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ANTONIA M. MILLER
"CREATIONS AND DESTROYINGS":
THE SELF-GENESIS OF JOHN KEATS

by

Antonina M. Miller, B.A. (Hons.)

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

This thesis traces John Keats's attempt to establish his own poetic and philosophic voice—his identity—marked, on the one hand, by his need for Wordsworthian "felt-experience", and on the other, by his desire for a Hazlittian "disinterestedness" of the self.

Chapter One examines the Wordsworth/Keats relationship, outlining the "modern" critical theory discussed in Wordsworth's "Preface" and poetry, emphasizing the Imagination, the validation of self as poetic subject matter, and the artistic need for "felt-experience". Chapter Two is devoted to Keats, first looking at him as fledgling poet; second, examining Wordsworth's and Hazlitt's diametrically opposite influences concerning Keats's conception of his "poetical character itself" and the development of his theory of "Negative Capability"; and third, revealing that, notwithstanding the fact that Keats rarely achieves his poetic ideal of "Negative Capability", he becomes a greater, if not a Wordsworthian, "mighty Poet of the human Heart".
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Written in memory of Terrence Maxwell Pack (1954-1982)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ............................................. 111
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ................................... iv
INTRODUCTION ....................................... 1

CHAPTER ONE: WORDSWORTH AND THINKING "INTO THE
HUMAN HEART" ...................................... 13

PART ONE: WORDSWORTH AND KEATS: MEN OF
"HIGH-CALLING" .................................... 16

PART TWO: "THE CHILD IS FATHER OF THE MAN" ... 25

CHAPTER TWO: "THAT WHICH IS CREATIVE MUST
CREATE ITSELF" .................................... 51

PART ONE: "THE SOUL IS IN A FERMENT":
KEATS AS FLEDDLING POET ......................... 54

PART TWO: ATTEMPTING TO RECONCILE "GENIUS
AND THE HEART" .................................. 76

PART THREE: BECOMING "A MIGHTY POET OF
THE HUMAN HEART" ................................ 110

CONCLUSION ........................................ 131

BIBLIOGRAPHY .................................... 142
INTRODUCTION

John Keats was a second generation Romantic—hei to the philosophic and poetic concerns that were boldly set forth by such notables as Wordsworth and Coleridge. The main thrust of this work will be to examine the self-genesis of Keats emphasizing, first, how his spirit was deeply rooted in the Romantic Era and second, and most importantly, how quickly and brilliantly he evolved as man and poet. Needless to say, any definition of the "Romantic sensibility" will be arguable at best, not to mention the fact that the diversity of Romantic experience resists easy encapsulation. Nevertheless, let us pause for a moment to arrange, to a certain extent, the furniture of the times, concentrating on Neoclassicism and then moving on to Romanticism. For it is only after having done so that we can truly acquaint ourselves with the particulars of the Romantic cast of mind, and in turn, have a more intimate understanding of Keats's Romantic, yet unique and precious temperament, his achievements and significance.

Let us begin then, with Neoclassicism. Decorum and balance, restraint and conformity were the hallmarks not only of its very society but of the art it
produced. Its literature was predominantly urban and upper-class and the emphasis was upon form and fixed genres, with an intention to refine, while at the same time perpetuate the Classical. To be certain, what the Augustan desired in almost all things was centricism rather than radicalism, for there was a great mistrust of any overt display of emotionalism, stressing rather a subordination of the parts to the whole. Once the growing and darkening forces of the industrial expansion began to gather, however, not to mention the strong influence of the French Revolution and its passionate assertion for truth and liberty, Neoclassicism—"The Age of Reason"—began its decline, yielding to Romanticism.¹ And in the face of the new economic and political forces, the Romantic felt a need for a re-appraisal, a reordering of experience. Now what became central was not an insistence upon uniformity, but rather a quest for freedom, democracy, individualism and the pursuit of self-fulfillment. Indeed, the Popean maxim, "What ever is, is right", which had been the very touchstone of Neoclassicism, became meaningless for the Romantic. For the great tapestry of eternal verities—the harmonized whole

which the Augustans had taken for granted was unraveling before the Romantic's very eyes.

Thus, caught in a state of flux—unsure of his past and even more uncertain of his future, the Romantic needed to weave a new set of poetic values that would hold the heart's and the mind's loyalties. To do so, he moved in a different direction, away from the "generalities" and the "golden mean" of the Augustan period to that of which he could be certain; he moved inward—to find truth in the subjectivity of the self. Individual consciousness, the imagination, would become the starting point from which, in the words of Keats, "almost any Man may like the Spider spin from his own inwards his own airy Citadel..." 2 Harold Bloom states the case succinctly when he says

The world of actuality faced first by Blake, Coleridge, and Wordsworth, and by Shelley, Byron, and Keats after them, afforded no existing conceptions fully acceptable to the imagination, and presented a provocation for a heightening of consciousness so intense that a true awareness of reality inevitably sought for itself the identifying sanction of imagination. 3

Of all the Romantic poets Wordsworth is the measure here. With Coleridge's emotional and intellectual


support, it was the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* and Wordsworth's Preface in 1798, that marked the laying of the actual foundations of Romanticism. Wordsworth's ultimate thrust was to synthesize an intense, intimate expression of life by hooking his poetry into "modern" man's major concerns. In fact, in his youth, he wrote very much out of the political chaos that abounded. And even though, as he matured, he basically left his political extremism behind, he rarely strayed from his initial poetic intention of trying to create for himself and others a strong sense of meaning by simply, yet radically, for the times, affirming the existence of the individual, the "One". As well, what Wordsworth emphasized was that the Romantic, more than or differently from his Eighteenth Century predecessors, would now create out of his own centre of thoughts and feelings with the nexus of Romanticism being, "the doctrine of experience—the doctrine that the imaginative apprehension gained through immediate experience". Thus, if emotional and intellectual certitude were to grow at all, it would do so because it was now rooted in that which is "primary and certain". 4

Of course, by the time Keats was ready to fall into succession some twenty-odd years later, the political intensity had dissipated somewhat. For the above reason, 4

then, not to mention the fact that it did not appear to be essential to the Keatsian temperament as it was, say, to a Shelley, Keats never did go through a political period as did Wordsworth. Nevertheless, certain seeds had been planted and there remained for almost every poet of this second generation of Romantics the fervent desire to evaluate, interpret and affirm one's existence. Shelley, for instance, when not addressing the political situation proper, imaginatively attempted a symbolic rendering of reality—sometimes becoming lost in the rarified air of his abstractions. And Byron, never able to place his faith in the imagination as a way of apprehending truth, eventually adopted the position that if truth were to be found it would not be in the statement but rather in the process, in the active participation of one's life. Yet it was Keats, more than any other poet of this second phase of Romanticism, who chose to follow the trail initially blazed by Wordsworth—furthering the emphasis of the individual consciousness, the validation of the self and indeed, even, as Wordsworth would say, "the growth of the poet's mind" as subject matter.

This is not to suggest, however, that the Romantic sensibility blasted suddenly into being strictly as a reaction to that which preceded it. For the seeds of the affirmation of the individual consciousness were planted in the last half of the eighteenth century by such not-
ables as Adam Smith and his discussion concerning the sympathetic imagination, outlined in his work Theory of Moral Sentiments, (1759), William Duff and his Essay on Original Genius, (1767), and Nicolas Tetens and his Philosophische Versuche über die Menschliche Natur und ihre Entwicklung, (1776-1777). Tetens, in fact had a great influence not only upon Coleridge, but also upon Kant, for in the words of James Engells, "on the nature of the imagination, Kant stands largely on the shoulders of Tetens, who in turn is well informed about nearly all eighteenth-century views of the imagination as they had been formulated by 1775." And many more Augustans enjoyed a popularity with the Romantics:

Coleridge loved Akenside and would hardly revolt against or condemn men like Francis Hutcheson, Hugh Blair, or Archibald Alison. William Hazlitt thought Hobbes a great philosopher, and Hazlitt's second book was an abridgment of Abraham Tucker's Light of Nature Pursued (1768-1777). Wordsworth read widely in eighteenth-century aesthetics, psychology, and moral philosophy. Keats dedicated Endymion to the memory of Chatterton. The German Romantics often took issue with Kant but rarely, if ever, regarded him as a sworn enemy. Shaftesbury, Spinoza, and Leibniz were "discovered", debated, and revered.

One must not forget too the influence of such poets as Collins, Young, Gray, Akenhite, and Cowper.

In the main then, the Romantic Era was not a wholesale condemnation of Neoclassicism. It was

6 Engell, p. 5
rather, a protest against such things as Augustan reductionism, mechanism, and static laws, and man viewed solely as a thinking machine. Indeed, the concern was that because of Augustan attitudes in general the organic being had withered at the root. Augustan uniformity threatened to stifle creativity itself. The Romantics therefore stressed the need for organic growth, and applauded such qualities as diversity, originality, freedom, self-realization, and even eccentricity, sometimes pushed to madness. For the Romantic vitality became a key concept—an unfolding of life from within to without. And unlike the Augustans, the Romantics wanted to number the very streaks of Dr. Johnson's tulip—giving the reader its true scent and sense—for they felt that it was only through the particular that one could hope to feel a part of something larger and greater.

The Romantic attitude, in fact, puts us back at the beginning of experience. It returns us not to innocence and childhood, but to the conscious examination of what constitutes experience—the need to try to determine what man is. And it is phrases like Rousseau's "je suis unique" and Goethe's Faust's "Feeling is all" that echo the spirit of the age—its intensity.

and spontaneity. Allied to this too, in response to a repudiation of mechanism and materialism, and a feeling of nihilism, was a cultivation of solitude, a return to nature and a paradoxical rejection of human society. Vitality then, and the sense of growth—human life viewed as a process of development—a growing into and out of different states of being, this characterizes the Romanticism of a diversity of poets. Ideally there will be a constant sense of renewal, a passing from stage to superior stage.

Keats then, with Shelley and Byron, is the spearhead of the second phase of Romanticism. Old enough to be touched by their pioneering excitement and young enough to learn from their failed or triumphant expeditions, he captured the spirit of his era, synthesizing and refining both the theory and practice of the earlier Romantic poets. Nonetheless, his poetic expression did not come as easily as Keats would have hoped. Throughout his career he strove to articulate what he felt constituted excellence in art and then tried to meet those demands. Yet there were times when some things seemed impossible. Notwithstanding the fact that the post-Napoleonic disillusion left one with the sense that they had entered a new age, coupled with the Keatsian disadvantages of birth and education, perhaps one of Keats's greatest insurmountables was what Walter Jackson Bate refers to as the
paralyzing embarrassment, which accompanied the rise of romanticism, which intimidated the Victorian poet, and which was to threaten the vitality and range of poetry even more in the twentieth century. The embarrassment is that the rich accumulation of past poetry, as the eighteenth century had seen so realistically, can curse as well as bless. So, in a moment of despondency two years later, Keats was to tell his friend Richard Woodhouse that he felt "there was now nothing original to be written in poetry; that its riches were already exhausted,—& all its beauties forestalled."

When, however, Keats did not feel himself so much under the yoke of the poetic past he strove to have, as he said, his own "unfettered scope". And he demanded of himself, as he told his friend and publisher, John Taylor, "That if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all."—suggesting that the ideal mode of poetic expression should be (or at least seem to be) something that comes into being organically, with naturalness, ease and facility of expression. Yet paradoxically to achieve his "natural" poetic voice Keats had to consciously labour at developing his sensibilities, at the same time re-


9 Walter Jackson Bate's essay, "The English Poet and the Burden of the Past, 1660-1820", in *Aspects of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Earl R. Wasserman (New York, 1965), pp. 245-64, is an interesting discussion concerning the influence of the poetic legacy upon the Romantic poets. Bate concludes that a poet must acknowledge and honour his heritage yet at the same time attempt to move beyond his predecessors.

10 *Letters*, I, 238.
senting the manipulation and introspection necessary for the creation of the self, and subsequently, his art. And feeding directly into the matrix of his poetic concerns were two, at times, diametrically opposite influences—those of William Wordsworth and William Hazlitt. Thus to do justice to a study of Keats's "self-genesis", it will be necessary to examine the impact of these then still-living progenitors. This is less a question of details, of the many instances of parallel lines and poetic echoes between Wordsworth and Keats (although they will be mentioned when pertinent) than of philosophical and theoretical strands gleaned by Keats from and shared with these two fellow spirits.

The study of Keats' poetic evolution, then, will begin with a two part section on Wordsworth, the first and perhaps the most potent predecessor. Our primary concern will be to establish the personal and professional relationship between Wordsworth and Keats not only for the purpose of assessing their thoughts and feelings regarding one another as men and poets, but also to place them within the fabric of their times—giving us a sense of their position and purpose as Romantics. Therefore we will, at the same time, examine Wordsworth's concern for poetic form and presentation as outlined in his Preface to the Lyrical Ballads. And then, armed with his critical theory, we will devote the second section to a more detailed study of the
salient features of his poetry and philosophy. Central here is Wordsworth's overall concern with the imagination, the self as poetic subject matter, and his emphasis upon the individual's need to allow the polarities of experience to play their part as the shaping elements in what Keats so aptly calls, "the vale of Soul making". Imagination, self, the polarities of experience, augmented by Wordsworth's rigour about the principles of artistic creation will, as our examination progresses, be found to be fibres of the Keatsian sensibility.

The second chapter will be devoted to John Keats and divided into three stages. The first will concentrate on Keats's formative years—the earliest struggles to establish his poetic voice. Then, with the middle stage, and a certain emphasis on William Hazlitt and his critical insights regarding the creation of art, we will attempt to come to some understanding of what Keats felt the ultimate poetic expression should be. For it was Hazlitt’s reference to the need for a poet to have a certain "disinterestedness" of the self—to negate one's own ego—before he can truly succeed in capturing and radiating the "gusto" of his subject, that influenced (or perhaps affirmed) what Keats had come to understand about the "poetical character itself" and the need for "Negative Capability". And finally, turning our attention back to his poetry, and keeping in mind the demands Keats made of himself, we will continue to trace his
artistic and philosophic development with the intention of determining whether or not he was ever able to achieve his ideal.

In the main, what will eventually emerge is the dichotomy Keats faced in trying to achieve a balance between the need for Wordsworthian "felt-experience" and the desired Hazlittian "disinterestedness". And ultimately what Keats grew to know and understand is that "Life must be undergone", that one must experience the "Creations and destroyings" of the self, until one knows, to a certain extent, what it is one is. Perhaps only then can one hope to achieve the desired state of "Negative Capability".
CHAPTER ONE

Wordsworth and Thinking "Into the Human Heart"

The 1798 publication of William Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads and the subsequent 1800 edition, which included the famous Preface, mark the first full articulation in English of the voice of modern poetry. It is a poetry that is a product of a new cast of mind, one that reflects a distrust of modern civilization as it seems to be heading, and it strains to correct, as Wordsworth would say, what "man has made of man."¹ Now, for Wordsworth, and for those who would feel the need to follow, poetry must be hooked into the major concerns of life, not so much, if you will, into the whiteness, but rather into the howness—how one becomes what one does—and ultimately, how one comes of a philosophical mind.

Throughout Wordsworth's poetry and prose we witness a new-found celebration of the imagination—the affirmation of life itself, and the recognition of

¹ "Lines Written in Early Spring", 8. All quotations from Wordsworth's poetry and prose are taken from Wordsworth Poetical Works, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, r.g.v. Ernest de Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1978).
individual spiritual growth—the hope of "something ever more about to be". And it was for these very reasons that John Keats was drawn to Wordsworth's work. Not because it was a new way of thinking for him as man and poet, but perhaps especially because it affirmed what Keats had begun to know and feel for himself—great poetry should be spun from, and in turn, reveal the human fibres of experience.

On the face of it, the yoking together of Keats and Wordsworth might seem irrational save for their both being chronological "Romantics". And granted there are definite artistic and temperamental differences. One cannot imagine, for instance, Keats writing "Michael" or "She dwelt among the untrodden ways" for it seems he was neither interested in, nor capable of isolating the particular kind of tragedy and heroism and joy and beauty found in the Wordsworthian commonplace. Nor, for that matter, could one imagine Wordsworth writing a poem like "The Eve of St. Agnes": he was hardly noted for his affinity for the sensual. As well, a work like the frolicky "Cap and Bells" would be equally foreign to his nature, for one thing we most certainly never think of Wordsworth as having is a penchant for the burlesque. However, once we are comfortable with setting some of these differences aside, we will come to see that there is a meeting ground. It lies with such works as Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey", his
"Immortality Ode", and *The Prelude*, and Keats's *Sleep and Poetry*, "Ode to a Nightingale" and "The Fall of Hyperion", for it is here that we find that both poets are, at one and at once, as Keats said admiringly of Wordsworth, thinking "into the human heart".  

* * *

\[2\] Letters, I, 282.
PART ONE

WORDSWORTH AND KEATS: MEN OF "HIGH-CALLING"

From what we can gather it was Keats, himself, who was responsible for obtaining his first complete collection of Wordsworth in the fall of 1815. For even though Charles Cowden Clarke had introduced him to many of the worthies of the world of literature, it seems that Clarke, like most of the reading public of that time, was not familiar with Wordsworth. In fact, between the years 1807-15 Wordsworth's popularity was at its lowest ebb. It was not, really, until his subsequent friendship with Leigh Hunt that Keats received any real exposure to Wordsworth's poetry. Notwithstanding the fact that Hunt's admiration for Wordsworth tended to be somewhat unbridled, (his "Rimini", a study of sound and sensation and little sense what with its "gorgeous glooms" and "flowery walks", being a prime example) his enthusiasm was, nevertheless, quite infectious. Hunt's admiration alone for Wordsworth's Excursion and its


4 Gittings, p. 92
renewed vision of mythology undoubtedly became fuel for Keats's poetic sensibilities. And fortunately, Keats did not allow Hunt's relatively frivolous interpretation of Wordsworthian felt-experience to push him over the edge into sensory indulgence for good. For one of the Keatsian marvels, and at times his saving grace, was his ability to mine his diverse literary influences for only their sterling qualities, thus enabling him to develop his own true poetic voice.

Before long, then, Keats's circle of literary friends began to expand and it included such notables as Charles and Mary Lamb—friends of Wordsworth and also close friends of Samuel Taylor Coleridge—who, as we know, not only collaborated with Wordsworth on the Lyrical Ballads, but also was the recipient (as early as 1807) and admirer of Wordsworth's most notable work --The Prelude. There were too, friends, Benjamin Haydon, the painter, and Benjamin Bailey, who went on to take orders in the church. Like Hunt, Bailey had the greatest admiration for Wordsworth. And in his estimation not only did Wordsworth belong in the noted company of Plato and Aristotle, and Milton and Dante—but he also took special care to introduce their works, as well as Coleridge's, to Keats. In fact, in September of 1817 Keats visited Bailey at Oxford at a time when Keats's appreciation for all philosophical and poetic concerns continued to deepen.
It was, unquestionably, a productive period for the young poet—filled with important talk and the writing of the third book of *Endymion*. Yet amidst the sea of work and chatter were, it seems, islands of quietude devoted to the exploration of the Wordsworthian realm:

... during one week they [Bailey and Keats] relaxed and took a boat every day on the Isis. Skimming into beds of rushes, they became 'naturalized riverfolk', and there they would lie while they 'read Wordsworth and talked as may be'.

