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# TESIS CON FALLA DE ORIGEN

**A MIS ABUELOS**

**TO DR MARJORIE HENSHAW**

**Sweet are the pleasures that to verse belong,  
And doubly sweet a brotherhood in song.**

**J.K.**

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## INTRODUCTION

When a casual modern reader considers the English Romantic poets of the early XIX century, he will most likely think of love, particularly the flamboyant adventures of Lord Byron and Shelley. However a close reading of these poets reveals that romantic love, or what we have come rather loosely to call "Hollywood" love, was not a major theme in their poetry. This is not to say that they did not treat love poetically; Keats, it seems to this investigator, treats some aspect of love in nearly all of his poetry. His early work is a general statement of his intention of writing poetry to stimulate man to love, that is, to develop the capacity to relate to both people and things outside of himself.

A study of Keats's treatment of various forms and ideas of love is both challenging and perilous. It is challenging because to gain insight into a poet's mind as sensitive as Keats's requires an investigator to expand his own imagination and develop his critical powers. But imagination, however useful in considering possible insights into the poet Keats, is unreliable for a critical study of his work.

Furthermore, a study of an abstract idea such as "love" is in itself fraught with enough critical peril to alarm even the most objective of students.

## 2.

In order to avoid as much subjectivity as possible, it is necessary to provide a working terminology, that is, a definition of terms, before engaging in a detailed analysis of Keats's poetry in order to determine what he means by love. As already observed, definition, particularly of abstract ideas, is difficult to arrive at. The question "What do you mean by..." occurs more frequently in a conversation than we usually realise. Most of the time we take meanings for granted, with the conclusion that a listener or a reader ends up with a distorted idea of the concept we are trying to put across. When aware of this hindrance in communication, we may try to define our terms and to our surprise -or even our anger- we discover that we were applying the same term to entirely or almost entirely different ideas.

Few terms could be as slippery as the one in question. Everyone has something to say about love; therefore the definitions and descriptions of love, or what being in love is, are innumerable. There is obviously no possibility of finding a definition that will do for everyone, everywhere and at all times; but a definition must be found if the present piece of research is to make sense at all. Love, whatever else might be said about it, is universal; the constant concern of man, either for or against it, stands



as proof. In order to arrive at a universality that may be applicable to Keats, this chapter will deal with assorted definitions of love provided by past and present thinkers. The purpose of treating some of these definitions at some length has the object of suggesting more than a simple and brief statement might denote.

Plato, for example, uses an ancient myth to explain man's need of love. According to this myth, mankind is originally conceived and created in an androgynous form, that is, as having both sexes. Punished by the gods for some mysterious crime, these first human beings were split in two parts, one masculine and one feminine. Ever since then, man, according to Plato, has been in search for his other half:

When all nature was divided in this way, to each human being came the longing for his own other half, and the two halves embraced and entwined their bodies and desired to grow together again.<sup>1</sup>

Platonic love, not in its popular conception, but in the most strict Platonic terms, is this need man has to achieve unity with the half of his nature that was taken away from him. When man has achieved this union, when his desire to be one with his beloved is fulfilled, his humanity is integrated, and he is ready, so to speak, to seek union with the divine. According to Wallace Fowlie, in his "Love in Literature," "man's love," in Plato's theory, "is his search for himself."<sup>2</sup>

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In broad terms, Platonic love is basically related to man's search for his identity, an identity which, in essence can only be found in the union with a divinity, or "the whole" as Plato himself called it. Man, then, is separated from his creator, and as such, is only a fragment, a part seeking to re-unite to the whole. "For love is the desire of the whole," Plato said, "and the pursuit of the whole is called love."<sup>3</sup>

Another Greek philosopher, Aristotle, describes love also as a desire, but as a desire characterized by the mutual welfare of the persons involved in a love relationship. He believes that "perfect love" can exist only between two persons of similar, if not identical, virtues. A good person in Aristotelian terms, is he who has found something that enables him to fulfil himself, and wishes the same for the object of his love. Aristotle considers that a good man lives according to what he believes to be constructive, and maintains a balance between thought and action resulting in a joy for his existence and for life itself. Aristotle believes that acceptance of and love for one's self is pre-requisite to love, because the loved object is viewed as another self and the attitude towards this object should be the same as the one the lover has towards himself. "For a man to be good," writes Aristotle, "he should love himself, which is a good action from which other men may profit."<sup>4</sup> From the love

a man has for himself and the way he leads his own life, he will like and accept the lives of other men, "which will bring forth coexistence and communication, both in word and thought."<sup>5</sup>

For Aristotle, then, to love would be to live in complete harmony with other men, but only a few of them, since he believes that the human being can love only a limited number of people. The reason is that a good man, according to Aristotle, can not love a bad man, since the loved object is loved only in so far as he has good qualities. Besides, he says, it is impossible to like all men enough to be willing to live in close contact with them: "One should not try to have as many friends as possible, but only those one can have a personal exchange of ideas, and experiences to share."<sup>6</sup> Aristotle does not say that we should disregard the rest of the people; on the contrary he says it is the duty of the more developed men to help those who have not reached a level of development equal to their own. But this he calls benevolence, which is different from love in that it needs two people with similar human development. This feeling of benevolence reflects too in harmonious living, but it lacks the intense personal contact between two individuals of the same human stature that Aristotle finds essential in what he calls love.

Equality of virtue in people is irrelevant in the kind of love Jesus Christ preached. Christ expressed love for every human being on earth, regardless of his degree of inner development. Contrary to Aristotle, Christ commanded man to love those of evil, or apparently evil, nature; he commanded him to love everyone, even his enemies: "Amad a vuestros enemigos, haced bien a los que os aborrecen, y orad por lo que os persiguen y calumnian." <sup>7</sup> Christ affirmed self-love, and furthermore, he asked man to "love thy neighbour as thou lovest thyself," in other words he wanted men to establish an empathic relationship with each other. Of this empathy or identification with the loved object, Dom Georges Lefebvre, a Catholic priest, in "The Mystery of God's Love" says, in reference to Christian love, that:

...love tends towards perfect unity, towards identification with the beloved, yet in such a way, that the beloved must remain a separate entity in order to remain the object of love; in the strict sense of the words, it is not possible to love oneself. Love is giving. With its whole being, it turns towards the other, it forces us out of ourselves. ...A lover wants nothing in him to exist independently of his love; he wants to live only for the beloved and only as long as his life depends on the beloved. ...And, if men can achieve genuine union with each other, then this will be through their common participation in that pure, real love..."<sup>9</sup>

A Trappist monk offers another definition of Christian love: "...it is sacrifice, it is pain, it is struggle, it is fire, it is power, it is all that is good and holy

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and perfect...We must give, give, give our treasure of love to all and we will find that our love will always grow -we can never be selfish: give and receive- we always receive more than we give. We become one with the ones we love..." <sup>10</sup>

Christian love involves effort, self-discipline and pain, since it is not easy to love one's enemies. The goal of Christian love lies in the achievement of oneness with the world, which may or may not include emotion. For a Christian, the love of humanity is expressed in prayers and in keeping a benevolent attitude towards the human beings he meets.

This apparent need of man to establish contact with other men, as pointed out by Aristotle, is echoed in Erich Fromm. Fromm treats love as the successful attempt every man makes to break through his own isolation. Man is "life being aware of itself; he has awareness of himself, of his fellow man, of his past, and of the possibilities of his futures." <sup>11</sup> This awareness of his aloneness and separateness, of his helplessness before the forces of nature and of society, all this makes his separate, disunited existence and unbearable prison.<sup>12</sup> Fromm asserts that man can not exist without trying "to unite himself in some form or other with men, with the world outside,"<sup>13</sup> In fact, he considers this craving for union as the "deepest need of man."<sup>14</sup> A complete failure at establishing some kind of link with the outer world would mean destruction in the form of insanity, because through

it man merely forgets his aloneness by supressing that world he wants so very much to belong to; it is manifested in the taking of drugs, drinking, masturbation and sexual intercourse for the pleasure of it per se. This "transitory state of exaltation"<sup>15</sup> is just that: transitory. It does not succeed in uniting man with his fellowmen in an established, secure manner. The opposite happens when man seeks identification through conformity, that is, an attempt to be like everybody else in order to blend, to fit in. It manifests itself in conformity to the way of dressing, behaving, having fun that the social group approves, and selecting a job considered as "normal." It is the so-called gregarious instinct expressed in a herd-like fusion; to quote Fromm: "Union by conformity is not intense and violent; it is calm, dictated by routine, and for this very reason often is insufficient to pacify the anxiety of separateness."<sup>16</sup> And not only that, this kind of "unity" destroys the individuality of man; it makes him forget about himself to think in terms of what is outside of him. Creative work is a more satisfactory way of trying to belong; in this kind of work "the creating person unites himself with his material, which represents the world outside of himself"<sup>17</sup> but again, following Fromm, this is only a partial success because creative work is not "interpersonal."

The work of the artist or the artisan by itself is too detached from people to substitute an integral union with

the world "...the unity achieved in orgiastic fusion is transitory; the unity achieved by conformity is only pseudounity. Hence, they are only partial answers to the problem of existence. The full answer lies in the achievement of interpersonal union, of fusion with another person in love."<sup>18</sup>

Fromm describes mature love as "union under the condition of preserving one's integrity, one's individuality...Love is an active power in man... In love the paradox occurs that two beings become one and yet remain two."<sup>19</sup> The reason Fromm gives love an active character is that he sees love as basically an act of giving, not of receiving. Here again he comes close to Aristotle's idea that "if it is a beautiful thing to do good without expecting something in return, it is rewarding to receive some kind of benefit."<sup>20</sup> The Frommian lover gives "of all expressions and manifestations of that which is alive in him,"<sup>21</sup> even his suffering; this is contrary to the Aristotelian theory of love which poses that in general the lover should avoid sharing his miseries with his beloved:

...people of manly nature guard against making their friends grieve with them, and, unless he be exceptionally insensible to pain, such a man cannot stand the pain that ensues for his friends, and in general does not admit fellow-mourners because he is not himself given the mourning; but women and womanly men enjoy sympathisers in their grief, and love them as friends and companions in sorrow.<sup>22</sup>

Fromm asserts that in love a person "gives...of his joy, of his interest, of his understanding, of his knowledge, of his humour, of his sadness."<sup>23</sup>

This act of giving works as a fertilizer because what the lover gives is life which vitalizes the depository of one's love or as Fromm puts it "in giving he can not help bringing something to life in the other person, and this which is brought to life reflects back to him; in truly giving, he cannot help receiving that which is given back to him."<sup>24</sup>

This idea is in accordance with Aristotle when he says:

And in loving a friend men love what is good for themselves; for the good man in becoming a friend becomes a good to his friend. Each, then, both loves what is good for himself, and makes an equal return in good will and in pleasantness; for friendship is said to be equality, and both of these are found most in the friendship of the good.<sup>25</sup>

which is the same thing Fromm says about the changes operated in the giver and the receiver of love:

Giving implies to make the other person a giver also and they both share in the joy of what they have brought to life. In the act of giving something is born, and both persons involved are grateful for the life that is born for both of them. Specifically with regard to love this means: love is a power which produces love; impotence is the inability to produce love.<sup>26</sup>

Fromm very enthusiastically follows his dissertation with a quotation from Marx which I reproduce.



'Assume man as man, and his relation to the world as human one, and you can exchange love only for love, confidence for confidence, etc. If you wish to enjoy art, you must be an artistically trained person; if you wish to have influence on other people, you must be a person who has a really stimulating and furthering influence on other people. Every one of your relationships to man and to nature must be a definite expression of your real, individual life corresponding to the object of your will. If you love without calling forth love, that is, if your love as such does not produce love, if by means of an expression of life as a loving person you do not make of yourself a loved person, then your love is impotent, a misfortune. 27.

Menninger's conception of Freudian love is very similar to theories expostulated by Fromm. Both psychoanalysts agree that love, a meaningful and satisfying relationship with other human beings, is the only way we can live our lives successfully<sup>28</sup> to use the words of Dr Allan Fromme, a follower of Freud. The breaking away from the loneliness of the self, as explained by Erich Fromm, has its equivalent in the Freudian theory of love, which asserts that loneliness is overcome by the development of "attachments." Like Fromm, who considers that love requires daily practice, the Freudians Karl Menninger and Allan Fromme consider love as an ability to be acquired and developed through practice. Thus, in Freudian terms, love is an ability to develop attachments. Dr A. Fromme explains the meaning of attachment:

When two things are attached, they are two things brought together and bound to each other in some

way, whether it is two pieces of wood fastened with nails and screws, or two people joined by common interests which they pursue together, or an individual and an activity to which he is linked by some interest or desire within him.<sup>29</sup>

Love "in larger terms," writes Dr A. Fromme, may be defined then as "any kind of attachment, whether to a person, an idea, a place, an object, an activity, even to oneself."<sup>30</sup> Dr Karl Menninger elaborates more on this theory by stating that Freud identified love with the "life-instinct" and hate with the "death-instinct." Both these instincts form part of human nature, the life instinct expressed in man's creative acts and the death-instinct in all that is destructive or aggressive. In this scientific theory of love, as Dr Menninger calls it, the life instinct -that is love- expresses itself in three forms: 1) Neutralization of destructiveness, 2) attachments to non-sexual objects and 3) attachments to sexual objects.

The neutralization of destructiveness is called sublimation which Dr Menninger describes in the following terms:

All aggressive energy except that small quantity necessary for self-defence against real dangers is turned into useful channels and employed in the services of living and loving. Aggression, destructive energy, is thus effectively denatured, and by a shift in object and modality it becomes constructive. This latter process constitutes sublimation, as I view it. 31

It is better to love than to have to sublimate, but it is better to sublimate than to hate, states a Freudian precept.

The second category of attachments according to Menninger includes attachment to non-sexual objects, such as our tools or our possessions in general. There is only one step from an attachment to things to an attachment to such non-human objects as animals, especially pets, and the object of nature, such as trees. There is a great tendency, especially among children to personify these non-human objects by talking to them and treating them as beings like themselves. Dr Menninger considers these attachments to be productive for man, since they, in their way, unite man to life. There is no harm as long as the affection for non-human objects is not motivated by fear of loving people. The ability to have deep friendships and some kind of attachment to society is also a direction of the life-instinct toward non-sexual objects; even mere socializing may produce "an exchange of feelings and mutual stimulation of affection"<sup>32</sup> though the danger lies in the conformism that Erich Fromm speaks of.

In establishing his first contact with the world, a newborn baby begins by experiencing objects with his body, especially with his mouth and hands. A child feels he must touch things, hold them in his hands, or even take them to pieces to experience the nature of the object in a fuller way. But as an adult, he is usually satisfied with the impression his eyes give him of almost every non-human object. Few adults,

impressed though they may be at the sight, for example, of Michelangelo's David, would be tempted to touch, to experience with their hands, the marble that the statue is made of. This shows how man loses, as he grows up, his capability of establishing contact through his body; except in erotic experiences, man is gradually relating less and less with his body. It is true that, in some countries, friends still kiss each other when they meet or say good bye, but for the most part a mechanical shaking of hands is the only physical manifestation of the attachment we have for our friends. Dr Allan Fromme observes that

Strong feelings find their clumsiest expression in human speech. The language of the body comes to our rescue because of the utter simplicity of its expression. A man's and a woman's hands reach out and touch. Silently they eloquently speak of their mutual awareness. An all enveloping bear-hug more deeply proclaims one's affection than even the prettiest words. ...What we say moves us far less than how we say it. Acting it out, using the body gives any message its most deeply felt meaning.<sup>33</sup>

In this Freudian interpretation of love "sex is necessary for the deepest expressions of love."<sup>34</sup> The "use of the body by a man and a woman for the purpose of seeking and expressing satisfaction in each other is what we mean by sex."<sup>35</sup> This acting out of erotic affection satisfies man's need for attachment, "experienced as a pleasure in proximity, a desire for fuller knowledge of one another, a yearning for mutual identification and personality fusion."<sup>36</sup>

Whatever the nature of the love or the attachment, the highest intensity, according to Menninger, results from identification with the loved object. By identification, he makes it clear, he means not the "unconscious identification, the psychological process" but simply that conscious attempt to imagine or to perceive how the other fellow feels,<sup>37</sup> which he considers the core of being. Identification leads to what he calls fusion, that is, an empathic relationship with the whole world. This is the supreme attachment, the goal where, he thinks, human happiness resides. The Song of Solomon is a good example of an empathic relationship between two lovers. The bride and the groom in this "Song of Songs" are not only "attached" to each other, but are mutually identified. Their deep identification, in Menninger's concept of identification, is carried unto fusion, as a result of the intense degree of empathy. In the following lines, the bride is getting ready to receive her beloved:

Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow  
upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow  
out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat  
his pleasant fruits.<sup>38</sup>

Her garden, her orchard, her fruits, which for the Catholic Church are symbols of justice, sanctity and grace. In a different level show the exuberance of the bride's life -both inner as well as physical life- and how she wants to make herself better, to improve herself in some way -"blow upon

my garden, that the spices thereof may blow out"- which is the change effected on her by their love. The groom replies:

I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse:  
I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have  
eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk  
my wine with my milk 39

Notice that they refer to their possessions -their lives- as being freely shared: "We become one with the ones we love."<sup>40</sup> Love acts creatively on the groom as he feels some kind of union, or communion with the world: "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved."<sup>41</sup> Paraphrasing Marx, this is an "expression of life" as a loving person makes himself a "loved person," his love being potent and fortunate.

Loneliness is the opposite of fusion; it is the opposite of love for creation. Complete loneliness is the state in which man fails to express his life-instinct on a human object, perhaps the miser or the spinster totally devoted to a couple of pets. Desolation can only result in self-destruction, which is the case of many suicides. Fusion is the antithesis of destruction because it is the urge that man has to establish attachments with all creation. Dr Menninger describes the effects of fusion in the following terms:

We shall have realigned our faith in God to include more brothers, more sisters, more sons and daughters in a vastly wider family concept. <sup>42</sup>

Finally we have reached the point where we can synthesize

definitions of love ranging from Aristotle to Menninger. When we refer to "love" in this paper we will understand by it the ability to establish creative attachments, particularly those attachments resulting from identification, fusion, or a sense of oneness - the common denominator in all the definitions included here and which finds support in Keats's own theory of "Negative Capability" to be treated in the next chapter. In short, this will be a discussion of some of Keats's attachments, as they are reflected in his poetry and letters. This thesis will deal with the attachments he established with natural and artistic beauty, and the relationship between love and beauty; it will treat Keats's own attachment to the idea of love and how love, or the absence of it, is reflected in his poetry.

## CHAPTER I

### NEGATIVE CAPABILITY

Recently a school for the senses was founded in California. Such an educational centre shows that the man living in this age of missiles and pre-fabrication is dangerously impairing his sensitivity and the possibility of developing his capacities in a more integral way. The purpose of this new school for the senses is to help man recover and develop his deadened sensorial perception. Other educational institutions offer college credits for courses such as Gardening, Eurithmy and Story-telling on the same level as the credits given for Biochemistry and Mathematics.

