,
The moss-lain Dryads shall be lull'd to sleep;

And in the midst of this wide quietness
 A rosy sanctuary will I dress
 With the wreath'd trellis of a working brain,
 With buds, and bells, and stars without a name,
 Who breeding flowers, will never breed the same:
 (ll. 56-63)

Fancy will fill this realm with "all soft delight" (l. 64), so that a state is attained in which all sensuous beauties from all the seasons are experienced at once and are everlasting.¹⁰ In this imaginary realm beauty does not die, and here Psyche will evermore meet her Cupid by the light of "A bright torch" (l. 66). Thus Psyche, or the soul, achieves that ecstatic, heavenly state of having her earthly happiness constantly repeated. But she can only attain this because she has led a life of intense sensations, both of pleasure and pain, and so she gains that state of eternal love. And love, for Keats, is the highest and best of sensations.

The myth of Psyche serves Keats well to exemplify his philosophy of "soul-making" for her myth integrates aspects of melancholy and of love, both of which are important in Keats's ideas. As far as philosophy goes, however, the Ode does have its limitations. The idea of a soul which is created and progresses to heaven has only gone on in his mind; it is imagined, and so is like a theory. As such it is not real, for "Nothing ever becomes real till it is experienced".¹¹ What will happen if he tries to attain this heavenly state in the reality of earthly life? This is the question that Keats faces as he writes "Ode to a Nightingale".

The nightingale also serves Keats as an appropriate symbol around which to order his philosophy, for, like Psyche, it is associated with both melancholy and love.¹² And, like Psyche, the bird -- or at least its song -- attains a heavenly state of constant ecstasy, although we are not told that it went through melancholy stages to achieve this.

The opening of the Ode is also somewhat parallel to the opening of the "Ode to Pysche": again the poet experiences a state of drowsy numbness in which his senses are numbed and his imagination takes over; a state of "diligent ^{indolence}" in which the exercise of Negative Capability is possible. The state also involves a fusion of pain and pleasure in a way that the bird itself does:

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thine happiness --
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.
(ll. 1-10)

The first four lines show the poet in a downward movement involving pain, while the last six lines show him in an upward movement involving pleasure.

The poet's upward movement is towards the happiness of the nightingale as he seeks to identify with the bird who has attained a heavenly state somewhat similar to that attained by Psyche. Like that "happy, happy dove" ("Psyche", l. 22) -- the bird image creates a link between the goddess and the nightingale -- the nightingale is in a state of eternal happiness, emphasized by the repetition of the word "happy". And the bird's "melodious plot / Of beechen green, and shadows numberless" is similar to Psyche's heavenly garden in the poet's mind, created by "shadowy thought". The poet hopes to attain this "finer tone" too, through identification with the bird, or rather with its song or spirit.¹³ Thus, in both "Psyche" and "Nightingale" the poet is talking about a being that is both physical and spiritual, the song being an excellent symbol of both.

The poet's desire to identify with the bird's song is a desire to escape the real world and attain heavenly bliss here on earth. But, like Psyche's temple, which exists in the poet's mind and can only be reached by his imagination, the bird's "melodious plot" exists somewhere in the wood beyond the poet's view and he can only reach that spot through a flight of the imagination. In stanza II he hopes that "a draught of vintage" (l. 11) will allow him to make that flight by destroying his selfhood:

That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with these fade away into the forest dim:
(ll. 19-20)

There is a desire for the state of "delicious diligent indolence" of stanza I where it was created by "being too happy in thine [the bird's] happiness", and one gets the impression that the poet had a momentary communion with the bird's song before the poem opens. He hopes that drink will allow him to attain this communion again --- by allowing his imagination to take flight --- and maybe to hold it.

Stanza III vividly articulates the real world from which the poet longs to escape, a world of:

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.
(ll. 21-30)

depression
unhappy
sorrow
despair
gloom
melancholy

This is the horrific, diseased world of reality, the world of cruel suffering in which Tom had just died,¹⁴ and where love and beauty are fleeting and transient. The repetition of the word "Where" emphasizes the poet's monotonous despair, and the emphatic "Here" at the beginning of line 24

serves to pronounce the dichotomy between the nightingale's imagined world "among the leaves" and the poet's real world. The real world is completely opposite to the nightingale's, where beauty, symbolized by the bird's melodious ecstasy, is everlasting. It is also completely opposite to the rich, sensuous world of "Dance, and Provencal song, and sunburnt mirth!" (l. 14) to which the poet longs to escape by means of drink in stanza II. But the poet seems unable to attain the selflessness, the "dissolving" of self, necessary to escape; he cannot attain the state of Negative Capability in which his imagination has free flight. The reason for this may be the mere fact that now he thinks -- "Where but to think is to be full of sorrow" -- for thought, at least reasoned thought, involves a consciousness of selfhood in which the distinction between "I" and "thou" exists. If the poet could shut off his capacity for reasoned thought and let his imagination alone work, he could leave the world of reality and fly to an identification with the bird the way he did just before the poem opens.¹⁵

Drink having failed, in stanza IV the poet attempts a new means by which to fly to the nightingale's idealized realm, this time "on the viewless wings of Poesy," (l. 33). And this time, despite the fact that "the dull brain perplexes and retards" (l. 34), he is able to arrest his reasoning processes and let his imagination lift him to the bird's realm of beauty, where:

tender is the night,
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;
(ll. 35-37)

But if the poet enjoys a momentary, imagined communion with the nightingale, he is quickly back on earth again:

But here there is no light,

Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
 Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.
 (ll. 38-40)

But this time the return to the world of experience leaves him more reconciled to reality, and the previously tortured movement of the Ode takes on a sense of tranquility in stanza V. The darkness of reality still pervades the scene, but now it does not prevent him from participating in a complete imaginative enjoyment of the natural beauty of the English spring:

The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
 White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
 Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
 And mid-May's eldest child,
 The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
 The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.
 (ll. 45-50)

For the first time in the poem he remembers that the world of soul-making has its sensuous beauties too, and the fact that they are transient and mortal -- the "Fast fading violets" -- serves to heighten their beauty rather than negate it. Even the "darkness" (l. 43), symbol of death, is "embalmed" -- endued with balmy fragrance -- which gives it rich, rather positive connotations. This rich description, along with the sense of calm in this passage, show Keats moving for the first time towards the total acceptance of process and mortality that he achieves in "To Autumn". And the mood of indolence, evoked here by the images of "soft incense hang[ing] upon the boughs," and "The murmurous haunt", is similar to the mood created in "To Autumn", as we shall see. It is a transference of the creative mood of "diligent indolence", felt at the beginning of the poem, that involves an acceptance of natural process. Again his reasoning faculty is laid asleep and his creative imagination allows him to participate in the world

of the object contemplated, but here that object is the natural world, not the bird's ideal one. This is as near as Keats has yet come to his concept of Negative Capability, that state of "being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason". Here, despite his uncertainties and doubts about life, there is no need to analyze and explain the fading of the violets, no need to rationalize death. Bernard Blackstone suggests that the fact that the poet "cannot see" but is prepared to "guess" at his surroundings reinforces this idea.¹⁶

The acceptance of reality is momentary in this poem, however, and the call of the nightingale to join it in an ideal realm is never far away; it returns, in fact, with "Darkling I listen;" (l. 51). But now, instead of a desperate cry for communion with the bird's song, the poet begins to meditate on the experience he has been having and similar experiences he has had before:

and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;
(ll. 51-54)

The reason why he has been half in love with easeful Death is that, when he has an intensely ecstatic experience which involves sensuous pleasure -- such as the momentary, imaginative communion with the nightingale's song -- he longs to die at the height of the experience and so be transported immediately to heaven where his happiness will be "repeated in a finer tone and so repeated". Thus he will manage to hold the beauty of the moment and be eternally happy.¹⁷ Furthermore, hearing the nightingale's song and communing with it seems to be the most intensely beautiful and ecstatic experience he has ever had, for

Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
 To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
 While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
 In such an ecstasy!

(ll. 55-58)

But already the poet is suspicious of such an escape as is evident by the fact that he has only been "half in love" with Death and now it only "seems" rich to die. The realization that it is impossible to accomplish such an escape, and so it is useless to try, is emphasized in the last two lines of the stanza:

Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain --
 To thy high requiem become a soul.

