John Keats's Journey To An Understanding Of The Poet's Place in Society

by

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Because the critics have given so little attention to it, the question of what John Keats thought about his relationship as a poet to society must be described as one of little interest to them. When they have commented upon this matter at all, writers have pointed out that, considering the whole of Keats's biography, it is clear that he never resolved this question to his own satisfaction.[1] Finding it an apparently fruitless effort to consider this issue in Keats's life, most critics who are interested in the English Romantics have been inclined to propose and to answer questions which are about the relationship of Keats's poetry to Keats as a person and which are not about the relationship of Keats and his poetry to society. From the viewpoint of many commentators, especially Keats's biographers, the value of such examinations comes mostly from the way they serve to reveal Keats to be the very model of a great poet.[2] However, in both the poetry and, especially, the letters which he wrote in the years prior to the last half of 1818 and during

the first two-thirds of 1819 when he wrote his greatest poetry, evidence exists, as it serves to illuminate the relationship between Keats and the external world, which sheds light on the way Keats came to fill his role as a poet. Certainly, Keats's really successful completion of an effort--though not his final effort--to arrive at an understanding of his personal relationship to the external, "social" world was one of his major achievements, being a central cause for his success both as a poet and as a man.

It was the purpose of this paper, then, to describe from beginning to end Keats's difficult journey to an understanding of the nature of his existence as a poet in society. During this journey, Keats moved, often in an agonizing manner, from the point where he saw poetry as a solitary refuge in which he could find pleasure and goodness for himself to the point where, having given up these first, selfish considerations, he perceived that worthwhile poetry must include ideas, not only about pleasure and goodness, but, also, about pain and evil; and, eventually, during this journey, Keats finally moved to the point, one which he reached mainly through his powers of genius to overcome almost totally his own egotistical involvement in poetry,

where he could view himself, not as the recipient of poetry's beneficence, but, essentially, as society's servant, working in an altrustic manner, to reveal unvarnished beauty and truth in his poetry for his readers to use in whatever particular ways they saw fit.

At the outset of this paper, I want to acknowledge the help I received from four different sources of information. To follow the path of Keats's journey would have been impossible had it not been for the assistance of the primary source materials that are in The Letters of John Keats, edited by Hyder Edward Rollins, and in The Poetical Works of John Keats, edited by H. W. Garrod. As well, I want to express my gratitude to two men for their preparation of two quite different, but invaluable secondary reference sources. Because I constantly referred to his book while I wrote this paper, my thanks go to Professor Walter Jackson Bate for his 1963 publication, the definitive biographical account entitled John Keats; and, because his explanation of what Keats meant by the terms beauty and truth helped me to write my second chapter, I want to make clear my indebtedness to my acquaintance, Mr. James W. Hardin, for his writing in his unpublished 1962 Ball State Teacher's College thesis, "The Development, Meaning and Critical Ramifications of John Keats's Concept of Negative Capability."

I

When one considers the whole of Keats's biography, the beginning of his journey to an understanding of what his role as a poet in society should be shows itself quite clearly. For, even as a child, Keats came to be very much aware of an external world that many would insist is probably beyond any child's normal realm of concern. He underwent a series of experiences during his early years which inaugurated a pattern of living that made up almost the whole fabric of his life. This pattern of living, consisting of uprooting and alienating experiences which were woven together with stabilizing and humanizing experiences, was one certainly which influenced Keats's work as a poet. In following an account of these experiences, one cannot but be struck by the nature of their intensity and frequency.

From the time Keats was approximately eight years old,* events which caused him some kind of personal disturbance began to show themselves in extremely clear terms. Although Keats and his younger brother, George,

* Keats was born the first of five children on 31 October 1795.

had probably already known some unhappiness when their parents took the two boys some fifteen miles from their first home to begin their education at John Clarke's Enfield School, the first great experience of uprooting came on 15 April 1804 with their father's early death, caused by a fractured skull suffered in a fall from a horse. Although the affection which he held for his father was probably considerable, Keats, as a child, along with his brothers and sister, could probably have begun in a rather short time to take the loss for granted, had his mother only been able to keep her family's affairs moving on a fairly even keel. But, because she was so distraught over losing her husband, and then, because she found that she had to take over the unfamiliar, and quite unfeminine task of managing her late husband's livery stable, Frances Keats apparently experienced a kind of extended panic. On 27 June 1804, hardly more than two months following her first husband's death, and much to the disapproval of her mother, Mrs. Jennings, she married a William Rawlings, a man who shortly proved that he was only a fortune hunter, interested mostly in acquiring the livery stable and hardly at all in Frances or her children. Immediately following the marriage, Mrs. Jennings, because she so disapproved of the match and her new son-in-law, moved the Keats children out of her daughter's house. John

Keats and his brothers and sister were never again to call their mother's house their home.[3]

Certainly, one needs no great amount of empathy to suppose young John Keats's feelings as he witnessed the chaos which so suddenly swirled about him. Most appalling to him must have been some kind of realization that his mother, who had once seemed so stable and loving, should be the one responsible for all of the trouble. Why, he must have wondered, did she let all of the unhappiness come about? Following the new marriage and the Keats children's move to their grandmother's house, fate was to wait only a half year before it brought more trouble. On 8 March 1805, John Jennings, the Keats children's maternal grandfather, who intended to be their chief benefactor, died after several years of ill health. He left behind him, first, an ambiguous will, which was to cause John Keats serious difficulty to the end of his days, and, next, a family with no adult men who were readily available to take responsibility.[4] And, then, probably within a year's time--precisely when is uncertain--Frances Keats Rawlings called her second marriage a failure, left her husband, as well as the fairly lucrative livery stable, and returned to her mother's house.[5] There, during the next three and one-half years while her children watched her, she fell victim to consumption, and,

in March of 1810, she died.[6] Following his mother's death which was the climactic blow that external nature had dealt him thus far in his life, John Keats, age fourteen and one-half, became what almost seemed another being.[7]

Fortunately, other biographical facts permit some qualification of this bleak rehearsal. For, when the turmoil of his family life became so disturbing that he felt driven to try escaping from it, Keats was able almost immediately to find a surprisingly satisfactory way out. Within the context of the boarding school at Enfield, which had been his real home for almost half of his entire life, his endeavor to escape showed itself in a seemingly abrupt fashion. Quickly, it became a "sustained commitment to study, to reading, and to all that was represented by the school of the kindly John Clarke."[8] Of course, this endeavor, coming from a fairly sudden, quite desperate need to grasp for something stable, may seem to have had its roots in shallow soil. But, like most human manifestations that have lasting meaning, its roots were, in fact, well grounded. First of all, though he had never been the bookish sort, having gained a reputation for being something of a roughneck,[9] a report states while he was at Enfield, "there was ever present a determined and steady spirit

in all his undertakings. . . . He was a most orderly scholar."[10] Then, as a growing boy of fourteen, he was probably able to bring support to this orderliness through the vigor which his own steady physical and mental maturation made possible. Quite simply, both physically and mentally, he was probably ready to learn. But, more than any other cause, it was the person of Charles Cowden Clarke, John Clarke's twenty-three year old son who was swiftly achieving prominence in 1810 as the most energetic, well-read, and benevolent teacher in his father's school who made scholarly endeavor so enticing that John Keats could not resist its temptation.[11]

At this point, to extol Charles Cowden Clarke's virtues as John Keats's teacher and fast friend seems almost trite. Even though the self-effacing Clarke would never take any special credit for helping Keats,[12] there is no doubt that Clarke's influence on the boy was profound. Keats, himself, recognized this fact. Possibly no teacher has ever received a more eloquent tribute than the one Keats presented in his early verse letter "To Charles Cowden Clarke." The key statment is:

> Ah! had I never seen,
> Or known your kindness, what might I have been?[13]

This statement is without exaggeration. For almost to the degree that Keats's disturbed family experiences had

introduced him to the external world's alien character, Charles Cowden Clarke introduced him to those things which men, in common, recognize to be their most important and stable concerns. It seems to be no overstatement to say that through the wholesome acquaintance which the two established, Keats perceived for the first time that men themselves are worthwhile. While in Clarke's care, Keats began to know the nature of his own humanity.

In the long run, to outline in extensive detail the specific ways in which Clarke helped Keats would accomplish little. It is enough to acknowledge the general directions in which Clarke led Keats, while recognizing that because he followed Clarke, Keats found his very existence to be enhanced. In the classroom and library, Keats discovered, at Clarke's direction, the joys of Greek and Roman mythology and of English literature. Through informal encounters with Clarke, Keats gained his first inkling of the exciting intellectual activity that was going on in early nineteenth century England. He learned about the contemporary English drama with the great actor, Edmund Kean, at its forefront;[14] he learned something of the tenor of English politics, mostly by reading The Examiner, a politically liberal periodical published by Clarke's friend, Leigh Hunt.[15] But, most important of all, because of Clarke's friendship

and concern, Keats no doubt could recognize for the first time that at least one person beyond the limits of his rapidly diminishing family would support him as he faced an alien world.

During the summer of 1811, Keats must have recognized the full value of Clarke's concern when a seemingly perverse nature again thrust itself into his life. A sour-tempered London tea merchant named Richard Abbey, whom Mrs. Jennings had named following Frances Keats Rawlings's death to be the Keats children's principal trustee,[16] apparently saw no good reason for keeping either John or George Keats at Enfield. As a very practical businessman, Abbey saw no use in the studies of languages, literature and mathematics, apparently thinking them to be merely frivolous.[17] Taking George into the tea business, he arranged that John be apprenticed to an apothecary named Thomas Hammond. Of this turn of events, Walter Jackson Bate observed, "It is incredible that Keats, after what had happened to him at Clarke's school during this last two years, could have left Enfield without an almost desperate reluctance."[18] At least for a time, Keats no doubt viewed this new experience of uprooting as a disaster second only in severity to his loss of his mother. Certainly, his thoughts of Clarke's friendship helped temper his new unhappiness; and he

surely counted as fortunate the fact that Hammond's apothecary shop was located at Edmonton, situated only two miles from Enfield. Upon finding his apprentice work to be quite easy, he soon found sufficient time to make five or six visits each month to Enfield. There, during these visits which continued for four years, as Clarke explained later, "we" [Clarke and Keats] "had good talk."[19]

To the historian of Keats's life, the wish to ascertain the precise nature of Clarke and Keats's four years of "good talk" has proved to be a cause of almost unrelieved frustration. The reason for this frustration is quite simple. Aside from "Recollections of Keats"* which Clarke wrote at a distance of fifty years from their acquaintance and a few pieces of Keats's earliest poetry, absolutely no evidence exists which can help to determine what happened during Keats's Edmonton days. However, from the information that is available, three related ideas suggest themselves. They are (1) that beyond any reasonable doubt, because of his "good talk"

* Clarke's "Recollections of Keats" is a part of Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke's book, Recollections of Writers, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1878.

with Clarke, Keats eventually decided to become a poet; (2) that while making his decision, Keats may have recalled in some way both his pleasure, particularly while in Clarke's company, of discovering and appreciating poetry and his wretchedness while undergoing various encounters with nature's alienating forces; and (3) that as a natural outcome of his recollections, Keats seems to have sensed that in taking upon himself the role of the poet, he not only could enter more intimately into the pleasure which he had already known in reading poetry, but he could also acquire for himself a kind of psychological refuge from a threatening external world.

Even in Clarke's description of Keats's early genuine interest in reading poetry, and, perhaps, in writing it, there is some hint of why Keats could come to view poetry, not only as a device for pleasure, but also as one for refuge. Thus Clarke wrote:

> It were difficult, at this lapse of time [written some fifty years later], to note the spark that fired the train of his poetical tendencies; but he must have given unmistakable tokens of his mental bent; otherwise, at that early stage of his career, I never could have read to him the "Epithalamia" of Spenser; and this I remember having done, and in that hallowed old arbour [on the grounds of Enfield], the scene of many bland and graceful associations having passed away. At that time, he may have been sixteen years old; and at that period of life, he certainly appreciated the general beauty of the composition, and felt the more passionate passages; for his features and exclamations were ecstatic.[20]

Because the issue is central to any understanding of Keats's early work as a poet, commentators have explored in considerable detail the outcome of Keats's ecstatic reaction to Spenser. They have been greatly interested, also, in an additional comment from Clarke which explains that Keats was not only attracted to Spenser's "Epithalamia," but, after asking Clarke for a copy of The Faerie Queene, he went through the work "as a young horse would through a meadow--ramping!"[21] As a result, there is no doubt that between 1812 and 1814, Keats, in Ernest Pettet's words, "found" in Spenser "a kindred spirit."[22]

To some, this kindred feeling with Spenser has meant that Keats not only took Spenser for his first literary idol, but, also, that as a beginner at poetry, Keats, like Spenser, espoused a neo-platonic philosophy of life.[23] Certainly, this observation bears more than a grain of truth. By taking into account how chaotic most of Keats's life had been, one can understand why Keats would have been especially sympathetic to a philosophy which held as its basic tenent that "true reality is found not in the realm of sense but in a higher, spiritual realm of the ideal and the universal.[24] A number of Keats's earlier poems bear witness that Keats welcomed some strains of neo-platonism into his thinking.

But, in the light of a careful study of both Keats's biography and early poems, one must assert that to call Keats a neo-platonist without qualification is a mistake. If nothing else, such an assertion ignores that Keats "lacked even the small exposure to Plato himself that a college undergraduate might have had."[25] As well, it neglects the fact that Keats's indoctrination into neo-platonism through his reading of Spenser and his talks with Clarke was both quite indirect and very subtle. Probably Clarke and certainly Keats were not aware in any specific way of their neo-platonic tendencies. Rather, in the early 1800's--as evident in Coleridge, Shelley, and Carlyle--neo-platonism had animated the major currents of English literary thought. Without their being entirely aware of what had happened, both Clarke and Keats were swept along by these currents. But, most important, to suppose that Keats ever slavishly adopted a ready made set of ideas is to ignore an extremely important fact about Keats himself. From the beginning of his career, Keats asserted his individuality. In formulating practically all of his notions about poetry, while he necessarily had to use ideas that he had learned from other people, he never borrowed them without modification. Certainly he had no prior commitment to neo-platonism. Rather, he seemed to choose for his own use whatever notions came

way which best fitted his own needs. Then, after using these notions as points of departure, he constructed a coherent body of thought that was, essentially, his very own. This body of thought was a personal vision of ideal existence.

Naive thought it might be, Keats's vision of ideal existence, with its apparent overtones of neo-platonism, stood as a natural outcome of his repeated experiences of alienation and humanization. Probably with no social considerations as part of its formulation, it had as its principal reason for being Keats's own very real, entirely personal need for refuge from nature's most powerful manifestations of evil--the forces of pain and death. As a medium, poetry provided Keats the way to a more or less solitary refuge. Because of his past experiences with poetry, he envisioned, it seems, that by taking upon himself the role of the poet, a man could come to know in a much more intimate way than even poetry's most perceptive reader, the intrinsic joy which is poetry itself. It should be made clear, however, that Keats did not see in his vision that as a man took on the poet's role, he could avoid confrontation with the world's destructive, evil forces. Rather, Keats believed that by learning the poet's role, a man could gain for himself a more satisfactory means to deal with evil than the

means which other men possess. From his own point of view, Keats did not so much want to use poetry as a device for escape from pain, as he wanted to use it as a kind of balm to relieve the severity of pain.

In writing some of earliest poems, Keats had the components of his vision in mind. Thus, in the sonnet of praise which he addressed to Byron, he explained:

> Byron! how sweetly sad thy melody!
> Attuning still the soul to tenderness,
> As if soft Pity, with unusual stress,
> Had touch'd her plaintive lute, and thou, being by
> Hadst cought the tones, nor suffer'd them to die.
> O'ershadowing sorrow doth not make thee less
> Delightful. (11. 1-7 p. 376)

In these lines, though he seems not to have accurately understood him in his efforts as a poet, Keats credited Byron with being especially gifted to use what he understood was the poet's particular power--to be an extremely perceptive singer. Byron caught, or perhaps, he matched pitch with, the tones which he perceived were the very essence of tenderness. These tones compose a soothing quality which practically all men recognize--the balm of "soft Pity." Then, with these tones, as Keats observed to Byron:

> thou thy griefs dost dress
> With a bright halo, shining beamily,
> As when a cloud the golden moon doth veil,
> Its sides are ting'd with a resplendent glow,
> Through the dark robe oft amber rays prevail,
> And like fair veins in sable marble flow (11. 7-14 p.376).

As a poet whom Keats fitted into his vision, Byron, at first, dressed over his personal griefs by using his poetic powers. But as Keats saw them, these poetic powers were able to accomplish even more. With Pity's soft tones, which were like "amber rays" that "through the dark robe prevail," or, what seems a better comparison, "like fair veins in sable marble flow," Byron permeated to dilute and, thereby, make less the power of "O'shadowing sorrow."

A sonnet addressed to Chatterton suggests and interesting adjunct to Keats's vision of ideal existence. Though he intended to use the vision in living, he did not insist that the dividends of taking on the poet's role must necessarily end upon death. In the sonnet, Keats lamented the young, dead poet:

> O Chatterton! how very sad thy fate!
> Dear child of sorrow--son of misery!
> How soon the film of death obscur'd that eye,
> Whence Genius mildly flash'd, and high debate.
> (11. 1-4 p. 375)

But after he mourned Chatterton:

> How soon that voice, majestic and elate,
> Melted in dying numbers! Oh! how nigh
> Was night to thy fair morning, (11. 5-7, p. 375)

Keats, in an abrupt escape into some sort of ideal existence, apparently compounded of neo-platonism and conventional Christianity, declared:

> Thou didst die
> A half-blown flow'ret which cold blasts amate.
> But this is past: thou art among the stars
> Of highest Heaven: to the rolling spheres
> Thou sweetly singest: nought thy hymning mars,
> Above the ingrate world and human fears (11. 7-12, p. 375).

Quite obviously, while his vision of ideal existence was rooted mainly in earthly soil, Keats could not resist the temptation to contemplate a final, heavenly triumph over "the ingrate world and human fears."

In late 1814, following the death of the seventy-eight-year-old Mrs. Jennings,[26] Keats, for the first time, made some "practical" application of his vision of ideal existence. In his application, he succeeded perhaps more completely than one might have supposed he would. At least while writing two pieces of poetry, he used his vision of ideal existence as a kind of rationale to deal with pain and death as they again centered their forces upon him. In some lines from a sonnet, he found comfort as he pictured his grandmother in a conventional heaven:

> As from the darkening gloom a silver dove
> Upsoars, and darts into the Eastern light
> On pinions that nought moves but pure delight,
> So fled thy soul into the realms above,
> Regions of peace and everlasting love
> Where happy spirits, crown'd with circlets bright
> Of starry beam, and gloriously bedight,
> Taste the high joy none but the blest can prove.
> (11. 1-8, p. 421)

Then, perhaps because he recognized his poetic work of singing to be a source of earthly joy, he seemed to

direct his grandmother:

> There thou dost joinest the immortal quire
> In melodies that even Heaven fair
> Fill with superior bliss (11. 9-11, p. 421)

After some reflection, Keats decided, it seems, that his sonnet "As from the darkening gloom," was not entirely satisfactory. From his point of view, perhaps, as the sonnett contemplated the realms of "pure delight," it was too divorced from consideration of the real cause for his pain. This cause, of course, had made him, his brothers and his sister to be orphans, who were all quite alone in an alien world. Therefore, he might have felt somewhat better by writing this comment "On Death."

> Can death be sleep, when life is but a dream
> And scenes of bliss pass as a phantom by?
> And transient pleasures as a vision seem,
> And yet we think the greatest pain's to die.
>
> How strange it is that man on earth should roam,
> And lead a life of woe, but not forsake
> His rugged path; nor dare he view alone
> His future doom which is but to awake (11. 1-8, p. 426).

Apparently, with the help of poetry, Keats could rationalize that death is not ultimately triumphant. Beyond death, Keats could have supposed, man wakes into an existence--one different from that which he knew during life--in which he is confronted not by loneliness, but, in some way, by truth.

For almost a year, Keats maintained intact his vision of ideal existence, believing that by a man's

taking upon himself the role of the poet, he could attain one means to hold the earthly forces of evil at bay. The poems that survive from the first nine months of 1814 suggest that following his grandmother's death, he settled again into the routine of Hammond's surgery. For the most part, only the issues which existed near the periphery of his cloistered life at Edmonton and Enfield aroused him to write. Three languid poems entitled "To Some Ladies," "On Receiving a Curious Shell, and a Copy of Verses, From the Same Ladies," and "To Emma" clearly show that Keats could manifest only the most polite concern for the young ladies. Simply enough, at that time, he was not interested in women. Two short, but vigorous poems, a sonnet "Written on the Day that Mr. Leigh Hunt Left Prison," and a short piece of four lines, "Anniversary of Charles II's Restoration," indicate that he could generate a good deal more interest in the great political tumult which filled England in 1815 preceding Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo. But these political poems should be understood for the most part as manifestations not so much of Keats's desire to persuade or to instruct society in political philosophy, but to fortify his own personal liberal political viewpoint which he had gained from Hunt and from Clarke.

It was only in one of his poems from early 1815, a curious piece called, "To Hope," that Keats touched upon a personally disconcerting issue, an issue, though he probably did not recognize it as such, which made suspect his first conception of the poet's work. Thus, as he asked "Sweet Hope" to help him:

> When by my solitary hearth I sit,
> And hateful thoughts enwrap my soul in gloom;
> When no fair dreams before my "mind's eye" flit,
> And the bare heath of life presents no bloom
> (11. 1-4, p. 19)

he pointed to a difficulty which he encountered frequently during his career as a poet. All too often, he had "hateful thoughts enwrap" his "soul in gloom" simply because he had nothing about which to write. At times, to find subject matter, he had to resort to abstractions as in "To Hope," or he had to write poems about poetry itself as in the "Ode to Apollo."[27] In time, the thought may have occurred to him, though in only the most fleeting manner, that the business of the poet may be neither so easy nor so difficult as catching tones of some sort out of the etherial or the earthly atmosphere. It might be something else. But, during most of 1815, nothing disturbed his confidence in what he supposed he knew. Only another major upset in his personal existence would cause him to question what there was of his personal philosophy of life and poetry.

II

In late September, 1815, Keats completed his apprentice work at Hammond's, and, for the first time in his young adult life, he left his home for London to enter on 1 October 1815 the United Hospitals of St. Thomas and Guys, intending to study surgery and eventually to be certified as an apothecary.[28] At first, he might have considered this move the natural thing to do. In a short time, however, he no doubt began to regard his new situation as the probable cause of his undoing. The first reason for his unhappiness was simple homesickness. He was away from the Clarkes, and from Enfield and Edmonton; and, while he and his brothers, George and Tom, soon became very close to each other, he apparently did not take immediate consolation that they lived within easy walking distance of the hospital.[29] Probably he felt unwelcome in Abbey's counting house. Certainly, his loneliness was so apparent that in a short time, one of his lecturers at the hospital, Astley Cooper, asked a student to look after Keats. The student, George Cooper, invited Keats,[30] along with several other students, "to hire a joint sitting room and separate bed Rooms."[31]

This living arrangement, though it probably dispelled Keats's first loneliness, did not insure him any immediate

satisfaction. Indeed, the biographical evidence shows something quite to the contrary. While he at first experienced some difficulty in adjusting to his work at Guys, he found greater, more prolonged trouble in adjusting to his fellow students. Together, they disagreed with each other in an essential way, for, while Keats's primary interest was in poetry, their interest, it seems easy to understand, was in their apothecary studies. Many years later in March (?) 1847, Henry Stephens, one of the students who shared rooms with Keats, described the frequently abstruse, but very real conflict which grew up between Keats and his associates:

> His Passion if I may so call it, for Poetry was soon Manifested--
>
> "It was the Goal, to whence his wishes bent
> Where every hope, where every thought was sent
> Concent'red there, he lived for it alone"--
>
> He attended Lectures and went through the usual routine, but he had no desire to excel in that pursuit, In fact Medical Knowledge was beneath his attention for--
>
> "When the young Eagle with exulting eye
> Had learn'd to dare the splendour of the sky,
> Would his free wing, from that Majestic height
> Descend, to follow some less magic light?"
>
> No--Poetry was to his mind the zenith of all his Aspirations--The only thing worthy the attention of superior minds--So he thought--All other pursuits were mean & tame, He had no ideal of Fame, or Greatness, or the Attainment of Poetical Excellence, The greatest men in the world were the Poets, and to rank among them was the chief object of his ambition.-- It may readily be imagined that this feeling was accompanied with a great deal of Pride and some conceit, and that amongst mere Medical students, he would walk, & talk as one of the Gods might be supposed to do, when mingling with mortals, This pride had

> exposed him, as may be readily imagined, to occasional ridicule, & some mortification.[32]

Further, as if the hostility that he received from the hands of his peers and the gory, stinking work which he did at the hospital were not enough, he would not agree even with those few acquaintances who did profess some interest in poetry. Again, Stephen's comments are enlightening:

> Having a taste & liking for Poetry myself, though at that time but little cultivated, he regarded me as something a little superior to the rest, and would gratify himself frequently, by shewing me some lines of his writing, or some new idea which he had struck out. We had frequently conversation on the merits of particular poets, but our tastes did not agree, He was a great admirer of Spenser, His Fairy Queen was a great favorite with him, Byron was also in favor, Pope he maintained was not a poet, only a versifier. I was fond of the bold, nervous & declamatory kind of Poetry, He was fond of Imagery, The most trifling Similes appeared to please him, Sometimes I ventured to show him some lines which I had written, but I always had the mortification of hearing them--condemned, indeed he seemed to think it presumption in me to attempt to head along the same pathway as himself, however humble a distance--[33]

However, if Keats treated Stephens in a high-handed way, Stephens apparently did not go completely unvindicated as he witnessed an acquaintance of Keats named Newmarch, or possibly Newmarsh, repay Keats in his own coin. Stephens reported:

> Whenever "Keats" showed Newmarch any of his Poetry it was sure to be ridiculed, and severly handled.-- Newmarch was a light hearted, & merry fellow, but I thought he was rather too fond of mortifying Keats,

> but more particularly his brothers, as their praise of their Brother John amounted almost to idolatry, & Newmarsh & they frequently quarrelled.[34]

In retrospect, one can say that during his first weeks in London, Keats for the first time squarely confronted that indomitable force called society--a force which he regarded generally as a perverse thing, which, in his probable view, was usually composed of only a few difficult individuals who opposed him and his poetry mostly for the sake of being contrary. As he frequently knew it during the rest of his life, he found society to be excruciatingly intimidating. Rather quickly he discovered his first defense against this force, a defense by conceit, to be entirely unsuccessful. As a result, he again contemplated retreating into the sanctuary of poetry. In one of his best early pieces, a sonnet written in November 1815, he seemed almost ready to acquiesce to society's power, seeing a life of solitude as possibly his only alternative.

To solitude, however, Keats made one major plea:

> O solitude! if I must with thee dwell,
> Let it not be among the jumbled heap
> Of murky buildings (11. 1-3, p. 36)

Without hesitation, he was ready to abandon great and gloomy London, a composite symbol of all of society's perverse, intimidating manifestations for something not unlike Enfield and Edmonton. Therefore, he beckoned

solitude to:

> climb with me the steep--
> Nature's observatory--whence the dell
> Its flowery slopes, its river's crystal swell,
> May seem a span; let me thy vigils keep
> 'Mongst boughs pavillion'd where the deer's swift leap
> Startles the wild bee from the fox-glove bell.
> (11. 3-8, p. 36)

But, before he concluded, Keats presented solitude with a significant reservation to any agreement they might make. By this reservation, Keats practically rejected an existence in pure solitude; and, what is much more important, he acknowledged for the first time in writing his very real dependence on humanity. He explained to solitude:

> But thought I'll gladly trace these scenes with thee,
> Yet the sweet converse of an innocent mind,
> Whose words are images of thoughts refin'd,
> Is my soul's pleasure; and it sure must be
> Almost the highest bliss of human-kind,
> When to thy haunts two kindred spirits flee (11. 9-14, p. 36).

Undoubtedly, while he wrote these lines, Keats was not in the least concerned with poetic theory. Yet one cannot help remarking upon what these lines suggest about his personal and poetic values in late 1815. Less than a year before in December, 1814, he supposed the state of highest bliss would be found in a solitary existence with poetry. Eleven months later, following the move to London where he soon realized he could no longer take for granted the kind of companionship he had enjoyed with Clarke, he

maintained that the highest bliss of human-kind occurred "when two kindred spirits flee" to solitude's haunts. It seems clear that in the sonnet, "O Solitude," Keats in some way equated the worth of poetry with the worth of humanity. Possibly, because he recalled his old association with Clarke, he regarded "sweet converse" with "an innocent mind" to be important. With his new recognition, the first innocent mind whom he sought out was a young acquaintance named George Felton Mathew.

Although Keats had known Mathew since late 1814 or early 1815, apparently it was only after he moved to London that he decided to become in any way close to Mathew.[35] Clearly, the relationship was established mostly on Keats's initiative because he probably regarded Mathew, by comparison with the dullards at Guys, to be a particularly special kind of man. In Keats's eyes, Mathew stood out from others as the first person he had ever known who professed to be a poet.[36]

W. J. Bate describes the Keats-Mathew relationship as a "comedy of enthusiasm."[37] But probably from both Keats's and Mathew's viewpoints, the comedy was laced with irony. In his rush to gain a cohort after his first gray weeks in London, Keats wrote his first verse epistle, addressing it "To George Felton Mathew," its first lines stated:

> Sweet are the pleasures that to verse belong,
> And doubly sweet a brotherhood in song (11. 1-2, p. 23).

Because he assumed Mathew to be a singer in what he considered the manner of Spenser, Chatterton, and Byron, Keats invested him with a "great partnership" (1.8, p. 23) in which the two of them would diffuse:

> Over the genius-loving heart, a feeling
> Of all that's high, and great, and good, and healing.
> (11. 9-10; p. 23)

The epistle continues with the plea "O Mathew lend thy aid" that "we may soft humanity put on, . .

> And Sit, and rhyme and think on Chatterton;
> And that warm-hearted Shakespeare sent to meet him
> Four laurell'd spirits, heaven-ward to intreat him.
> With reverence would we speak of all the sages
> Who have left streaks of light athwart their ages.
> (11. 53, 55-60, p. 24)

But, while the friendship with Mathew at first seemed to offer Keats the best possible means to escape, if only briefly, "far different cares" that sternly beckoned him "from soft 'Lydian airs,'" (11. 17-18, p. 23) Keats apparently perceived rather quickly that Mathew was not one who would leave "streaks of light athwart" (1. 60, p. 24) his own age. Probably, Mathew did not approach Keats as an intellectual equal;[38] and, as a poet, he took little interest in placating his reader's "genius-loving heart." (1. 9, p. 23) Unlike Keats, he probably did not much idolize Shakespeare, Milton, or Chatterton.[39] Nor was he interested in language as such. He regarded imagery

and metaphor as only "external decorations" which were not related to "the deep emotions of the muse." Rather than sanction poetry with a particular intellectual orientation, he preferred a poetry of sentiment. The qualities in poetry which he regarded as "indicative of extreme sensibility" were those that brought forth both tears in the eyes and a breaking in the voice. For him, emotion was probably the most important thing in poetry.[40]

For a time, Keats did pattern his views after Mathew's. For example, Mathew considered Keats's "Three Sonnets on Woman" to be especially praiseworthy.[41] In particular, he was moved by the sentiment in the lines:

> God! she is like a milk-white lamb that bleats
> For man's protection. Surely the all-seeing,
> Who joys to see us with his gifts agreeing,
> Will never give him pinons, who intreats
> Such innocence to ruin,--who vilely cheats
> A dove-like bosom (11. 31-36, p. 22).

But, Keats soon began to realize that to continue doting on sentiment, without going beyond it to any particular action or development, soon loses its appeal. While he had hoped to find some kind of refuge in poetry, he discovered that Mathew's approach to poetry did not, really could not, satisfy his needs. Because of its insistence upon almost pure emotion, Mathew's approach to poetry decreed that both the poet and his reader, in a real sense, should wallow in these emotions. His

approach led to a kind of dead end, where neither the poet nor the reader could make any intellectual or even emotional advance. By perceiving something of these ideas, at first, probably on a purely instinctive level, Keats knew that a poetry which had sentiment for almost its entire foundation was of little use to him, or, for that matter, to many other people. With such a realization, Keats no doubt was particularly distressed to find that for his own ends the only thing that a poetry of sentiment could effectively accomplish was to lead him back to the painful emotions he wanted to avoid. Because of his experience with Mathew, although he was still far away from any final knowledge of what he wanted in poetry, he at least knew one that he did not want. He must have experienced considerable disappointment to realize that he had jumped to conclusions by thinking that on poetic matters he and Mathew were compatible.

Many years afterward in a letter of 3 February 1847 written to Keats's first biographer, R.M. Milnes, Mathew made clear his own feelings about the relationship. While he apparently felt pride in having had some association with Keats, he nevertheless did not hesitate to describe his position on poetry to be fundamentally different from Keats's. Keats's eye, Mathew explained:

> was more critical than tender, and so was his mind . . . He delighted in leading you through the mazes of elaborate description, but was less conscious of the sublime and the pathetic. He used to spend many evenings in reading to me, but I never observed the tears in his eyes nor the broken voice which were indicative of extreme sensibility. These indeed were not the part of poetry which he took pleasure in pointing out. Nevertheless he was of a kind and affectionate disposition, and though his feelings might not be so painful to himself, they would perhaps be more useful to others.[42]

With disenchanted thoughts and feelings much like the ones that Mathew had for Keats, Keats drifted away from Mathew to search elsewhere for a "kindred spirit." After a time, he felt he had found this spirit in the writing and the personality of Leigh Hunt.