The reason for this reaction against traditional educations is the recognition that man is losing his capacity to establish attachments with the natural world and his power to develop empathic relationships, both with human and non-human objects. Keats did not have this problem, his senses, imagination, intuition and empathy were far from being numbed. As a matter of fact he was endowed with a capability greatly developed to notice the world around him. From the time he was a young child, he established strong attachments with the objects around him, especially animals and nature, as he recorded in "A song about Myself." No doubt the fact that he lived in a little country town stimulated



this fondness, and probably, as observed by Dr Menninger to be typical of most children, he was given to personifying animals and natural objects, in such a way that he experienced these objects by becoming one with them. It must have been thus, otherwise it would be hard to understand his later readiness to identify with his surroundings.

Very early, in his surprisingly rapid maturation as a poet, he became aware that there was more than sheer pleasure and admiration, feelings that had characterized his previous contact with nature, to be derived from the beauty of nature. Some powers of perception, other than his reason, had indicated to him that here was a mystery in nature which would be enlightening for him to absorb. Admiration of natural beauty by itself for him was an incomplete perception, as he was always the subject while nature still remained a remote object. In his contemplation of nature he discovered he could partake of its essence in a closer, more intimate way. Thus he became part of nature, or rather he became nature itself. This projection of Keats's identity, however, was not limited to nature; it included the whole creation. Aileen Ward attributed one of the reasons for Keats's failure as a surgeon to the fact that he could not detach himself from the nature of his patients:

Apparently he was encountering a difficulty which is a frequent cause of failure in me-

dical school - an excessive identification with the patient, arising from the student's inability to develop a sense of detachment from suffering early in his career.<sup>1</sup>

Later he himself was to recognize this phenomenon on two different occasions, when he referred to those months he looked after his dying brother Tom and when ailing Rice asked him to spend a few days with him away from London. Both times Keats was very upset by the suffering of his brother and his friend, especially when he remained with them by himself - their suffering being thus more evident with nothing to divert his attention from their pain. One also thinks of Keats's commentary in reference to a billiard-ball, which made him feel "a sense of delight from its own roundness, smoothness, volubility, and the rapidity of its motion."<sup>2</sup> At the beginning he was probably not quite aware of this empathic relation with the world, but by November 1817, when he writes to Bailey, he is perfectly conscious of his habitual tendency to identify with other expressions of life:

"..if a Sparrow come before my window I take part in its existence [sic] and pick about the Gravel."<sup>3</sup>

His capacity to project himself into the world around him did not go unnoticed by his friends. It was not merely his capacity to absorb other natures that impressed them, but the wide range of objects that this capability included:

What strikes us most in his capacity for sympathetic identification, starting with the schooldays at Enfield, is its inclusiveness. This is not the volatile empathic range of even the rare actor. For the range is vertical

as well as horizontal, and is distinguished more by an adhesive purchase of mind than by volubility. He might, in describing the bearbaiting to Clarke, instinctively begin to imitate not only the spectators but the bear, "dabbing his fore paws hither and thither," and, in diagnosing Clarke's stomach complaint and comparing the stomach to a brood of baby-birds "gaping for sustenance" automatically open his own "capacious mouth."<sup>4</sup>

or as Severn reports on this aspect of Keats's nature:

Nothing seemed to escape him, the song of a bird and the undernote of response from convert or hedge, the rustle of some animal, the changing of the motions of the wind - just how it took certain tall flowers and plants- and the wayfaring of the clouds: even the features and gestures of passing tramps, the colour of one woman's hair, the smile on one child's face, the furtive animalism below the deceptive humanity in many of the vagrants, even the hats, clothes, shoes, wherever these conveyed the remotest hint as to the real self of wearer.<sup>5</sup>

The relevance of his empathic relation with the world lies in how it affected his poetry and its startlingly quick development.

When he picked up styles in the writing of poetry it was not as a mimic or copyst but as a fellow participator identified even more with the other's aim and ideal than with the individual himself. If, when still a student at Guy's Hospital, he caught elements of Felton Mathew's style, he dignified them; and the result, poor as it is, transcends anything Mathew wrote. So later with Hunt. Except at the very start, and except for a few isolated passages afterwards, we have nothing of the routine mechanism of a copy. If anything, he brings Hunt more to life.

Still later, in Hyperion, he was to write within little more than two or three months the only poem among all the Miltonic imitations in English that Milton himself might not have been ashamed to write.<sup>6</sup>

The beginning of Keats's most creative year (Oct. 1818 to Oct. 1819) was marked by his own awareness of how, in his own words, he was "annihilated" by "the identity of everyone"

When I am in a room with People if I ever am free from speculating on creations of my own brain, then not my-self goes home to myself: but the identity of everyone in the room begins to /for so/ to press upon me that I am in a very little time an/ni/hilated- not only among Men; it would be the same in a Nursery of children.<sup>7</sup>

"A poet", he says, "is the most unpoetical thing" because he must surrender his identity to become the object he is striving to capture in the lines of a poem.

As to the poetical Character itself ( I mean that sort of which, if I am anything, I am a Member...) 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 of 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 philosopher, 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 creature 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.<sup>8</sup>

Earl Wasserman defines this empathic element in Keats's conception of Negative Capability as "the act of freeing the self of its identity and its existence in time and space, and consequently the act of mystic absorption into the essence of outward forms." <sup>9</sup>

A second element in Keats's idea of Negative Capability refers to man and his power to find truth through reason. Keats thought that man relied too much upon logical thinking, especially because it despised the validity of truth arrived at through other human capabilities, such as sensory perception, imagination, intuition and empathy. A quotation will suffice to support this point:

...what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously -I mean Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason -Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetrarium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge.<sup>10</sup>

The two elements in Negative Capability are closely linked, as the idea of selflessness to be fully grasped requires "a man...capable of being in uncertainties...without reaching after fact and reason..."<sup>11</sup>

A complete loss of identity might have a neutralizing effect on the individual, Keats thought, but he knew that a total disinterest in the self was a rare occurrence:

...I perceive how far I am from any humble standard of disinterestedness-- Yet this feeling ought to be carried to its highest pitch as there is no fear of its ever injuring Society -which it would do I fear pushed to an extremity- For in wild nature the Hawk would loose his Breakfast of Robins and the Robin his of Worms -the lion must starve as the swallow. 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.<sup>12</sup>

but then he contradicts himself when in the same letter he says that a complete detachment from the self would make man more complete as he would be partaking all manifestations of life, and he quotes Wordsworth to prove this point: "we have all one human heart."<sup>13</sup> In other words disinterestedness in the self would be enriching man's humanity since he would experience the existence of other beings, their needs and satisfactions as well as their miseries and conflicts, and it could then lead him to a true desire for creative -loving- coexistence. He knew of course, how far men were from negating themselves: "I have no doubt that thousands of people never heard or have had hearts completely disinterested: I can remember but two -Socrates and Jesus- their Histories evince it."<sup>14</sup> He then proceeds to explain how he viewed both of them:

What I heard a little time ago, Taylor observe with respect to Socrates may be said of Jesus -That he was so great a man that though he transmitted no writing of his own to posterity, we have his Mind and his sayings and his greatness handed to us by others. It is to be lamented that the history of the latter [Jesus] was written and revised by Men interested in the pious fraud of Religion. Yet through all this I see his splendour.<sup>15</sup>

Placing Jesus on the same level with Socrates indicates his conception of a god and religion. This is not the place to engage in such a discussion, but what should definitely be stressed is the fact that the outcome of selfless existence led to creative living. Both Socrates' and Jesus'

main concern, according to Keats, was to do good in the world.

But at the same time, Keats was very angry with the world -an attitude common to the rest of the English romantic poets. His anger, to a certain extent at least, was motivated by the sense of oppression that social injustice created in him. He was deeply troubled by the chaotic and destructive course society was taking. For him, this overriding problem stemmed from the fact that men were following false values. Man was self-directed, self-centred in his own welfare, which was not bad in itself, but this selfishness made man forget his brethren. Keats felt no harm was caused by man's exploration of his nature, its quests and satisfactions. The evil was rooted, Keats thought, in his unwillingness to deny himself, in his reluctance to make that "conscious attempt to imagine or to perceive how the other fellow feels,"<sup>16</sup> to use Dr Menninger's description of identification. And Keats felt one could only experience life by becoming one with life, by becoming life itself. In other words, Keats's Negative Capability is equal to the common denominator in the definitions of love given in the introduction: a sense of oneness with the world. Keats was aware of the urgent need of "creating attachments" with life, the need to love life. In the Freudian conception of love, Negative Capability is the equivalent of fusion, namely, the optimum of attachments.

CHAPTER II  
LOVE OF NATURE

On a tree, a flower, a star, wherever beauty manifested itself, Keats's eye fell with delight. Whether it was a fleeting view of the minnows slipping in between the algae of the creeks nearby his house in Finsbury, or the sight of the Elgin Marbles at the British Museum, it arose in Keats an overriding pleasure. His eye, as though mysteriously pulled, caught the surrounding beauty with the mixture of childish exhilaration and intense ecstasy. He struck his friends as having the expression of one who is looking at a "glorious vision."<sup>1</sup> His brother George wrote in his recollections that "John's eyes moistened, and his lip quivered at the relation of any tale of generosity...or at sights of loveliness."<sup>2</sup> Severn tells of one occasion when on visiting the British Museum he discovered Keats before the Elgin Marbles, his "eyes shining so brightly" and his "face so lit up by some visionary rapture"<sup>3</sup> that the painter tiptoed away for fear of breaking the spell he was under. In 1817 Keats wrote to his brothers that for "a great poet the sense of beauty overcomes every other consideration or rather obliterates all consideration."<sup>4</sup>

A few weeks before he died, away from his friends and the woman he loved, attacked fiercely by the critics,



in the midst of pain and of constant blood spitting, he wrote to Fanny Brawne that he "had loved the principle of beauty in all things."<sup>5</sup> Not even the desolation of his death-bed had destroyed his attachment to beauty. "Beauty over-comes every other consideration."<sup>6</sup>

Not only did Keats love beautiful things, but he had a passion for the mere idea of beauty. It is not an exaggeration to say that he had an almost ever-present concern for beauty; he proves this in many of his letters. His discovery of a new beautiful sight was accompanied by an uninhibited expression of pleasure. Even the beauty of familiar spots came to him as a shock, as though he had not noticed them or appreciated them before. "I saw the sweetest flower wild nature yields," he says in a sonnet to Wells, "a fresh-blown musk-rose, 'twas the first that threw/ Its sweets upon the summer...and...I feasted on its fragranc<sup>7</sup>y." The poet discovers something which he considers beautiful and he luxuriates in it. He satiates himself voluptuously; the verb "feasted" suggests nothing spiritual or intellectual; his pleasure is merely of the senses. The same phenomenon occurs a few lines later: "...When, O Wells! thy roses came to me/ My sense with their deliciousness<sup>8</sup> was spelled." ✱

The effect of natural beauty on him is not only a titillation. The sensual response is the beginning

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✱ Italics mine.

of an elaborate process which culminates with poetic creation. Once he has indulged his senses with the beauty of nature, a deeper reaction follows immediately. The loud contentment gives way to a more quiet mood in which the poet goes from strictly looking at the object to contemplating it. It is not solely liking the object, but admiring it. "Oh! How I love..." he says in a sonnet written in 1816, "...to find, with easy quest,/ A fragrant wild, with Nature's beauty drest,/ and there into delight my soul deceive."<sup>9</sup> The difference between "feasting" on beauty and these lines is self-evident. Nature effects a more profound influence, which involves the poet's soul instead of his senses.

In this rising chain of perception, Keats has gone from an almost instinctual reaction of the senses to the more integrated perception of beauty by both his senses and his mind. When he has captured the essence of natural beauty and, furthermore, has become part of natural beauty itself, the awareness of its quality has itself taken shape: the beauty of nature is indeed rewarding but, and here we come to one of Keats's main concerns, it is a beauty that will not last. Keats realized that nature, that manifestation of beauty he was so much attached to, is subject to the process of flux and decay of life. This thought was going to oppress the poet's mind for the greater part of his

creative years; the brevity of this form of beauty was anguishing for Keats, who craved eternal beauty. Art was to answer this need. He certainly could not do anything to stop the decay of natural beauty, but he could capture fleeting impressions of beauty and eternalize them in art.

It was this preoccupation with the transience of beauty which made poetic creativity a more demanding need for Keats; such is the theme of "Fancy":

Summer's joys are spoilt by use,  
 And the enjoying of the Spring  
 Fades as does its blossoming;  
 Autumn's red-lipp'd fruitage too,  
 Blushing through the mist and dew,  
 Cloys with tasting: What do then?<sup>10</sup>

The lines hardly need an explanation. "Summer's joys," "the enjoying of the Spring," "Autumn's red-lipp'd fruitage," in other words, all natural beauty will fade, will be "spoilt by use." Similarly, in the jaunty lines of this poem, Keats expresses the inevitability of old age as a prelude to death, the destruction of beauty:

Oh, sweet Fancy! let her loose;  
 Every thing is spoilt by use:  
 Where's the cheek that doth not fade,  
 Too much gaz'd at? Where's the maid  
 Whose lip mature is ever new?  
 Where's the eye, however blue,  
 Doth not weary? Where's the face  
 One would meet in every place?  
 Where's the voice, however soft,  
 One would hear so very oft?<sup>11</sup>

This is immediately followed by two lines, a kind of refrain in this light-toned poem: "At a touch sweet pleasure

melteth/ Like the bubbles when rain pelteth."<sup>12</sup> The pleasure derived from his love of natural beauty is given the fragility of a bubble. It is not a lasting feeling; it can not be, for the poet is saddened by the fate of nature. "What do then?"<sup>13</sup> he questions himself and his reader. His advice comes quickly, without the slightest hesitation:

Sit thee by the ingle, when  
 The sear faggot blazes bright,  
 Spirit of a winter's night;  
 When the soundless earth is muffled  
 And the caked snow is shuffled  
 From the ploughboy's heavy shoon;<sup>14</sup>

If reality is cruel and deceptive, Keats offers imagination, or fancy, as an antidote. The development of his ideas is very important here. Notice how he first creates an atmosphere of meditation: sitting down "by the ingle" in the coziness of its warmth on a cold "winter's night." The silence and ease of peaceful meditation is then introduced masterfully: "the soundless earth is muffled/ And the caked snow is shuffled." It is not only a "soundless earth" but it has been "muffled". Its inaudible sounds are deadened, thereby evoking the image of complete stillness; the music of these two lines is itself quiet, relaxed -they have to be read almost in a whisper. This is on account of the [s], [ʃ], [d], [f], [m] and [n] sounds of which the two lines are basically made. There is not only a whisper, but an echo; the accented vowel sounds -[au], [ou], [ɜ], [ʌ], [eɪ]- are very long, extending their sounds as a pianist

would, lengthening his sounds with the pedal.

This silence, this peaceful stillness are the necessary elements for the poet to quiet down the loud surprise, provoked by his attachment to natural beauty. His "feasting" has to give way to a withdrawal into himself. The result is sending "abroad, / Fancy, high-commission'd: -send her!"<sup>15</sup> This introversion has a first fruit, and essential to Keats, the bringing forth of his fantasy. The "wonders of nature,"<sup>16</sup> as he called them, stimulate his imagination. This process will be repeated countlessly in his poetry, as for example, in "To a Friend Who Sent Me Some Roses":

As late I rambled in the happy fields,  
 What time the sky-lark shades the tremulous dew  
 From his lush clover covert; -when anew  
 Adventurous knights take up their dinted shields:<sup>17</sup>

or in the "Epistle" to his brother George:

There are times, when those that love the bay,  
 Fly from all sorrowing far, far away;  
 A sudden glow comes on them...  
 It has been said, dear George, and true I hold it,  
 ...that when a Poet is in such a trance,  
 In air he sees white courses paw, and prance,<sup>18</sup>  
 Bestriden of gay knights, in gay apparel...

It is the thought of the bay, in this case, which stimulates his imagination and peoples it with legendary beings; in "Ode to a Nightingale," his fantasy makes him talk to the bird. When in the Summer of 1818, he went on a walking trip to Scotland with his friend Brown, he describes, in the journal he kept for his brother Tom, Fingal's Cave on the island of Staffa:

The finest thing is Fingal's Cave -it is entirely a hollowing out of Basalt pillars. Suppose now the Giants who rebelled against Jove had taken a whole Mass of black columns and bound them together like bunches of matches -and then with immense axes had made a cavern in the body of these Columns-<sup>19</sup>

As a rule, any impressive sight puts his imagination to work. The imagination, again in "Fancy":

Open wide the mind's cage-door,  
 She'll dart forth, and cloudward soar.  
 ...has vassals to attend her:  
 She will bring, in spite of frost,  
 Beauties that the earth hath lost;  
 She will bring thee, all together,  
 All delights of summer weather;  
 All the buds and bells of May,<sup>20</sup>

Natural beauty is a "beauty that must die"<sup>21</sup> but with his imagination Keats can recreate the experience gone. "...in spite of frost" fancy has the power to recapture the joy reality is chary in providing. "Open wide the mind's cage-door..." because in so doing his imagination will give life to dead beauty. This is already a consolation, but, nonetheless, his imagination can not endow nature with eternal life. Though fantasy is not a giver of immortality, Keats has partly solved one problem: his imagination whenever he wants it to, will bring back to life "sights of loveliness" "spoilt by use."

Keats's attachment to the idea of eternal beauty was overpowering. Indirect appreciation of the beauty of nature, a recreation of it through his fantasy, was but a fleeting answer to his quest. He had not really solved

the problem. His imaginary creation of beauty was slippery and evanescent. But it was through his imagination that he was going to satisfy the desire for eternal beauty. A rose told him of medieval knights and the feats accomplished; natural scenery evoked, and brought back to life, magic, mythological beings. Keats definitely associated nature with legends, tales, myths, all sorts of real or imaginary creatures. In his desire to perpetuate these experiences Keats discovered that he himself could render them in poetry, since artistic beauty has a life of its own, a life, or an existence, which is not the subject to mutability. And Keats found himself writing poetry, deriving his inspiration from nature. I "pry 'mong the stars, to strive to think divinely," he wrote in his verse epistle to George in the year of 1816, the beginning of his career as a poet. Keats had to go through the problem most amateur artists are faced with: the search of a theme to convey his feelings and expressive impulses, which in Keats were certainly overpowering:

....wonders strange he [the poet] sees and many more,  
 Whose head is pregnant with poetic love.  
 Should he upon an evening ramble fare  
 With forehead to the soothing bare  
 ...And should I ever see them, I will tell you  
 Such tales as needs must with amazement spell you.<sup>22</sup>

Again in 1818 he wrote to Tom from Scotland:

...What astonishes me more than  
 any thing is the tone, the coloring, the slate, the

stone, the moss, the rock-weep; or, if I may so say, the intellect, the countenance of such places. The space, the magnitude of mountains and waterfalls are well imagined before one sees them; but this countenance or intellectual tone must surpass every imagination and defy any remembrance. I shall learn poetry here and shall henceforth write more than ever, for the abstract endeavor of being able to add a mite to that mass of beauty which is harvested from these grand materials, by the finest spirits, and put into ethereal existence for the relish of one's fellows.<sup>23</sup>

This is not a momentary thought. A month later he wrote to Bailey that "I should have not consented to 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"<sup>24</sup> Books, even Homer, Keats did not consider such good sources of inspiration as "the wild scenery of Northern England and Scotland."<sup>25</sup> In "Oh! How I love," he expresses his fondness of walking "on a fair summer's eve" with the object, among others, of "Perhaps on wing of Poesy upsoar."<sup>26</sup>

Keats's fascination with nature, the attachment he felt for its beauty was not only visual. He loved its sounds--how could he not if he himself were a musician of words. The sonnet "How Many Bards" tells us of his perception of the sounds of nature and of poetry:

How many bards gild the lapses of time!