And in very short time Keats's enthusiasm for Wordsworth reached such proportions that it began to spill over into his letters. At one point he asked eagerly of his friend John Martin, of the Rice/Piccadilly social set, whether he had had the opportunity to meet "with the Cumberland Beggar or been wondering at the old Leech Gatherer?" Indeed, it was apparent that not only had the cast of Wordsworthian individuals made their mark, but also works such as the "Immortality Ode" were becoming very much a part of his centre of reference. As Bailey said of Keats and the Ode, "'He was never weary of repeating it'.

It was through his friendship with Haydon, however, that Keats had the good fortune to meet Wordsworth in

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6 Moorman, p. 315.
person. The actual date is not available but we pre-
sume it was either just before the "Immortal Dinner" or
on the eventful evening itself. Haydon's was a valu-
able connection, for as his autobiography and journals
attest, he enjoyed much more than a nodding acquain-
tance with Wordsworth. As early as 1815 he was record-
ing his praises for the Lake Poet:

Never did any man so beguile the time as Words-
worth. His purity of heart, his kindess, his
soundness of principle, his information, his
knowledge, and the intense and eager feelings with
which he pours forth all he knows affect, interest
and enchant one. I do not know anyone I would be
so inclined to worship as a purified being.\(^7\)

Undoubtedly, Haydon had had the opportunity to learn
and appreciate, to a certain extent, Wordsworth's phil-
osophy and poetics. In one excerpt from his diary he
refers to an evening he and a friend spent with Words-
worth during which "he shook us both in explaining the
principles of his system, his views of man, and his
object in writing."\(^8\) Haydon's relationship with Words-
worth developed, it seems, during the time Haydon
worked on a life mask of Wordsworth which was used as a
model for his appearance in Haydon's painting "Christ's
Entry Into Jerusalem". And interestingly enough the
final product found Wordsworth not only in the company

\(^7\) The Autobiography and Memoirs of Benjamin Robert
Haydon, ed. Tom Taylor (London, 1926); I, 209-10.
Hereafter cited as Haydon, I or II.

\(^8\) Haydon, I, 209.
of such luminaries as Voltaire and Newton, but also in that of young Keats.

In turn, it seems that from the beginning Haydon was taken with the genius of Keats. And the well-known histrionics and constant requests for Keats's financial assistance aside, Haydon's artistic and somewhat megalomaniacal spirit did have a positive influence upon him, the least of which was his insistence that Keats try to write a long poem, for this was, according to Keats, "a [true] test of my invention". 9

Even very early on in Keats's career Haydon knew that this fledgling poet stood apart—and in good company. "Keats was the only man I ever met with," said Haydon, "who seemed and looked conscious of a high calling," except Wordsworth. 10 Perhaps what spurred Haydon to say this was the realization that the similarities between Wordsworth and Keats ran deeper than just the sense that they were both of a "high calling", that it was more than the fact that the times in which a man lives are a part of the man himself. Indeed, Haydon was so supportive of Keats's efforts that he made sure Wordsworth received a copy of Keats's sonnet devoted to the great spirits of his age—Hunt, Haydon and Wordsworth—the very thought of which, said Keats,

9 Letters, I, 169.

10 Haydon, I, 253.
"put me out of breath." Enclosed too must have been some sort of background regarding Keats and his potential, for Wordsworth wrote in return:

Your account of Young Keats interests me not a little; and the sonnet appears to be of good promise, of course neither you nor I being so highly complimented in the composition can be deemed judges altogether impartial—but it is assuredly vigorously conceived and well expressed . . . .

It was, then, almost a year after Wordsworth received Keats's sonnet that the two actually met for the first time. Much has been written about the "Immortal Dinner" and also the tone of Wordsworth's reaction to Keats's reading of his "Hymn to Pan". Therefore, we will not spend a great deal of time trying to add to this scholarship. Suffice it to say that one questions Haydon's interpretation of the events, and his insistence that Wordsworth's comment "a Very pretty pie of Paganism" was intended to be a direct slight against Keats's poetic efforts. Haydon goes on to say that Keats, in fact, never recovered from this scene and that even though he had the opportunity to sit at the same table again with Wordsworth his feelings for him

11 Letters, I, 118.


13 For more details see Gittings, p. 251, or Bate, pp. 265-68.
had become somewhat blunted. Keats, however, makes no mention of the incident in any of his letters. Granted, had he been hurt to the quick, the affair would not have been something he would anxiously repeat to others. Nevertheless, the matter was probably not as traumatic as Haydon, or even Severn, the painter, insisted. Gittings rightly suggests that the whole incident seems to have been viewed by Keats with some amusement, given the tone of the letter he wrote to Clarke regarding the dinner itself. The fact was, too, that at this particular stage of Wordsworth's life he was known more for his irascibility than his diplomacy. As a result, his moodiness and his somewhat solipsistic existence at times made for poor company.

In any case, it seems that this did not prevent Keats from accepting an invitation from Wordsworth a week or so later:

On January 5th Wordsworth asked Keats to dinner. There he met Mary and another lady to whom he was evidently imperfectly introduced, for he speaks of her first doubtfully as 'I think, his daughter', and then 'his enchanting sister'. It was, of course, really Sara Hutchinson; neither Dorothy nor Dora was in London. There also Keats would have heard Wordsworth delivering his opinions about poetry on his own ground—a different world, somewhat, from Haydon's studio with its festive glamour and sparkling exchanges of wit. Those opinions were frequently expressed with a severity which many people found displeasing. He was apt also to talk about his own poetry and poetic theories in a manner which it would be unjust to call conceited—for it arose from his intense absorption in his poetic vocation—but which often made an unfavourable impression on his audience. 14

14 Moorman, p. 318.
Yet despite this Keats was usually able to divine the good and the true in the Lake Poet. For even though he mused after a Wordsworth visit to London that the poet, to all intents and purposes, had "returned to his Shell --with his beautiful Wife and his enchanting Sister"\textsuperscript{15} --on the face of it Keats could still say "I am sorry that Wordsworth has left a bad impression wherever he visited in Town--by his egotism, Vanity and bigotry--yet he is a great Poet if not a Philosopher."\textsuperscript{16}

Indeed, the dimensions of Wordsworth's world were shrinking. And it was not a case of Wordsworth being the last to know. More than a hint of this self-knowledge surfaces in the "Essay Supplement" to the Preface of his 1815 edition, for as he states, "as the mind grows serious from the weight of life, the range of its passions is contracted' and 'its sympathies' become exclusive."\textsuperscript{17} And it had even been suggested by such notables as Hazlitt and Byron, among others, that Wordsworth was, in fact, somewhat of a vendu--because his later works tend to spin out of his need to rebuild his Christian foundations--the very thing that he, in his youth, found hollow and meaningless--and it was all at the cost of breaking new ground.

\textsuperscript{15} Letters, I, 251
\textsuperscript{16} Letters, I, 237.
Nevertheless, Wordsworth was not averse to reading and admiring others' attempts to broaden the horizon, for even though Keats's 1817 collection sat relatively untouched on Wordsworth's bookshelf, Keats was still very much of interest to him.18 Several years after their first meeting Wordsworth wrote to Haydon—"How is Keates, he is a youth of promise too great for the sorry company he keeps."19 And even after Keats's death, as we shall see in the conclusion to our discussion as a whole, the bond between Wordsworth and Keats was still very much in evidence.

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18 It was sent by Keats himself and bore the inscription "To W. Wordsworth with the Author's sincere Reverence", Gittings, p. 250.

19 de Selincourt, II 578.
PART TWO

"THE CHILD IS FATHER OF THE MAN"

Moodiness and "egotistical sublime" aside, then, for Keats, Wordsworth's inherent value always shone through. And the reasons were, of course, much more complex than merely that Keats admired Wordsworth's conscious and courageous attempt to break new philosophical and poetical ground. On the largest scale Keats admired Wordsworth because he was not "closely wed to musty laws lined out with wretched rule: And compass vile ...."21. Nor was Wordsworth one of the "thousand handicraftmen who wore the mask of Poesy"22 exhibiting "the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers".23 Granted there were times when he could be at his worst, smug and pretentious about his art, particularly in reference to others' attempts. There is, for example, the following comments he made regarding the quality of Gray's

20 Letters, I, 387.


22 "Sleep and Poetry", 200.

poetry:

Gray failed as a Poet, not because he took much pains, and so extinguished his animation; but because he had little of that fiery quality to begin with; and his pains were of the wrong sort. He wrote English Verses, as he and other Eton school-Boys wrote Latin; filching a phrase now from one author, and now from another. I do not profess to be a person of very various reading; nevertheless if I were to pluck out of Grays tail all the feathers which, I know, belong to other Birds he would be left very bare indeed. Had this statement been made by anyone other than a Wordsworth we might not take it as seriously. We know, however, that it was made by one who at least acknowledged that he himself "may have sometimes" lighted "upon unworthy subjects" but it was always in the interest of creating and charting a new poetic territory. And he did not do so, if you will, on borrowed wings. Hence, when Keats was feeling particularly unsure about his own capabilities he felt not unlike he was playing the "sick eagle" to the soaring figure of the Wordsworthian "great spirit". And he consciously chose to emulate this "spirit" not only because it was fresh, modern and meaningful, but also because it ultimately affirmed the direction that he too eventually believed he must follow—the path of self-discovery.

To fully appreciate the Wordsworthian and in turn, the Keatsian sensibility, let us turn our attention now

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24 de Selincourt, II, 301.
26 "On Seeing The Elgin Marbles", 5.
to Wordsworth's work as a whole. We will begin our examination with Wordsworth's re-definition of the role of poet, and the desired purpose and nature of poetry. We will look, too, at Wordsworth's self-generation and thus come to some understanding of how and why the soul and the imagination of the poet are but one and the same. And finally we shall answer the important question: to what end and value does it all lead?

With the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* it was Wordsworth's intention that "a class of Poetry would be produced well adapted to interest mankind permanently". And in spite of the fact that his attempt to do so was somewhat of an "experiment", he knew too that it was, in his own way, a step towards restoring meaning and unity to the individual. He felt that there was a desperate need for poetry to be more honest, more particular and more personal. As he says in *The Prelude*, it was his intention to "speak bare truth/ As if to thee alone in private talk", and at the same time emphasize our singularity:

Points have we all of us within our souls Where all stand single: this I feel, and make Breathings for incommunicable powers (III, 185-87)

27 Preface, p. 734.
28 Preface, p. 734.
A poet, says Wordsworth, is but "a man speaking to men"\textsuperscript{30}. Granted, he possesses "more than usual organic sensibility"\textsuperscript{31} and a "greater readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels"\textsuperscript{32}. Yet, in having been given this heightened awareness, and ability to think "long and deeply"\textsuperscript{33} he is all the more in a position to trace "the primary laws of our nature"\textsuperscript{34}—to "keep us in the company of flesh and blood"\textsuperscript{35}. To do so, as Wordsworth once told a young writer, the poet must trust his own intuitions. "You feel strongly . . . trust to those feelings and your poem will take its shape and proportions as a tree does from the vital principle that actuates it"\textsuperscript{36}.

Now, poetry—to be worthy of the name—must spin out of the "continued influxes of feeling which are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings"\textsuperscript{37}. And unlike the "smooth, inlay, and clip, and fit"\textsuperscript{38} approach:

\textsuperscript{30} Preface, p. 737.
\textsuperscript{31} Preface, p. 735.
\textsuperscript{32} Preface, p. 737.
\textsuperscript{33} Preface, p. 735.
\textsuperscript{34} Preface, p. 734.
\textsuperscript{35} Preface, p. 736.
\textsuperscript{36} Perkins, p. 62.
\textsuperscript{37} Preface, p. 735.
\textsuperscript{38} "Sleep and Poetry", 107.
to writing verse—wherein the occasion, shape and form might give rise to any feeling therein—it is Wordsworth's insistence that "the feeling" must give "importance to the action and the situation". Ideally, then, good poetry, according to Wordsworth, comes of an intense consciousness and, in turn, a sincere record of man's physical and psychological encounters with reality. And having stated as much, it then became his somewhat awesome task to create accordingly. In so doing, he must have asked himself, as others have, where does one begin to bind "together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society"?

Thus, in his attempt to grapple with this demand, Wordsworth started with an assessment of the condition of mankind. It was his belief that the fine point of man's spirit had been blunted not only because of increasing historical and political complexities of the times, but also just because of the simple fact that man had become a creature of the city. And man, according to Wordsworth, separated from Nature, was separated from himself. Such knowledge became the catalyst for the Wordsworthian "quest for permanence". He began first by turning his attention to "Humble and rustic life . . . because, in that condition, the essential

39 Preface, p. 735.

40 Preface, p. 738.
passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity.\textsuperscript{41} And, with his poetry he invested the natural world about him with a newfound joy and sense of expectation--stressing that even the smallest bit of life is the embodiment of wonder and importance. As he says: "To me the meanest flower that blows can give/ Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.\textsuperscript{42} His is none other than the celebration of life itself--a life for life's sake attitude:

\textquote{\textit{Tis Nature's law}
That none, the meanest of created things,
Of forms created the most vile and brute,
The dullest or most noxious, should exist
Divorced from good--a spirit and pulse of good,
A life and soul, to every mode of being
Inseparably linked.\textsuperscript{43}\}

And above all else, he offers that long sought after hope and sense of purpose about one's existence:

\textquote{Our destiny, our being's heart and home,
Is with infinitude, and only there;
With hope it is, hope that can never die,
Effort, and expectation, and desire,
And something evermore about to be.\textsuperscript{44}\}

With his poetry, then, Wordsworth tried to weave some sort of a centre of reference, a touchstone of realities, constants and expectations. And even though he may, at times, have placed undue emphasis on some things, he did so with the thought of rendering his

\textsuperscript{41} Preface, p. 734.
\textsuperscript{42} "Immortality Ode", XI, 206-07.
\textsuperscript{43} "The Old Cumberland Beggar", 73-79.
\textsuperscript{44} The Prelude, VI, 604-08.
subject fresh and new. As a result, because some of his topics were "experiments", we have at one end of the scale a work such as "Peter Bell" which does not achieve the respect and credibility Wordsworth desired. In fact, when it was published it received a barrage of criticism from all sides. John Hamilton Reynolds, who through Haydon, became a very close friend of Keats, wrote a skit on Peter Bell that even today has the reputation of being "one of the greatest parodies of all times." And anyone who has taken the time to read the poem cannot help but agree that it is full of flaws. But the problem doesn't really lie with the subject matter, for Wordsworth tried to present a sincere picture of a rustic who, in experiencing life's traumas, grows to recognize and value his own existence and the life about him:

And now is Peter taught to feel  
That man's heart is a holy thing;  
And Nature, through a world of death,  
Breathes into him a second breath,  
More searching than the breath of spring.

The fault is found more in the shape and form of the work. The allegro cadence, rather than acting as a support for the intended seriousness of the subject--provides more the music for a send-up. Thus, Peter Bell comes across, at his worst, as a caricature--with

45 Gittings, p. 142.

46 "Peter Bell", 1071-75.
clenched fists and set jaw ready to take life, if you will, on the chin.

'There was a hardness in his cheek,
There was a hardness in his eye,
As if the man had fixed his face.
In many a solitary place,
Against the wind and open sky!' (316-20)

Yet at the other end of the scale we have a noble work like "Michael"—and when read in its entirety one can see that it is a fine example of a poet who not only understands the mood of dignified tragedy very well but is also able to replicate it.

However, what is often left unsaid in reviewing works like "Peter Bell" and "Michael" is that they are but a part of a meaningful whole—a part of Wordsworth's sincere attempt to reveal "the essential passions of the heart". This sympathetic side of Wordsworth's nature, especially in relation to others' thoughts and feelings is one that is rarely given the proper attention it deserves. We tend to remember Wordsworth more for giving us the history of his own mind, and justifiably so; for this is where his strength ultimately lies. But rather than acknowledging that some of Wordsworth's experiments were indeed, just that, our purpose is to try to come to some understanding of why it is so. Wordsworth understood what was required of him in order to bring things to life, and only too well. As he says in the Preface, at times,
it will be the wish of the Poet to bring his feelings near to those of the persons whose feelings he describes, nay, for short spaces of time perhaps, to let himself slip into an entire delusion, and even confound and identify his own feelings with theirs; modifying only the language which is thus suggested to him by a consideration that he describes for a particular purpose, that of giving pleasure.  

He knew what was desirable, yet rarely was he able "to slip into an entire delusion" in order to make the reader see and feel the "inscape" of his subject. Because of this then, we find that Wordsworth is not always adept at crystallizing the essence of his subject, whether it be an animate or inanimate object. This is not to say that there are not times when he succeeds in capturing, as Hazlitt would say, the "gusto" of the subject. There is for instance, the following excerpt from "Resolution and Independence"—revealing the artist in Wordsworth at his best:

All things that love the sun are out of doors;  
The sky rejoices in the morning's birth;  
The grass is bright with rain-drops;—on the moors  
The hare is running races in her mirth;  
And with her feet she from the plashy earth  
Raises a mist; that, glittering in the sun,  
Runs with her all the way, wherever she doth run.  

(II, 8-14)

What is of note is the precision, and the dual visual and onomatopoeic effect of the "plashy earth"—we can see and hear the earth rise in a muddy mist as the hare bounds across the "moors". However, instances such as the above aside, generally speaking, Wordsworth's is

47 Preface, p. 737.
not the talent of a Coleridge whose gift is a verbal vitality that animates almost every bit of light and shade, and sense and shape. Nor is he a Keats whose art often rises up to the heights of synesthesia.

Yet after stating the case as such, we should in turn, stop and ask ourselves whether or not we have the right to fault Wordsworth for sometimes "telling" rather than "showing" us people and things. It may be that it was a demand that he never would have been able to meet simply because it wasn't in him. (Oh! That we could all be but half a Shakespeare.) Or perhaps, just as we will come to realize of Keats, he found that giving himself over entirely to his subject without settling some of the "uncertainties" and "doubts" about the essentials of his own existence, made the negation of his own ego a fleeting talent at best.

It certainly wasn't a question of his not being able to recognize the power and the energy of the external world. For even as a youth, as he says in

The Prelude:

. . . everywhere a vital pulse was felt,
And all the several frames of things, like stars,
Through every magnitude distinguishable,
Shone mutually indebted, or half lost
Each in the other's blaze, a galaxy
Of life and glory. (VIII, 480-85)

And yet, as time passed, the ability to "slip into an entire delusion" seemed to become less of a Wordsworthian

48 Letters, I, 193.
concern, and it was soon superceded by the need to find answers to:

... those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings;
Blank misgivings of a Creature
Moving about in worlds not realized.

In fact, it could be said that, on the whole Wordsworth is most successful when the external world serves as a backdrop for the re-creation of a "spot of time", bringing to life one or more frames of experience—his experience. Even then, the rendering of the subject tends to be more a cataloguing of particulars, a layering of detail, and all with the purpose of evoking a special mood. The following passage from "Nutting" is a fine example of this talent. It is a marvelous re-creation of a fairyland-like nook that Wordsworth regularly visited as a child.

