

Great Maker's Presence
A Study of Time and Existence
in John Keats

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ABSTRACT

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The present thesis deals with the change and development of Keats's sense of time and existence throughout the body of his poetry as he pursues the identity of imagination, beauty, love and also himself. In spite of Keats's longing for the immortality of these four, in reality they are all ephemeral. Imagination vanishes; beauty withers; love fades; Keats himself is not allowed to escape death. When he speculates upon the essence of these existences, time which transforms them and in the end causes their death stands as a barrier. Keats's value-making is, therefore, closely linked with his idea of time. Also, in his case, the epistemological activity of the self which tries to recognize the essence of existence comes upon a question. Time and existence can be perceived only through consciousness, the experiencing self. The question of time and existence is inseparable from the question of the self. The act of elucidating the mysteries of time and existence at the same time operates as self-examination. What Keats seems to find at the end of his search is the presence of God behind the beauty of time and all existences, an insight beyond the romantic illusion of the exalted self.

To My Parents

Acknowledgments

For completing the present thesis, the author is indebted to many critics in this area, including Japanese scholars. Even though Keats study is active in Japan, it is unfortunate that many of the critical essays are not yet translated into English. In Japan Keats's poems and letters have been translated and published in various editions; The Complete Poems was published in 1974 in Prof. Yasuo Ideguchi's brilliant translation. Keats's poems are greatly enjoyed not only by the students of English Literature but also by many lovers of English poetry. The author of this thesis consulted some of the major Japanese essays for reference. When it is required to quote some lines from a Japanese source, I myself have translated them into English. If there is any awkwardness in expression, the blame is mine alone.

I wish to thank Prof. Auchinachie for his valuable advice and his generous understanding, and also I must record here special gratitude to my parents whose love and encouragement have sustained me throughout the difficult process of completing this thesis.

Contents

Introduction	1
Chapters	
I. The Sky and Eternity: Poems around 1817	12
II. Time's Sea: Death and the Tragedy of Human Time	39
III. The Island of the Moment: The Paradoxes of Time	
1. Paradoxes of the Imaginative Moment	70
2. Diana-Triplex of the Moment	105
3. "Negative Capability" and Epistemological Paradoxes	140
IV. The Panorama of Time: Memory	152
V. The Aesthetics of Time: Songs of the Four Seasons	187
Bibliography of the Works Consulted	210

Introduction

What, then, is time? I know well enough what it is, provided that nobody asks me; but if I am asked what it is and try to explain, I am baffled.

St. Augustine's perplexity and question about time is indeed an universal one. From ancient days up to the present, many people have pondered over time. Some have studied it mathematically, and others have discussed it philosophically. The problem of time ranges over various fields; but in whatever field it is considered, time is inseparable from man's life. No one doubts that time exists. No one can live free from the hand of time nor deny its strong effect over him. Man is always aware of time--passing time, coming time or whatever it may be.

Awareness of time is closely related to the question of existence and its duration. Actually time and existence seem to be inseparable. Whenever man thinks of himself as a being, he inevitably admits the work of time which is behind all beings and moves them equally toward one definite end as long as he can know on earth. Time brings all existences to death. Death is apparently physical destruction,

¹Saint Augustine, Confessions, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961), p. 264 (XI:14).

the cessation of the physical activity of existence.

However, we have to note here that death is an aspect of time as well as an aspect of existence: in the personal sense, death is not only the end of existence but also the end of the time a person has consumed during his life.

Death is a crisis for the sense of time and existence in their relation to eternity and immortality. If one believes in the immortality of existence, time is a conveyer to its status; if not, time is a mere destroyer. At the same time, if one believes in eternity succeeding or transcending time, then existence could be permanent; if not, existence is temporary flesh which vanishes into nothingness after a certain period. Thus, the sense of time and the sense of existence totally depend upon each other. These two senses are so complicatedly intermingled as to be dealt with separately.

Georges Poulet asserts in his study of human time-consciousness that the Christian of the Middle Ages "did not have first to discover himself existing in a present moment in order next to conceive himself as existing in time."² If so, those Christians were lucky. For them, time was a movement to carry them toward God; therefore, there was no distinction between being and becoming in the essence of existence. However, since the awakening of the notion of the self as an individual entity in the

² Georges Poulet, Studies in Human Time, trans. Elliott Coleman (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1956), p. 3.