A few of them have ever been the food  
 Of my delighted fancy,--I could brood  
 Over their beauties, earthly, or sublime:  
 And often, when I set me down to rhyme,  
 These will in throngs before my mind intrude:  
 But no confusion, no disturbance rude  
 Do they occasion; 'tis a pleasing chime.<sup>27</sup>

The music of poetry, he says in these lines, is certainly "pleasing" to his ear; he is aware of and accepts the influence of other poets. Music in poetry is then paralleled to the sounds of nature:

... 'tis a pleasing chime.  
 So the unnumber'd sounds that evening store:  
 The songs of birds--the whisp'ring of the leaves--  
 The voice of waters--the great bell that heaves  
 With solemn sounds,--and thousand others more,  
 That distance of recognizance bereaves,  
 Making pleasing music, and not wild uproar.<sup>28</sup>

The "sounds that evening store"<sup>29</sup> --audible beauty-- are again a source, and in this case a material, for inspiration. The same parallel can be found in the ode "Bards of Passion":

Bards of Passion and of Mirth,  
 Ye have left your souls on earth!  
 Have ye souls in heaven too,  
 Doubled-lived in regions new?  
 Yes, and those of heaven commune  
 With the spheres of sun and moon;  
 With the noise of fountains wond'rous,  
 And the parle of voices thund'rous;<sup>30</sup>  
 With the whisper of heaven's trees

The poet's soul "commune" with the sounds of earth:

Where the nightingale doth sing  
 Not a senseless, tranced thing,  
 But divine melodious truth;  
 Philosophic numbers smooth;  
 Tales and golden histories

Of heaven and its mysteries. 31

This is one of the few instances in which Keats gives eternal permanence to natural beauty. It is not the life of the Nightingale itself which will project indefinitely on time; it is the song of the bird which strikes him as a "divine melodious truth." The nightingale is viewed as a poet, or as one in communion with the souls of dead poets, for the bird is a creator of beauty- just as a poet- is telling us of "Tales and golden histories of heaven and its mysteries."

For Keats, the presence of the dead poets manifests itself in nature ; this is the theme in the "Ode Bards of Passion and of Mith:" " Thus go live on high " he addresses the dead poets and then " On the earth ye live again." <sup>32</sup>

This communion of a poet's soul with nature "teach us here, the way to find you" <sup>33</sup> In the light of this union, poet-nature is viewed as a source of inspiration for "mortals" who, then are told of ancient "sorrows and delights; of their glory and their shame." <sup>34</sup> The living poet can derive, if he is appreciative, inspiration from his attachment to nature. The beauty of nature will "teach us, every day/ Wisdom..." <sup>35</sup> The attachment to nature, and the initial pleasure of the senses that it brings forth in Keats, leads him to a richer, deeper state of perception. It is not mere sensual pleasure, but wisdom the poets acquires from nature. And it was this wisdom which Keats delivers

in his poetry.

Natural beauty, for Keats, can only have full meaning when it is a bringer of love, or a stimulant to our capacity to relate to others. The wisdom he refers to in "Bards of Passion" is basically an attitude of love towards life. In his sonnet "To Wells", Keats describes his rambling in the heaths about Hampstead, where he sees a flower which in his exhilaration he calls "the sweetest flower wild nature yields, /a fresh-blown musk-rose...I thought the garden-rose it far excell'd."<sup>36</sup> After the walk, already at home, he receives some roses from Wells which make him exclaim:

But when, O Wells! thy roses came to me  
 My sense with their deliciousness was spell'd:  
 Soft voices had they, that with tender plea  
 Whisper'd of peace, and truth, and friendliness  
 /unquell'd.<sup>37</sup>

The opening "but" is made stronger by being placed at the beginning of the lines; in his pleasure Keats sees the wild-rose as "the sweetest flower" but, and he emphasizes his new consideration of it, the bunch of flowers just presented to him are, by far, better, the reason being that now something has been added to the beauty of these garden-roses: love. The roses Wells had probably picked for him hold the thoughtfulness, the affection that motivated Wells to make the present. Keats is aware of the energy --love energy or as Menninger would say energy from the life-

instinct-- his friend has put in going to the pleasure of sending him the roses, in such a way that the roses are not mere flowers. They are now worth more, since emotion, human feeling has been poured into them, in fact it is an act of giving, a common characteristic in the definitions of love treated in the Introduction. The roses "soft voices" which "whisper'd of peace, and truth, and friendliness..."--this is the message, the real value, of the roses. Love in its expression of peace, truth, and friendship. Love as it understood here, as an attachment, takes on the form of friendship. And if Keats's preoccupation with beauty was constant, love played no smaller role in his life. "I could not live without the love of my friends,"<sup>38</sup> he wrote in a letter to Reynolds in April 1818. His life proves this is not a light statement; the bulky volume of his letters stands as proof of his constant concern for his friends, for the need to develop and keep "attachments." It is common knowledge that Keats went out of his way to help those around him, even when he did not know them, as it is the case with the young painter Cripps for whom he went around collecting money to pay for his education.

That Keats derives peace from nature is no unique reaction --many people do as well. We have already pointed out the peacefulness he is filled with at the sight of natural beauty. "Young Calidore," for example, "...turns

for calmness to the pleasant green /Of easy slopes, and shadowy trees..." Natural beauty leads him to the realms of friendship and peace. But it is not only his own harmony that he is concerned with. The world parches, he believes, for that same need of harmonious living. He is aware though, of the difficulties of satisfying this need, as he expresses it in a letter to Reynolds in February 1818:

...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...<sup>40</sup>

He goes on saying that "It is however quite the contrary."

Man should not dispute or assert but whisper results to his neighbour and thus by every germ of spirit sucking the sap from mould ethereal every human might become great, and Humanity instead of being a wide heath of Furze and Briars with here and there a remote Oak or Pine, would become a grand democracy of Forest Trees!<sup>41</sup>

He is optimistic about it. That is, he is conscious of the existence of human selfishness, but he feels it can be overcome. He can make the previous statement, and mean it really because he has discovered in himself the capacity to overcome his own self-centred desires. He has found the pleasure of giving: "It has been an old comparison for our urging on--the beehive: 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..."<sup>42</sup>

In other words, he has discovered what generosity is. "The receiver and the giver are equal in their benefits,"<sup>43</sup>

which goes along with the interpretation of Frommian and Christian love discussed in the Introduction. Furthermore, Keats believes that by giving, a person has gained rather than lost:

The flower, 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?#44

The conclusion, then, is to be ready to welcome whatever the generosity of our fellowmen might chance to bestow upon us. And of course to give of ourselves as much as we can, to give with "negative capability":

...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  
aimed 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 favours us with a visit--  
sap will be given us for meat and dew for drink. #45

Observe the joy Keats projects on thinking of this exchange of love and the spontaneous profundity of its expression. He then goes on to mention where he got these ideas:

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... #46

The need to love one another has been brought about by "the beauty of the morning." He has delivered himself to a long, deep gazing of nature; he has been idle and has derived this insight into life, not by reading books, but

by allowing natural beauty to illumine his whole being. And the revelation takes place. Beauty gives him insight into the mysteries of life. Beauty has brought about truth -a truth which, in this case, is the firm belief in love as the answer to real harmonious and creative living. Through love "Humanity...would become a grand democracy of Forest trees!"<sup>47</sup>

A little over a year later, when he wrote "Ode to a Nightingale," his ideas had changed. He had not lost his faith in love but he was less optimistic about its fulfillment. Life had been especially hard for him during those fourteen months. In February 1818, when he wrote to Reynolds, he had finished "Endymion" and was copying it for the press, and though he was not satisfied with it, he had developed a strong confidence in his capability as a poet. Naturally he was happy about it and was ready to devote his life to poetry. Most of 1817 had been a self-imposed test on his poetic powers; this "trial of invention"<sup>48</sup> had been successful and given evidence of his strong, resolute character. Keats was no weakling, far from it. He was a tough poet who engaged himself in formidable projects and was able to persevere until he finished them.

But there was a limit to his endurance. And the period from February 1818 to May 1819 partly broke through it.

Not that Keats had had an easy and uneventful life before 1818. On the contrary, we should remember the early death of his parents -his father died when he was nine and his mother when he was fourteen- who themselves were not paragons of parental affection. The only relative left was his grandmother, a dynamic and loving woman, but she died when he had just turned nineteen. Away from his two younger brothers and sister, he was apprenticed for four or five years to a London hospital which was never quite to his liking. Constant death and separation had inlaid in his nature a sense of isolation and loneliness. So his optimism of early 1818 did not stem from a life free of problems and pressures, rather his lonely early years, deprived of the warmth of a home, made him perceive more clearly the value of that which he lacked: love. And the assertion that he was a tough poet as well as an extraordinarily strong man is, in part, proved by the fact that hardships had not turned him into a pessimist, a gloomy brooder of life. His attachments to life were strong and multiple to be destroyed by pain. This was true, to a certain extent, for 1818 and early 1819.

Keats never lost either his love for life or his passion for beauty. But constant blows did hit Keats strongly, whose strength faltered and his refreshing optimism diminished to give way to the painful feelings in



"Ode to a Nightingale," which, however, were balanced by the happy world depicted in "Grecian Urn," to be discussed in the next chapter, and by the confidence the poet reflected in "Ode to Psyche," which preceded the writing of "Nightingale".

The poetic value of "Ode to Psyche" resides in its last thirty lines -the complete ode has 67. The first forty lines show that Keats had not developed a plan to convey the story since the structure is loose and many lines are mere fillers. Being the first of the odes, its hesitant and faulty composition is easily understood. Psyche had not been quite worshipped as a goddess. The poet, with his fondness for myth, gives himself the task of being her worshipper. He will be her priest and as such will build her sanctuary in "some untrodden region of" his "mind:"

Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane  
 In some untrodden region of my mind,  
 Where branched thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain,  
 Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind:  
 Far, far around shall those dark-cluster'd trees  
 Fledge the wild-ridged mountains steep by steep;  
 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,  
 With all the gardener Fancy e'er could feign,  
 Who breeding flowers, will never breed the same  
 And there shall be for thee all soft delight  
 That shadowy thought can win  
 A bright torch, and a casement ope at night,  
 To let the warm Love in! 49

His thoughts are "branched thoughts" which shows Keats's

awareness of nature as well as his capacity to project himself into a given thing and partake of its nature; the intensity of this selfless-reaching causes him "pleasant pain." The lines that follow describe the setting where the sanctuary will be; "gardener Fancy" will be at work, and as it was observed before, fancy for Keats is the creator of supreme beauty. Once the atmosphere of beauty has been established, the conclusion follows, a bit too briskly though: "To let the warm Love in!"

The opposite approach is followed in "Nightingale:" Keats writes about the evils threatening humanity to emphasize the need for love and beauty. The bird "among the leaves,"<sup>50</sup> besides being a real nightingale, is a symbol of natural beauty. The beauty that captivates Keats and makes him cry: "Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget/ What thou among the leaves hast never known."<sup>51</sup> The nightingale is viewed as a privileged being as it lives all its days around beautiful open green spaces, not polluted by society: "The weariness, the fever, and the fret/ Here..."<sup>52</sup> This is certainly a different way of approaching the world from the one he had in February 1818, when the world was a forest with very few trees, but the possibility of reforesting it was not remote. However, in 1819, with no home of his own to turn to, and in spite of the love of his friends, Keats felt a deep estrangement from the world. His early feeling of isola-

tion had been intensified by the fact that his brother George had left for a settlement in Kentucky, his brother Tom had died in December 1818, his young sister Fanny was away at a school she disliked and her guardian did not tolerate Keats's visits which had to be cut down. On top of all this, he was troubled by lack of money -money he had, but was not allowed to make use of by his dishonest guardian.

His friends were a vital source of life for the affectionate poet. And he had been disappointed and depressed by petty difficulties among them. Leigh Hunt talked patronizingly about Keats's poetry, and lied when he told their small literary group of friends that he himself had guided Keats in writing "Endymion." Haydon and Hunt were engaged in constant rebukes and petty fights; Haydon was playing the big benefactor of beginning painters -but it all amounted to nothing for all of a sudden he decided not to give any help if he did not get money for it. This was upsetting to kind-natured Keats, who was trying to deny himself to understand others, who would lend his allowance to his needy friends when he himself had to travel on the outside of coaches to save money. He interpreted these lies and quarrels as <sup>being</sup> basically motivated by a lack of generosity. The world was inhabited by men who did not understand love and beauty, and who were not interested in understanding them. He viewed humanity as a place "where men sit and hear each other groan."<sup>53</sup> Self-centred, men

could not do anything but "groan" at each other. The possibility of communication was being not only rejected, but destroyed.

His fatal illness was also manifested in the Summer of 1818 during the walking tour to Scotland. As it has been observed, he engaged in such a trip with the expectation that close contact with nature would be of benefit to his poetic perception. There is no doubt, as accounted in his letters, that the trip was revealing and inspiring. But in July he caught a violent a violent cold with throat ulcers in the Isle of Mull, and was forced to go back to Hampstead. However, he was not, or did not want to show it, totally disappointed. He was coming back with the hope of finding himself a job as a writer "on the liberal side."<sup>54</sup> Not that he was very eager to write anything that was not poetry, but he needed the money and was willing to earn it. But as it turned out, he returned only to find his brother Tom dying of consumption. Keats nursed him for three and a half months of agonizing pain until Tom died on December 1. A clear reference is made in that same third stanza of "Ode to a Nightingale:" "Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,/  
Where youth grows pale and spectre-thin, and dies."<sup>55</sup> Keats, a sturdy looking man, and very much given to physical exercise, felt strongly the decaying energy of his brother. And, under the influence of this trying period of his life, he

sees man either worn out -"a few, sad, last gray hairs"- or young, but run down -"spectre-thin"- and inevitably fated to a premature death. It is the lack of man's will to oppose destruction, his lack of inner intensity in facing himself and the world, which makes desire to "dissolve and quite forget."<sup>56</sup>

The world created in the third stanza turns gradually into a micro-cosmos, "where but to think is to be full of sorrow/ And leaden-eyed despairs."<sup>57</sup> Analytic mental process leads man to sad thoughts; in other words, thinking will not help man in anyway, because it either makes man arrive at answers which are unsuitable to humanity's real needs or his thinking is turned to mere brooding over the miseries of the world, as he himself is doing.

The tone of the last two lines of the stanza is that of the man whose highest values have been disregarded, destroyed, trod upon unmercifully. Humanity has forgotten its true nature, its true goals and is pestered with weariness, with meaningless frets; humanity has destroyed the possibility of communication. Man is disintegrating physically, mentally and spiritually. It is a world "Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes/  
Or new Love pine at them beyond tomorrow."<sup>58</sup> In the midst of this chaos, there is no room for beauty which in the poem is personified as perishing languidly with humid eyes. By "new love" the poet means just-born, a love that is beginning to grow is killed in the bud. For love, which is also person-

ified, has turned callous, insensitive; it can not "pine" at the "lustrous eyes" of dying "Beauty." In this disintegration of the world, which Keats presents, beauty is dead, and love does not exist for it can not even mourn for the destruction of beauty. Love has forfeited its essence, and therefore love no longer is.

The human harmony Keats so much struggles for is perceived, in this period of his life, as unreachable. Therefore the only thing to do is to escape from it. These last two lines: "Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes, / or new Love pine at them beyond tomorrow,"<sup>59</sup> summarize the evils of the world, in the Keatsian conception. Without love and beauty, Keats no longer desires to live in such a place, for there is not even the possibility of struggling to instill life in them. As a result, the poet wishes to "fade far away" to a world where love and beauty can exist. And he finds this loving, beautiful world in nature, and through a creature of nature: the nightingale.

Therefore, as has been observed, the attachment Keats has for natural beauty results in the acquisition of truth, or a series of truths which by degrees make him arrive at the conclusion that love should be man's highest goal. His delight at the sight of a beautiful spot takes on a deeper meaning when Keats's ability to "annihilate the self"<sup>60</sup> allows him to experience nature, not as an object, but as a partaker

of its identity. This empathic relationship with nature provides him with a truer awareness, so to speak, of the beauty of nature. Out of his empathic relationship with nature, Keats arrives at a double consideration. The first one is that natural beauty can, and in fact does, stimulate his attachments with the world. This is the main realisation he is led into: beauty is a source of love. The second consideration, growing out of the first, is that natural beauty as a generator of love is only too brief. It is then that the mutability of natural beauty makes him seek more durable sources of love. Art provides him with an answer. Natural beauty has so stimulated him that he feels he must render the experience in poetry. Writing poetry is, therefore, the logical sequence to his encounter with beauty in its natural manifestation. Furthermore, through poetry he will create undecaying beauty, thus making available eternal sources of love for mankind to "greet with the spirit."<sup>61</sup>

CHAPTER III  
LOVE OF POETRY

In April 1817, Keats wrote to Reynolds from the Isle of Wight: "I find that I cannot exist without poetry- without eternal poetry- half the day will not do -I began with a little, but habit has made me a Leviathan..."<sup>1</sup> This was the first day of the self-imposed seclusion to prove his powers as a writer, what he called a "trial of invention."<sup>2</sup> His love for poetry had been intense from the beginning; for poetry he had abandoned his profession as an apothecary, left his brothers and friends and set off for Wight where he intended to write "Endymion" in his effort to give permanence to beauty.