In much the same way that he had first looked upon Mathew, Keats regarded Hunt as a person with whom he could exchange ideas about poetry. However, the relationship between Keats and Hunt, by compairson with the Keats-Mathew association, was built on far more stable, though not entirely infallible grounds. Certainly, the relationship did not begin in a manner which in the least resembled the way Keats hastily and aggressively made Mathew his confidant. Rather, Keats's interest in Hunt developed slowly over quite a long period of time.

To appreciate the extent of his interest in Hunt, one must keep in mind that Keats prefaced his first personal meeting with Hunt by undergoing six or seven

years of preparation. On numerous occasions as a student, he heard Charles Cowden Clarke speak of Hunt as a friend. Sometime before he left Enfield in 1811, he began to read Hunt's liberal periodical, The Examiner, a practice which he continued far into his adult years. According to Clarke, this reading "no doubt laid the foundation of his love of civil and religious liberty.[43] Several years later, he apparently manifested his acceptance of Hunt's politics during his association with Mathew. Certainly, Mathew, holding views on politics which were as limited as his views on poetry, remembered Keats's political ideas many years later when, in his correspondence with Milnes, he complained that Keats:

> was not one who thought it better to bear the ills we have, than fly to others which we know not of. He was of the sceptical and republican school. An advocate for the innovations which were making progress in his time [sic]. A faultfinder with everything established [sic].[44]

Though without intending to do so, of course, Mathew, in making this complaint, not only described Keats's liberal approach, but, for the most part, he also described Hunt's. Then, in February, 1816, as he moved steadily into the second portion of his work at Guy's Hospital, Keats read Hunt's newly published narrative romance, The Story of Rimini.[45] Immediately, he was delighted to realize that not only in politics, but also

in poetry, both he and Hunt stood together.

Still, the exciting discovery of Rimini did not end Keats's preparation to meet Hunt. Rather, this discovery served as a kind of signal for Keats to begin an entirely new study of Hunt's work. But this time, of course, he studied Hunt's poetry, not his politics. No doubt, the study was haphazard and very informal. After all, his work at Guy's Hospital kept him very busy. But it is clear that the study was completed and that it was extremely successful. In his books, John Keats and The Stylistic Development of John Keats, Walter Jackson Bate documents in a claar way the extent of Hunt's influence on Keats's style and versification.[46] These studies confirm that Keats essentially infused his writing with Hunt's ideas about society. But the question remains: why was Keats so captivated by Rimini? The answer to such a question not only clarifies what Keats thought about poetry during most of 1814, but it also serves to determine the point of departure which Keats used when he moved on to other ideas.

Probably Keats's reason for finding particular pleasure in Rimini was his supposition that through the poem, Hunt affirmed Keats's old ideas about poetry. As a framework for the poem, Hunt used the famous Italian tale about Paolo and Francesca. And within this framework,

he made room to paint many Italian scenes.[47] One can easily imagine that after reading the poem Keats assumed that Hunt intended his beautiful scenes to be places where both poet and reader could find refuge from unpleasant reality. Probably Keats believed that in Hunt, he had found a poet, perhaps excelled only by Spenser, who actually put his, Keats's ideas about poetry into practice.

But, by espousing Hunt's poetry, Keats implicitly adopted a new, and at first, a very subtle issue into this thinking. In the weeks that followed his initial discovery of Rimini, he decided to attempt imitating Hunt. "A Specimen of an Introduction to a Poem" and "Calidore, a Fragment" were the two attempts at imitation which he made; and they were both failures, mostly because he had no plan to develop them into anything.[48] By attempting these imitations, however, he caused himself to address his poetry to a general audience, and not to specific people or events as he had most of the time in writing his very early poems. One should explain, of course, that in some of his early poems, though Keats appears to address the general public, it seems quite probable, when one considers how involved Keats was with his poetry, that he wrote these poems mostly for his own benefit and not really for his reader's. Yet in "A Specimen," as well as in "Calidore," by imitating Hunt,

whose purpose in writing Rimini was to produce a straight-forward narrative-descriptive poem to be read by other people, Keats also took for himself this purpose. Specifically, in "A Specimen," he began by writing:

Lo! I must tell a tale of chivalry. (1.1, p. 9)

Without any development in mind and upon reflection, probably feeling ill prepared and overly presumptuous to try following in Hunt's footsteps, he never told the tale. But, whatever his reason might have been for doing so, because he assigned himself the task, saying that he "must tell a tale of chivalry," it seems apparent, though this interpretation is debatable,that Keats implicitly felt the need to communicate with a larger group of readers than he had previously written for. Responding to this need, he became, for the first time in his career, a poet essentially responsible to society. At the time, he was probably not much aware that he had taken on such a responsibility. Rather, his awareness of the fact developed slowly in the following months and years. It seems farily clear that the growth of this awareness began only after Keats had read Hunt's Rimini.

Only one clear piece of evidence exists which shows that before his first meeting with Hunt, Keats had begun to alter his thoughts about poetry. During August and

September of 1816, having completed his course of study at Guy's Hospital and having passed the difficult examination in Latin to become an apothecary,[49] he decided to take a vacation at the coastal town of Margate. There, he intended to make his first serious, uninterrupted attempt to write poetry.[50] Actually, like his effort earlier in the year to imitate Hunt's poem, this attempt failed miserably, mostly because he did not have any particular incidents in mind from which he could develop his poems. During his two month at Margate, he wrote only three pieces, a sonnet and two verse epistles. One of the epistles was Keats's statement of hamage and thanks to Charles Cowden Clarke. The sonnet and the other verse epistle were intended for Keats's brother, George. Because of its brevity, the sonnet says little, except to describe the scenery around Margate and to tell George, that "without the social thought" of him, all of the beautiful scenery would mean nothing. At least, then, Keats had the word, <u>social</u>, in his vocabulary, as the word suggested the need for a close human relationship. But, in the verse epistle, with nothing else to say and because he had thought intensely about the matter for several weeks, he explained his notions about poetry.

In the beginning passage of the epistle, "To My Brother George," Keats lamented both his inability to

produce poetry:

> Full many a dreary hour have I past,
> My brain bewilder'd, and my mind o'ercast
> with heaviness; (11. 1-3, p. 25)

and his fear:

> That I should never hear Apollo's song. (11. 9, p. 25)

But, in spite of his bewilderment and despair, he re-affirmed his strong faith that:

> . . . there are times, when those that love the bay,
> Fly from all sorrowing far, far away;
> A sudden glow comes on them, nought they see
> In water, earth, or air, but poesy (11. 19-22, p. 26)

Thus, his old belief reasserted itself that through the power of poesy, the poet could "fly from all" sorrow to find "a sudden glow" of joy. He felt so certain in his views because

> It has been said, dear George, and true I hold it,
> (For knightly Spenser to Libertas /Hunt/ told it).
> (11. 23-24, p. 26)

By naming Hunt /or Libertas/ along with Spenser as the authority for his belief, he dispelled any doubt concerning how highly he regarded Hunt.

Further into the epistle, Keats described the nature of what he believed the poet could achieve with his special powers. He defined his personal goal in writing poetry, previous to his meeting Hunt. He hoped to see "wonders strange." With confidence, he declared that:

> These <u>wonders strange</u> he /the poet/ sees, and many more,
> Whose head is pregnant with poetic lore (11. 53-54, p. 26)

Asking questions about the poet, he continued:

> Should he /the poet/ upon an evening ramble far
> With forehead to the soothing breezes bare,
> Would he naught see but the dark, silent blue
> With all its diamonds trembling through and through?
> Or the coy moon, when in the waviness
> Of whitest clouds she does her beauty dress,
> And staidly paces higher up, and higher,
> Like a sweet nun in holy-day attire? (11. 55-62, p. 27)

And, zestfully, he answered:

> Ah, yes! much more would start into his sight--
> The revelries, and mysteries of night. (11. 63-64, p. 27)

Then, though still maintaining his staunch belief, he concluded with an element of uncertainty. To George, Keats vowed that should he ever see "The revelries, and mysteries of night"--

> I will tell you
> Such tales as needs must with amazement spell you.
> (11. 65-66, p. 27)

Up to this point, Keats had said nothing that essentially altered his earliest philosophy of poetry. But in the next section of the epistle, he revealed that he had broadened the basis for his thought about poetry. In his thinking, there is no longer a narrow preoccupation with himself, for, although still egotistical, he is at least concerned with his effect on other people. Of course, he still wanted to know the poet's "warm glow" in order to see "wonders strange." "These," he said,

"are the living pleasures of the bard: but," he added, "richer far /is/ posterity's award." (11. 67-68, p. 27) Of this award, Keats posed the question:

> What does /the poet/ murmur with his latest breath,
> While his proud eye looks through the film of death?

Confidently, inclusively and with great naïveté, he gave an extensive answer:

> What though I leave this dull, and earthly mould,
> Yet shall my spirit lofty converse hold
> With after times. (11. 71-73, p. 27)

First of all, he stated that with this converse:

> 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.
> The sage will mingle with each moral theme
> My happy thoughts sententious; he will teem
> With lofty periods when my verses fire him
> And then I'll stoop from heaven to inspire him .
> (11. 73-80, p. 27)

But the politicians and the sages will not be the only ones who will benefit from his poetry, for after his death, he will leave:

> Lays . . . of such dear delight
> That maids will sing them on their bridal night.
> (11. 81-82, p. 27)

The "gay villagers, upon a more of May" will use his songs as they crown "that lovely lass . . . their queen ." (11. 86-87, p. 27) And further:

> To sweet rest
> Shall the dear babe, upon its mother's breast
> Be lull'd with songs of mine (11. 101-103, p. 28).

Then, in a climax of great good feeling, he concluded the passage in the poem:

> 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 thy dominions.
> Full joy I feel, while thus I cleave the air,
> That my soft verse will charm thy daughters fair
> And warm thy sons! (11. 103-109, p. 28)

Within less than half a year, Keats was entirely unable to muster such buoyant gladness about his role as a socially responsible poet. He began to question seriously the real extent of the poet's powers. At least to himself, it seems, he suggested that his roles as poet and as socially responsible individual were probably incompatible. Even in his "Epistle to George Keats," he admitted a schism of sorts to exist between the poet and society. In his view, while the poet lives, the dividends of his poetry "are the living pleasures of the bard." It is only "through the film of death" that the poet's "proud eye" will see these pleasures awarded to posterity. But this issue, one about which he became profoundly concerned, still had not squarely confronted Keats in the late summer of 1816.

Toward the end of September, Keats left Margate.[51] Shortly before his departure, he wrote to Clarke expressing his despair over failure to produce poetry:

> With shatter'd boat, oar snapt, and canvass rent
> I slowly sail, scarce knowing my intent;
> Still scooping up the water with my fingers.
> (ll. 18-20. p. 29)

But within a few weeks, he enjoyed a reunion with Clarke. Following a night which the two spent reading from Chapman's translation of Homer, he went home at daybreak to complete within two hours his most famous sonnet. He titled it simply--"On the first looking into Chapman's Homer." As soon as he completed the sonnet, he evidently felt that it was good. While he had previously been very shy about showing his poetry to anyone, he sent a copy of the poem to Clarke by ten o'clock in the morning. Keats probably looked upon the sonnet as fittingly and successfully concluding his fruitless days at Margate.[52] With something to write about, in fact, he knew that he could write. Beyond his renewed confidence, only one other thing could increase his happiness. This would be an introduction to Hunt. And this introduction was shortly forthcoming. In late September or early October, Clarke had shown a few of Keats's poems to Hunt. Being very much impressed with what he read, Hunt invited Clarke to bring Keats to his cottage in the Vale of Health. Immediately, Clarke told Keats about the invitation.[53] And, in the first surviving letter (9 October) excepting the verse epistles, Keats prophetically and excitedly

wrote to Clarke:

> I can now devote any time you may mention to the pleasure of seeing Mr. Hunt--'t will be an Era in my existence.[54]

After some sixty-two years, Clarke recalled Keats's first meeting with Hunt:

> That was a "red-letter day" in the young poet's life, and one which will never fade with me while memory lasts.[55]

In retrospect, one can say that as the two approached Hunt's cottage, Keats began a period of sustained ecstasy, which would continue for at least three months. In Clarke's words:

> The character and expression of Keats's features would arrest even the casual passenger in the street; and now they were wrought to a tone of animation that I could not but watch with interest, knowing what was in store for him from the bland encouragement, and Spartan deference in attention, with facinating conversational eloquence, that he was to encounter and receive. As we approached the Heath, there was the rising and accelerated step, with the gradual subsidence of all talk. The interview, which stretched into three "morning calls," was the prelude to many after-scenes and saunterings about Caen Wood and its neighborhood; for Keats was suddenly made a familiar of the household, and was always welcome.[56]

To say that Keats found himself overwhelmed by Hunt is almost an understatement. From all appearances, Hunt, the writer and humanitarian, was everything Keats had expected him to be. A passage from the Clarke Recollections might describe Keats's feelings about Hunt soon after their first meeting:

> Hunt was peculiarly encouraging to young aspirants, whether fledgling authors or callow causists; and treated them with nothing of condescension, or affable accommodation of his intellect to theirs, or amiable tolerance for their comparative incapacity, but, as it were, placed them at once on a handsome footing of equality and complete level with himself. When, as was frequently the case, he found himself left master of the field of talk by his delighted hearers, only too glad to have him recount in his own felicitous way one of his "good stories," or utter some of his "good things," he would go on in a strain of sparkle, brilliancy, and freshness like a sun-lit stream in a spring meadow.[57]

It was these "good stories" and "good things," one can easily suppose, which most interested Keats. After all, he could recall in a vivid way how Hunt's The Tale of Rimini had seemed to rescue him from Mathew's empty approach to poetry. If Hunt could help him so much in an indirect and impersonal manner, then, through direct, personal contact with Hunt, he surely could gain the help he needed to escape from doldrums like the ones he had recently experienced at Margate. So far as he knew, Hunt, more than any other person, could show him how to gain the bliss he had so long believed must be the true poet's lot.

And, at least for a time, Keats was not disappointed with Hunt, or for that matter, with life itself. Not only could he count on Hunt's fast friendship, but he was quickly accepted by Hunt's brilliant and interesting friends. Haydon, Reynolds, Hazlitt, and Shelley accepted

Keats as one of their own.[58] To propel his elation even higher, the Hunt circle soon assured Keats that he would do well to edit some poems for publication.[59] On 31 October 1816, Keats arrived at his majority.[60] If nothing else, he could claim his legal, if not his financial freedom from Abbey. And, by mid-November 1816, Keats and his brothers, George and Tom arranged to live together.[61] After so many years apart, the three boys could at last feel that they had a home. The feeling of immense comfort which Keats himself knew from this happy arrangement revealed itself in a moving sonnet, written on Tom's seventeenth birthday (18 November) and entitled simply, "To My Brothers." As W. J. Bate points out, the sonnet:

> is poignant, with stock associations of home. There is the hearth, so dear to the English soul--the "faint cracklings" of the fire over the coals are "whispers" of "household gods"; there are no parents but there are at least "fraternal souls" in the small apartment in the midst of mercantile London.[62]

Because it so clearly shows the quality of Keats's joy during the last months of 1816, the sonnet is quoted in full:

> Small, busy flames play through the fresh laid coals,
> And their faint cracklings o'er our silence creep
> Like whispers of the household gods that keep
> A gentle empire o'er fraternal souls.
> And while, for rhymes, I search around the poles,
> Your eyes are fix'd, as in poetic sleep,
> That aye at fall of night our care condoles.
> This is your birth-day Tom, and I rejoice
> That thus it passes smoothly, quietly,

> Many such eves of gently whisp'ring noise
> May we together pass, and calmly try
> What are this world's true joys,--ere thy great voice,
> From its fair face, shall bid our spirits fly
> (ll. 1-14, p. 36).

Of course, the irony of the sonnet, "To My Brothers," lies in the fact that within two years, the Keats's brothers fraternal kinship was forever put asunder.[63] But at the time when Keats wrote the sonnet, such a possibility seemed very remote.

There was another event in 1816 which, more than any other, sent Keats to the very pinnacle of intoxicating happiness. In The Examiner for 1 December, Hunt declared to his readers--and to a completely unexpecting Keats--that there were three "Young Poets", Shelley, Reynolds, and Keats, who had the very highest sort of promise.[64] Later, Henry Stephens, Keats's old rooming associate at Guy's Hospital, wrote that Hunt's article "sealed [Keats's] fate and he gave himself up more completely to Poetry."[65] With such encouragement, one can easily suppose, Keats, both as a man and a poet, could begin to feel like the poet of "I Stood Tip-Toe . . ." who searched for Endymion. He could think that, like the poet, he would soon be so filled with the strength which genuine happiness can give man, he would truly, "burst our mortal bars" to find himself in "some wond'rous region." From a superficial viewpoint, when compared with his forlorn, alien circum-

stances of late 1815, Keats, in late 1816, could believe his life to be magically transformed. Yet, as December wore on to its conclusion and as he wrote his extremely significant poems, "I Stood Tip-Toe . . . " and "Sleep and Poetry", he began to hear "low rumblings" and "strange" thunderings. He started to sense that all was not well in his thinking as a poet. In a surprisingly short time, he found his ecstatic excitement to be dispelled. Although intrinsically related, the causes for his troubled thinking appeared to be two in number. One cause was a part of his growth as a poet; the other, which was mostly self-made, might be more accurately described as a part of his growth as a man.

Essentially, the trouble came from Keats's ever-increasing awareness that his assumptions about poetry and what he observed in the real world seemed to be incompatible. When he wrote his "Epistle to George" while at Margate, he had hinted that he sensed this incompatibility as he tried briefly to resolve his divergent roles as poet and socially responsible individual. But, from the time of his vacation in August and September until he completed preparations to publish his first book of poems in late December, he began to regard poetry in a far more candid, penetrating way. No doubt, the disappointing experience at Margate had taken its toll.

He could no longer really hope to write poetry by attuning his soul in some way to the tones of an "ingrate world." Probably his discussions with the Hunt circle had helped him to approach poetry in a more incisive way. By mid-December, while completing "I Stood Tip-Toe . . . ," he allowed his doubts concerning his old assumptions about poetry to have a rather faint voice. Before the end of December, however, as he worked to complete "Sleep and Poetry," these doubts became clear realizations.

The subtle suggestion that Keats had begun to doubt his old assumptions came in the second half of "I Stood Tip-Toe . . ." Because he wrote it with no plan in mind, most of the poem turned out to be a catalogue of luxuriant nature descriptions. His delight in the flowers and brooks, bees and fish, and, for a few lines, in a young maiden, grew with such buoyance that, after a time, he seemed almost to exclaim:

> For what has made the sage or poet write
> But the fair paradise of Nature's light? (11. 125-126, p. 6)

In the next lines he clarified what the thought was the poet's function. This function was to use "the calm grandeur of a sober line" to charm:

> us at once away from all our troubles:
> So that we feel uplifted from the world,
> Walking upon the white clouds wreath'd and curl'd.
> (11. 138-140, p. 6)

Of course, if he is to exert such charm on his readers,

the poet must first know this uplifting experience. In describing such an experience, Keats believed that without doubt:

> So felt he [the poet], who first told, how Psyche went
> On the smooth wind to realms of wonderment;
> What Psyche felt, and Love, when their full lips
> First touch'd; what amorous, and fondling nips
> They gave each other's cheeks; with all their sighs
> And how they kist each other's tremulous eyes
> (11. 141-146, p. 6).

But, as continued, Keats began to modify his description of the poet's wonderful experience. Almost as if to do so were against his better judgment, he introduced by intimation the disconcerting thought that if the poet saw Psyche and Love's amorous joy, he also must have seen their pain. He must have seen:

> The silver lamp,--the ravishment,--the wonder--
> The darkness,--loneliness,--the fearful thunder;
> Their woes gone by (11. 147-149, p. 6).

By preparing a second description of what he thought must make up the successful poet's creative experience, Keats emphasized that his awareness of pain was not an accident. Again, as he described what he thought must be the successful poet's uplifted feelings, Keats supposed:

> So did he [the poet] feel, who pull'd the bough aside,
> That we might look into a forest wide,
> To catch a glimpse of Fauns, and Dryades
> Coming with softest rustle through the trees;
> And garlands woven of flowers wild, and sweet
> Upheld on ivory wrists, or sporting feet (11. 151-156, p. 6-7).

And, as before, Keats explained that if the poet could reveal such delights, he could also tell:

> us how fair, trembling Syrinx fled
> Arcadian Pan, with such a fearful dread (11. 157-158, p. 7);

Yet, as though he held some slight hope to resolve this painful dread into pleasure, Keats concluded:

> Poor nymph,--poor Pan,--how did he weep to find,
> Nought but a lively sighing of the wind
> Along the reedy stream; a half heard strain,
> Full of sweet desolation--balmy pain (11. 159-162, p. 7)

Together, these two descriptions are of compelling interest. They seem to qualify Keats's old assumption that a man should use poetry to gain a pleasurable refuge from pain. Through these descriptions, but particularly through the second one, Keats seems to admit that a departure into "wonders strange" amounts to more than he once had believed. Indeed, he may have sensed that his old assumption was practically a dead letter. As a result, before he concluded "I Stood Tip-Toe . . . ," he apparently tried to reverse the direction of his thought. In the poem's last eighty lines, he admitted by implication that the modern poet (as Keats regarded himself) was quite inept. But, he felt certain that the "bard of old," (1. 163, p. 7) with his powers to capture and control feeling, must surely have "burst our mortal bars."(1. 190, p. 7) Yet even while he insisted upon the true poet's transcendent powers, he seemed, at least

to a degree, to compromise his stand. He suggested that the old poet did not enjoy any sort of sustained refuge beyond the mortal bars. Rather, after he communed with the immortal, he returned to human activity, becoming a kind of all-knowing sage who served both the immortal and the mortal. Because he held knowledge well beyond the range of most men, the sagacious old bard "gave [the immortal] Cynthia her Endymion." (l. 204, p. 8) And, through humanitarian action, he revealed to mortals the joyful fulfillment which can be found in life. By telling of "men of health" (l. 216, p. 8) and "lovely women," (l. 219, p. 8) the poet restored vitality to the languid sick. After writing "I Stood Tip-Toe . . . ," Keats's spirit, no longer fortified by his old assumption, could not soar as he once had hoped. Instead, he soon had to admit that his wings had been clipped by the realities of earthly pain and evil.

In the rambling, four hundred-line poem, "Sleep and Poetry," which he began immediately after completing "I Stood Tip-Toe . . . ," Keats reluctantly acquiesced to his new realization. To avoid the issue, he filled the poem's first two-hundred and ten lines, and, as an afterthought, the last ninety lines, with a jumble of personal ideals, hopes, ambitions, and intentions. But, at the beginning of the poem's most serious passage

(lines 210-312, pp. 47-49), in quite an abrupt manner, he faced the inevitable fact that pain and evil, along with pleasure and goodness, have a place in poetry. He admitted that:

> in truth we've had
> Strange thunders from the potency of song
> Mingled indeed with what is sweet and strong.
> (11. 230-232, p. 48)

To characterize these "strange thunders" which were themes "disturbing the grand sea" of poetry, he used figures of speech that carry brutal connotations.

> . . . in clear truth the themes
> Are ugly clubs, the poet's Polyphemes
> Disturbing the grand sea (11. 233-235, p. 48).

Grimly, he explained:

> . . . A drainless shower
> Of light is Poesy; 'tis the supreme power,
> 'Tis might half slumb'ring on its own right arm.
> (11. 235-237, p. 48)

Here, for one of the first times in his career as a poet, Keats used the device of personification in his poetry. With this useful device, he revealed his new feelings about poetry, regarding its power, at least in part, as a drainless, unrelenting, sinister thing "half slumb'ring on its own right arm." As he continued, in order to amplify his feelings, he broadened this personification, giving poetry a wily, feminine character. With uneasiness, he described poetry's seductive power:

> The very archings of her eye-lids charm
> A thousand willing agents to obey
> And still she governs with the mildest sway.
> (11. 238-240, p. 48)

But, at the same time, he was painfully aware that beneath poetry's mild façade, there was a slumbering, fiendish strength. Thus:

> Strength alone even though of Muses born
> Is like a fallen angel: trees uptorn
> Darkness, and worms, and shrouds and sepulchres
> Delight it (11. 241-244,p. 48)

The naked power of poetry

> . . . feeds upon the burrs,
> And thorns of life; forgetting (11. 44-45, p. 48)

(at least, forgetting what Keats always wanted to believe)

> the great end
> Of poesy, that it should be a friend
> To sooth the cares, and lift the thoughts of men .
> (11. 244-247, p. 48)

Keats's statement of belief calls to mind his confident lines in the "Epistle to George."

> Full joy I feel . . .
> That my soft verse will charm thy daughters fair,
> And warm thy sons! (11. 107-109, p. 28)

But, quite obviously, the bounding confidence which Keats felt when he wrote to George had disappeared by the time he wrote "Sleep and Poetry." Even while writing "I Stood Tip-Toe . . ." he had hinted rather abstrusely that his confidence was slipping. Because of his new, clear perceptions about poetry, however, he must have felt, as he worked his way through "Sleep and Poetry," that everything

which once had made poetry seem so attractive to him had disappeared into thin air. To protect himself from his new and harsh realizations, then, he marshalled all of his forces. He rationalized ably.

At first, Keats clung to the hope that men should be:

> . . . accounted poet kings
> Who simply tell the most heart easing things .
> (11. 267-268, p. 48)

And, he added to this:

> O may these joys be ripe before I die (1. 269, p. 48)

Yet, as he prepared to continue in the next lines, he was clearly aware that he could not varnish the truth. The issue of pain simply was not to be denied. While aware of poetry's discordant elements, he tried to rationalize his faith that in the future poetry will "tell the most heart easing things." He tried to defend himself against the "dread thunderbolt" of disgrace which he anticipated to strike at his very essence after the possible failure of his book. Therefore, he wrote:

> Will not some say /in the face of pain/ I presumptuously
> Have spoken? that from disgrace
> 'Twere better far to hide my foolish face?
> That whining boy should with reverence bow
> Ere the dread thunderbolt /of disgraceful failure/ could reach?
> (11. 270-274, p. 49).

In answering these challanging questions about how he should survive, it seems very doubtful that Keats entirely believed what he wrote. But, upon deciding to take a

resolute stand, he exclaimed:

> How!
> If I do hide myself, it sure shall be
> In the very fane, the light of Poesy
> If I do fall, at least I will be laid
> Beneath the silence of a poplar shade;
> And over me the grass shall be smooth shaven
> And there shall be a kind memorial graven.
> (ll. 274-280, p. 49)

Suddenly, Keats's apparently placid façade gave way. He seemed to shout:

> But off Despondence! Miserable bane! (l. 281, p. 49)

And, in the face of his fear, he made a forceful statement of faith:

> What though I am not wealthy in the dower
> Of spanning wisdom; though I do not know
> The shiftings of the mighty winds that blow
> Hither and thither all the changing thoughts
> Of man; though no great must'ring reason sorts
> Out the dark mysteries of human souls
> To clear conceiving: yet there ever rolls
> A vast idea before me, and I glean
> Therefrom my liberty; thence too I've seen
> The end and aim of Poesy (ll. 284-293, p. 49).

With this statement, Keats for the first time clearly abandoned his escapist philosophy of poetry. He seemed prepared to accept poetry as an adjunct to life--life which is composed of both pleasure and pain. He anticipated in a profound way the great price he had to pay to gain any sort of liberty, the nature of which he hardly understood at the time. Yet, however vague this notion of liberty was to him, even as he stated in thse lines, it was for him "the end and aim of Poesy." For,

while momentarily cautioning himself:

> Stay! an inward frown
> Of conscience bids me be more calm awhile (11. 304-305 p. 49)

he continued on to commit himself in an absolute way to poetry as a way of life. He was prepared to accept the enormous task of achieving this ideal of liberty. To begin with, he implicitly compared the vast, unknown realm of poetry with "an ocean dim":

> An ocean dim, sprinkled with many an isle,
> Spreads awfully before me (11. 306-307, p. 49).

And, he continued:

> How much toil!
> How many days! what desperate turmoil!
> Ere I can have explored its wideness
> Ah, what a task! (11. 307-310, p. 49)

Finally, as if to seal his commitment, he said:

> Upon my bended knees
> I could unsay those-[tasks] (11. 310-311, p. 49-50).

But, rejecting this, he concluded:

> No, impossible!
> Impossible! (11. 311-312, p. 50)

Within this one long passage of "Sleep and Poetry," Keats began to reach for his maturity as a poet. Essentially, he started to put away his immature belief that in a world of pain, poetry can make everything right. But this was only a beginning. For, what he began in "Sleep and Poetry" would take many months and great effort to bring to fruition. While he seemed on the

verge of doing so in this poem, he still needed to admit to himself, without hoping for some easy way out, that if he were to attain a life of liberty, he could not achieve his goal simply by denying pain's reality. From another viewpoint, he needed to realize that as a socially responsible poet he would not help society by causing it to deny this reality. He could no longer address pain with the remark:

> They [members of society] should not know thee (1.282, p. 49).

Instead, it would be through much toil that he would seek some other means to attain freedom and, thereby, acheive the end and aim of poetry.

For Keats, the most significant, short-range outcome of adopting his new approach to poetry appeared in the nature of his relationship with Hunt. Naturally, just after he completed "Sleep and Poetry," he did not immediately change his feelings toward his benefactor. But, it was probably inevitable that his feelings should begin to change. In a sense, Hunt was the very personification of Keats's old views about poetry. As a result, after writing "Sleep and Poetry," Keats probably began more and more to regard Hunt as something of a relique, an artifact which he would put on the shelf with his old ideas.

Yet, one must be clear, Keats's eventual disenchantment with Hunt did not result from an honest difference of opinion. It was more probable that after a time Keats began to regard Hunt as a disappointment. Fleetingly, he might have blamed Hunt for failing to be the sort of fairy god-father which, in his own mind, he had unrealistically and unfairly hoped Hunt to be. Hunt had allowed him the bliss of a warm friendship; but Hunt had not shown Keats what at one time Keats had believed to be poetry's bliss. Perhaps he became unhappy with Hunt partly because he came upon his new, disturbing ideas about poetry only after what he supposed was Hunt's failure to suggest anything that might take their place.

After knowing him for a few months, then, Keats had to accept Hunt as he really was--a man of easy-going manner, kindly disposition, and idealistic temperament. Like most other men, Hunt was incapable of miracles. He was not a kind of all-knowing seer or sage like the poet in "I Stood Tip-Toe . . . " of whom Keats wrote, "surely he hath burst our mortal bars." (l. 190, p. 7) Probably he held no special truths which Keats had not already learned in early 1816 when he made his intensive study of Rimini. Unfortunately, Keats never thanked Hunt in any proper way for the invaluable help which he did receive from him. Yet, he could never have attained his

final, great achievement without using Rimini as an early model for his poetry. Nor, would he have remembered the rich, warm months of late 1816 without the enjoyable, wholesome companionship, and the forthright praise and encouragement which Hunt gave him. Mostly because of Hunt's influence Keats decided irrevocably to become a poet.

From Keats's viewpoint, it was the quality of egotism, more than any other matter, which caused Hunt eventually to seem a less desirable person. In early 1817, Benjamin Haydon, the painter and one of the least closely aligned members of the Hunt circle, brought the issue to Keats's attention. As an orthodox Christian, Haydon had grown increasingly at odds with Hunt, whose easy-going attitude toward religion Haydon had begun to take as a personal affront.[66] Apparently, the very idea that Hunt would feel free to make light of such a serious matter outraged Haydon. Because he had become one of Haydon's special intimates after his introduction into the Hunt circle, Keats no doubt came to know the strength of Haydon's feelings. Eventually, Haydon warned Keats:

> Beware, for God's sake of the delusions and sophistications that are ripping up the talents and morality of our friend Hunt! (Letters, I, 135)

With such influence, together with his disappointment stemming from his faulty assumption that Hunt had purported,

yet had failed to act as his personal poetic seer, Keats began to consider Hunt's thoughts and actions as motivated mostly by mere vanity. Later, Keats harshly termed Hunt's vanity as "egotism of a drivelling nature." (Letters, I, 191)

But, one should also regard Keats's growing ill feeling for Hunt from another viewpoint. Without question, practically all of Keats's feelings against Hunt were shot through with pettiness. At some later time, had he considered these feelings in a candid way, he probably would have been ashamed of them. Yet, regardless of how foolish they were, these feelings may have served Keats to his advantage in two ways. First, he may have realized that to expect miracles from any person was foolhardy. Hunt showed him that absolute perfection was not a human virtue. Once for all, then, he had to discard perfectibility as unrealistic. He had to recognize that human achievement would always be limited. Second, with his growing disgust for Hunt's vanity, he apparently began to feel that his ties with Hunt were too close. In a sense, Keats could think that Hunt possessed him; and, in an innocent way, Hunt certainly did possess him. Much of his thought came directly from Hunt. Yet however innocent this possession may have been, Keats probably saw it as insidious. Therefore, though complete freedom from Hunt was truly impossible, he came to feel that he must rid

himself of Hunt's possessiveness and strike out entirely on his own, hoping to establish his own identity and, thereby, to call his soul his own.