... O'er pathless rocks,
Through beds of matted fern, and tangled thickets,
Forcing my way, I came to one dear nook
Unvisited, where not a broken bough
Drooped with its withered leaves, ungracious sign
Of devastation; but the hazels rose
Tall and erect, with tempting clusters hung,
A virgin scene!—A little while I stood,
Breathing with such suppression of the heart
As joy delights in; and with wise restraint
Voluptuous, fearless of a rival, eyed
The banquet;—or beneath the trees I sate
Among the flowers, and with the flowers I played;
A temper known to those who, after long
And weary expectation, have been blest
With sudden happiness beyond all hope.
Perhaps it was a bower beneath whose leaves
The violets of five seasons re-appear

49 "Immortality Ode", IX, 145-49.
And fade, unseen by any human eye;
Where fairy water-breaks do murmur on
For ever; and I saw the sparkling foam,
And—with my cheek on one of those green stones
That, fleeced with moss, under the shady trees,
Lay round me, scattered like a flock of sheep—
I heard the murmur and the murmuring sound,
In that sweet mood when pleasure loves to pay
Tribute to ease; and, of its joy secure,
The heart luxuriates with indifferent things,
Wasting its kindliness on stocks and stones,
And on the vacant air. (14-43)

Notice the sureness of hand as he sketches in the
"rocks", "beds of matted fern", "leaves", "flowers",
and "trees". What is of interest too is the calling on
of almost all our senses to experience the placing of
"the cheek on one of those green stones/That, [is].
fleeced with moss . . . ." It is a private and almost
sacred ritual that is accompanied by the magical and
animistic "murmuring sounds" of Nature herself.

What is apparent then, in reviewing some of Wordsworth's earliest works, from the Peter Bells to the
Nuttings, is that, all in all, his poetic strength is
best rooted in personal experience. And it is only
when he abandons his cast of individuals; and turns his
full attention to the exploration of his own world that
he truly comes into his own poetic voice. His longer
autobiographical works such as the "Immortality Ode",
"Tintern Abbey" and The Prelude form the foundation,
the molding together for himself and others all the
knowledge that he has gathered. With these poems
Wordsworth exhibits all the requisites of a good poet
—possessor of a vital and sincere soul, revealer of
general truths, and master of the craft of poetry. For Wordsworth they represent too, a form of stock-taking—an illustration of the creative mind at work, revealing whence it springs and how it works. And most importantly, they represent the epitome of human reality—with thoughts and feelings being translated into a kind of doctrine about who and what we are.

In taking a closer look at his autobiographical works we can see that for Wordsworth life itself is viewed as a creative process, a continual sense of becoming—a moving into and out of different states of being, with each one adding the necessary layers of experience to render one an individual. He begins his self-definition then, by isolating three main stages of growth—and the shaping forces of the imagination to be found therein. First, he reaches back into childhood, not for sheer nostalgia’s sake, but rather for interpretations—to re-evaluate life’s primordial experiences—because they were first, he realizes how important they are. Childhood represents "the simplest dawn of the affections and faculties" and marks too, the beginning of the filial bond between the external world and the poet. Thus, during this time, the initial powers that formed and molded him were those of Nature herself.

50 de Selincourt, I, 334.
The river "Derwent" and the "grassy holms" nursed him as a "babe in arms". It was a thoughtless time, given over almost exclusively to sensation and "glad animal movements". "I held unconscious intercourse", said Wordsworth,

...with beauty
Old as creation, drinking in a pure
Organic pleasure from the silver wreaths
Of curling mist, or from the level plain
Of waters coloured by impending clouds.

And as he passed into the second phase, that of youthhood, he felt Nature more keenly, and the world about him was perceived as having a life of its own. It was sharp, vital and sensitive, and his own affectations began, at times, to consciously respond to and record this energy. It was a "time" of simple "rapture" punctuated by simple ideas.

To every natural form, rock, fruit, or flower, Even the loose stones that cover the highway, I gave a moral life: I saw them feel, Or linked them to some feeling: the great mass Lay bedded in a quickening soul, and all That I beheld respired with inward meaning.

Much too, entered his soul unawares in a kind of "wise passiveness" to be "Felt in the blood, and felt

51 The Prelude, I, 275-76.
52 "Tintern Abbey", 74.
53 The Prelude, I, 562-66.
54 The Prelude, I, 430.
55 The Prelude, III, 127-32.
56 "Expostulation and Reply", 24.
along the heart"\textsuperscript{57}--to become a vital part of the multitude of "passions that build up our human soul"\textsuperscript{58}. Nature gradually interfused herself with his being more and more, and he rejoiced in its splendour and, in turn, in the love of mankind--a harmonious and sacramental state that eventually realizes the poet "A sensitive being, a creative soul."\textsuperscript{59}

As he continues his journey of self-discovery into manhood we learn that he was shaped too, by the polarities of experience; "the turns and counterturns, the strife/ And various trials of his complex being"\textsuperscript{60} worked him to and fro "like a sea"\textsuperscript{61}--"hope and joy"\textsuperscript{62} were counter-pointed by "incumbrances"\textsuperscript{63} and "fear"\textsuperscript{64}. And yet, as Wordsworth comes to realize, the value of this experience was something that could only be brought into focus with a backward glance. With maturity comes the ability to quantify and qualify life's events. This is because, as he tells us, a child feels

\textsuperscript{57} *Tintern Abbey*, 28.
\textsuperscript{58} *The Prelude*, I, 407.
\textsuperscript{59} *The Prélude*, XII, 207.
\textsuperscript{60} *The Prélude*, XII, 148-9.
\textsuperscript{61} *The Prelude*, I, 475.
\textsuperscript{62} *The Prelude*, XI, 105.
\textsuperscript{63} *The Prelude*, XIII, 34.
\textsuperscript{64} *The Prelude*, I, 302.
before he thinks; and it is only when one grows older that he acquires the cognitive powers to allow for the formulation and analysis of complex ideas. And the point that Wordsworth makes perfectly and eloquently clear with his autobiographical works, particularly with The Prelude, and that he fails to make with "Peter Bell", is that one usually recognizes the positive value of the polarities of experience only after suffering an intense personal crisis—thus forcing one into introspection. As he says:

How strange that all
The terrors, pains, and early miseries,
Regrets, vexations, lassitudes interfused
Within my mind, should e'er have borne a part,
And that a needful part, in making up
The calm existence that is mine when I
Am worthy of myself.'

So it was then, with Wordsworth. For as he tells us in Books XII through XIV of The Prelude, the catalyst for his self-definition was the impairment of his creative abilities, brought on by his earlier attempts to find an intellectual explanation to justify man's existence. Thus, to understand the dynamics of Wordsworth's "Imagination and Taste, How Impaired and Restored" is to truly understand how one eventually comes of a philosophical and poetic mind. Therefore, let us take a few moments to review this important incident.


66 Other than the need to review his own mind in order to understand how far nature had taken him for the preparation of his great philosophical poem.
in Wordsworth's life.

According to Wordsworth, as a youth he became very much caught up with the spirit of the French Revolution. He felt, just as others, that the "multitudes" could unite and form "One spirit over ignorance and vice". And his aspirations were further fuelled by the publication, in 1793, of Godwin's tract entitled, Political Justice. Its appeal for Wordsworth seemed to be in the fact that man was thought to be perfectable, that there was no such thing as original sin, but merely error of judgement. Shortly, however, the veneer of the perfect world Wordsworth had envisioned began to crack. Much to his horror the striving for democracy led to mass murders and England soon found herself at war with France. As a result, Wordsworth's confidence began to waver. The Revolution's ideals of freedom and justice proved to be meaningless, and he also came to realize that Godwin offered him even less hope. Godwin's approach to life was flawed for it separated the emotional from the rational, and this was antithetical to Wordsworth's nature, for he felt that the imagination would always reign superior to pure reason. Indeed, there were times when he felt nothing but disdain for the "meddling intellect" as he said, it often "murder[s] to dissect." Thus, in a state of utter

67 The Prelude, VIII, 655, 668.
68 "The Tables Turned", 26, 28.
confusion he "Yielded up moral questions in despair" and in so doing, his imagination went into an eclipse--for the very lifeline of his sensibilities, the spontaneity of his expression, became dulled in the confusion of his moral judgement.

His recovery, as he tells us, although not rapid, was forthcoming due first to his friendship with his sister, and his, then, close friend, Coleridge. But ultimately what allowed for the mending of his spirit was the renewing of the bond between the poet and Nature. He called upon the very "breezes and soft airs" to, once again, voice their inspiration. And gradually through love, and the administration of Nature he was able to come to terms with "the turns and counterturns" of his existence. He found too, and most importantly, that he could rely on an inner strength, a part of him that was seeded at so early an age that it was virtually indestructible--his "substantial centre." As the vital union of thoughts and feelings begins to resurface and coalesce, the mind's autonomy is reasserted as well. In Wordsworth's words:

I had known
Too forcibly, too early in my life,
Visitings of imaginative power
For this to last: I shook the habit off

69 The Prelude, XI, 305.
70 The Prelude, XII, 9.
71 The Prelude, VIII, 431.
Entirely and for ever, and again
In Nature's presence stood, as now I stand,
A sensitive being, a creative soul (XII, 201-07)

Ideally, Wordsworth's "creative soul" must be able to recall "the visible scene" that "Would enter unawares into his mind." Experience after experience is deposited in the vast storehouse of memory, and the inability to recall and transform these imbibed sensations with "a certain colouring of imagination" marks a spiritual death for Wordsworth. But now with his imagination on the rise again he reveals to us the nexus of his creativity.

There are in our existence spots of time,
That with distinct pre-eminence retain
A renovating virtue, whence, depressed
By false opinion and contentious thought,
Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight,
in trivial occupations, and the round
Of ordinary intercourse, our minds
Are nourished and invisibly repaired;
A virtue, by which pleasure is enhanced,
That penetrates, enables us to mount,
When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen.
This efficacious spirit chiefly lurks
Among those passages of life that give
Profoundest knowledge to what point, and how,
The mind is lord and master--outward sense
The obedient servant of her will. Such moments
Are scattered everywhere, taking their date
From our first childhood. (XII, 208-25)

The "spots of time" are collected in "wise passiveness"
--indelibly imprinted on the mind, becoming "life and food/ For future years." And whether these "spots"

72 The Prelude, V, 384-85
73 Preface, p. 734.
74 "Tintern Abbey", 64-65.
be as vivid and bright as a particularly lovely day spent by "Derwent", or flash before him an instant, like the first time he strapped on a pair of skates and became one with Nature as he "cut across the reflex of a star"\textsuperscript{75}, or merely moments—undefinable, unexpected, collected—they are all an integral part of the sacred interchange between the poet and the external world. The return of these "Gleams like the flashing of a shield"\textsuperscript{75}, and the ability to experience this epiphany are the very things that make Wordsworth feel "nourished and invisibly repaired". His power returns and with it his life takes a new and deeper meaning.

With a backward and knowing glance, Wordsworth realizes that growth could only have come through the administration of adversity and endurance. He had to travel "with difficult steps . . . Against the blowing wind", and when he found himself looking "all round for my lost guide"\textsuperscript{77}, he was to find guidance from within:

So feeling comes in aid
Of feeling, and diversity of strength
Attends us, if but once we have been strong.
Oh! mystery of man, from what a depth!
Proceed thy honours. I am lost, but see
In simple childhood something of the base
On which thy greatness stands; but this I feel,
That from thyself it comes, that thou must give;
Else never canst receive. \hspace{1em} (XII, 269-77)

\textsuperscript{75} \textit{The Prelude}, I, 450.
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{The Prelude}, I, 586.
\textsuperscript{77} \textit{The Prelude}, I, 586.
It was, then, Wordsworth's acutely sensitive relationship with Nature that established his "base", and the strength that returned welled up from this "substantial centre". The patterning of his complex emotional growth that he spins for us is not unlike the creation of a vast tapestry, with the careful blending and harmonizing of thread, colour and texture, each strand being a vital part of the whole. This is what Wordsworth means when he states that "feeling comes in aid/ Of feeling"—one sense experience leads to another, each giving the other more depth and meaning, nourishing and sustaining him emotionally, and in turn, creatively.

Wordsworth, with newfound confidence, returns his attention to the constant in his life—Nature. The earlier polarities of experience, "beauty and fear", that fostered him as a child are now joined by "peace and excitation". Once again, "feeling comes in aid/ Of feeling", and with its realization, the rebirth of his poetic "Genius".

From Nature doth emotion come, and moods
Of calmness equally are Nature's gift:
This is her glory; these two attributes
Are sister horns that constitute her strength.
Hence Genius, born to thrive by interchange
Of peace and excitation, finds in her
His best and purest friend . . . (XIII, 1-7)

As Wordsworth continues to expand, he speaks of inspiration. Imagination, he comes to realize, is best fostered by Nature, by "objects that endure" and he vows to rebuild his hopes for mankind upon a sounder founda-
tion, seeking "present good in life's familiar face". 78

With the last book of The Prelude, Wordsworth relives for us what is, perhaps, his most momentous "spot of time"—the objective correlative of the working mind. Here, upon the sighting of Mount Snowdon, the poet's imagination fuses with the underlying harmony of Nature to reveal the vision "Of a majestic intellect":

There I beheld the emblem of a mind
That feeds upon infinity, that broods
Over the dark abyss, intent to hear
Its voices issuing forth to silent light
In one continuous stream; a mind sustained
By recognitions of transcendent power,
In sense conducting to ideal form,
In soul of more than mortal privilege.
One function, above all, of such a mind
Mid Nature shadowed there, by putting forth,
"Mid circumstances awful and sublime,
That mutual domination which she loves
To exert upon the face of outward things,
So moulded, joined, abstracted; so endowed
With interchangeable supremacy,
That men, least sensitive, see, hear, perceive,
And cannot choose but feel. (XIV, 57, 70-86)

Now the poet is at the height of his powers. His sensations, thoughts and recollections, which take their rise from a state of tranquility, conceive a concrete immediacy—a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings". We not only "hear", but "see", "perceive, /
And cannot choose but feel" the intensity of his subject—the very essence of "feeling intellect".

78 The Prelude, XIII, 32, 62.
All in all, Wordsworth's initial gesture of tracing the fibres of his self-genesis—particularly in the case of *The Prelude*—was intended to be a preparatory exercise for his great philosophical poem, "The Recluse". And yet, by the year 1807, which we can say effectively marks the end of Wordsworth's truly creative period, "The Recluse" was unfinished and destined thus to remain.

By this time Wordsworth had already written most of his autobiographical works, including "Tintern Abbey", "Immortality Ode", and most notably, five books of *The Prelude*. The import of these works must have been as apparent to him as they now are to us, because he devoted the rest of his life to expanding *The Prelude*—continuing to weave the warp and weft of his life's experience. And it is, as we have come to understand with our examination of Wordsworth's work, only through the active engagement and examination of the very process of life itself that one can hope to achieve some sense of permanence amid the transitory.

Thus, if, according to Wordsworth, it is the poet's intention to give his reader the special gift of the "breath and finer spirit of all knowledge" then he must not do so with "A history... of departed things,/ Or a mere fiction of what never was" , but take perhaps

79 Preface, p. 738.
80 "The Recluse", 50-51.
his direction from the following advice Wordsworth
gave to R.P. Gilles regarding the poet's ever present
challenge to find the perfect expression:

we should be cautious not to waste our lives
in dreams of imaginary excellence, for a thousand
reasons, and not the least for this, that these
notions of excellence may perhaps be erroneous,
and that our inability to catch a phantom of no
value may prevent us from attempting to seize a
precious substance within our reach.81

The "precious substance within our reach" is none other
than the mind and "the very heart of man"82. And in
Wordsworth's attempt to "paint what then I was", his
poetry became the "most philosophic of all writings",
for we "cannot choose but feel" his affirmation and
celebration of life. As he says:

Prophets of Nature, we to them will speak
A lasting inspiration, sanctified
By reason, blest by faith: what we have loved,
Others will love, and we will teach them how;
Instruct them how the mind of man becomes
A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
On which he dwells . . .

(XIV, 444-50)

David Perkins states the case succinctly when he says
that "The sincerity of another man increases our own."83

So it will become too for Keats, for he grows to
see the importance of the Wordsworthian continual need
to search for growth and the widening of one's sympathies.

For Wordsworth, and those who choose to follow, if truth

81 de Selincourt, II, 179.
82 The Prelude, XIII, 241.
83 Perkins, p. 269.
is to be found it will be found not in the statement, but rather in the process. Faith and strength come only of exploring the different rooms of the "mansion" of the "mind" and each step forward, each glimpse through the "magic casements" becomes a part of "the regular stepping of the Imagination towards a Truth." To realize the value therein is to recognize the shaping forces of the imagination and of the "philosophic mind". Thus, as Wordsworth says, at the height of his creativity:

Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind;
In the primal sympathy
Which having been must ever be;
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering;
In the faith that looks through death
In years that bring the philosophic mind.

To conclude, then, we have reviewed Wordsworth's prose and poetry with the purpose of establishing the common strands that link this first generation Romantic. Wordsworth, to the second generation, John Keats. In so doing, we have come to some understanding of what means to write "poetry of experience". And once we

84 "Tintern Abbey", 140, 139.
85 "Ode to a Nightingale", 69.
86 Letters, I, 218.
87 "Immortality Ode", 181-90.
88 To echo the title of Robert Langbaum's work.
turn our attention to Keats's work as a whole, we will see that what was one's concern was, indeed, very often the other's.
CHAPTER TWO

"THAT WHICH IS CREATIVE MUST CREATE ITSELF"

Now that we have come to some understanding of what it means to be of Romantic sensibility and, in turn, have examined the Wordsworthian realm of creativity, we are in a position to give our full attention to John Keats and his world of poetics. Keats was, perhaps more so than most, as Cowden Clarke once said of him—"a poet 'born, not manufactured'". And upon examining even the earliest of his works, it is quite obvious that Keats was, indeed, blessed with the gift of poesy. He too must have realized this because after having devoted some five years to the study of medicine he gave himself over entirely to the urge to refine his poetic expression. That he was able to create and continued creating in the face of what seems to have been a relentless visitation of personal tragedy, and that he moved from "apprentice" to "poet" in an astonishingly short period of time is a tribute at once to the gift and to the tenacity of the gift's owner. But what continues to draw readers back to his

work, perhaps above and beyond all else, is the privilege of witnessing the marvelous process of his development—the acquiring of an identity as man and poet—which can be traced throughout his prose and poetry.

What will be of interest in this chapter then, is how Keats's work is not unlike a vast manifesto dedicated to the whole business of what it means to be a poet, and ultimately how one earns that title. And even though he did not write as tangible a document as Wordsworth's "Preface", we can, through an examination of his prose and poetry, compile a most comprehensive understanding of his thoughts and feelings regarding poetic theory and aesthetics, and the inextricable link found between the development of the poetic and the philosophic mind.

Both Wordsworth and Keats were extremely conscious of their poetic intentions, of their identities as men and poets, and the direction and devotion necessary to give their readers a glimpse, as Keats would say, through the "magic casements." Therefore, with the study that follows, what we will witness is Keats's unending desire to define the power of poetry, to determine its relevance in an increasingly scientific world wherein the only thing of certainty, for many, seemed to be the transience of life itself. We will see too, that his self-genesis is, in fact, very much akin to the Wordsworthian "growth of the poet's mind"—the
moving into and out of different states of existence and with each step becoming a reconstituted state of being—adding to the "substantial centre" that defines him as man and poet—and ultimately hoping to become richer in thought and expression.