The transitoriness of natural beauty, for Keats, could be overcome by the imagination. This was part of his poetic creed. Through poetry he wanted to capture impressions of beauty and free them of their vital essence. Beauty was, the way he perceived it, either gone, destroyed by the process of time, or preserved by art. In "Robin Hood" he mourns the death of legend and legendary characters; "the old bow-string,"<sup>3</sup> "the woods unshorn,"<sup>4</sup> "the archer keen,"<sup>5</sup> "tight little John," Robin Hood and Marian in spite of all their energetic beauty have disappeared by the remorselessness of time. It is only poetry that can bring to life "...their minutes buried all/Under the down-trodden pall/ Of the leaves of many years."<sup>7</sup>



In "Nightingale" and the "Grecian Urn" man's vitality is contrasted with the unvital existence of a piece of art and, as discussed later, with the worble of a bird made eternal by the poet. In reference to the figures on the urn, B. Ifor Evans says that they

are symbols of action which stimulate the mind to imaginative experience. If instead of those shapes we had the living counterparts of which they are the image, the music would pass, the loves die, the joy be made bitter by regret; but on the urn they are "unravish'd," perpetual figures... by which the perdurability of the affections arising for the imagination is maintained... 8

This is a different type of perception from that of sensual or mental cognizance. Instead it is the "imagination projecting itself into certain situations....working up its imaginary feelings to the height of reality" to use the remark Keats had enthusiastically quoted from Hazlitt.

Walter J. Bate has called "world of process"<sup>10</sup> that gradual transformation of growth into decay which every living creature is subject to. We know Keats wanted to stop this "process" or as Bate puts it: "...to possess the past and future in distillation while at the same time the present is fully experienced and retained."<sup>11</sup> The urn is an example of this; its unvital existence satisfies Keats's desire for durability: "foster-child of silence and slow time."<sup>12</sup> The beauty of the urn is eternal and "canst thus express/  
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme;<sup>13</sup> the urn  
is both a teller -a "sylvan historian"<sup>14</sup> - and an

inspirer of more songs, Keats's ode one of them. In acknowledging the urn, Keats fulfils it in a double way: first, he absorbs its beauty and, second, he projects it to us. In absorbing its beauty, the purpose for which the urn was created has been fulfilled. The artist who made it gave shape to his inspiration in the beauty of the urn, whose existence has transcended time, projecting itself into the future - Keats's present. But in this case, not only is the beauty being "seized," but it is stimulating the creativity of the admirer who in turn derives beauty from that of the urn: Keats's ode. As an immortal "sylvan historian", the urn has recorded one event: the existence of the urn itself. Both the urn and the ode are oblivious of the "world of process". Keats's plum-tree, in his house in Hampstead, lost its leaves every winter, leaving "a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd".<sup>15</sup> But the boughs in the ode are "happy, happy boughs" because they "cannot shed" their leaves "nor ever bid the Spring adieu" - their joys are not "spoilt by use".<sup>16</sup>

A slight shift is taken in "Nightingale". In this ode the bird leads the poet away from the painful "world of process" - "where youth grows pale and dies" - <sup>17</sup> but for that matter, the nightingale itself - a living creature of nature - must die. The urn, an object outside the destroying influence of vital life, is timeless while a nightingale is as mortal as any living creature, unless it is divested of its mortal quality, as it happens in

this case. The transformation takes place even before the poem begins, for when the bird is introduced in the poem it is already endowed with the same timeless existence as that of the urn, or to be exact with that of the figures engraved on the urn. Keats has given these figures a major quality, happiness:

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 enjoyed,  
For ever panting, and for ever young; <sup>18</sup>

The boughs, the melodist, love, the three are viewed as happy. Keats clearly emphasizes this aspect of their nature, otherwise he would not have used the same adjective six times in five lines. Their happiness stems from their immortality, which is quite stressed too - in the seven lines the idea of eternity is made recurrent by the five repetitions of "for ever" and of "nor ever". In the first stanza of "Nightingale", the bird also is referred to as happy:

'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot  
 But being too happy in thine happiness - <sup>19</sup>  
 That thou ... Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

Both odes were written the same month, in fact one right after the other, so there is no reason to believe Keats had changed his mind about the meaning of this adjective.

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\*Italics mine

Therefore, since Keatsian happiness is partly identified with timeless existence, it is not far-fetched to conceive the nightingale as an immortal bird. Besides, a few months before Keats had written in "Bards of Passion" about an imaginary world

Where the nightingale doth sing  
Not a senseless, tranced thing,  
But a divine melodious truth;  
Philosophic numbers smooth;  
Tales and golden histories 20  
Of heaven and its mysteries.

which illustrates that the idea of an immortal nightingale was not foreign to Keats's mind.

In stanza VII the nightingale is openly called immortal: "Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!" 21 The capitalization of "bird" particularizes the nightingale from the rest of its species. The only other time in the poem Keats addresses the nightingale, he calls it "light-winged Dryad," 22 he is also careful to capitalize the noun. "The immortal Bird" projects its existence as the urn, into the future and the past.

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. 23

The nightingale is then a manifestation of natural life which reaches timeless existence. The fact that Keats

gave timeless existence to a natural creature stands for his eagerness to eternalize beauty.

Since natural beauty, as a source of love does not last enough, Keats approached art as a way to preserve beauty, when he discovered he could write, he set at it with the intention of giving birth to, or developing love in humanity.

As early as 1816, in "Sleep and Poetry" Keats defines the object and character of poetry: "... the great end/ of Poesy should be a friend/ To sooth the cares and lift the thoughts of man." 24 Thus, in the most strict Keatsian terms, the goal of poetry is "to sooth" humanity's suffering, in other words, to provide the means of relieving the effect of destructive living in a world where "there is no light". 25 But poetry should be more than a palliative, says the romantic poet, for it should "lift the thoughts of man". 26 It is a two-fold goal: consolation, and, at the same time, stimulus to make man improve himself. Keats affirms clearly his belief in the strength of poetry to shake man to a new awakening: "A drainless shower/ of light is poesy; 'tis the supreme of power..." 27 The resources of poetry are "drainless," and powerful enough to enlighten man. Notice how he insists on identifying poetry as a giver of light, as a bringer of a clearer awareness of what man can achieve. However, the true value of poetry does not reside in its strength:

The very archings of her eye-lids charm  
 A thousand willing agents to obey,  
 And still she governs with the mildest sway:  
 But strength alone though of the Muses born  
 Is like a fallen angel: trees uptorn,  
 Darkness, and worms, and shrouds, and sepulchres  
 Delight it; for it feeds upon the burrs  
 And thorns of life.... 28

Power may be destructive also. Satan, the "fallen angel" of Christianity, uses its power to destroy. "trees uptorn" are not only lifeless, as the wood in furniture is, they are dead. They have been dispossessed of their life by a murdering force. And the imagery of death and decay are added unto this murky picture: "Darkness, and worms, and shrouds, and sepulchres..." 29. This negative influence of poetry on the reader is due to the fact that it has been inspired, fed "... upon the burrs,/ And **thorns of life...**" automatically betraying "the great end of poesy". Beauty would not "keep her lustrous eyes" 30 which veiled - negated - could not effect its soothing influence and inspire creative acts to men.

A romantic character could be attacked on many grounds. Irrational, unrealistic, excessive, are some of the labels given to the romantic. Nonetheless it would be hard to doubt romantic sincerity since spontaneity is one of its defining characteristics. The ideas and feelings of a romantic flow uncalculated, free. So it is only natural for Keats to regard sincerity and honesty very highly. In his verse epistle to George he tells him:

The patriot shall feel  
 My stern alarum, and unsheath his steel;  
 Or, in the senate thunder out my numbers  
 To startle princes from their easy slumbers. 31

The message of these ardent lines carries as much meaning nowadays as it did when he wrote them. The patriot is likely to lose only too soon sight of his ideals. Almost surely Keats had in mind the French revolution with its aftermath which he considered -with the rest of the romantics, except perhaps for Byron - unnecessary cruelty. It is well known the disappointment these English poets went through when - in their anxiety - the revolution did not give immediate harmonious results. Short-sighted of the cruel scenes that a revolution involves, the romantics felt that the leaders -'the patriots'- had forgotten their humanitarian goals and been transformed into blood-thirsty creatures. So Keats's poetry, not in "alarum" but in "stern alarum," would remind the leader of the honesty necessary for the pursuit of his objectives and "unsheath his steel" in defence of justice and freedom. Dishonest rulers would hear Keats's voice "to startle" them "from their easy slumbers." His poetry would "lift the thoughts of man" from the easy comfort of accepting passively a given situation, just because it was easier to accept than to improve.

Wise men would profit too. His poetry would make them wiser and kindle in them the "fire" of conviction needed to

arise their pupils:

The sage will mingle with each moral theme  
My happy thoughts sententious; he will teem  
With lofty periods when my verses fire him. " 32

Keats, the poet, will be dead, but not destroyed:

What though I leave this dull, and earthly mould,  
Yet shall my spirit loft converse hold  
With after times. 33

His poetry will speak for him, but he will not be absent  
for "... then I'll stoop from heaven to inspire him." 34

Wise men, patriots, princes will be reached and inspired  
to make a better world. It is Keats's "stern alarm". It  
is the "strong" component of poetry, but as Keats says  
in "Sleep and Poetry", poetry is "mingled indeed with what  
is sweet and strong".<sup>35</sup> And in his youthful lines to  
George he says:

Lays have I left of much a dear delight  
That maids will sing them on their bridal night. 36

This is the inevitable "sweet" component of friend-poetry.  
Friendship, in fact, is also present in Keat's idea of what  
poetry should be and is a cause of mirth and merry-making:

Gay villagers, upon a morn of May  
When they have tired their gentle limbs with play,  
And form'd a snowy circle on the grass,  
And plac'd in midst of all that lovely lass  
Who chosen is their queen, -with her fine head  
Crowned with flowers purple, white, and red:  
For there the lily, and the musk-rose, sighing,  
Are emblems true of hapless lovers dying:  
Between her breasts, that never yet felt trouble,  
A bunch of violets full blown, and double,  
Serenely sleep: -she from a casket takes  
A little book, - and then a joy awakes  
About each youthful heart, - with stifled cries,



And rubbing of white hands, and sparkling eyes:  
 For she's to read a tale of hopes, and fears;  
 One that I foster'd in my youthful years:  
 The pearls, than on each glist'ning circlet sleep,  
 Gush ever and anon with silent creep,  
 Lured by the innocent dimples 37

A friend, for Keats, is soothing and tender. Keats wants his poetry to be a love companion, and he does not forget motherly love:

To sweet rest  
 Shall the dear babe, upon its mother's breast,  
 Be lull'd with songs of mine 38

As Keats grows aware that the function of poetry is to give love - a creative activity leading to honesty, zeal, mirth, consolation and motherly affection, in short, to human harmony - he is taken up by rapture:

Fair world, adieu!  
 Thy dales, and hills, are fading from my view:  
 Swiftly I mount, upon wide spreading pinions,  
 Far from the narrow bounds of my dominions.  
 Full joy I feel, while thus I cleave the air,  
 That my soft verse will charm thy daughters fair,  
 And warm thy sons!" 39

But these are plans, ideals to fulfil. Upon the realisation of them, Keats will fulfill his nature; writing poetry is his function in society, and only through it would he be "dearer" to humanity:

Ah, my dear friend and brother,  
 Could I, at once, my mad ambition smother,  
 For tasting joys like these, sure I should be  
 Happier, and dearer to society. 40

"I find there is no worthy pursuit but the idea of doing some good for the world" 41. The date is April 24,

.818. He has just finished Endymion and is convinced that poetry is his means of leaving his trace in the world.

People do it in a variety of ways:

...some do it with their society - some with their wit - some with their benevolence - some with a sort of power of conferring pleasure and good humour on all they meet and in a thousand ways all equally dutiful to the command of Great Nature - there is but one way for me - the road lies through application study and thought. I will pursue it and to that end purpose retiring for some years. I have been hovering for some time between an exquisite sense of the luxurious and a love for Philosophy - were I calculated for the former I should be glad - but as I am not I shall turn all my soul to the latter. 42

One of these are chance thoughts. Over a year later he writes to Reynolds:

I am convinced more and more day by day that fine writing is next to fine doing, the top thing in the world, the Paradise Lost becomes a greater wonder. 43

No separation can be made between the man and the poet - not at least in Keats - but he, the remarkable poet, is also a remarkable man. He is one of those men acutely aware of the need to give of himself, to help, to understand. In order to do this, he had to overcome his own selfishness, his desires, when these interfered with his goals; and he lost his own identity to become one with the universe. He was one of those few men who really conquered themselves through love. He went through tremendous struggles in order to keep his faith in the world which, he once wrote to

Bailey, "is malignant enough to chuckle at the most honorable simplicity - and that Idea makes me sick of it" 44. He loved life and humanity not because they had constantly been on his side, for they had not. He was fatally ill, and "society" many times nasty and aggressive. But his faith in the goodness of life was too rooted to be upturned by the "malignance" of the world. Bailey commented after his death that "he was uniformly the apologist for poor, frail human nature" 45. It is not then surprising that Keats wrote to help his readers. In his letters, he seems to be trying to give what he feels the friend he is writing to may be needing at that particular moment:

I wish I knew always the humour my friends would be in at opening a letter of mine, to suit it to them as nearly as possible. I could always find an egg shell for Melancholy and as for Merriment a Witty humour will turn any thing to Account - My heart is sometimes in such a whirl in considering the million likings and antipathies of our Moments - that I can get into no settle strain in my Letters - 46  
(To Reynolds. July 1818)

This is also reflected in the way he refers to people:  
"I like the Scotchman best because he is less of a bore - I like the Irishman best because he ought to be more comfortable" 47

Basically the poets he likes best are those who, he believes, put their poetry to humanitarian purposes, those who endured great suffering and still succeeded in

writing, and of course those whose poetry is musical and evokes the mysterious. In his "Epistle to G.F. Mathew" he refers to "that warm-hearted Shakespeare,"<sup>48</sup> and expresses his delight at finding a place to "sit, and rhyme and think of Chaterton;"<sup>49</sup> he invites Mathew to "moralize on Milton's blindness"<sup>50</sup> - the effort Milton went through to write his poetry must have made quite an impression on Keats- and requests Mathew's aid " To find a place where I may greet the maid-/ Where we may soft humanity put on;"<sup>51</sup> He desires to write poetry -"greet the maid" - with the purpose of singing of humanity. Humanity is viewed as "soft humanity," but notice the contrast that occurs a few lines later :

And mourn the fearful dearth of human kindness  
 To those who strove with the bright golden wing  
 Of genius, to flap away each sting  
 Thrown by the pitiless world...  
 ... Felton! without incitements such as these,  
 How vain for me the niggard Muse to tease:... 52

which shows that although he perceives a "fearful dearth of human kindness" and that the world may be "a pitiless world" it is still a "soft humanity". He is aware of the existing evils. His reaction is to do something to counteract the destructive forces that prevail. Love, the highest creative activity, was the answer, the truth, he ventured against this disintegrated coexistence :

I am certain of nothing but the holiness of  
 the Heart's affections and the truth of  
 Imagination. ( To Bailey, Nov. 22, 1817) 53

Keats's conception of truth is something that has teased all students and scholars who have analysed his poetry. Undoubtedly some of the puzzlement has derived from the fact that, when critics refer to truth, they think of it as a concept. When Keats used the word "truth" he was not using it in its most generalized meaning, that is, in the sense of something liable to be verified by analytic thinking. The question should not be what the concept of truth is, but what his conception of it is. Truth and Love, in Keats's subjective judgement, are closely related, for he believed that love was the deepest truth mankind could follow. In other words, what Keats believed about truth was his own and particular way of interpreting the word:

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. (To Bailey, Nov. 22, 1817)<sup>54</sup>

We have mentioned the role that imagination plays in Keats's process of remembrance. He will bring back to his memory the beauty of a thing. Through his imagination - "greeting of the spirit" - he will make the memory more complete and more beautiful. Should we have to identify imagination in Keatsian terms, it would be a sense -yes, like the traditional five- or one more way of perceiving and comprehending. In his conception whatever is "known" through the imagination as beautiful, is called truth:

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 consequitive reasoning -and yet it must be. Can it be that even the greatest Philosopher ever arrived at this goal without putting aside numerous objections. However it may be, O for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts! 55

In short, it is a different form of cognizance. Here are the poet's words exemplifying his conception of truth:

...The simple imaginative Mind may have its rewards in the repeti [ti] on of its own silent Working coming continually on the Spirit with a fine Suddenness -to compare great things with small- have you never by being Surprised with an old Melody -in a delicious place- by a delicious voice, felt over again your very Speculations and Surmises at the time it first operated on your Soul -do you not remember forming to yourself the singer's face more beautiful [for than] it was possible and yet with the elevation of the Moment you did not think so -even then you were mounted on the Wings of Imagination so high -that the Prototype must be here after- that delicious face you will see. 56

In November 1818 in one of his voluminous letters to George and Georgiana, he calls the imagination a "perceptive power":

I never can feel certain of any truth but from a clear perception of its Beauty -and I find myself very young minded even in that perceptive power -which I hope will increase - 57

What is extremely interesting is the fact that it is a power that can be developed. A few lines later he expresses his preference for some Italian frescos which appeared "finer to me than more accomplished works- as there was left so much room for Imagination." 58 In a letter to Bailey (Oct.1817 )

he gives his judgement of Wordsworth's "Gypseys": " ... it is a kind of sketchy intellectual Landscape -not a search after Truth."<sup>59</sup> If one remembers that "I have the same Idea of all our Passions as of Love, they are all in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty,"<sup>60</sup> one arrives at a consideration which can rank among the Keatsian "axioms": poetry should be a search after truth - truth being "beauty seized by the Imagination,"<sup>61</sup> which he considers to be a source of love. A.C. Bradley states it quite well when he regards beauty as a need in the poet:

.. a poet, he [Keats]/felt, will never be able to rest in thoughts and reasonings which do not also satisfy imagination and give a truth which is also beauty; and in so far as they fail to do this, in so far as they are mere thoughts and reasonings, they are no more than a means, though a necessary means, to an end, which end is beauty, -that beauty which is also truth, This alone is the poet's end, and therefore his law. "With a great poet the sense of beauty overcomes every other consideration." Thought, knowledge, philosophy, if they fall short of this, are nothing but a "road" to his goal," 62

The last two lines of the "Grecian Urn" 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,' -that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."<sup>63</sup> make sense when approached with Keats's conception of truth. T.S. Eliot is right when he says of these lines that "The statement of Keats seems to me meaningless, or perhaps the fact that it is grammatically meaningless conceals another meaning for me."<sup>64</sup> He does not offer a possible explanation on the nature of this statement,

but his candid remark does make some sense, because the two lines are certainly devoid of meaning when they are approached grammatically or semantically. "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" has even been considered an "uneducated conclusion;" Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch remarks irritably that it is "a vague observation -to anyone whom life has taught to face facts and define his terms, actually an uneducated conclusion, albeit most pardonable in one so young and ardent."<sup>65</sup>

Sir Arthur forgets that among the poet's function is not the one of using language "to define terms." He is almost reproaching Keats for his lack of university education. Definition of terms and a college education are by no means the brand of a good poet, or essential to him, whose main job is to deconceptualize language in order to give it the unique power of expression that goes together when communication is aimed to the reader's total powers of perception.