The third of March 1817 should have been another "red-letter" day in Keats's life. He would remember it as the date of publication for his first book of poems. (Letters, I, 33) But, surely the disenchanting experience with Hunt and his growing doubts and fears concerning his ideas about poetry made the day seem less important than it might have been. By comparison with his effervescent experience of late 1816, he could regard his state of affairs in early 1817 as extremely bleak. Throughout his life, he had been shoved hither and thither by the workings of fate. But after each of these past uprooting experiences, he had been able to grasp for something familiar. After a time, he had again found himself on stable ground. Now, however, so far as he could see, there was nothing but poetry for which he could grasp; and he was entirely aware that he knew very little about what he was grasping for. With such an awareness, then, he found that his only alternative was to scrutinize his situation carefully and to assess his possibilities for advancement. He could no longer hope that other men like Clarke, Mathew, or Hunt could tell him what to do.

Rather, the time had come when he needed to begin determining for himself what the nature of his existence as a poet would be.

NOTES: CHAPTER I

[1]Writers who have commented upon what John Keats thought about his relationship to society include: Meyer Howard Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp (New York, 1953), pp. 328-29; Douglas Bush, "Keats and his Ideas," English Romantic Poets, ed. M. H. Abrams,(New York, 1960), pp. 338-39; and, briefly, Walter Jackson Bate, The Stylistic Development of John Keats (New York, 1945), p. 172.

[2]Biographers of John Keats who have as their general purpose to show Keats's greatness include: Sidney Colvin, John Keats (London, 1917); Amy Lowell, John Keats, 2 vols., (Boston, 1925); Claude Finney, The Evolution of Keats's Poetry, 2 vols., (Cambridge, Mass., 1936); Dorothy Hewlett, A Life of John Keats, 2nd ed. (New York, 1950). Two less inclusive, but well known studies which have as their purpose to evidance Keats's genius are: Robert Gettings, John Keats: The Living Year (Melbourne, 1954) and Robert Gittings, The Mask of John Keats (Cambridge, Mass., 1956).

[3]Walter Jackson Bate, John Keats (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), pp. 9, 12-13. Unless otherwise specifically noted, all references to Bate will indicate this volume.

[4]Ibid., pp. 13-15.

[5]Ibid., pp. 13.

[6]Ibid., p. 21.

[7]Ibid., pp. 25-27; for a more forceful commentary, see Lowell, I, 39.

[8]Bate, p. 27.

[9]Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke, Recollections of Writers (New York, 1878), p. 123.

[10]Ibid., p. 122.

[11]Edmund Blunden, John Keats (London, 1950), p. 13.

[12]Clarke, p. 122ff.

[13]"To Charles Cowden Clarke," The Poetical Works of John Keats, ed. H. W. Garrod (London, 1956), ll. 72-73, p. 31. Henceforth, all references to Keats's poetry will be made to this edition. As occasion demands, notation of these references will be made within parenthesis in the thesis text itself simply by giving the line and page number, i.e. (ll. 72-73, p. 31). In the special case of Endymion, the book number will proceed the line number(s), i.e. (I, ll. 777-81, p. 74).

[14]Clarke, p. 123.

[15]Ibid., p. 124.

[16]Bate, p. 23-24.

[17]Ibid., p. 29.

[18]Ibid., p. 30-31.

[19]Clarke, p. 125.

[20]Ibid.

[21]Ibid., p. 126.

[22]Ernest C. Pettet, On the Poetry of Keats (Cambridge, 1957), p. 13.

[23]In a footnote to his comments upon the presence of neo-platonism in Keats's early thoughts in his John Keats (1963), p. 172, Walter Jackson Bate points out that those writers who view Keats as a neo-platonist include "H. C. Notcutt (1919), Clarence Thorpe (1926), Claude Finney (1936), and, with differences, the various works of J. M. Murray."

[24]William Flint Thrall and Addison Hibbard, A Handbook to Literature, rev. and enl. ed. by C. Hugh Holman (New York, 1960), p. 355.

[25]Bate, p. 174.

[26]Ibid., p. 38.

[27]Ibid., p. 41.

[28]Ibid., p. 43; also, see The Keats Circle, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins (Cambridge, Mass., 1948), II, 207. Hereafter, all references to this work will be cited as KC, followed by the volume and pgge number(s).

[29]Bate, p. 45.

[30]Ibid., p. 47.

[31]KC, II, 207.

[32]Ibid., II, 208-9.

[33]Ibid., II, 209.

[34]Ibid., p. 209-210.

[35]Bate, pp. 51-52.

[36]Ibid., p. 52.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Ibid., p. 53.

[39]In the verse epistle, "To George Felton Mathew," Keats mentions Shakespeare, Milton, and Chatterton as poets whom he hopes Mathew and he can enjoy together.

[40]KC, II, 185.

[41]Bate, p. 54.

[42]KC, II, 185-86.

[43]Clarke, p. 124.

[44]KC, II, 185-86.

[45]Bate, p. 59.

[46]Ibid., pp. 77-82, 90-93, 111, 184-87, 312, 412 et passim; also, see, Bate, The Stylistic Development of John Keats, pp. 9-27, 192-96, 199-201, 208-09 et passim.

[47]Louis Landre, "Leigh Hunt: His Contributions to English Romanticism," Keats-Shelley Journal, VIII, Part 2 (1959), 142.

[48]John Keats, pp. 59-63.

[49]KC, II, 211.

[50]Bate, p. 67.

[51]Ibid., p. 84.

[52]Ibid., p. 84, 86-89.

[53]Ibid., p. 90.

[54]The Letters of John Keats, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), I, 113. Henceforth, all references to Keats's letters will be made to this edition. As occasion demands, notation of these references will be made within parenthesis in the thesis text itself simply by using the term, Letters, followed by the volume and page number, i.e. Letters, I, 113.

[55]Clarke, p. 133.

[56]Ibid.

[57]Ibid., p. 45.

[58]Bate, pp. 89, 134; also, see Leigh Hunt, Lord Byron and His Contemporaries (London, 1828), p. 410.

[59]Bate, pp. 95, 118-22.

[60]Ibid., p. 89.

[61]Ibid., p. 108.

[62]Ibid., pp. 109-10.

[63]Ibid., p. 110.

[64]Ibid., p. 111.

[65]KC, II, 211.

[66]Benjamin Robert Haydon, The Autobiography and Memoirs of Benjamin Robert Haydon, ed. Tom Taylor (New York, 1926), pp. 220-21.

I

What came of Keats's effort to reassess his views on life was nothing less than an almost total personal reorientation concerning his goals for himself as a man and as a poet. One need only compare what he wrote during the last happy days of 1816 with what he wrote and did during early 1817 to find that a major upheaval in his life was underway. While writing "Sleep and Poetry," he apparently supposed that he had about come to terms with poetry. With hope, he made the appeal:

> O Poesy! for thee I grasp my pen
> That am not yet a glorious denizen
> Of thy wide heaven; yet, to my ardent prayer
> Yield from thy sanctuary some clear air
> (ll. 79-82, p. 44).

When poesy granted him this clear air of revelation, he hoped to:

> Write on my tablets all that was permitted,
> All that was for our human senses fitted.
> Then the events of this wide world I'd seize
> Like a strong giant (ll. 79-82, p. 44).

Yet, as the early months of 1817 wore on, Keats's vision of himself as a "strong giant" must have disappeared as he experienced feelings of deepening confusion. At the beginning of March, when he prepared his famous sonnet, "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles for the First Time," it appears that he was completely bewildered about what to do as a poet. After viewing the magnificent Grecian

artifacts and, perhaps, after reflecting upon the great skill of the artists who carved the marbles, he lamented:

> My spirit is too weak; mortality
> Weighs heavily on me like unwilling sleep,
> And each imagin'd pinnacle and steep
> Of godlike hardship tells me I must die
> Like a sick eagle looking at the sky (ll. 1-5, p. 376)

To reinforce his feelings of inadequacy, he soon found that no one had much noticed his first book of Poems. By late March or early April, he probably sensed that his publishers, the Olliers, were impatient about the book's poor sale. In a blunt letter dated 29 April 1817, they informed him that in their opinion the book was a failure. They were abandoning it.[1] And, without much doubt, Keats also knew some feelings of loss and embarrassment after he, in turn, decided to abandon Hunt. After a few months, Hunt certainly realized that something was wrong. In a letter of 1 July 1817 to Charles Cowden Clarke, Hunt asked, while using a nickname which he had coined for Keats:

> What has become of Junkets [sic][2] I know not. I suppose Queen Mab has eaten him.

In a real sense, Hunt was right, for during the middle six months of 1817 from April to September, Keats pretty much withdrew into his concern for poetry, discarding his wish to become a strong giant who would use poetry to control "events of this wide world" ("Sleep and Poetry, ll. 81, p. 44) and entering an intensive period of personal

introspection and study. Because he left scant evidence in his few letters which survive, one can make only some superficial comments about the first manifestations of Keats's personal examination. It is certain, however, that he engaged himself in what appears to be four endeavors, the first intrinsically supported by the other three. He began probing to ascertain what should be the nature of his efforts as a poet. To carry out his probing, he examined what his personal involvement with poetry should be. Almost concurrently, he implemented this probing at least partly as he started his serious reading of Shakespeare; and, he sustained this probing as he began to write his longest poem, Endymion, into which a number of his new and most significant ideas eventually found their places. Together, through these efforts, he undertook what must simply be described as a search for truth. There seems no question that these activities contributed directly to the formation in Keats's mind of a complex of ideas, all of which helped him determine his existence as a poet.

With good fortune, Keats unintentionally began his reorientation by falling back upon perhaps his oldest and most fundamental poetic tenet, his belief that through a medium of poetry, he could reach a state of joyful solitude in which he could gain relief from worldly pain. Starting with this tenet, he did not leave a stone unturned.

Because of his disillusionment with almost every aspect of his life in London, he began to think of going away, much as he had in August and September 1816 when he went to Margate.[3] On 17 March 1817, he wrote to Reynolds:

> My brothers are anxious that I sho[d] go by myself in the country--they have always been extremely fond of me; and now that Haydon has pointed out how necessary it is that I sho[d] be alone to improve myself, they give up the temporary pleasure of (t) living with me continually for a great good which I hope will follow--So I shall soon be out of Town (Letters, I, 125)

In fact, the trip was delayed almost a month until 14 April 1817.[4] Among other things, a move by the Keats brothers from London to Hampstead, where the sickly Tom Keats could enjoy the country air took up some time.[5] But, when Keats finally did leave London for the Isle of Wight,[6] his departure, in the eyes of his biographers, was significant. His journey signaled the beginning of what professor William Walsh calls "that astonishing passage from Cockney to Classic".[7] To accomplish this metamorphosis, Keats entered upon the most significant period of growth in his entire life.

The first manifestation of Keats's growth was quick in coming, for his effort to gain solitude proved almost immediately meaningful to him in a way which he had not anticipated. While he found the sparsely settled Isle of Wight much to his liking, he was not satisfied with

his venture, practically from its beginning. What a frustrating paradox it must have seemed to him when he realized that he could not write anything, although he had pretty much achieved the solitary state which he, as well as his brothers and Haydon, had long believed was most conducive to writing poetry. After several fruitless days, he might have recalled that six months before, in an almost similar situation while at Margate, he had been very unproductive. In a week or so, he apparently decided that as an ingredient for poetic creation, solitude was quite useless to him. Shortly after making this decision, he left the Isle of Wight for the familiar surroundings which he could find at Margate.[8] A few weeks later, he explained in a letter to Hunt:

> I went to the Isle of Wight--thought so much about Poetry so long together that I could not get to sleep at night--and moreover, I knew not how it was, I could not get wholesome food--By this means in a Week or so I became not over capable in my upper Stories, and set off pell mell for Margate, at least 150 miles--because forsooth I fancied that I should like my old Lodging here, and could contrive to do without trees. Another thing I was too much in Solitude, and consequently was obliged to be in continual burning of thought as an only resource (Letters, I, 138-139).

The first results of Keats's effort at reassessment were these. In a brief time, he almost completely discarded his notion that he could best work as a poet while living alone. Quickly, he got his fill of being

only with himself. He complained that because almost no one disturbed him during his week on the Isle of Wight, he had been "obliged to be in continual burning of thought as an only resource." Indeed, he "thought so much about Poetry so long together that /he/ could not get to sleep at night." As a whole, he believed that he "was too much in solitude." And, had he continued with his explanation, one might suppose, he might have reasoned that while other poets accomplished something in solitude, the life of a near-hermit was not for him. Very dimly, he might have perceived that an existence which precludes almost any contact with other people is one steeped in egotism. Certainly, he knew that such a life left him "not over capable in /his/ upper Stories." To improve his capabilities, he needed to live in familiar surroundings, in his "old Lodging here" at Margate; and presumably, he needed the people who would be in these surroundings, though they might be--like Hunt--of a somewhat egotistical frame of mind.

On 10 and 11 May 1817, Keats wrote two letters, one to Hunt cited above and one to Haydon, which considerably amplified his thinking about egotism. Probably because he missed the pleasure of Hunt's company, he felt a continuing need for self-justification at having so abruptly dropped his friend. As a rationalization for abandoning Hunt, he used the excuse that Hunt's self-centeredness was intolerable.

For the moment, this excuse was something of an hypocritical facade. He had only begun in quite a subtle fashion to confront his own egotism. He still had not progressed far enough in his thinking to allow the issue of Hunt's egotism to die a silent death. The letter portion of the letter to Haydon contains a singular display of Keats's peevish, self-righteous feelings about Hunt:

> I wrote to Hunt . . . scarcely know what I said in it--I could not talk about Poetry in the way I should have liked for I was not in humor with either his or mine. His self delusions are very lamentable they have inticed him into a Situation which I should be less eager after than that of a galley Slave--what you observe thereon is very true must be in time. Perhaps it is a self delusion to say so--but I think I could not be deceived in the Manner that Hunt is--may I die tomorrow if I am to be. There is no greater Sin after the 7 deadly than to flatter oneself into an idea of being a great Poet--or one of those beings who are privileged to wear out their Lives in the pursuit of Honor--how comfortable a feel it is that such a Crime must bring its heavy Penalty? That if one be a Selfdeluder accounts will be balanced?
>
> (Letters, I, 143)

One can feel fairly certain that as Keats vented his wrath, he knew the ring of his bombastic words sounded hollow. He probably sensed that perhaps he, least of all, could rightfully enjoy the comfortable knowledge that Hunt's alleged "Crime must bring its heavy Penalty," that the self-deluder's "accounts will be balanced." Indeed, as he tacitly admitted, it was a self delusion for him to say anything against Hunt, for he, even more than Hunt, was one of those

who had taken for himself the privilege "to wear out his life in the pursuit of Honor." Both his hazy, apparently neo-platonic notion that the poet's first duty is to himself in order to find some way of escape from earthly pain, and his personally conjured up great expectations that Hunt would make him a great poet, contributed to his self-centeredness. And, it is clear from another portion of the Haydon letter that he sensed his poetic efforts had been poorly motivated by "Envy and detraction which were stimulants to further exertion" (Letters, I, 142). Aware of his weakness, he wrote, "I think I could not be deceived in the Manner that Hunt is" (Letters, I, 143). Perhaps with the assistance of hindsight, he recalled both his own and Hunt's ego-centered actions.

Further evidence that Keats was disturbed about the egotistical nature of his poetic efforts is in the letter to Hunt, in which he revealed:

> I have asked myself so often why I should be a Poet more than other Men,--seeing how great a thing it is,--how great things are to be gained by it--What a thing to be in the Mouth of Fame--that at last the Idea has grown so monstrously beyond my seeming Power of attainment that the other day I nearly consented with myself to drop into a Phaeton--yet . . . at this moment I drive the thought from me (Letters, I, 139).

Probably it was as well that Keats dismissed the question about why he should be a poet. For him to pursue this extremely esoteric question with his still relatively super-

ficial approach to poetry would have only led to something so vague as to be worthless. Even in his last effort to deal with the problem in Hyperion, the Fall some three years later, he had not arrived at an answer that satisfied him. Yet, with the aid of an inordinately perceptive and zealous study of Shakespeare, begun shortly after he set out on his venture to the Isle of Wight and to Margate, he had begun to arrive at a second extremely important realization in his effort at reassessment.

While he failed to perceive why he should be a poet, Keats began to perceive, though quite inexactly, at first, how he should exist as a poet. A passage from the letter to Haydon reveals the source of his perception. Keats wrote to Haydon:

> I remember you saying that you had notions of a good Genius presiding over you--I have of late had the same thought for /sic/ things which /I/ do half at Random are afterward confirmed by my judgement in a dozen features of propriety--Is it too daring to Fancy Shakespeare this Presidor? (Letters, I, 141-42)

While he might have felt somewhat impetuous for claiming such an august mentor, Keats, during his impassioned study of Shakespeare, began to take the Bard as the presidor over the molding of his literary judgment. Though Keats seemed to regard his student-"good Genius" relationship in a rather mystified way, one can observe that since Keats was full of impressions and phrases from his study of the

master, it does not seem strange in retrospect that his writings "half at Random" and his thoughtful "judgement" of these efforts at sometime "afterward" should coincide. Certainly, one of these half random comments, written in an early portion of the Haydon letter, served him as the touchstone for his eventual, profound realization of what the nature of the poet, indeed, must be. He confirmed this realization to his own thoughful satisfaction even before the end of 1817.

As suggested in the Haydon letter, Keats, during his reading of the fourth act of King Lear, had apparently been struck by a speech which Edgar made as he stood on the brink of the Dover Cliffs, looking down at the beach of the English Channel. Edgar had exclaimed:

> How fearful
> And dizzy 'tis to cast one's eyes so low!
> The crows and choughs that wing the midway air
> Show scarce so gross as beetles. Halfway down
> Hangs one that gathers samphire, dreadful trade!
> Me thinks he seems no begger than his head.
> The fishermen that walk upon the beach
> Appear like mice (King Lear, IV, VI, 12-18).

With the aid of the one that "Halfway down/ . . . gathers samphire, dreadful trade!" and "The fisherman that . . . upon the beach / Appear like mice," Keats took his next step forward in his metamorphosis, moving from "Cockney to classic."[9] Having earlier discarded his self-concept of regarding himself as one striving for poetic omniscience, he had redesigned his view of himself, constructing a new

relationship between himself as a poet and the world around him. In the Haydon letter, he explained:

> I am "one that gather Samphire, dreadful trade" the Cliff of Poesy Towers above me--yet when Tom who meets with some of Pope's Homer in Plutarch's Lives reads some of those to me they seem like Mice to mine (Letters, I, 141).

Thus, as he viewed himself, Keats no longer made any pretense as he once had about attaining poetic omniscience. Rather, he considerably changed his view of himself, seeing that he was one situated within a craggy hierarchy of values, perched with the Cliff of Poesy above him, but also seeing himself above Pope, the "unenlightened" eighteenth century versifer whose lines seemed "like Mice" by comparison with his own. Clearly, he used his disdain of Pope to bolster his flagging spirit, caused deliberately (and sensibly) by lowering his own self-evaluation. But, one can forgive his narrow-mindedness about Pope. It apparently helped him initiate a new pattern of thinking in which he began to view himself, not as a poet striving for egotistical supremacy, but as a poet in the middle of things, engaged in earthly affairs, particularly as he "gathers samphire, dreadful trade."

Of course, in his new view of himself, Keats still did not obliterate all egotistical involvement in his work as a poet. Rather he successfully subordinated egotism, and by doing so, he laid the groundwork for achieving a magnificent victory over egotism, though he required several more

months, some extremely important reading, and a good deal of writing to reach his triumph. While it is apparent that his study of Shakespeare had already awarded him dividends, he still needed to consider "the bard" with care to reach what Caroline F. E. Spurgeon described as Keats's "own deepest and most original convictions about life and poetry."[10] Also, he was completely aware that if he were to accomplish anything of a lasting nature, he needed to write. He was under no delusion that his task would be easy as he began his poem about Endymion, the shepherd-king whose human perfection made him attractive to the goddesses of Olympus. In an accurate way, Keats anticipated the nature of his future efforts as he wrote to Hunt:

> I began my Poem about a Forthight since and have done some every day except travelling ones--Perhaps I may have done a good deal for the time but it appears such a Pin's Point to me that I will not coppy [sic] any out--When I consider that so many of these Pin points go to form a Bodkin point (God send I end not my Life with a bare Bodkin, in its modern sense) and that it requires a thousand bodkins to make a Spear bright enough to throw any light to posterity--I see that nothing but continual uphill Journeying? Now is there any thing more unpleasant (it may come among the thousand and one) to whistle all these cogitations into the Sea where I hope they wil breed Storms violent enough to block up all exit from (Rutla) Russia (Letters, I, 139)

II

During the rest of the spring and through the summer of 1817, Keats apparently did "whistle all . . . cogitations

into the sea" as he journeyed through the first and second books of Endymion, until he paused for a few days in early September when he traveled to Madgalen College, Oxford, at the invitation of his friend, Benjamin Bailey. During his month at Oxford, Keats underwent the kind of experience which he had hoped for, but had failed to gain, during his visits to Margate and to the Isle of Wight. In the comfortable academic atmosphere, he was able to complete the entire third book of Endymion (1032 lines) in a bare three weeks.[11] At the same time, upon Bailey's suggestion, he read several books. Among them was the ambitious, though short, 1805 publication by William Hazlitt, entitled An Essay on the Principles of Human Action.[12] This book provided him a point of departure from which he could begin to purge the last traces of egotism from his poetic concepts and, then, to climb toward his maturity as a poet.

Although it is easy to scoff, saying that the words in a book could not change the course of a man's life, there is no question that Hazlitt's Essay did exert such an influence on Keats. He found the central notion of the Essay to be almost immediately useful. Further, W. J. Bate has asserted that during the next year, in late 1817 and well into 1818, the notion became "something of a polar Star" so far as Keats's notions about the nature of his existence as a man and a poet were concerned.[13] This extremely important

idea which must be considered in any account of Keats's development has the appropriately unpretentious label of "disinterestedness."

It is altogether possible that Keats knew about the psychological concept of the disinterested mind before he read Hazlitt's Essay, for "natural" disinterestedness, as opposed to natural selfishness, was a fairly common, late eighteenth-century notion with which almost any British or continental intellectual could be familiar.[14] Many thinkers had come to regard the concept with its self-explanatory name (the disinterested mind should never be confused in any way with an uninterested mind) as the best possible refutation of the unhappy Hobbesian contention which made itself felt so forcefully in eighteenth-century philosophy that Man's primary motive for action is selfishness.[15] Another, even better reason to believe that Keats knew something about natural disinterestedness is that during his closet association with the Hunt circle, Keats had been introduced to Hazlitt, Hobbes's most vigorous opponent in early nineteenth-century England.[16] Because of this acquaintance, Keats could very well have known about Hazlitt's book concerning disinterestedness in opposition to Hobbesian self-love at some time before Bailey directed Keats's attention to it. But, one should never accuse Bailey of leading Keats over already familiar ground. For, whatever Keats

might have previously known about the concept, disinterestedness was never so appealing to him than when he came upon it at Oxford. He had the good fortune to come across the notion at precisely the right moment in his development to make the best possible use of it. An examination of Hazlitt's concern for "the Natural Disinterestedness of the Human Mind" needs to be made before the nature of Keat's great interest in the concept can be appreciated.[17]

Especially as a young man, but actually throughout all of his life, Hazlitt felt compelled to advocate his belief--really a primary thesis of the Essay--that Thomas Hobbes and his eighteenth-century followers, especially Hartley, were fundamentally wrong in their notion "that self-love in one way or another, is the mainspring of all human action."[18] Hobbes believed that there is implanted in every man an innate desire for self-preservation which dictates his every action. He maintained that man will never take any action for strictly altruistic reasons because his all powerful love of self will overrule any concern which he may have for the welfare of others. He agreed that man may act in what would appear to be a generous way. But, he would insist that man acts generously only because he wishes to be praised, or because he wishes to get along with other people, or because he wishes to think well of himself; but especially man acts as he does because he wants others to grant him the same opportu-

nities of "peaceable, sociable, and comfortable living" that they want for themselves.[19] Hobbes, in fact, insisted that man never hopes, nor plans, nor does anything except that he might be sure to help himself or avoid pain at sometime in the future.[20]

On this point where Hobbes maintained that man always acts out of selfishness in order to assure for himself a pleasant, painless future, Hazlitt was convinced that Hobbes and his followers had ignored a very significant fact of life.[21] In order to prove his conviction, Hazlitt questioned how it is that any man can actually know and "love" his own identity, especially in the future.[22] To begin answering this query, Hazlitt reasoned that for a man to know his past and his present identities, he must depend upon his memory and upon his sensations respectively. If a child, for example, burns his finger, he knows only through sensation that it is he and not someone else who feels the pain. In a similar way, he knows only through memory that it was he, and not someone else, who felt pain because he burnt his finger at sometime in the past.[23] But, Hazlitt argued, and here Hazlitt arrived at the most vital point in his argument, that for a person to know his future identity, it is not enough, as Hobbes believed, to depend on memory and sensation. Hazlitt held that when a man pictures his future identity, he does so only by depending upon the sympathetic identifying

potentialities of his imaginative faculty. Therefore, the child who has once been burned will thereafter avoid the fire, with its prospect of pain, only because, through the identifying capacity of the imagination, he sympathetically "projects himself forward into the future, and identifies himself with his future being."[24] As a result, the sympathetic, identifying imagination, for all practical purposes, "creates" the child's future, just as it "creates" any man's future--by warning the child not to touch the fire.[25] In Hazlitt's opinion, the philosophy of Hobbes and his followers was sorely lacking because it failed to take into account the sympathetic imagination as a creative human faculty.

As Hazlitt examined the faculties by which man can identify with his past (by memory), with his present (by sensation), and with his future (by imagination), he recognized that the first two of these faculties, memory and sensation, can cater only to man's subjective, selfish wants and needs; they center upon man himself to constitute his "personal identity."[26] But, with the identifying faculty of the sympathetic imagination which points to the future, Hazlitt found no subjective, selfish point of reference. For, while he has distinct faculties for knowing his past and present, man has no comparable faculty which can give him "a direct present interest in his future sensations."[27]

Memory and sensation are not enough to enable the child who was burnt, for example, to avoid future, direct contact with the fire. Rather, because of his complete inability to identify distinctly and selfishly with his future self, with the fire which might burn him in the future, or, for that matter, with any people or things which he might encounter in the future, the child--or any person--finds, as he enters the realm of the future that he becomes disengaged and liberated from the self which he has known in the past or knows in the present.[28] By means of his imagination, any person can, in a sense, transcend his own identity and turn his liberated, really disinterested concern in any direction he might choose (italics are mine). While he might choose to turn his concern toward his own future thoughts and feelings (toward his own future identity), there is no reason why he should not just as well direct his concern so that he might enter sympathetically into the thoughts and feelings of others, really to enter into the identities of others. Indeed, if certain qualities in other people, or monotony does not work against it, a "general /truly genuine, lasting, disinterested/ benevolence can arise from an habitual cultivation of the natural disposition of the mind to sympathise with the feelings of others by constantly taking an interest in those /feelings/ which /he/ know/s/ and by imagining other

/feelings/ that /he/ do/es/ not know.[29]

With this explanation of man's natural capacity for imaginatively disinterested identification with others, Hazlitt dismissed the Hobbesian belief that man is naturally selfish. From Hazlitt's viewpoint, selfishness cannot be construed to be natural, or, at least, any more natural than disinterestedness. Rather, selfishness is "a purely artificial feeling" which is "caused by a long narrowing of the mind /as a man considers only his/ own particular feelings and interests, and a voluntary insensibility to everything which does not immediately concern him."[30] In Hazlitt's opinion, then, Hobbes's argument for the natural selfishnhss of man simply contradicts the facts of natural human existence. For, as Hazlitt stated with clarity and conviction, because of man's capacity for sympathetic imagination, he could not in truth "love himself, if he were not capable of loving others. Self-love, used in this sense, is in it's /sic/ fundamental principle the same with disinterested benevolence".[31]

In 1805, as he wrote his Essay primarily to argue for man's natural benevolence, Hazlitt did not intend to press for any practical application of his theory of disinterested, sympathetic imagination. Indeed, he made his aim quite clear when he said, "I only wish to define the sense of the general position /concerning the disinterested imag-

ination/ as strictly as I can."[32] A few pages further on in the Essay, he remarked, "I leave it with the reader to apply this the power of the imagination to the cases of friendship, family attachments, /and/ the effects of neighbourhood."[33] But one should never suppose for a moment that Hazlitt did not want the imagination to be used. Without question, he hoped that the readers of his Essay would recognize the imagination to be a vital, creative force. In particular, though his remarks in the Essay are not explicitly political, he no doubt had in mind a political application for the imagination which, to give a specific example, he thought should be put into effect at once in early nineteenth century English politics.

In the early 1790's Hazlitt began to share with his father an increasing disgust with the conservative Tory government as it imposed harsh controls upon the British people to forestall a possible nationwide upheaval like the French Revolution, while it dismissed as an unnecessary luxury in a time of possible peril the institution of many civil, economic and religious reforms which desperately needed to be made.[34] Without question, he believed that the ruling classes should wisely temper their fears of revolt, liberate the people from the harsh measures which, because of their severity, actually invited revolt, and, at the same time, by means of sympathetic identifica-

tion, rise to a state of disinterested benevolence in which they could recognize the rights of the ordinary British citizen. Then, rather than use their power to suppress the citizen while only insuring his right to subsistence, the government leaders should take political action (in this case, to institute various reforms) to substantiate each citizen in his aspirations--not only for self-preservation--but for a self-realization of his greatest intellectual, emotional, and moral capacities as a human being.[35] And, yet by leaving "it with the reader to apply the power of the imagination"[36] in some practical way, Hazlitt would have probably been more than pleased to learn that at least one of his readers, John Keats, himself a man with a great dislike for the Tory government and a strong devotion to liberty, had made his own first applications of imaginative disinterestedness to politics and to personal freedom.

Almost at once, Keats was apparently able to assimilate the principle of imaginative disinterestedness into his thinking. Probably even more than Hazlitt, he found that aspect of the imagination's power which disengages and liberates a person from his egotistical self to be profoundly compelling. Indeed, it was the answer to his prayers for salvation from egotism. Though having just arrived to visit Bailey and even while he was probably still reading

the Essay, it appears that he so completely accepted Hazlitt's principle that he felt he could write about it. On 5 and 6 September 1817, rather than continue at once to narrate Endymion's quest for ideal love and beauty, Keats, as he wrote the first lines of Endymion, Book III, decided to consider the significant ideas, especially disengagement, which he had come upon while reading Hazlitt. Hazlitt's principle of imaginative disinterestedness, when applied to politics, seemed so obviously right that Keats could not resist expressing his own condemnation of selfish political expediency before he offered his own interpretation of how the imagination's disengaging powers, if permitted to work, could produce a benevolent freedom, desirable in politics and, by clear implication, in poetic creation.

In harmony with Hazlitt's thinking, particularly concerning contemporary nineteenth century English politics, Keats began Endymion, Book III, using a cynical tone. This tone is completely foreign to the rest of the poem, but it echoes the tone of his very early political poems. In Endymion, he states that:

> There are who lord it o'er their fellow-men
> With most prevailing tinsel; who unpen
> Their baaing vanities, to browse away
> The comfortable green and juicy hay
> From human pastures (III, 1-5, p. 105).

This expression of disgust with political injustice quick-

ly became one of stinging scorn and contempt for its perpetrators as Keats sneered:

> With not one tinge
> Of sanctuary splendour, not a sight
> Able to face an owl's, they still are dight
> By the blear-eyed nations in empurpled vests,
> And crowns, and turbans (III, 8-12, p. 105).

So utterly devoid of merit and innate nobility were these irresponsible rulers who took advantage of the politically illiterate, powerless, "blear-eyed nations" that their worthlessness was matched only by their outrageous self-glorification, when:

> With unladen breasts,
> Save blown self-applause, they proudly mount
> To their spirit's perch, their being's high account,
> Their tiptop nothings, their dull skies, their thrones--
> Amid the fierce intoxicating tones
> Of trumpets, shouting, and belabour'd runs,
> And sudden cannon (III, 12-18, p. 105).

Yet, as he concluded his fierce diatribe against egotistical politicians by warning:

> Ah! how all this hums,
> In wakeful ears, like uproar past and gone--
> Like thunder clouds that spake to Babylon,
> And set those old Chaldeans to their tasks--
> (III, 18-21, p. 105)

Keats asked what was for him a new and important question:

> Are then regalities all gilded masks? (III, 22, p. 105)

With only the political education which he had received at Enfield School under Clarke's guidance, Keats would have probably answered this question with a resounding

"Yes!" Because of his old anger at the Prince Regent, who was responsible for Leigh Hunt's libel conviction,[37] one can suppose that Keats thought that practical politics, particularly under a monarch, could never be anything much more than gilded and selfish. But, with the help of Hazlitt's imaginatively disengaged disinterestedness, his viewpoint had broadened in scope. While the term <u>regality</u> would necessarily continue in his mind to denote governmental control, he began to sense that it could mean something more. It could suggest not only a calculating, selfish ruling principle of government but, on another level, an ideal of omnipotence, at once both forthright and unassuming. With thoughts such as these, then, he answered his question ("Are then regalities all gilded masks?) with a very definite "No! There are indeed throned seats unscalable/ But by a patient wind, a constant spell." (III, 23-24, p. 106) Through the workings of this imaginatively disinterested, "constant spell," he was certain that:

> Aye, 'bove the withering of old-lipp'd Fate
> A thousand Powers keep religious state,
> In water, fiery realm, and airy bourne:
> And, silent as a consecrated urn,
> Hold sphery session for a season due (III, 29-33, p. 106).