Renaissance, the sense of time and existence changed drastically. It became so much a part of the question of the self. Time and existence came to be perceived in terms of their relation with self, and therefore through the consciousness of self. By this process, man found internal time in the sphere of consciousness apart from external time. Here arises a problem. Human consciousness, which is "always of the present moment,"³ knows nothing of human becoming but the actual state of being. To know the change and becoming of the self, man has to wait for time: only time can tell it as a result of his experience in time. Time is the only medium to connect the being and becoming of the self.

Time, existence and self seem to make the eternal triangle. When we think of time or the work of time, existence and self also come into question. The question of time is likewise the question of existence and what is more, the question of self. The attempt to elucidate the mysteries of time and existence simultaneously operates as self-examination.

Though time may be a concern to every man in some way or other, time seems to occupy an important role especially for the artist. First of all, time is obviously a great enemy for an artist who wishes to give his work an immortal aspect. The poet (or the novelist) tries to save his work

³Poulet, Studies in Human Time, p. 13.

from destructive time by fixing it in language. Yet, paradoxically, time seems to be one of the most crucial elements in the creative process in literature; for as John Lynen says,

. . . while, on the one hand, the author's sense of time reflects the influences which have shaped his mind, it is, on the other hand, a governing idea, or premise, which gives to his experience a form that can be reproduced in language. In other words, the time he assumes constitutes a way of organizing the elements of his consciousness, which is also a way of organizing a poem or a novel.

Time can be creative as well as destructive. In this sense, the creative process is a struggle with time. To achieve his art, the artist has to put up with time's burden and in some way has to find a reconciliation with it. As a poet, John Keats is no exception in his struggle with time. Indeed, E. L. Stelzig regards the Romantic lyric itself as "an extensive dramatic meditation of the self in its relation to time."⁵ Keats's poetry lends itself to consideration from this point of view.

"A thing of beauty is a joy for ever" (I.1),⁶ says

⁴John F. Lynen, The Design of the Present: Essays on Time and Form in American Literature (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1969), p. 25.

⁵E. L. Stelzig, All Shades of Consciousness: Wordsworth's Poetry and His Self in Time (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), p. 40.

⁶Keats's poems will henceforth be quoted and cited by line numbers as given in Miriam Allott, ed., The Poems of John Keats (London: Longman, 1970) except where otherwise indicated.

Keats at the opening of Endymion, and this remains his primal assertion throughout his career. However, in reality, neither beauty nor joy can last forever. On the contrary, they are more commonly regarded as if they were the very symbols of transience and fragility in life. All living things in this world (or should I say "forms," if Keats really tried to mean "essence" in the Platonic sense by this "thing," as Newell Ford suggests?⁷) are ceaselessly changing and transfiguring, and soon decay. Keats often refers to the attitude of "speculation" and its importance in the process of his poetic creation, and the more he speculates upon beauty or other objects, the more clearly he must notice their change toward decay, the inevitable end of all existences. What, then, is existence? The longing for eternity and the recognition of actual life bring forward a consciousness of time which stands between them. Thus, if beauty is Keats's life-long concern, it is quite evident that in his pursuit of the essence of beauty and the aesthetic value of "things," his judgement is linked decisively with his sense of time; that is how he interprets time or the works of time.

As for the nature of imagination, time again occupies the same dominant position in its recognition. Romanticism is generally based upon the assertion of the exalted power

⁷Newell Ford, The Prefigurative Imagination of John Keats: A Study of the Beauty-Truth Identification and Its Implication (1951, rpt. Hamden: Archon Books, 1966), pp. 13-19.

of imagination. This power enables a poet to free his existence from the chronicity of time. This freedom of the self obtained in imagination is well expressed in Keats's famous theory of "Negative Capability"⁸--the declaration of the poet's being as timeless, spaceless and selfless existence. The vision of the self out of time may assure Keats of the immortality of the whole of existence; this especially fulfills his desperate desire for the immortality of love, beauty, fame, and art which otherwise seem temporal in reality. However, time in imagination (as it is often called "timeless time") has a paradoxical structure within itself. While in imagination the moment can be sublimated to the eternal present, in reality it is always nothing but the passing moment which follows the previous one and is followed by the up-coming one. Gaston Bachelard distinguishes time in poesy from actual time which flows away, as it were, with a flux of water and a gush of wind. He calls the former "vertical" and the latter "horizontal."⁹ Thus, when the specious moment in imagination is viewed as a part of the duration of existence, we cannot but notice that it is destined to vanish into nothingness just like other existence in time. Keats is keenly aware of this

⁸Hyder E. Rollins, ed., The Letters of John Keats, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1958), I, 193; henceforth cited as Letters