The mystery of the last lines of the ode is increased by the fact that there are four different versions of them, but none is Keats's manuscript -unfortunately a manuscript in Keats's own handwriting does not survive. The four manuscripts available are copies of Keats's original. And even if the four original manuscripts had survived there would still be disagreement. The reason is that Keats was extremely careless about punctuation; as a proof we offer his letters where he only punctuates occasionally, especially by throwing dashes in between his thoughts. He himself



was conscious of his disregard for punctuation, as he expressed it in one of his letter to his editors when they asked Keats if they could punctuate a few lines of "Endymion" for the sake of clarity. This is why we risk the hypothesis that if the manuscripts survived they would probably differ in punctuation.

There are dozens of interpretations of the "Grecian Urn". Each one seems to satisfy only the critic who ventured the interpretation. Actually a common agreement on its meaning would be surprising -if not impossible-, rather than the variety of theses so far posed. W.J. Bate,<sup>66</sup> affirms that the real "truth" in the epigraph is the fact that every generation that views the urn is in the process of wasting, and living "in the midst of other woe / Than ours," which is a true consideration. He continues saying that the urn "Aloof from the brevity and sharp claims of human life..." is "...freer to advance the message it does in a way that no human being could confidently do, and yet, as a work of art, limited to the realm in which its message applies."<sup>67</sup>

Mr. Bate, as any other critic, is entitled to choose the version of the "Grecian Urn" that most suits his intuition - intuition in its strict psychological meaning: an unconscious and spontaneous reordering and re-arranging of information to arrive at new knowledge- but his assertion that the epigraph comes from the urn leads him to a con -

tradiction. He denies the veracity of the statement by saying that Keats was addressing society in terms which are obviously untrue and unreal: "...it is not all that man knows or needs to know..." This is true, the world is "in the midst of...woe" and as such knows about other things than "Beauty is truth." Keats could have contradicted himself. But it would be thinking very little of Keats if we believed he made a statement only to contradict it two lines later. It would have been too obvious to slip his mind; Keats could not have possibly been addressing humanity, not even through the urn. Mr Bate himself invalidates his own analysis. Middleton Murry is among the critics who feel the last line is addressed to the reader, but he differs from Bate by having Keats himself utter it.

Another possibility would be to take the epigraph "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" as a message from the urn to which Keats would answer: "...that is all/ Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." Robert M. Adams in his "Trompe-l'oeil in Shakespeare and Keats," which appeared in *Sewanee Review*, puts it in the form of an imaginary dialogue between Keats and the urn:

"It's enough for you to say, 'Truth and beauty are the same -that's your function in the world. But we who are men know this and something else too.'" 68

In addition to this critic, Mr G. St. Quintin also believes that Keats is speaking in the last line of this poem:

An alternative suggestion is to assume that the "ye" of the last line is addressed to the figures on the Urn. For them beauty is truth because their experience is limited to the beautiful as depicted on the Urn. As Keats points out in the second and third stanzas, they would have none of the drawbacks of the ordinary course of experience. The Urn's message, if addressed to the world in general, and if literally interpreted, is absurd; but the Urn remains "a friend to man" because when he contemplates it he can escape from the real world to the world of imagination, where Beauty is Truth. This interpretation, of course, requires that only the words "Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty" be printed in inverted commas, as in Professor de Selincourt's edition." 69

The interpretation of Messers Adams and St. Quintin seems to make more sense. The truth of the urn is its beauty, and since the urn is "a friend to man" the conclusion is obvious: beauty brings comfort to humanity, and giving comfort is a form of attachment.

It can be said, to summarize, that beauty, whether natural or artistic, for Keats is a way of finding truth. His own poetry is a search after truth, or a truth at least. The truth he discovered is that man's efforts should only be put to work in the pursuit of love. Honesty, mirth, consolation, tenderness, assistance, comfort through inspiration... these are the attitudes that make up the Keatsian conception of love. Poetry can do that for men, Keats ardently believed. The gifted young poet gave himself to poetry, his goal being to develop his own creative attitude towards life as well as that of his readers.

In the ode "Bards of Passion and of Mirth" he prays to



FLOSOPFIA  
Y LETRAS

70.

the souls of dead poets to come, not only to his assistance, but to the assistance of all living poets, so that they, in their turn, will be able to inspire men and kindle in them the search toward self-knowledge. Keats believed man could reach a state where his attitude towards himself and the world could be a creative one. Thus he prays to the souls of dead poets to:

Teach us, here, the way to find you...  
...Here, your earth-born souls still speak  
To mortals, of their little weck;  
Of their sorrows and delights;  
Of their passions and their spites;  
Of their glory and their shame;  
What doth strengthen and what maim. 70

He ends up the stanza by summing up what he requires from the dead poets:

Thus ye teach us every day  
Wisdom, though fled far away. 71

As a poet Keats derives wisdom from the poets of the past, the object being to inspire that same wisdom to his fellow men.

Love and beauty go together in Keats's microcosm. One can not exist without the other because they generate each other. "...I have the same Idea of all our Passions as of Love they are in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty" 72 Phrased differently, but developing the same idea he writes to James Rice on February 14, 1820:

... I think of green fields. I muse with the greatest affection on every flower I have Known from my infancy - their shapes and colours are as new to me as if I had just created them with a superhuman fancy. It is because they are

connected with the most thoughtless and happiest moments of our Lives. 73

A flower, for Keats a beautiful thing, draws forth his love, just as "Love" is "...creative of ... Beauty." While in St. Guy's Hospital he writes his epistle "To George Felton Mathew", a fellow student of his who also wrote poetry: "Sweet are the pleasures that to verse belong," 74 telling us of the excitement produced by his encounter with the beauty of art. But there is a more rewarding experience: the "pleasures" of poetry are sweet and "doubly sweet a brotherhood in song" 75 Beauty takes on a full significance when it is accompanied by love. They intertwine, they blend to give life its true nature. This "brotherhood in song" inspires in Keats an attitude of benevolence, and increases his strength to reach his ideals:

The thought of this great partnership diffuses  
Over the genius loving heart, a feeling  
Of all that's high, and great, and good, and healing. 76

Beauty and love give, increase each other reciprocally, thereby growing hand in hand. The fact that beauty has more meaning when it is related to love is evident in his sonnet "To My Brother George" in which he marvels at the exuberance of the world:

Many the wonders I this day have seen:  
The sun, when first he kist away the tears  
That fill'd the eyes of morn...  
...The ocean with its vastness, its blue green,  
Its ships, its rocks, its caves, its hopes, its fears... 77

and he ends the sonnet with a rhetorical question:

But what, without the social thought of thee,  
Would be the wonders of the sky and sea? 78

In a poor redundance, we could say that love - "the social thought of" his brother - has made beautiful things more beautiful. Perhaps less startling, but just as true in Keats, is the process beginning with beauty to end up in love. Such is the case in his love for Fanny Brawne.

...Why may I not speak of your Beauty, since  
without that I could never have lov'd you. I  
cannot conceive any beginning of such love as I  
have for you but Beauty. There may be a sort of  
Love for which, without the least sneer at it,  
I have the highest respect and can admire it in  
others; but it has not the richness, the bloom,  
the full form, the enchantment of love after my  
own heart. 79

In the third stanza of "Nightingale" Keats describes a cosmos desintegrating because of the absence of love and beauty. He will not dwell on it and escapes, aided by the fascination the nightingale exercises upon him and by his contemplation of natural beauty. But it is the beauty of "Poesy" that finally transports him from the painful world that is gradually poisoning him - the "drowsy numbness" produced by the symbolical hemlock.

Away! Away! for I will fly to thee,  
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,  
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,  
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards. 80

The flight to this imaginary world in the forest is not taken on Bacchus' chariot which together with the leopards suggest an image of voluptuous lubricity.

The exclamation, "Oh, for a life of sensations," 81 is not literal, not at least in the modern concept of sensation. Brute sensory experience must be selected and ordered, otherwise Keats would have been seeking refuge from a loveless world through transitory means. He does not dissolve his isolation through "orgiastic union" 82 to put it in Frommian terms, that is, it is not the chaos "Bacchus and his pards" offer which Keats sought. Rather it is the "viewless wings of Poesy" that have transported the poet to the world of the nightingale. The first things he notices are the tenderness of the night and especially the light coming from the moon.

Already with thee! tender is the night,  
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,  
Gluster'd around by all her starry Fays... 83

The sounds are really "an echo to the sense". The hard sounds of the first lines: the [ei] in "away"! away!, [ai] in "I" and "fly" and the [i] in "thee", the open [a] in "charioted", "Bacchus", and "pards" show the energy of his feelings - the reader can hear the shouts of an anxious travelling man urging the carriage horses to run faster. Notice the strong contrast between these sounds and those of the first line. The combination of [l], [n], [r], [ʃ], [θ], [t] and [d] make the line sound as a whisper, conveying the surprise and the ecstasy operated on the poet. This is followed by a digression to the world of the previous stanza:

But there is no light,  
 Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown  
 Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways 84

It is perhaps in this fourth stanza that Keats uses the short iambic trimeter more effectively than in the other seven stanzas the ode is made up of. Its conciseness makes it intensely powerful. And what it conveys - the lack or absence of light - is most relevant, since the two opposing worlds differ in that the world of the nightingale has light while the oppressing reality is dark. The two lines that follow are of high poetic excellence. Its leading sounds are dry short vowels [ə], [ɪ], and [ə] (as in from, heaven, is, with, verdurous and winding) evoking weariness. The gloomy [ou] in "blown", alternated with [a], [u], [ʌ], [s] and [z] suggests the sound of the "breezes blown"; the [m] and [n] stretch the sound, like the reverberation of a funeral bell. All these sounds, plus the intonation these two lines require, give them the sad musicality of a dirge. Thus Keats has used mourning music to show the gradual death of the world, where we "live" in darkness, as he emphasizes it in stanza V.

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,  
 Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,  
 But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet  
 Wherewith the seasonable month endows  
 The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;  
 White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;  
 Fast fading violets 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. 85



The absence of beauty makes the world gloomy and depressing. It is a world of decay, of desintegration; men are not loving and are therefore destroying themselves. Through artistic beauty - the "viewless wings of Poesy", and the immortal nightingale - Keats reaches love - where there is light, warmth, order, in short all that creative activity suggests and that he shows in this poem by contrast of absence.

The odes "On a Grecian Urn" and "To Psyche" are radically different from "Nightingale"; while in the latter he shows the outcome of the absence of beauty and love, in the former two he depicts beings in possession of beauty, as are the lovers on the urn:

Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave  
 Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;  
 Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss,  
 Though winning near the goal - yet, do not grieve;  
 She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,  
 For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair! 86

The happiness of both lovers stems from two facts: the first lies in their eternal existence. The second fact is double one. On one side the lovers are described as being beautiful and surrounded by natural beauty, and on the other they can love, but they love eternally. The essence of the urn is its eternal beauty - beauty is all the urn needs to know - which, like the figures, will always be loved. This is why Keats refers to it as "a friend to man", because its own nature will bring forth love to whoever is able to perceive its beauty. It is suggestive to remark

that in this eternalization of love and beauty, a sacrifice is about to be offered. There is an altar, a "mysterious priest" 87 and a garlanded heifer "lowing at the skies". 88 Would it be far-fetched to include eternal adoration to a deity in this picture of happiness? There is no sufficient evidence in the poem to elaborate on this hypothesis, and Keats was not basically interested in religious matters as to bring them up in his poetry. However it is thrilling to think that perhaps this altogether appealing and pagan sacrifice is being offered in exchange for a miracle: the eternity of love and beauty.

CHAPTER IV  
THE LOVELESS WORLD OF "ISABELLA"

The appeal the Middle Ages had for the romantics naturally had to affect the early XIX century literature. Keats, as well as the other poets of his time, was doubly interested in medieval institutions. He was first fascinated by its remote mysterious exoticism and, second, he saw in its oppressive institutions a powerful device to frame the conflicts strangling the men of his day. In "Isabella" or "The Pot of the Basil," Keats joins both societies, the medieval and his own, through the destructive power they project towards spontaneous and natural attachment. Not that "Isabella" is a typical case of courtly love with all its characteristics, but there are enough elements in it that together do more than sketch the nature of the feudal attitude towards love and marriage. Establishing a parallel between both epochs should not be wrongly interpreted as an assertion that courtly love was still prevalent in the England of George III, after, more than three centuries separated both societies, and Keats firmly believed that humanity was slowly but gradually improving itself.

In the Middle Ages the official union of a young couple was only supposed to bring forth social as well as economic

welfare to the families of the bride and groom. That love had no relation to marriage was common knowledge to any young boy or girl. They got married to fulfill a duty imposed by their elders; whether they knew or liked the person they were going to marry was irrelevant. To abide by the established code was the commandment. And individual satisfaction came next, if not last. In 1174 a court of love in the house of the Countess of Champagne passed on a judgement:

We declare and affirm, by the tenour of these presents that love cannot extend its rights over two married persons. For indeed lovers grant one another all things mutually and freely, without being impelled by any motive of necessity, whereas husband and wife are held by their duty to submit their wills to each other and to refuse each other nothing.

May this judgment, which we have delivered with extreme caution, and after consulting with a great number of other ladies be for you a constant and unassailable truth.... 1

But no edict can direct the human need for attachment. Out of this brutal repression, courtly love sprang. Marriage, a business contract in the Middle Ages, was the only existing reality towards which the overt expectations of man and woman could turn. A religious wedding followed by a quiet submission from the wife and mutual public respect was what marriage added up to. As far as betrothal was concerned this inharmonious set up was what society recognized as reality. "Whatever turns into a reality is no longer love" 2 So, the easily understood dissatisfaction of the human nature

began to seek compensation through fantasy and daydreaming. Both men and women began to secretly cherish anyone they thought compatible with their nature, thus indicating their yearnings for attachment. But these lovers were pressed to remain apart most of the time, so they really did not know each other. A quick frightened glance and some kind of fetiche in token of their secret love was, for the most part, all they could share. A stolen kiss here and there was sometimes completed with physical union; the secrecy of courtly love was relative, as the spouses frequently knew what was going on, but pretended not to know anything about it.

However, whether the lovers were sexually involved or not, what they did have to face was habitual separation. And custom made of separation a way of life with the inevitable result that the lovers must leave to their imagination the filling of the gaps that daily living would have otherwise filled, idealization of the love object developed as a result. They were not loving anyone in particular but someone in general, in the abstract - someone their own minds had created, but who did not really exist. This is proved by the fact that most of the troubadours' descriptions of their ladies fall into a pattern.

Courtly lovers do not love one another. They could not possibly since they did not know each other: "What they love is love and being in love".<sup>3</sup> Even more, they do not enjoy being together. This is no wonder; it must

have been quite frustrating to be with someone they did not know and whose real presence clashed with the ideal image they had been cherishing all the time. Their passionate dreams were actually more rewarding. Denis de Rougemont says of Tristan and Iseult and of all courtly lovers that:

Their need of one another is in order to be aflame, and they do not need one another as they are. What they need is not one another's presence, but one another's absence. "Thus the partings of the lovers are dictated by their passion itself, and by the love they bestow on their passion rather than on its satisfaction or on its living object. (That is why the Romance ["Tristan and Iseult"] abounds in obstructions, why when mutually encouraging their joint dream in which each remains solitary they show such astounding indifference, and why events work up in a romantic climax to a fatal apotheosis.)"<sup>4</sup>

"Fair Isabel, poor simple Isabel!" is the first line of the romance. Its simple repetitive composition with the long stressed vowel sounds announces the beginning of a medieval story with the echoes of its charming plainness. Immediately the situation is established: Isabel is in love with "Lorenzo, a young palmer in Love's eye!" but their love is not approved.

They could not in the self-same mansion dwell  
 Without some stir of heart, some malady;  
 ... They could not, sure, beneath the same roof sleep  
 But to each other dream, and nightly weep. 5

They love each other at a distance, they have but the faintest

idea what each one is really like, but their attraction develops into a passion ever present in their dreams.

With every morn their love grew tenderer,  
 With every eve deeper and tenderer still;  
 He might not in house, field, or garden stir,  
 But her full shape would all his seeing fill;  
 And his continual voice was pleasanter  
 To her, than noise of trees or hidden rill;  
 Her lute-string gave an echo of his name,  
 She spoilt her half-done broidery with the same. 6

It is the obsession of the courtly lovers whose whole existence is centered upon someone they do not know, though they think they do, especially because of their exchange of looks:

He knew whose gentle hand was at the latch  
 Before the door had given her to his eyes;  
 And from her chamber-window he would catch  
 Her beauty farther than the falcon spies;  
 And constant as her vespers would he watch,  
 Because her face was turn'd to the same skies;  
 And with sick longing all the night outwear,  
 To hear her morning-step upon the stair. 7

They pine in mutual longing: "A whole long month of May in this sad plight/ Made their cheeks paler by the break of June:" But they do not do anything about it, thus prolonging their agony; Lorenzo is shy and afraid of rejection and in spite of her warm glances he lets days pass by without trying to approach her. Keats stresses Lorenzo's passive acceptance of suffering: "... but, alas,/ Honeyless days and days did he let pass." 8

Their love is recurrently mixed with suffering. She falls sick and he views the disclosure of their love as an occasion to "drink her tears." 9 Rougemont in his

superb study of courtly love quotes a diary of a romantic lover:

"When pain is being shunned, that is a sign that one no longer wants to love. Whoever loves must everlastingly remain aware of the surrounding void, and keep the wound open. May God grant that I shall preserve this pain which is exquisitely dear to me..." 10

It is the same pathos Lorenzo reveals when he finally speaks to her of his love:

"O Isabella, I can half perceive  
That I may speak my grief into thine ear;  
If thou didst ever anything believe,  
Believe how I love thee, believe how near  
My soul is to its doom: I would not grieve  
Thy hand by unwelcome pressing, would not fear  
Thine eyes by gazing; but I cannot live  
Another night, and not my passion shrive..." 11

And "Great bliss was with them." In keeping with the romance conventions Keats uses the word "bliss" which is almost invariably related to sexual enjoyment; the nights of Troilus and Cressida, Tristan and Iseult, Madeline and Porphyro are all described as "blissful." The consummation of their love changes their pain to "great happiness" and for many a night, their bliss is endless, though their love must remain hidden.

Their attachment must be concealed from society. A young couple who has succeeded, or think they have, in breaking through their own alienation is alienated by their fellow beings themselves. This is obviously a destructive attitude coming from an embittered nature. In his search for social and individual harmony, Keats's mind detected the source of it: destruction came from a distortion of the real values in



man which should be creative, whatever their character.

In "Isabella" love is haunted and destroyed by her brothers. Their human distortion is shown by their being solely interested in wealth and power.