We will begin our examination, first, with an assessment of Keats as fledgling poet—looking at the fingerprints of the precision to come. Then, after having gained some sense of the potential powers of his poetic expression, with our second section we will go on to compile a necessary frame of reference regarding his poetic theory. What we will focus on, in fact, is Keats's development of the concept of "Negative Capability" and all that it entails—from the desired poetic stance of the poet, to the very nature of the poetry itself. And finally, after having determined what Keats felt constitutes excellence in art, we will pick up where we left off, devoting our third section to the tracing of the various strands of his poetry and prose with the purpose of trying to determine whether or not Keats was ever able to achieve his ideal.
PART ONE

"THE SOUL IS IN A FERMENT": KEATS AS FLEDDLING POET

Early accounts of Keats's life suggest that his poetic identity—his strong centre of reference—began to take shape during his last year or so at Enfield school and shortly thereafter. It was undoubtedly a painful and lonely time. For by the year 1810, Keats was to find himself orphaned and left with the knowledge that, at the tender age of fourteen, he was emotionally, if not monetarily responsible for his younger sister and brothers. The details of the various financial fiascos that ensued—leaving Keats and his family needlessly and forever wanting—are numerous. Suffice it to say that a lesser being would have crumbled under such adversity. And needless to say there must have been moments when Keats felt that this would be the case. A fellow classmate, Edward Holmes, paints a pathetic picture of the orphaned Keats at this critical time in his life.

When his mother died—which was suddenly—he gave way to such impassioned and prolonged grief—(hiding himself in a nook under the master's desk) as awakened the liveliest pity and sympathy in all who saw him.
Yet, as the portrait continues, some of the tenacity, the energy and the "generosity" of character that we have come to associate with Keats appears to have been a part of the young poet from the very beginning:

He was in every thing the creature of passion--....The point to be chiefly insisted on is that he was (not) Literary--(his love of books & poetry manifested itself chiefly about a year before he left school.) in all active exercises--he excelled. The generosity & daring of his character--with the extreme beauty & animation of his face made I remember an impression on me--& being some years his junior I was obliged to woo his friendship--in which I succeeded but not till I had fought several battles. This violence & vehemence--this pugnacity and generosity of disposition--in passions of tears, or outrageous fits of laughter always in extremes will help to paint Keats in his boyhood. Associated as they were with an extraordinary beauty of person & expression--these qualities captivated the boys, and no one was ever more popular. 2

Given the facts, one could say that this sudden "literary" interest was due in part, to his mother's death--the whole idea of wanting to lose oneself in something larger--with the hope of forgetting his own unhappy existence--marking perhaps Keats's first real need and desire for "Negative Capability." And this very well may have been the case. But as Walter Jackson Bate rightly suggests, one cannot overlook the knowledge that we are dealing with a very empathetic and inquisitive being--one who naturally gravitated towards things outside himself just for the sheer pleasure of...

doing so. It seems, in fact, that the case of Keats throwing himself whole-heartedly into his studies at this time was more an intensification of devotion that had begun a year earlier—the strongest evidence being his winning several prizes for his literary endeavours.\(^3\) The headmaster John Clarke's and his son Cowden's protectiveiveness of the orphaned Keats may well have had as much to do with the sheer virility of the boy's spirit as with their compassion for the loss of his parents. In fact, it was the younger Clarke who indulged Keats's love of literature and in so doing Cowden was rewarded with the delight and sense of wonder Keats gleaned from each new work that came his way.

During this period of his life it was that his love of poetry first developed itself—at least, to me. He commonly walked over to Enfield once a week to borrow my books, and to talk about what he had read. He devoured rather than read; and at this time he translated and copied an immense quantity. So little idea at that time had I of his real love of poetry, that I imputed to a boyish ambition his asking the loan of the Faery Queen: but I soon found how that gorgeous world of ideality had called into being his own world of imagination. He ramped through the scenes of that, (not-of-this-earth)—that purely poetical romance, like a young horse turned into a Spring meadow.\(^4\)

This sense of freedom and discovery, and perhaps the somewhat cathartic pleasure that came of copying and translating "immense" quantities, represent the first formative steps of Keats's poetic sensibility. What is

\(^3\) Bate, pp. 26-27.

\(^4\) Keats Circle, II, 148-49.
of note here too is how Clarke's words bring to mind one of the Wordsworthian stages of growth—for we find Keats experiencing the "glad animal movements" of youth—as "young horse" revelling in words and sensations for their own sake—not merely reading, but "devouring" each new experience as it came his way. Indeed, it was a time for him consciously and subconsciously to add to the vast repository of experience out of which he would eventually write.

His absolute devotion to the world of literature was short-lived, however, for Keats was forced to leave Enfield at the age of fifteen and at his guardian's suggestion he spent the next five years of his life studying to be a surgeon and apothecary. Given the fact that this time represents one fifth of Keats's total life span we have very little information about the day to day existence of this new stage—save for what a few classmates had to say in retrospect, some thirty years after Keats's death. Nevertheless, what has come down to us about this budding poet and his venture into the medical world is that even though he more than capably completed the rigorous studies at hand, throughout it all the poet in him was ever present. Fellow students recall that the usual state of affairs was that

In any room where Keats Happened to be, he tended to sit at the window, looking out, "so that the
Classes were attended, notes taken, but as Keats once told Clarke, more often than not his heart and mind were rarely where they should have been:

"The other day, for instance, during the lecture, there came a sunbeam into the room, and with it a whole troop of creatures floating in the ray; and I was off with them to Oberon and fairyland."  

And as we quickly scan the first twenty or so years of his life many other examples—the most obvious of which was his giving up his medical career for poetry, suggest the poet inherent in Keats. To be sure, he exhibited as Wordsworth would say, "more than the usual organic sensibility." For like Wordsworth, Keats had a definite, if not more finely-focused eye for the particular.

His keen innate ability to capture the essence of his object is very much evident in his correspondence and his day to day existence and, as we shall see, carries over naturally into his poetry. Unquestionably, he had an extraordinary feeling for sensuousness, and his friend Severn often marvelled at the delight and empathy the young Keats held for nature. It was as if Keats felt the very life of things flow through and about him. According to Severn, during the writing of

5 Bate, p. 49.
6 Clarke, p. 132.
the second book of *Endymion* the two friends spent many a summer's day walking on Hampstead Heath. Keats would wait with great anticipation for the sound of "the tide coming across the woodlands." He loved what he referred to as "the inland sea"—

"The tide! the tide! he would cry delightedly, and spring on to some stile, or upon the low bough of a wayside tree, and watch the passage of the wind upon the meadow-grasses or young corn, not stirring till the flow of the air was all around him."

Indeed

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

And Keats himself often attested to the fact that his sympathetic imagination was open even to the smallest bit of life, for as he said: "if a Sparrow come before my Window I take part in its existance and pick about the Gravel."  

We can see too, in his earliest poetry, even in the most juvenile of his musings how—when the literary apparatus is too apparent, and there is evidence

7 Bate, p. 255.  
8 Letters, I, 186.
of forced rhyme. With the poet trying, trying to express himself—his poetic creations can be saved just by the utterance of a few words. For instance, in "Woman! when I behold thee flippant, vain", we are immediately aware of the painfully contrived rhymes:

Who can forget her half-retiring sweets? God! she is like a milk-white lamb that bleats (30-31)

and yet the poem is memorable because of the last three words:

Had I e'er seen her from an arbour take
A dewy flower, oft would that hand appear,
And o'er my eyes the trembling moisture shake. (40-42)

We can see in "trembling moisture shake" that the sensuousness is there from the beginning of Keats's poetic attempts. And very soon it is coupled with the great attention he gives to detail, as in one of his pastoral musings, "I stood tip-toe upon a little hill". Within the first few lines we are treated to a mode of expression that is quintessentially Keatsian—"there crept a little noiseless noise among the leaves". This oxymoron suggests an echo of a feeling—already with Keats's inimitable hallmark on it. As the poem progresses it is true that one somewhat tires of the proliferation of adjectives (particularly the feminine endings that were so favoured by his friend Leigh Hunt) but once again we delight in the poet's receptiveness

9 l. 11, my underlining.
to beauty and detail as he ponder's

...the soft rustle of a maiden's gown
Fanning away the dandelion's down;
Than the light music of her nimble toes
Patting against the sorrel as she goes

(95-98)

As we trace the first few steps of this fledgling poet, what is apparent too, is that on the whole, he is working his way along instinctively—always refining, continuing to create better—attempting to attain the ideal sensation and expression. Granted, the growth of his imagination was, in part, a deliberate bookish nurturing, channeled by the likes of Clarke, Hunt, Haydon, and Bailey and guided by such greats as Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, Dryden and of course, Wordsworth. But above and beyond that, Keats's creativity seemed to spin out of a deeply rooted sense of just knowing what was fitting.

And for a while, Keats seemed content to submerge himself totally in the sensuous world of his imagination. It was, on the whole, a "thoughtless" time, given over to the love and manipulation of sensations and imagery for their own sake. In fact, one could even say that in his naiveté it seemed as if he hoped to stumble upon a magic elixir in his garden of "Flora and old Pan" that would render him "poet." And with this instant title would come instant knowledge—stuff out of which he could continue to spin his poetic musings. Indeed throughout his early work we witness, again and again, his strong desire to retreat from the
world—yoked paradoxically to a burning need to know all there is to know about life and living. How marvelous it would be, as he says in "Sleep and Poetry," if he "...might know/ All that he writes with such a hurrying glow!" (153-54)

The poet's potion, however, was not to be found in his imaginary garden and Keats soon grew tired of what he referred to as "descriptions." Dandelions and maiden's gowns could only take one so far and then what? In his attempt to be "poet" he had even dutifully donned the cloak of the nature poet that Wordsworth wore so well, and in so doing, he too took his turn praising nature as a source of poetic inspiration. In true Wordsworthian fashion, he asks: "For what has made the sage or poet write/ But the fair paradise of Nature's light?" But somehow the words do not ring clear and true. And it is not because Keats failed to recognize the beauty and power of the natural world, for his poems more than suggest otherwise. Even some years later when he takes his walking tour of the Lake District and Scotland his ability to "live in the eye" was still very central to his being. Notice the particularization in the following passage taken from a letter written to his brother Tom in which he describes, with

10 Bate, p. 124.
11 "I stood tiptoe upon a little hill", 125-26.
great delight, "the Ambleside waterfall" and its surround-
ing.

...the waterfall itself, which I came suddenly upon, gave me a pleasant twinge. First we stood a little below the head about half way down the first fall, buried deep in trees,...--at the same time we saw that the water was divided by a sort of cataract island on whose other side burst out a glorious stream--then the thunder and the freshness. At the same time the different falls have as different characters; the first darting down the slate-rock like an arrow; the second spreading out like a fan--the third dashed into a mist--and the one on the other side of the rock a sort of mixture of all these. We afterwards moved away a space, and saw nearly the whole more mild, streaming silvery through the trees. What aston-
ishes me more than any thing is the tone, the coloring, the slate, the stone, the moss, the rock-weed; or, if I may so say, the intellect, the countenance of such places....I shall learn poetry here and shall henceforth write more than ever, for the abstract endeavor of being able to add a mite to that mass of beauty which is harvested from these grand materials, by the finest spirits, and put into ethereal existence for the relish of one's fellows.  

No, the problem was not that he failed to recognize the particulars of the natural world for their own sake. But rather it was that in trying on the nature poet's garb he did not truly feel, as Wordsworth did, the sacred and ennobling interchange between poet and na-
ture. There was the awful sense that he had merely been playing a part--trying on the robes and the in-
famous "laurel wreath"--and somewhat embarrassed that

12 Letters, I, 300-01.

13 See 'Gittings,' p. 178, for an interesting account of Keats's laurel wreath antics with Hunt during one of their many evenings together given over to their writing and admiration of poetry.
he had been caught doing so.

In fact, one could even say that as he matured, nature came to strike Keats as the Tennysonian "Nature, red in tooth and claw." For as Keats once said of himself, there were times when he "saw/ Too far into the sea"\textsuperscript{14} of reality—too far away from the feast of imaginary sensations and pleasures of his self-wrought garden. And as time went on he came to realize that his "Life of Sensations"\textsuperscript{15} did little to shield him from the "eternal fierce destruction"\textsuperscript{16} he felt about him—the "destruction" that as man and poet he must eventually address.

He was beginning too, to reach the stage wherein he felt he had spent enough time "cowering under the Wings of great Poets".\textsuperscript{17} Yet there still remained the nagging question of what to write about—the burning need to find subjects and, ultimately, how to capture the essence of his age and translate it into food and thought for his fellow man. He did not really want to believe that "... there was now nothing original to be written in poetry; that its riches were already exhausted,--& all its beauties forestalled--".\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{14} Letters, I, 261.
\textsuperscript{15} Letters, I, 185.
\textsuperscript{16} Letters, I, 262.
\textsuperscript{17} Letters, I, 239.
\textsuperscript{18} Letters, I, 380.
Nor could he, at least for the moment, see any redeeming features in the "egotistical sublime" of Wordsworth. For this side of Wordsworth's new poetic territory all seemed so very solipsistic, even pretentious, and definitely far removed from the universalities that all good writers should touch upon. As Keats stated:

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 a 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--19

Of course, at this point in his development Keats was unable to discern the true value of the "egotistical sublime"--that it represents a necessary part of the process--of the "Creations and destroyings"20 that he was undergoing and would continue to undergo. He was still very much removed from the realization that the validation of the self must, to a certain extent, come before the validation of the poet--otherwise, how else can one speak to and for the complexities of modern man's existence? It all has to come of "felt" experience, "proved upon our pulses"21. Things have to be.

19 Letters, I, 233.

20 Hyperion, III, 116.

21 Letters, I, 279.
explored, quantified, qualified, rejected and embraced. And then after the "One" as Coleridge would say, has tentatively established his own territory, then he may speak to and for the "Many".

Nevertheless, it must be stated that even as a young task-conscious poet, Keats realized the implications of being too introspective—too subjective, and he strove to attain a "disinterestedness" in the hopes that his own personality would not colour his subjects. Perhaps he knew too, albeit maybe subconsciously, that the ultimate danger in choosing to write strictly about one's own thoughts, feelings and impressions is that the resulting poetry, rather than helping others to overcome their own feelings of isolation and singularity, may simply reinforce them.

This is not to say, however, that Keats even when his protestations were at their loudest, was engaged in an outright condemnation of Wordsworth's subjectivity. As Bailey once said of the seeming love/hate relationship between this father and son of Romanticism, although Keats was still unsure of his own poetic territory, he rarely fell short in his ability to divine the value and good inherent in Wordsworth—aside from this one question of subjectivity. His admiration of Wordsworth's work ranged from the "simplicity" and "perfect pathos" of the Lucy poems to the "The Excursion" and
the "noble Tintern Abbey." As well,

... Wordsworth's ode on Immortality was deeply felt by Keats, who however at this time seemed to me to value this great Poet rather in particular passages than in the full length portrait, as it were, of the great imaginative & philosophic Christian Poet, which he really is, & which Keats obviously, not long afterwards, felt him to be.

And as Keats own small collection of poems began to gather, the value of "the philosophic Christian poet" and all its implications, whether Keats fully realized it or not, was gradually beginning to seep into his poetic consciousness.

'Even at this moment, when we find Keats railing against Wordsworth, one could say that Wordsworth's poetry if nothing else, may have suggested to Keats the possibility that he had been trying to write out of a largely uncreated consciousness, that there were many uncharted regions of "The Youth's soul" that . . . . "daily farther from the east/ Must travel" before he can, if ever, call himself a poet.

During the fall and winter of 1816, only a year or so after Keats had written his first poem, his thoughts regarding the poet's role, the creative imagination and the power of poetry began to coalesce. The result was the writing of his "Sleep and Poetry" with which he

22 *Keats Circle*, II, 276.
23 *Keats Circle*, II, 274.
24 "Immortality Ode", 71-72.
mapped out his strong sense of aversions and preferences in poetry. Although still unsure of what direction and form his own poetic expressions should take, he was above all else committed to establishing a Keatsian poetic voice—to have his own "unfettered scope". He knew too, that this could not be accomplished by clinging to the old or for that matter the newer "decrepit standard." For some, in their short-sightedness had allowed the art of poetry to become debased, treating it merely as a craft, the result being inspirational exhaustion. If nothing else, Keats knew he wanted to be a part of a "fairer season"(221). To do so would require, according to Keats, at least

... ten years, that I may overwhelm
Myself in poesy; so I may do the deed
That my own soul has to itself decreed.
Then will I pass the countries that I see
In long perspective, and continually
Taste their pure fountains. First the realm I'll pass
Of Flora, and old Pan: (96-102)

And then he must "bid these joys farewell"(122) and move on to find, as Wordsworth would say, "the soothing thoughts that spring/ Out of human suffering:"

Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life,
Where I find the agonies, the strife
Of human hearts." (123-25)

Thus, what is apparent in Keats's writing of

26 "Sleep and Poetry", 204.
"Sleep and Poetry" is his acknowledgement, however perfunctory, of the need for the "Gradual ripening of the intellectual powers"—the turning of his attention to "those obstinate questionings/Of sense and outward things"—and all with the hope of building a strong centre of reference. And what is of interest here too, besides this affirmation of process, is the following Wordworthian echo, which bears an uncanny resemblance to a sentiment expressed in The Prelude. As Keats brings his "Sleep and Poetry" to a close he admits that, for the moment, he lacks the necessary knowledge to become a good poet, yet he finds recompense in the potential that he has shown—in the Wordworthian "something ever more about to be." As Keats says:

... though I do not know
The shiftings of the mighty winds that blow
... -yet there ever rolls
A vast idea before me, and I glean
Therefrom my liberty ... (285-86)

(290-92)

With this poem, what we are witnessing, in fact, is the tentative shaping of Keats's poetic spirit—yet it is merely the shadow of the poet to come. For although Keats's "Sleep and Poetry" makes definitive statements about the role of poet and his work, on the whole there is the sense too that Keats says what he does, to a certain extent, because he thinks it must be

27 Letters, I, 214.
28 "Immortality Ode", 145-46.
said. But he has yet to reach the stage wherein he truly knows and feels that it is so. This comes later.

From "Sleep and Poetry" Keats takes another step forward in his attempt to refine his expression. His next project represents a true "test of Invention" the long poem of *Endymion*. And interestingly enough, even though "Sleep and Poetry" refers to the poet's need to travel the dark passages of human experience, with *Endymion* we find that Keats is still very much in his garden of "Flora and old Pan." Nevertheless, embedded in the lushness of the Elizabethan language and the diffuseness of the narrative, we can detect several new strands of Keats's poetic consciousness taking shape. As before, he continues his examination of the role of poetry and his own ambitions, and it is all very much entwined with his ongoing interest in love, nature and mythology. Yet underpinning it all is a new, albeit somewhat clumsy, attempt to question what constitutes the beautiful, and to articulate the dichotomy between the actual and the ideal—dream and reality.

What *Endymion* illustrates as well, is Keats's acceptance, like that of the "first" generation of Romantics (Coleridge in particular in *Biographia Literaria*) of the belief that there exist ideal states which

29 *Letters*, I, 170.
transcend human experience. Thus, the conviction is 
that it is the poet's role, if not responsibility, to 
aid man to come to some awareness of the ideals—to 
help bridge the gulf between the actual and the ideal. 
To state as much marks a turning point in Keats's 
development. For even though his poetic theory is still 
in its infancy, he has made the important link between 
the imagination and aesthetics.