⁹Gaston Bachelard, L'intuition de L'instant (Paris: Librairie Stock, 1932), p. 104.

paradox of the present moment. Many of his poems revolve around the problem. A question such as "Do I wake or sleep?" (80) at the end of "Ode to a Nightingale" is related to Keats's awareness of this paradox. To hold on to the moment that has already passed is to try to live in the past, death, and what is now nothing. In "Lamia" and "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," Keats bitterly experiences the negative aspect of the moment in imagination. Whether imagination is "Adam's dream"¹⁰ which turns out to be truth or "Jack a lantern to amuse whoever [sic] may chance to be struck with its brilliance"¹¹ greatly depends upon Keats's choice of time--"vertical" or "horizontal."

If I call the paradox of the present moment--an intersection of time and eternity, or of "horizontal" time and "vertical" time--the "ontological paradox"¹² according to Rosalie Colie's classification, the question of time and existence involves another kind of paradox--the "epistemological paradox."¹³ As explained at the beginning, the question of time and existence evokes the consciousness of self as a medium to elucidate the relation of the two and

¹⁰ Letters, I, 185.

¹¹ Ibid., I, 242.

¹² Rosalie L. Colie, Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 219-352.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 6-7, 355-507.

therefore often works as self-examination. However, self-examination itself is a paradox. The self has no other view-point outside itself to measure its operation since it deals with itself both as a subject and as an object. Fundamental self-examination inevitably contains the "epistemological" paradox, in which "the mind, by its own operation, attempts to say something about its operation."¹⁴

"What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth,"¹⁵ says Keats in a letter to Benjamin Bailey; yet while he tries to believe this, the truth of imagination remains a crucial question that afflicts him throughout his life. When the poet thinks about the identity of imagination, he is forced to undergo the process of self-examination. To prove the truth of imagination, he has to justify his self out of time by his self in time. It is only in time that he can make sense of what he felt or visioned outside time in imagination. In "Lamia," Keats displays this process of self-examination. Viewed from the point of Keats's sense of time and existence, the poem can be regarded as an analysis of the process of poetic creation when imagination appears in consciousness and crystallizes into a form. In this poem, Keats undergoes a painful but inevitable process

¹⁴ Colie, p. 6.

¹⁵ Letters, I, 184.

of epistemology--an effort to know what imagination is. This effort ends in a failure, since it is impossible to know the unknown and unknowable something beyond time like imagination. The end of "Lamia" is a fact of self-examination. It ends in a fall into an epistemological paradox, or worse into solipsism as the only way to solve the paradoxical situation. It is worth remarking here that "Lamia" is both Keats's analysis of his poetic creativity and at the same time a product of his creativity itself. The poem itself is a paradox.

If the ontological paradox and the epistemological paradox briefly introduced so far are caused by Keats's sense of time and being, Keats is also aware of becoming in time. There is no doubt that time brings all existences to decay; but when Keats calls the world the "vale of Soul-making,"¹⁶ he not only admits change and becoming in time but also tries to find a progress toward personal maturity through change. In his sense of becoming as a progress, he seems to seek for an answer to the paradoxes of being. "Hyperion" and "The Fall of Hyperion" are Keats's efforts to try to overcome the gap between being and knowing, by using the god of memory (Mnemosyne or Moneta) as a perspective on time.

Thus, Keats's sense of time and existence seems to be an interesting and important aspect through which to

¹⁶Letters, II, 102.

approach the poet and his poetry. The present study is, then, concerned with this aspect of his works--thoughts, feelings, and attitudes with which Keats faced time and coped with it in his search for the identity of existence and self--in terms of his development both as a poet and as a man. This study basically takes as its method textual analysis, but especially turns attention to Keats's direct mention of time and the metaphors used to express this sense of time and existence.

For mere convenience, this study develops by focussing on Keats's sense of time, though to focus on time eventually and inevitably involves a discussion of existence and self. The first chapter deals with Keats's early poems (around 1817), a remarkable characteristic of which is his longing for the sky, symbolized by the pose, "tip-toe." The second chapter traces a process of his encounter with actual time--his painful recognition of time as a destroyer through his experience in the Scotland-tour. The significance of the sea as a metaphor of process-time or death is also discussed in this chapter. The third chapter deals with the ambivalence and ambiguity especially intense in the poems of 1819, his annus mirabilis, in relation to the paradoxes of being caused by Keats's absorption into the present moment. The fourth chapter deals with Keats's view of time as becoming not only in the personal sense but also in the universal and historical sense, mainly focussing on a panorama of time revealed in "Hyperion" and

"The Fall of Hyperion." Keats's handling of time in these two versions is also considered from the existential point of view. The final fifth chapter, as a conclusion, deals with the aesthetics of time achieved in "To Autumn" as a result of Keats's struggle with time. Here, Keats reaches the stage of total submission to time without any conflict, and his "Negative Capability" is successfully accomplished, now not by escaping from time but by identifying himself with time itself.