(ll. 59-60)

If he was to die, the bird's song, instead of an ecstatic, vital force, would become a "requiem", while the poet would return to dust. The poet's perspective on death has now completely changed: no longer is death rich and alluring; instead it realistically involves mortal decay that is far removed from escape to heaven's bourne. The bird, after all, has not reached its heavenly state through death. Death in itself, he realizes, cannot lead him to eternal happiness. He must go through the whole process of soul-making in which death has its proper significance.

This changed view of death does not, however, change the poet's attitude towards the nightingale's song, and in stanza VII he addresses the bird itself:

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

Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.
(ll. 61-70)

The bird's song has managed to transcend death and attain immortality. Much controversy has gone on among critics as to whether the nightingale is an appropriate symbol of immortality or not. What many of them fail to realize, however, is that it is the song -- which represents the spirit of the bird -- that is immortal and not the particular feathered creature. Keats emphasizes this by capitalizing "Bird". Holloway is one of the few critics who does realize how Keats uses the bird. He says:

Keats, entranced as he listens to the nightingale and responds to its apparent ecstasy, has an experience that seems to him to transcend experience. The voice of the nightingale, we might put it, is made immune first to history, and then to geography: it can establish a rapport with dead generations or with faery lands.¹⁸

It is also important for our understanding of the Ode to realize that the song can relate to both the happiness of "emperor and clown" -- where it acts as entertainment -- and to the sadness of Ruth, for whom it is a comfort. It has become a universal, immortal symbol by virtue of its ability to appreciate the basic emotions of man in a way that the poet as yet cannot. Keats has fused into his nightingale both the Classical symbol of melancholy and the Medieval symbol of love.¹⁹ When the poet learns to appreciate both pain and pleasure -- which is basically what soul-making and Negative Capability are concerned with -- he may attain to the nightingale's state of eternal bliss.

The poet does not seem to realize this yet, however, and the "forlorn" at the end of stanza VII serves only to shatter his poetic vision of immortal bliss:

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole-self!
(ll. 71-72)

He returns to himself -- once more creating the dichotomy between his real world and the nightingale's ideal one -- and the drawn out effect of the run-on line gives the onomatopoeic sound of the funeral bell. Death is now seen as totally negative and the nightingale's song has become a "plaintive anthem" in the funeral metaphor.

Now that the world of reality, with all its associations of pain and suffering, has rushed in upon his vision, the poet views the eternity promised by the nightingale's song as merely an illusion created by fancy. And he now realizes that "the fancy cannot cheat so well / As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf," (ll. 73-74). Such escapist flights of fancy are useless because in the end he must return to the realm of reality: no escape is possible. The poem does not, however, involve a rejection of the imagination, as Stillinger claims it does;²⁰ instead, the poet realizes that such imaginative communions with ecstatic sensations can only be momentarily experienced "in a finer tone" here on earth, and so it is useless to try and hold that experience. As Gittings says:

Keats is left once more with his 'world of circumstance', in which the soul must grow through its pains of experience, helped by such inklings of eternity, but not in the end able to depend upon them.²¹

The Ode ends with the question:

Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music: -- Do I wake or sleep?
(ll. 79-80)

The implication seems to be that if it was "a waking dream" then it was a pure fantasy and the nightingale's bliss can never be real, but if it was "a vision", then there may be an element of reality in it. In any case the question is not answered, which seems to imply that the poet has not yet decided for himself.

The question "Do I wake or sleep?" not only echoes the previous question, but seems to be inquiring into the significance of the state of "drowsy numbness" he experienced at the beginning of the poem.²² In such states of ardent listlessness during which the imagination is in control, do we glimpse reality or not? Again the question remains unanswered, but it leads Keats into the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" in which he does see the significance of such a state, and in which he does learn a very important lesson from the urn, an object whose immortality is similar to that of the nightingale's song. Thus "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is similar to "Ode to a Nightingale", but it involves another step forward in Keats's developing philosophy.

The poem opens with an address to the urn:

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
 Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
 Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
 A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
(ll. 1-4)

It is immediately apparent that the urn is a fusion of paradoxical elements. It is an "unravish'd bride", which implies that it has achieved the perfection of being a bride, a symbol of great beauty, yet it is still unravished by passionate intensity, an idea that is emphasized by the deliberate dual meaning of "still" and by the fact that it is wed to "quietness". It has attained to that state of "mystic oxymoron",²³ of perfect being and still becoming (by virtue of its unravished nature). We are thus led to believe that its perfected beauty will not pass, for it has managed to fuse together its mortal and immortal qualities, its fluidity and its fixity, and so attained a state of permanence.

The urn's permanence is similar to the nightingale's immortality,

but they are not identical states, for where the nightingale's song transcends time completely, the urn is the foster-child of "slow time". It has succeeded in bringing time almost to a standstill, but not completely. That the urn is "still unravished" also implies that at some future date it may be ravished, and so it is not completely out of the reach of "hungry generations" in the way that the nightingale's song is. Perhaps the poet can learn a lesson from the urn -- in a way that he could not from the nightingale's song -- because the urn is not as completely removed from his realm as the nightingale was. At any rate, the poet does seem to be more successful at imaginatively communing with the world depicted on the urn than he was at communing with the nightingale's world.

The rest of stanza I is taken up with a description of the world depicted on the urn, given to us through a series of rhetorical questions:

What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both,
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?
(ll. 5-10)

The confusion over whether the figures on the urn are men or gods, coupled with the wild ecstasy depicted on the "bride of quietness", reinforces the idea that the urn fuses together all opposites. The wild ecstasy, however, is as much, if not more so, the poet's as it is the urn's, and the series of staccato questions shows the poet projecting his own passion into the world of the urn as he becomes sympathetically identified with that world.²⁴

The second stanza vaguely answers some of the questions posed in the first as the poet becomes more intensely identified with the urn's world. His empathic advance into this realm is emphasized by the increasing

concentration of his attention: he no longer regards the total urn, but discusses the individual symbols on the frieze and the intense activity of the figures there:

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:

(ll. 11-14)

The rationale behind this statement is the same as that behind the urn itself. Once a melody is heard it has reached its fulfilment, its perfection is over. Unheard melodies, on the other hand, are in a state of constant becoming, while they are also in a state of being on the urn: they are perfection held in eternity. This state also belongs to the figures on the urn, who, although they cannot consummate their love, know that it will never fade:

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!

(ll. 17-20)

These lovers have attained a state of permanence that is more satisfying than the world of reality where love and beauty are constantly fading and passing away; even their incomplete moment is superior to earthly life. As Gittings says, "The stillness, the timelessness of great art . . . is contrasted with the inevitable disappointments of human experience."²⁵

The contrast between the two worlds is strongly emphasized at the end of stanza III, but before that the poet continues to identify sympathetically with the figures on the urn. His identification is so complete, in fact, that he seems to participate in their happiness. This is emphasized by his exclamations:

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;
 (ll. 21-27)

The piper, the lovers, even the trees, have virtually attained that heavenly state of having their earthly happiness "repeated in a finer tone and so repeated", and the use of the present participle form for the verbs emphasizes this eternal process. Their state is similar to, but not identical with, that of Psyche and the nightingale. They are in that "happy, happy" state of Psyche and Cupid, but while the goddess and her lover can eternally consummate their love in the poet's mental temple, these lovers can never consummate theirs, for they are frozen on the urn. Furthermore, we must remember that these lovers still exist in "slow time": they have not transcended time completely the way Psyche and the nightingale have.

They have, however, succeeded in escaping the "World of Pains and troubles" where passion "leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd, / A burning forehead, and a parching tongue." (ll. 29-30). But the poet cannot, for all his ecstatic, imaginative projection into the world of art, forget the world of reality where beauty fades and dies, where love is cloying. And more than this, he begins to realize in stanza IV that the heavenly state attained by the figures on the urn does not in fact lack its dark side. The imagined "little town" (l. 35) in this perfect world is empty, "silent", and "desolate" because its inhabitants have left to attend the sacrifice. The tone created in this stanza is one of melancholy, and the inherent sense of loss comes with a slight shock after stanza III. The mood is not altogether unprepared for, however, and from as early as stanza II

we are told that the lover on the urn "hast not [his] bliss," (l. 19).

John Holloway claims that the triumph of the lovers on the urn lies "in the realized perfection of a single poignant and yet gracious moment. This moment embraces the same fusion of quiet and wild ecstasy, the same exquisite but precarious balance of grief and happiness . . . that Keats himself knew in 'To a Nightingale'."²⁶ I am inclined to go further than this, and I feel that the whole urn contains an exquisite but precarious balance of grief and happiness exemplified in the juxtaposition of ecstatic, warm love of stanza III and the empty desolation at the end of stanza IV. This balance is important for our understanding of the "Beauty-Truth" idea.