And for them many a weary hand did swelt  
 In torched mines and noisy factories,  
 And many once proud-quiver'd lins did melt  
 In blood from stinging whip; with hollow eyes  
 Many all day in dazzling river stood,  
 To take the rich-ored driftings of the flood. 13

which is definitely a description of the social conditions of England early last century. Many men were being savagely exploited by a minority, and not only men, but women and children had to work in the mines and in the factories for incredibly long hours at starvation salaries, under the most unsanitary conditions. Keats points out that these conditions of social injustice are not only local, but a manifestation of the exploitation that men suffered all over the world. The following lines are an exoneration of what is now known as capitalism:

For them the Ceylon diver held his breath,  
 And went all naked to the hungry shark;  
 For them his ears gush'd blood; for them in death  
 The seal on the cold ice with piteous bark  
 Lay full of darts; for them alone did seethe  
 A thousand men in troubles wide and dark;  
 Half-ignorant, they turn'd an easy wheel,  
 that set sharp racks at work, to pinch and peel...14

In the unsophisticated intensity of the poem, Keats rages against the pride stemming from wealth. Contemptuously, he wanders "Why were they proud?"

.....Because their marble founts  
 Gush'd with more pride than do a wretch's tears?-

Why were they proud? Because fair orange-mounts  
 Were of more soft ascent than lazar stairs?-  
 Why were they proud? Because red-lin'd accounts  
 Were richer than the songs of Grecian years?-  
 Why were they proud? Again we ask aloud,  
 Why in the name of Glory were they proud? 15

These Florentine merchants had already decided their sister's future "... 'twas their plan to coax her by degrees/  
 to some high noble and his love-trees." <sup>16</sup> Lorenzo's love for Isabel was a capital crime for he was a servant, poor and of humble birth. It was clear to them that radical measures had to be taken to end up with the love relationship: "... They resolved in some forest dim/ To kill Lorenzo, and bury him." <sup>17</sup>

Isabel is told that "Lorenzo had ta'en ship for foreign  
 lands, Because of some great urgency and need..." <sup>18</sup> Separation from her beloved leads her to suffering and in her pining  
 "... sweet Isabel/ By gradual decay from beauty fell..." <sup>19</sup> Her brothers, guilty of their crime, are haunted in their dreams and, not wanting to tell her the truth, they keep on answering her pressing questions with lies. "And she had died in drowsy  
 ignorance..." <sup>20</sup> had it not been for a visionary dream in which the whole truth is revealed to her. Lorenzo rises from his grave to tell her how his eternal rest is disturbed by memories of her. He does not hate his murderers for it is not in the nature of a spirit to hate: "... I should rage, if spirits could  
 go mad." <sup>21</sup> But if Keats, in this poem, views death as an end of hatred, it is certainly not an end of love, neither of jealousy; Lorenzo is satisfied when he sees how pale and with-

ered she has grown:

"thy paleness makes me glad;  
Thy beauty grows upon me, and I feel  
A greater love through all my essence steal." 22

This morbid element in Keats's conception of love is not a chance happening, as proved by the spontaneous poem he wrote to Fanny Brawne nearly two years afterwards, just a couple of months before his own death:

This living hand, now warm and capable  
Of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold  
And in the icy silence of the tomb,  
So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights  
That thou wouldst wish thine own heart dry of blood  
So in my veins red life might stream again,  
And thou be conscience-calm'd -see here it is-  
I hold it towards you. 23

And he was conscious of this feeling of possessiveness; he considered selfishness akin to love as he himself says it in "Isabella;" <sup>24</sup> "...Selfishness. Love's cousin..."

Possessiveness is a brand of romantic love and is often identified with the fealty that lovers owe each other. Isabel is a true-to-type romantic heroine in this respect. She feels she belongs to him and the destruction of their love awakens her from her dormant existence.

"Ha! ha!" said she, "I knew not this hard life,  
I thought the worst was simple misery;  
I thought some Fate with pleasure or with strife  
Portion'd us -happy days, or else to die;  
But there is crime -a brother's bloody knife! 25  
<sup>26</sup>

This "weak-sided poem," as was Keats later going to regard "Isabella," sparkles with pathos when Isabel sets for herself the task of disinterring Lorenzo's body. At night, accompanied by an old nurse, she leaves the castle in search of his

tomb. Keats's sense for dramatic impact can be seen emerging in the description he makes of Isabel as she shows the knife she will dig with. The aged nurse is mystified at what is happening and through her, the reader gets a splendid picture of the not so simple Isabel.

"What feverous hectic flame  
Burns in thee, child? -What good can thee betide,  
That thou should'st smile again?" 27

Isabel's search for her dead lover is reminiscent of Coleridge's  
28  
"woman wailing for her demon lover:"

She gaz'd into the fresh-thrown mould, as though  
One glance did fully all its secrets tell;  
Clearly she saw, as other eyes would know  
Pale limbs at bottom of a crystal well;  
Upon the murderous spot she seem'd to grow,  
Like to a native lily of the dell:  
Then with her knife, all sudden, she began  
To dig more fervently than misers can.

Soon she turn'd up a soiled glove, whereon  
Her silk had play'd in purple phantasies,  
She kiss'd it with a lip more chill than stone,-  
And put it in her bosom, where it dries  
And freezes utterly unto the bone  
Those dainties made to still an infant's cries:  
Then 'gan she work again; nor stay'd her care,  
But to throw back at times her veiling hair. 29

Shakespeare's sense of violence is echoed in this macabre deed:

With duller steel than the Perséan sword  
They cut away no formless monster's head,  
But one, whose gentleness did well accord  
With death, as life. The ancient harps have said,  
Love never dies, but lives immortal Lord:  
If Love impersonate was ever dead,  
Pale Isabella kiss'd it, and low moan'd.  
'Twas love; cold, -dead indeed, but not dethroned.

...She calm'd its wild hair with a golden comb,  
And all around each eye's sepulchral cell  
Pointed each fringed lash; the smeared loam

With tears, as chilly as a dripping well,  
 She drech'd away: and still she comb'd, and kept  
 Sighing all day -and still she kiss'd, and wept.30

Lorenzo's exhumed head she puts in a "garden-pot" and  
 o'er it set/ Sweet Basil, which her tears kept ever wet."<sup>31</sup>  
 This burial is a double one, for though physically alive,  
 she rejects her own life existing only to cherish the memories  
 of her destroyed love-affair, devoting herself to mourning  
 for Lorenzo's death:

And she forgot the stars, the moon, and sun,  
 And she forgot the blue above the trees,  
 And she forgot the dells where waters run,  
 And she forgot the chilly autumn breeze; 32

Isabella has lost her life-instinct, she is not attached to  
 anything except to death.

She had no knowledge when the day was done,  
 And the new morn she saw not; but in peace  
 Hung over her sweet Basil evermore,  
 And moisten'd it with tears unto the core. 33

The object of her attachment dies, and so does her desire  
 to live..

For simple Isabel is soon to be  
 Among the dead: She withers, like a palm  
 Cut by an Indian for its juicy balm. 34

Keats describes her as having "dead eyes," incessantly  
 shedding "a continual shower."<sup>35</sup> Her brothers, puzzled at her  
 behaviour, steal the basil away from her, trying to discover  
 the cause of her sorrow. They empty the pot to find "The  
 thing was vile with green and livid spot/ and They knew it  
 was Lorenzo's face."<sup>36</sup> It is then that guilt and horror des-  
 troy them. Banishment from Florence, away from their wealth  
 and dispossessed of power, is the punishment they receive:

The guerdon of their murder they had got,  
 And so left Florence in a moment's space,  
 Never to turn again. -Away they went,  
 With blood upon their heads, to banishment. 38

Isabel is doomed to "die a death too lone and incomplete."<sup>39</sup>

Her last days, without Lorenzo and the basil, are spent in melancholic pain.

And so she pined, and so she died forlorn,  
 Imploring for her Basil to the last. 40

The imagery in "Isabella" is an enlightening clue to what Keats does in the poem. Written from February to April 1818, a period in which Keats was heading towards the mature poetry he would write in less than a year, "Isabella" shows his inexperience and his lack of control over the language. The concision of phrase and the intensity achieved in "The Eve of St. Agnes" and in "Lamia" are not a feature in "Isabella." He was aware of it and with certain sober melancholy he announced that the poem was not good for the press. Nonetheless there are enough elements in it to analyse what he was aiming at. And in approaching Keats's poetry, it should always be kept in mind that he was writing with a definite purpose: to do some good for society. Two months after completing "Isabella" he recorded that he wrote "for the relish of one's fellows;"<sup>41</sup> his goal was to awaken man to "the greater realities of life."<sup>42</sup> The reality he is putting forth in "Isabella" is the destroyal of love by an excessive

concern for wealth and social power. Lorenzo's and Isabel's love relationship is put to an end by her brothers' greediness whom Keats attaches the label of "ledger men"<sup>43</sup> intruding in the lovers' "downy nest."<sup>44</sup>

Love for Lorenzo and Isabel is the equivalent of good health, of the exuberance of life in summer-time; in short it is all that opposes death. The following lines come from Lorenzo's love declaration.

"Love! Thou art leading me from wintry cold,  
 Lady! thou leadest me to summer clime,  
 And I must taste the blossoms that unfold  
 In its ripe warmth this gracious morning time."<sup>45</sup>

winter as compared to spring has been a traditional, almost conventional, symbol of death. But it was no symbol for the Keatses -especially for Keats himself. The "wintry cold" literally meant illness and death; consumption ran in the family feverishly; the three Keats brothers as well as their mother died of it, the four of them in the winter. His grandmother died in the winter too, but not of consumption. Thus, the severe English winter had always been a threat for all of them, especially for Keats who had to nurse his mother and his brother Tom. Keats's knowledge of medicine made more obvious what cold weather did to the consumptive. Thus every year winter-time was a time of emigration to warmer places for Tom and John. It was only natural that Keats feared the approaching of every winter; in December

1819 he writes to his sister excusing himself for not having visited her, since he feels "fearful<sup>46</sup> [s]t the weather should affect my throat which on exertion or cold continually threatens me." This was going to become almost an obsession for him; in his letters he constantly recommended that his addressees be careful during the cold weather, as he does to his sister again two months later: "You must be careful always to wear warm cloathing not only in frost but in a Thaw."<sup>47</sup> In the same letter he tells her that some Mr Davenport who was supposed to visit him could not do it on account of his Having so bad a cold he could not stir out -so you [see] tis<sup>48</sup> the weather and I am among a thousand." Some months later, he insists on the same recommendation: "Mind my advice to be very careful to wear warm cloathing in a thaw."<sup>49</sup> To Fanny Browne he writes saying: "I shall be looking forward to health and the Spring..."<sup>50</sup> and in another letter: "Be careful of open doors and windows and going without your duffle grey."<sup>51</sup> These recommendations follow one after the other: "If this north east<sup>52</sup> would take a turn it would be so much the better for e." "My dearest Love, You must not stop so long in the old -I have been suspecting that window to be open."<sup>53</sup> "You are gone out -you will be as cold as a topsail in a north attitude -I advise you to furl yourself and come in a doors."<sup>54</sup> and so it goes on and on asking everyone to beware of the bad influence of the "wintry cold." In this light, love for Lorenzo and Isabel means "summer clime," which is life.



Lorenzo slaughtered, Isabel is at the mercy of deadly  
winter:

In the mid days of autumn, on their eyes  
The breath of Winter comes from far away,  
And the sick west continually bereaves  
Of some gold tinge, and plays a roundelay  
Of death among the bushes and the leaves, 55

The warmth of spring is identified with vitality,  
with life itself. The couple of lovers is referred to as  
"twin roses" stirred by zephyr -the healthy warm western  
wind. Their love is described as "great happiness" growing  
"like a lusty flower in June's caress" reinforcing this  
way the creative power attached to spring and summer. Like  
the lovers in "The Eve of St. Agnes," Lorenzo's and Isabel's  
encounters are also staged by agreeable sense-impressions:

All close they met, all eves, before the dusk  
Had taken from the stars its pleasant veil,  
Close in a bower of hyacinth and musk, 58

The imagery around Isabel's brothers is quite dif-  
ferent. They are described as "untired and pannier'd mules  
for ducats and old lies," "ledger men," "Hot Egypt's pest,"  
"money-bags." They are "men of cruel clay" with "bitter  
thoughts" and "serpents' whine;" as they approach the site  
where Lorenzo is to be murdered, their faces look "sick and  
wan" while Lorenzo's "flush with love." On killing him,  
they also kill Isabel. Love is then destroyed by society,  
a society which in this case is portrayed as having one  
single pursuit: the accumulation of wealth. In Boccacio's  
tale the brothers kill Lorenzo because he was unworthy of

her. It was Keats who added the economic motive and the brother's intention of marrying Isabel to a wealthy noble. It is most relevant to point out that the materialistic society the brothers represent is only superficially satisfied. They are proud of their "marble founts" but "Every night in dreams they groan'd aloud;" their dreams turn real when "with blood upon their heads" they meet their end.

It is no wonder that the modern reader finds "Isabella" far from satisfactory in poetic qualities. Keats was doing too many things at the same time and his experience as a poet was not great enough to make the experiment a successful one. For one thing, he wrote it right after "Endymion" which shows the strong influence of Leigh Hunt. Keats no longer wanted to echo Hunt and went to extremes in changing his versification which explains his many flaws such as the amateurish repetition of stanzas XVI and LIII. On the other hand, he was interested in achieving contrasting effects through antithesis, but he did not always succeed. Part of the experiment depended on the fact that he felt obliged to follow the conventions of the narrative genre using a few Chaucerian-like digressions which are sometimes too sentimental.

However, the poem was very much liked in the XIX century. Sir Sidney Colvin, early this century still found

it a "high-water mark in human feeling, and in felicity both imaginative and executive."<sup>70</sup> Seven years later Amy Lowell felt the poem to be "a deplorable, unexplained retrogression in Keats's writing."<sup>71</sup> Keats himself, a little over a year after he wrote it, was conscious of its flaws:

I will give you a few reasons why I shall persist in not publishing *The Pot of Basil*. It is too smokeable. I can get it smok'd at the Carpenters shaving chimney much more cheaply -There is too much inexperience of live for life, and simplicity of knowledge in it -which might do very well after one's death -but not while one is alive. There are very few would look to the reality. I intend to use more finesse with the Public. It is possible to write fine things cannot be laugh'd at in any way. *Isabella* is what I should call were I a reviewer "A weak sided Poem" with an amusing sober-sadness about it. <sup>72</sup>

Keats is right when he refers to its lack of finesse. However, the reason this poem is analysed in detail in this thesis is not for its excellence in in craftsmanship, but for the attitude toward love that Keats reveals in it.

At the time Keats wrote "*Isabella*" he told Reynolds<sup>73</sup> he was "glad at not having given away" his "medical Books" and that he would go over them. This purpose, together with the immediacy of nursing sick Tom, accounts for the great number of medicine images that occur in the poem.

A string of images of medicine and disease runs through the poem like a dark vein through marble -a description of *Isabella* as thin and pale as a young mother with a sick child; accounts of stifling and pulsing and hallucinations and fever; pharmaceutical lore of distilling and compounding, of poisonous flowers and strong potions; observations of haemorrhage, psychological shock, and consumption;

a metaphor of amputation; and, finally, a detailed picture of a freshly exhumed corpse, perhaps recalled from the dissecting room at Guy's two and a half years before. 74

A month before, he had written to Taylor of his purpose "of doing some good for the world" through his poetry. The sick world in "Isabella" and its images of medicine, death and illness make Keats's statement that a poet should be a "Physician to mankind"<sup>75</sup> a meaningful one. The world was sick due to an indigestion of false values. In "Isabella" the world's sickness is suffocating it. Keats, the physician-poet, craves to alleviate the pain.

CHAPTER V  
TOWARDS THE FULFILMENT OF LOVE

Individualism is one of the major concerns of the romantic. For him, the individual has preference over the needs of society as a whole. Keats was no exception; he did not disregard society -on the contrary, he wanted to do something for it- but he was deeply aware that society did disregard the individual as such. Social institutions more often than not were based on assumptions totally foreign to the nature of man. Individual dissatisfaction made clear that something was wrong. It was the eternal paradox of men being irrationally blind-folded to the urges of man. And thus was prejudice brought about -along with the energy of some more enlightened men to fight against it. Love -a creative attitude in life- was being hindered by society in its efforts toward fulfilment, Keats thought. It is the theme of individual love fulfilled in defiance of a hostile society that the "Eve of St. Agnes" deals with. As a matter of fact, it treats not only the fulfilment of love, but its consummation and the forces that opposed to it.

The Scotch trip had shown Keats the futility of literal description for its own sake. From Scotland he writes to his brother Tom that "descriptions are bad at all

times", "Scenery is fine -but human nature is finer." Since that summer he was never to elevate nature to a central place in his poetry, and only rarely did he use description as a filler -which occurred when he did not have a plan for the particular poem he was engaged in writing at that moment, thus regressing to some of the habits in his early poetry of describing nature with no specific purpose in mind. However, one of the best achievements in the "Eve of St. Agnes" is precisely description, since Keats uses it to develop the theme and to build up the atmosphere. The poem opens with a description of St. Agnes' cold eve -January 20.

St. Agnes' Eve -Ah, bitter chill it was!  
 The owl, for all his feathers, was a- cold;  
 The hare limp'd trembling through the frozen grass,  
 And silent was the flock in wooly fold;<sup>1</sup>

Against this background, actually blending with it, a beadsman appears: "numb were" his "fingers, while he told/ His rosary"<sup>2</sup>, whose description helps build up the atmosphere of coldness by making it visible:

...while his frosted breath,  
 Like pious incense from a censer old,  
 Seem'd taking flight for heaven...<sup>3</sup>

He leaves the chapel where

The sculptur'd dead, on each side, seem to freeze.  
 Emprison'd in black, purgatorial rails:  
 Knights, ladies, praying in dumb orat'ries.  
 He passes by; and his weak spirit fails  
 To think how they may ache in icy hoods and mails.<sup>4</sup>

He had scarcely walked "three steps" when "Music's golden

tongue" violently interrupted the silence and his prayers. That Keats wanted to make a contrast of atmospheres is patent, by the way he refers to the music: "The silver, snarling trumpets 'gan to chide".<sup>5</sup> The poverty and religiousity of the beadsman oppose the adjectives "silver" and "golden", suggesting excessive luxury, -an overemphasis on the pleasures of the senses. The "snarling" of the trumpets invade -"chide"- the stillness of the palace chapel:

The carved angels, ever eager-eyed,  
 Star'd, where upon their heads the cornice rests,  
 With hair blown back, and wings put cross-wise on  
 their breasts.<sup>6</sup>

Into these contrasting atmospheres, Madeline is introduced as someone "Whose heart had brooded, all that wintry day,/ On love".<sup>7</sup> According to a medieval legend, on the Eve of St. Agnes maidens would have a vision in their dreams of the man they would marry, if they followed a series of ceremonies:

As, supperless to bed they must retire,  
 And couch supine their beauties, lilly white;  
 Nor look behind, nor sideways, but require  
 Of Heaven with upward eyes for all that they desire.<sup>8</sup>

She too heard the music, "yearning like a God in pain",<sup>9</sup> which keeps on being referred to in derogatory and painful terms. In the meantime, "across the moors,/ Had come young Porphyro, with heart on fire/ For Madeline."<sup>10</sup> It is significant that both Madeline's and Porphyro's hearts

are mentioned when they are introduced; Madeline's heart has been brooding "on love" while his is described as being "on fire" for her. Porphyro's "fire" suggests not only passion but light, a light he has inside but that is forced to remain in the dark. He is "Beside the portal doors,/<sup>11</sup> Buttressed from moonlight," and will be constrained to move about dark places through the rest of the poem. When he goes in the castle, the narrator asks that "all eyes be muffled,"<sup>12</sup> for the moment they catch sight of him "a hundred swords/ Will storm his heart, Love's fev'rous citadel."<sup>13</sup> His heart is "on fire" and is love's very same retreat -"citadel." He is identified with love, Madeline brooding on it.