This study of Keats's sense of time and existence reveals in the short years of his life a remarkable development as a man. Starting from egocentric indulgence in both sensuous and ideal beauty, Keats gradually comes to reject the romantic illusion about the self. At the end, he succeeds in accepting time as an existence in time. He neither tries to defy it nor dreams of transcending it. If he loves beauty, he also comes to love the beauty of time. It seems to me that Keats, after his struggle with time, finally reaches the stage when he is able to throw himself on the grace of God, a Maker of time and all existences.

Chapter I

The Sky and Eternity: Poems around 1817

1

For a young poet who is still ambitious and idealistic enough to dream of the immortality of beauty, love and poetry (and also the fame it brings him), before anything else time appears as a barrier to eternity. Keats's awakening to time happens with this longing for eternity. "I find that I cannot exist without poetry--without eternal poetry,"¹ says Keats to Reynolds in his letter of April 18, 1817. In spite of this aspiration, it seems that whenever Keats ponders over poetry and eternity, he cannot but feel helpless before the wonders of time. In the letters written in 1817, Keats often refers to eternal poetry and fame (actually he appears virtually to be obsessed by the idea), and sometimes quotes Shakespeare's lines concerning time. In the same letter to Reynolds, just before he mentions his desire for eternal poetry, he quotes the line from The Tempest : "In the dark backward and abysm of time. . ."²

¹ Letters, I, 133.

² The Tempest, I.ii.50.

Keats is always aware of time as a contrast to eternity.

In "To Charles Cowden Clark" (1816), Keats describes the vanity of his longing for eternal poetry, comparing himself to a swan trying to hold a water drop:

He slants his neck beneath the waters bright
 So silently, it seems a beam of light
 Come from the galaxy; anon he sports,
 With outspread wings the naiad Zephyr courts,
 Or ruffles all the surface of the lake
 In striving from its crystal face to take
 Some diamond water drops, and them to treasure
 In milky nest and sip them off at leisure.
 But not a moment can he there insure them,
 Nor to such downy rest can he allure them,
 For down they rush as though they would be free,
 And drop like hours into eternity.
 Just like the bird am I in loss of time
 Whene'er I venture on the stream of rhyme.
 With shattered boat, oar snapped, and canvas rent
 I slowly sail, scarce knowing my intent,
 Still scooping up the water with my fingers,
 In which a trembling diamond never lingers.

(3-20)

Time can never be eternity, nor can we stop the stream of time. In this poem, poetry and beauty, the two things Keats loves most, are under the influence of time. The swan is the embodiment of beauty. As Keats cannot grasp in poetry "each passing moment" ("To George Felton Mathew," l. 31), beauty cannot keep its fairness as it is. Everything is changing and moving. He only watches this without knowing what to do.

"In loss of time" indeed seems the adequate phrase to express Keats's sense of time and existence in his earlier days. He does not know what time exactly is, nor does he try to analyze it deeply. In "Sleep and Poetry" (1816)

Keats describes life as follows:

Stop and consider! Life is but a day;
 A fragile dew-drop on its perilous way
 From a tree's summit; a poor Indian's sleep
 While his boat hastens to the monstrous steep
 Of Montmorenci. Why so sad a moan?
 Life is the rose's hope while yet unblown;
 The reading of an ever-changing tale;
 The light uplifting of a maiden's veil;
 A pigeon tumbling in clear summer air;
 A laughing school-boy, without grief or care,
 Riding the springy branches of an elm.
 (85-95)

Here, time and existence are perceived simultaneously in both negative and positive images. In the first group of the images, Keats deplores the transiency of life. Time that puts a period to life is a destroyer. In the second group, Keats find the joy of life in images of innocence in spite of their fragility. Time is, here, regarded as an unfold of life and its beauty. The ambivalence of time and existence found in these lines is one of the major characteristics of Keats's poetry and is constantly seen throughout his career. However, the intensity of the ambivalence, so obvious in the later poems, is yet absent from these lines. We cannot find the severe conflict with time here. In this stage, Keats's perception of time and existence seems nothing but a series of unorganized and random, beautiful images that come into his mind. In "After dark vapours have oppressed our plains" (1817), the rebirth of nature in spring brings Keats an associated series of images:

The calmest thoughts come round us; as of leaves
 Budding, fruit ripening in stillness, autumn suns

Smiling at eve upon the quiet sheaves,
 Sweet Sappho's cheek, a sleeping infant's breath,
 The gradual sand that through an hour-glass runs,
 A woodland rivulet, a poet's death.