What has happened in stanza IV is that the poet's imagination is unable to stop at the passionate perfection depicted on the urn and it carries him further into the dark side of the urn's world, in the same way as his meditation on the nightingale's song lead him into Ruth's melancholy and "Forlorn". But in the "Nightingale" Ode it is still "a flaw in happiness to see beyond our bourn" and the experience, despite its momentary tranquility, teaches him only that "the Fancy cannot cheat so well / As she is fam'd to do". In the "Ode on a Grecian Urn", however, he goes far beyond this and the urn teaches him how to reconcile what he sees on it with what he imagines beyond it: how to reconcile pleasure and pain.

But before turning to the urn's message, I would like to dwell for a while on how the poet learns from the urn. As we have seen, at the beginning of stanza IV the poet stops projecting his passion into the urn's world, stops identifying with the lovers there, and begins to think of the world beyond: the town. He returns to his sole-self, begins to question the urn once more, and realizes that it does not merely mirror

his own passion, but that it has a lesson to teach him of its own. His state of passionate empathy is changed for one of calm receptivity in which the urn becomes his teacher. It is significant that his questions demand answers that involve rationalizations: he wants to know aspects of time and space ("Who are these coming to the sacrifice? / To what green altar . . . ?") but discovers that such questions cannot be applied to this urn which, although existing in time and space, defies both. He realizes that what the urn has to teach him cannot be learnt by questions, that "irritable reaching after fact & reason". He cannot comprehend the urn's message by the analytical and logical procedures of "consequitive reasoning"; he will never reach the truth by trying at it and so he ceases to question. Instead, he adopts a state of calm receptivity, of "wise passiveness" or Negative Capability in which his reasoning capacity is dormant and his imagination alone is active. It is in this state that he intuitively learns the urn's message.

Although this state of "diligent indolence" is not verbally articulated in this Ode, it is implied in the mood of calm receptivity that overspreads the poem by the end of stanza IV, and by the statements he makes to the urn in stanza V. Now that he has ceased to question, he addresses the urn in a tone of reverent admiration, maybe even of gratitude: "O Attic shape! Fair attitude!" (l. 41). And what, if anything, has this "silent form" done for him? It has teased him "out of thought / As doth eternity;" (ll. 44-45). The similarity to eternity is appropriate, of course, because the urn has virtually achieved such a state. But the appropriateness of the analogy lies in more than this: it tells us the kind of process the poet has gone through to learn the urn's message. He

has been teased out of thought in a similar way that eternity teases us out of thought, and here I take "out of" to mean "beyond, further than". That is, the urn has taken him beyond the analytic processes of thought into a realm that transcends rationality: the realm of imaginative intuition. The concept of eternity cannot be known by methods of reasoning for the rational mind works in the realm of time and space and is boggled by such concepts. The imagination, however, which grasps ideas intuitively, can conceive of a concept like eternity. And it is to the poet's imagination that the "silent form" has revealed its "Cold Pastoral" for it is only his intuitive imagination that can grasp such a message.

Finally, to the urn's message:

When old age shall this generation waste,
 Thou shalt remain in midst of other woe
 Than our's, 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.
 (ll. 46-50)²⁷

The three lines that come before the Beauty-Truth statement are important for they clearly articulate a feeling that has been growing throughout the poem -- first from the hint that the lover cannot have his bliss and then through the desolate little town -- that life contains waste and woe, pain and suffering, as well as passion and joy. Even the urn's world of joy and ecstasy contains aspects of this dark side of life. But in the urn's equation of Beauty and Truth it teaches the poet that he should not try to escape the "World of Pains and troubles" the way he did in the "Nightingale" Ode, for all of life is beautiful. "Beauty is truth" means that beauty is inherent in every aspect of life in the real world, and likewise, "Truth Beauty" means that every aspect of life in the real world is beautiful. Thus birth and death, pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow, creation and

destruction, process and change, are all beautiful because they are all necessary and integral aspects of life. All are necessary and integral to the formation of the soul, which is itself beautiful.

This is the message that the urn teaches the poet, and he receives it in a mood of calm acceptance. It is interesting to notice that the nightingale hints at a similar message through its association with pleasure ("emperor and clown") and pain (Ruth's melancholy), but there the poet was unable to receive the message in the way that he does here. Thus the poet, Keats, has moved a step further in his philosophy of soul-making: he has learnt to accept the dark side of life. What he learns here is basically the same as Apollo's "wondrous lesson" in Hyperion, when "Knowledge enormous makes a God" of him. And just as Apollo's knowledge comes to him, not through analytic reasoning, but through an imaginative vision, so the poet learns the urn's message by means of his imagination. He is truly exercising Negative Capability and what he learns in this state is basically a faith in life itself, a faith in the vale of soul-making, that supports him through life.

With his philosophy of soul-making now boldly articulated, Keats turns to a new Ode, "Ode on Melancholy", which, as its name implies, is a rather bold proclamation that the dark side of life must be accepted in order to live life to the full. It involves no dramatic search for a statement of truth -- the truth being known before the Ode begins -- and in this sense is the most doctrinaire of the Odes. As Bate points out, it has nothing of the "developing discovery by the poet of what he really believes", nor does it have any one dominant symbol from which the theme develops as we get in "Nightingale" and "Grecian Urn".²⁸ Instead, Keats

deals directly with the idea of melancholy itself, although he treats it in his typically concrete fashion.

The didactic tone of the Ode is evident from its opening lines:

No, no, go not to Lethe, neither twist
 Wolf's-bane, tight-rooted, for its poisonous wine;
 Nor suffer thy pale forehead to be kiss'd
 By nightshade, ruby grape of Proserpine;
 Make not your rosary of yew-berries,
 Nor let the beetle, nor the death-moth be
 Your mournful Psyche, nor the downy owl
 A partner in your sorrow's mysteries;
 (ll. 1-8)

This list of negative injunctions is a warning to the reader to avoid saturation in melancholy symbols of death because we will eventually become numb and insensate to feelings of pain and melancholy, which are themselves a desirable part of experience in the vale of soul-making:

For shade to shade will come too drowsily,
 And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul.
 (ll. 9-10)

The shades, or ghosts, of Lethe will come and kill our capacity to experience. If we dwell obsessively on the inducements to melancholy, then our capacity to appreciate a real melancholy fit will be lost; we will have drowned -- a perfect image which also links back to Lethe -- or satiated our "wakeful anguish of the soul". The soul must keep itself awake and alert to savour its anguish, the depressions of spirit Keats knew so well. Already he implies that true sensations of pain, anguish, melancholy are as desirable as sensations of pleasure and joy because they are integral to life as a whole.

This idea continues into the second stanza:

But when the melancholy fit shall fall
 Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud,
 That fosters the droop-headed flowers all,

And hides the green hill in an April shroud;
(ll. 11-14)

It is significant that true melancholy comes as a sudden fit, springing on man. It cannot be induced by obsession with symbols. And it comes from heaven, which gives it very positive connotations.²⁹ But these images are a strange mixture of creative and destructive forces, of pleasure and pain. The melancholy fit is like a cloud, a creative, life-giving force, but it is a weeping cloud, signifying melancholy. And it fosters flowers, symbols of joy, but they are "droop-headed", suggesting mourning. Finally, the weeping cloud hides the green hill, symbol of life and youthful growth, in an April shroud, symbol of death. Thus Keats emphasizes his idea that creation flows easily into destruction, pleasure into pain, life into death; one cannot exist without the other for both are important to life; they are all, in fact, aspects of a single life force.

In the second half of the stanza the poet gives advice on what we should do when the melancholy fit falls. We should "glut our sorrow" on some transitory beauty:

on a morning rose,
Or on the rainbow of the salt sand-wave,
Or on the wealth of globed peonies;
Or if thy mistress some rich anger shows,
Emprison her soft hand, and let her rave,
And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes.
(ll. 15-20)

This openness to, or virtual concentration on, things of fleeting beauty sharpens the sensation of melancholy; it refines our sensibility to the finest of intensity, which is the exact opposite of killing our sensations through satiation as we got in stanza I.

These images of transitory beauty also imply an acceptance of process which involves ultimately an acceptance of death.³⁰ Life is process,

involving both birth and death, pleasure and pain. Furthermore, beauty and joy are heightened by the fact of their transience. This is a philosophy that Keats had been unable to accept a year before in the epistle "To J. H. Reynolds". "Now, with the philosophy of soul-making through a world of trial to support him, he can bear that vision, and even use it to good."³¹ He is happy with life's destroyings as well as its creations.