As *Endymion* opens it is clear that the poet has a 
specific notion of what constitutes the beautiful—that 
it is the forms of beauty which save life for us, "They 
always must be with us, or we die." And according to 
Keats the nature of ideal beauty revolves around two 
essential characteristics, that of immutability and 
eternality. Therefore, once this beauty is captured in 
a particular object, it can be grafted on to time to 
bring joy and inspiration to those who come in contact 
with it:

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:  
Its loveliness increases; it will never 
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep 
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep 
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing. 
Therefore, on every morrow, are we wreathing 
A flowery band to bind us to the earth, 
Spite of despondence, of the inhuman hearth 
Of noble natures, of the gloomy days, 
Of all the unhealthy and o'er-darkened ways' 
Made for our searching: "yes, in spite of all, 
Some shape of beauty moves away the pall 
From our dark spirits." (I, I-13)

Keats, in fact, expands this Neo-Platonic notion some 
time later in "Ode on a Grecian Urn." In 1819 however,
he has yet to truly grasp the import of the relationship between the mortality of man and the immortality of beauty.

For now his attention is focused on the contemplation of beauty and how that contemplative act is not unlike the exercising, the ultimate enlarging of one's mind. According to Keats, the imagination could be instrumental in bringing man to some awareness of the ideal. But it is a gradual process—a successive one—not unlike climbing the rungs of a ladder. And at the very top lies love—not of the earth, but rather of the spirit—ideal love, which consists largely of experiencing beauty and truth. In describing how the imagination can lead man to the highest of pleasures Keats writes the following:

Wherein lies happiness? In that which becks
Our ready minds to fellowship divine,
A fellowship with essence; till we shine,
Full alchemized, and free of space. Behold
The clear religion of heaven! (I, 777-81)

It is of these very lines he was speaking when he wrote to his publisher John Taylor:

. . . I assure you that when I wrote it, it was a regular stepping of the Imagination towards a Truth. My having written that Passage will perhaps be of the greatest service to me of any thing I ever did . . . even like a kind of Pleasure Thermometer—and is my first Step towards the chief Attempt in the Drama—the playing of different Natures with Joy and Sorrow. 30

What is of note here is Keats's growing awareness of the Wordsworthian polarities of experience—the "Joy" and "Sorrow" that play a necessary part "in the Drama" of the shaping of the philosophic and the poetic spirit. What it reveals as well is that he realizes more and more that it all involves a "regular stepping of the imagination towards a Truth."

As the poet continues, he emphasizes the shaping powers of the poetic imagination and its ability to translate the ordinary into extraordinary and memorable experiences for mankind. And with the continual widening of one's sympathies he envisions the transcendence of our mortal state to be not unlike the following:

Feel we these things?--that moment have we stepped
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-top,
There hangs by unseen film, an oxbod drop
Of light, and that is love: (I, 795-807)

The role of poetry then, according to Keats, is to reveal some sense of this Love, some sense of man's oneness with the universal trinity of ideals—Love, Truth and Beauty—which permeate and transcend the seeming insularity of one's existence.

Yet perhaps what is even more important than Keats's recognition of the role of poetry is the underlying know-
ledge of the role of poet vis-à-vis his own self-
genesis. As he states in the third book of Endymion,
to succeed, to be thought of as an accomplished poet,
is possible firstly and only

If he utterly
Scans all the depths of magic, and expounds
The meanings of all motions, shapes and sounds;
If he explores all forms and substances
Straight homeward to their symbol-essences;
He shall not die. (III, 696-701)

But secondly and most important is the message inherent
in the previously quoted words—"more self-destroying"
for they represent the first hint of what Keats comes
to define as "Negative Capability". It is the dawning
of the knowledge that one needs to be "selfless" in
order to eventually realize one's full potential as man
and poet—to be able to "step into" that "sort of one-
ness."

Nonetheless, after having stated as much, Keats is
faced with the problem of not having, as of yet, an
identity to call his own:

What is this soul then? Whence
Came it? It does not seem my own, and I
Have no self-passion or identity. (IV, 475-77)

In fact, Keats compared the whole of the writing
of Endymion to being in a state not unlike that of sus-
pended animation—a purgatorial being-waiting for the
gestation of his conscious soul. As he states in the
Preface to Endymion,

The imagination of a boy is healthy, and mature
imagination of a man is healthy; but there is a
space of life between, in which the soul is in a
the potentials of a "sympathetic imagination", a "given" that this fledgling poet most assuredly possessed.

At the same time, however, Hazlitt's Essay provided no solutions to help solve the poetic contraries that were almost always present for Keats—of the need on the one hand for a "disinterested" poetic stance—to be able to give oneself over entirely to one's subject, and on the other—of being unsure of what even constitutes the self. And yet to solve the latter would require a conscious self-generation in which Keats felt he either could not, or should not play a part. He liked to believe, rather, in an openness of mind coupled with a heightened sensibility—a certain Wordsworthian "wise passiveness"—that would allow for the gradual growth of one's imagination and identity, and all relatively free from self-consciousness. In fact, he had little patience with his friend Dilke who

... was a Man who cannot feel he has a personal identity unless he has made up his Mind about everything. The only means of strengthening one's intellect is to make up one's mind about nothing—to let the mind be a thoroughfare for all thoughts. Not a select party. The genus is not scarce in population. All the stubborn arguers you meet with are of the same brood—they never begin upon a subject they have not preresolved on. They want to hammer their nail into you and if you turn the point, still they think you wrong. Dilke will never come at a truth as long as he lives; because he is always trying at it.39

As far as Keats was concerned, one could say that

39 *Letters*, II, 213.
PART TWO
ATTEMPTING TO RECONCILE "GENIUS AND THE HEART"

During the final stages of the writing of Endymion many things regarding the poet and his art began to "devour"32 in Keats's mind, not the least of which was the realization that scanning "all the depths" with the greatest assiduity was but a part of the whole. But what the writing of Endymion further emphasized for him was that, in addition to this need for a knowledge of meanings, the ideal poetic synthesis must bring together, as well, an empathetic response, Imagination, Beauty and Truth—and all under the aegis of his wanting artistic independence. Yet at the very heart of it there existed too an unspoken requirement that was gradually beginning to make itself known more and more—the need to negate one's own ego—to allow one's art to have a life of its own, without reflecting any hint of its creator.

I mean [said Keats] 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.

32 Letters, I, 193.
This pursued through Volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all considerations.\footnote{Letters, I, 193-94.}

Exactly when this notion of "Negative Capability" pushed itself to the forefront of his mind one cannot say. Nor was he the first, nor the last to make this distinction. As we witnessed earlier Wordsworth, for one, understood the importance of being able to "slip into an entire delusion" in order to allow one's subject to fulfil its organic nature—to allow it to have substance, feeling and definition. And Keats must have read what Wordsworth had to say on this subject in his "Preface". Nonetheless, we do know that besides any Wordsworthian influence, not to mention his continued exposure to classical thinkers and their thoughts regarding the principles of art, Keats's eventual formulation of the concept of "Negative Capability" was more than encouraged by the critical thought of another of his contemporaries, William Hazlitt.

Whether Hazlitt's opinions merely reinforced what Keats himself had come to believe about the nature of the artist and his art, or indeed, actually served as a catalyst—sparking off connections in the "ferment" of this young poet's soul—the power of Hazlitt's influence cannot be overlooked. His early philosophic Essay on the Principles of Human Action, his later judgement of...
the genius of Shakespeare and view of Wordsworth as "egoist" fed directly into the Keatsian poetic consciousness.

It was, in fact, Leigh Hunt who first introduced Keats to Hazlitt during the winter of 1816-17. And the next two years or so saw Hazlitt come very much into his own, with the publication of his Round Table essays and his popular lectures devoted to the "English Poets"--the majority of which Keats attended.

Hazlitt was not, however, a critic without defects. To be sure, his downfall was that he tended to write more from the heart than from the mind--marking him, as his noted biographer Herschel Baker says, as one of "the most uneven of our major critics". Nor was such unevenness, as we shall see, foreign to young Keats. Yet above and beyond all that, Hazlitt's strength was rooted in the very fact that if a particular subject did infect him with passion, he was more than capable of crystallizing many fine insights that are as fresh and piquant today as they were in his time. To read Hazlitt at his best is to "catch the passions living as they rise". And it was this Hazlittian passion or


"demon" that so inspired Keats. Keats valued not only Hazlitt's critical judgements regarding the relationship of poetry and art to life, but also the very manner in which Hazlitt chose to express them. In fact we can often feel and hear the presence of Hazlitt in Keats's correspondence. And even when Keats was given the opportunity to fill in for Reynolds as arts' critic, he consciously patterned not only his prose style but also his choice of subject matter—the brilliance of the actor Edmund Kean—after that of Hazlitt. Indeed, Keats's admiration for Hazlitt reached such heights that he counted him with Wordsworth and Haydon among those he considered to be the top three luminaries of his day. As Keats once commented to Haydon, "I am convinced that there are three things to rejoice at in this Age—The Excursion, Your Pictures, and Hazlitt's depth of Taste." 37

Yet it seems that Keats's relationship with Hazlitt began with the work, not the man. Keats had had some exposure to Hazlitt through Clarke, but it was Bailey who provided the most valuable and fruitful introduction during Keats's visit with him at Oxford in the fall of 1817, during which time Keats worked on the final books of Endymion. Bailey, who at the time was

36 Letters, II, 76.
37 Letters, I, 203.
reading for the Church, naturally gravitated towards the philosophic thought of Hazlitt's Essay on the Principles of Human Action. For what Hazlitt was attempting to address with this, his first book, was the problem of human "identity". Like many others in the half century or so before him, and Adam Smith in particular, Hazlitt was determined to refute the Hobbesian contention that all human action springs out of self-love. What he attempted to show, rather, was that man possesses a sympathetic imagination, that he instinctively identifies with objects outside himself forming, as Hazlitt's subtitle suggests, "a natural disinterestedness of the mind." Hazlitt's thoughts, of course, would appeal to Bailey for they reinforce the Christian notion of love and selflessness—ultimately asserting that there is no mechanical determinism, such as Hobbes and his followers assumed, toward self-love. The disinterestedness exists as far as the potential development of the mind is concerned. Knowledge can direct and habituate the imagination to ideas other than that of our own identity.38

In turn, we can understand how Hazlitt's Essay would have had a powerful influence on young Keats who was in the throes of trying to forge for himself a philosophy to justify his own existence as man and poet. Undoubtedly, upon reading the work, Keats must have been encouraged to learn of Hazlitt's ideas regarding

38 See Bate, pp. 255-59 for an informative discussion on Hazlitt's Essay.
the potentials of a "sympathetic imagination", a "given" that this fledgling poet most assuredly possessed.

At the same time, however, Hazlitt's Essay provided no solutions to help solve the poetic contraries that were almost always present for Keats--of the need on the one hand for a "disinterested" poetic stance--to be able to give oneself over entirely to one's subject, and on the other--of being unsure of what even constitutes the self. And yet to solve the latter would require a conscious self-genesis in which Keats felt he either could not, or should not play a part. He liked to believe, rather, in an openness of mind coupled with a heightened sensibility--a certain Wordsworthian "wise passiveness"--that would allow for the gradual growth of one's imagination and identity, and all relatively free from self-consciousness. In fact, he had little patience with his friend Dilke who

... 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 one's mind about nothing--to let the mind be a thoroughfare for all thoughts. Not a select party. The genus is not scarce in population. All the stubborn arguers you meet with are of the same brood--They never begin upon a subject they have not preresolved on. They want to hammer their nail into you and if you turn the point, still they think you wrong. Dilke will never come at a truth as long as he lives; because he is always trying at it.39

As far as Keats was concerned, one could say that

39 Letters, II, 213.
Dilke's "trying at it" was not unlike continually tearing up a young seedling in order to inspect its roots for growth, whereas Keats saw more value in allowing for the organic realization of self. Yet to state as much did little to help answer the question of how one goes about negating the self for one's art, particularly when the self is still very much in the process of becoming.

And when we turn to Keats' correspondence we can see, in fact, just how much he was affected by the Hazlittian view of "identity". We first find him toying with the idea of "disinterestedness" in a letter written to the Reynolds girls. Then, about a month later, in a letter to Bailey, he somewhat hesitantly begins to formulate his ideas regarding the link between "Genius" and "disinterestedness", and at the same time tentatively shapes his philosophic creed regarding the Imagination:

... Men of Genius are great as certain ethereal Chemicals operating on the Mass of neutral intellect—by 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—

But I am running my head into a Subject which I am certain I could not do justice to under five years study and 3 vols octavo—and moreover long to be talking about the Imagination—... 0 I wish I was as certain of the end of all your troubles as that of your momentary start about the authenticity of the Imagination. 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
The Imagination may be compared to Adam's dream—he awoke and found it truth. I am the more zealous in this affair, because I have never yet been able to perceive how anything can be known for truth by consecutive reasoning—and yet it must be—Can it be that even the greatest Philosopher ever arrived at his goal without putting aside numerous objections—. It is 'a Vision in the form of Youth! a Shadow of reality to come—. Adam's dream will do here and seems to be a conviction that Imagination and its empyreal reflection is the same as human Life and its spiritual repetition. But as I was saying—the simple imaginative Mind may have its rewards in the repetition of its own silent Working coming continually on the spirit with a fine suddenness—to compare great things with small—have you never by being surprised with an old Melody—in a delicious place—by a delicious voice, felt over again your very speculations and surmises at the time it first operated on your soul—do you not remember forming to yourself the singer's face more beautiful that it was, possible and yet with the elevation of the Moment you did not think so—even then you were mounted on the Wings of Imagination so high—that the Prototype must be here after—that delicious face you will see—What a time! I am continually running away from the subject—sure this cannot be exactly the case with a complex Mind—one that is imaginative and at the same time careful of its fruits—who would exist partly on sensation partly on thought—to whom it is necessary that years should bring the philosophic Mind—

Later, upon more reflection, Keats will again refer to these men of "Genius" as opposed to "Men of Power", identifying two of the most "selfless" as Socrates and Jesus. Nevertheless, for the moment, his is still very much an outpouring of feeling, "running his head into a subject" that is a mass of shadowy thoughts and intuitions. But upon reading the above quotation what is

40 Letters, I, 184-86.
apparent too is that he is well on his way to not only articulating, but also understanding the elements that come into play in the interaction of the actual and the ideal and the Imagination—for as has been said, it is only when an idea can be articulated that it is entirely understood. What is also of interest is that out of the trials and frustrations of thinking about his identity, he is moving more and more towards the affirmation of process—echoing Wordsworth's assertion that it necessarily takes "years" to acquire a "philosophic mind". And if we, in fact, look at "Truth" as being the realization of the self—as Keats undoubtedly did—then we can say that Keats is beginning to see that he would not arrive at it by chance in his garden of Flora and old Pan, nor through "consecutive reasoning" or "meddling intellect". It will come by "Truth" and "Identity" gradually, intuitively, on "practised finger-ends". Thus, as Hazlitt would say, it all begins with man's "natural disinterestedness of the mind" and then, by "coming continually on the spirit with a fine suddenness", one hopes to gradually move up the "Pleasure Thermometer" towards the trinity of ideals; Beauty, Truth and Love.

41 From "The Pope" in Robert Browning's The Ring and the Book, 1249. How Keats would have admired Browning's rendering of this character who arrived at truth through a "regular Stepping of the Imagination".
And as Keats turned to Hazlitt's other works he
could find further amplification of the ideas that "Men
of Genius" do not have any "determined character" or
"individuality". In particular, it was Hazlitt's per-
ceptive comments regarding Shakespeare's genius—the
wealth of which Keats had already begun to mine on his
own—that helped him further delineate his conception
of what the ideal poetic nature should be. In one of
his essays published in The Examiner, Hazlitt, in com-
paring Milton to Shakespeare, made the following dis-
tinction:

The genius of Milton was essentially undramatic; he
saw all objects from his own point of view, and
with certain exclusive preferences. Shakes-
ppeare, on the contrary, had no personal character,
and no moral principle, except that of good nature.
He took no part in the scene he describes, but
gave fair play to all his characters, and left
virtue and vice, folly and wisdom, right and wrong,
to fight it out between themselves.42

And Hazlitt continued this comparison of Shakespeare
and Milton during his English Poets lectures:

The striking peculiarity of Shakespeare's mind was
its generic quality, its power of communication
with all other minds—so that it contained a uni-
verse of thought and feeling within itself, and
had no one particular bias, or exclusive excellence
more than another. He was just like any other man,
but that he was like all other men. He was the
least of an egotist that it was possible to be. He
was nothing in himself; but he was all that others
were, or that they could become. He not only had
in himself the germs of every faculty and feeling,

42 Kenneth Muir, John Keats: A Reassessment (Liv-
Muir.
but he could follow them by anticipation, intuitively, into all their conceivable ramifications, through every change of fortune or conflict of passion, or turn of thought. . . . There was no respect of persons with him. His genius shone equally on the evil and on the good, on the wise and the foolish, the monarch and the beggar. He had only to think of any thing in order to become that thing, with all the circumstances belonging to it.\(^\text{43}\)

According to Hazlitt then, Shakespeare represented the supreme "power of communication". But most importantly he "was the least of an egotist that it was possible to be" and this, above all else, is the essential poetic characteristic—to be "nothing in himself" and "all that others were".

As well, Hazlitt felt it was this very talent that his contemporaries, and Wordsworth in particular, sorely lacked:

The great fault of a modern school of poetry is, that it is an experiment to reduce poetry to a mere effusion of natural sensibility; or what is worse, to divest it both of imaginary splendour and human passion, to surround the meanest objects with the morbid feelings and devouring egotism of the writers' own minds. 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.\(^\text{44}\)

One could even say that in the main Hazlitt's criticism of Wordsworth tended to be somewhat misguided, if not irrational and is, indeed, a fine example of how

\(^{43}\) Howe, V, 47-48.

\(^{44}\) Howe, V, 53.
Hazlitt's passionately subjective responses could sometimes go awry. In turn, reasons for his reactionary behaviour were perhaps rooted in the fact that in earlier days Hazlitt and Wordsworth had been relatively good friends; however, after some sort of altercation—the details of which remain hazy to this day, Hazlitt could rarely speak of Wordsworth with a civil tongue. Nonetheless, this is not to say that there were not times when adverse criticism would not have been justified. But unfortunately, where Wordsworth was concerned, Hazlitt did not often seize the appropriate opportunities given him. A case in point is his decision to use Wordsworth's poem on the Gipsies—undoubtedly one of Wordsworth's weaker attempts—to illustrate his thesis in his Round Table essay entitled "On Manner".

In fact, what Hazlitt actually achieves with his choice of illustration is not so much an effective criticism of Wordsworth but more an undermining of his own authority and judgement as literary critic:

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

45 See Baker, pp. 135-39.
ness.' Mr. W. Wordsworth will excuse us if we are not converts to his recantation of his original doctrine; for he who changes his opinion loses his authority. We did not look for this Sunday-school philosophy from him. What had he himself been doing in these four and twenty hours? Had he been admiring a flower, or writing a sonnet? We hate the doctrine of utility, even in a philosopher, and much more in a poet: for the only real utility is that which leads to enjoyment, and the end is, in all cases, better than the means.\(^{46}\)

Keats, on the other hand, was much more capable of truly seeing the work and Hazlitt's criticisms for what they were, and eloquently states as much to Bailey:

Now with respect to Wordsworth's Gipseys I think he is right and yet I think Hazlitt is right and yet I think Wordsworth is rightest. Wordsworth had not been idle he had not been without his task—nor had they Gipseys—they in the visible world had been as picturesque an object as he in the invisible. The Smoke of their fire—their attitudes—their Voices were all in harmony with the Evenings—It is a bold thing to say and I would not say it in print—but it seems to me that if Wordsworth had thought a little deeper at the Moment he would not have written the Poem at all—I should judge, it to have been written in one of the most comfortable Moeds of his Life—it is a kind of sketchy intellectual Landscape—not a search after Truth—nor is it fair to attack him on such a subject—for it is with the Critic as with the poet had Hazlitt thought a little deeper and been in a good temper he would never have spied an imaginary fault there.\(^{47}\)

Most assuredly, in this case Keats was more than capable of thinking "a little deeper" than his mentor, Hazlitt.