From these "thousand powers," so disengaged from petty, pompous human concern, something better could come than that which the despicable "gilded masks" produced and, then,

insisted was good enough. As if to compare the silent nobility of these "thousand powers" with the ego-centeredness of the "gilded masks," he described with real satisfaction the unassuming, benevolent nature of genuine regality, at first noting that:

> . . . few of these far majesties, ah few!
> Have bared their operations to this globe
> (Endymion, III, 34-35, p. 106).

Instead, these thousand powers:

> . . . with gorgeous pageanty enrobe
> Our piece of heaven--whose benevolence
> Shakes hand with our own Ceres; every sense
> Filling with spiritual sweets to plenitude,
> As bees gorge full their cells (Endymion, III, 36-40, p. 106).

Acting with disengaged, imaginative disinterestedness, a genuine and noble regality can negate niggardliness to encourage physical and spiritual abundance.

But, in Keats's penetrating mind, the scope of disengaged, imaginative disinterestedness could not be limited to politics. Beyond the political applications of noble disinterestedness, he recognized disengaged nobility as an indigenous quality necessary for producing worthwhile poetry. Thus, in Endymion, after giving his attention to political regalities, Keats shifted his concern to the noble Apollo, the god of the poets, and, then, to Apollo's "sister-fair," the moon. In an extensive passage, Keats described and praised the quality of disengaged, disinterested

nobility, found in the moon, "most meek and most alone," which he believed defined the very essence of the poet's selfless approach to his subject matter. Thus he announced:

> I here swear,
> Eterne Apollo! that thy Sister fair
> Is of all these the gentlier-mightiest,
> When thy gold breath is misting in the west,
> She unobserved steals unto her throne,
> And there she sits most meek and most alone;
> As if she had not pomp subservient;
> As if thine eye, high Poet! was not bent
> Towards her with the Muses in thine heart;
> As if the ministring stars kept not apart,
> Waiting for silver-footed messages
> (Endymion, III, 41-51, p. 106).

Next, Keats spoke directly to the moon, "the gentlier-mightiest" of all the deities. The moon, with disinterestedness, as "She unobserved steals unto her throne, / And there she sits most meek and most alone," personified that psychological state of disengagement that Keats, like Hazlitt, believed must be attained in order to produce unassuming, benevolent, disinterested human action. In politics, action inspired by disinterested motivation produces great good. In poetry, disinterested observation produces unegotistical writing filled with truth. Acknowledging in her this quality of disengaged observation with which everything is seen without any sort of bias, Keats addressed the moon-goddess, saying:

> Thou dost bless every where, with silver lip

> Kissing dead things to life. The sleeping kine,
> Couch'd in thy brightness, dream of fields divine:
> Innumberable mountains rise, and rise,
> Ambitious for the hallowing of thine eyes;
> And yet thy benefiction passeth not
> One obscure hiding-place, one little spot
> Where pleasure may be sent: the nested wren
> Has thy fair face within its tranquil ken,
> And from beneath a sheltering ivy leaf
> Takes glimpses of thee (Endymion, III, 56-66, p. 106-7)

So perceptive are the moon goddess's powers of disengaged observation, Keats says to her, that even:

> The mighty deeps,
> The monstrous sea is thine--the myriad sea!
> O moon! far-spooming Ocean bows to thee,
> And Tellus [the ocean's mother] feels his forehead's cumbrous load (Endymion, III, 68-71, p. 107)

One can only conclude by asserting that the ideal of disengaged disinterestedness dominated Keats's thinking about politics and poetry for the rest of his life.

But, for good reason, Keats could not allow his political ideas nor his poetic theory, even when he discussed them using the luxuriant words and metaphors of Endymion, to dominate his writing. Apparently, he realized that neither theoretical nor practical politics offered much material for sustained poetic development. In any case, to achieve the goal which he set for himself when he began Endymion, to "make 4000 Lines of one bare circumstance and fill them with poetry" (Letters, I, 170), he had to get on with the narration of Endymion's adventures. Yet, one should never suppose that as Keats turn-

ed his attention toward other matters that he necessarily stifled his enthusiasm for imaginative disinterestedness. Quite to the contrary, this notion came to be almost continually on his mind. By contrast to the philosophical, impersonal way which he probably supposed his teacher, William Hazlitt, used the notion to oppose the selfishness that tended to limit the natural rights of man, Keats began, even while he was still at Oxford, to use imaginative disinterestedness in an elementary, personal, and, what soon proved to be both for himself and his poetry, a profound way.

III

Although the evidence from ten letters and approximately one hundred lines of Endymion, pertinent to the concept of imaginative disinterestedness is scanty and often tenuous, one can sense that for some time after his introduction to it, Keats tended to consider the concept almost as if it were divided into its two component parts --the imagination and disinterestedness--rather than as one whole notion. No doubt, even before he read Hazlitt's Essay, he had known about the imagination as a more or less logically unexplainable faculty which helped the artist organize his ideas into a completed work. Thus, in the 8 October 1817 letter to Bailey, he quoted from still another

letter (now missing) which he had written in the early spring to his brother, George, saying that "Endymion . . . will be a test, a trial of my powers of Imagination (Letters, I, 169) and that "a long Poem is a test of Invention which I take to be the Polar Star of Poetry, as Fancy is the Sails, and Imagination the Rudder" (Letters, I, 170). But, in the two months or so after he had read the Essay, disengaged disinterestedness, and not the imagination, was foremost in his mind. Only in late November, shortly before he wrote the famous 22 November 1817 letter to Bailey did the imagination suddenly become important to him again. Disengaged disinterestedness, however, was important to him almost immediately, at first, as a rather abstract, psychological notion, and, then, as a way to approach the complex and painful business of living.

Eight days after he wrote his diatribe against selfish government in Endymion, Book III, Keats was consciously ready to apply the concept of disinterestedness to his own life. On 14 September 1817, he wrote to his friends, Jane and Mariana Reynolds, saying that to them and their brother, John:

> I shall ever feel grateful for having made known to me so real [a word denoting the highest praise] a fellow as Bailey. [Keats met Bailey for the first time at the Reynolds's in the spring of 1817.][38] He delights me in the Selfish and (please God) the disinterested (sic) part of my disposition. If the old Poets have any pleasure in looking down at the

> Enjoyers of their Works, their eyes must bend with double satisfaction upon him--I sit as at a feast when he is over them and pray that if after my death any of my Labours should be worth saving, they may have as "honest a Chronicler" as Bailey. Out of this his Enthusiasm in his own pursuit and for all good things is of an exalted kind. (Letters, I, 160)

Bate has stated that "Benjamin Bailey was perhaps the last of Keats's close personal friends to affect his intellectual development in an essential, formative way."[39] And, so far as it goes, Bate's statement is entirely correct. But, while Bailey came as close as any of Keats's friends to being a real scholar, a man who offered Keats valuable suggestions about what books he should read and with whom Keats could engage in extended and serious discussion,[40] Keats probably valued Bailey in the long run not so much for his strength as an intellectual but for his overall stability as a person. In what might be taken as an implied comparison, Keats states that, much as his effervescent, dilettantish friends in the Hunt circle had once delighted him, "he /Bailey/ delights me in the Selfish . . . part of my disposition," but, apparently with real fervor, Keats also recognized that "he delights me (please God) in the disenterrested part of my disposition." (Letters, I, 160)

Clearly, it was not only fortunate that Bailey suggested to Keats that he should read Hazlitt's book, but

it was one of the most fortunate workings of Fate that Keats should find in Bailey a practical example of disinterestedness which he could recognize and appreciate. In the earnest, industrious, self-assured Bailey, Keats could probably see that disinterestedness was something more than a beautiful idea. In Bailey, disengaged disinterestedness appeared to obliterate the personal, petty egotism which Keats hated so much. But what is even more important, having understood the nature of disinterestedness in Bailey, Keats, as a person, could begin to recognize within himself the subtle, very real differences between the selfish and the disengaged, disinterested parts of his own disposition. With this broadened sensitivity and increased understanding, he could begin to use his anti-egotistic, self-effacing powers of disinterestedness even as he rejoiced that "I sit as at a feast when he [Bailey] is over them [when Bailey discusses the old, great poets] and their poetry and pray that if after my death any of my Labours should be worth saving, they may have as "honest a Chronicler as Bailey" (Letters, I, 160). Thus, in sharp contrast to the superficially neo-platonic, escapistic, and certainly unattainable pleasures which he had once wished for, he could start, even as he learned about them, to take advantage of the truly worthwhile, but very temporal pleasures which he said are "of an exalted

kind" (Letters, I, 160) and which are inherent in practical, disengaged disinterestedness. Even several months after his visit to Oxford, having been disturbed by a number of serious problems, he could affirm that his delight in Bailey and his absolute faith in disinterestedness as applied in his own life had stood the test of time and, probably, the onslaughts of egotism. In the 13 January 1818 letter to his brothers, George and Tom, he wrote:

> I am quite perplexed in a world of doubts & fancies--there is nothing stable in the world . . . I do not mean to include Bailey in this . . . he is one of the noblest men alive at the present day . . . That sort of probity & disinterestedness which such men as Bailey possess, does hold & grasp the tip-top of any spiritual honours, that can be paid to any thing in this world. (Letters, I, 204-205)

Yet, in spite of the sincere praise which he gave to Bailey for living an exemplary, disinterested life, Keats would probably have agreed that it was Hazlitt who helped him most of all to confirm his allegiance to disinterestedness. A note of warning needs to be sounded, however, before this notion can be more fully developed. Because it is so simple to recognize that Keats read Hazlitt's book, one could suppose the nature of Hazlitt's and Keat's relationship to be so obvious that it deserves no further consideration. Certainly, the fact that Keats read the Essay must never be minimized. But, to assume that the relationship between the two was anything like the simple,

impersonal, very distant relationship which might exist between any writer and one of his readers would be a mistake. From Keats's and, perhaps, Hazlitt's viewpoint, their relationship, which began pretty much as a one-sided matter, eventually matured into a strong, personal alliance,[41] one extremely important to Keats. In a final analysis, probably both Hazlitt and Keats would have agreed that their relationship was at least partly successful because, unlike the Keats-Hunt relationship, it occurred in a more or less disengaged and disinterested manner. A rehearsal of the biographical facts concerning Keats's and Hazlitt's relationship should make plain this disinterestedness.

Because he had probably read Hazlitt's articles in Hunt's Examiner, Keats no doubt was familiar with Hazlitt's name, if not his ideas on politics, drama, and literature, when he met him at either Hunt's or Haydon's in late 1816.[42] For his own part, Hazlitt also underwent a bit of preparation for his introduction to Keats. During the autumn of 1816, he probably read and then joined with his associates in the Hunt circle[43] to approve some of Keats's poems which Clarke had asked them to consider. But, because he was rather critical and demanding of contemporary writers, his reaction to the poems was probably not so generous as his colleagues.[44]

Of Keats and Hazlitt's first meetings, almost nothing can be said. One can suppose, however, that the two were not especially attracted to each other. This supposition seems reasonable because Hazlitt neither wrote anything which survives nor said anything to his associates which they noted about his first impressions of Keats. Certainly, the young, impressionable Keats felt no need to make any special comment about Hazlitt, at least, in the few letters that survive from late 1816.[45] In all likelihood, both Keats, busy editing his Poems, and Hazlitt, writing his books, The Round Table and Characters of Shakespear's Plays, had little time for each other or for anyone else in the few months after they met.[46]

But Hazlitt and Keats were probably quite aware of each other. No doubt, they met at various gatherings of the Hunt circle. In particular, they probably saw each other in the early months of 1817 at Haydon's when Haydon painted small portraits of heads of the two which he eventually worked into his very large painting, "Christ's Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem" (Letters I, 129; also see Letters I, 76). While Hazlitt might have had little time to read Keats's poetry, Keats was reading some of Hazlitt's writing. In the letter to Haydon written on 10 and 11 May 1817, it seems fairly clear that along with reading Shakespeare's primary works, Keats had just completed

reading Hazlitt's book on Shakespeare is enough for us" (Letters, I, 143). But, he also said that he had just read Hazlitt's vitriolic review of Robert Southey's Letter to William Smith, Esq, M. P. Certainly, Keats did not like this vindictive review which he described as concluding "with such a Thunderclap" (Letters, I, 138).

The initial relationship between Hazlitt and Keats can be described, then, in fairly simple terms. The two probably thought of each other as nothing more than casual acquaintances. To Hazlitt, Keats was perhaps a young, bright, but floundering poet. To Keats, Hazlitt was probably a middle-aged, shy, austere, able, but at times, evil-tempered critic. In September, 1817, with Bailey's help, however, this indifferent relationship began to change. Mostly because he read Hazlitt's Essay, which gave him a sure weapon against his own egotism, Keats began to think of Hazlitt much less as a mere acquaintance and a good deal more as a special person.

One can only suppose why Keats began to regard Hazlitt with increasing esteem, although in the 21 September 1817 letter written at Oxford to J. H. Reynolds in London, there is at least one valuable hint of what Keats's thoughts and feelings about Hazlitt might have been. While inquiring after news of happenings in London, Keats asked with apparent casualness, "How is Hazlitt?" Then, he vol-

volunteered:

> We /Bailey and Keats/ were reading his /Hazlitt's/ Round Table last night--I know he thinks himself not estimated by ten People in the world--I wishe /sic/ he knew he is. (Letters, I, 166)

After his confusing, disappointing association with Hunt, Keats perhaps planned to keep himself from being swept off his feet again by anyone. But, because of this remark in the Reynolds letter, it is not at all difficult to suppose that Keats permitted himself to indulge in an adulation of Hazlitt which was not unlike what he had once felt toward Hunt. However, by comparison with the unrestrained, impulsive homage which he gave Hunt, he probably did not grant obeisance to Hazlitt without using some good sense. He could call to mind not only the Round Table which he had read with Bailey, but also Hazlitt's Essay, his Characters of Shakespear's Plays, and his numerous contributions to The Examiner and to The Edinburgh Review. He could consider these publications together as substantial evidence that Hazlitt, in fact, knew a great deal about many things. But, more than anything else, Hazlitt possessed a more or less penetrating knowledge about literature. Keats could think that by contrast to the shallow Hunt, whom he once ridiculed for "flattering himself into an idea of being a great Poet", (Letters, I, 143) Hazlitt might actually know how to become a poet; or

might be able to explain to someone what must be done to become a poet. In short, Keats could conclude that Hazlitt was the seer for whom he had been searching during the last year.

Yet, aside from his interest in Hazlitt as an inordinately perceptive student of literature, Keats intimated some really more deep-seated causes for his homage to Hazlitt. For, when Keats wrote of Hazlitt, "I know he thinks himself not estimated by ten People in the world--I wishe /sic/ he knew he is," (Letters, I, 177) one wonders if Keats was completely frank with himself. No doubt, he believed that Hazlitt deserved to know that people thought well of him; but one questions if Keats would ever have wanted the extent of his own admiration made known to Hazlitt. Probably he would not. Once before, when he had made known his admiration for a man, in that instance, for Hunt, he had lived to regret it. He needed only to recall the incident in late February or early March of 1817 when he received a laurel crown from Hunt and, in turn, he gave Hunt an ivy crown (also, he wrote a sonnet in honor of the event, "On Receiving a Laural Crown From Leigh Hunt") to ascertain the embarrassment which this sort of revelation brings.[47] During the months from April to September, 1817, as he became increasingly self-effacing in his reaction against egotism, he had almost certainly decided that such

familarity would not occur again. As he wrote later, he did not want to "be laugh'd at in any way" (Letters, I, 174). And, definitely, no evidence exists that he ever made any revelation of his feelings to Hazlitt. Perhaps, he thought--although probably he encountered some evidence to the contrary--that Hazlitt, the apostle of anti-egotistical, imaginative disinterestedness, could not, in principle, at least, care much for personal praise. It is precisely for this reason--the belief that Hazlitt would probably not insist that personal praise was his due--that Keats might have wanted to give him homage. He could feel that Hazlitt genuinely deserved the praise.

To summarize, one can suppose two reasons for Keats's homage to Hazlitt. First, it might be that by comparison with Hunt, who Keats thought, though without much fairness, had demanded a certain obeisance both for himself and his ideas, Hazlitt seemed to Keats truly deserving of some unsolicited adulation. But, from a much less altruistic, far more selfish viewpoint, it might be that by comparison with his mounting disgust for Hunt's egotism, Keats, in the warmth of his admiration for Hazlitt, could ignore Hazlitt's failure to pay even token attention to him as a poet. Hazlitt, in fact, never did comment on Keats's Poems. But, without much trouble, Keats might have interpreted Hazlitt's indifference to be really a kind of disengaged, disinterested concern. He could suppose that, upon reading and judging

the Poems, Hazlitt felt no direct, personal stake in them, as Hunt once felt about Keats's writing. Because he found them to be more or less mediocre, he saw no reason to bother Keats with any sort of comment--whether good or bad.

In late 1816, Keats had luxuriated in the Hunt circle's abundant encouragement. At the time, and even though he later repudiated it, this good will was extremely important to him. However, by September, 1817, he had progressed in his development so that he no longer wanted or needed to be coddled as a kind of pet lamb. Rather, in the latter half of 1817, as he progressed through Endymion, he was beginning increasingly to depend upon his own resources, coming more and more to depend upon himself in order to make his own decisions and to earn his own praise. Perhaps, then, Keats secretly admired Hazlitt because he felt that by comparison with the overbearing way Hunt might have forced ideas upon him, Hazlitt presented ideas to him ~~to him~~ on many things, including disinterestedness, in a disinterested manner, a manner which invited him to examine the ideas and, then, with a sense of freedom, to select or reject these ideas as he pleased. It might be that because Keats felt Hazlitt's ideas were not forced upon him, he freely adopted many of them as his own. But, whatever the reason, it seems certain that with Hazlitt's disinterested "help," Keats was fast abandoning

his boyish immaturity, taking on the ways of a man, and beginning to strive for what is at least one goal of Hazlitt's theory of imaginative disinterestedness, personal self-realization. When one considers the problems that Keats was about to face, it is certain that he, with Hazlitt's help, had come of age just in time.

IV

To follow the significant events in Keats's life from October to December 1817 is to witness an intense drama of self-realization--the conclusion of which eventually made it possible for Keats to prophesy accurately, "I think I shall be among the English Poets after my death" (Letters, I, 394). During these months, Keats found that by the sheer force of will, he could achieve for himself a psychological state of disengaged, imaginatively aided disinterestedness;[48] and, with this disinterestedness, he could begin not only to take in stride the day-to-day personal troubles which he had to face, but, also, with the additional help of his imaginative powers, he could negate the perverse egotism which he believed had affected his own poetry.[49] Freed from these mundane, egotistical cares, he soon became a poet liberated from confusion about what poetry is and clearly apprehending what he and his poetry should be about.

Especially during October 1817, Keats became increasingly aware that disengaged disinterestedness was valuable to him. This growing awareness is apparent when one compares Keats's approach to trouble near the beginning of the month to the way he met adversity just a few weeks later. In two letters, one written on 28 September 1817 to Bailey, it appears that he had no particular, effective defense which he could deliberately use against trouble. Rather, he found himself driven to use inefficient defense mechanisms with which he could not effectively protect himself. To justify failure, he used superficial rationalization; to release pent-up feelings of disgust, he used torrents of displaced, verbal abuse, directing his complaint, not at the trouble maker, but at one who was powerless to set things aright. Thus, in the 28 September letter written at Oxford to Haydon, he reported in lines suggesting fatigue and confusion:

> within these last three weeks I have written 1000 lines--which are the third Book of my poem (Endymion) My ideas with respect to it I assure you are very low--and I would write the subject thoroughly again, but I am tired of it and think the time would be better spent in writing a new Romance which I have in my eye for next summer--Rome was not built in a Day, and all the good I expect from my employment this summer is the fruit of Experience which I hope to gather in my next poem. (Letters, I, 168)

Of course, from the vantage point of hindsight, Keats could have seen that his rationalizations were

accurate. Indeed, "Rome was not built in a day." The fact that Endymion was not turning out as he had hoped did not mean that his future efforts as a poet were doomed. Quickly after completing Endymion, he did gather "the fruit of /the/ Experience," becoming able to formulate his own practical literary philosophy. But, at the time when he wrote to Haydon, these accurate rationalizations did not help lessen his awareness that his efforts had gone wrong. He had drained himself intellectually and physically to complete his third book. After realizing that his "1000 lines" were not satisfactory, he could not avoid bitter feelings of forlorn exhaustion.

A few days later, upon returning to London from Oxford, Keats did not find any relief from his unhappiness. Aggravated by a bad cold and the "horrid row" caused by his landlady's children, he soon found that everyone in town seemed to be out of sorts. Perverse egotism was running rampant. In the 8 October letter to Bailey, he complained:

> I went to Hunt's and Haydon's who live now neighbours. Shelley was there--I know nothing about any thing in this part of the world--every Body seems at Loggerheads. There's Hunt infatuated--There's Haydon's Picture in status quo. There's Hunt walks up and down his /Haydons/ painting room criticising every head most unmercifully-- There's Horace Smith tired of Hunt. The web of our Life is of mingled Yarn. (Letters, I, 169)

But these vexations seem to fade into relative insignifi-

cance as he announced with growing annoyance:

> I am quite disgusted with literary Men and will never know another except Wordsworth--no not even Byron--Here is an instance of the friendship of such--Haydon and Hunt have known each other many years--now they live pour ainsi dire jealous Neighbours. Haydon says to me Keats dont show your Lines to Hunt on any account or he will have done half for you--so it appears Hunt wishes it to be thought, When he met Reynolds in the Theatre John told him that I was getting on to the completion of 4000 Lines. Ah! If he will say this to Reynolds what would he to other People?
> (Letters, I, 169)

No doubt, having vented his anger by writing this passage, Keats felt better. Meddling friends like Haydon and, especially, Hunt would be frustrating to anyone. Keats's disgust at Haydon's and Hunt's petty advice and at Hunt's pretended, possessive assistance seems more or less justified. Yet, no matter how understandable Keats's complaint was, it suffered from one major fault. Keats directed it toward Bailey and not the offenders, Haydon and Hunt. Of course, talking with these two would probably have accomplished nothing. However, aside from helping him let off some emotional steam, Keats's approach to the matter, without any doubt, accomplished nothing.

But Keats's earlier statement, "I know nothing about any thing in this part /the Hunt Circle's part/ of the world," (Letters, I, 169) implies that at least in this one instance while confronting a major source of confusion in his life, he appreciated the value of a specific, effective

defense against trouble, if he could only find one. If nothing else, he would like simply to put Haydon's and Hunt's indiscretions out of his mind. In truth, such a wish was not totally unreasonable. Having read Hazlitt's Essay and having espoused himself to its ideas, he knew that he was no longer really a part of Haydon's and Hunt's intimate group anyway. Recognizing this fact, he declared toward the conclusion of the letter to Bailey:

> You see Bailey how independent my writing has been--Hunt's dissuasion (about Endymion's length) was of no avail--I refused to visit Shelley, that I might have my own unfettered scope--and after all I shall have the reputation of Hunt's eleve. (Letters, I, 170)

With Keats striving for his "own unfettered scope," disengagement was becoming a fact in his life.

Certainly, as October wore on, Keats began deliberately to bring disengaged disinterestedness into his everyday existence. To an extent which he had never been able to achieve before, he began objectively to take his day-to-day troubles in stride. In order to do so, he tried to be less preoccupied with himself, attempting to disengage his own egotism from his "neutral" self. Therefore, at the end of October, when new attacks of egotistical meddling suddenly came toward him with special violence, it appears that he handled the problems without knowing the surprise and bitterness which he had experienced before in facing trouble. Indeed, Keats managed a totally unexpected attack

which came in the October issue of the new Tory publication, Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine with almost surprising deftness.[50] William Blackwood, with help from the conservative critics, John Wilson and John Gibson Lockhart, planned to write a series of articles deriding the liberal "Cockney School" of intellectuals which recognized Leigh Hunt as its mentor. These critics promised:

> Our talk shall be (a theme we never tire on)
> Of Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron,
> (Our England's Dante)--Wordsworth--HUNT, and KEATS,
> The Muses' son of promise; and of what feats
> He yet may do.[51]

Of course, Keats could not view this promised attack with complete indifference. The capital letters for his name, along with Hunt's upon whom a "flaming attack" had already been written, suggested that in time he would be given special attention (Letters, I, 179). Yet, rather than becoming terribly disturbed about it, he dealt with the issue in a more or less analytic fashion. He recognized that the attack came from a source which was interested in making trouble for its own sake. Therefore, in a fairly disengaged fashion, he could dismiss the whole matter, saying in the 3 November letter to Bailey:

> I dont mind the thing much--but if he should go to such lengths with me as he has done with Hunt I mu/s/t infalibly /sic/call him to an account--if he be a human being and appears in Squares and Theatres where we might possible meet--I dont relish his abuse. (Letters, I, 170)

But Keats never met the critics; and when the Blackwood's article on Keats finally appeared in August 1818, suggesting that its subject ought to return to the apothecary's "plasters, pills, and ointment boxes,"[52] he hardly noticed it. With the help of disengaged disinterestedness, Keats settled what could have been a troublesome vexation with almost no trouble at all.

Keats's reaction to a second, though more distant concern probably shows even more clearly his determination to be disengaged and disinterested. In a letter from Bailey, Keats learned that there had been some difficulty about Bailey's ordination in time for him to take up a curacy. The blame was apparently put upon the Bishop of Lincoln.[53] Upon hearing of Bailey's disappointment and, probably, with the pending attack from Blackwood's on his mind, Keats suddenly let loose a storm of violence which he did not want to permit himself:

> The Stations and Grandeurs of the World have taken it into their heads that they cannot commit themselves towards an inferior in rank--but is not the impertinence from one above to one below more wretchedly mean than from the low to the high? There is something so nauseous in self-willed yawning impudence in the shape of conscience--it sinks the Bishop of Lincoln into a smashed frog putrifying: that a rebel against common decency should escape the Pillory! That a mitre should cover a Man guilty of the most coxcombical, tyranical and indolent impertinence! I repeat this word for the offence appears to me most especially impertinent--and a very serious return would be the Rod--Yet doth he sit in his Palace.
>
> (Letters, I, 178-9)

> it does not become us to kick them? At this Moment I take your hand let us walk up yon Mountain of common sense now if our Pride by vainglorious such a support woud /sic/ fail--yet you feel firm footing--now look beneath at that parcel of knaves and fools. Many a mitre is moving among them. (Letters, I, 179)

Of course, though he tried to deny the fact, Keats's argument does smack of the vainglorious. But, when something even approaching disengaged disinterestedness is brought to bear on a disturbing issue, it seems less threatening.

Finally, a third problem, far more than the others, demanded that Keats, by himself, "walk up yon Mountain of /disengaged/ common sense" (Letters, I, 179). In doing so, he began to arrive at his maturity both as a man and as a poet. While still at Oxford in September, he received a letter from Haydon requesting that he inquire after a young artist named Charles Cripps, whom Haydon had observed copying an alter piece during some previous visit to Oxford.[54] Appealing to Keats as an artist of sound judgement, as a comrade in art, and, like himself, interested in doing good for others, Haydon wrote:

> I am anxious to know about that Young Man, the copy promised something--will yQu if you can see the Young Man, and ascertain what his wishes in Are are--if he has ambition, if he seems to possess power--if he wishes to be great--all of which you can soon see--(Letters, I, 181)

But in the calm after this storm, Keats went on to define the disinterested, objective way which he wanted, in fact, to manage trouble. With the Bishop of Lincoln's offense on his mind, he reflected:

> Such is this World--and we live--you have surely /been/ in a continual struggle against the suffocation of accidents--we must bear (and my Spleen is mad at the thought thereof) the Proud Mans Contumely /Insulting behavior/. (Letters, I, 179)

For the moment, he pleaded:

> O for a recourse somewhat human independant of the great Consolations of Religion and depraved Sensations, of the Beautiful, the poetical in all things--O for a Remedy against such wrongs within the pale of the World! (Letters, I, 179)

Yet, he knew that any effective remedy "within the pale of the World" against worldly wrongs could not be merely "somewhat human." The "Proud Mans Contumely" must be recognized for the perverse, destructive, egotistical thing it is. And one must head off such insulting behavior, first of all, by turning, not unreasonably, upon oneself. Keats said earnestly:

> By Heavens my dear Bailey, I know you have a spice of what I mean--you can set me and have set it in all the rubs that may befal me you have I know a sort of Pride which would kick the Devil on the Jaw Bone and make him drunk with the kick--There is nothing so balmy to a soul imbittered as yours must be, as Pride. (Letters, I, 179)

However, not wanting to be overly severe toward Bailey or even himself, Keats concluded:

> When we look at the Heavens we cannot be proud--but shall stock and stones be impertinent and say

And, following a favorable report from Keats, Haydon continued:

> should any friend be disposed to assist him up to London & to support him for a Year I'll train him in the Art, with no other remuneration but the pleasure of seeing him advance--I'll put him in the right way, and do every thing to advance him. (Letters, I, 161)

Haydon's generous offer stirred Keats into action. Together with Bailey, whom Haydon suggested might also be interested in helping the young artist, Keats found Cripps, ascertained his interest in painting, predicting "that he will be a tolerable neat brush," and concluded enthusiastically that Haydon's helping Cripps "is perhaps the finest thing that will befal him this many a year" (Letters, I, 167).

But, by the end of October, when he was encountering so many difficulties that he complained in a letter to Bailey, "there is no quiet nothing but teasing and Snubbing and vexation," (Letters, I, 172) one of the things which annoyed Keats most was Haydon's apparent decision to abandon Cripps, even before the young fellow arrived in London.[55] Keats's frustration about the matter is apparent when he reports to Bailey:

> I asked Haydon to dine with me. When I thought of settling all Matters with him in regard to Cripps and let you know about it--now although I engaged him a Fortnight before--he sent illness as an excuse--he never will come--(Letters, I, 174)

To Keats, it began to seem that his and Bailey's efforts

to raise money to help Cripps study under Haydon had been for no purpose. Very upset, he wrote to Bailey again a few days later:

> The thought that we are mortal makes us groan . . . I hope you will receive an answer from Haydon soon--if not Pride! Pride! Pride! (Letters, I, 179)

Yet, as if to defeat this egotistical pride which he hated so much, he doggedly refused to allow Haydon's apparent attitude to cause Cripps disappointment. The money would be raised:

> I have received no more subscription /to pay for Cripp's study/ --but shall soon have a full health Liberty and leisure to give a good part of my time to him--I /if not Haydon/ will certainly be in time for him--We have promised him one year let that have elapsed and then do as we think proper. (Letters, I, 179)

And, with a curious, almost whimsical remark, perhaps speaking in more general terms than before, he concluded the matter saying:

> If I did not know how impossible it is, I should say 'do not at this time of disappointments disturb yourself about others'--(Letters, I, 179).

By recognizing "how impossible it is" not to be "disturbed . . . about others," Keats appears to be at or even beyond the threshhold which he wanted to cross, becoming, in truth, an essentially disengaged, disinterested person. Some months before, while still wrapped in his pervasive, egotistical concern for himself, he would not, one can easily surmise, have cared much about any

other artist's advancement, much less have pretended that he wanted to aid this advancement materially. As well, only a short time before, upon recognizing either a real or imagined affront from a close acquaintance, for example, Leigh Hunt, Keats would have repaid the troublemaker more than in kind by rejecting him almost totally.[56] But, as he wrote to Bailey, he now recognized the impossibility of trying to prevent other people's concerns and actions from impinging upon his own. Instead, by using disengaged disinterestedness, he began to get out of the shackles of his limiting, petty self, and rather than run from adversity as a child might, he deliberately faced it as a mature individual. It is extremely significant that by contrast to the way he managed his relationship with Hunt, Keats, while fully aware of Haydon's faults, did not reject the man. After some three weeks, when Bailey finally received an "extremely cutting" letter from Haydon, (Letters, I, 183) Keats was able to counter his own great disillusionment in Haydon, a person of whom he once thought so much, by disposing of the trouble, but, certainly, not of Haydon. Mustering the full power of his disengaged, disinterested common sense, he wrote in the 22 November 1817 letter to Bailey:

> --What occasions the greater part of the World's Quarrels? simply this, two Minds meet and do not understand each other time enough to p /r/event any shock or surprise at the conduct of either

> party--As soon as I had known Haydon three days I had got enough of his character not to have been surp/r/ised at such a Letter as he has hurt you with. Nor when I knew it was it a principle with me to drop his acquaintance although with you it would have been an imperious feeling. (Letters, I, 184)

No doubt, Keats used his mild accusation against Bailey, that in the same circumstances he would have known "an imperious feeling" to drop Haydon, in order to shore up his own determination to treat Haydon with disinterestedness. This accusation in no way obscures the fact, to use Keats's own words, that "a very gradual ripening of the intellectual powers" (Letters, I, 214) had brought him to his point of view, the one which he retained for the rest of his life. Through the sheer force of his will, he had become, in truth, "one who gathers samphire, dreadful trade," one who deals directly with earthly affairs. (Letters, I, 141) But, in fact, by recognizing his nature as a man able to face the world, Keats had not merely begun to approximate that description of himself which he had borrowed from King Lear some six months before and explained to Haydon. Certainly, he had done something more. With the help of disengaged, disinterested objectivity, he had begun to perceive his mature definition of reality or truth and of beauty.