He has come a long way, too, since his search for a symbol of eternal beauty that transcends pain and death in "Ode to a Nightingale". He no longer desires to escape to heaven's bourne in one quick step. Now he is perfectly prepared to accept that:

She dwells with Beauty -- Beauty that must die;
And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh,
Turning to Poison while the bee-mouth sips:
Ay, in the very temple of delight
Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine,
Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue
Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine;
His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,
And be among her cloudy trophies hung.

(ll. 21-30)

Here the ideas are personified for emphasis. We see that Beauty is transient, that Joy and Melancholy dwell in the same "sovran shrine", that Pleasure passes easily into Poison. The one cannot exist without the other, an idea that is similar to Blake's concept of "necessary contraries". Only the person who is able to relish sensuous joys and pleasures in their finest intensity can behold, and relish, "Veil'd Melancholy", and so experience life to its fullest.³²

The acceptance of beauty's transient nature and the acceptance of all aspects of life is less didactically, but more powerfully, expressed in the ode "To Autumn", written three or four months after the other Odes.

It is the culmination of his philosophy of soul-making and of his concept of Negative Capability.

"To Autumn" was written when Keats was staying at Winchester in September, 1819. He was enthralled by the beauty of the season and on 21 September he wrote to Reynolds describing the inspiration for the Ode:

How beautiful the season is now -- How fine the air. A temperate sharpness about it. Really, without joking, chaste weather -- Dian skies -- I never lik'd stubble-fields so much as now -- Aye better than the chilly green of the spring. Somehow a stubble plain looks warm -- in the same way that some pictures look warm -- this struck me so much in my Sunday's walk that I composed upon it.³³

Some of these phrases actually appear in the Ode and, although the poem goes far beyond this physical setting, the theme remains basically autumn itself. Keats uses a set of personal impressions, taken from his natural surroundings, to catch his philosophic mood at this time -- a mood, as he expresses it, of "a more thoughtful and quiet power" than he had experienced before.

The theme, as I stated above, is autumn itself, and the poem opens with an apostrophe to the season and with a description of nature at its richest and ripest stage. Through concentration on details of the fruit, the flowers, and the bees, Keats creates an exquisitely vivid, lush, and colourful picture. It is a depiction of perfection, of fulfilment, of ripeness, of growth reaching its climax beneath "the maturing sun" as the vines and trees bend beneath the weight of their fruit.

Yet amid this attained fulfilment there is still a sense of on-going growth, of process, achieved by the use of the present participle -- "maturing sun" (l. 2) and "Conspiring" (l. 3) -- and by the idea of the sun and autumn conspiring "to set budding more, / And still more, later

flowers" (l. 9), so that the bees are deceived into feeling that summer will never end. As Bate points out, Keats has achieved "a union of process and stasis (or what Keats had called 'stationing')." ³⁴ His commentary continues:

What the heart really wants is being found. Here at last is something of a genuine paradise, therefore. It even has its deity -- a benevolent deity, that wants not only to 'load and bless', but also to 'spare', to prolong, to set 'budding more'. And yet all this is put with concrete exactness and fidelity.

But Bate, like many other critics, seems to miss the negative aspects or hints given in this stanza which show that the poet is aware of the passage of time and so of perfection. In the last line there is a reference to the summer which has already past, and, by implication, autumn will pass likewise. The poet also tells us that the bees "think warm days will never cease" (l. 10). This use of the verb "think" meaning "believe" shows that the poet knows more than they: he knows that warm days will cease and, unlike the bees, he is not unaware of the fact that beauty is transient and perfection momentary. But the poet's awareness of these things in no way detracts from the rich, sensuous beauty of the scene; instead, it heightens that beauty.

In stanza II the poet's imagination enters into the description and we get autumn personified in three appropriate settings. The personifications are remarkably resonant and evocative, presenting images that hover between the traditional allegorical figure of autumn as a woman and the purely natural scene. For example, in the first personification there is a figure "sitting careless on a granary floor" (l. 14), but the "hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind" (l. 15) is a strange mixture of human hair and stalks of wheat suggested by "winnowing". Thus the human and

natural are beautifully integrated. Nowhere are we given a concrete figure of a woman, but a sense of femininity pervades the picture and hovers like an animating spirit in the natural scene.

It is also significant that, in her relaxed postures, "Drows'd with the fume of poppies" (l. 17), autumn seems to be in a state of "diligent indolence" similar to that achieved by the poet in the previous Odes. In this state she both fully appreciates the beauty of the season and calmly accepts its passing away. She is truly exercising Negative Capability, and so is similar to the poet.

Of the second stanza, Bate says:

it is something of a reverse or mirror image of the first -- we find stillness where we expect process. For now autumn is conceived as a reaper or harvester. Yet it is a harvester that is not harvesting. This benevolent deity is at first motionless, 'sitting careless on a granary floor', or asleep on a 'half-reap'd furrow', while its 'hook / Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers' -- spares not only the full grain but those 'later flowers' that are interlocking with it. Movement begins only in the latter part of the stanza. Even then it is only suggested in the momentary glimpses of the figure keeping 'steady' its 'laden head' as it crosses a brook.³⁵

This is true: there is a sense of the prolonging of autumn fulfilment; but there is also a sense that time is passing and autumn with it. Autumn has become a "gleaner" and, despite the fact that she "Spares the next swath" (l. 18), she has already begun to bring the flowers to an end, "next" implying that she has already cut some. The "last oozings" (l. 22) of the cyder-press suggest that the end is approaching, while "hours by hours" signifies time passing away. There is a paradoxical mixture of lingering and passing, but there is no doubt that autumn is withdrawing, that the death of the year is approaching, that perfection must pass.

This idea comes out more strongly in stanza III where we leave the

personified figure of autumn and return to concrete images of life as we got in stanza I. But where stanza I is a celebration of the sights of autumn, this is a celebration of its sounds:

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
 Think not of them, thou hast thy music too, --
 While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
 And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;
 Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
 Among the river shallows, borne aloft
 Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
 And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
 Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft
 The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;
 And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.
 (ll. 23-33)

The opening question implies that the season of youthful Spring has long passed, and with it its beautiful sounds. Time and the seasons pass. But autumn has its music too, found in the "wailful choir" of "small gnats", the bleat of the lambs, the cricket's song, the robin's whistle, and the swallows' twittering. The images of these animals are extremely rich, but in no way cloying, and there is a remarkable sense of orchestrated sound. But although this stanza contains the richest imagery, it also has the greatest sense of autumn passing away, and it is to Keats's credit as a poet that he can achieve this magnificent richness in conjunction with an underlying mood of melancholy.

The hint of autumn passing is first given at the beginning of line 3 where the word "While" makes us realize that the music of autumn will only last while barred clouds do. Also in line 3 we get "soft-dying day", a symbol, however gentle, of the approaching end, of death; and this image is found, rather oddly, in conjunction with the verb "bloom" which suggests fruition. But the yoking of the two is deliberate and serves to reinforce the theme that in the richest, most intense moment of beauty there is a

melancholy sense that it must pass. In the fourth line we get "stubble-plains" which suggest that the crop has already been harvested, is gone, while in the fifth line the "wailful choir" of "small gnats" who "mourn" heightens the sense of melancholy. They seem to be aware of the approaching end. Even the "light wind" which "lives or dies" suggests an easy passage from life into death. In the eighth line, the "full-grown lambs" suggest that growth and fulfilment are over, while the "gathering swallows" suggest not only the approaching nightfall, but also "gathering" for migration south as winter and death approach. But it is important to note that they are still "gathering", and the day, like the season, is "soft-dying" -- the use of the present participle creates a sense of lingering, and Keats has managed to capture autumn in its most intensely and poignantly beautiful moment.

Bate insists on calling this poem perfect and I fully agree with him. He says:

the whole is perfected -- carried through to its completion -- solely by means of the given parts; and the parts observe decorum by contributing directly to the whole, with nothing left dangling or independent.