Yet, above and beyond this instance, there is evidence too that Hazlitt's opinions of Wordsworth, regard-

\(^{46}\) Howe, \textit{IV}, 45-46.

\(^{47}\) \textit{Letters}, I, 173-74.
less of how unjust they could be did, to a certain extent, influence Keats. Hazlitt's comments on "On Mr. Wordsworth's Excursion" in which he accuses Wordsworth of indulging in "An intense intellectual egoism [that] swallows up every thing"⁴⁸ undoubtedly lay behind Keats's reference to "the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime"⁴⁹ as opposed to "the camelion Poet". And Keats astutelyintuited—Hazelitt's impassioned responses aside—that there was always a danger, as Hazelitt, in fact, pointed out, inherent in writing out of one's centre of thoughts and feelings—the whole sense, as mentioned before, that in a poet choosing to record his felt experience rather than helping others overcome their own feelings of isolation, he may unwittingly tend to reinforce them.

As well, there were moments, where Wordsworth was concerned, when Keats could be just as sharp-tongued and almost as convincing as Hazelitt himself. And Keats could, if the occasion demanded, send up the best-intended of Wordsworthian phrases with a quick slash of his pen. There is no better example of this than the following excerpt from a letter written to Reynolds in which he somewhat flippantly and most decidedly, in a Hazelittian way states, "Moods of one's mind! You know I

⁴⁸ Howe, IV, 113.
⁴⁹ Letters, 1, 387.
hate them well".  

The comment, of course, was made to Reynolds of "Peter Bell"-parody fame, and thus represented the ideal in anti-Wordsworthian audiences—a fact that was not lost on Keats. Yet, interestingly enough, almost at the very moment he was making such adverse comments about Wordsworth to Reynolds, he was, in turn, saying the complete reverse to Bailey—who, as we know, held Wordsworth in the highest of esteem. And one could even say that where Bailey was concerned, Keats almost bragged that he had "seen a good deal of Wordsworth" and said so with no hint of the irreverence witnessed in his correspondence to Reynolds.

Given Keats's somewhat paradoxical view of Wordsworth then, what remains to be answered is just how much Hazlitt's opinions of both Shakespeare and Wordsworth vis-à-vis the writer and his art influenced Keats's formulation of what he believed the ideal poetic nature should be.

In order to answer this question, let us begin by stating that, almost above all else, Keats's appeal is in his ability to evaluate and appreciate the complexities of virtually everything and everyone about him. This was particularly true where Hazlitt was concerned, and it was to be the case for Shakespeare and Wordsworth.

50 Letters, I, 263.
51 Letters, I, 212.
as well. His openness of mind and hesitation to allow certain flaws to colour his overall judgement led Keats to say of his own friends and human nature in general:

Men should bear with each other—there lives not the Man who may not be cut up, aye hashed to pieces on his weakest side. The best of Men have but a portion of good in them—a kind of spiritual yeast in their frames which creates the ferment of existence—by which a Man is propelled to act and strive and buffet with Circumstance. The sure way Bailey, is first to know a Man's faults, and then be passive, if after that he insensibly draws you towards him then you have no power to break the link. Before I felt interested in either Reynolds or Haydon—I was well read in their faults yet knowing them I have been cementing gradually with both—I have an affection for them both for reasons almost opposite—and to both must I of necessity cling—52

In turn, there is little doubt that Keats was "insensibly" drawn to the philosopher in Wordsworth—and that the vital "link"—the need to trust felt-experience—and the "moods of one's own mind" was slowly but surely being forged in the "ferment" of young Keats's soul. And as time went on, regardless of what Hazlitt said, or he himself feared, Keats was beginning to feel truly the need to trace the "dark passages" of human experience. And he could see too, that in the largest sense, one's self-genesis as man and poet was inextricably linked. Indeed, by May of 1818, he was able to articulate the following about the development of the human mind. He likened it 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 one's nerves that the World is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression--whereby This Chamber of Maiden Thought becomes gradually darken'd and at the same time on all sides of it many doors are set open--but all dark--all leading to dark passages--We see not the balance of good and evil. We are in a Mist--We are now in that state--We feel the "burden of the Mystery," To this point was Wordsworth come, as far as I can conceive when he wrote, "Tintern Abbey" and it seems to me that his Genius is explorative of those dark Passages. Now if we live, and go on thinking, we too shall explore them.53

Thus, even though Keats on the one hand could reject Wordsworth for his introspection, dismissing his work as the epitome of the "egotistical sublime"54--on the other he recognized the need for and value of a "gradual ripening of the intellectual powers". The poet's identity was not a "given". It had to be created if not by actually piercing the "mist", then by "straining at

53 Letters, I, 280-81.
54 Letters, I, 387.
particles of light in the midst of a great darkness". Ultimately, "That which is creative, must create itself."

Keats, then, like Wordsworth, was beginning to feel the presence of the "many doors" and the need to find answers to the "burden of Mystery". And yet there was a part of him that desperately tried to resist this almost magnetic power that was forcing him inward, impelling him to begin writing from within to without—the part of him that could at one moment say "I am very near Agreeing with Hazlitt that Shakspeare is enough for us—"; the part of him that, after having met Wordsworth in person, concluded that the older Romantic poet could be a churlish, self-centred creature who had, as Keats noted, left "a bad feeling about town" wherever he ventured. And this was not, as Keats must have said to himself, the sort of man and poet he wanted to be. Nor did he gravitate towards that seemingly self-righteous side of Wordsworth that could, if not kept in check, produce a poetry that has a "palpable design upon us".

But above and beyond all else Keats was, it was true, drawn more towards, rather than away from Wordsworth—towards the Wordsworth who could keep his reader in the company of "flesh and blood" and at his very

55 Letters, II, 81.
56 Letters, I, 143.
best, could reveal "the essential passions of the heart." This was the "portion of good" Keats admired and would soon, in his own way, emulate. In fact, for Keats, Wordsworth grew to be just as valuable, if not more so, than Milton and Shakespeare because Keats, unlike Hazlitt, intuited a very important distinction regarding the modern artist and his art that Hazlitt seemingly was never able to discern—a distinction that is, in effect, twofold.

First, in trying to determine the validity of Hazlitt's criticism regarding the ideal poetic nature, we must turn our attention to the very underpinnings of his theory. It was, as we are well aware, Shakespeare who represented for Hazlitt the touchstone of excellence—and herein lies the problem. For Shakespeare was, in the largest sense, more a dramatist than a poet—whereas Wordsworth was a modern Romantic poet, not an Elizabethan dramatist. And for the most part Hazlitt never really allowed himself properly to address the issue that Wordsworth, and those who followed, were of a different, more complex, more questioning time than that of Shakespeare. Granted, Hazlitt could, when it suited him, discern that the "Lake school of Poetry"

had its origin in the French revolution, or rather in those sentiments and opinions which produced that revolution; and which sentiments and opinions were indirectly imported into this country in translations from the German about that period.57

57 Howe, 161.
As well, he could state that the Romantics' "world" had "been turned topsy-turvy". And as a result the "object was to reduce all things to an absolute level". In turn, "they open a finer and deeper vein of thought and feeling than any poet" to date. But Hazlitt, inconsistent, unwilling to push his analysis further, is capable of such critical regressions as

He [Wordsworth] has not the constructive faculty. He can give only the fine tones of thought, drawn from his mind by accident or nature, like the sounds drawn from the Aeolian harp by the wandering gale.---He is totally deficient in all the machinery of poetry.

To be sure, such utterances indicate that it is Hazlitt --not Wordsworth, who has "mistaken" the "powers" of his "age", nor does he exactly understand them himself. He cannot form a whole", as Hazlitt himself once remarked of Wordsworth's inadequacies.\textsuperscript{58} Young Keats, on the contrary, after having picked his way through the labyrinth of his own queries and questionings, did not suffer from such short-sightedness. Yes, Keats could appreciate that Shakespeare's genius was that he could be "nothing in himself, and all that others were" but the question that came to the poet's mind was whether the same could reasonably be expected of the Romantic poet, whether for that matter it was valid to view his generation of poets in the same light that surrounded

\textsuperscript{58} Howe, V, 156.
a Shakespeare or a Milton.

For the sake of argument then, let us say that if a poet is going to speak to and for the complexities of modern man—to give one a sense of self and purpose in a world wherein, as Keats said, "I am quite perplexed. . . . there is nothing stable. . . . uproar's your only musick"59; and if it his desire to create and affirm that, yes, there is a "centre" and it will "hold"60, then the poet must start with the particular—the concrete, and gradually add to and write out of a centre of thoughts and feelings that can be felt "along the blood and in the heart". This has to be his starting point. In effect, he must first build for himself his own centre of reference, and in so doing help his reader build and affirm his own. Thus, the direction in which Wordsworth was attempting to move was exactly that—to create a poetry that was, most decidedly, more private, more personal, more individual and very much in touch with the life chords of man's existence. Wordsworth was, in fact, tentatively shaping a part of the "whole", the "whole" it seems, that Hazlitt failed to comprehend. Indeed, one cannot state the case more eloquently than Keats:

59 Letters, I, 204.

60 To twist Y.B. Yeats' words around: "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;" from his poem "The Second Coming".
Here I must think Wordsworth is deeper than Milton [in his exploration of those dark passages]—though I think it has depended more upon the general and gregarious advance of intellect, than individual greatness of Mind—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 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 ethereal and authentically divine—. . . . 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—Yet Milton as a Philosopher, had sure as great powers as Wordsworth—What is then to be inferr’d? O many things—It proves there is really a grand march of 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—61

Ultimately then, what Hazlitt initially had failed to truly grasp about Wordsworth was that he was a part of the "Grand march of intellect", one that necessarily "subdues the mightiest Minds to the service of the time being." Milton was a man of his time, so too, for that matter was Shakespeare, and anyone else who has dared to put pen to paper with the hopes of transforming the chaos of their own existence into something meaningful for others. Thus, for Keats it wasn't so much a question

61 Letters, I, 281-82.
of attempting to determine who was superior because he realized that, in essence, such an exercise would be futile. What was, and is, of importance is to acknowledge the present—in the face of the past and its "certain points and resting places".

In turn, the second facet of the whole that we must address, in our attempt to discern the differences between Shakespeare and a Wordsworth in the light of Hazlitt's critical tenets, is whether or not Hazlitt's use of a Shakespearian play is an appropriate measuring stick with which to judge modern lyric poetry. Or is the dramatist's task of trying to capture, as Browning would say, "the infinite within the finite" somewhat of a different demand? The latter assumption seems safer. For in the largest sense if we think of drama and modern poetry in terms of being, for instance, paintings—life captured on canvas, as it were—the former would include perhaps more than one subject, a fairly well-defined setting, as well as somewhat of a collage of life's circumstances, giving the viewer, in effect, a vast and grand picture for his contemplation. While poetry, the sort of Romantic lyric poetry that the Wordsworths and Keatses felt and, indeed, still feel the need to write, is more akin to a finely detailed miniature portrait—most often of only one—an individual who, for a fairly brief, often intense moment reveals explicitly and implicitly a "flash", a perception, a Wordsworthian "spot
of time" that represents the very affirmation of life itself. Hazlitt's criticism is less concerned with poetry as we have defined it than with the art of tragedy, and how its standards had slackened in his day.62 Hence his undying interest in the brilliance of the Shakespearean actor, Edmund Kean, for in Hazlitt's eyes Kean was helping to keep alive the powerful genius of "the dramatist's imagination [wherein] character, plot and language [fuse] to make a living principle."63

In fact, even if we give Hazlitt the benefit of the doubt and say that he did not deliberately blur the distinction between drama and poetry, at the very least we must admit he uses the word "poetry" more often than not in the largest of senses. For in his own words, drama, Shakespearian drama, represented

The truest form of poetry because Imagination requires the complete submission of the writer to his subject. It is the noblest form of poetry because Imagination leads the spectator, as it leads the artist to soar beyond himself and reach the liberalizing truth of nature.64

Keats indeed could conclude with Hazlitt that on most levels "Shakespeare is enough for us".65 Yet unlike Hazlitt, he could also appreciate, as we witnessed ear-

62 Howe, IV, 13.
63 Howe, V, 58. My underlining.
64 Howe, V, 48, 50.
65 Letters, 143.
lier, that as a modern poet Wordsworth was justified in his attempt to forge new "points", to explore, create, and subsequently write about "the growth of the poet's mind". For the "new" world this was hardly drama. And it is this ability to make such penetrating distinctions that sets Keats apart from Hazlitt. As well, one could even say that Keats was growing to realize that Hazlitt's attempt to use Shakespeare's genius to judge modern poetry was, in fact, a faulty litmus test, one that failed to show the subtleties and shadings, stages and phases, the parts of the new "whole" that the modern "poets" were, and still are, forced to create for themselves. Kenneth Muir, in attempting to account for some of the differences between Hazlitt's and Keats's depth of vision succinctly states the case when he says,

Hazlitt wrote on the nature of poets and poetry from the outside. Keats looked within, and compared what he found there with Hazlitt's theories. He never accepted a theory about poetry unless he could support it from his own experience.66

To be sure, it is the Keatsian struggle to come to terms with the "Genius and the heart" of modern man that has afforded us some of the most honest and perceptive utterances about the poet's struggle for identity, and for that matter, la condition humaine, to come out of the realm of English literature.

But we are getting somewhat ahead of ourselves,

66 Muir, p. 142.
for Keats has yet more "creations and destroyings" to undergo before the particulars and distinctions between poets past and present coalesce.

For the moment, the ability to qualify and quantify all the variables involved in creating the poet's identity remains, for Keats, somewhere out there, so to speak. In fact, one could even say that after having written *Endymion* he was barely in a position to leave the "chamber of Maiden Thought". And in his attempt to divine from Hazlitt's criticisms the ideal poetic nature we find him oscillating back and forth between faith and pessimism, waiting for

The innumerable compositions and decompositions which take place between the intellect and its thousand materials before it arrives at that trembling, delicate and spail-horn perception of Beauty-- [of Truth].

Therefore definitive answers regarding the validity of "poetry of experience" would have to await the test of time. Yet what Keats did cling to of Hazlitt's perceptions was that there was indeed an ultimate poetic identity--regardless of what lay between the getting and becoming--after which he intended to pattern himself. In a letter written some six months after his "Chamber of Maiden Thought" letter, Keats, in echoing Hazlitt's comments about Shakespeare being the avatar of "disinterestedness", says of the ideal "poetical character":

it is not itself—it has no self—It is every thing and nothing—it has no character—it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated—it has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher, delights the camellion Poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things any more than from its taste for the bright one; because they both end in speculation. A Poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence; because he has no identity—he is continually in for—and filling some other Body—The Sun, the Moon, the Sea—and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute—the poet has none; no identity—he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's Creatures.68

Thus, after all is said and done, Keats still appreciated the poetical ability to have "no character", to be a "camellion poet". Yet at the same time we can see too, that he was beginning to believe more and more that there were many "dark passages" to be explored before his own identity could ever hope to be deemed as such.

Up to this point in our study we have been discussing then, the poet's "identity" and its part in Keats's conception of "Negative Capability". But what remains to be addressed is the desired nature of the poetry itself. For this was, just as much as defining the poet's role, very much a Keatsian concern. In fact, at the same time Keats was struggling to define and affirm his own existence, he was attempting to formulate various critical tenets regarding excellence in poetry. To be a "camellion poet" is unquestionably but a part of the

68 Letters, I, 279.
whole. There are, as well, many other requirements according to Keats that one should follow in order to attain the ideal in art.

However, before we turn our attention to this area let it be stated that we will not account for all the literary influences that may have filtered into Keats's poetic theory, regardless of how valuable an exercise, on some levels, it may be. The reason for this decision is twofold. The first is, because like many other facets of the Keatsian sensibility, what Keats gleaned from others he more often than not refined upon. Suffice it to say that such works as Wordsworth's "Preface" undoubtedly helped to shape Keats's point of view and its presence will be self-evident; not to mention the odd Hazlittian strands of critical excellence. But secondly and most importantly, what is really of interest to us is the examination of Keats's poetic theory expressly for the purposes of determining the demands he was to make of himself as poet--this will be our emphasis--and subsequently how he attempted to follow his established criteria.

To begin then, let us return for a moment to the poet's formative years. As we witnessed earlier Keats demonstrated a natural empathetic response to seemingly each and every bit of life about him. It was an ability that he not only attempted to carry over into his poetry but also, as we have come to learn, one that he recognized
and valued in others' work as well. Cowden Clarke, in remembering the young Keats's "delight" in "Spenser" commented:

This it was that first showed me his love of poetry; for I shall never forget the expression of pleasure and surprise in his face while speaking of that poet's power in conveying by one epithet the complete character of an image. One of the instances most strongly in my recollection is, where Spenser speaks of the "sea-shouldering whale." I think it was, unquestionably, the effect produced upon him by studying that finest of all models for fanciful, and descriptive scenery, that afterwards communicated such an impulse to his own genius in placing in the highest point of light, and in the most forcible language—position—regardless of everyday conventionalisms, whatever he felt, and desired to describe. 69

And as Keats's poetic sensibility evolved he continued to value this potential "power" but realized too, that to capture the intensity of an object was not an easy task. This concern surfaced in a letter written to his brothers on December 17th, 1817 in which he relates the details of his visit to an art gallery to view Benjamin West's painting entitled "Death on a Pale Horse". Keats was aware of the praises West had received for supposedly attaining the "sublime", and yet, as he stated, he found the painting insipid—"there is nothing to be intense upon; no women one feels mad to kiss; no face swelling into reality." 70 The painting lacked, as Hazlitt would say, "gusto", an "intensity" which should

69 Keats Circle, II, 149.
70 Letters, I, 192.
be, according to Keats, an integral part of the ideal rendering of art. Hence, in Keats's opinion, West had failed, for "The excellence of every Art is its intensity". Keats valued, rather, the beauty and perfection captured in the Elgin Marbles—for in his estimation they represented no less than the quintessence of art infused with the spirit of the ideal. And unlike West's attempt, they embodied the desired—energy in a state of repose—that marvelous sense of "might half-slumbering on its own right arm". 71

And yet the artist's ability to capture the essence, the "intensity", is not enough in itself, for it must be done subtly, maintaining at the same time a high level of suggestiveness. In Keats's words:

Poetry should be great & unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself but with its subject—How beautiful are the retired flowers! how would they lose their beauty were they to throng into the highway crying out, "admire me I am a violet! dote upon me I am a primrose!" . . . we need not be teased with grandeur & merit—when we can have them uncontaminated & unobtrusive. 72

Nor was this recognition of the power of suggestion something that revealed itself to Keats only after he vowed to write with "judgement". The knowledge of its importance was seemingly an inborn quality, just one of the many indicators of the depth of his taste. A case

71 "Sleep and Poetry", 237.
72 Letters, I, 224.
in point is the following instance related by Cowden Clarke, in which he refers to one of the many examples of Keats's "high poetic promise".