In his 1962 Ball State Teacher's College thesis, Mr. James W. Hardin deliniates Keats's concepts of truth and

beauty. Hardin explains:

> Reality or Truth, as Keats so often called it, is a fluid progression of events which can be apprehended only at the "Moment" when each event occurs. It does not remain "the Mystery" because it is a preordained and static group of cosmic laws which, even though they are beyond man's feeble power to fathom them, exist in such a state that they might be understood; Keats's truth remains a "Mystery" simply because it is constantly being created anew and is thus--except for the fact that its component parts constitute a great harmony--nonpredictable in nature.[57]

Hardin continues by explaining that "the term, beauty, is to be understood as the momentary instance of harmony between a soul and an object--a single perception of one of the 'thousand of those beautiful particles,'" constituting the whole of fluid truth which can be apprehended at the "Moment."

> With the generally prevalent definition of beauty, /this concept/ has simply nothing to do; rather it is concerned, as Keats believed the . . . poet must be, with apprehending the balance of all antitheses--"foul or fair, high or low . . ." Keats might have said, in other words that "apprehending the balance of all antithesis overcomes every other consideration." One's ability to discover such Beauty could, in Keats's words, be facilitated by "a very gradual ripening of the intellectual powers," "a continual drinking of Knowledge" which would increase the poet's store of antithetical comparators.[58]

It was following Keats's earliest comprehension of beauty and truth--both "simply different degrees of completeness, the former apprehensible by man in 'the moment,' the latter always broadly fluid and essentially unknowable"--that he wrote in Endymion, Book IV, the "Hymn of

the Indian Maid."[59] Apparently, at the time when he wrote it, he considered the passage as the most significant thing he had ever produced. He was entirely serious, not merely being "poetic," as he penned these lines with an antithetical theme:

'O Sorrow,
Why dost borrow
The natural hue of health, from vermeil lips?--
To give maiden blushes
To the white rose bushes?
Or is't thy dewy hand the daisy tips?

'O Sorrow,
Why dost borrow
The lustrous passion from a falcon-eye?
To give the glow-worm light?
Or, on a moonless night,
To tinge, on syren shores, the salt sea-spry?

'O Sorrow,
Why dost borrow
The mellow ditties from a mourning tongue?--
To give at evening pale
Unto the nightingale,
That thou mayst listen the cold dews among?

'O Sorrow,
Why dost borrow
Heart's lightness from the merriment of May?--
A lover would not tread
A cowslip on the head,
Though he should dance from eve till peep of day--
Now any drooping flower
Held sacred for thy bower,
Wherever he may sport himself and play.

'To Sorrow
I bade good-morrow,
And thought to leave her far away behind:
But cheerly, cheerly,
She loves me dearly:
She is so constant to me, and so kind:
I would deceive her
And so leave her

But ah! she is so constant and so kind.
(Endymion, IV, 146-81, pp. 135-36)

With this conclusion, that sorrow "is so constant and so kind," Keats dismissed totally and finally whatever manifestations of escapism that he might ever have possessed. Rather than devote his efforts as a man and as a poet to the goal of achieving earthly, human existence void of pain, he admitted without reservation that in man's life pain has its place along with pleasure. Perhaps, this realization of the antithetical relationship between pain and pleasure was the first one of the "thousand of those beautiful particles" (Letters, I, 403) of fluid truth of which he was clearly cognizant. In one of the most important passages in the famous 22 November 1817 letter to Bailey, he elucidated this realization, acknowledging it as a fundamental aspect of his approach to life:

> You /Bailey/ perhaps at one time thought there was such a thing as Worldly Happiness to be arrived at, at certain periods of time marked out--you have of necessity from your disposition been thus led away--I scarcely remember counting upon any Happiness--I look not for it if it be not in the present hour--nothing startles me beyond the Moment. . . . The first thing that strikes me on hea/r/ing a Misfortune having befalled another is this. 'Well it cannot be helped.--he will have the pleasure of trying the resourses of his spirit, and I beg now my dear Bailey that hereafter should you observe any thing cold in me not to /put/ it to the account of heartlessness but abstraction--for I assure you I sometimes feel not the influence of a Passion or Affection during a whole week--and so long this sometimes

> continues I begin to suspect myself and the genuiness of my feelings at other times--thinking them a few barren Tragedy-tears (Letters, I, 186).

By steeling himself to the reality that he must objectively begin to accept life as it is in "the Moment," (Letters, I, 186) Keats no doubt found it less frustrating, less painful to accept pain for what it is than to continue contradicting his own good sense by supposing he could merely wish and pain would go away. He knew, in fact, that he really had nothing to fear from pain, for, once he objectively recognized this adversary, his disengaged disinterestedness would protect him well enough.

Within a brief time, Keats's new, inclusive approach to the nature of life began influencing his efforts as a poet. If he could manage personal troubles by viewing them objectively, having already used disinterestedness to free this "neutral intellect" from his egotistical self, he could use the same approach while writing poetry to solve problems which egotism caused. Thanks to the recent, gradual ripening of his intellectual powers, he had perceived in an antithetical fashion what he must become to achieve such solutions. Rather than becoming one of what he called "Men of Power," he realized that he must strive to become one of what he called "Men of Genius." In the 22 November 1817 letter to Bailey, he explained:

> I wish you knew all that I think about Genius and the Heart--and yet I think you are thoroughly acquainted with my innermost breast in that respect or you could not have known me even thus long and still hold me worthy to be your dear friend. In passing

> however I must say of one thing that has pressed upon me lately and encreased my Humility and capability of submission and that is this truth--Men of Genius are great as certain ethereal Chemicals operating on the Mass of neutral intellect--by /for but/ they have not any individuality, any determined Character. I would call the top and head of those who have a proper self Men of Power--(Letters, I, 184).

In this important contrast between "Men of Genius" and "Men of Power," each of the latter possesses a "proper self" while each of the former lacks "any individuality, any determined character." Apparently, one of the "Men of Power" asserts his individuality as a "proper self," insisting as much as possible that his ego-centered, "proper" desires be fulfilled. One of the "Men of Genius," however, not having "any determined character," influences matters in a far more subtle, really disengaged way. His powers are like "certain ethereal Chemicals operating on the Mass of neutral intellect." If he were such a "Man of Genius," Keats, the poet, knew that his "ethereal" power over his "neutral intellect" was his faculty of imagination. Having long been aware of its role in artistic creation, Keats would probably have described the imagination as the logically unexplainable, psychological force which, when brought to bear on all of the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual elements of his "neutral intellect," would be able, first, to sort out from these various elements the ones which are most useful for

artistic creation and, then, once these selected elements have mixed and mingled together within the artist, to fuse them into an artistic (poetic) whole. Not for one moment had Keats doubted the imagination's importance:

> I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination--What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth--whether it existed before or not--for I have the same Idea of all our Passions as of Love they are all in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty--In a Word, you may know my favorite Speculation by my first Book /discussed hereafter/ and the little song /"Hymn of the Indian Maid" which is quoted above/ I sent in my last /letter of 3 November 1817/ which is a representation from the fancy of the probable mode of operating in these matters--The Imagination may be compared to Adam's dream--he awoke and found in truth. (Letters, I, 184-5)

Probably Keats championed the imagination most of all because it could not be influenced in any way by egotistical desire. Indeed, "What the imagination seizes" in the moment as "essential Beauty" "must be" a single perception of fundamental "truth--whether it existed before or not." For a long time, Keats had toadied to what he eventually called "the whims of an Egotist" (Letters, I, 233) only to produce what he recognized after a time as unsatisfactory poetry. But, thanks to the imagination's totally unbiased, discerning powers, he knew now that these whims could be rejected, essential beauty which "must be truth" (Letters, I, 184) could be perceived, and poetry of integrity could be written. In summary, he believed that:

> the simple imaginative mind has its rewards in the repeti/ti/on of its own silent working coming continually /and without bias/ on the spirit /of truth/ with a fine suddenness. (Letters, I, 185)

Like Adam following his dream, the poet can awaken from his creative experience and find that he has written truth.

A second reason for Keats's allegiance to the imagination was its extremely appealing efficiency. Because of its very nature, it was superior to step-by-step reasoning. No doubt, he believed that ordinary intellectual activity, especially as embodied in conventional moral systems and aesthetic theories, suffered from cumbersome, "consequitive" reasoning which, potentially, at least, was also subject to egotistical contamination. Recognizing the freedom which the imagination gives the artist (or anyone) by cutting him free from any predetermined, iconic methods for creation, Keats wrote to Bailey:

> I am the more zealous in this affair /of espousing himself to the imagination/, 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 ever (when) arrived at his goal without putting aside numerous objections--However it may be, O for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts! It /knowing imaginative truth/ is 'a Vision in the form of Youth' a Shadow of reality to come--and this consideration has further conv/i/nced me for it has come as auxiliary to another favorite Speculation of mine, that we shall enjoy ourselves here after by having what we called happiness on Earth repeated in a finer tone and so repeated--And yet such a fate can only befall those who delight in sensation rather than hunger /consequitively/ after truth. (Letters, I, 185)

Without question, even as he wrote these lines, Keats realized that "such a fate" was befalling him in his efforts to finish Endymion. He was on the verge of "a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts!" Very shortly, he saw "a Shadow of reality to come." To recount, after turning out 1032 lines of his third book during three weeks in September, he had produced hardly half that number of lines for his fourth book in more than twice the time during October and November. In the last three weeks of October, he wrote only three hundred or so lines. By the time he wrote to Bailey on 22 November, he had finished just five hundred lines, better than a quarter of these being lyrical or quasi-lyrical insertions, mostly filler with which he could mark time.[60] This slow down in production had occurred because, as previously discussed, Endymion, as a poem was no longer what he wanted. At his inception of the poem, he had intended to expand the fable of Endymion, which he had touched upon briefly in "I Stood Tip-Toe . . ." He had planned to guide Endymion through numerous adventures while he quested for the ideal, this ideal taking the form of an unknown goddess whom he first had discovered in a dream. Eventually, he had intended Endymion to learn the goddess's identity as that of Cynthia, the moon deity, and with this knowledge, to earn his own immortality, becoming "enskyed"

along with Cynthia. But, such a conclusion was no longer compatible with his point of view. Because he had expended so much time and effort to write better than three thousand lines of the poem, however, he could not simply discard it. Rather, he needed a conclusion with which he could achieve a compromise between his old escapist views as expressed in Endymion's first three books and his new, matter-of-fact, disengaged disinterested views.[61]

Once again, as it had seemed necessary when he had previously withdrawn from London, going to Margate and to the Isle of Wight to get on with his writing, Keats felt that he must go away for a few days. Yet, this departure meant something far different fromtthose earlier, often worthless ones. He went to the valley of Michleham, a few miles south of London between the villages of Dorking and Leatherhead, a place with an inn called the Fox and Hounds.[62] By withdrawing from London, where he knew social and egotistical involvement, he seemed deliberately to act out in his own life his formula to attain poetic truth. As much as possible, he attempted to cause himself to become neutral intellect, so that the "simple imaginative mind," unhampered by consequitive reasoning and depending on "Sensations rather than thoughts" could be free to work in order to come "on the spirit /of truth/ with a fine suddenness." (Letters, I, 185) Within a

short time, his efforts bore fruit. In six days, from 22 until 28 November 1817, he wrote a daily average of eighty to eighty-five lines, eventually to produce about five hundred lines and, therewith, complete the first draft of the poem.[63] The contrived plot of these lines suggests that Keats was able to bring off a not entirely unsuccessful conclusion in order to keep Endymion from being a failure, simply for not being finished.

At this point, in order to achieve a fuller appreciation of Keats's accomplishment, a summary of the plot in Endymion, Book IV, is useful. In the first half of the book, Keats had already introduced an Indian Maid, lonely and hungering for human love, whom Endymion encounters and who sings to him the song, "O Sorrow,/ Why dost borrow . . ." (Endymion, IV, 146-47, p. 135) After the song and following his affirmation of love to the Indian Maid,

> I must be thy sad servant evermore,
> I cannot choose but kneel here and adore,
> (Endymion, IV, 301-02, p. 139)

Endymion takes her hand and asks, "Wilt fall asleep?" (Endymion, IV, 318, p. 140). Then, following an ominous warning coming from the woods, "Woe to that Endymion!" (Endymion, IV, 221, p. 137), Mercury appears and the two lovers are carried on winged, jet-black steeds into the air. The lovers sleep; Endymion dreams that he is among

the gods and learns that the goddess he has sought is really Cynthia. Naturally, he feels torn. In great suffering, he is carried to the Cave of Quietude. In this place of desperate apathy and exhaustion, where one can gain peace through painful, personal introspection, Endymion, himself, recovers peace of mind. Thus, as one passage states:

> the man is yet to come
> Who hath not journeyed in this native hell.
> But few have ever felt how calm and well
> Sleep may be had in that deep den of all.
> (Endymion, IV, 522-525, p. 145)

Descending to earth, Endymion determines to give up his long search for the ideal. The Indian Maid and he will live in the natural realm of Pan, where, by comparison with Cynthia's exalting realm, the breathing is not so thin. But it turns out that the Indian Maid, for reasons not entirely clear, is forbidden to accept his love. With her departure, as Endymion sits helplessly alone realizing that both his heavenly and earthly desires have been thwarted, his sister, Peona, appears to welcome his return to the human world. He tells her of his misfortune and announces his decision to become a hermit. Before he leaves, they are to meet that evening in the grove behind the temple of Cynthia. The hour comes, and with it, the conclusion of the poem. The Indian Maid is suddenly transformed before his eyes into Cynthia. The ideal has

been discovered through acceptance of the earthly.[64]

Yet, as Bate remarks, "Endymion is not really 'enskyed' except through the most improbable deus ex machina."[65] Keats felt, no doubt, that he must immortalize his hero in order to maintain the integrity of the ancient legend and, at least, superficially to establish some sort of coherence between the poem's conclusion and what had gone on in its first three books. But, certain confessional passages in Book IV clearly show that Keats, in fact, no longer espoused or even hopefully sought some other worldly escape from earthly pain for himself or his hero.* Thus, at the point in Book IV where Endymion, at least for the time, believes that he has lost both Cynthia and the Indian Maid, Keats, himself, intrudes upon the narrative to assure his miserable hero (and, no doubt, himself) that it is the recognization of fundamental truth which occurs when man puts aside his efforts "to burst his mortal bars" ("I Stood Tip-Toe . . ." l. 190, p. 6). Man is an earthly creature and he must stay on earth.

Endymion! unhappy! it nigh grieves

*Generally, the passage, Endymion, IV, 513-779, implies that Keats had given up his effort, either for himself or for Endymion, to escape earthly pain. The Cave of Quietude passage, especially lines 513-48, consists of a rationalization by means of which Keats could accept defeat. But, Endymion, IV, 636-648, contains Keats's most overt statement of resignation.

> Me to behold thee thus in last extreme:
> Ensky'd ere this, but truly that I deem
> Truth the best music in a first-born song
> (Endymion, IV, 770-73, p. 151).

Clearly acknowledging the irrevocability of his mortality, and the fallaciousness of even trying to attain the dream of immortality, Keats admits as Endymion speaks:

> I have clung
> To nothing, lov'd a nothing, nothing seen
> Of felt but a great dream! O I have been
> Presumptuous against love, against the sky,
> Against all elements, against the tie
> Of mortals each to each, against the blooms
> Of flowers, rush of rivers, and the tombs
> Of heroes gone! Against his proper glory
> Has my own soul conspired: so my story
> Will I to children utter, and repent.
> There never liv'd a mortal man, who bent
> His appetite beyond his natural sphere,
> But starv'd and died (Endymion, IV, 636-48, p. 150).

As Newell Ford has observed, Keats acknowledged in writing this passage in his Endymion that:

> . . . the limitations of mortality are not dissolvable merely because hope and wish delude the yearning heart. Truth is not dream, and wisdom lies in a sober resignation to the unecstatic conditions of mortality. Here alone, if happiness is for man, let him look for it. This is the lesson which finally has been learned, and it is the poet rather than his hero who has learned it.[66]

With in a month, following his return in late November to London, Keats, in a flash of brilliance, was able to articulate the great experience through which he had passed. He clearly recognized the implications of this experience for this work as a poet. And, in the months that followed, he realized its significance for

him as a man facing "the unecstatic conditions of mortality"[67] and acting as a responsible member of society. In a letter written 21 December 1817 to his brothers, George and Tom, he gave his first statement concerning what he had achieved. In the letter, he relates that while walking home with his friends. Brown and Dilke, from a Christmas pantomine, he had what he called "not a dispute but a disquisition" with Dilke. He says that as it proceeded:

> . . . several things dovetailed in my mind, & at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously--I mean Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason--Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge. (Letters, I, 193-94)

Many months later, curiously enough, while again remarking about his mild antagonism toward Dilke, Keats continued his explanation of negatively capable half-knowledge. In the 17-27 September 1819 letter to the George Keatses, he wrote:

> That Dilke was a Man who cannot feel he has a personal identity unless he has made up his Mind about every thing. The only means of strengthening one's intellect is to make up ones mind about nothing--to let the mind be a thoroughfare for all thoughts. Not a select party. The genius is not scarce in population. All the stubborn arguers you meet with are of the same brook--They never begin upon a subject they have not preresolved on. They want to hammer their nail into you and if you turn

> the point, still they think you wrong. Dilke will never come at a truth as long as he lives; because he is always trying at it. (Letters, II, 213)

In tracing Keats's personal experience in those final days of his work on Endymion, Book, IV, it seems that he became what he had described in his 22 November 1817 letter to Bailey: he had become one of the "Men of Genius." (Letters, I, 184) Having caused himself to become psychologically a neutral intellect and, following this withdrawl, one almost entirely free of egotistical preconception, Keats rose to a state of negative capability. As an artist, his intellect was made up about nothing. Rather, he caused his mind to become a thoroughfare or a passageway through which all thoughts that came his way might pass. He accepted all of these thoughts so that his powers of imagination could evaluate them and then select the ones which should be included in the work of art (specifically, in this case, Endymion). Never permitting his egotistical self to intrude upon the imagination's efforts, he was content to be "in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason," (Letters, I, 193) a contentment absent in Coleridge and, especially, in Dilke, which kept them from coming upon truth. Then, following his preparation in negative capability, his imagination, having settled upon the materials out of which his poetry should be made, was

ready, as he described in the 30 January 1818 letter to his publisher, John Taylor, to mount "the gradations of Happiness which are like a kind of Pleasure Thermometer." (Letters, I, 218)

By means of a passage in Endymion, Book I, about which he explained in the above-mentioned letter to Taylor, "I assure you that when I wrote it, it was a regular stepping of the Imagination towards a Truth," (Letters, I, 218) Keats seems to define the creative process through which he passed. Thus, he first of all caused his hero, Endymion, to ask, "Wherein lies happiness?" And, then, answering his own question, Endymion says,

> In that which becks
> Our ready minds to fellowship divine,
> A fellowship with essence; till we shine
> Full alchemized, and free of space
> (Endymion, I, 777-780, p. 74)

Diverse critical opinion exists concerning the meaning of these lines.[68] Yet, within the context of Keats's apparent efforts to describe the creative process, one can interpret the "fellowship divine,/a fellowship with essence" as the encounter between a divine, neutral intellect, which is free of egotism, and the essence of existence. This encounter takes place in the poet's mind which, for this context, Keats calls "the thoroughfare of all thoughts." (Letters, II, 213) Following this initial

encounter, the selection of those materials out of which the poetry is to be made occurs, and, then, and only then, the poet and his subject matter, "full alchemized, and free of space," are ready to ascend the Pleasure Thermometer.

To begin the climb, moving from rational objectivity to aesthetic fusion, Endymion seems almost to command the poet to

> Fold
> A rose leaf round thy finger's taperness
> And soothe thy lips (Endymion, I. 781-83, p. 74).

By folding a rose leaf about his finger, the poet heightens his sensuous pleasure. Then, Endymion continues,

> hist, when the airy stress
> Of music's kiss impregnates the free winds,
> And with a sympathetic touch unbinds
> Aeolian magic from their lucid wombs:
> The old songs waken from enclouded tombs;
> Old ditties sigh above their father's grave;
> Ghosts of melodious prophecying rave
> Round every spot where trod Apollo's foot;
> Bronze clarions awake, and faintly bruit,
> Where long ago a giant battle was;
> And, from the turf, a lullaby doth pass
> In every place where infant Orpheus slept
> (Endymion, I, 783-94, p. 74).

The simple pleasure of touching a rose leaf widens into the more profound pleasures found in the beauties of nature and of music. At his level, as if to ascertain that the poet is still with him, Endymion pauses briefly to inquire, "Feel we these things?" And, as if the poet indicates that he does, Endymion goes on to show that even greater things

are possible as he says:

> . . . that moment have we stept
> Into a sort of oneness, and our state
> Is like a floating spirit's. But there are
> Richer entanglements, enthralments far
> More self-destroying, leading, by degrees,
> To the chief intensity; the crown of these
> Is made of love and friendship, and sits high
> Upon the forehead of humanity.
> All its more ponderous and bulky worth
> Is friendship, whence there ever issues forth
> A steady splendour; but at the tip-tip
> There hangs by unseen film, an orbed drop
> Of light, and that is love: Its influence,
> Thrown in our eyes, genders a novel sense,
> At which we start and fret; till in the end,
> Melting into its radiance, we blend,
> Mingle, and so become a part of it,--
> Nor with aught ease can our souls interknit
> So wingedly: when we combine therewith,
> Life's self is nourish'd by its proper pith,
> And we are nurtured like a pelican brood.
> (Endymion, I, 795-815, pp. 74-75)

The final steps toward fusion of the poetic materials requires great intensity within the poet. This intensity:

> . . . genders a novel sense,
> At which we start and fret; till in the end,
> Melting into its radiance, we blend,
> Mingle, and so become a part of it.
> (Endymion, I, 808-811, p. 75)

In a conclusive remark concerning the Pleasure Thermometer passage, Keats wrote to Taylor (30 January 1818), "My having written that Argument (Passage) will perhaps be of the greatest Service to me of any thing I ever did." (Letters, I, 218) And, of course, it was. Finally, after months of thought and writing, Keats was beginning to realize his practical abilities as a poet.

NOTES: CHAPTER II

[1]Bate, pp. 149-51.

[2]Clarke, p. 194.

[3]Bate, p. 152.

[4]Ibid., p. 156.

[5]Ibid., p. 152.

[6]Ibid., p. 158.

[7]William Walsh, "John Keats," From Blake to Byron, ed. Boris Ford (Baltimore, 1957), p. 220.

[8]Bate, pp. 159-63.

[9]Walsh, p. 220.

[10]Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, Keats's Shakespeare (London, 1928), p. 4.

[11]See Bate, pp. 205-18. Also, for evidence of Keats's favorable reaction to Oxford, see his 10 September 1817 letter to Fanny Keats (Letters, I, 153-56) and his 21 September 1817 letter to J. H. Reynolds (Letters, I, 162-166).

[12]Bate, pp. 2-102.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Walter Jackson Bate, From Classic to Romantic (New York, 1961), pp. 131-147, 153-158.

[15]For commentary related to Hazlitt's essay on the "Principles of Human Action" and its two central concepts of imagination and disinterestedness, see Bate, pp. 255-59; Herschel Baker, William Hazlitt (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), pp. 142-46; and W. P. Albrecht, "Liberalism and Hazlitt's Tragic View," College English, XXIII (1961), 112-118.

[16]Baker, pp. 142-46, 247.

[17]William Hazlitt, "On the Principles of Human Action," The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, ed. P. P. Howe (London, 1930-34), I, 1. Henceforth, all references in this thesis to Hazlitt's writings will be to this edition, and will be designated in the notes by the term, Works, followed by the volume and page number (s), i.e. Works, I, 1.

[18]Works, I, 83; also, see Bate, p. 256.

[19]Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, ed. M. Oakeshott, Oxford, 1957) pp. 13-17, 25-27, 84-85, 93-105, 112, et passim; English Works, ed. William Molesworth, (London, 1839) I, xiii; IV, 255; see also Oakeshott's introduction, xx, et passim.

[20]Walter Jackson Bate, Criticism: The Major Texts (New York, 1952), p. 283.

[21]Works, I, 3.

[22]Ibid., I, ii.

[23]Ibid., I, 18f.

[24]Ibid., I, 28.

[25]Ibid., I, 26; also, see Bate, p. 257.

[26]Ibid., I, 32; also, see Baker, p. 145.

[27]Ibid., I, 1.

[28]Baker, p. 145.

[29]Works, I, 14.

[30]Ibid., I, 14f.

[31]Ibid., I, 2.

[32]Ibid., I, 9.

[33]Ibid., I, 15.

[34]See Baker, pp. 37-115 for an account of Hazlitt's early political interests.

[35]William P. Albrecht, "Political Ideas," Hazlitt and the Creative Imagination (Lawrence, Kansas, 1965), pp. 29-62, but, especially, p. 59.

[36]Works, I, 15.

[37]See Chapter I, p. of this thesis for remarks concerning Keats's reaction to Hunt's imprisonment.

[38]John Keats, p. 196.

[39]Ibid.

[40]Ibid., p. 201.

[41]In a footnote to his discussion of Keats's relationship to Hazlitt (see p. 247), Professor Herschel Baker explained that "the relationship of Keats and Hazlitt has been so extensively investigated by Garrod, De Selincourt, Finney, and others that there is a small library on the subject, but two fairly recent articles may be cited as representing our current state of knowledge: Clarence Thorpe ("Keats and Hazlitt: A Record of Personal Relationship and Critical Estimate," PMLA, LXII (1947), 487-502 has collected most of the biographical data, and Kenneth Muir ("Keats and Hazlitt" in John Keats: A Reassessment, ed. Kenneth Muir (1958), pp. 139-158) has treated Keats's use of some of Hazlitt's main ideas. Bertram L. Woodruff's unpublished Harvard dissertation, "Keats and Hazlitt; A Study of the Development of Keats" (1956), is encyclopedic."

[42]Baker, p. 195.

[43]Hunt, pp. 409-10.

[44]Baker, p. 247.

[45]Ibid., p. 247; also, see Letters, I, 99-121; wherein Keats says nothing about Hazlitt.

[46]All three books, Keats's Poems and Hazlitt's Round Table and Characters of Shakespear's Plays were published early in the year of 1817.

[47]Bate, pp. 138-140.

[48]Ibid., pp. 193-232; but, especially, pp. 193-94.

[49]Ibid., pp. 226-27.

[50]Ibid., p. 224.

[51]"On the Cockney School of Poetry, No. 1," (anon. art.), Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, II, No. 7 (October, 1817), 38.

[52]"On the Cockney School of Poetry, No. 4," (anon. rev.), Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, III, No. 17 (August, 1818), 542.

[53]Hewlett, p. 115.

[54]Bate, p. 211.

[55]Ibid., p. 212.

[56]See pp. in this thesis.

[57]James W. Hardin, "The Development, Meaning, and Critical Ramifications of John Keats's Concept of Negative Capability," unpubl. thesis (Ball State Teachers College, 1962), pp. 172-73.

[58]Ibid., p. 177.

[59]Ibid., p. 174.

[60]Ibid., pp. 189-92, 220, 228.

[61]Ibid., pp. 189-92

[62]Ibid., p. 229.

[63]Ibid., p. 231.

[64]Ibid., p. 190-91.

[65]Ibid.

[66]Newell F. Ford, The Prefigurative Imagination of John Keats, Stanford Univ. Pubs. in Lang. and Lit., IX, No. 2 (Stanford, 1951, 158).

[67]Ibid.

[68]Bate, p. 182-83 discusses this diversity of opinion.

I

Upon completing his first draft of Endymion and with his return to London in early December, Keats concluded the long period of introspection which he had forced himself to endure for most of the year.[1] Once in town, he very deliberately turned his back upon solitude and study in order to begin moving outward in his concerns. Once again, he became an active member of society. During most of the holiday season, except for the sudden coalescence of thoughts which he experienced to produce his most singular of literary concepts--negative capability (Letters, I, 193-94), and for writing two reviews of theatricals at Reynolds's request,[2] he put aside serious intellectual endeavors, and, with zeat, he gave himself over to numerous social activities. (Letters, I, 191-94) He spent long evenings with friends; he attended the theatre for his own pleasure; he went to dinners and dances; probably he drank a lot of wine.[3] In general, since he was asking less for himself his conduct during the holidays did much to confirm that, having taken disinterestedness into his very being, he found himself blessed with a new, rewarding sense of freedom. Thus, kept at a safe distance, the world seemed less intimidating than it had. Indeed, for a time, at

least, living in the world was fun.

Earlier, in the 22 November 1817 letter to Reynolds, Keats had described rather indirectly how he kept the world at bay. He had appealed to Reynolds:

> Why dont you, as I do look unconcerned at what may be called more particularly Heart-vexations? They never surprize me--lord! a man should have the fine point of his soul taken off to become fit for this world--(Letters, I, 188).

No doubt, from Keats's viewpoint, to "look unconcerned at . . . Heart-vexations" did not mean that he refused to give them the attention that they deserved. Looking unconcerned was merely an overt manifestation of his disinterestedness. Certainly, nothing had taken "the fine point off his soul." Rather, acting as a kind of shield, disinterestedness had begun to protect him, making him "fit for this world." To use another metaphor, with the help of disinterestedness, Keats, upon encountering "Heart-vexations," was no longer the thin-skinned boy that he once had been. Therefore, when Wordsworth and Hunt made flippant or derisive remarks about Endymion which, at an earlier time, he would have taken as crushing blows, he dismissed the remarks, but not to his critics, as being of no consequence[4] (Letters, I, 213-14). When his virtual enemy, Mr. Abbey, told him "in an indirect way, that I had no business" calling to visit his sister, Fanny, who was in London for the holidays

from her boarding school, he would not be intimidated (Letters, I, 214). He visited her anyway.[5] With plans for Cripp's study getting on well enough,[6] he put aside his anger at Haydon and renewed his friendship with the man, assuring him, "Your friendship for me is now getting into its teens" (Letters, I, 203). And, at almost the same time, when Haydon had serious fallings out with both Reynolds and Hunt, Keats, though he lamented the unhappiness, saying "I am quite perplexed in a world of doubts & fancies--uproar's your only musik," (Letters, I, 204, also Letters, I 205) simply stayed out of the fuss.[7] (Bate, p. 276) Because of the distance from trouble which disinterestedness helped him maintain, he did not waste his time and energy. By the last of January, 1818, he knew that he had something far more important to do.

In the new year, Keats began turning outward not only in his social interests, but, also, in his concerns as a poet. This change in concern, unlike his change from being in solitude to being gregarious, did not occur at once. But, after a few months, it was, like his increased interest in social activities, just as deliberate. The reason for his eventual change came directly from the way he understood the concept of negative capability. He valued the concept because it assisted him to ascertain what was essential beauty, i.e.,

a momentary glimpse of the preordained and static group of cosmic laws which are truth.[8] In time, using this beauty as the subject matter for his poetry, he apparently realized, though with difficulty, that one of the legitimate reasons why other people should want to read his poetry was to learn of the beauty, that is, truth, which it could make clear to them. Being a man cognizant that he was irrevocably a member of society, he probably viewed it as his duty to make available to society whatever he perceived as beauty. To follow the course which Keats took in the next five months toward the recognition of his social duty will be the purpose of this last chapter.

From the first of January until the middle of March, Keats was preoccupied with correcting Endymion before he sent it off to his publishers. Between 6 and 20 January, his work on Endymion, Book I, apparently went along satisfactorily (Letters, I, 38). Aside from working on his manuscript, he did very little except socialize. For him, the first weeks in the new year were still a time of rest after his long, hard effort to complete Endymion. They were a time of intellectual indolence. Yet, Keats did not really waste time.[9] As he explained it, "Nothing is finer for the purposes of great productions, than a very gradual ripening of the intellectual powers" (Letters, I, 214). Certainly his idea of gradual ripening applied

to himself as much as anyone. As time passed, he allowed the concept of negative capability to penetrate deep into his thinking. Its influence became increasingly powerful in his life. Very soon, it guided him to consider at least important issues. He settled one of them even before he wrote about it. The other issue occupied his thoughts, apparently, for the rest of his life.

In the 5 January 1818 letter to his brothers, a letter which, otherwise, is only of passing interest, Kaats wrote an important statement which shows that, thanks to negative capability, he had disposed of at least one matter with almost no trouble. At some earlier time, his brothers had asked him about some novelists whose books he had been reading. He replied by writing:-

> You asked me what degrees there are between Scotts Novels and those of Smollet--They appear to me to be quite distinct in every particular--more especially in their Aim--Scott endeavours to th/r/ow so interesting and ramantic a colouring into common and low Characters as to give them a touch of the Sublime--Smollet on the contrary pulls down and levels what with other Men would continue Romance. The Grand parts of Scott are within the reach of more Minds that /for than/ the finest humours in Humphrey Climker--(Letter, I, 199-200).

With this statement, Keats made explicit his preference in favor of Smollett, a neo-classical novelist who lived a full two generations before him, in opposition to Scott, his contemporary and one of early nineteenth century England's most successful writers, and, thereby, shows

himself to be dissatisfied with the romanticism which was popular in his own time. An apparent paradox, this dissatisfaction with romanticism by one of England's most famous romantic poets deserves consideration not only because it is a curious matter in itself, but also because it evidences perhaps the most vital development in Keats's literary judgement which occurred during his entire life.

First, one should understand that Keats's dissatisfaction with one strain of romanticism is not, in any way, a total rejection of the whole of romanticism. Instead, it makes manifest that Keats had greatly increased his sense of discrimination concerning literature. It seems clear that in preferring Smollett over Scott, he did not totally refuse to consider Scott or any other contemporary writer. As well, little evidence exists showing that he was very fond of Smollett. Rather, what had happened was that he had acquired, through negative capability, specific criteria for literary judgement which were not related either to popularity, like Scott's, or to at least some of the tenets of nineteenth century romanticism.