(9-14)

The four seasons, eternity, life, time and death--these are all intermingled here. The rebirth of spring reminds Keats of the cycle of nature. The cycle of nature is linked with eternity symbolized by Sappho, the eternal poet whom Keats worships. The thought of eternity is followed by that of fragile life on the earth. Life is carried away, as if mechanically, by "deaf and senseless minutes of the day" (Endymion, IV.76) symbolized by the sand-clock toward its end, death. After death or winter, is spring again reborn? Keats does not answer the question here. He simply cannot. To answer the question, he has to gain more experiences of time in time. To Keats in this stage, time is still a mystery. Even though he observes its destructiveness and deplores the transiency of life, he has not yet experienced the intense "sorrow of the time" ("Hyperion," I.301) that later torments Hyperion. As Graham Hough points out, Keats's earlier poems are remarkable for the "unanalyzed delightfulness of living and growing things."³ While Keats's early sense of time seems dull before this joy of life, his sense of it sharpens with the investigation of his maturer poetry.

³Graham Hough, The Romantic Poets, 3rd ed. (1953; rpt. London: Hutchinson Univ. Library Press, 1974), p. 159.

Nevertheless, as long as Keats longs for eternity, time is still the "fragile bar / That keeps us from our homes ethereal" (Endymion, I.360). No other Romantic Poets are as keenly aware of the transiency and fragility of earthly life as is Keats. Whatever time is, Keats cannot help seeking for a way to be free from its hand that seems to cause the change and decay of life. Keats's mind is, then, turned toward the sky that seems stable, eternal and beyond the boundary of time.

ii

One of the characteristics of Keats's earlier poems which distinguish them from the later poems is his pathetic longing for the sky which becomes his symbol for eternity. In the earlier poems, the sky is perceived not only as a contrast to fragile, earthly life but also as a place where his free will can be realized. In the sky he seeks a temporary refuge, leaving the life on the earth behind. In this stage he chooses the way of an escapist instead of facing the mysteries and the apparent destructiveness of time.

"Tip-toe" is the pose that clearly manifests Keats's longing for the eternal sky. It shows the will to fly. In "I stood tip-toe . . ." (1816), Keats stands atop a hill trying to reach the sky:

I stood tip-toe upon a little hill,
I gazed awhile and felt as light and free

As though the fanning wings of Mercury
 Had played upon my heels; I was light-hearted,
 And many pleasures to my vision started.
 So I straightway began to pluck a posy
 Of luxuries bright, milky, soft and rosy.

(1-28)

It has been said that Keats had a complex about his height. Gaston Bachelard indicates in his L'air et les Songes, "tip-toe" represents the desire to transcend height as well as the will to fly into the sky.⁴ The posy he plucks there is the posy of heaven that would never be withered by the lapse of time. "Light" and "free"--these two words are generally linked with a dream of flight and mean liberation from time and earthly life. It is notable that in the poem nature as well as the poet stands tip-toe:

Here are sweetpeas, on tip-toe for a flight,
 With wings of gentle flush o'er delicate white,
 And taper fingers catching at all things
 To bind them all with tiny rings.

(57-60)

The sweetpeas depicted here are about to fly as if they were butterflies. The beauty of the flowers is delicate and fragile. The color of those wings, "gentle flush o'er delicate white" is as transitory and beautiful as the blush on Cynthia's cheeks when she first visits Endymion in his dream:

Blush-tinted cheeks, half smiles, and faintest sighs,

⁴Bachelard, L'air et les Songes: Essai sur L'imagination du mouvement (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1943), p. 78.

She took an airy range,
 And then, toward me, like a very maid,
 Came blushing, waning, willing, and afraid. . . .
 (Endymion, I.619-35)

Both flush and blush are transitory colors. It seems that Keats loves these two colors, for he often uses them to describe the beauty of nature. Strangely enough, Cynthia, the embodiment of eternal beauty is also adorned by these transitory colors. Keats might have wished the immortality of these colors all the more because of their transiency. The delicate beauty of the sweetpeas is, in a word, "Beauty that must die" ("Ode on Melancholy," l. 21). These sweetpeas cannot escape from their fate as long as they are earthly existences. In this poem, they stand tip-toe, longing for the eternal sky.