Among the Keatsian qualities that existed... even at this time, his mid-teens was his correct taste. I remember to have been struck with this by his remarks on that well known & often quoted passage of the Excursion (IV, 857-60) upon the Greek Mythology,—where it is said that

"Fancy fetched
Even from the blazing Chariot of the Sun
A beardless youth who touched a golden lute,
And filled the illumined groves with ravishment."

Keats said this description of Apollo should have ended at the "golden lute," & have left it to the imagination to complete the picture,—how he "filled the illumined groves." I think every man of taste will feel the justice of the remark. 73

What is remarkable about Clarke's recollection is that, even though Keats had not attained the sufficient maturity to enable him to articulate all the nuances implicit in his contention that the poet must lead his readers to their own discovery of truth and beauty, the depth of understanding was, undoubtedly, there. It merely needed time. And with time, what was once implicit soon became explicit. Keats's reference to the poet's need to "leave it to the imagination to complete the picture" is, in fact, with some amplification, shades of the dialectical method used by Socrates—an approach in which, by means of being asked, or asking oneself questions, the individual is led to the under-

73 Keats Circle, II, 276.
standing of the concept, the essence, on his own rather than simply being told. It is a way of getting at "Truth", as it were, through a combination of "on the pulses" successive exercisings of the imagination, and hence a gradual movement up the Keatsian "Pleasure Thermometer" towards the trinity of ideals.

Thus far, then, in our attempt to define the desired nature of poetry itself, we have isolated two of Keats's critical tenets--the need to capture the "intensity" of one's subject and, at the same time, maintain a certain degree of suggestiveness. And thirdly we may add to the above the following extract from a letter sent to John Taylor in which Keats says of excellence in poetry:

1st. I think Poetry should surprise by a fine excess and not by Singularity--it should strike the Reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a Remembrance--

2nd. Its touches of Beauty should never be half way therby 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--

To state as much suggests again not only the need for poetry to be "great and unobtrusive", but also that it embody an added and vital dimension of naturalness--that it seemingly comes into being organically, with a sense of ease and a felicity of expression. As well, it

74 Letters, I, 238.
further delineates the expectation Keats demanded of himself—ultimately—"That if Poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree it had better not come at all".

Having compiled these various tenets then, coupled with the first facet of the whole, "Negative Capability" and the need to be a "camelion poet", and all the contradictions inherent therein, we are now in a position to conclude the following. For Keats the ideal poetic expression comes of a sympathetic imagination, one that has the ability to carefully capture, distill and radiate a certain "intensity". It will maintain an objectivity in not allowing one's identity to colour one's work; and yet, at the same time the expression must be sincere, a felt-experience, at one and at once "sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of Man."

Thus, with Endymion and his "mawkish" stage behind him, Keats had, with a great sense of application and determination, begun to formulate certain critical tenets, demands that he was now prepared to meet. Keeping his poetic theory in mind, then, let us turn back to his poetry and see just how often, if ever, he achieved his ideal.

75 Much has been written about the poet's need for "sincerity". As well, there have been various attempts to define exactly what is meant if one says the poet's intention was one of sincerity. Perhaps David Perkins, in his work Wordsworth and the Poetry of Sincerity
(Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964) best clarifies this issue when he says, "There is, it seems to me, only one sense in which it is even possibly appropriate to say that a poem must be sincere. It may be that in order to write well a poet must deeply feel the emotion he expresses as he creates the poem, though he need not feel it ever before or after. . . . For in this sense sincerity would be merely a sufficient power of sympathetic imagination." p. 3.

76 Letters, I, 281.
PART THREE

BECOMING "A MIGHTY POET OF THE HUMAN HEART"

During the first few months of 1818, having devoted so much of himself to his philosophic and poetic expansion of theory, Keats had little time for the creation of poetry. He had, it was true, written the odd sonnet, including "Time's sea . . .", Blue! 'Tis the life of heaven . . ." and "When I have fears . . .", as well as two light verse pieces, "Lines on the Mermaid Tavern" and "Robin Hood". However, his full return to poetry did not come until April when he wrote a metrical romance, entitled "Isabella". With this work, as always, we find that Keats's accomplishments tend to lag somewhat behind his expectations. In fact, throughout his career it is more the norm than the exception to find him darting out ahead of himself intellectually and then having to play catch-up, so to speak, with his poetic projects. So it was with "Isabella". It was, in effect, not so much a poetic opportunity for Keats to reveal his heightened knowledge and awareness, but more a chance to dawdle—to indulge in emotion for its own sake. And most decidedly "Isabella" represented too the use of romance as an escape from the pain in his own life, in particular
the impending death of his brother Tom.

Yet "Isabella" became, as well, another stepping stone on the way to great heights. And very shortly we find Keats making further strides aesthetically and philosophically with the writing of Hyperion. It is a work that is not only impressive in design and beauty but also one that is more carefully planned than anything to date. A Miltonic influence is detectable with his sonorous phrases and the Paradise Lost parallels, but most importantly the result is a greater concentration of the Keatsian style. There is a certain striving for compression, strength and dignity—somewhat of a preparation for the great Odes wherein we find that Keats's thought is the stanza, and not the individual line.

In fact, Hyperion represents two definitive areas of growth for Keats. Firstly we can see that he is moving out from under the aegis of Hunt's influence. His poetic style changes and we find him dropping the feminine endings almost entirely. Gone are the "lawny crests, mossy beds, and posies and rosies." Instead, he chooses to make use of the past participle as adjective to help seize and condense the energy within the object. Notice in the following excerpt how far he has come since "I Stood Tiptoe . . .":

As when, upon a tranced summer-night,
Those green-robed senators of mighty woods,
Tall oaks, branch-charmed by the earliest stars,
Dream, and so dream all night without a stir,

(I, 72-75)

The very atmosphere is heightened because the "summer night" is "tranced" and the "oaks" are "branch-charmed" and all is invested with a certain human spirit—striking a regal pose as "green-robed senators". Keats has, at long last, managed to convey at one and at once the strength, tension and required restraint that make for a poetry that is intrinsically powerful.

But what is most notable of all, stylistically, is the first stanza of Hyperion, for it is here that Keats comes close to attaining his concept of Negative Capability. He virtually gives himself over to his subject, spinning a synesthetic rendering that transports the reader into the realm of the gods. The scene opens in medias res and we are slowly enveloped by the "shady sadness" of the fallen Saturn:

Deep in the shady sadness of a vale
Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn,
Far from the fiery noon, and eve's one star,
Sat grey-haired Saturn, quiet as a stone,
Still as the silence round about his lair;
Forest on forest hung above his head
Like cloud on cloud. No stir of air was there,
Not so much life as on a summer's day
Robb not one light seed from the feathered grass,
But where the dead leaf fell, there did it rest.
A stream went—voiceless by, still deadened more
By reason of his fallen divinity
Spreading a shade: the Naiad 'mid her reeds
Dressed her cold finger closer to her lips.

(I, 1-14)

Keats's inherent musical sense is here in all its glory—
with the intricate vowel interplay and the alliterative use of the "s's" helping to continually wash the deadening silence over us. And what a marvelous image he evokes as he makes us feel the lifelessness of it all—the "No stir of air" that "Rob's not one light seed from the feathered grass". Saturn's end is, indeed, so very still and cold, "Far from the fiery noon" and it is all finely and exquisitely punctuated by the "Naiad 'mid her reeds" who "Pressed her cold finger closer to her lips".

Stylistically then, Hyperion marks a great advancement in Keats's poetic capabilities but secondly, and perhaps even more notably is that there is evidence too of a number of the Keatsian philosophic thoughts beginning to coalesce. And they do so pre-eminently to form the single idea that the many, many "Creations and destroyings" of the self represent a natural and desired progression, one that ultimately involves a fulfillment of process, which in turn will lead to the realization

77 Cowden Clarke once commented about Keats's use of assonance: "One of his favourite topics of discourse was the principle of melody in Verse, upon which he had his own notions, particularly in the management of open & close vowels. . . . Keats's theory was, that the vowels should be so managed as not to clash one with another so as to mar the melody, -- & yet that they should be interchanged, like differing notes of music to prevent monotony. The following lines will, I think, illustrate his theory, as I understood him. . . .", and he goes on to give the first stanza of Hyperion as his example, in Keats Circle, II, 277.
of the ideals of truth and beauty. To illustrate this point Keats selects a theme well-suited to his ideas on the progressive nature of awareness, that of the displacement of the Titans by the Olympian gods. And the vehicle Keats chooses for the expression is the character of Oceanus and his role in enabling Saturn and all the Titans—save for Hyperion—to understand the reasons for their being cast down. The fallen gods, in attempting to determine the best course of action, gather together and hold a council (reminiscent of Satan's council in Paradise Lost). During this time, Saturn is unable to find justification for their fall and turns to his learned father, Oceanus, for an explanation. Oceanus begins by chastising the Titans for misdirecting their energies—for they should be seeking reasons, not revenge. Instead, he tells them, they "must be content to stoop" before the truth, take comfort from it, for the knowledge thereof can ease the pain of loss. Unquestionably, if one lives, sorrow is inevitable, and it should be viewed as a positive addition, a part of the shaping forces that add to the knowledge and growth of the self.

As Oceanus tells the Titans:

> We fall by course of Nature's law, not force
> Of thunder, or of Jove. 

(II, 181-82)

> ...as thou wast not the first of powers,
> So art thou not the last; it cannot be:
> Thou art not the beginning nor the end.

(II, 188-90)
And in Oceanus telling the Titans that their rule has come to an end through natural progression, he is voicing Keats's contention that all things are temporal except the ideals themselves. Therefore, even though the Titans stand closer to the ideals than man, they are, nevertheless, distinct from those ideals and must therefore bow to the natural and eternal law—the law of progressive advancement towards the ideals. To accept loss, to assimilate it and then carry on in spite of it, help to forge the very hallmark that makes one an individual worthy of existence:

Now comes the pain of truth, to whom 'tis pain—
O folly! for to bear all naked truths,
And to envisage circumstances, all calm,
That is the top of sovereignty. (II, 202-05)

In turn, Oceanus continues his explanation of the law of Nature by stating that each race, each generation has its time. And when it has run its course one must be content to realize that they are but a part of the whole—a part of the "grand march of intellect" that works to improve the state of the world. As Oceanus comments, it is not that the Titans have been conquered but rather their time has run out:

So on our heels a fresh perfection treads,
A power more strong in beauty, born of us.
And fated to excel us, as we pass
In glory that old Darkness: nor are we,
Thereby more conquered, than by us the rule
Of shapeless Chaos. (II, 212-17)

Thus, the Titans' fall is but a part of the pro-
gression of the world towards the realization of the ideal of Beauty, one that is aligned to both love and truth.

We are such forest-trees, and our fair boughs Have bred forth, not pale solitary doves, But eagles golden-feathered, who do tower Above us in their beauty, and must reign In right thereof. For 'tis the eternal law That first in beauty should be first in might. Yea, by that law, another race may drive Our conquerers to mourn as we do now. (II, 224-31)

And to state the case as such not only voices Keats's doctrine of the progressive realization of the ideal within each individual: but notice how it has broadened now to include the attainment of the ideal in the "one", the world—that is made of the "many".

Thus, what Keats achieves with his Hyperion is to stress the importance for man to accept "the pain of truth", to "Receive the truth; and let it be your balm". As well, man must be content to accept his own finitude, for the temporality of man is as undeniable as the eternality of the ideal. Man must strive towards realizing his own potential by gleaning comfort from the truth, for such knowledge will gradually help shift the focus away from the self and personal loss towards the inevitability of process and the universality of experience. Ultimately the eternal process will subsume the individual, leading towards the eventual attainment of the ethereal ideals in the actual world.
We have, then, to this point, been examining the first two books of Hyperion with the intention of charting Keats's new poetic and philosophic growth. And in so doing, we can easily substantiate the statement that the young poet now writes with more "judgement" and indeed, attains many of the principles of art that he demanded of himself. Yet once we turn to the third book we can see that it becomes somewhat harder for Keats to maintain his level of artistic excellence, not to mention the much-desired degree of objectivity. Reasons for this seem to be rooted in the fact that the first two books were written before the death of his brother, Tom. While the third book, in which Keats had planned to detail the confrontation between Hyperion and Apollo, was spun out of a nexus of "obstinate questionings", doubts, and fears which once again pushed themselves upon the young poet—returning him to a state of self-consciousness. As a result, with the third book, we find that stylistically, there is a certain regression to the Endymion days, and structurally, it was never seen to completion. In fact, there is evidence in his letters that Keats struggled with Hyperion until April of 1819, a full five months after Tom's death.

Yet even though, at times, the poetry is poor, there is much to be learned about the young poet and his self-genesis in the third book. For the very things that
Apollo needs and gets, Keats desires—intensity and identity:

Knowledge enormous makes a God of me
Names, deeds, grey legends, dire events, rebellions,
Majesties, sovereign voices, agonies,
Creations and destroyings, all at once
Pour into the wide hollows of my brain,
And deify me, as if some blithe wine
Or bright elixir peerless I had drunk,
And so become immortal.'—Thus the God,
... with a pang
As hot as death's is chill, with fierce convulsive
Die into life:
(III, 113-20, 128-30)

And perhaps the reason Keats finally pushes Hyperion aside is because his conception of Apollo does not ring true. For his transition from uninformed god to God is too abrupt; and in turn, reflects all too well Keats's jejeune wish of earlier to know "all that he writes with such a hurrying glow." Indeed one cannot "Die" instantly "into" the life of a god, man, or Poet. It comes only of many reconstituted states of being gained through "knowledge and experience". Therefore, just one month before Keats abandons Hyperion for good we find him writing to Haydon:

... I have come to the resolution never to write for the sake of writing, or making a poem, but from running over with any little knowledge and experience which many years of reflection may perhaps give me—78

After having taken Hyperion as far as he could then, Keats once again found himself caught between the need

78 Letters, II, 43.
for an identity and the desire to attain a certain "disinterestedness" of self. But to be a self-less man, one of the "Benefactors of Humanity" was an accomplishment of so few. In fact, only two names came to Keats's mind, those of Socrates and Jesus. Nor was this to say that he ever envisioned himself to be thought of in the same light as these two special beings. Granted, he was, at times, very much caught up with the idea of fame—sometimes materialistic, sometimes immortal—why else write? Still, shadowing the hunger for recognition, on whatever level, was a sincere desire merely to do "some good for the world". At the same time, however, he found that, good intentions notwithstanding, it is very hard for man to look beyond himself, for even circumstances that work in the lives of others have a way of touching us in a personal manner. Keats refers to this dilemma in discussing the death of a close friend's father:

This is the world—thus we cannot expect to give way many hours to pleasure—Circumstances are like Clouds continually gathering and bursting—While we are laughing the seed of some trouble is put into the wide arable land of events—while we are laughing it sprouts in grows and suddenly bears a poison fruit which we must pluck—Even so we have leisure to reason on the misfortunes of our friends; our own touch us too nearly for words. Very few men have ever arrived at a complete disinterestedness of mind; very few have been influenced by a pure desire of the benefit of others—in the greater part of the Benefactors & to Humanity some

79 Letters, I, 271.
meretricious motive has sullied their greatness—some melodramatic scenery has fascinated them—
From the manner in which I feel Haslam's misfortune I perceive how far I am from any humble standard of disinterestedness—

And as Keats continues this reflection we can see just how much his thoughts had begun to consolidate.

Undoubtedly Tom's death acted as a catalyst for his rapid maturation, a force that "pushed" and shaped his thoughts "to the point"—just as Wordsworth's depression and subsequent loss of his poetic powers forced him into self-consciousness and thus furthered his self-genesis. The difficulties Keats experienced in trying to arrive at a state of selflessness, the lack of certainty which haunted him, the acknowledgement of the interplay of joy and sorrow—the necessity of "on the pulses" experience, all are present:

Even here though I myself am pursuing the same instinctive course as the veriest human animal you can think of—I am however young writing at random—straining at particles of light in the midst of a great darkness—without knowing the bearing of any one assertion of any one opinion: Yet may I not in this be free from sin? May there not be superior beings amused with any graceful, though instinctive attitude my mind (may) fall into, as I am entertained with the alertness of a Stoat or the anxiety of a Deer? Though a quarrel in the streets is a thing to be hated, the energies displayed in it are fine; the commonest Man shows a grace in his quarrel—By a superior being our reasoning may take the same tone—though erroneous they may be fine—This is the very thing in which consists poetry; and if so it is not so fine a thing as philosophy—For the same reason that an eagle is not so fine a thing as a truth—. . . . 'Even a Proverb is no

80 Letters, II, 79.
proverb to you till your life has illustrated it.

One month later he becomes even more articulate with his brilliant conception of the growth of one's identity, one's soul:

There may be intelligences or sparks of the divinity in millions—but they are not souls till they acquire identities, till each one is personally itself. . . . how then are souls to be made? How then are these sparks which are God to have identity given them—so as ever to possess a bliss peculiar to each one's individual existence? How but by the medium of a world like this? . . . This is effected by three grand materials acting the one upon the other for a series of years—These three materials are the intelligence—the human heart (as distinguished from intelligence or mind) and the world . . . I will call the world a school instituted for the purpose of teaching little children to read—I will call the human heart the horn book used in that school—and I will call the child able to read, the soul made from that school and its horn book. Do you not see how necessary a world of pains and troubles is to school an intelligence and make it a soul? A place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways! Not merely is the heart a hornbook, it is the mind's Bible, it is the mind's experience, it is the test from which the mind or intelligence sucks its identity—As various as the lives of men are—so various become their souls, and thus does God make individual beings, souls. Identical souls of the sparks of his own essence—

What is of note about the above passage is that Keats's concept is, in effect, a parallel of the Wordsworthian ideals of poetic and philosophic growth. It is not merely a simple restatement of his earlier "Life must be undergone" but rather a much fuller, more complex

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81 Letters, II, 81.
82 Letters, II, 102-03.
rendering of the whole idea that the imagination must undergo certain stages of development, be shaped by the polarities of experience and in so doing form an internal environment which renders one an "individual being".

Similarly, as a poet Keats, like Wordsworth, envisioned that the role of poetry in this grand scheme could become an integral and valuable part of each individual's soul-making by encouraging states of reflection which would lead to their own emotional and intellectual development. Hence, after developing one's own being, there would be a certain reconciliation of the actual and the ideal—an acknowledgment of the eternal natural process and one's place within it. And the longer one lives the likelier one will be to experience successive states of realization, beckoned onward by the many passages which lead off the "Chamber of Maiden Thought", and encouraged by the prospect of "something ever more about to be". For the process of soul-making is an eternal one for each individual, a Sisyphean struggle towards momentary reconciliations of the actual and the ideal—a continual "straining at particles of light in the midst of a great darkness".

At the same time that Keats was experiencing this rapid expansion of philosophic thought, he was, most decidedly making large artistic leaps. Very soon we find him weaving marvelous tapestries of sensations such as
we find in the famous feast of "The Eve of St. Agnes":

And still she slept an azure-lidded sleep,
In blanchèd linen, smooth, and lavendered,
While he from forth the closet brought a heap
Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd,
With jellies soother than the creamy curd,
And lucent syrups, tinct with cinnamon;
Manna and dates, in argosy transferred
From Fez; and spiced dainties, every one,
From silken Samarkand to cedared Lebanon.