At the center of any literary judgement which Keats made was his concern with the intensity and depth of beauty which he found in a piece of literature.

He believed that this beauty must be of a negatively capable sort which any writer could perceive only when he would be content with "being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts" (Letters, I, 193). If he were entirely candid, Keats, in stating his preference for Smollett rather than for Scott, would probably have admitted that he could not judge with absolute certainty which of the two instilled his writing with the greater degree of negatively capable beauty. However, he could feel confident that should either one have perceived such beauty, it would be Smollett, and not Scott, who would have caused this beauty to be most evident to his readers. Apparently, Smollett was content at "being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts" (Letters, I, 193) because he "pulls down and levels what with other Men would continue Romance" (Letters, I, 200). As Keats probably thought of it, Smollett's view of life out through whatever layers of deception that might have impared it. On the other hand, Scott, as he continued to produce one romantic novel after another, was persistently "reaching after fact & reason." By doing so, he was attempting to avoid "being in life's uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts" (Letters, I, 193) by covering his "common and low characters . . . to give them a touch of the Sublime" with many coatings

of romanticism. Unfortunately, with these coatings, he covered over whatever negatively capable beauty that his "novel of the Antiquary" might have contained (Letters, I, 200).

To Keats, any literature which aspired to integrety, showing life as it is, was preferable to a literature corrupted by any biased viewpoint. Upon perceiving the nature of negative capability, he realized that the romanticism popular in his day, especially Scott's, made possible suchabiased viewpoint. In its own way, it distorted the truth concerning the nature of human existence. In an absolute sense, then, Keats's understanding of negative capability helped him in a significant way to increase both in breadth and depth the degree of his taste. In essence, with negative capability's aid, he defined what became his mature approach to literary evaluation.

In his remarks on Smollett and Scott, Keats merely touched upon a second issue, one at the time which did not immediately concern him. The key passage in his statement reads, "[Smollett and Scott] appear to me to be quite distinct in every particular--more especially in their Aim" (Letters, I, 199 - 200). It was this matter of aim or purpose that soon became central in his thinking. He needed to decide what use he intended for

his poetry which he hoped that he would fill with the truth he perceived while in a state of negative capability. For the moment, he apparently deferred any serious concern about his future goal because he wanted to continue, following the new year, to luxuriate in his intellectual indolence. He could point out that to rework Endymion, certainly no small task, occupied his time well enough. To consider such a complex matter as what he intended eventually to accomplish as a poet no doubt demanded more than he was willing to give just then.

But the very circumstances of Keat's existence did not allow him to put off for long some effort to find what direction he would be taking as a poet. Among other things, while he maintained his general indolence of thought, he found himself meditating, probably for only brief periods of time, upon the significant accomplishments of others, upon other people's "works of genius." (Letters, I, 205). In a brief note written on 10 January 1818, he told Haydon, "I am convinced that there are three things to rejoice at in this Age--/Wordsworth's/ The Excursion your Pictures, and Hazlitt's depth of taste" (Letters, I, 203). Three days later, on 13 January 1818, after repeating in a letter to his brothers his "three things to rejoice at in this age," he added a fourth thing to his list.

Insisting that works of genius are not, of necessity, "the first things in this world," he praised:

> that sort of probity & disinterestedness which such men as Bailey possess, does hold & grasp the tip top of any spiritual honours, that can be paid to any thing in this world (Letters, I, 205).

These meditations, quite easily, might have led him to consider his own accomplishments. Aside from Endymion with which he was dissatisfied, he might have wondered just what had he to show for all of his past efforts.

Knowing that he had nothing to show, Keats needed only to look about himself to be reminded that he had no assurance that he would ever accomplish anything. He needed only to consider his own family to realize the transient nature of human existence. Both his father and mother had been dead for years. His youngest brother, Tom, was becoming progressively weaker from an illness for which there seemed no cure. His brother, George, though in good health, also worried him. He knew that George, out of work and spending his time as Tom's nurse, was becoming restless, as he wondered what his future prospects would be (Letters, I, 82 - 84). Further afield, Keats lamented that because of arguments among his friends, he could no longer count on the personal relationships which, at one time, he had found so valuable.[12] And, he had cause to wonder with Bailey

"Why should Woman suffer?" (Letters, I, 209), why should she "have Cancer?" (Letters, I, 292). Before he fell heir to these human problems of disease and death, Keats knew that he must attempt to satisfy his own curiosity. He wanted to find out if he were capable of "works of Genius." But even more, perhaps, he wanted to strive "for that sort of probity & disinterestedness which such men as Bailey possess" in order to find some way to earn legitimately "the tip top of any spiritual honours, that can be paid to any thing in this world" (Letters, I, 205).

Keats received indirect encouragement to satisfy his curiosity from his "disinterested" mentor, William Hazlitt. During the holiday season, he talked with Hazlitt several times. At two or three "very intellectual dinners" which both Keats and Hazlitt attended,[13] the conversation must have turned to Hazlitt's immediate concern, the series of eight Lectures on the English Poets, which he planned to present at the Surrey Institution between 13 January and 3 March (see Letters I, 212, note 2). Whether through informal discussion or by attending the lectures, all of which he heard except for one,[14] Keats certainly learned of Hazlitt's thoughts which were generally concerned with poetry's and the poet's purposes. These thoughts are delineated most

clearly in Hazlitt's first lecture, "On Poetry in General."

In one of his most important statements in the lecture, Hazlitt explained his belief that:

> Impassioned poetry is an emanation of the moral and intellectual part of our nature, as well as the sensitive--of the desire to know, the will to act, and the power to feel; and ought to appeal to these different parts of our constitution, in order to be perfect[15].

In making this statement, no doubt, in light of his own efforts to perceive the intrinsic value of "impassioned poetry," Hazlitt insisted that any student of such poetry should place special emphasis upon its moral--in deference to its intellectual--worth. He held that poetry, if it were to support successfully man's "desire to know, . . . will to act, and . . . power to feel," should harmonize knowledge--whether it be knowledge of good and evil, but especially of evil--with man's natural concern to carry on the business of living. In successful poetry, he thought that the poet should present life, including its evil aspects, as it is. To do so, especially to be concerned with evil, is the poet's moral responsibility, for, by putting evil into a meaningful context within his poetry, the poet makes it possible for his reader to know exactly evil's nature. By ascertaining this knowledge for him, the poet makes it possible for his reader to gain a

unique freedom," not from the consequences of evil--which are inescapable-- but from being deceived by it."[16] In making possible this unique freedom for his reader, the poet helps him at least partly to overcome evil's pervasive nature so that he can gain a sense of perspective in his encounters with it. And, with the understanding which he can perceive with this perspective, the reader can integrate his knowledge of evil with his knowledge of other aspects of human life in order, thereby, to achieve some accurate understanding of the nature of reality or truth,[17] i.e. what Keats understood as a preordained and static group of cosmic laws.[18] One can hardly doubt that Keats possessed something of these ideas, especially of the poet's need to be concerned with evil, as he heard Hazlitt discourse in his lecture, "On Poetry in General" upon poetry, and the poet's responsibility, by saying:

> . . . all that is worth remembering in life, is the poetry of it . . . the poet does no more than describe what all the others think and act (Works, I, 2).[19]

Easily, Keats could interpret Hazlitt's statement of the poet's function as a charge from his teacher to give his readers whatever glimpses of essential beauty as perceived in a state of negative capability that he might come upon after observing human nature. Refreshed by almost two months of rest, during which "a very

gradual ripening of /his/ intellectual powers" occurred, he quickly felt ready to find how he could best describe "what all the others/of mankind/ think and act." On 20 January, he took his completed revision of Endymion, Book I, to his publishers (Letters, I, 38). The next day, finding himself with a little free time, he decided to visit Leigh Hunt, who, he thought, would like to see a copy of his first book.[20] During the visit, Hunt showed him "a real authenticated Lock of Milton's Hair" (Letters, I, 210) and asked him to write some lines about the lock. To please Hunt, though he might not have cared much for such an extemporaneous exercise, Keats agreed to try.[21] As he wrote, it became clear that he was at the beginning of a new era in his life. Suddenly his holiday of intellectual indolence was over.[22] A few days later, using a considerable understatement as he wrote to his brothers, he acknowledged that:

> I think a little change has taken place in my intellect lately--I cannot bear to be uninterested or unemployed, I, who for so long a time, have been addicted to passiveness (Letters, I, 214).

By following the "Lines on Seeing a Lock of Milton's Hair," one can easily observe the point at which Keats's "little change" began. At first, his writing was choppy, not at all serious:

> Chief of organic Numbers!
> Old scholar of the spheres!
> Thy spirit never slumbers,
> But rolls about our ears
> For ever and for ever,
> O, what a mad endeavour
> Worketh he,

> Who, to thy sacred and ennobled hearse,
> Would offer a burnt sacrifice of verse
> And Melody! (LL. 1 - 10, p. 377).

But, as he continued in his fairly superficial praise of Milton:

> How heavenward thou soundest
> Live Temple of sweet noise;
> And discourd unconfoundedst:
> Giving delight new joys,
> And Pleasure nobler pinions--
> O where are thy Dominions! (LL. 11 - 16, p. 377).

the nature of the poem changed rapidly. These lines, except for a sonnet for Mrs. Reynolds and her daughters on their aging cat, were the first new ones that he had written since he finished the first draft of Endymion.[23] The effort of writing apparently served ~~to~~ jar him into a total awareness of what all of his previous experience, especially his meditations in the past few weeks upon personal achievement or "works of Genius," in fact, meant. If he were to accomplish anything of essential worth as a poet, he must, it was clear, be one who would work "a mad endeavour / . . . / Who, to /Milton's/ sacred and enobled hearse,/ Would offer a burnt sacrifice of verse / And Melody!" (LL. 6 - 10 passium p. 377). Like Milton, whose greatness had continued without abatement long after his death so that his poetry is still a "Life Temple of sweet noise," (L. 12, p. 377) still unconfounded by discord. "Giving delight new joys, / And Pleasure nobler pinions!" (LL. 14 - 15, p. 377). Keats

realized that he must reach upward toward greatness. Indeed, he asked of Milton (though without accurate punctuation), "O where are thy Dominions!" (L. 16, p. 377). For the moment, he felt uncertain, really overwhelmed at the prospect. Yet, affirming his determination with "a young delian oath," (L. 18, p. 377) he declared to Milton:

> When every childish fashion
> Has vanish'd from my rhyme
> Will I grey-gone in passion
> Give to an after-time
> Hymning and harmony
> Of thee, and of thy Works and of thy Life:
> But vain is now the burning and the strife--
> Pangs are in vain--until I grow high-rife
> With Old Philosophy
> And mad with glimpses at futurity!
>
> For many years my offerings must be hush'd:
> When I do speak I'll think upon this hour,
> Because I feel my forehead hot and flush'd,
> Even at the simplest vassal of thy Power--
> A Lock of thy bright hair!
> Sudden it came,
> And I was startled when I heard thy name
> Coupled so unaware--
> Yet, at the moment, temperate was my blood:
> Methought I had beheld it from thy flood (LL. 23 - 42
> p. 378). Jan 21st

In fact, while writing his "Lines on Seeing a Lock of Milton's Hair," Keats found himself swept back into the main stream, into "the flood," of poetry and his development as a poet began again with renewed vitality. Delian youth, he wanted to test his strength by adventure in the mode of the old poets. He believed all of his efforts as a poet--all of "the burning and the strife"--

would be "in vain--until I grow high-rife / With Old Philosophy / And mad with glimpses at futurity" (LL. 29 - 32, p. 378). Not withstanding his feelings of hesitation, as one being so startled that he felt his "forehead hot and flush'd," (L. 35, p. 378) he found his new realization to be extraordinarily tantalizing. He wanted to learn where his new thoughts would lead him.[24]

Just two days later, on 23 January 1818, Keats announced his first plans for his "mad endeavour." They were extremely ambitious and far reaching. Excited by his new prospect, he began to chafe at being held down to correcting the wordy, romantic Endymion.[25] He wrote to Haydon, telling him "to wait for . . . Hyperion--

> When that Poem is done there will be a wide range for you--in Endymion I think you may have many bits of the deep and sentimental cast-- the nature of Hyperion will lead me to treat it in a more naked and grecian Manner-- and the march of passion and endeavour will be undeviating (Letters, I, 207).

In comparing them, Keats had decided that the "one great contrast between" the two poems would be:

> that the Hero of the written tale being mortal is led on, like Buonaparte, by circumstance: whereas the Apollo in Hyperion being a fore-seeing God will shape his actions like one (Letters, I, 207).

No doubt, in making this decision of primary significance,

Keats's impassioned study of Shakespeare helped him. Having reread King Lear on the preceeding day, 22 January, he compared the "golden-tongued Romance" of Endymion with the "bitter-sweet" of Shakespeare's greatest play to decide how he would bring about the profound change in his writing.[26] In a sonnet written "On sitting down to King Lear once Again," which he included in his 23-24 January 1818 letter to his brothers, he expanded his plans for his mad endeavor. First, he insisted that the "Fair plumed Syren," his romantic mode, must leave his writing. It simply did not have the strength to support the "bitter-sweet" truth which was the essence of great poetry. Second, he defined what he intended to do to achieve poetry that would be "naked and grecian."

> "On sitting down to King Lear once Again"
> O golden tongued Romance with serene Lute!
> Fair plumed syren! Queen! of far away!
> Leave melodizing on this wintry day,
> Shut up thine olden volume & be mute.
> Adieu! for once again the fierce dispute,
> Betwixt Hell torment & impassioned Clay
> Must I burn through: once more assay
> The bitter sweet of this Shakespeareian fruit
> Chief Poet! & ye clouds of Albion.
> Begettors of our deep eternal theme,
> When I am through the old oak forest gone
> Let me not wander in a barren dream
> But when I am consumed with the Fire
> Give me new Pheonix-wings to fly at my desire
> (11, 1-14, p. 380).

Having copied out the sonnet, Keats continued, telling his brothers, "So you see I am getting at it, with a

sort of determination and strength," (Letters, I, 215). He was convinced that his intentions were entirely legitimate. He was insistent, "Betwixt damnation and impassion'd clay/ I must burn through."(L. 6, p. 380) But there was a weakness in his apparent strength. Still, he could not avoid having some feelings of reservation, wondering if he could achieve his goals. He was "getting at" them, but "with a sort of determination and strength" (italics mine). Realizing that he planned intentionally to divorce himself from the ways of his romantic contemporaries, he could not avoid wondering what would raally happen to him after going "through the old oak forest" (L. 11, p. 380) of romance. Would he, then, only "wander in a barren dream?" (L. 12, p. 380) Having died as a romantic poet, would "new Phoenix wings" (L. 14, p. 380) lift him from his own ashes?[27] Within a few days, unhappily, he became quite certain that he had reason for his suspicion and doubt. He knew that while his "new Phoenix wings" (L. 14, p. 380) might hêlp him fly, still they would probably not be so useful as he had hoped.

On 27 January 1818, taking time out from his work on Endymion, Book II, Keats attended the third of Hazlitt's Lectures on the English Poets, entitled "On Shakespeare and Milton" (see Letters, I, 39). He found most of what

Hazlitt said to be assuring. The old poets, when compared with the poets of the modern age, were far superior. The four greatest of the old poets, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton, all demonstrated subtle differences among themselves as writers, but, as imaginative poets, shared one common and defining characteristic with all great artists: an absorbing interest in their subject matter, which means that their commitment to the truth of nature is stronger than their interest in themselves.[28] As Hazlitt turned his attention directly upon Shakespeare, Keats might have been especially struck by one of Hazlitt's most brilliant passages. With reference to Shakespeare, Hazlitt described with great perception the kind of negatively capable existence to which Keats aspired. Shakespeare, Hazlitt said;

> was just like any other man, but that he was like all other men. He was the least of an egotist that it was possible to be. He was nothing in himself; But he was all that others were, or that they could become. He not only had in himself the germs of every faculty and feeling, but he could follow them by anticipation, intuitively, into all their conceivable remifications, through every change of fortune or conflict of passion, or turn of thought. He had 'a mind reflecting ages past,' and present: all the people that ever lived are there. There was no respect of persons with him . . . He had only to think of any thing in order to become that thing, with all the circumstances belonging to it.[29]

By contrast with this total commitment to a subject of which Shakespeare and Milton were the greatest masters,

Hazlitt continued:

> The great fault of a modern poetry is, that it is an experiment to reduce poetry to a mere effusion of natural sensibility: or what is worse, to divest it both of imaginary splendour and human passion to surround the meanest objects with the morbid feelings and devouring ego egotism of the writers' own minds. Milton and Shakespeare did not so understand poetry. They gave a more liberal interpretation both to nature and art. They did not do all they could to get rid of the one and the other, to fill up the dreary void with the Moods of their own Minds. They owe their power over the human mind to having had a deeper sense than others of what was grand in the objects of nature, of affecting in the events of human life. But to the men I speak of there is nothing interesting, nothing heroical, but themselves. To them the fall of gods or of great men is the same. They do not enter into the feeling. They cannot understand the terms.[30]

Simply enough, Hazlitt put into the plainest possible words what was current in Keats's mind. To penetrate to the greatest truth in the manner of the old poet, he needed to divorce himself from "the morbid feelings and devouring egotism" which, as he already recognized, permeated contemporary poets and their poetry.

But something else that Hazlitt said served to shatter whatever complacency Keats might have begun to feel. At the beginning of his lecture "On Shakespeare and Milton," Hazlitt discoursed for some little time on the nature of creative genius as it manifests itself in are and, by comparison, in natural philosophy. His explanation is lengthy but, for Keats, it was also very significant. He began, by remarking:

In looking back to the great works of genius in former times, we are sometimes disposed to wonder at the little progress which has since been made in poetry, and in the arts of imitation in general. But this is perhaps a foolish wonder. Nothing can be more contrary to the fact, than the supposition that in what we understand by the fine arts, as painting and poetry, relative perfection is only the result of repeated efforts in successive periods, and that what has been once well done, constantly leads to something better. What is mechanical, reducible to rule, or capable of demonstration, is progressive, and admits of gradual improvement: what is not mechanical, or definite, but depends on feelings, taste, and genius, very soon becomes stationary, or retrograde, and loses more than it gains by transfusion. The contrary opinion is a vulgar error, which has grown up, like many others, from transferring an analogy of one kind to something quite distinct, without taking into the account the difference in the nature of the things, or attending to the difference of the results. For most persons . . . have been led hastily to conclude, that there was a general tendency in the efforts of the human intellect to improve by repetition, and, in all other arts and institutions, to grow perfect and mature by time. We look back upon the theological creed of our ancestors, and their discoveries in natural philosophy, with a smile of pity: science, and the arts connected with it, have all had their infancy, their youth, and manhood, and seem to contain in them no principle of limitation or decay; and, inquiring no farther about the matter, we infer, in the intoxication of our pride, and the height of our self-congratulations, that the same progress had been made, and will continue to be made, in all other things which are the work of man. The fact, however, stares us so plainly in the face, that one would think the smallest reflection must suggest the truth, and overturn our sanguine theories. The greatest poets, the ablest orators, the best painters, and the finest sculptors that the world ever saw, appeared soon after the birth of these arts, and lived in a state of society which was, in other respects, comparatively barbarous. Those arts, which depend on individual genius and incommunicable power, have always leaped at once from the first rude dawn of invention to their meridian height and dazzling lustre, and have in general declined ever after . . . as soon as the first

> mechanical difficulties had been got over, and the language was sufficiently acquired, they rose by clusters, and in constellations, never so to rise again![31]

Here, Hazlitt points out that the old poets had the advantage of seeing human life more clearly and responding to it more fully because they were unhibited by more sophisticated patterns of thought. Probably Hazlitt's words served to put into focus Keats's doubts about his recently formalized aspirations to be with the old poets, the "begetters of our deep eternal theme" (Letters, I, 215). Because of his sense of disengaged disinterestedness and, more practically, his routine work of revising Endymion, Book II, Keats was not greatly upset that his so recent, sparkling hopes had suddenly tarnished. For good reason, it appears, he maintained his sense of humor. Apparently, he perceived quite suddenly how to revise "the gradations of Happiness" or "the Pleasure Thermometer" section of Endymion, Book I, which he had already sent to his publisher.[32] At last, he had finally caused this section, which he regarded as the most important in the book, to say precisely what he wanted it to say. As noted above, he wrote to Taylor concerning the revision, "My having written that Argument will perhaps be of the greatest Service to me of any thing I ever did" (Letters, I, 218). And, no doubt, his feelings of

exhilaration carried over to the next day when he wrote to Reynolds.

The 31 January 1818 letter to Reynolds, written mostly in verse, begins with five stanzas of bawdy, jocular lines (Letters, I, 219-20). Concluding these lines, he then announced, "Now I Purpose to write to you a serious poetical Letter" (Letters, I, 220). But, after writing a few clauses, he contradicted himself. Because he was so full of good humor, he admitted:

> I cannot write in prose, It is a sun-shiny day
> and I cannot so here goes,
>
> Hence Burgundy, Claret & port
> Away with old Hock and Madeira
> Too couthly /probably earthly/ ye
> are for my sport
> There's a Beverage brighter and
> clearer. (Letters, I, 220)

But, as he continued, much in the same way as when he wrote the "Lines on Seeing a Lock of Milton's Hair" for Leigh Hunt, something happened. He began to write a far more serious poem. Apollo, the god of the poets and, by far, Keats's favorite mythological character, came to mind. Suddenly, his bubbly, effervescent feelings were at an end.[33] He wrote:

> God of the Meridian
> And of the East and West
> To thee my soul is flown
> And my body is earthward press'd. (LL. 1-4, p. 379)

His "soul is flown" to be with the old poets, but his "body

is earthward press'd," forced by circumstances to keep company with the modern world, and, therefore, modern poetry with its "morbid feelings and devouring egotism." With a far greater sense of uncertainty than he had expressed in the lines which he had written at Hunt's, he admitted, concerning his goal to be with the old poets, "It is an awful mission." (l. 5, p. 379) Any effort to achieve the goal will produce "A terrible division/ which leaves a gulph austere/ To be filled with worldly fear--." (ll. 6-8, p. 379) Much as he had recognized almost two and one half months before, saying in the "Cave of Quietude" section of Endymion, Book IV, that he had been presumptuous to pursue "beyond his natural sphere" (l. 647, p. 148) the impossible of his old, apparent neo-platonism, he allowed, with fearful gloom:

> Aye, when the Soul is fled
> To high above our head
> Affrighted do we gaze
> After its airy maze--
> As doth a Mother wild
> When her young infant child
> Is in an eagle's claws--
> And is not this the cause
> of Madness? (ll. 9-17, p. 379)

Was it madness? He could not help thinking it so. He could only hope of Apollo:

> God of Song
> Thou bearest me along
> Through sights I scarce can bear
> O let me, let me share
> With the hot Lyre and thee

> The staid Philosophy.
> Temper my lonely hours
> And let me see thy bowr's
> More unalarm'd-- (ll. 17-25, p. 379)

Stopping his writing abruptly, aware that his emotions were getting out of hand, he concluded the letter:

> My Dear Reynolds, you must forgive all this ranting--but the fact is I cannot write sense this Morning--however you shall have some--I will copy my last Sonnet.
>
> When I have fears that I may cease to be
> Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,
> Before high piled Books in charactery
> Hold like garners the full ripen'd grain--
> When I behold upon the night's starr'd face
> Hugh cloudy symbols of a high romance
> And feel that I may never live to trace
> Their shadows with the magic hand of Chance:
> And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,
> That I shall never look upon thee more
> Never have relish in the fairy power
> Of unreflecting Love: then on the Shore
> Of the wide world I stand alone and think
> Till Love and Fame to Nothingness do sink.--
> (Letters, I, 222).

Strictly from a biographical viewpoint, the sonnet, "When I have fears that I may cease to be," seems only somewhat less important to Keats than the sonnet, "On sitting down to King Lear Once Again." As Bate points out, the most popular interpretation of this sonnet has been that in it, Keats clairvoyantly anticipates an early death.[34] Yet, to use such an interpretation is, in fact, to miss the point. Keats speaks of death in the sonnet in only general terms. He was not immediately worried about dying. Rather, for the first time since his

conception of negative capability, just as he had so recently defined in the sonnet on rereading King Lear what he hoped would be the nature of his future poetry, he now defined in the sonnet, "When I have fears that I may cease to be," just what he hoped his future purpose as a poet would be. Indeed, in this sonnet he was trying to "write sense." (Letters, I, 222) He probably wrote this sonnet several hours before he wrote the letter to Reynolds, containing "God of the Meridian." Writing it without the alarm of "God of the Meridian," apparently he concluded that he was willing to accept the challenge of bridging the "gulph austere" (l, 7, p. 379) within himself, having already found that "To thee [Apollo] my soul is flown/ And my body is earthward pressed." (ll. 3-4, p. 379) It seems he decided that he was willing to keep faith with Apollo, "God of Song." (l. 17, p. 379) He wanted to believe that somehow, either he could reconcile his divergent nature as a poet (that is, reconcile his desire to be with the old poets, and his corporal, especially intellectual existence as a modern poet), or, by some miracle, not withstanding his being a modern poet, he could become one with the old poets anyway. He was holding to this belief because he eventually wanted to glean his "teeming brain;" (l. 2, p. 366) he wanted to prepare "high piled Books in charactery/ [that] Hold like

full garners the full ripen'd grain;" (ll. 3-4, p. 366) trace the shadows of the "Hugh cloudy symbols of high romance/ . . . / . . . with the magic hand of chance." (l. 6 and l. 8, p. 366) In other words, he was willing to defy Hazlitt, who had implied in his lecture "On Shakespeare and Milton" that the modern poet could not reach the heights of the old poets. As well, he was willing to defy his own good sense. He could justify such defiance not because he hoped eventually to gain any sort of personal self-glorification as a poet, but because he aspired to glean his "teaming brain," (l. 2, p. 366) to fill "high piled Books," (l. 3, p. 366) to trace the shadows of high romance "with the magic hand of chance" (l. 8, p. 366) so that he could reveal the essence of imaginative truth in his poetry.

In the very important 31 January 1818 letter to Reynolds, it seems that the only thing he did not say was to whom he wanted to make known this imaginative truth. Possibly, he supposed that the object of his revelation was obvious. Why else should he write poetry unless he could reveal in it what he perceived as truth to his fellow himan beings? Coming squarely to face the social purpose for his poetry, however, still did not much concern him. In time, he would come to this matter anyway. For the time being, he was far more interested

in pursuing his goal of traversing the "gulph austere" (l. 7, p. 379) in order to become one in spirit with the old poets. Undaunted by how impossible it seemed, he planned to get at his goal with defiant vigor. Of course, the amazing thing about his attempt is just how close he came to accomplishing the impossible.

In the 3 February 1818 letter to Reynolds, Keats made clear the zeal with which he sought to be with the old poets. In his discussion of considerable length, he gave his most lucid statement of why he wanted to divorce himself from his contemporaries, who, as modern poets, found "nothing interesting . . . but themselves" to write about.[35] Shunning this sort of egotism "as a quicksand," he told Reynolds:

> We must cut this, and not be rattlesnaked into anymore of the like--It may be said that we ought to read our Contemporaries. that Wordsworth &c should have their due from us. but for the sake of a few fine imaginative or domestic passages, are we to be bullied into a certain philosophy engendered in the whims of an Egotist--Every man has his speculations, but every man does not brood and peacock over them till he makes a false coinage and deceives himself--(Letters, I, 223-4).

To continue by paraphrasing and giving a fuller explanation of an obscure, but important passage in the letter: Keats, to illustrate his point that "Every man has his speculations, but every man does not brood and peacock over them till he makes a false coinage and deceives

himself," acknowledged that, not only does "Every man have his speculations," but, also, that "Many a man can travel to the very bourne of Heaven." That is, many a man perceives beauty through his negative capability. "Yet /unfortunately such a man/ want/s/ confidence to put down his halfseeing." He lacks the "confidence" to state definitely in writing what he conceived in "halfseeing." (Letters, I, 223-4) In other words, he lacks faith in his imaginatively conceived half-knowledge because it is, and always will be (since man is capable only of knowing beauty which is merely a revealed segment of otherwise unknowable, preordained and static truth) incomplete or not tied into a neat, apparently logical system of some sort.

But as Keats understood, out of the great number of men who lack "confidence" in what they conceive in "half-seeing" and, therefore, remain nonverbal, there will be someone, who, fearing that he will be accounted a fool unworthy of attention because he cannot explain everything after his experience of "halfseeing," insists on writing anyway. At first, Keats's statement about this sort of man is particularly puzzling. "Sancho," Keats wrote, "will invent a Journey heavenward as well as anybody." (Letters, I, 224) Apparently, Keats intended that Sancho be understood as the sort of man, who, though

fully aware of his uncertain feelings about his imaginatively conceived half-knowledge, all the same, presumes that he should write. He is the man who "brood/s/ and peacock/s/ over his speculations . . . till he makes a false coinage and deceives himself" (Letters, I, 223). That is, because he can not explain everything after his experience of imaginative "halfseeing," he decides to "invent a Journey heavenward" (Letters, I, 224). He attempts to fill in the unknown portions of his half-knowledge with elements of his own selection to make it seem understandable to humanity. In Hazlitt's words, he "will fill up the dreary void with the Moods of his own mind".[36] Such volition, Keats believed, merely contaminated whatever imaginatively conceived, negatively capable beauty that "Sancho" might ever have possessed as a writer. In practical terms, as Keats viewed, such volition on the part of any writer will produce only inferior writing. This writing cannot escape being in some way egotistically self-oriented and, probably didactic. Of such writing, particularly of such poetry, Keats understood:

> We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us--and if we do not agree, seems to put its hand in its breeches pocket (Letters, I, 224).

Rather than being stiff, defensive, and narrowly pedantic--with, "its hand in its breeches pocket," poetry, Keats

held:

> should be great & unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself but with its subject.--How beautiful are the retired flowers! how would they lose their beauty were they to throng into the highway crying out, "Admire me I am a violet! dote upon me I am a primrose! . . . Old Mathew spoke to /Wordsworth/ some years ago on some nothing, & because he happens in an Evening Walk to imagine the figure of the old man--he must stamp it down in black & white, and it is henceforth sacred--I don't mean to deny Wordsworth's grandeur & Hunt's merit, but I mean to say we need not be teazed with grandeur & merit--when we can have them uncontaminated & unobtrusive. Let us have the ole Poets, &Robin Hood Your letter and its sonnets gave me more pleasure than will the 4th Book of Childe Harold & the whole of any body's life & opinions. (Letters, I, 224-5)

In summary, drawing a clear contrast between the pinched, prying, pettiness of the modern poets with the freedom, directness, and abundant power of the old poets, especially the Elizabethians, Keats wrote:

> Modern poets differ from the Elizabethans in this. Each of the modrrns like an Elector of Hanover governs his petty state & knows how many straws are swept daily from the causeways in all his dominions & has a continual itching that all the Housewives should have their coppers well scoured: the antients were Emperors of vast Provinces, they had only heard of the remote ones and scarcely cared to visit them (Letters, I, 224).

Metaphorical language concerning birds, like the reference to the Phoenix in the sonnet, "On sitting down to King Lear once Again," quoted above, served Keats well on several occasions. To conclude his discourse on the modern and the old poets, asserting his determination

to be a free agent who is unencombered by contemporary prejudices governing poetry, Keats asked defiantly:

> Why should we be owls, when we can be Eagles? (Letters,I, 224)

Yet for all of his rebellious vigor, Keats remained entirely aware, having admitted as much in his "God of the Meridian" that to accomplish such a metamorphosis, changing from a mundane, "earthward press'd" owl (l. 4, p. 377) to a soaring, noble eagle, was not a simple matter. He possessed no reason to assure him in any way that, even with his defiant blustering, he could accomplish the feat. Certainly, he got no encouragement from Hazlitt, who, in his Lectures on the English Poets, which succeeded the lecture "On Shakespeare and Milton," continued to insist that old poets were the greatest ones and that the modern poets will always be inferior. Hazlitt believed that the modern poets would not escape this inferiority, no matter how brilliant they might be, because, unlike the old poets, they lived in a complex society with sophistications that covered over the elementary nature of human existence out of which comes truly great poetry.[37] But, for the time being, Keats apparently thought that he must not give up his determined stance. He intended to hang on doggedly, resolved that he would eventually become one with the old poets. Following this accomplishment, he would fill his poetry to the greatest possible degree with imaginative truth.

II

Perhaps for several weeks, Keats's determination sustained him. What is more likely, he was too busy correcting the last books of Endymion in order to send them to his publishers, and, after the first week in March, too disturbed about his brothers to find much time when he could worry about how he could begin writing with the depth and fulness of Shakespeare or Milton[38] (Letters, I, 40). One of the few letters which he wrote, the 27 February note to John Taylor, showed that his confidence was apparently still holding. Mostly he described what he hoped eventually to achieve in his poetry:

> In Poetry I have a few Axioms, and you will see how far I am from their Centre. 1st I think Poetry should surprise by a fine excess and not by Singularity--should strike the Reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a Remembrance--2nd Its touches of Beauty should never be half way thereby making the reader breathless instead of content: the rise, the progress, the setting of imagery should like the Sun come natural natural too him--shine over him and set soberly although in magnificence leaving him in the Luxury of twilight--but it is easier to think what Poetry should be than to write it--and this leads me on to another axiom. That if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all (Letters, I, 238-9).