Though "tip-toe" is a longing for the eternal sky, it is yet the action of a mortal. An immortal being does not need to long for eternity nor need to stand tip-toe to fly away from the earth. "Tip-toe" is the action of a mortal who wishes to escape from the hand of time. In "Lamia" Lamia, pretending to be a goddess, rises tip-toe as if to fly away, when Lycius begs her to stay with him:

. . . she rose
 Tiptoe with white arms spread.
 (I.286-87)

This action proves Lamia's mortality. She is no longer the magical creature free from the restrictions of time. She is a mere woman. As shall be seen, Lamia's tragedy is

caused by her trying to immortalize her love for Lycius, a desire evident from this pose.

"Tip-toe" indicates another major characteristic of Keats's poetry as well. "Tip-toe" is neither movement nor stillness. It is a point during a process. David Perkins calls this the "eternal present":

The effect . . . is not mere absence of motion, but of things poised on a brink of action, their action briefly arrested and ready to continue.

This effect is to be seen in many of his poems, including Autumn reposing in "To Autumn" which seems to present the most perfect figure of this "eternal present." However, the eternal present is Janus-faced, like Joy in "Ode on Melancholy," "whose hand is ever at his lips / Bidding adieu" (22-23). It always has as its other face the "temporary present." In this sense, "tip-toe" is not only a longing for the eternal sky but also a display of dynamism in arrested time.

Keats's longing for the eternal sky or his dream of flight is also seen in his other earlier poems. In "To Hope" (1815), one of his earliest poems, Keats wishes for Hope's pinions to escape from time and gloomy, earthly life:

When by my solitary hearth I sit,
And hateful thoughts enwrap my soul in gloom,

⁵David Perkins, The Quest for Permanence: The Symbolism of Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats (1959; rpt. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1969), p. 212.

When no fair dreams before my 'mind's eye' flit,
 And the bare heath of life presents no bloom,
 Sweet Hope, ethereal balm upon me shed,
 And wave thy silver pinions o'er my head.

(1-6)

In "To My Brother George" (Epistle, 1816), Keats imagines his life after death. In his imagination he ecstatically flies away to heaven, rejoicing in the immortality of his poetry:

Fair world adieu!
 The dales and hills are fading from my view.
 Swiftly I mount, upon wide spreading pinions,
 Far from the narrow bounds of thy dominion.

(103-06)

In "Sleep and Poetry" (1816), Keats's mind travels with a chariot through the sky. In Endymion (1817), the hero, in his dream, flies into the sky where for the first time he meets Cynthia, the object of his longing for eternity.

The sky is Cynthia's domain:

The doors
 Of heaven appeared to open for my flight,
 I became loath and fearful to alight
 From such high soaring by downward glance,
 So kept me steadfast in that airy trance,
 Spreading imaginary pinions wide.

(I. 581-86)

Again, in the sonnet of summer, 1816, Keats wishes to fly away to the evening sky, seeking for a tranquil moment:

Oh, how I love, on a fair summer's eve,
 When streams of light pour down the golden west,
 And on the balmy zephyrs tranquil rest,
 The silver clouds, far, far away to leave,

All meaner thoughts, and take a sweet reprieve
 From little cares. . . .
 Perhaps on the wing of poesy upsoar,
 Full often dropping a delicious tear
 When some melodious sorrow spells mine eyes.

In this sonnet Keats emphasizes the bliss of the summer's evening, by using a series of beautiful adjectives: "fair," "golden," "balmy," "tranquil," "silver," "sweet," "fragrant," "delicious" and "melodious." The evening sky wraps the poet in a joyful mood, relieving him from time and earthly troubles. Here, we have to notice that while in this sonnet Keats flies "far, far away" to the eternal sky, later in "Ode to a Nightingale" (1819), he only wishes to "fade far away" (21) "into the forest dim" (20). Both the sky and the forest are for Keats, the same world of bliss. However, the sky in this sonnet, different from the forest on the earth, is another world beyond our reach. The flight to the evening sky is nothing but a refuge from time and reality, what Keats himself calls a "sweet reprieve." The sky and the earth are here perceived as the opposites; therefore, the bliss in the eternal sky can only be the object of longings which can never be fulfilled on the earth. As Keats knows the temporality of his escape, in this sonnet he is also aware of the temporality of the beautiful evening. Katsuzo Sakata expresses this as follows:

In the summer of 1816, the evening cannot yet escape from the fetters of time: the common sense that the joy of the evening is temporal and the night visits soon after this has not yet overlooked. Though Keats laments the

temporality of the evening, there is no intensity of imagination which transfigures the moment into eternity. He only deplures naïvely the temporal beauty of the evening.