Not only the formal structure but the whole conception of the odal hymn becomes transparent before its subject. The poet himself is completely absent; there is no 'I', no suggestion of the discursive language that we find in the other odes; the poem is entirely concrete, and self-sufficient in and through its concreteness.³⁶

Despite its self-sufficient completeness, however, "To Autumn" is even richer when viewed in conjunction with the other Odes for it is the culmination of Keats's philosophy and it contains perfectly his belief that pleasure and pain are closely, integrally, related; that the apprehension of intense beauty -- such as we get in this ode -- must involve a feeling of melancholy because this beauty is transient. Joy and sorrow

cannot exist without each other -- at least not here on earth -- and the experience of one is heightened by the attendance of the other. But nowhere is this theme explicitly stated as we get in "Ode on Melancholy"; the theme of transitoriness and mortality is only suggested; the theme is inherent in the natural images. As Leonard Unger says:

Whereas in 'Ode on Melancholy' the theme, in one of its aspects, is the immediate subject, in 'To Autumn' the season is the subject and the details which describe and thus present the subject are also the medium by which the theme is explored. The relationship between subject and theme is not one of analogy. The theme inheres in the subject and is at no point stated in other terms. That is why we could say, in our reading of the poem, that the subject is both the reality and the symbol.³⁷

But to extract the theme from the subject for a moment. It is important to note that despite the sense of melancholy and the suggested awareness of the approach of the end, there is a total acceptance of mortality and transitoriness. The poet has come to accept death totally as an integral part of life. There are no wild questions and "By accepting the signs of decay and disappearance in all its surrounding world, the soul matures itself into a final completion."³⁸ The poem is, then, the end of Keats's philosophy of soul-making. To adopt Keats's own analogy, the school has been accepted by the child and the child has learnt to read; the soul has learnt to accept and to love the world in all its diverse aspects. This results from the exercise of Negative Capability, that mood of calm in which he is reconciled to life without having to rationalize it. It is an acceptance based on faith -- his faith in soul-making -- and this in turn is based on his imaginative perception of the real world. The truth of life, or wisdom, is received by the imagination in a calm state of Negative Capability or "wise passiveness".

FOOTNOTES

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER I

¹Keats's letter of 27(?) December, 1817 to George and Tom Keats in The Letters of John Keats, ed. Hyder E. Rollins (Cambridge, 1958), I, 193-194. Cited hereafter as Letters. The original spelling is maintained throughout.

²Keats (Oxford, 1926), p. 41.

³Keats (London, 1955), pp. 281-282. This book was first published as Studies in Keats (London, 1930).

⁴Negative Capability (Cambridge, 1939), p. 66.

⁵Ibid., p. 12.

⁶Ibid., p. 66.

⁷Letters, I, 169.

⁸Ibid., I, 212. See also p. 202.

⁹Ibid., I, 203.

¹⁰Negative Capability, p. 29.

¹¹Letters, II, 80.

¹²"Negative Capability and Wise Passiveness", PMLA, LXVII (June, 1952), 383.

¹³Ibid., p. 389.

¹⁴See, for example, C. D. Thorpe, "Wordsworth and Keats -- A Study in Personal and Critical Impression", PMLA, XXXXII (1927), 1010-1026.

- ¹⁵Letters, I, 231.
- ¹⁶"Negative Capability and Wise Passiveness", p. 389.
- ¹⁷John Keats (New York, 1963), p. 161.
- ¹⁸The Poetics of Romanticism (Yellow Springs, 1969), p. 128.
- ¹⁹Ibid., p. 130.
- ²⁰"The Meaning of the Odes", in Kenneth Muir, ed., John Keats: A Reassessment (Liverpool, 1969), p. 64.
- ²¹John Keats (Harmondsworth, 1971), p. 287.
- ²²Biographia Literaria, ed. George Watson (London, 1965), p. 256.
- ²³Thora Balslev, for example, states: "In this instance it is Coleridge who is blamed by Keats for not being content with half-knowledge, but Wordsworth would qualify as well." (Keats and Wordsworth, Copenhagen, 1962, p. 159).

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER II

¹Keats, p. 290.

²Letters, I, 193.

³William Babington, M.D. and William Allen, F.L.S. list in their Introduction to A Syllabus of a Course of Chemical Lectures Read at Guy's Hospital (London, 1802), the two following items that are to be studied by medical students:

7. Of the Motion of bodies, as communicated to them by external Impulse, or excited in them by their disposition to attract, or repel each other.
8. Of the different species of Attraction which originate from this disposition, viz. of Magnetism -- of Electricity -- Capillary Attraction -- Attraction of Gravitation -- Attraction of Aggregation or Cohesion, and Chemical Attraction. (p. 2)

(From William Babington, M.D. F.R.S. and James Curry, M.D. F.A.S., Outlines of a Course of Lectures on the Practice of Medicine as Delivered in The Medical School of Guy's Hospital, London, 1802-1806).

⁴That Keats was not unaware of the topic of electricity is evidenced in his letter to George and Georgiana of 19 March, 1819 in which he states that "there is an electric fire in human nature tending to purify --" (Letters, II, 80). Here Keats seems to be using a mixed metaphor that draws on the traditional religious belief that fire purifies, and the contemporary idea of electrolysis, in which electro-chemical decomposition takes place breaking down compounds into their pure component parts.

It is also not implausible that Keats might have discussed the topic of electricity with Shelley in the Hunt circle. We know for a fact that Shelley was very interested in electricity while at school and he had heard Sir Humphry Davy lecture on the topic.

⁵The Collected Works of Sir Humphry Davy ed. John Davy, Vol. V: Bakerian Lectures and Miscellaneous Papers from 1806 to 1815, (London, 1840), p. 2. See also Michael Faraday's view on the idea:

It will be well understood that I am giving no opinion respecting the nature of the electric current now, beyond what I have done on former occasions; and that though I speak of the current as proceeding from the parts which are positive to those which are negative, it is merely in accordance with the conventional, though in some degree tacit, agreement entered into by scientific men, that they may have a constant, certain, and definite means of referring to the direction of the forces of that current. (Experimental Researches in Electricity, Vol. I, London, 1839).

⁶Line numbers for those poems by Wordsworth quoted in the text are given, in parentheses, in the text. Quotations from poems of the 1798

edition of Lyrical Ballads are cited from Lyrical Ballads, 1798, ed. W. J. B. Owen (London, 1967). Quotations from the 1805 edition of The Prelude are cited from The Prelude (Text of 1805), ed. E. de Selincourt, rev. Helen Darbishire, corrected by Stephen Gill (London, 1970). All other quotations from Wordsworth's poems are from Poetical Works, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, rev. E. de Selincourt (Oxford, 1936).

⁷It is interesting to note that Keats describes his creative mood while writing the "Ode to Psyche" in similar terms: "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 and healthy spirit." (Letters, II, 106, italics mine). This creative mood of peace and health seems to be very similar to Wordsworth's "wise passiveness".

⁸As I will be dealing with Keats's and Wordsworth's attitudes to rationalism in chapter V, I will not deal with it in any detail here.

⁹"On Manner" in The Round Table and Characters of Shakespear's Plays, intro. by C. M. Maclean (London, 1936), pp. 45-46.

¹⁰Hazlitt comments:

The Hindoos that we see about the streets are another example of this. They are a different race from ourselves. They wander about in a luxurious dream. They are like part of a glittering procession, -- like revellers in some gay carnival. Their life is a dance, a measure; they hardly seem to tread the earth, but are borne along in some more genial element, and bask in the radiance of brighter suns. . . . The people of the East make it their business to sit and think and do nothing. They indulge in endless reverie; for the incapacity of enjoyment does not impose on them the necessity of action.

(The Round Table, p. 46).

The emphasis on the dream-like state of indolence would, undoubtedly, have interested Keats a great deal.

¹¹Letters, I, 209-210, italics mine. In dealing with these letters and poems, unless otherwise indicated, the italics are mine.

¹²Ibid., I, 214.

¹³Ibid., I, 231-233.

¹⁴The Evolution of Keats's Poetry (Cambridge, 1936), I, 367.

¹⁵Keats and Wordsworth (Copenhagen, 1962), p. 23.

¹⁶It is interesting to notice how much the young Keats was influenced

by Lyrical Ballads, although this is not surprising if we remember that these poems are the outpourings of Wordsworth's own relatively youthful mind, and it is perhaps to the younger Wordsworth that Keats was most attracted in his early days of writing.

¹⁷The Evolution of Keats's Poetry, I, 367.

¹⁸Letters, II, 213.

¹⁹Ibid., I, 231-232.

²⁰Keats The Poet (Princeton, 1973), p. 63.

²¹Bailey's account is given in his letter of 7 May, 1849 to R. M. Milnes in Hyder E. Rollins, ed., The Keats Circle (Cambridge, 1965), II, 276.