In writing this statement, Keats might have been trying to emulate the old poets' confidence. At a first

glance, it appears that he succeeded. No doubt, Keats had observed that the old poets' writing struck their readers "as almost a Remembrance," never leaving them "breathless instead of content." But, would it have crossed the old poets' minds to use such axioms? Would they have been so self conscious as to admit that "it is easier to think what Poetry should be than to write it?" Would they have been so inhibited as to believe "that if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all?" (Letters, I, 238-39)

The truth, of course, is that Keats, with his introspective analysis, and by using negative capability, wanted to cut through the preoccupied, artificial patterns of thought that have grown up in modern times and which are different from the old poets' direct and confident patterns of thought. Yet, at the same time, Keats knew that modern poets, even with negative capability, can no longer see life in the simple terms of the old poets. As Hazlitt had already warned it was this intrinsic difference between the old and modern poets which made it impossible for the modern poets to cross the "gulph austere." (l. 7, p. 379) The old poets, who were members of a simpler, more innocent age, could confront basic truths in their writing in a more or less straight forward manner in the sense that they did not

have to deal with the artificial intellectual patterns that a more sophisticated society could build up.[39] However, the modern poets, like Keats, whose ways of life were far more sophisticated than the old poets', could not avoid approaching the more difficult problems of their own times, except in a more complex, involved way. The evidence of this fact, specifically in Keats's letters, is extremely clear, showing that, although he resisted the idea for a time, he was essentially a modern poet who ultimately would not be able to deny the fact of his innate heritage.

Indeed, just how irrevocable Keats' nature as a modern poet was is obvious enough in his 19 February 1818 letter to Reynolds, a letter which he wrote only a little more than two weeks after he so vigorously, but in the long run, so fallaciously declared on 3 February 1818, also in a letter to Reynolds, his intention to separate himself from the Hanoverlike, modern poets who governed only petty domains. The validity of what he wrote in the 19 February letter is certain; for, no doubt, as he wrote the letter, being led to do so, as he told Reynolds, "by the beauty of the morning operating on a sense of Idleness," (Letters, I, 232) he was so transported by his thoughts that, for the time, his intention to defy the modern concepts of poetry did not forcefully enter

his mind. Possibly, he might have allowed some though of his fruitful, restful days back in January during which, as he realized, "a very gradual ripening of his intellectual powers" (Letters, I, 214) had occurred, to serve him as a point of departure when he began writing the letter. The letter is valuable because Keats suggests within it the nature of his personal values which, in turn, eventually dictated the nature of his most mature poetry. Herewith, this letter is extensively quoted:

> My dear Reynolds,
> I have an idea that a Man might pass a very pleasant life in this manner--let him on any certain day read a certain Page of full Poesy or distilled Prose and let him wander with it, and muse upon it, and dream upon it--untill it becomes stale--but when will it do so? Never--When Man has arrived at a certain ripeness in intellect any one grand and spiritual passage serves him as a starting post towards all "the two-and thirty Pallaces" How happy is such a "voyage of conception,' what delicious diligent Indolence! A doze upon a Sofa does not hinder it, and a nap upon Clover engenders ethereal finger-pointings--the prattle of a child gives it wings, and the converse of middle age a strength to beat them--a strain of musick conducts to 'an odd angle of the Isle' and when the leaves whisper it puts a 'girdle round the earth. Nor will this sparing touch of noble Books be any irreverance to their Writers--for perhaps the honors paid by Man to Man are trifles in comparison to the Benefit done by great Works to the 'Spirit and pulse of good' by their mere passive existence. (Letters, I, 231)

Keats's eloquent description of a "voyage of conception,' which he characterized as a journey of "delicious diligent Indolence!" follows directly from his earlier speculations on disengaged disinterestedness.

Because he had already gained so much from it, particularly because it is such a central notion in his concept of negative capability, he could hardly avoid taking special delight in describing the intricacies of indolent thought, and in making further intellectual explorations with its help. In reality, it was only another "regular stepping of his Imagination toward truth" (Letters, I, 232) when he realized that, as a concept, "mere passive existence" (Letters, I, 214) served not only as the most reliable state in which to conceive truth but also as the most significant characteristic of the means by which truth could be disseminated. To use his own words, though from another context, these "noble Books" (Letters, I, 231) are "great & unobstruive," what they contain will enter into the reader's soul, and, as a device for conveying knowledge, being totally neutral in character without any egotistical predisposition, they neither "startle . . . /n/or amaze" the soul with themselves, but with their contents. (Letters, I, 224) Their neutral nature, far more than any person with some sort of aggressive, didactic purpose, though this purpose might be of the most virtuous kind, could encourage their readers in whatever way they saw fit to influence the 'Spirit and pulse of Good!'[40] Keats held to this not at all naively optimistic idea even until the last time he ever spoke of the purpose

and function of writing in his 16 August 1820 letter to Shelley (Letters, II, 322-23). Certainly, this concept of passive disseminations from books has held credence even to the present day.

In a second portion of the letter to Reynolds, Keats described the applications that had occurred to him in making his further explorations with the help of passiveness. As he had already explained, he believed that passiveness need not in anyway be a narrow, limiting concept.

> Now it appears to me that almost any Man may like the Spider spin from his own inwards his own airy Citadel--the point of leaves and twigs on which the Spider begins her work are few and she fills the Air with a beautiful circuiting: man should be content with as few points to tip with the fine Webb of his Soul and weave a tapestry empyrean--full of Symbols for his spiritual eye, of softness for his spiritual touch, of space for his wandering of distinctness for his Luxury--But the Minds of Mortals are so different and bent on such diverse Journeys that it may at first appear impossible for any common taste and fellowship to exist between two or three under these suppositions--It is however quite the contrary--Minds would leave each other in contrary directions, traverse each other in Numberless points, and all /for at/ last greet each other at the Journeys end--A old Man and a child would talk together and the old Man be led on his Path, and the child left thinking--Man should not dispute or assert but whisper results to his neighbor, 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 Furse and Briars with here and there a remote Oak or Pine, would become a grand democracy of Forest Trees. (Letters, I, 232)

Thus, passiveness broadens from a power to achieve

spiritual delight for the individual, to a power to bring about the best, most natural kind of instruction not only for children, but for all men, and, last of all, to a power which can lead man to be in harmony with his fellows. Passiveness leads man to find inner personal joy, to gain intellectual sustenance, and to know a guide to ethical conduct.

As if to give further justifications for his concept of passiveness, Keats sontinued his letter by writing:

> It has been an old Comparison for our urging on--the Bee hive--however it seems to me that we should rather be the flower than the Bee--for it is a false notion that more is gained by receiving than giving--no the receiver and the giver are equal in their benefits--The f/l/ower I doubt not receives a fair guerdon from the Bee--its leaves blush deeper in the next spring--and who shall say between Man and Woman which is the most delighted? Now it is more noble to sit like Jove that /for than/ to fly like Mercury--let us not therefore go hurrying about and collecting honey-bee like, buzzing here and there impatiently from a knowledge of what is to be arrived at: but let us open our leaves like a flower and be passive and receptive--budding patiently under the eye of Apollo and taking hints from evey noble insect that favors us with a visit. (Letters, I, 232)

Then, as a final affirmation of his own faith in passiveness, Keats, near the conclusion of his letter to Reynolds, copied out one of his loveliest sonnets:

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

> To thee the Spring shall be a tripple morn--
> O fret not after knowledge--I have none
> And yet my song comes native with the warmth
> O fret not after knowledge--I have none
> And yet the Evening listens--He who saddens
> At thought of Idleness cannot be idle,
> And he's awake who thinks himself asleep!
> (ll. 1-14, p. 379-80)

But even as he wrote to Reynolds, a letter which he must have recognized himself as one of his most singular departures into indolent thought, Keats did not permit himself to be transported entirely beyond an awareness of reality. Most notably, only two days after he wrote the letter, he contradicted in one sense the letter's whole thesis, a thesis which seems best summarized in the sonnet refrain, "O Fret not after Knowledge." (Letters, I, 232) In the letter of 21 February 1818 to his brothers, he told them, "I am reading Voltaire and Gibbon, although I wrote to Reynolds the other day to prove reading of no use" (Letters, I, 237). Simply enough, in writing to Reynolds, he quite deliberately sacrificed his credibility for the moment in order to make his point about the virtues of indolent thought. Indeed, in the concluding paragraph of the Reynolds letter (not quoted above), he admitted as much, that while what he had written "may neighbor . . . to truths," his idea of passiveness, all the same, was "a mere sophistication," and that he had not deceived himself that "Man should be equal with Jove."

Instead, he would think man "very well off as a sort of scullion-Mercury or even a humble bee" (Letters, I, 233).

It was not difficult, then, that when Keats again started thinking about his efforts to defy his nature as a modern poet, that he could easily transfer the idea of man, in general, being "a sort of scullion-Mercury or even a humble bee" to himself. In the long run, he could not deny his own good sense. He knew that as a modern poet, he was, at best, a "scullion-Mercury" or "a humble bee;" only Shakespeare, and, perhaps, Milton could be equated with "jove." (Letters, I, 233) He soon conceded that for him to reach his goal to be in spirit with the old poets was, essentially, an impossibility. Fortunately, not long after he made that concession, he had found an alternate, but successful pathway to greatness.

III

Sometime between 28 February and 4 March, Keats received a surprise visitor. After being with Tom in Devonshire, in far southwestern England for some two and one-half months, Keat's brother, George suddenly turned up in London. His purpose in coming to town was twofold. Because he reached twenty-one on 28 February, he believed

that it was time for him to inquire, especially of Mr. Abbey, about his future prospects. As soon as possible, he wanted to get about the business of living his own life. As well, he probably wanted John to go to Devonshire to become Tom's companion.[41]

No doubt, on suddenly finding that he should give up his quiet existence as he corrected the last portions of Endymion, Keats was at first dismayed. Since mid-December, when his brothers had left for Devonshire where they hoped to find a climate in which Tom's health would improve, he had been putting off his own promised departure to be with them. Though he had excused himself from going, stating his need to work on Endymion, his real reason for avoiding the trip was his feeling, especially after the third week in January and throughout February, that he was on the verge of perceiving something new.[42] At any moment, he hoped that he would come upon some way to escape his role as merely a modern poet and become one with the old poets. But, because he was coming increasingly to doubt that he could ever make such an escape, and because he knew that it was only fair he should take his turn looking after Tom, he did not protest his being disturbed. Quickly, he prepared to leave.[43]

On 4 March, Keats took the coach for Devonshire, riding on the outside in the rain throughout the twenty-six

hour trip in order to save money.[44] Once he arrived, he remained for two months. (Letters, I, 40-1) As he began his stay, very much in contrast to several earlier occasions when he absented himself from town, he did not regard his sojourn as any special opportunity to do great things. Yet the fact is that while he was away from London, he accomplished much. Keats arrived at his most permanent thoughts concerning the nature of his existence as a poet.[45]

To a considerable degree, Keats simply made himself achieve so much in his thinking about poetry. He wanted to avoid worrying about his brothers and to avoid boredom in his new surroundings. He could not help being concerned about Tom. The boy's tuberculosis symptoms had become increasingly obvious. He had grown weaker and weaker.[46] Keat's concern about George came from the knowledge that his brother planned to leave England, once he acquired a wife, to seek his fortune in the back country of the United States.[47] With Tom's eventual death and George's impending departure, Keats could not help viewing the future gloomily. He could see that quite soon his sister, Fanny, would be his only close relation who would be near him. As well, when considering his new situation in Devonshire, he could not escape feeling despondent. After he arrived, the rain continued for six or more days. Once he met some of the local people, especially the men, he quickly felt alienated

from them.[48] Like his brothers, he enjoyed the company of the Jeffrey family, especially the girls, Marian, Sarah, and Fanny. (Letters, I, 78-80). But, for the most part, his interests in poetry did not coincide with the ordinary Devonshireman's concerns. Therefore, he kept much to himself, brooding over his own problems.[49]

By 14 March, Keats finished his revisions of Endymion (Letters, I, 40). Within another week, he wrote a preface and a dedication for the poem.[50] On 21 March, he sent everything off to his publishers (Letters, I, 40). But these concluding efforts with his longest poem probably did not begin to fill his time. He was painfully aware that his future as a poet was terribly uncertain. (Letters, I, 270) Even before he left London, he had apparently almost given into the inevitable. Very tired of reworking Endymion and quite overtaken by feelings of despondency, as he thought about the future, he had written in the 27 February 1818 letter to Taylor, "However it may be with me I cannot help looking into new countries with 'O for a Muse of fire to ascend!" (Letters, I, 239). But these new "countries" or areas for him to explore as a poet appeared no closer than they had weeks before when he first announced his intentions to begin exploration. And probably, feeling unable to marshal a vigor which even resembled that of the old poets, he honestly doubted, even

if he were able to perceive a great idea for a poem, whether he could ascend such a "Muse of fire." Essentially, he was ready to abandon his efforts to be in spirit with the old poets. He rationalized ably, in preparation to admit failure, telling Taylor:

> If Endymion serves me as a Pioneer perhaps I ought te be content. I have great reason to be content, for thank God I can read and perhaps understand Shakespeare to his depths, and I have I am sure many friends who, if I fail, will attribute any change in my Life and Temper to Humbleness rather than to Pride--to a cowering under the Wings of great Poets rather than to a Bitterness that I am not appreciated (Letters, I, 239).

However, as his stay in Devonshire lengthened into weeks, Keats, in spite of his sensible rationalizing, became more and more unhappy with himself. He wrote nothing in particular to acknowledge that, in fact, he was "cowering under the Wings of great Poets." Indeed, during all of March, 1818, he wrote only a few letters.* But the tone of most of the letters which he did write is one suggesting thought and feelings of considerable perplexity. He found himself to be without any immediate sense of purpose, because he, no doubt, recognized his failure to become one in spirit with the old poets.[51]

*In The Letters of John Keats, ed, Rollins, there are only six letters for March 1818.

He came close to admitting as much in the 13 March letter to Bailey, in which he stated with candor, "Now my dear fellow I must once for all tell you I have not one idea of the truth of any of my speculations" (Letters, I, 243). Feigning sagacity while making this revelation to Bailey, he tried rather desparately to find something definite within his confused thoughts by observing:

> . . . it is an old maxim of mine and of course must be well known that every /sic/ point of thought is the center of an intellectual world--the two uppermost thoughts in a Man's mind are the two poles of his World he revolves on them and everything is southward or northward to him through their means (Letters, I, 243).

Probably Keats's maxim assured him of at least momentary stability because it accurately described his immediate situation. It defined for him the position where he stood just then. But, undoubtedly, he could not find even the slightest possible hope for any long range feeling of self-confidence with it. During the last half of March and well into April, he did revolve, as a planet, between "the two poles of his world." These two poles, "the uppermost thoughts" at the center of his intellect were his two perceptions, on the one hand, of modern poetry, and, on the other, of the old, great poetry. Yet from his jaded viewpoint, he soon became totally disgusted that "everything was southward or northward to him through their means." After meditating on both of them, he

eventually decided that to pursue either one was a waste of time and energy. Adding to his already considerable dissatisfaction with modern poetry was his resentment, having recognized the fact as inevitable, that if he were to write poetry at all, then he must use the modern mode.[52] Having previously so intimated (see 3 February 1818 letter to Reynolds, Letters, I, 224), he continued to think that modern poetry possessed little real worth. He explained to Bailey:

> I am sometimes so very sceptical as to think modern Poetry itself a mere Jack a lanthern to amuse whoever may chance to be struck with its brilliance--As Tradesman say everything is worth what it will fetch, so probably every mental pursuit takes its reality and worth from the ardour of the pursuer--being in itself a nothing. (Letters, I, 242)

Plainly, he was not rushing to pursue modern poetry's brilliance. Using the tradesman's criterion for evaluation, Keats though modern poetry to be worth nothing.

Of course, Keat's abandonment of the old, great poetry as a mode of writing worthy of the aspiring writer's pursuit seems almost totally inconsistant with his earlier thought and actions concerning.it. Yet, after what must have been considerable reflection, he was convinced, especially after considering his own disappointing effort at doing so, that any pursuit of the old mode was possibly even more worthless than the pursuit of the modern mode. If one were to write like the old poets, he would merely

be repetitious. Keat's decision not to pursue the old mode is embodied in one of the most matter-of-fact statements in all of his writing. In the 24 April 1818 letter to Rice, he blamed the old poets for causing one of the most difficult perplexities that the modern poet must face. The old poets have already done everything. The modern poets can find nothing of significance to do. To explain himself, choosing Milton as a primary example of the old poets, Keats began by posing a question which he apparently supposed would evoke a positive response. The question was:

"Did Milton do more good or harm to the world? (Letters, I, 255) Keats continued by answering, at first, in a positive vein,

> Milton wrote . . . (for I have it from a friend, who had it of--) he wrote Lycidas, Comus, Paradise Lost and other Poems, with much delectable prose--he was moreover an active friend to Man all his Life and has been since his death. Very good--(Letters, I, 255).

But, as Hazlitt had impled in his lecture "On Shakespeare and Milton" and as Keats herewith acknowledged, Milton's and the other old poet's achievements which benefited mankind were not totally unblemished. With their achievements came the one perhaps insurmountable problem at least for the writers of succeeding generations. As he explained the problem, admittedly using unnecessary parenthesis to

do so, Keats told Rice:

> . . . my dear fellow I must let you know that as there is ever the same quantity of matter constituting this habitable globe--as the ocean notwithstanding the enormous changes and revolutions taking place in some or other of its demesnes--notwithstanding Waterspouts whirlpools and mighty Rivers emptying themselves into it, it still is made up of the same bulk--nor ever varies the number of its Atoms--And as a certain bulk of Water was instituted at the Creation--so very likely a certain portion of intellect was spun forth into the thin Air for the Brains of Man to prey upon it--You will see my drift without any unnecessary parenthesis. That which is contained in the Pacific and lie in the hollow of the Caspian--that which was in Miltons head could not find Room in Charles the seconds--he like a Moon attracted Intellect to its flow--it has not ebbd yet--but has left the shore pebble all bare--I mean all Bucks [a trifling dramatist, Charles Bucke, 1781-1846] Authors of Hengist [An anonymous play, Hengist, Or the Fifth Century, An Historical Melodrama, 1816] and Castlereaghs of the present day--who without Miltons gormandizing might have been all wise Men (Letters, I, 255).

Having delineated his complaint against the old, great poets, Keats ended his deliberate pursuit of the old mode of poetry. He probably harbored feelings of regret for having to do so. Yet, because he was unwilling to settle for what seemed to him as the goals of modern poetry, he continued to be without bearings. For the moment, he could not avoid supposing how delightful it would be if he could find some easy way out of his perplexing intellectual dilemma. He remarked to Rice:

> What a happy thing it would be if we could settle our thoughts, make our minds up on any matter in five Minutes and remain content--that is to build a sort of mental Cottage of feelings quiet and pleasant--to

> have a sort of Philosophical Back Garden, and cheerful holiday--keeping front one--(Letters, I, 254).

"But alas!" Keats concluded, "This can never be." He knew that to attempt using any simple solution to deal with his complex predicament would be naively foolish. To describe the nature of this naivete, he expanded his metaphor about the "mental Cottage of feelings," mentioning first, what he called "the material Cottager", and, then, "the Spiritual Cottager." "The material Cottager," he wrote:

> knows there are such placés as France and Italy and the Andes and The Burning Mountains--so the spiritual Cottager has knowledge of the terra semi incognita of things unearthly; and cannot for his Life, keep in the check rein . . . You will see however I am obliged to run wild, being attracted by the Loadstone Concatenation (Letters, I, 254-55).

In the plainest terms, "the material Cottager," as Keats thought of him was the person who would settle for, or perhaps, even insist upon the simple solution. Brushing aside all objections that decry oversimplification, he would be satisfied with some neat, logical system that would help him, probably in a good many instances, to understand and to deal with the nature of human existence. All would be well, in his opinion, if he possessed in his "mental Cottage of feelings," a "Philosophical Back Garden, and cheerful holiday-keeping front one," over which he held, or supposed he held, control. And, the possibility simply

would not concern him that some unforeseen trouble, for which his limited system of logic had not prepared him, might crowd in upon his little circumscribed world. Content with a superficial, to a large degree, materialistic explanation of life, he would think it enough to know that in the world "there are such places as France and Italy and the Andes and the Burning Mountains," though probably he would never want to visit them or even care to understand anything about them.

Of course, upon perceiving and then taking for himself the concept of negative capability, wherein a "man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after face and reason," (Letters, I, 193) Keats divorced himself totally from anyone like "the material Cottager." Having at one time foolishly pursued the promise of salvation from worldly pain which he had believed one circumscribed philosophy of life made, he intended not to make the mistake again.

In essence, then, Keats believed that any rigid, limited philosophy of life could not cope with the fact that reality or truth is a fluid progression of events which can be apprehended only at the "Moment" when each event occurs, and that it is beyond man's feeble power to fathom this progression of events, each of which might be understood only when it happens. At best, a rigid

explanation of existence, though probably presenting itself as an all inclusive philosophy, could afford its adherents only a superficial understanding of life. In opposition to "the material Cottager," Keats certainly saw himself as a "spiritual Cottager." His knowledge was "of the terra semi incognita of things unearthly." Unable to settle "quiet and comfortable" in a "sort of Philosophical Back Garden" or in a "cheerful holiday-keeping front one," he understood that in order to maintain contact with the reality or truth of life, since the flow of life is impossible to control, he was "obliged to run wild, being attracted by the Loadstone Concatenation," being attracted by the connected series of events that is life. (Letters, I, 254-5)

In the long run, Keat's almost unfailing devotion to his understanding of truth's nature was his salvation. His intentions to remain "in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (Letters, I, 193) sustained him until he perceived significant truth. But the burden of waiting for such a perception, the burden of being negatively capable, was not an easy one. Possibly, the last days of March and on into April in 1818 saw Keats undergo the acid test of his allegiance to the concept of negative capability. Having given up all efforts to become one in spirit with the old,

great poets yet continuing to believe that to pursue the goals of modern poetry was a worthless effort, he felt himself to be almost totally without a sense of direction. The feelings of perplexing anxiety which he endured while marking time until the fluid progression of events brought him to the "Moment" when he would know what he would do next as a poet were terribly unsettling. His patience to exist in uneasiness was tried perhaps to an ultimate extent.

On 25 March 1818, just a day after he wrote the letter to Rice in which he implied that he was as a "spiritual Cottager," Keats wrote a verse letter to an ailing John Reynolds. His aim was to entertain his friend. Probably he would have liked to avoid any thought of his confused state of affairs as a poet. Like his extemporaneous "Lines on Seeing a Lock of Milton's Hair," which he wrote some two months before at Hunt's, his "Epistle to J. H. Reynolds" is more or less light hearted in nature. But, in the last third of the "Epistle," as in the last portion of the "Lines . . . on Milton's Hair," the poem's tone becomes serious. Therein Keats revealed perhaps totally the extent of his confused feelings as he persevered to maintain his negative capability. Most of all, he craved for clear-cut meaning. He wished,

O that our dreamings all, of sleep or wake,

> Would all their colors from the sunset take:
> From something of material sublime,
> Rather than shadow our own soul's day-time
> In the dark void of night. (Letters, I, 261,
> ll. 67-70)

He thought that he would feel a sense of assurance if "our dreamings all of sleep or wake" would take some definite form in the "material sublime," even if this material be so subtle as the "colors from the sunset." But, he unhappily understood that man's day to day thought is filled with preoccupations and anxieties of all kinds. A man cannot build anything meaningful out of materials so tenuous as the various colors contained in a ray of light. Instead, what would be apparent in "/his/ own Soul's daytime," man obscures "in the dark void of night." Because of this realization, viewing life as immensely, even unfathomably complex, Keats confessed, with regret:

> to philosophize
> I dare not yet!--Oh never will the prize,
> High reason, and the lore of good and ill
> Be my award. Things cannot to the will
> Be settled, but they tease us out of thought (Letters,
> I, 262, ll, 73-76).

As he knew so well, life is the most unstable of things. To grasp for anything certain and sustantial--as he had recently reached for the confidence, clarity and directness of the old, great mode of writing--will lead only to failure and disappointment. Without doubting this notion even for a moment, Keats was certain that in life "things cannot to the

will--, be settled." To the contrary, the more one tries to force some order upon life, the more he is led into confusion. To a real degree, the incomprehensible, uncontrollable things of life "tease us out of thought." Rather than try to think, it seems vastly easier and, at times, more sensible not even to bother.

While languishing in perplexity, Keats perhaps reminded himself of a time, only a few months before when, in the "Cave of Quietude," he reflected upon his perplexing failure to achieve transendence over life's pain. Then, he had decided that:

> There never liv'd a mortal man, who bent
> His appetite beyond his natural sphere
> But starved and died (Endymion, IV, 646-8).

Now, in writing the "Epistle to J. H. Reynolds," he used a similar rationale. First, he asked:

> . . . is it that Imagination brought
> Beyond its proper bound, yet still confined,--
> Lost in a sort of Purgatory blind,
> Cannot refer to any standard law
> Of either earth or heaven? (Letters, I, 262, ll. 78-82).

Then, he answered,

> It is a flaw
> In happiness to see beyond our bourn--
> It forces us in Summer skies to mourn;
> It spoils the singing of the Nightingale
> (Letters, I, 262, ll. 82-85).

Indeed, he seemed to lament that in efforts "to see beyond our bourn," one not merely sees more of truth than he would like, forcing "us in Summer skies to mourn," and spoiling

"the singing of the Nightingale," but he very well might come upon new problems, new mysteries, that he had not anticipated. Continuing his "Epistle," Keats explained one such perception.

> Dear Reynolds, I have a mysterious tale
> And cannot speak it. The first page I read
> Upon a Lampit Rock of green sea weed
> Among the breakers--'Twas a quiet Eve;
> The rocks were silent--the wide sea did weave
> An untumultuous fringe of silver foam
> Along the flat brown sand. I was at home,
> And should have been most happy--but I saw
> Too far into the sea; where every maw
> The greater on the less feeds evermore;--
> But I saw too distinct into the core
> Of an eternal fierce destruction,
> And so from Happiness I far was gone
> (Letters, I, 262, 11. 86-98).

Even an apparently peaceful garden is full of "fierce destruction."

> the hawk at pounce,
> The gentle Robin, /is/ like a pard or ounce,
> Ravening a worm (Letters, I, 262, 11. 103-5).

Within a year, De Selincourt points out, "Keats returns to the problem of Nature's cruelty . . . in the long 14 February-3 May 1819 letter to the George Keatses (Letters, II, 79f), and shows himself far more able to grapple with it."[53] But, for the moment, while writing the last lines of the "Epistle to J. H. Reynolds," he apparently felt that the effort to struggle for understanding of the perplexing, painful nature of existence was too much for him. Suddenly, he decided to bring the "Epistle" to a conclusion.

He insisted, "Away ye horrid moods, Moods of one's mind!" (Letters, I, 262-3, ll. 103-4). To Reynolds, he wished, "do you get health--and Tom the same" (Letters, I, 263, l. 109). In the next few weeks, trying to take, at least, some superficial command of his situation, he announced, "I'll dance / And from detested moods in new Romance / Take refuge." (Letters, I, 263, 109-11).

Keat's "new Romance" turned out to the rather lengthy verse narrative, Isabella: or, the Poet of Basil. Probably at sometime during January, 1818, he had talked with Reynolds about bringing out a book of short narrative poems based on stories in Boccaccio. Though nothing ever came of any joint effort to produce the book, both men made some tentative beginnings at writing these narratives. After Keats's death in 1821, Reynolds published what he prepared in his The Garden of Florence. For his part, Keats began a few stanzas in early February 1818 on the story of the Poet of Basil. In late March, 1818, when he began seriously to work on his "new Romance," he used these few experimental stanzas as a starting point. Completing it in about a month, he apparently encountered only one problem as he wrote the poem. In Bate's opinion, because Boccaccio's story determined the plan for the narrative, Keats could not cause himself to become much involved with what he was doing. As a result, the poem

did not provide the "refuge" that he had hoped for.[54]

Still, Keats found time to think. Frequently, he fell into his "detested moods" about his seemingly pointless existence as a poet. Probably his feelings of confusion and self-pity came to an end only after a letter for him arrived on either 8 or 9 April from London. In the letter, John Reynolds informed him that he, along with John Taylor, Keats's publisher, had decided that the preface to Endymion, which Keats had prepared after he came to Devonshire, could not be printed. Something else would have to be written.[55] Terribly angered by the rejection, Keats put aside his self-doubtings to defend his preface. By writing a letter of recrimination to Reynolds and by trying to rationalize the rejection in his own mind, he suddenly found himself exploring an area of thought which he had seriously considered once before. (Letters, I, 266-68, but, especially see 267). Since the beginning of 1818, his futile effort to become one in spirit with the old poets and his revision work on Endymion had deverted his attention. But, within a little over two weeks, from 9 to 24 April 1818, he returned to the idea which he had put aside for several months. Following this return, he soon possessed a clear, definite awareness of what, in fact, was to be the central purpose of all his subsequent efforts as a poet.

IV

In both Reynolds's and Taylor's opinions, the trouble with Keats's preface was obvious. Written in a defensive, ego-centered manner, it simply would not do.[56] As he had prepared it during the third week in March, 1818, Keats had deliberately filled it with hostility. A great portion of this general ill will came directly from his having given in, just a short time before, to the fact he could never become one in spirit with the old poets. He permitted his hostile feelings which this failure caused to feed upon his old animosities against the critics of the literary journals who, a year before, had received his Poems in a hostile fashion and who, in Blackwoods' Edinburgh Magazine, had promised to write some kind of unpleasantness about him in their continuing attack on the "Cockney school."[57] These reasons, of course, did not excuse the bad taste of what Keats had written. By following through a considerable portion of what he wrote, one can find at first hand why John Taylor would not send Keats's preface to Endymion to the presses.

Bordering on the insolent, Keats began his preface:

> In a great nation, the work of an individual is of so little importance; his pleadings and excuses are so uninteresting; his 'way of life' such a nothing, that a Preface seems a sort of impertinent bow to strangers who care nothing about it.[58]

But, Keats continued, at the very least, a preface should

cause the reader to "catch an idea of an Author's modesty and non-opinion of himself--which I sincerely hope may be seen in the lines I have to write." (Poems, p. 462) Yet, in the rest of what he wrote, Keats essentially contradicted himself. Rather than a "non-opinion of himself," he showed with his impertinent words that he held very strong feelings about himself. Barely holding his hostile feelings in check he wrote:

> About a twelvemonth since, I published a little book of verses; it was read by some dozen of my friends who lik'd it; and some dozen whom I was unacquainted with, who did not. Now when a dozen human beings are at words with another dozen, it becomes a matter of anxiety to side with one's friends--more especially when excited thereto by a great love of Poetry.
> (Poems, p. 462-63)

He went on to speak about the writing of Endymion itself. When he began work on the poem, he explained,

> . . . my steps were all uncertain. So this poem must rather be considered as an endeavour than a thing accomplished; a poor prologue to what, if I live, I humbly hope to do. In duty to the Public I should have kept it back for a year or two, knowing it to be so faulty: but I really cannot do so,--by repetition my favourite passages sound vapid in my ears, and I would rather redeem myself with a new Poem should this one be found of any interest . . . .
>
> It has been too much the fashion of late to consider men bigoted and addicted to every word that may chance to escape their lips; now I here declare that I have not any particular phrase, word, or letter in the whole affair. I have written to please myself, and in hopes to please others, and for a love of fame; if I neither please myself, nor others, nor get fame, of what consequence is Phraseology?
>
> I would fain escape the bickerings that all Works not exactly in chime bring upon their begetters--but this is not fair to expect, there must be conversation

> of some sort and to object shows a man's consequence. In case of a London drizzle or a Scotch mist, the following quotation from Marston may perhaps 'stead me as an umberella for an hour or so; 'let it be the courtesy of my persuer rather to pity my self-hindering labours than to malice me.' (Poems, 463)

At least as dense as any London drizzle or Scotch mist, Keat's feelings of malice filled the atmosphere as he replied in his 9 April 1818 letter to Reynolds concerning the rejected preface. Apparently, in rejecting the preface, Reynolds had said that the whole thing was written in an affected manner, in something of Leigh Hunt's flippant way.[59] To which, Keats answered:

> Since you all agree that the thing is bad, it must be so--though I am not aware there is any thing like Hunt in it, (and if there is, it is my natural way, and I have something in common with Hunt) look it over again and examine into the motives, the seeds from which any one sentence sprung (Letters, I, 266).

As he continued his commentary, Keats's motives became crystal clear.

> I have not the slightest feel of humility towards the Public--or to any thing in existence,--but the eternal Being, the Principle of Beauty,--and the Memory of great Men--When I am writing for myself for the mere sake of the Moment's enjoyment, perhaps nature has its course with me--but a Preface is written to the Public; a thing I cannot help looking upon as an Enemy, and which I cannot address without feelings of Hostility (Letters, I, 266-7).

Keats resented greatly having to make even momentary deference to the public by writing another preface. He explained,

> If I write a Preface in a supple or subdued style, it

> will not be in character with me as a public speaker--I would be subdued before my friends, and thank them for subduing me--but among Multitudes of Men--I have no feel of stooping, I hate the idea of humility to them (Letters, I, 267).

And, delivering a final blow, Keats finished:

> I never wrote one single Line of Poetry with the least Shadow of public thought (Letters, I, 267).