Keats's longing for the eternal sky becomes all the more intense because he is helpless before the lapse of time, even though he is aware that the escape to the sky is also temporal.

iii

Why does Keats long for the sky so intensely? It is not only because the sky is the symbol of his eternity but also because it is the place where his free will can be realized without any restrictions. The longing for the sky, in its essence, contains a subconscious narcissism of the free will.

The sky is the space without dimension just like the inner space in imagination. In L'air et les Songes, Bachelard analyzes the significance of reveries on the sky. He calls the sky "le fond absolu"⁷ and "l'objet suffisant du sujet revant."⁸ He then observes the connection between the reveries on the sky and narcissism:

Si le monde est aussi volanté, le ciel bleu est le volanté de lucidité. Le "miroir sans tain"

⁶Katsuzo Sakata, John Keats: Imagination as Self-Annihilating (Tokyo: Nan'undo, 1976), p. 219.

⁷Bachelard, L'air et les Songes, p. 189.

⁸Ibid., p. 192.

qu'est un ciel bleu éveille un narcissisme spécial, le narcissisme de la pureté, de la vacuité sentimentale, de la liberté libre.

As "le miroir sans tain" points out, the sky is not the mere image of eternity. It is the projection of one's will (here, Bachelard means imagination by "la liberté libre").

In the sky we can see all the things desired yet denied in reality of time and ordinary space. In "Hence burgandy, claret and port" (1818) Keats sings:

My bowl is the sky,
And I drink at my eye. . . . (7-8)

What he sees, then, in the sky is what his imagination-will creates in his mind, and not what is actually happening in the sky. As Bachelard calls it "l'objet suffisant du sujet revant," though the sky is the object of Keats's contemplation, the object is filled with the visions of the subject, his dreamy mind; therefore, he is actually contemplating his own will. The contemplation of the sky is, in a way, subconscious self-absorption.

Keats often sees in the sunset sky Apollo's "western halls of gold" ("Ode to Apollo," l. 1). There, all the great poets of old from Homer to Shakespeare and Milton are enjoying their celestial lives and singing with mighty tones. They are

the laurelled peers
Who from the feathery gold of evening lean. . . .
("To My Brother George"--Sonnet)

⁹Bachelard, L'air et les Songes, p. 195.

The "feathery gold" is the cloud floating in the sky as Miriam Allott notes citing Shelley's Queen Mab, "far clouds of feathery gold" (II.16).¹⁰ The cloud appears as a railing to Keats's eyes. He sees, in the sky, the figures of all those honored poets leaning on a railing of the cloud. These visions are the materialization of Keats's desire for eternal poetry and fame rather than a revelation from the heaven. He desires passionately for the immortality of his poetry and the fame it brings him, and yet it seems impossible in reality. He desires the eternal beauty of nature, and yet it seems only temporal in reality. Then, when he sees the evening sky--evening between day and night seems most fragile in a day--his free will-imagination creates the images of all he desires on the canvas of the sky. The visions in the sky give him a certain self-satisfaction and self-assurance.

In the stable sky, only the cloud shows transfiguration. The cloud is also the object of reveries on the sky, as Keats sees it as a railing in "To My Brother George" (Sonnet). Bachelard refers to the cloud as follows:

Devant ce monde de formes changeantes, où la
volanté de voir dépassant la passivité de la
vision projette les être les plus simplifiés,
le rêveur est maître et prophète. Il est

¹⁰Allott, ed., The Poems of John Keats, p. 48, n. 4.

le prophète de la minute.¹¹

The shape of the cloud changes moment by moment. It is not the sky or the wind that creates its shape, but it is the viewer's will to see. The cloud is the material for imagination-will; the contemplator of the cloud molds its shape with the hands of imagination.

In Endymion, when Endymion sits beside a well in the forest beyond the temple of Latona, he sees Cupid and then Cynthia, in the clouds which are reflected on the surface of the water. He tells Peona of this strange happening as follows:

Some mouldered steps lead into this cool cell,
Far as the slabb'd margin of a well
Whose patient level peeps it crystal eye
Right upward, through the bushes, to the sky.