²²See Thora Balslev, Keats and Wordsworth, pp. 116-117 for another interesting parallel between Wordsworth's account of myth and a passage in Hyperion.

²³Keats's great interest in Tintern Abbey is evidenced in his long letter of 3 May, 1818 to Reynolds (Letters, I, 278-281) in which he discusses Wordsworth's poetic progress.

²⁴C. Spurgeon, Keats's Shakespeare (Oxford, 1966), p. 151.

²⁵The Poetics of Romanticism, p. 104. In Sleep and Poetry Keats observes that "for what there may be worthy in these rhymes / I partly owe to him [sleep]" (ll. 347-348), and in Endymion he praises "magic sleep" as the "great key . . . to all the mazy world / Of silvery enchantment!" (Book I, ll. 453-461).

Wordsworth also emphasizes the state of "weariness", that dream-like state, in which the Greek shepherd creates myths (The Excursion, Book IV), and in Tintern Abbey he emphasizes that "serene and blessed mood" in which he is "laid asleep in body" while his imagination takes over.

²⁶Letters, II, 77-79.

²⁷Ibid., II, 77.

²⁸Ibid., II, 106.

²⁹Quoted by W. J. Bate in his John Keats (Cambridge, 1966), p. 501. See also Keats's letters to Fanny Keats on 12 April, 1819 (Letters, II, 51)

and to Haydon on 13 April, 1819 (Letters, II, 55), both of which stress his mood of idleness.

³⁰Letters, II, 116.

³¹Ibid., II, 77.

³²Keats and Wordsworth, p. 38.

³³Letters, I, 287.

³⁴Ibid., I, 271.

³⁵Ibid., II, 113. See also his comment to George and Georgiana: "I must again begin with my poetry -- for if I am not in action mind or Body I am in pain." (Letters, II, 12).

³⁶Lyrical Ballads 1798, p. 157.

³⁷I realize, of course, that Keats more than likely never saw The Prelude as it was only published twenty-nine years after his death, and although I have tried to confine my study of Wordsworth's influence to poems published while Keats was alive, the similarities between the two poets in this respect warrant some attention. Wordsworth is, after all, expressing a completed view of ideas we have seen developing in his other poetry and prose.

³⁸Letters, I, 374. Keats's italics. See also Keats's comments to Reynolds on Lamia: "I have great hopes of success, because I make use of my Judgment more deliberately than I have yet done". He also says in this letter that he has spent "many thoughtful days". (Letters, II, 128).

³⁹Literary Criticism of William Wordsworth, ed. Paul M. Zall (Lincoln, 1966), pp. 140-141. It is interesting to note that in his Anatomical and Physiological Note Book Keats notes that "The Mind has 3 Functions: 1 Memory, 2 Judgment 3 Imagination". (John Keats's Anatomical and Physiological Note Book, ed. M. Buxton Forman, New York, 1970, p.2).

⁴⁰"Keats and Hazlitt" in John Keats: A Reassessment, p. 149.

⁴¹Letters, II, 81.

⁴²"Keats and Hazlitt", p. 148.

⁴³Letters, I, 238.

⁴⁴The Mind of John Keats (New York, 1964), p. 184. Keats had expressed a similar idea earlier to Reynolds: "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." (Letters, I, 224).

⁴⁵See, for example, Muir, "Keats and Hazlitt", p. 148. A passage I have noticed in Hazlitt's writing that may have been influential is his comment on The Tempest: ". . . the character of Caliban not only stands before us with a language and manner of its own, but the scenery and situation of the enchanted island he inhabits, the traditions of the familiarity of an old recollection." ("On Shakespeare and Milton" in Lectures on the English Poets, intro. by A. R. Waller, London & New York, n.d., p. 48). We know that Keats attended these lectures and studied them afterwards.

⁴⁶The Mind of John Keats, p. 184.

⁴⁷Wordsworth's distinction between the Fancy and the Imagination is given in the 1815 Preface in Literary Criticism of William Wordsworth, p. 153.

⁴⁸Wordsworth also states in the 1815 Preface that "When the Imagination frames a comparison, if it does not strike on the first presentation, a sense of the truth of the likeness, from the moment that it is perceived, grows -- and continues to grow -- upon the mind", a claim that is somewhat similar to Keats's idea of poetry surprising by an excess. (Literary Criticism of William Wordsworth, p. 153).

⁴⁹Letters, I, 238.

⁵⁰Lyrical Ballads 1798, pp. 166-167.

⁵¹The passage from "Sleep and Poetry" to which I am referring is:
 Could all this be forgotten? Yes a schism
 Nurtured by foppery and barbarism,
 Made great Apollo blush for this his land.
 Men were thought wise who could not understand
 His glories: with a puling infant's force
 They swayed about upon a rocking horse,
 And thought it Pegasus. Ah dismal soul'd!
 The winds of heaven blew, the ocean roll'd
 Its gathering waves -- ye felt it not. The blue
 Bared its eternal bosom, and the dew
 Of summer nights collected still to make
 The morning precious: beauty was awake!
 Why were ye not awake? But ye were dead
 To things ye know not of, -- were closely wed

To musty laws lined out with wretched rule
 And compass vile: so that ye taught a school
 Of dolts to smooth, inlay, and clip, and fit,
 Till, like the certain wands of Jacob's wit,
 Their verses tallied.

(ll. 181-199).

These eighteenth-century poets would not allow physical sensations, experienced from nature, to spur them into imaginative speculation. Instead, they followed a preconceived, artificial system of poetics that is the antithesis of Keats's concept of Negative Capability.

⁵²Letters, I, 238-239.

⁵³The Round Table, p. 24.

⁵⁴Lyrical Ballads 1798, p. 157.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER III

¹Letters, I, 223-224.

²See, for example, C. D. Thorpe, "Wordsworth and Keats -- a Study in Personal and Critical Impression", p. 1016, or K. Muir, "Keats and Hazlitt", p. 147.

³"Observations on Mr. Wordsworth's Poem The Excursion" in The Round Table, p. 113. Hazlitt states the same idea in his lecture "On the Living Poets" where he says that:

Mr. Wordsworth is the most original poet now living. . . .
His poetry is not external, but internal; it does not depend upon tradition, or story, or old song; he furnishes it from his own mind, and is his own subject. He is the poet of mere sentiment.

(Lectures on the English Poets, p. 156)

We know that Keats attended this lecture. (cf. W. J. Bate, John Keats, pp. 259-260).

⁴Selected Prose of John Hamilton Reynolds, ed. L. M. Jones (Cambridge, 1966), p. 76. In his essay "The Quarterly Review -- Mr. Keats", Reynolds echoes the same idea of Wordsworth: "Posterity is a difficult mark to fit, and few minds can send the arrow full home. Wordsworth might have safely cleared the rapids in the stream of time, but he lost himself by looking at his own image in the waters." (Selected Prose, p. 227).

⁵Owen glosses Wordsworth's use of "feelings" in this case as "faculties, analogous to the physical senses, which respond to stimulus from without", (Wordsworth as Critic, Toronto, 1969, p. 38).

⁶Wordsworth as Critic, p. 41.

⁷Letters, I, 232.

⁸Keats The Poet, p. 59. Sperry's study of Keats's ideas on how poetry should affect the reader is generally excellent.

⁹Ibid., p. 55.

¹⁰On the narrow scope of modern poetry compared to the "great and unobtrusive" poetry of the Elizabethans, Keats may be again indebted to Hazlitt, who writes:

The great fault of a modern school of poetry is, that it is an experiment to reduce poetry to a mere effusion of natural

sensibility; or what is worse, to divest it both of imaginary splendour and human passion, to surround the meanest objects with the morbid feelings and devouring egotism of the writers' own minds.

("On Shakespeare and Milton" in Lectures on the English Poets, p. 53).

¹¹"Observations on Mr. Wordsworth's poem The Excursion" in The Round Table, p. 112.

¹²Letters, I, 237.

¹³Ibid., I, 184. Keats's term "Men of Genius" may have been borrowed from Hazlitt, who states in his essay "On Posthumous Fame" that Shakespeare "was almost entirely a man of genius . . . He seemed scarcely to have an individual existence of his own, but to borrow that of others at will, and to pass successively through 'every variety of untried being', -- to be now Hamlet, now Othello, now Lear, now Falstaff, now Ariel. In the mingled interests and feelings belonging to this wide range of imaginary reality, in the tumult and rapid transitions of this waking dream, the author could not easily find time to think of himself, nor wish to embody that personal identity in idle reputation after death, of which he was so little tenacious while living." (The Round Table, p. 23).