Like Juliet or Isabella, Madeline is surrounded by a family in deadly quarrel with the family of the man she loves:

For him, those chambers held barbarian hordes,  
Hyena foemen, and hot-blooded lords,  
Whose very dogs would execrations howl  
Against his lineage...<sup>14</sup>

The imagery begins to take shape, thus defining the characters. The "snarling" sound of the trumpets are audible manifestation of the "Hyena foemen...Whose very dogs... howl/' Against his lineage."<sup>15</sup> Madeline's feasting family like "barbarian herdes"<sup>16</sup> would destroy "Love's fev'rous citadel,"<sup>17</sup> if they discovered his presence in the palace. But in "that mansion foul"<sup>18</sup> there is one on friendly



terms with Porphyro: Angela, Madeline's nurse, an old  
 "beldame, weak in body and in soul."<sup>19</sup> Porphyro, from a  
 dark corner -"hid from the torch's flame"<sup>20</sup> -spots her  
 and contrives to get her attention. She knows the mor-  
 tal danger he has exposed himself to, and tries to get  
 him to leave the palace:

'They are all here to-night, the whole blood-thirsty  
 race!

## XII

'Get hence! get hence! there's dwarfish Hildebrand;  
 'He had a fever late, and in the fit  
 'He cursed thee and thine, both house and land:  
 'Then there's that old Lord Maurice, not a whit  
 'More tame for his gray hairs -Alas me! flit!  
 'Flit like a ghost away.'<sup>21</sup>

But he presses upon her to the point of blackmailing her  
 psychologically:

'Good Angela, believe me by these tears;  
 Or I will, even in a moment's space,  
 'Awake, with horrid shout, by foemen's ears,  
 'And beard them, though they be more fang'd than  
 wolves and bears.'<sup>22</sup>

The woman, "weak...in soul,"<sup>23</sup> surrenders to his wishes  
 and takes him to a closet next to her chamber. Madeline  
 is getting ready to go to bed, "all akin/ To spirits of  
 the air, and visions wide."<sup>24</sup>

Keats rapidly growing dramatic sense has staged mas-  
 terfully what would be the climactic act in the poem:  
 Offstage, in the higher chambers, Madeline's family,  
 having a loud party, are ready to kill Porphyro at the  
 least indication of his presence in the palace. Angela

and the beadsman make penance for the sins of the world. Madeline is in "the lap of legend"<sup>25</sup> hopeful to have her visionary dream, while Porphyro gazes at her from her closet. The situation has been thrillingly established and Keats proceeds to materialize the setting. The action will take place in Madeline's bower with a casement in the background:

A casement high and triple-arch's there was,  
 All garlanded with carven imag'ries  
 Of fruits, and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass,  
 And diamonded with panes of quaint device  
 Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,  
 As are the tiger-moth's deep-damask'd wings;  
 And in the midst, 'mong thousand heraldries,  
 And twilight saints, and dim emblazonings,  
 A shielded scutcheon blush'd with blood of queens  
 and kings.<sup>26</sup>

For the first time in the poem, bright colours are introduced. The setting had been all black and white, but all of a sudden Keats changes to colour. And an exuberant polichromy it is. Just as Madeline enters the room, and interplay of colour from the casement bathes her:

Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,  
 And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast,  
 As down she knelt for heaven's grace and boon;  
 Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest,  
 And on her hair a glory, like a saint.<sup>27</sup>

The contrast of atmospheres is reinforced by the first two lines. Keats reminds us of the freezing gloom outside -"wintry moon"- and then emphasizes the shift by having the cold silvery moonlight filtered through the

casement which shades Madeline's breast with "warm gules."  
 So far Porphyro looks on her as an angel; her beauty causes  
 him to swoon, making him one of the cavalier company of  
 Troilus and Tristan:

And on her hair a glory, like a saint:  
 She seem'd a splendid angel, newly drest,  
 Save wings, for heaven: -Porphyro grew faint: 28  
 She knelt, so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint.

But as she undresses "Anon his heart revives." Keats -and  
 possibly the imaginative reader- vicariously enjoys the  
 scene, as he takes great care in describing the removal of  
 her garments. The moment she lets loose her hair, she  
 stops being an angel to become a voluptuous woman: "Of all  
 its wreathed pearls her hair she frees." <sup>30</sup> Slowly almost  
 tantalizingly, Madeline "Unclasps her warmed jewels one  
 by one." <sup>31</sup> Notice how Keats changes the ordinary adjective  
 "warm" to the past participle "warméd," suggesting not  
 only the action in process, but its completion. This  
 warmth is certainly an echo of "warméd" Porphyro. As she  
 "Loosens her fragrant boddice," <sup>32</sup> Keats makes the most of  
 this scene, delightedly stressing its slowness by the use  
 of the expressions "one by one" and "by degrees."

...by degrees  
 Her rich attire creeps rustling to her knees:  
 Half-riden, like a mermaid in sea-weed, 33

Porphyro's senses are not only revived by what he sees,  
 but also by what he hears -the rustling of her clothes  
 creeping down- and so are the reader's as he hears the  
 [ t ], the [ p ] and the [ s ] sounds combined with such

vowel sounds as [ʌ] and [I]. In his first draft Keats had used "siren" instead of "mermaid," but not liking the connotation of man being tempted to destruction, he decided for the latter. So from one stanza to the next Madeline has transformed her nature, to the eyes of Porphyro, from that of an angel to the seductive one of a half-naked woman. The process towards the consummation of love has begun.

More ardent than ever, Porphyro is caught in a spell of beauty, tinged with religious and erotic feelings:

Stol'n to this paradise, and so entranced,  
Porphyro gazed upon her empty dress,  
And listen'd to her breathing... 34

He is in a paradise, but ~~no~~merely a spiritual one, since his attention is quite on her "empty dress." Once he has made sure she is asleep, he gets busy carrying on with his "stratagem."

Then by the bed-side, where the faded moon  
Made a dim, silver twilight, soft he set  
A table, and, half anguish'd, threw thereon  
A cloth of woven crimson, gold and jet:35

Even in his ecstasy, he has not forgotten the mortal presence of the feasting guests, he is definitely afraid:

...then from the closet crept,  
Noiseless as fear in a wide wilderness.  
And over the hush'd carpet, silent, stopt...36

Keats had learned how to create suspense in his narrative. And as reminder of the danger hanging over Porphyro, music from the feast is heard. "O for some drowsy Morphean amulet,"

cry both Keats and Porphyro:

The boisterous, midnight, festive clarion,  
 The kettle-drum, and far-heard clarinet,  
 Affray his ears, though but in dying tone: 37  
 The hall door shuts again, and all the noise is gone.

It was a false alarm, but the effect has been successful. The reader is kept in expectation from both the device and the way Keats handles it. The structure of these five lines are a testimony of his craftsmanship. The first is the startled reaction followed by the explanation of what had happened in the next three lines and it is not until the last line, the second half of it, that we know the danger is gone, if momentarily. Keats, in administering his information keeps to the very end the most important part of it. The "boisterous" snarling does not wake her up:

And still she slept and azure -lidded sleep,  
 In blanched linen, smooth, and lavender'd...38

The impressions of tone -for they are not of colour- multiply as does the sexual imagery. Porphyro can not divert his attention from her bed; the blanched smooth lavendered sheets are an appealing invitation to touch them. With these impressions he goes on setting the table:

he from forth the closet brought a heap  
 Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd;  
 With jellies soother than the creamy curd,  
 And lucent syrups, tinct with cinnamon;  
 Manna and dates, in argosy transferr'd  
 From Fez; and spiced dainties, every one,  
 From silken Samarcand to cedar'd Lebanon. 39

This delicate food is served on equally appealing plates:

These delicates he heap'd with glowing hand

On golden dishes and in baskets bright  
 Of wreathed silver: sumptuous they stand  
 In the retired quiet of the night,  
 Filling the chilly room with perfume light. 40

Finally he finishes making true the "visions of delight"<sup>41</sup>  
 that according to the legend would accompany the "soft  
 adorings"<sup>42</sup> from the man whom she would supposedly wed. The  
 room really works up to the dream-expectations of any maiden.  
 The soft moon-beams are broken through the casement into a  
 pattern of dream-like hues. Madeline lies asleep, seductively  
 surrounded by the semi-transparent curtains of her bed. On  
 the "crimson, gold and jet"<sup>43</sup> table-cloth lie exotic and  
 colourful dainties "filling the chilly room with perfume  
 light."<sup>44</sup> It is a fantasy in colour, light, texture, and  
 perfume. Keats has created beauty -"the sense faints pictur-  
 ing it"<sup>45</sup>- to be the setting of an act of love -the same process  
 as in "Ode To Psyche" where he builds up impressions of beauty  
 "to let warm Love in."

The setting for the climactic scene is ready. Porphyro  
 tries to awake her:

'And now, my love, my seraph fair, awake!  
 'Thou art my heaven, and I thine eremite.  
 'Open thine eyes, for meek St. Agnes' sake, 46  
 'Or I shall drowse beside thee, so my soul doth ache.'

As his words will not wake her up, he dares touch her  
 pillow: "his warm, unnerved arm sank in her pillow,"<sup>47</sup> while  
 the visual impressions keep growing about them: "The lustrous  
 salvers in the moonlight gleam;/ Broad golden fringe upon  
 the carpet lies."<sup>48</sup> His excitement growing, he plays her lute:

"Tumultuous ...Close to her ear touching the melody:

Wherewith disturb'd, she utter'd a soft moan:  
 He ceased -she panted quick- and suddenly  
 Her blue affrayed eyes wide open shone:  
 Upon his knees he sank, pale as smooth-sculptured stone.<sup>49</sup>

The visual composition is one of remarkable beauty; a static silent beauty where he is as motionless as a stone statue harmonizing with the "azure" of her eyes.

But despite Porphyro's efforts to make reality as beautiful as the dream of Madeline, he fails. When she awakes, reality is not as beautiful as the images she has been having in her dreams.

There was a painful change, that nigh expell'd  
 The blisses of her dream so pure and deep  
 At which fair Madeline began to weep,  
 And moan forth witless words with many a sigh.<sup>50</sup>

For in her dream Porphyro looked better than he is:

'Ah, Porphyro!' said he, 'but even now  
 'Thy voice was at sweet tremble in mine ear,  
 'Made tuneable with every sweetest vow;  
 'And those sad eyes were spiritual and clear:  
 'How chang'd thou art! How pallid, chill, and drear!  
 'Give me that voice again, my Porphyro,  
 'Those looks immortal, those complainings dear! <sup>51</sup>

But nonetheless she loves him, and whatever the actual images of her dream were, we can guess on their nature. of her dream were, we can guess on their nature. The "soft adorings" she was having in her dream were of a sexual kind, as she cries to him:

'Oh leave me not in this eternal woe,  
 'For if thou diest, my Love, I know not where to go! <sup>52</sup>

Keats himself referred to her as a woman "in such state" <sup>53</sup>

that only a "eunuch would leave her unsatisfied." Her words

have the effect she wants: he is not able to restrain himself, "Beyond a mortal man impassion'd far at these voluptuous accents, he arose."<sup>54</sup> The verb "arose" vividly communicates Porphyro's sexual excitement. The act of gazing at her taking off her clothes plus her "voluptuous accents" have made his senses reel: he is "Ethereal, flush'd and like a throbbing star" trembling with excitement: "Into her dream he melted, as the rose/ Blendeth its odour with the violet."<sup>55</sup> And thus the sexual consummation of their love takes place.

Keats does not frown upon their sexual experience, the imagery accounts for it. When it first occurs to Porphyro to make her dream come true, Keats refers to the idea as "a full-blown rose." Though we can not say that Madeline would have accepted any sexual advancements had the circumstances been different, we can assert Porphyro does not force her, especially when she herself was really conjuring it up. The consummation is not a violent one, as a matter of fact Keats puts it in gentle terms. The fragrance of two flowers blending, the outcome a "Solution sweet."<sup>56</sup> In the original version of the poem, Keats delights over the scene and describes it in more detail. The following lines were rejected by his publishers on moral grounds:

See while she speaks his arms encroaching slow  
Have zon'd her, heart to heart -loud, loud  
the dark winds blow. 57

Unfortunately, these lines were found unfit for young ladies



to read, and Keats had to leave them out -very much against his will- in the published version. It is unfortunate because the lines are suitably graphic, and the rhythmical use of monosyllables combined with the whispering and panting effect of the [ z ], the [ h ] and the [ d ] sounds convey the experience in a masterful way. This climactic scene is framed by the strong music of the wind blowing against the casement:

...meantime the frost-wind blows  
Like Love's alarum pattering the sharp sleet  
Against the window-panes; St. Agnes' moon hath set. 58

"St. Agnes' moon hath set" and so have their ardent feelings. St. Agnes' maiden's eve is gone as well as Madeline's maidenhood. "The Imagination may be compared to Adam's dream -he awoke and found it truth."<sup>59</sup> Madeline like Adam, awoke to find her dream "truth." The moon, goddess of chastity, has set and Madeline's guilt rises as Porphyro tells her it has been no dream:

'No dream, alas! alas! and woe is mine!  
'Porphyro will leave me here to fade and pine.-  
'Cruel! what traitor could thee hither bring?  
'I curse not, for my heart is lost in thine,  
'Though thou forsakest a deceived thing;-  
'A dove forlorn and lost with sick unpruned wing.'60

But Porphyro assures her that his love is real and asks her to elope with him.

'The bloated wasaillers will never heed:-  
'Let us away, my love, with happy speed;  
'There are no ears to hear, or eyes to see,-  
'Drown'd all in Rhenish and the sleepy mead:  
'Awake! arise! my love, and fearless be,  
'For o'er the southern moors I have a home for thee. 61

Her agreement is only tacit as she does not reply, but

She hurried at his words, beset with fears,  
For there were sleeping dragons all around, 62

And so they leave "that mansion foul"

And they are gone: aye, ages long ago  
These lovers fled away into the storm. 63

Their love has overcome the obstacles that hindered its fulfillment. "Heart to heart," his "love's fev'rous citadel" and hers brooding "on love, they will project themselves creatively, as a "full blown rose" does.

2

St. Agnes' eve is a wish-fulfilling eve. It is a night when Porphyro and Madeline's dreams and wishes are brought to the height of reality -and through theirs Keats's as well. If "Isabella" is a case of love destroyed, in "The Eve of St. Agnes" Keats deals with love fulfilled. Both romances have in common young lovers whose love is threatened by those around them. However Lorenzo and Porphyro do not stand on the same terms. They are both hated by their lady's family, but while Isabella's brothers oppose Lorenzo because he is a servant, and a poor one, in the case of Porphyro we do not know why he is rejected. He is referred to as a noble knight, and in possession of wealth. The apparent dispute between his house and that of Madeline's is not accounted for. But the hatred felt by Madeline's family is clearly stressed by Keats. They are characterized by an imagery of brutal, animalistic destruction -and not only Madeline's

house, but those in association with them. They are "barbarian hordes" threatening "Love's fev'rous citadel." They are that which opposes Porphyro's pursuit; it is the universal struggle between hate and love, destruction and creation.

The identification of the characters with opposing attitudes is accomplished from the very beginning and carried on to the end of the poem. Madeline's family and the feasting guests are "hyena foemen,"<sup>64</sup> "hot blooded lord,"<sup>65</sup> "a hundred swords" to "storm his [Porphyro's] heart."<sup>66</sup> They can be paralleled to the decaying society portrayed in the "Ode to a Nightingale"<sup>66</sup> "where men sit and hear each other groan," where palsy has taken hold of men, and turned them into a strangling society, unable to project themselves creatively. If "The Eve of St. Agnes" is viewed as a semi-allegorical poem, the feasting guests represent society, or a faction of it, in complete opposition to individual creative attitudes. Porphyro and Madeline stand for love and beauty seeking mutual fulfilment. Their search is inhibited by society.

It is inhibited in such a way that love, in order to exist, must be hidden in the darkness. This is what Keats contends in "The Eve" and to this purpose he confines Porphyro to move all the time about dark places. He is introduced standing by, at the palace entrance "Buttress'd from moonlight."<sup>68</sup> Once he is inside he is "hid from the torch's flame" and must move subreptitiously:

He follow'd through a lowly arched way  
Brushing the cobwebs with his lofty plume, 70

Love is confined to "a little moonlight room,"<sup>71</sup> a dungeon not fit even for a criminal: "Pale, lattic'd, chill and silent as a tomb."<sup>72</sup> There he is to remain, afraid of being caught, and when he leaves his dungeon in the pursuit of love and beauty, he must go "through many a dusky gallery."<sup>73</sup>

The individual, wishing creative fulfilment, is haunted by a society which is in full command. If Porphyro (love) must be set in darkness, society bursts in "argent revelry."<sup>74</sup> While Porphyro's and Madeline's sexual consummation is an integrated act, the feasting guests dwell only upon the animalistic abuse of the senses, as shown by their audible manifestations: "the silver, snarling trumpets 'gan to chide,"<sup>75</sup> and "the music, yearning like a God in pain."<sup>76</sup> They live in a "mansion foul" and their possessions are destructive: their "very dogs would execrations howl/ Against his lineage."<sup>77</sup> They are sickly: "dwarfish Hildebrand; he had a fever late, and in the fit/ He cursed thee and thine, both house and land,"<sup>78</sup> they are men who "will murder upon holy days" and "More fang'd than wolves and bears."<sup>79</sup><sup>80</sup>

Their love consummated, the young lovers will leave. The "boisterous" music has quieted down, "the bloated wassailers" are "Drown'd all in Rhenish."<sup>81</sup> They fly haunted by the spirit of the "mansion foul" which takes real foul dimensions:

A chain-droop'd lamp was flickering by each door:  
The arras, rich with horseman, hawk, and hound,  
Flutter'd in the besieging wind's uproar; 82

### III.

"Those lovers fled away into the storm" which is only "Of  
haggard seeming, but a boon indeed"<sup>83</sup> since it is really an  
"elfin-storm from faery land."<sup>84</sup> The "sleeping dragons"<sup>85</sup>  
are left behind to decay in their own "weariness and fever."<sup>86</sup>

That night the Baron dreamt of many a woe,  
And all his warrior-guests, with shade and form  
Of witch, and demon, and large coffin-worn,  
Were long be-nightmar'd. 87

"And they" -the lovers- "are gone," consummated love is gone  
from "the whole blood thirsty race" towards its fulfilment.  
Love has escaped strangulation.