Apparently, after a moment of reflection, Keats himself was a bit taken aback by his own vindictiveness. He left a space on the page upon which he was writing. Then, in quite a different tone, as in the calm after the storm, he tried to qualify his remarks. To ease the embarrassment which he felt because of his own rancor, he asked of Reynolds:

> Forgive me for vexing you and making a Trojan Horse or such a Trifle, both with respect to the matter in Question, and myself--but it eases me to tell you--I could not live without the love of my friends--I would jump down AETNA for any great Public good--but I hate a Mawkish Popularity (Letters, I, 267).

But, in elaborating upon his hatred of "Mawkish Popularity," he nearly permitted his feelings of hostility to get out of hand again. Because he was so bound up in his efforts as a poet, he possessed nothing but disgust for an insincere public, made up of hypocritical "art lovers," which supposed it possessed the right to criticize indiscriminately and maliciously what an artist had done. He announced:

> My glory would be to daunt and dazzle the thousand jabberers about Picture and Books--I see swarms of Porcupines with their Quills erect "like lime-twigs

> set to catch my Winged Book" and I would fright'em away with a torch--You may say my preface is not much of a Torch (Letters, I, 267).

Yet, of course, the fact that he had succeeded so well in making his preface a scathing torch was just the trouble. Because of his pride, he never permitted himself to acknowledge the fact specifically. In only an indirect way, he admitted that he had written impetuously. In the letter to Reynolds, he implied that the preface, like Endymion itself, was not worth much. It was made out of quite worthless clay. He explained:

> It would have been too insulting "to begin from Jove" and I could not set a golden head upon a thing of clay (Letters, I, 267).

He concluded his diatribe, saying,

> If there is any fault in the preface it is not affectation similar to Hunt's: but an undersong of disrespect to the Public--if I write another preface, it must be done without a thought of those People--I will think about it (Letters, I, 267).

Certainly, Keats did think about it. But his thoughts soon ranged beyond the immediate business of writing another introductory passage for Endymion. After one day, on 10 April 1818, he sent off a second preface to Reynolds and Taylor, writing,

> I am anxious you should find this Preface tolerable, if there is an affectation in it 'tis natural to me,--Do let the Printer's Devil cook it--and 'let me be as the casing air.' (Letters, I, 269).

Then, following in the subdued manner of this statement, as

though drawing a cloak of chastened reflection about his personality, Keats withdrew from almost all contact with society so that, once again, he could allow his imaginative faculty, operating in an atmosphere of negative capability, to come upon a glimpse of truth.

For the most part, one can only speculate about what Keats thought during the middle two weeks of April, 1818. He wrote no letters and he apparently saw few people. His only visitor of note was John Rice, who came down from London, arriving on 18 April and leaving on 20 April. (Letters, I, 41) He did not interrupt his contemplation to give some clue concerning the nature of his thoughts until 24 April. On that day or on the day before, he received an advanced copy of Endymion from John Taylor. (Letters, I, 270, note 4) Naturally, having devoted a full year of his life to the poem, he could not ignore the first printed copy he had ever seen of it. He replied to Taylor, thought, at first, assuring his publisher that "the book pleased me much--it is very free from faults," by devoting better than half his letter to a listing of textual errors. (Letters, I, 270-71) However, as he wrote, he did not limit himself merely to an exercise in proofreading. He knew what a profound transition had occurred in his thought and he wanted to say something about it. He couched his statement in general terms, writing not about himself but about all young men. But what he said,

describing any youth's initiation into life, was also intensely personal.

He observed:

> Young men for some time have an idea that such a thing as happiness is to be had and therfore are extremely impatient under any unpleasant restraining--in time, however, of such stuff is the world about them, they know better and instead of striving from Uneasiness greet it as an habitual sensation, a pannier which is to weigh upon them through life. (Letters, I, 270)

With studied deliberateness, Keats probably forced the detached, impersonal tone upon this statement concerning young men. He probably did so because he wanted to renew his commitment to disinterestedness, a commitment which he realized, while reflecting upon the brief, but quite violent preface espisode, had become altogether dormant in his thinking. Following his first single-minded, zealous determination in the last months of 1817 to subdue his self-seeking vanity, he might have dismissed any possibility of failure as seeming so remote that such an occurrance could not happen. With the beginning of 1818, as he turned his attention toward finding some escape from his role as a modern poet, he probably felt in a very complacent way that his defenses built of disinterestedness were so strong that he could safely leave them untended, perhaps indefinitely, in order to hold off any attacks they might be subjected to from egotism. Certainly as the new year progressed, while he supposed that, rather than to be a circumscribed material cottager, he would

be a spiritual cottager, he made no obvious effort to be less preoccupied with himself in managing the business of living. He required the shock of having his preface rejected before he became aware, in the aftermath of the trouble, that he was not at all so free of smug egotism as he, no doubt, supposed.

Deluded by his assumption that he could remain disinterested enough to protect himself from any egotistical encroachment, Keats had became one of the "Young Men who for some time have an idea that such a thing as happiness is to be had and therefore are extremely impatient under any unpleasant restraining." (Letters, I, 270) But, it is evident, as he concluded that he could not escape the conventions of modern poetry and, particularly, as Reynolds and Taylor refused to use his first preface to Endymion, he saw his happiness fade, and chafing under the restraint of finding that he could not have his way in these important matters, he was quickly overcome by feelings of egotistical peevishness. The rejection, on top of his disappointment that he could not become one in spirit with the old poets, caused Keats to embark upon a temper tantrum. For him, the obvious whipping boy upon whom he could vent his rage was the reading public, especially the literary critics and the insincere "art lovers." He seethed:

I have not the slightest feel of humility towards the

> Public--or to anything in existence,--but the eternal Being, the Principle of Beauty,--and the Memory of great Men . . . a Preface is written to the Public; a thing I cannot help looking upon as an Enemy, and which I cannot address without feelings of Hostility . . . I hate a Mawkish Popularity.--I cannot be subdued before them--My glory would be to daunt and dazzle the thousand jabberers about Pictures and Books--I see swarms of Porcupines with their Quills erect "Like lime-twigs set to catch my Winged Book" and I would fright'em away with a torch (Letters, I, 266-67).

But, in the midst of all his hostility, Keats permitted himself one very significant contradiction. Though he damned his hypercritical, malicious readers into whose hands he accurately anticipated that his Endymion would fall, he also insisted, "I could not live without the love of my friends--I would jump down AEtna for a great public good." (Letters, I, 267)

In the days of contemplation that followed the preface incident, Keats concluded in a manner which he supposed was common to all young men, that because "of such stuff is the world," to hold the "idea that such a thing as happiness is to be had" is perhaps totally fallacious He decided that "instead of striving from Uneasiness," that he should "greet it as an habitual sensation, a pannier which is to weigh upon him through life." (Letters, I, 267) No doubt, he did not like this decision, but after sorting out his complex thoughts, it appeared to be the only one he could make. He understood why he attacked the public

and what he understood probably embarrassed him now.

Some eight months before, after reading Hazlitt's Essay on the Principles of Human Action, Keats had taken to the notion of disinterestedness so quickly because it helped him to keep disconcerting, often egotistically conjured up troubles at some distance from him. The ideas in the Essay appealed to him, however, not strictly because of the personal, really selfish reason that they made his confrontation with life's troubles seem easier. In the Essay, Hazlitt had insisted that any man, if he so wished, could use his faculty of imagination in order to transcend his selfish, egotistical interests to enter sympathetically into the thoughts and feelings of others. With this broadened knowledge, he could approximate a state of benevolence if he only cultivated the natural disposition of his mind to sympathise with the feelings of others.[61] With the ability to identify sympathetically with his fellow humans, he could come upon as many or, perhaps, even more ways than there are people by which he could fulfill his benevolent desire to do good for his fellow human.

But, following his emotional outburst during the preface incident, Keats could only admit to himself that, except in the formulation of his concept of negative capability, he had not achieved much obvious, definite success in his efforts to practice the ideals in Hazlitt's

Essay. At least briefly, when Reynolds and Taylor rejected his preface, he had essentially forgotten about disinterestedness. His attempt to escape the conventions of modern poetry, an attempt which he might have justified as being benevolently motivated because he could suppose that to bring the old, great poets' qualities of confidence and directness into his writing would in some way benefit his readers, had been terribly abortive. Yet, it seems apparent that as he reflected upon this failure, he became totally willing to concede that the responsibility for it was entirely his own. Certainly in his own mind, his failure did not diminish in the slightest the worth of Hazlitt's ideas. Clearly it must have seemed to him that if he were to find again and maintain a sense of integrity between his thinking of the past with what he might conclude in the future, he needed to renew with all possible deliberateness his allegiance to the notions which Hazlitt had set forth in his Essay.

As he looked toward the future during his days of meditation Keats became very certain, first, about what he did not intend to do, and, then, about what he hoped to accomplish. Most of all, he knew, no doubt, that he did not want to repeat the ugly performance that he had given during the preface episode. It completely negated the benevolent intent of Hazlitt's principles. Having allowed his disinterestedness to slip away as he prepared to send Endymion

on its way for public consideration, Keats perhaps reflected that he had become a person not unlike Sancho, the sort of man whom he had described in his 3 February 1818 letter to Reynolds. (Letters, I, 223-25) Sancho, as Keats had obliquely suggested, refused to remain content with the limited perceptions which he gained in an experience of imaginative "half-seeing." As he wrote about these perceptions, he insisted upon filling in those areas of knowledge of which he did not have any command with ideas of his own selection. By doing so, he supposed that he could relate to his readers with more success what he had originally perceived.

Essentially, as he wrote his first preface to Endymion, Keats, like Sancho, was not content to remain with the knowledge he possessed. Following its publication, he believed his poem would fall into the hands of readers who would treat it unfavorably. Though it would have been an almost totally ineffective effort, even if Reynolds and Taylor had not stopped it, Keats's ego-centered intention in writing his first preface, like the characteristically egotistical intention of a Sancho, was deliberately to manipulate his reading public. Unwilling to allow any reader of the poem whose intentions might have been labeled as insincere to examine and evaluate it as he saw fit, Keats wanted to use his preface, deliberately causing

it to flame with invective, as a torch to frighten away those readers who might treat the poem in a contrary way. Like the arbitrary, didactic Sancho who insisted on telling his readers what to think, Keats, very arbitrarily, wanted to control who would and who would not read his poem. He may have supposed that by offending those readers of his poem who would be insincere, he would dissuade them from reading the poem at all. They might think or write in an unkind way about it. He wanted only those who would think and write in a kind manner about the poem to read it. To use his own words, before Reynolds and Taylor stopped him, Keats, with his preface, had "a palpable design" upon his readers. Far from being "great and unobtrusive" as he said poetry and, therfore, the poet should be, he was stiff, defensive and narrowly pedantic. He was prepared, if he should find someone who did not agree with him, "to put his hand in his breeches pocket," and no doubt, glare. But, now, during the last week of April, 1818, being entirely cognizant of the character of these thoughts as he prepared to conclude his experience of deep reflection, he no doubt understood that in his effort made to protect his poetry and himself from whatever derision that might come along, he had allowed himself to "brood and peacock over /his speculations/ till he /made/ a false coinage and deceive /d/ himself." And, facing squarely what he knew, that he had

created this, an essentially counterfeit facade for himself, he moved deliberately to do away with it, the last, very serious egotistical deception which stood in his way before he could begin his climb to greatness as "one of the English poets."

W. J. Bate explains that until Keats went to Devonshire, "it never occurred to him to consider the larger questions of poetry (what it had done, what it might do) apart from those of life itself."[62] Rather, his interests had been so permeated with his concern for what good poetry could do for him in his own life that he had always believed--certainly his brothers and his close acquaintances had encouraged such a belief--that poetry's purpose by nature was a selfish one. But, in deliberately holding to his belief, he must have begun to sense something wrong, if he had never sensed it before, when he found soon after he arrived in Devon that he could not establish anything more than the most passing acquaintance with the ordinary Devonshireman. At the time, he probably dismissed this failure to achieve any meaningful relationship with the local people as really their failure to understand him and, in any case, of no consequence. Yet, in the first six or so weeks of his stay in Devon, especially after the preface incident when he saw how contrary his ego-centered aims as a poet were to the

benevolent purpose inherent in Hazlitt's principle of sympathetic, imaginative identification, something happened in his thoughts so that he knew he must cause his concerns as a poet to coincide with the ordinary man's concerns. To gain some sense of worthwhile purpose, he needed the satisfaction, at least in his own mind, of knowing that he had reconciled his endeavors as a poet with the general, on-going endeavors of society. At the time of the preface trouble, he had determined the purpose of his existence as a poet as that of defining the nature of "the eternal being, the Principle of Beauty." (Letters, I, 266) And, at the same time, though he vehemently insisted that his interests as a poet were of such a personal nature that they should be of no concern to society, he asserted in a clearly contradictory fashion, "I would jump down AEtna for a great public good." (Letters, I, 26) Now, in the last week in April, he resolved this contradiction, perhaps by asking himself just what greater public good he could accomplish than that of revealing in his poetry for his reader's understanding the glimpses of beauty that he perceived in "the Moment." (Letters, I, 185-6) He might have thought, should he possess such knowledge of essential beauty, that it was his duty to present his knowledge for his reader's consideration. And, further, recognizing it as his duty to reveal truth to the world, he might have concluded that

he was obliged to discard the last vestages of his egotistically constructed exclusiveness and to begin regarding himself as a full-fledged member of society, fulfilling his obligation as a member by doing what he could do best.

To achieve his new purpose as a poet, Keats knew that he still must overcome weaknesses. Though a bookish person, he realized that he had not read enough nor had he lived enough to write great poetry. He needed knowledge; that is, he needed the fruits of reading and living generally. Henceforth, he knew that, as a poet, "I mean to follow Solomon's direction of 'get Wisdom--get understanding.'" Rejecting his old, selfish purposes for being a poet, he recognized that as a responsible member of society, "I find cavalier days are gone by." He could not allow his efforts as a poet to be motivated only for selfish purposes because:

> I find that I can have no enjoyment in the World but continual drinking of Knowledge--I find there is no worthy pursuit but the idea of doing some good for the world--some do it with their society--some with their wit--some with their benevolence--some with a sort of power of conferring pleasure and good humor 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 (Letters, I, p. 271).

Three days after writing this statement in his 24 April

1818 letter to Taylor, Keats advanced his future plans as a poet further, saying in the 27 April 1818 letter to Reynolds that after preparing himself by means of a baptism into philosophy or general knowledge, he hoped

> to ask Hazlitt in about a years time the best metaphysical road I can take.--For although I hate poetry to be Chief, there is something else wanting to one who passes his life among Books and thoughts on Books (Letters, I. 274).

With these plans, though knowing that once they were completed he still would have more to do, Keats prepared the foundations for his final "living year"[63] of 1819 when he wrote his most important poems. In making these preparations, he reached his essential maturity as a writer. To attain this maturation, he had necessarily capitulated to the fact which he had tried so long to avoid. He had finally recognized in the fullest sense that he was a social animal and that within the structure of society, he must fill a useful role as a poet, having as his purpose the revelation of what he perceived to be truth. Before setting out on the life he intended to pursue, he had only to review what he had brought to fruition, thus far, in his life as a poet, especially during his thoughtful days while living in Devonshire. In one of his most remarkable letters, the 3 May 1818 letter to Reynolds, Keats revealed the nature of his maturity as a man and, more specifically, as a poet.

Having finally defined the purpose of his existence,

Keats must have known, perhaps for the first time in his life, a most satisfying sense of confidence. He felt certain that he had built his assurance upon stable, not sandy foundations. He was not grasping for some will-o-the-wisp escapist joy or the simplicity and clarity of the old poets. Such grasping efforts, he knew only too well, ended in perplexing failure. His goal to "get Wisdom--get understanding" (Letters, I, 271) was something which he knew that he could do and which he knew from his experience at C. C. Clarke's Enfield School, his relationship with Hunt, and his reading of Hazlitt could produce rewarding, personal satisfaction. Using a metaphor about birds, his testimony concerning the value of acquired knowledge is eloquent.

> An extensive /sic/ knowledge is needful to thinking people--it takes away the heat and fever; and helps, by widening speculation, to ease the Burden of the Mystery: a thing I begin to understand a little, and which weighed upon you in the most gloomy and true sentence in your Letter. The difference of high Sensations with and without knowledge appears to me this--in the latter case we are falling continually ten thousand fathoms deep and being blown up again without wings and with all /the/ horror of a shoulderd Creature--in the former case, our shoulders are fledge/d/, and we go thro' the same air and space without fear (Letters, I, 277).

No doubt, Keats had in mind one specific matter about which his "widening speculation" had eased "the Burden of the Mystery"--the burden of knowing that as a human being, it is preordained that he could never know the true nature of existence but must grope through life so that occasionally

and, mostly by chance, he might come upon momentary glimpses of portions of this truth which he called beauty. Thanks to his honest, adventurous mind, he had entirely changed his concept of the nature of the poet. From his new viewpoint, simply by seeing the poet not as an individual isolated from the world, but as a person serving an integral function as a member of society, he realized that the degree of his achievement as a poet would be determined by the amount of knowledge he possessed about the world. Contrary to his old notion that an impinging world would contaminate both his poetry and himself as a poet, he understood that the more he knew of the world, the more his knowledge would increase the value of his poetry. Therefore, he concluded that:

> Were I to study physic or rather Medicine again,--I feel it would not make the least difference in my Poetry; when the Mind is in its infancy a Bias is in reality a Bias, but when we have acquired more strength, a Bias becomes no Bias. Every department of knowledge we see excellent and calculated towards a great whole. I am so convinced of this, that I am glad at not having given away my medical Books, which I shall again look over to keep alive the little I know thitherwards (Letters, I, 276-77).

Certainly, Keats knew that he had paid dearly in order to reach his new maturity as a poet. In particular, he had given up his bias or strong inclination against modern poetry. In a perceptive analysis of modern poetry, he had seen that because of its complexity as it dealt with the subjective, inner life of man, it could not be so clear,

direct and confident as the great, old poetry. Previously, he had felt it to be only sensible that, if at all possible, he wanted to be in spirit with the great, old poets whose virtues were obvious, rather than to try finding something of worth in the difficult, complex, and involved nature of modern poetry. But, since late January when he had announced to his brothers that he was "getting at" the task of being with the old poets, (Letters, I, 215) he had concluded not only that his goal was essentially an impossibility, but also that achieving such a goal was not, in any case, very desirable. In his typical antithetical fashion, as he had viewed "the two uppermost thoughts" (Letters, I, 243) in his mind with the old poets and the modern poets at the two opposite poles of his world, he had decided, in fact, that the confident, calm philosophy of the old poets was not applicable to the anxieties of modern life. Essentially, these old poets, like Milton, were too innocent for modern times.

> From the Paradise Lost and the other Works of Milton, I hope it is not too presuming, even between ourselves to say, his Philosophy, human and divine, may be tolerably understood by one not much advanced in years. In his time englishmen were just emancipated from a great emancipated from a great superstition--and Men had got hold of certain points and resting places in reasoning which were too newly born to be doubted, and too much opposed by the Mass of Europe not to be thought etherial and authentically diveine--who could gainsay his ideas on virtue, vice and Chastity in Comus, just at the time of the dismissal of Cod-pieces and a hundred other

> disgraces? who would not rest satisfied with his hintings at good and evil in the Paradise Lost, when just free from the inquisition and burrning in Smithfield? The Reformation produced such immediate and great benefits, that Protestantism was considered under the immediate eye of heaven, and its own remaining Dogmas and superstitions, then, as it were, regenerated, constituted those resting places and seeming sure points of Reasoning--from that I have mentioned, Milton, whatever he may have thought in the sequel, appears to have been content with these by his writings--He did not think into the human heart, as Wordsworth has done(Letters, I, 282).

Keats understood, then, that the modern poet's business is to "think into the human heart." As a man living in contemporary society, he could not subscribe to Milton's "seeming sure points of Reasoning." He knew that these points were not really applicable to modern times. And, in any case, as he had already acknowledged in his 24 March 1818 letter to Reynolds, he could repeat Milton's ideas only at the risk of being repetitious. Finding himself to be far more akin to his contemporary, Wordsworth, than to the old poet, Milton, he knew that out of necessity he needed to be one, like Wordsworth, who "martyred himself to the human heart." (Letters, I. 278-79) No doubt, Keats used the word martyred with deliberateness, for he felt vividly his own rejection of the hope to be in spirit with the old poets. At least in one sense, he had admitted that he was a modern poet only because he had been subjected to an undeniable pressure--the fact that he was of the modern age and that he had to live

as a modern man. It was under the duress of this fact that during his long days of contemplation while living in Devonshire that he had tried to "branch out" (Letters, I, 278) from the state of perplexity which he had known when he realized that he could not be with the old poets. And, in these efforts to branch out, he had arrived repeatedly at only one conclusion--a conclusion which he reached, quite healthily, without any regret. Out of the labyrinth of his painfully confused thought, he had come to the observation:

> My Branchings out . . . have been numerous: one of them is the consideration of Wordsworth's genius and as a help, in the manner of gold being the meridian Line of worldly wealth,---how he differs from Milton.--And here I have nothing but surmises, from an uncertainty whether Miltons apparently less anxiety for Humanity proceeds from his seeing further or no than Wordsworth: And whether Wordsworth has in truth epic passion/s/, and martyrs himself to the human heart, the main region of his song---In regard to his genius alone--we find what he says true as far as we have experienced and we can judge no further but by larger experience--for axioms in philosophy are not axioms until they are proved upon our pulses: We read fine-------things but never feel them to the full until we have gone the same steps as the Author.--I know this is not plain; you will know exactly my meaning when I say, that now I shall relish Hamlet more than I ever have done--Or, better--You are sensible no man can set down Venery as a bestial or joyless thing until he is sick of it andttherefore all philosophizing on it would be mere wording. Until we are sick, we understand not;--in fine, as Byron says, "Knowledge is Sorrow"; and I go on to say that "Sorrow is Wisdom"--and further for aught we can know for certainty! "Wisdom is folly"--So you see how I have run away from Wordsworth, and Milton; and shall still run away from what was in my head, to observe, that some kind of letters are good squares others handsome ovals and others some orbicular, others spheroid--and why

> should there not be another species with two rough edges like a Rat-trap? (Letters, I, 278-279).

After quite an extensive experience of being "obliged to run wild, being attracted by the Loadstone Concatenation," (Letters, I, 255) Keats was certain that the only ideas upon which he could depend were those that he had "proved upon /his own/ pulses." (Letters, I, 279). Essentially, he had run away from Wordsworth and Milton, both who had only recently been "the two poles of his World," (Letters, I, 243) because he was ultimately an independent thinker who knew, though using his observations of Wordsworth and Milton as points of departure for his own writing, that he must, as best he possibly could, follow his own course to produce his own poetry. It would be gratifying if he could give his writing the reassuring form of a "good square" or the graceful shape of a "handsome oval" or some consistant orbicular or spheroidal form. But none of these would necessarily fit his own purposes. As a writer, he believed that he must be free to find his own form. And why should not this form "be another species with two rough edges like a Rat-trap?" He would assume complete responsibility for his independence and hope that "all will be well," that after finding his own way, he could achieve coherence in his writing so that "by merely touching the spring delicately and etherially, the rough edged /Rat-trap/ will fly immediately

into a proper compactness." (Letters, I, 279) And if he achieved only confusion as he had experienced in the past, then

> . . . alas for me, it being an impossibility in grain for my ink to stain otherwise: If I scribble long letters I must play my vagaries. I must be too heavy, or too light, for whole pages--I must be quaint and free of Tropes and figures--I must play my draughts as I please, and for my advantage and your erudition, crown a white with a black, or a black with a white, and move into black or white, far and near as I please--I must go from Hazlitt to Patmore, and make Wordsworth and Coleman play at leap-frog--or keep one of them down a whole half holiday at fly the garter--"From Gray to Gray, from Little to Shakespeare" (Letters, I, 279-280).

Perhaps Keats allowed his writing to border more and more on the absurd because, as one aware that he existed in perpetual uneasiness, he could not avoid fear for not knowing what he would ultimately accomplish. To use something of an old cliche to suggest the purpose of his nonsensical writing, "He needed to laugh in order to avoid tears." As a modern poet, he realizedthat even if his achievement would eventually be equal with Wordsworth's--an achievement which he did not take lightly or suppose he fully understood--he could not be certain if, with Wordsworth, if he would become, indeed, a great poet, so that like a great eagle, he would fly to meet, as all great poets have met, the pressing needs of their particular age. (Letters, I, 280)

Keats's fear of failure to measure up to future

challenges was a very real one. Yet, in one of the most remarkable statements in all of his letters, one which irrevocably relates him to modern times in its concern for the inner life of man, he made clear his courage to live with this possibility of failure. Contrary to Hazlitt's pessimistic view that art can not achieve the general progress found particularly in the advancement of natural philosophy,[64] he possessed the faith that, though he, as a person, might fail to participate in it, "there is really a grand march of intellect," (Letters, I, 281) that there is a chance for accomplishing something more in art by perceiving the truth concerning the nature of human existence with greater completeness than that of the old, great poets. Keats began his testimony of hope and faith, saying:

> I will return to Wordsworth--whether or no he has an extended vision or a circumscribed grandeur--whether he is an eagle in his nest, or on the wing--And to be more explicit and to show you how tall I stand by the giant, I will put down a simile of human life as far as I now perceive it; that is, to the point to which I say we both have arrived at.
> (Letters, I, 280).

Then follows the notable passage:

> I compare human life to a large Mansion of Many Apartments, two of which I can only describe, the doors of the rest being as yet shut upon me--The first we step into we call the infant or thoughtless Chamber, in which we remain as long as we do not think--We remain there a long while, and notwithstanding the doors of the second Chamber remain wide open, showing a bright appearance, we care not to hasten to it; but are at length imperceptibly impelled by the awakening of the thinking principle--within us--we no sooner

> get into the second Chamber, which I shall call the Chamber of Maiden-Thought, than we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere, we see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there for ever in delight: However among the effects this breathing is father of is that tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of Man--of convincing ones nerves that the World is full of Misery and Heart-break, Pain Sickness and oppression--whereby This Chamber of Maiden Thought becomes gradually darken'd and at the same time on all sides of it many doors are set open--but all dark--all leading to dark passages--We see not the ballance of good and evil. We are in a Mist--We are now in that state--We feel the "burden of the Mystery," To this point was Wordsworth come as far as I conceive when he wrote 'Tintern Abbey' and it seems to me that his Genius is explorative of those dark Passages. Now if we live, and go on thinking, we too shall explore them.
> (Letters, I, 280-81)

Probably Keats was not entirely confident of the validity of his description of the Mansion of Many Apartments. But, by assuming its validity, his description helped him explain why "Wordsworth is deeper than Milton--though I think it has depended more upon the general and gregarious advance of the intellect, than individual greatness of Mind." (Letters, I, 281) Because of this "grand march of the intellect--, It proves that a mighty providence subdues the mightiest Minds to the service of the time being, whether it be in human Knowledge or Religion." It proves that "After all there is certainly something real in the World." His joy was so great that he concluded by assuring Reynolds, "Your third Chamber of Life shall be a lucky and a gentle one--stored with the wine of love--and the Bread

of Friendship." (Letters, I, 282-83)

Of course, because he decided to explore the "dark Passages" beyond the Chamber of Maiden Thought, Keats went on to write his greatest poetry during the next year of 1819. In his exploration of the "dark Passages," he clearly came to his most valid confrontations with beauty while writing the great odes, and being aware of this achievement, he felt confident to make his plainest, most forthright statement of affirmation concerning his belief in an immutable principle of fluid truth. In his "Ode on a Grecian Urn," while addressing the urn, the symbol of this principle of beauty and truth, which are both simply different degrees of the same thing, "the former apprehensible by man in 'the moment,' the latter always broadly fluid and essentially unknowable,"[65] he defined the nature of the principle, the only one to which he--as a modern man existing in a continuing state of perplexing anxiety, and entirely aware that "this generation shall waste . . . in midst of other woe"--knew that he could cling. To this fundamental law, a steadfast "friend to man," he declared:

> When old age shall this generation waste,
> Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
> Then ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st
> 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,'--
> ("Ode on a Grecian Urn," ll. 56-59, p. 210)

But, in May, 1818, a full year before he wrote these often-quoted, but seldom understood lines, Keats stood at

the threshold of his own "third Chamber of Life," (Letters, I, 282) with no particular vision of the great perceptions of beauty and truth which could eventually manifest themselves in his writing. Indeed, he was certain perhaps of only three things. First, during the summer months of 1818, he planned to accompany his acquaintance, Charles Brown, on "a pedestrian tour through the North of England, and part of Scotland," intending this sojourn to be "a sort of Prologue to the Life I intend to pursue--that is to write, to study, and to see all Europe at the lowest expense." (Letters, I, 264) Second, as he repeated in the 10 June 1818 letter to Bailey, he wanted "to write, to study, and to see" as preparation to move on into other chambers in the Mansion of Many Apartments--two of which were service to humanity and, then, death. He assured Bailey:

> . . . now I am never alone without rejoicing that there is such a thing as death--without placing my ultimate in the glory of dying for a great human purpose. (Letters, I, 293)

And, third, he wondered how well he could accomplish his "great human purpose." It was only natural that he should be curious about how he would eventually reveal to his readers what he perceived as glimpses of beauty which are moment revelations of "the Mystery," the preordained and static group of cosmic laws which, together, constitute reality or truth. He still wanted to determine if the poet

could attain the large simplicity, the "old vigour," of the poetry written long ago. In striving for the large simplicity of the old poets, he wondered if he could not achieve their scope. Then could he not, at least, find some sort of compromise? Could he not write with the same confidence and "content" of the old poets, even if only to a "little clan?" In his unfinished "Ode to Maia" which he included in his 3 May 1818 letter to Reynolds, he asked Maia--"Mother of Hermies," the messenger between men and the gods, between brief-living man and the ideal--if the poet could still write "great verse."

> Mother of Hermies! and still youthful Maia!
> May I sing to thee
> As thou wast hymned on the shores of Baiae?
> Or may I woo thee
> In earlier Sicilian? or thy smiles
> Seek as they once were sought, in Grecian isles,
> By Bards who died content in pleasant sward,
> Leaving great verse unto a little clan?
> O give me their old vigour, and unheard,
> Save of the quiet Primrose, and the spann//
> Of Heaven, and few ears//rounded by thee
> My song should die away//content as theirs//
> Rich in the simple worship of a day.--//
> (Letters, I, 278).

With this fourteen-line fragment, Keats could only leave off to wait for what his future thoughts, actions, and experiences might bring to him and, therefore, to his poetry. Whatever could come his way, he knew with certainty that he could not accept it by using the viewpoint of a person who saw himself separated from society. Rather,

he would accept it in the manner of a man who viewed himself as one among his fellow men, for he had determined that he would use this view as a point of departure as he began to seek his future existence as a poet.

NOTES: CHAPTER III

[1]Bate, p. 264.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 236.

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 273-74.

[4]*Ibid.*, p. 267.

[5]*Ibid.*, p. 275.

[6]*Ibid.*

[7]*Ibid.*, pp. 264-66 and 269-73. See these references for an account of Keats's relationship with Haydon during December 1817 and January 1818.

[8]*Ibid.*, p. 276.

[9]Hardin, p. 172.

[10]Bate, pp. 284-85.

[11]*Ibid.*, pp. 236, 301 and 316.

[12]*Ibid.*, pp. 275-76.

[13]See William Bewick, *Life and Letters of William Bewick* (Artist), ed. Thomas Landseer (London, 1874), I, 41.

[14]Bate, p. 259.

[15]*Works*, V, 6.

[16]Albrecht, p. 99.

[17]*Works*, V, 6-8.

[18]Hardin, p. 172.

[19]*Works*, I, 2.

[20]Bate, p. 285.

[21]*Ibid.*, pp. 285-86.

[22]Ibid., pp. 286-87.

[23]Ibid., pp. 284-85.

[24]Ibid., p. 287.

[25]Ibid., p. 284.

[26]Ibid., pp. 287-88.

[27]Ibid., p. 288.

[28]Works, I. 46f.

[29]Ibid., V, 47-48.

[30]Ibid., V, 53.

[31]Ibid., V, 44-46.

[32]Bate, p. 288.

[33]Ibid., pp. 288-89.

[34]Ibid., p. 291.

[35]Works, V, 53.

[36]Ibid.

[37]Ibid., V, 44-46.

[38]Bate, p. 300f.

[39]Ibid., V. 44-46.

[40]William Wordsworth, "The Old Cumberland Beggar," The Complete Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, Grasmere edition, II (Boston and New York, 1911), 95, l. 77.

[41]Bate, p. 301, 316-18.

[42]Ibid., p. 300.

[43]Ibid., p. 301.

[44]Ibid., pp. 301-02.

[45]Ibid., pp. 321-22.

[46]Ibid., p. 317.

[47]Ibid., pp. 319-20.

[48]Ibid., p. 302.

[49]Ibid., pp. 306-07.

[50]Ibid., p. 303.

[51]Ibid., p. 323.

[52]Ibid., p. 322.

[53]John Keats, The Poetical Works of John Keats, ed. E. De Selincourt (New York, 1926), p. 539.

[54]Bate, p. 310.

[55]Ibid., p. 304.

[56]Ibid.

[57]See Chapter II above, pp.

[58]Reprinted in Poems, ed. Garrod, pp. 462-63. Henceforth, all references to the original preface to Endymion will be made within parenthesis in the thesis text itself simply by using the term, Poems, followed by the page number.

[59]Bate, p. 304.

[60]Ibid., pp. 366-74. These pages give a comprehensive account of the three famous attacks on Endymion which came during 1818.

[61]Works, I. 14.

[62]Bate, p. 306.

[63]See Chapter I, Note 2.

[64]Works, I. 45-46.

[65]Hardin, p. 174.

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