¹⁴Letters, I, 184. Here Keats is using the word "ethereal" with a scientific meaning. As Sir Humphry Davy explains it in his discussion "Of Radiant or Ethereal Matter":

In treating of the different substances which, by their agencies, combinations, or decompositions, produce the phenomena of chemistry -- radiant or ethereal matters will be first considered, as their principal effects seem rather to depend upon their communicating motion to the particles of common matter . . . than to their actually entering into combination with them.

(The Collected Works of Sir Humphry Davy, Vol. IV: Elements of Chemical Philosophy, p. 140).

¹⁵Letters, II, 19. Keats disliked West's painting Death on the Pale Horse because "in this picture we have unpleasantness without any momentous depth of speculation excited" (Letters, I, 192). It is not the unpleasantness he objects to, but the fact that the painting does not allow the viewer to entertain speculations.

¹⁶Letters, I, 387. The term "egotistical sublime" Keats may have developed from Wordsworth himself for Wordsworth uses the term "sublime" quite often in connection with consciousness of self. For example, in the 1815 Preface Wordsworth states that the creative aspect of the imagination works by "alternations proceeding from, and governed by, a sublime consciousness of the soul in her own mighty and almost divine powers." (Literary Criticism of William Wordsworth, p. 149).

¹⁷Letters, II, 11.

¹⁸In his lecture "On Shakespeare and Milton" Hazlitt states: The striking peculiarity of Shakespeare's mind was its generic quality, its power of communication with all other minds -- so that it contained a universe of thought and feeling within itself, and had no one peculiar bias, or exclusive excellence more than another. He was just like any other man, but that he was like all other men. 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 not only had in himself the germs of every faculty and feeling, but he could follow them by anticipation, intuitively, into all their conceivable ramifications, through every change of fortune or conflict of passion, or turn of thought. . . . His genius shone equally on the evil and on the good, on the wise and the foolish, the monarch and the beggar. (Lectures on the English Poets, pp. 47-48)

¹⁹Selected Prose of John Hamilton Reynolds, p. 59.

²⁰Letters, I, 186.

²¹Ibid., I, 368-369.

²²Ibid., I, 387. For other letters that express similar ideas about identities pressing upon him and annihilating him, see Letters, I, 392 and 395, II, 5 and 349.

²³Letters, II, 77.

²⁴Keats, p. 285. Murry goes on to point out that Keats's distinction between poets and mere dreamers, made at the beginning of The Fall, is probably influenced by similar distinctions and questionings in The Excursion, III.

²⁵Letters, II, 234.

²⁶Keats, p. 283.

²⁷Letters, II, 79.

²⁸Ibid., II, 80.

²⁹Ibid., II, 79.

³⁰Ibid., II, 79.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER IV

¹Letters, I, 184-185.

²The Mind of John Keats, p. 64.

³John Keats, p. 240.

⁴John Keats's Anatomical and Physiological Note Book, p. 55.

⁵Letters, II, 13.

⁶Ibid., II, 18.

⁷Keats The Poet, p. 7.

⁸Keats, pp. 31-33. Garrod also states that "For Wordsworth the language of poetry is before all else the language of the senses. The Lyrical Ballads are, as I have said, before all else, a revindication in poetry of the life of the senses. They are a crusade against the long domination in poetry of the Reason. They have their origin in the conviction that truth, truth in and for poetry, is given by the report of the senses. Poetry begins in the free surrender of ourselves to the impressions of sense." (pp. 126-127).

⁹The Prelude, Book XII, l. 377.

¹⁰Wordsworth describes the process in even greater detail in The Prelude, Book II, ll. 265-275.

¹¹Letters, I, 185.

¹²Ibid., I, 218.

¹³Ibid., II, 115.

¹⁴Lyrical Ballads, 1798, p. 156.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 166. See also The Prelude, Book XIII, where Wordsworth talks of "Emotion which best foresight need not fear, / Most worthy then of trust when most intense." (ll. 115-116).

¹⁶The Keats Circle, II, 144.

¹⁷Quoted in R. D. Havens, The Mind of a Poet (Baltimore, 1941), I, 213.

¹⁸Letters, I, 170.

¹⁹Ibid., I, 192.

²⁰Ibid., II, 19.

²¹Ibid., I, 403.

²²The Mind of John Keats, p. 104.

²³See above p. 21.

²⁴Letters, I, 143.

²⁵Ibid., II, 18.

²⁶Literary Criticism of William Wordsworth, pp. 146 & 152.

²⁷Ibid., p. 160. Wordsworth's italics.

²⁸Wordsworth as Critic, pp. 183-184. See also Havens's comment that, for Wordsworth, "poetry of the higher kind [is that] in which 'life and nature are described as operated upon by the creative or abstracting virtue of the imagination'" (The Mind of a Poet, p. 209).

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER V

¹Letters, I, 184.

²Ibid., I, 243.

³Ibid., II, 213.

⁴cf. The Excursion, Book IV, ll. 987-992 for a similar attack on analytical philosophers. Hazlitt draws attention to this passage when commenting on the passage in The Excursion that deals with the creation of Greek myths:

The foregoing is one of a succession of splendid passages equally enriched with philosophy and poetry, tracing the fictions of Eastern mythology to the immediate intercourse of the imagination with Nature, and to the habitual propensity of the human mind to endow the outward forms of being with life and conscious motion. With this expansive and animating principle, Mr. Wordsworth has forcibly, but somewhat severely, contrasted the cold, narrow, lifeless spirit of modern philosophy.

("Observations on Mr. Wordsworth's Excursion" in The Round Table, p. 115)

⁵Letters, I, 162.

⁶Keats's dislike for Newton was well known to his friends as is evidenced in Haydon's account of his "immortal dinner" at which both Keats and Wordsworth were present. Haydon writes:

He [Lamb] then, in a strain of humour beyond description, abused me for putting Newton's head into my picture -- "a fellow," said he, "who believed nothing unless it was as clear as the three sides of a triangle." And then he and Keats agreed he had destroyed all the poetry of the rainbow, by reducing it to the prismatic colours. It was impossible to resist him, and we all drank "Newton's health, and confusion to mathematics." It was delightful to see the good-humour of Wordsworth in giving in to all our frolics without affectation, and laughing as heartily as the best of us.

(Quoted by Bate, John Keats, p. 270)

⁷These lines were probably influenced by Hazlitt, who, in Lectures on the English Poets, states that:

poetry is one part of the history of the human mind, though it is neither science nor philosophy. It cannot be concealed, however, that the progress of knowledge and refinement has a tendency to circumscribe the limits of the imagination, and to clip the wings of poetry. (p. 9)

⁸See, for example, G. R. Elliott, "The Real Tragedy of Keats", PMLA, XXXVI (1921), 315-331, and R. D. Havens, "Unreconciled Opposites in Keats", Philological Quarterly, October 1935, pp. 289-300.

⁹Quoted in C. D. Thorpe, The Mind of John Keats, p. 113. Thorpe goes on to comment:

This is a doctrine to which Keats would have heartily subscribed. For in this larger sense he was always an intuitionist. The imaginative is the highest, the most generative, of all poetic functions. Reason and knowledge are requisites, it is true; but only as educators of the imagination. They are but guides to point the way. In the end the pupil far outruns the master.

(p. 113)

Thorpe's study of the growth of this 'philosophical' approach in Keats's mind is, I think, the best to date. Other studies include the articles by Elliott and Havens mentioned above as well as A. C. Bradley's "Keats and 'Philosophy'", in his A Miscellany (London, 1929). A more recent study is Jacob Wigod's The Darkening Chamber: The Growth of Tragic Consciousness in Keats (Salsburg, 1972). All of these studies have exploded the old myth, propounded by Garrod, that Keats is "the great poet he is only when the senses capture him" (Keats, p. 62).

¹⁰Letters, I, 271.

¹¹Ibid., I, 274.

¹²Ibid., I, 277.

¹³Ibid., I, 279.

¹⁴Ibid., I, 184.

¹⁵R. D. Havens, The Mind of a Poet, p. 129.

¹⁶Letters, II, 81.

¹⁷Ibid., I, 168.

¹⁸Ibid., I, 342.

¹⁹Ibid., I, 218-219. Much later, when he was in Italy, Keats claimed that the "information (primitive sense) necessary for a poem" is "the knowledge of contrast, feeling for light and shade." (Letters, II, 360).