(262-70)

Unquestionably the mechanics seem effortless to the reader. The appeal lies not only in the exquisite blending of the exotic with the sensual, the tactile, and the gustatory, but also in the poet's ability to retain at the same time an exactness and crispness that is "blanchèd", "smooth" and "lavendered". To be sure, Keats's sympathetic imagination, his openness to phrasing and imagery--at times rising up to the state of synesthesia--and his ability to capture and radiate the energy of his object leave little doubt that he has been able to meet many of his axioms of great poetry.

One asks then, is this not enough--but for Keats it was not. Objectivity still eluded him. His poetry in short time becomes even more self-conscious, exploring "some untrodden region . . ./ Where branchèd thoughts, [Become] new grown with 'pleasant pain". And within a matter of a few weeks he would compose some of the greatest lyric poems ever to be written in the English

83 "Ode to Psyche", 51-52.
language—"Ode to Psyche", "Ode to a Nightingale", "Ode on a Grecian Urn", "Ode on Melancholy" and "Ode on Indolence". All were written with the attempt to come to an understanding of the process, with the hope of finding justification for "The weariness, the fever, and the fret" of the world, and most importantly with the intent to define the significance of the "sole self". In fact, the Odes, particularly that of the "Nightingale" and the "Grecian Urn" represent the quintessential "romantic quest". First there is a desire to burst through the mortal bars—to escape to the ideal; then there is a rejection thereof; and finally there is a return to the actual—a return that brings with it a heightened self-awareness and greater understanding, yet another step in the series of one's "creations and destroyings".

As well, what is notable about Keats's writing of the great Odes is that now the opening words of his pioneer work Endymion—"A thing of beauty is a joy forever"—take on a different and deeper meaning. Beauty can exist in the garden of the imagination, but in reality it has its basis in the inevitable pain of life. The haunting melody of the "nightingale" gives the poet comfort, while simultaneously paining him because he wishes that his art would flow as naturally and effort-

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While the exact order of composition is unknown, conventional opinion places them in this order; see John Keats, The Complete Poems, p. 346.
lessly. And the pain intensifies with the realization that the experience is so temporary—that it will outlive itself, whereas the poet will die.

Yet such self-consciousness remains far removed from the Keatsian ideal of Negative Capability. Indeed, there is only one more instance aside from the opening of *Hyperion*, when he actually succeeds in sustaining the ideal and even then it is not for the whole of the poem, but just for the first two stanzas. The poem is entitled "To Autumn", and it was composed in the fall of 1819. It seems to have been written effortlessly, as if the contraries of life explored in the great Odes had somehow, if only for an instant, been resolved. A letter written at this time by Keats to Reynolds attests to this momentary reconciliation of self and process.

How beautiful the season is now—How fine the air. A temperate sharpness about it. Really, without joking, chaste weather—Dian skies—I never lik'd stubble fields so much as now—Aye better than the chilly green of the spring. Somehow a stubble plain looks warm—in the same way that some pictures look warm—this struck me so much in my Sunday's walk that I composed upon it, 85

85 It occurs in the following line from "Ode to a Nightingale" and is indicative of the Keatsian ability to capture an exquisite and powerful interplay of sense impressions in a cogent and precise manner:

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs.

(41-42)

The synesthetic imagery renders the scent of incense tangible, giving it shape and form as it "hangs" in the enveloping darkness.

In turn, this ease and sense of inner peace is revealed in the poem itself. One imagines Keats's hand, pen and ink at the ready, gliding across the page guided by the warm spirit of autumn herself:

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun,
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eyes run;
To bend with apples the mossed cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease,
For Summer has o'er-brimmed their clammy cells.

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
Or on a half-reaped furrow sound asleep,
Drowsed with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
Sparès the next swath and all its twined flowers;
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
Steady thy laden head across a brook;
Or by a cider-press, with a patient look;
Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

Now, with these first two stanzas, there is no intrusion of the poet's personality. Keats has given himself over to the spirit of autumn completely, investing her with his humanity. She is "the bosom-friend of the maturing sun", and he seizes and savours the fullness of her maturity. His sympathetic imagination captures the essence of the vegetation, the "swell" of the "gourd" and the plumpness of "the hazel shells/ With a sweet kernel". There is a rich aroma to the air with the "mists and mellow fruitfulness", and as we move to the granary we
become intoxicated, "Drowned with the fume of poppies". The imagery is particularly lovely. Autumn sits "careless on a granary floor", and her hair is "soft-lifted by the winnowing wind". What a marvelous expression—"winnowing wind"—it sets the tone for the entire two stanzas, for there doesn't seem to be an end to our enjoyment, nor is there a sense of urgency to move on and think about what it all means and what might follow. We can watch "the last oozings hours by hours". Undoubtedly, with these two stanzas, Keats has attained his desired poetic sensibility—the sympathetic imagination, the intensity, the synesthetic qualities of his imagery, they are all present, and most importantly, there is the long sought after "disinterestedness".

And yet if we are to consider the value of Keats's accomplishment with his ode "To Autumn" we must turn and look at the third stanza, for only when the work is viewed in its entirety can we grasp its true import. As we have witnessed, Keats's need to develop the self and his poetic sensibilities had almost totally made the realization of Negative Capability impossible. This is because, in his feeling the need to "think into the human heart", his poetic path necessarily became one of self-discovery. After a few juvenile musings he realized too that he no longer wanted to write just for the sake of writing. Indeed, the excellence of a work encompasses
so much more than just mechanics. Ultimately poetry should be viewed as "philosophy" and the poet as "A humanist, physician to all men". Therefore, as he attempted to meet the demands he made of himself; the more he realized what it means to be an individual and poet, and what one's responsibilities are to oneself and mankind. Milton was a "genius" in his time, but Wordsworth could be considered much "deeper". There was, as there is now, a "grand march of intellect", hence a poet and the purpose of his work should address the emotional and intellectual needs of his time.

In turn, the very beauty of the first two stanzas does help "soothe the cares, and lift the thoughts of man" but we may well ask as one is sure Keats did—is this enough in itself? For in truth, it is only when we experience the mood change in the third stanza that the fullness of the expression is completed. Yes, "A thing of beauty is a joy forever", but man and poet are constantly reminded of "the eternal fierce destruction" that moves on relentlessly. Thus, it is only when Keats asks

\[
\text{Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they? Think not of them,} \\
(III, 23-24)
\]

that the poem takes on an added dimension because it

87 Fall of Hyperion, 190.
88 "Sleep and Poetry", 247.
brings into focus the very transitoriness of life. The beauty in the poem "soothes" the reader and lessens the "agonies and strife/Of human hearts", but only because one is strengthened by the experience of reality. As Keats says in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn"--"Beauty is truth, truth beauty", and it is this truth of reality, the ideal of beauty juxtaposed with the transitoriness of man himself, that represents Keats's true accomplishment. Indeed, we value the ode "To Autumn" not so much because the first two stanzas represent the Keatsian ability for Negative Capability, but because of what the work achieves as a whole—with the third stanza helping emphasize that human suffering is common to all, and the realization of this helps the "intelligence" become a "soul" and an "individual".

In the main then, one could say that the Keatsian realm of poetry is very autobiographical—a poetry of felt-experience rather than one of Negative Capability. And taking everything into consideration, it seems that it was almost by chance that the two stanzas of "To Autumn" even materialized. For after having written his work in praise of the "Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness" Keats went on to write only a handful of works before his tuberculosis forced his poetic sensibility into its eternal eclipse—works that, on the whole, reveal that rather than moving on to attain a state of disinterestedness, Keats was still very much concerned
with his self-genesis, his "Growing within". As well, we find too, that coupled with this emphasis on self-definition, there still remains a desire to justify his existence as poet. This is particularly apparent in *Fall of Hyperion* wherein we find Keats asking:

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What am I then? Thou spakest of my tribe:
What tribe?
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What benefit canst thou do or all thy tribe;
To the great world? Thou art a dreaming thing,
A fever of thyself.
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(193-94) (167-69)

Unquestionably after all was said and done, his was still very much the need to forge a "resting place", to "fathom the space every way" and find not "nothing"—but rather a strong centre of reference. first for himself and then for others.

He had, it was true, finally let go of his imaginary garden, the realm of Flora and old Pan, and acknowledged in true Wordsworthian fashion that which he once thought was impossible—

'Nothing can bring back the hour
Of spendour in the grass and glory in the flower.'

Yes, with his many "Creations and destroyings" he had moved beyond those halcyon days and in reality, had given up nothing. For at the centre of it all remains some of

89 *Fall of Hyperion*, I, 40.
90 *Fall of Hyperion*, I, 82, 84.
91 *Letters*, II, 113.
that "splendour" and "glory"—to which has been added a wealth of thoughts and feelings that have afforded us some of the greatest poetry and prose ever written. Indeed, John Keats's worth should not be judged, as he was wont to do, by whether or not he ever achieved his ideal of Negative Capability. But rather the wonder and value of it all is how, in the short period of time allotted to him, he became such a "mighty Poet of the Human Heart".92

Letters, II, 115.
CONCLUSION

Due to his unsettled state of health, John Keats wrote very little in the last year or so of his life. He finally died in Rome in February of 1821, a mere twenty-five years of age. And yet this quarter-century of life had been a rich and vital one for even during so short a period of time we have been able to trace within the poet and his work the extraordinary growth of the Romantic legacy as it was passed on to this, the second generation. As we witnessed, it was a sensibility that grew from the initial Wordsworthian affirmation of the individual—the beingness at all costs, even to the extreme such as we have with "The Idiot"—and on to the conception of the creative imagination rising up to the heights of "feeling intellect", to the Keatsian world view that transmutes, enriches and refines the "dark/Inscrutable workmanship"\(^1\) that had been Wordsworth's "main region of song". Indeed, Keats's prose and poetics afford us a vision of life that is far more fertile and complex than most spun by his then still-living progenitors. His poems of exploration—of "Creations and destroyings" and self-transformations reveal a wealth and wonder of life—a con-

\(^1\) The Prelude, I, 340-41.
tinual kaleidoscopic juxtaposition of the actual and ideal, dream and reality, passion and thought, pursuit and satedness, immortality and mortality, and poetry and philosophy. To read Keats is to come away with the sense that, as Hamlet would say,

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy. (I, V, 66)

And it was all done in a searching, serious way and not through the likes of mystical schemes, visionary flights, or political theorizings of the Blakes and Shelleys. Rather, for Keats it became the actual---life itself---that was the one reality, and he honoured it. Therefore, even when Keats found himself at the nadir of his emotional and physical existence, his was still the assertion that

I wish for death, every day and night to deliver me from these pains, and then I wish death away, for death would destroy even those pains which are better than nothing. Life and Sea, weakness and decline are great separators, but death is the great divorcer for ever.²

For Keats then, beingness was everything and with his life he attempted to balance not only, as others before him had, a social responsibility with the poetic imagination, but also because of his position in the "grand march of intellect", it became his task to forge for himself a philosophy that would hold the mind's and

²Letters, II, 345.
the heart's loyalties. There was the intense need to define what it is man is, to make sense thereof and thus give purpose to one's existence.

Nor was this dilemma, as we well know, peculiar only to the Romantic Period proper for it is still very much, if not more so, with us today. We are really but an extension of the Romantic Era to which has been added the Victorian cast of mind, aptly described by Carlyle as "floating anxiety", not to mention the layers and layers of new concerns that the twentieth century has brought with it. In fact, perhaps Matthew Arnold most accurately diagnosed modern man's state of being when he referred to it as a chronic illness that one must learn to live with rather than expect to cure. In turn, Keats, most assuredly would have understood Arnold's analysis and approved the contention that education and self-knowledge are the only keys to working one's way to some form of freedom. And he would have valued the Arnoldian insistence that one needs to establish one's "best-self", for that was, in essence, most central to his own being.

Thus, taking everything into consideration it is not surprising that in Keats's attempt to develop his "best-self", coupled with the unwillingness to give anything less than the truth, he would have to make sacrifices. Perhaps Keats never fully realized in his poetry the full implications of the Negative Capability theory
and yet one feels that Keats knew, particularly by the time he wrote the great Odes, that as we proceed painfully towards the ideal we must pay a certain price. He may have failed on one level, but those who seize the opportunity to witness the cultivation of this poet's poetic and philosophic mind will be rewarded by coming to an understanding of the ideals as they exist in the world at large, and hence within their own selves; perhaps as much as any writer can hope to achieve.

And gradually it seems that for Keats the very act of creating itself soon grew to represent one of the few real validations of his existence. There was the sense that, as Byron would say,

Tis to create, and in creating live
A being more intense. . . 3

In turn, because Keats died at such an early age, there has always been a great deal of speculation as to what new state of "being" he might have entered and what form his next expression might have taken. Although what follows is mere conjecture, having used Keats's poetry and prose as an index to his personality, it does not seem beyond the realms of possibility to suggest that he may well have become a playwright. He had, in fact, always leaned that way what with his admiration for Hazlitt's fine critical thoughts about the art of drama, and his

3 Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, III, 46-47.
heightened appreciation of Shakespeare, not to mention his intention to write a play for the great Shakespearean actor, Edmund Kean. Hence the writing of Otho the Great, Keats's and Brown's little "dog-cart"₄, perhaps the first, however feeble, of other attempts had he lived longer. Nor can Otho be thought of as an isolated incident, for in Keats's words:

---One of my Ambitions is to make as great a revolution in modern dramatic writing as Kean has done in acting... ⁵

And of course, above and beyond all else, good drama, "the playing of different Natures with Joy and Sorrow"₆, represents the ultimate attainment of Negative Capability. If one cannot achieve it poetically, then why not dramatically? Then again, and this seems to have been the case for Keats, perhaps the writing of drama is a step one makes only after writing a certain amount of "on the pulses" poetry—a step that comes only after struggling with some of life's questions and subsequently the gaining, however tentative, of one's "substantial centre". Undoubtedly, with the modern poet's need to travel the path of self-discovery, to write from within to without, the whole nature and validity of his expression and its

₄ Letters, II, 135.
₅ Letters, II, 139.
effect upon his readers are called into question. It leads one to ask whether or not meaningful poetry can come of anything other than unresolved tensions and to assert that perhaps the only way the modern reader can gain value is by experiencing with the writer a certain dialectical working of one's way towards an understanding of the one, and the many. Some since Keats have tried to strike a balance between the ever-present conflicts of social duty and the poetic self, life and art, and obligation and detachment. And Tennyson, for one, was successful with such works as his "epic" lyrical In Memoriam wherein he manages a most skillful blend of the private and public self. Robert Browning, on the other hand, eventually chose a very different vehicle for his expression, one that Keats would have found most intriguing, and that was his use of the dramatic monologue which he eventually used to its fullest extent in his novel play in verse entitled, The Ring and the Book.

Yet to say that Keats may have become a playwright had he lived longer is; as stated before, mere speculation at that. Nevertheless, whatever the case may have been, one feels fairly certain that the Keatsian vision would not have narrowed to the extent that, say, Wordsworth's did—wherein we find the poet, who in his youth constantly sought growth and the widening of one's sympathies, in later years spent many of his days shaping safe little
sonnets of the "River Duddon" variety. Granted, with age and experience usually comes a certain settling of things and one cannot deny that, on the whole, as David Perkins rightly states,

... no poet gives a more vivid picture of the mind encountering and building up its world, and reading Wordsworth we can see more clearly the modes and processes of our own consciousness. There is also the Wordsworth who senses the aura of strangeness around any act or object, the sheer inexplicability of it, the mystery and unfathomable depth.

But with Wordsworth, unlike Keats, there is the nagging sense that there were certain chambers in the labyrinth that remained, if not unexplored, then purposely buried. For example, his writings do not convey any hint of his sexuality. And one could even say that he appears to have had an undeveloped sense of humour—while with Keats one comes away with the feeling that his struggle for identity, his self-genesis, was somehow more all-encompassing, more intense, and yes, one could even say more honest. And perhaps it is because of this added sense of honesty and integrity that we find Keats in the not unheard of position wherein not only does the pupil, to a certain extent, outgrow the teacher but also the roles may even become reversed. Thus, even though one must read between the lines somewhat, the following information about our first and second generation Roman-

tics suggests more than a hint of admiration and emul-
lation on Wordsworth's part:

Wordsworth himself traced his kinship with the
younger poet and acknowledged it. He felt, he said,
'a peculiar satisfaction' in having anticipated in
his own sonnet 'Praised be the art', printed in
his 'Lyrical' volumes, the thought of Keats' 'Ode on a
Grecian Urn'; he hastily and generously added 'not
that he suggested any borrowing of the idea on the
part of Keats'.

As well, a particular River Duddon sonnet entitled,

"The Resting Place"

... where he speaks of

the Fancy, too industrious Elf.
greatly resembles ... Keats's 'deceiving elf',
Fancy, in the 'Ode to a Nightingale', and is too
strong to be accidental. Keats's poem had been
first printed in a periodical called Annals of the
Fine Arts in July 1819. In all probability Haydon
had sent Wordsworth a copy of the number in which
the 'Ode' had appeared. Wordsworth's line was a
tribute from the older poet to the younger which
Keats would have enjoyed, but when "The River Dud-
don" appeared, in May 1820, he was too ill to take
delight in anything again.

And Hazlitt also, albeit somewhat grudgingly, eventually
acknowledged the Keatsian greatness. As Herschel Baker
comments, although

... Hazlitt had no gift for keeping friends, and
Keats, in his dizzy rise to splendor, quickly grew
beyond the men who once had seemed to him to be
great spirits; but so far as we can tell, the af-
fecion and respect these two felt for one another
suffered no attrition. Always rather captious about
contemporary writers, Hazlitt no doubt undervalued
Keats (as Haydon charged), but he was the first to
anthologize his work and to proclaim that he had
shown "the greatest promise of genius of any poet

8 Moorman, pp. 377-78.
of his day.\textsuperscript{9}

Indeed, if a poet is to endure, he must come into his own voice and this John Keats did with seemingly "full-throated ease"\textsuperscript{10}. And his expression continues to be fresh and vital even in these jaded times that are ours not so much because he occasionally achieved Negative Capability, for one can see that for all intents and purposes that is now a moot point; rather Keats is of value because of the very fact that through witnessing his continual creation, organization and reorganization of the self vis-à-vis reality we realize the intricacy of the whole human process. And such a vision is needed in a world like ours wherein ironically, in spite of propelling ahead scientifically, the more knowledge we have, the less personal integration seems possible. The "best-self" has to struggle against great odds in the face of a world that is scientifically manipulated. For science, at its worst, and because of its very nature, is a discipline that works always by abstracting what it needs from reality, thereby narrowing man's potential scope of reference. The work of John Keats then, acts as a touchstone, bringing each and every one of us back to our "sole self". And in so doing, it impresses upon us that the very manner by which

\textsuperscript{9} Baker, p. 247.

\textsuperscript{10} "Ode to a Nightingale", 10.
one can hope to find meaning and learn to control one's existence is by first consciously shaping the self, and all else will come after.

In closing then, it almost goes without saying that John Keats was an extraordinary poet. To be sure his work spins out of the fact that he possessed a keen and virile mind, one that was always reaching and searching. But perhaps above and beyond all that we are drawn to him because of his marvelous and uncanny sense of honesty, because as man and poet he was capable of admitting

... I strive—to know myself. ... I wrote with my Mind—and perhaps I must confess a little bit of my heart.
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