### 3

The strong and emphatic affirmation of sexual love  
as a way towards self-fulfilment is an indication of Keats's  
rebelliousness against the traditional morality of his time.  
Hide-bound institutions required self-denial from man when  
only self-fulfilment could lead him to the creative projection  
of his humanity as a whole. It should not be implied, however,  
that Keats favoured dissipation -he was far from regarding  
women as mere sexual objects, the way Brown, his closest friend,  
approached women. In fact, he often chid Brown for having  
sexual relations with his maid, condemning it on the ground  
that he was only using her to satisfy his masculine needs  
without putting any love in it. Porphyro is no raper in the  
same way as Madeline is not a latent prostitute, as Earl  
Wasserman believes;<sup>88</sup> their sexuality was in harmony with  
their other capabilities which made of their experience a

reaction of their human nature as an integral unit. That they overcome conventional values in the fulfilment of their love speaks for Keats's attitude toward social institutions.

CONCLUSION  
"LOVE IS MY RELIGION"

Natural beauty has inspired many poets. Keats is among them. But to him the beauties of nature speak of truth, a truth which Keats calls love. His attachment to the natural world is a pleasurable one, at the same time that it is a source of inspiration and wisdom. Keats calls it wisdom because it is a deep revelation, an insight into the mysteries of life. The function of a poet, in the Keatsian conception, is to deliver the wisdom elaborated by the poet's musings; thus for Keats natural beauty is the poet's poet since natural beauty is the original giver of the poet's wisdom. The "most noble tenderness" of nature, as he refers to it, is his direct source of wisdom, which he translates into love, as discussed in Chapter II. But the beauty of nature being perishable posed the problem of finding undecaying and everlasting beauty. He finds in artistic beauty the solution to this problem and in his desire to create sources of love that will transcend life, he ambitiously gives himself the job of adding "a mite" of his own to the already existing artistic beauty.

And he writes to make of his poetry a love companion to the man of all times. Chapter III deals with the comfort

he expects to offer man through his poetry. His "Grecian Urn" is a "friend to man,"<sup>2</sup> and as he announces in "Sleep and Poetry" he will inspire man to honesty and mirth; his poetry would be tender consolation in times of stress. However, the statements made in his early poetry are a mere promise, or more so a vow. With this purpose of inspiring men into a creative attitude, he decides to write only when he feels he has something to say.

I have come to this resolution -never to write for the sake of writing or making a poem, but from running over with any little knowledge or experience which many years of reflection may perhaps give me; otherwise I will be dumb.<sup>3</sup>

This, he feels, is necessary if his poetry is to be a source of wisdom. The ardent promises he makes in "Sleep and Poetry" he fulfills in the next three years, especially in 1819.

Let man, he says,

...read a certain Page of full poesy or distilled Prose, and let him wander with it, and muse upon it, and reflect upon it, and bring home to it, and prophesy upon it, and dream upon it, until it becomes stale -but when will it do so? Never.<sup>4</sup>

He sees poetry as a way towards inner growth, as a "delicious diligent Indolence"<sup>5</sup> which can be prolonged indeterminately.

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 music conducts to "an odd angle of the Isle", and when the leaves whisper it puts a girdle round the earth.<sup>6</sup>

This way poetry will improve human nature and will operate



creative changes for the benefit of the world. Clearly Keats is referring to a man who has developed a passionate attachment for literature, but even he who has not done so will "Benefit.... by the great Works to the Spirit and pulse of blood by their mere passive existence."<sup>7</sup> He does not explain clearly his reasons for this belief, but we may presume that he refers to the influence that those who have benefited in a fuller way from a "Page of full Poesy"<sup>8</sup> have over the passive men who will have to be prophesied upon.

The world for Keats is basically being modified by a big universal struggle between life and death. Chapters IV and V are a discussion of the nature of this struggle. Keats, anticipating the findings that Psychology would put forth over half a century later, foresees love as the only condition suitable for man's harmonious existence, both with himself and with society. Hate is any deviation man takes from creative action; it is a distortion of the supreme human value. As it was observed in Chapters IV and V, love and beauty, symbolized by the two couples of lovers, fight their way towards fulfilment. Society is portrayed as blind to the needs of man, as an aggressive and sickly majority in possession of full power to decide on what right or wrong is. In "Isabella" love is defeated, while "The Eve of St. Agnes" stages the victory of love in the form of erotic attachment. In both poems, society ends destroyed as a consequence of this adhering to a destructive force: hate.

Isabel is destroyed as her attachment in life is limited to one area: the erotic. It is this limitation that makes her life-instinct too weak; her fragile creative attachment is destroyed and, as a result, she dies. Her brothers are even more limited for they are only attached to wealth and power which is a destructive bond as it excludes other objects of attachment. The allegorical interpretation in these two poems may be questioned and doubted. However, to support the validity of our approach to the two poems, we quote the following lines from Keats himself which are self-explanatory.

.... All I can do is by plump contrasts  
 -Were the fingers made to squeeze a guinea or  
 a white hand? -Were the Lips made to hold a pen  
 or Kiss? 9

These two poems contradict the common belief that Keats is not interested in the world's affairs. He is not as interested in politics and economics as to make of them recurrent themes in his poetry, the way Byron and Shelley do. But as discussed in Chapters IV and V, he does not disregard social conditions; however, he is more prone to bring them up in his letters than in his poetry:

I would sooner be a wild deer than a Girl under  
 the dominion of the Kirk, and I would sooner  
 be a wild hog than be the occasion [sic] of  
 a Poor Creatures pennance before those execrable  
 elders. 10

"Isabella" is a case of love against hide-bound institutions

with acrid comments on the nature of the prevailing economic system; the theme of "The Eve" is love against social prejudice.

The richness of Keats's sensory perception has often been the cause of his being labelled as a mere sensuous poet with no direction or aim other than the mere recreation for the pleasure of the senses. This is an erroneous conception which happily is being corrected in the last four decades. His conception of life is well thought out. He regards the world in process towards a strengthening of the life-instinct. His violent rejection of the destructive forces in society do not deprecate humanity; he rages against these forces in some of his poetry and letters, but he attributes men's short-sightedness to a lack of perception into the nature of man's heart: " the world is very young and in a verry [sic] ignorant state-We live in a barbarous age."<sup>11</sup>

On this he blames the existence of "hyena foemen"<sup>12</sup> and "pannier'd mules,"<sup>13</sup> which implies his acknowledgement of the under-developed state of some men who being human act like beasts. He is not looking down upon the animal world, by any means, animals react as such and do not harm anyone, but he considers it beneath man's human stature to react like an animal. He distinguishes the degree to which every man has developed himself.

... I compare human life to a large Mansion of Many apartments, two of which I can only describe, the doors of the rest being as yet shut upon me. The first we-step into we call the infant or thoughtless Chamber, in which we remain as long as we do not think- We remain there a long while, and notwithstanding the doors of the second Chamber remain wide open, showing a bright appearance, we care not to hasten to it; but are at length imperceptibly impelled by the awakening of this thinking principle within us- we no sooner get into the second Chamber, which I shall call the Chamber of Maiden-Thought, that we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere, we see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there for ever in de-light: 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 convicing one's nerves that the world is full of Misery and Heart-break, Pain, Sickness and oppression- whereby this Chamber of Maiden Thought becomes gradually darkn'd and at the same time on all sides of it many doors are set open -but all dark- all leading to dark passages- We see not the ballance of good and evil. We are in a Mist. We are now in that state- We feel the "burden of the Mystery"...<sup>14</sup>

So he thus far knows two stages of human development: the pre-thinking stage where man is still an infant with few capabilities developed, and the thinking stage where "Pleasant wonders" are overcome by "Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression." Perhaps he was still in the infant chamber when in November 1817 he writes the following advice to Reynolds: "Why don't you, as I do, look unconcerned at what may be called more particularly Heart-vexations? They never surprize [sic] me- lord! A man should have the fine point of his soul taken off to become fit for this world."<sup>15</sup> There is no reason to doubt his sincerity, especially because at the time he writes it he has just spent a relatively un-

troubled period of time; in fact at the time he writes it he is satisfied at the prospect of finishing *Endymion* within the time-limit he set himself. But as he definitely moves to the Chamber of Maiden-Thought, things were going to look different. What he now lightly calls "Heart vexations," two years later are going to burn him when small misunderstandings arose between him and Fanny Brawne. That same day- Nov. 22, 1817- he writes about "What occasions the greater part of the World's Quarrels?"

... simply this, two Minds meet and do not understand each other time enough to prevent any shock or surprise at the conduct of either party<sup>16</sup>

Scarcely five months later, already settled down in the Chamber of Maiden-Thought, "the World's Quarrel's," and the inexperience of life that motivates them, have changed to the "Misery and heartbreak<sup>f</sup> with doors" leading to dark passages." It is a crescendo which reaches its climax in "The weariness, the fever and the fret/Here"<sup>17</sup> Where he expresses the painful feelings involved in his attachment to a callous world.

It is the same world he perceived in the early days when he wrote "Sleep and Poetry" wondering if he will "bear/The o'erwhelming sweets/ 'twill bring to" him "the fair/<sup>18</sup> Visions of all places." At this early stage he takes vows to become a happy priest of poetry, his house being "a poet's house who keeps the keys of pleasure's temple."<sup>19</sup>

He presents his life as a sacred offering in sacrifice to Apollo:

... that I may die a death  
of luxury, and my young spirit follow  
The morning sun-beams to the great Apollo  
Like a fresh sacrifice;<sup>20</sup>

And to the end of 1817 Keats contemplates death, but as something that can prevent him from writing the poetry he wants so eagerly to write; the probability of an early death oppresses him: "My spirit is too weak, mortality weighs heavily on me like unwilling sleep"<sup>21</sup> He sees himself dying "Like a sick eagle looking at the sky"<sup>22</sup> In June 1818 his growing involvement with the idea of death is expressed in his viewing it as "the glory of dying for a great human purpose."<sup>23</sup> Keats exposes his feeling of loneliness and loss as something that has haunted him since his infancy. As was mentioned earlier, the end of 1818 with the death of his brother Tom marked the total desintegration of his family ties, which though precarious had meant a great deal to him:

My love for my Brothers from the early loss of our parents and even for earlier Misfortunes has grown into an affection 'passing the Love of Women'<sup>24</sup>

In May 1819, he gives way to his desolation, his frustration and anger: his early optimism towards the world has turned into bitter disappointment; this hate-energy he releases in "Ode to a Nightingale," where he grieves in utter despair over the failure of men to establish creative attachments

with the world. There is no beauty in the world: "I cannot see what flowers are at my feet"<sup>25</sup> and communication is poor and unsuccessful: he can not see, and at his best he can only guess; the world, as well as the poet, is consuming itself. Escaping from it is what the poet does, an escape which threatens to be total: "Now more than ever seems it rich to die."<sup>26</sup>

But his strong death-wish is balanced by an even stronger desire to live, and an awareness of his self-destructive drive:

I have a horrid Morbidity of Temperament which has shown itself at intervals- It is I have no doubt the greatest Enemy and stumbling block I have to fear - I may even say that it is likely to be the cause of my disappointment. However every ill has its share of good.<sup>27</sup>

This positive side of hardship is rooted in the belief that "difficulties nerve the Spirit of a Man."<sup>28</sup> Keats, then, accepts suffering and pain on the basis that man has a great deal to learn through them. Thus the nature of his attachment to the world lies not in the fact that everything is smooth and agreeable; life offers a duality of opposite experiences: joyful ones and painful ones. And, for Keats, love for life is also expressed in accepting the difficulties of life as well as the pleasant experiences it offers.

The first thing that strikes me on hearing a Misfortune having befallen another is this. " Well

it cannot be helped -he will have the pleasure of trying the resources of his spirit!<sup>29</sup>

Notice the way he approaches it: difficulties should be taken as a blessing rather than as a curse. It is implicit in his statement that hardship will bring along the energy to overcome pain or to accept it. It is in this sense that Isabel is a weak character, she does not try to overcome her grievance which then overcomes her instead. She feels happy and satisfied as long as everything goes the way she wants to, but Keats says:

Circumstances are like clouds continually gathering and bursting -While we are laughing the seed of some trouble is put into the wide arable land of events -while we are laughing it sprouts is for it grows and suddenly bears a poison fruit which we must pluck-

When Keats was faced with problems, he always tried to come to some sort of harmonious determination. He would put himself together and face the situation courageously. His "stumbling block," as he called it, was his "morbidty of temperament,"<sup>31</sup> which was partly the outcome of his so much developed imaginative powers. He himself recognized that his imagination turned out to be destructive when he brooded too much upon the evils of the world. His capability for an objective analysis of his character is often surprising, as it is the explanation he gives to Brown about his problems:

Imaginary grievances have always been more my torment than real ones. You know this well. Real ones will never have any other effect upon me than to stimulate me to get out of or avoid them. This is easily accounted for. Our imaginary woes are conjured by our



passions, and are fostered by passionate feeling; our real ones come of themselves, and are opposed by an abstract exertion of mind. Real grievances are displacers of passion. They imaginary nail a man down for a sufferer, as on a cross; the real spur him up into an agent.<sup>32</sup>

Real problems make him avoid the creation or exaggeration of imaginary ones. The solution he gave to the crisis reflected in "Nightingale" - the strong death wish- is dual: on one side he probably accepted it as a way towards gaining inner-strength and on the other, the grievances in the ode, though real, were made to have enormous and overpowering dimensions due to an over-emphasis of his imagination. But the poem remains as a source of love for the reader willing to "greet it with the spirit,"<sup>33</sup> and as evidence of the attitude of the poet towards the need of love and beauty.

Keats's life, as is clear by now, was not easy. He had to face many hard blows and of so many kinds. But his strong nature and the efforts he made to project himself creatively fortified his life-instinct. In this sense his attachment to love and beauty is a direct consequence of a need to negate

to overcome the sordid. It can be asserted that his main themes and supreme values were love and beauty. He hated, but what he hated was ugliness, and base actions. He succeeded most of the times in directing his aggressive tendencies to that which he did not consider creative. His harsh words apply more to the attitude of man, than to man himself. State-

ments such as "I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections..."<sup>34</sup> and "the eternal Being, the Principle of Beauty, and the Memory of great men"<sup>35</sup> reveals the way he regards the world, both as man and poet. It is not surprising to hear from the man who uttered, "I could'nt live without the love of my friends,"<sup>36</sup> the statement that the " first political duty of a Man.. is the happiness of his friends."<sup>37</sup> In a letter to Fanny Brawne, he refers to his love for life as an attachment, the term selected to define love in this thesis: "Like all Sinners now I am ill I philosophise aye out of my attachment to every thing, trees, flowers, thrushes Spring, Summer, Claret & c & c..."<sup>38</sup> In the follow  
line  
we can clearly see his rejection of the sordid:

...we must bear ( and my Spleen is mad at the thought thereof) The Proud Mans Contumely. O for a recourse somewhat human independant of the great Consolations of Religion and undepraved Sensations- of the beautiful the poetical in all things- O for a Remedy against such wrongs within the pale of the World!<sup>39</sup>

or as he says in the lines of "Oh How I love:"

... far -far away to leave  
All meaner thoughts, and take a sweet reprieve  
From little cares; to find, with easy quest,  
a fragant wild, with Nature's beauty drest,<sup>40</sup>

or in "Grecian Urn" when he sets the idea of old age against the eternal existence of the urn:

When old age shall this generation waste,  
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe  
Than ours, a friend to man,<sup>41</sup>

One of Keats's "axioms" in poetry refers to the intensity

of art: "The Excellence of every Art is its intensity capable of making all disagreeables evaporate."<sup>42</sup> This axiom he applied to both his writings and his life, and it should not be surprising; if some artistic works can be studied without the need to know anything about the author, Keats is the opposite. For him, his own life and poetry were the same thing since his highest goal in life was to write good poetry. Keats tried hard "To make all disagreeables evaporate" and he did, except for consumption. Psychoanalysts would perhaps call it a defense mechanism, the one called reaction formation. Dr. Charles Brenner defines it as:

... a mechanism whereby one of a pair of ambivalent attitudes, e.g., hate, is rendered unconscious and kept unconscious by an overemphasis of the other, which in this example would be love. This hate appears to be replaced by love, cruelty by gentleness, stubbornness by compliance, pleasure in dirt by neatness and cleanliness, and so on, yet the missing attitude persists unconsciously.<sup>43</sup>

A reaction formation or not, Keats strongly affirms the nonsordid side of life: "Gorge the honey of life,"<sup>44</sup> he writes to Reynolds.

And not only does he affirm a beautiful and loving life, but he becomes one with it. Socrates and Jesus he admired because he considered them to be among the few who were able to deny their selves to be one with the world. However, he did not think of Christ as God, and much as he admired him, he could not agree or believe in Christianity as a religion. He believed in the existence of a soul and in its immortality. There had to be another life to compensate for the suffering

of this one, he thought. But as to having a religion as a means of arriving at truth, Keats had substituted poetic imagination. He depended on beauty to find truth. And about belonging to a religion, he wrote to Fanny Brawne:

I have been astonished that Men could die Martyrs for religion. I have shudder'd at it. I shudder no more -I could be martyr'd for my Religion- Love is my religion. I could die for that. I could die for you. My Creed is love Love and you are its only tenent. 45

Thus his religion was love and beauty. And in this sense he was a very zealous faithful. As a lover he tried to break through his isolation and to establish an attachment with some kind of loving object. And Keats did break through his own isolation. His selfless capability allowed him to identify with almost any object.

This capacity for identification is not given to all people. I confess I cannot decide in my own mind whether love is determined by identification or identification by love. All that I am sure of is that they go together. 46

Such is the value Dr. Menninger gives to identification. "The poet is the most unpoetical of all things,"<sup>47</sup> Keats asserted. The poet has no self. Or perhaps it would be better to say that he partakes of the identity of many selves. Dr Menninger, as we pointed out in the first chapter, says of this capability of the human being to identify with the world around him that it "leads by extension to a wish for fusion."<sup>48</sup> The accomplishment "of this fusion is the object of the love impulse. To promote it in every known way is the prescription for happier living."<sup>49</sup> As a result of fusion, he

adds that

We shall have realigned our faith in God to include more faith in human beings, and extended our identifications to include more brothers, more sisters, more sons and daughters in a vastly wider family concept. 50

or in the words of Plato, "love is the desire of the whole,  
and the pursuit of the whole is called love."<sup>51</sup> It was  
this pursuit of the whole that Keats wished to promote  
through his poetry. "I have loved," he says from his  
death-bed, "the principle of beauty in all things."<sup>52</sup> Love  
and the beautiful were his religion.

## Foot-notes

### Introduction

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- 6 Ibid., 253.
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