²⁰This unconventional image of the savage Robin may have been

influenced by Wordsworth's poem "The Redbreast Chasing the Butterfly", which also presents the Robin as a hunter.

²¹Keats and Wordsworth, pp. 102-104.

²²It has long been recognized that Keats's wording here is probably an echo of Wordsworth's "Prospectus" to The Recluse, which reads:

we look
Into our Minds, into the Mind of Man --
My haunt, and the main region of my song.
(ll. 39-41)

²³Letters, I, 278-279.

²⁴Ibid., I, 280-281.

²⁵The influence of Tintern Abbey upon this letter has been pointed out by E. de Selincourt in his edition of The Poems of John Keats and by many other critics including C. D. Thorpe, The Mind of John Keats, pp. 43-47. These critics have also pointed out that "Sleep and Poetry" traces the development through the same poetic stages and is also indebted to Tintern Abbey for some of its ideas. As this comparison has been dealt with so often, I will not dwell on it here. More recently, J. Burke Severs has rejected the claim that "Sleep and Poetry" follows the pattern of development set up in Tintern Abbey, but although his detailed argument raises some good points, I still agree with earlier critics that Keats's poems and letters are indebted to Wordsworth's poem. See J. Burke Severs, "Keats's 'Mansion of Many Apartments,' Sleep and Poetry, and Tintern Abbey", Modern Language Quarterly, XX (June, 1959), 128-132.

²⁶Letters, I, 281.

²⁷Ibid., I, 277.

²⁸The Mind of John Keats, p. 101.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER VI

¹Perhaps Wordsworth's best discussion of the idea of "wise passiveness" outside of Lyrical Ballads is given in an early draft of a passage for The Prelude, Book VII found in the Alfoxden Notebook. The passage reads:

There is a holy indolence
Compared to which our best activity
Is oftentimes deadly bane.
They rest upon their oars
Float down the mighty stream of tendency
In the calm mood of holy indolence
A most wise passiveness in which the heart
Lies open and is well content to feel
As nature feels and to receive her shapes
As she has made them
The mountain's outlines and its steady forms
Gave simple grandeur to his mind, nor less
The changeful language of its countenance
Gave movement to his thoughts and multitude
With order and relation.

(Quoted in The Prelude, ed. E. de Selincourt, 2nd edition rev. Helen Darbishire, Oxford, 1959, p. 566).

Keats, of course, could not have seen this passage.

²John Holloway, for example, says that "these poems collectively make up a psychological document -- an unexpected one -- of unique interest", and he goes on to interpret the Odes as "a complex and detailed poetic revelation of what Keats knew himself as the creative mood." ("The Odes of Keats", in his The Charted Mirror, London, 1960, pp. 40-41). Robert Gittings also views the Odes as being "bound together by a unity of form and theme", but he goes on to state that "The order of the Odes does not matter greatly; there is no progress of thought from one Ode to the other" (John Keats, London, 1968, pp. 454-455), a statement to which I am totally opposed. It should also be noted that when Gittings speaks of "the Odes" he excludes "Psyche" which he claims in no way resembles the other Odes. Kenneth Allott is one of the critics who insists that the Odes cannot be viewed as a group. See his essay "The 'Ode to Psyche'", in K. Muir, ed., John Keats: A Reassessment, pp. 75-95.

³Letters, II, 102. Robert Gittings suggests that the Odes can be read in conjunction with the "soul-making" letter, but he does not deal with the topic in detail. See John Keats, p. 455.

⁴For a discussion of the dating of the Odes see Robert Gittings, The Odes of Keats and their Earliest Known Manuscripts (Ohio, 1970), pp. 7-16.

⁵Letters, I, 185. Although this letter expressing Keats's views on

heaven was written over a year before the Odes, the idea of the heavenly state as one in which our earthly sensations are repeated in a finer tone was still in his mind at the time of the composition of the Odes as the "Bright Star" sonnet shows. Although there is some controversy as to when this sonnet was composed, most critics agree that it was some time between February and July, 1819. Keats's ideas on the heavenly state are, I think, important for our understanding of the Odes as Earl Wasserman has shown in The Finer Tone (Baltimore, 1953).

⁶J. Lempriere, A Classical Dictionary (London, n.d.), p. 510.

⁷"The Odes of Keats", p. 43.

⁸"The 'Ode to Psyche'", p. 86. The suffering and seemingly hopeless longing that Psyche has endured in her search for Cupid, although not explicitly stated in the poem, is inherent in both the myth and the poem.

⁹Jack Stillinger, in his essay "Imagination and Reality in the Odes", in his "The Hoodwinking of Madeline" and Other Essays on Keats's Poems (Chicago, 1971), claims that the Ode is an attempt to celebrate man's myth-making capacity in order to preserve it against the age of Lockean and Newtonian reason.

¹⁰A similar situation is created in Keats's "Fancy", ll. 31-36.

¹¹Letters, II, 81.

¹²In Classical literature the nightingale is associated with melancholy, and in Medieval literature with love.

¹³It is not uncommon for a song to be an external manifestation of the singer's spirit.

¹⁴It has long since been recognized that the line "Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;" is a reference to Tom's death, and Kenneth Muir points out that Keats associated Tom's illness with the voice of the nightingale by means of a passage in King Lear. See "The Meaning of the Odes", p. 68.

¹⁵This idea also crops up in "Lamia" where the beautiful illusion created by Lamia begins to crumble when a trumpet blast from outside sets "a thought a-buzzing in his [Lycius's] head"; he then begins to analyze their situation.

¹⁶The Consecrated Urn (London, 1959), p. 327.

¹⁷In the "Bright Star" sonnet we also get this wish for death while experiencing some ecstatic pleasure, in the belief that the pleasure will continue eternally in after-life.

¹⁸"The Odes of Keats", pp. 46-47.

¹⁹The idea of a song as symbol of basic human emotions, which gives it its universal quality, also comes out strongly in Wordsworth's "The Solitary Reaper". There, too, the song transcends both geography and history. This poem undoubtedly influenced Keats's Ode.

²⁰"Imagination and Reality in the Odes", pp. 99-119.

²¹John Keats, pp. 464-465.

²²The similarity between the poet's state at the beginning of the poem and the question at the end is pointed out by Holloway, "The Odes of Keats", p. 50.

²³The term is first applied to this Ode by Kenneth Burke in his essay "Symbolic Action in a Poem by Keats" in A Grammar of Motives (1945). The term is adopted by Wasserman who elaborates on it at length in The Finer Tone. We do not need Burke or Wasserman in order to understand this state, however, for it is amply articulated by Keats when he says, in his letter of 21 December, 1817 to George and Tom, that "the excellence of every Art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty & Truth" (Letters, I, 192).

²⁴Wasserman claims that Keats was aware of the meaning of ecstasy as "the passage of the soul out of the self" (The Finer Tone, p. 29), which reinforces the idea of the poet projecting himself into the urn's world.

²⁵John Keats, p. 467.

²⁶"The Odes of Keats", pp. 48-49.

²⁷Here I have used George Keats's transcript version of the Ode -- probably the closest to the original -- which implies that all of the last two lines of the stanza are spoken by the urn.

It is unnecessary for me to say that the Beauty-Truth statement made by the urn has been the source of much critical analysis and controversy. I will just say that I disagree with those critics -- eg. Middleton Murry and Allen Tate -- who claim that this statement is out of place in the context of the poem itself, and with those critics -- eg. Cleanth

Brooks -- who claim that the statement only has significance and meaning within the dramatic context of the poem. The statement is, I feel, important both in and out of the poem.

²⁸John Keats, p. 520.

²⁹The image of melancholy as a cloud also appears in Keats's journal letter of February-May, 1819 to George and Georgiana: "This is the world -- thus we cannot expect to give way many hours to pleasure -- Circumstances are like Clouds continually gathering and bursting --" (Letters, II, 79).

³⁰The image of the rose also appears in the journal letter to George and Georgiana: "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 cannot escape it, it cannot destroy its annoyances -- they are as native to the world as itself:" (Letters, II, 101).

³¹Gittings, John Keats, p. 461,

³²Wordsworth, too, enjoyed and valued moods of melancholy as he states in The Prelude, Book VI, ll. 188-207.

³³Letters, II, 167.

³⁴John Keats, p. 582.

³⁵Ibid., p. 582.

³⁶Ibid., p. 581.

³⁷"Keats and the Music of Autumn", in John Keats: Odes, a Casebook, p. 188.

³⁸Robert Gittings, The Odes of Keats and their Earliest Known Manuscripts, p. 13.

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