Oftener, heavily,
When love-lorn hours had left me less a child,
I sat contemplating the figures wild
Of o'er-head clouds melting the mirror through.
Upon a day, while thus I watched, by flew
A cloudy Cupid with his bow and quiver,
So plainly characterized no breeze would shiver
The happy chance; so happy, I was fain
To follow it upon the open plain,
And, therefore, was just going, when, behold,
A wonder, fair as any I have told--
The same bright face I tasted in my sleep,
Smiling in the clear well.

(I. 869-96)

It seems to Endymion that Cynthia visited him dressed in the cloud as she did before in his dream. The cloudy Cupid is, for him, a herald of Cynthia's arrival. However, the

¹¹Bachelard, L'air et les Songes, p. 213.

images of both Cupid and Cynthia are actually created by Endymion's will to see the beloved face. He has been spending the "love-lorn hours," not being able to forget the image of Cynthia, since he saw her first in his dream. Then, when he sits beside the well contemplating the figures of the clouds, his love-sick imagination first materializes his love in the shape of Cupid, a god of love. Lost in love, all his pent-up desire for Cynthia finally creates her image. These visions of Cupid and Cynthia visit him not because the heavens ordained it but because his imagination willed it. The reveries on the cloud are also, like the reveries on the sky, the projection of one's will.

There are various images of the cloud in Keats's poems. Keats often sees the cloud as a adornment of Cynthia as Endymion saw her face in the cloud. These two are quite often associated;

Cynthia is from her silken curtains peeping
So scantily that it seems her bridal night. . . .
("To My Brother George"--Sonnet)

Or the coy moon, when in the waviness
Of whitest clouds she does her beauty dress. . . .
("To My Brother George"--Epistle, ll. 59-60)

Keats also configures clouds as flowers or even as an elephant. Since Katsuzo Sakata has studied the change and development of the images of the clouds in the chapter of "The Ripeness of the Cloud,"¹² I shall not refer

¹² Sakata, John Keats, pp. 211-27.

to the details of those images here. However, as the images of Cynthia's curtains or robes show, Keats's cloud generally possesses peacefulness and stability rather than wild mobility of the stormy cloud. Though the cloud may seem to transform its shape every second, it is yet, for Keats, a part of the eternal sky.

In both the reveries on the sky and the reveries on the cloud, the free will-imagination which, in reality, is often interrupted by the restrictions of time and space finds its freedom and its fulfillment. Keats's longing for the eternal sky in his earlier poems often originates in this aspect of the sky. In the letter of November 22, 1817, Keats talks about "Adam's dream" and "Imagination and its empyreal reflection."¹³ Newell Ford interprets the relation between imagination and the empyrean in Keats's poetry, using "reflection" as a key word. He says while imagination generally reflects the empyrean like a mirror or records it like a camera,

Keats's idea is the very reverse: imagination is like a projector, throwing its sensuous, mortal images far out into the empyrean, projecting and extentionalizing them both in time and in space.¹⁴

Here, Ford is talking about Keats's imagination in general. However, Keats's contemplation of the sky seems most fit in

¹³ Letters, I, 185.

¹⁴ Ford, The Prefigurative Imagination of John Keats, pp. 30-31.

this description. In this case, his imagination becomes a projector, and the sky becomes a mirror or a screen.

(However, in spite of the projector-image of Keats's imagination, there is one big difference between his earlier imagination and his more matured imagination in later days. This is seen in the essential difference between the contemplation of the sky and the contemplation of the earthly things (indeed, in his later poems, the objects of his* contemplation are sought in more concrete, earthly things like a Grecian urn, a nightingale and autumn in his great odes). In his letters, Keats repeatedly refers to the importance of the attitude of "Negative Capability" in contemplation. As Charles Patterson points out, "Negative Capability" is a kind of "aesthetic empathy."¹⁵ Empathy is the capacity in a person to merge into the object contemplated and to identify himself with the object. To achieve this effect, the person has to annihilate his self. He has to become a timeless, spaceless and selfless being. In the letter of October 27, 1818, Keats explains this as the "poetical Character":

it is not itself--it has no self--it is everything 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 a much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. . . . A poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no

¹⁵ Charles I. Patterson, Jr., The Daemonic in the Poetry of John Keats. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976), p. 36.

Identity--he is continually in for-- [informing?] and filling some other Body.¹⁶

Nevertheless, in the case of empathy with the sky, the person does not annihilate his self. Let us remember that Bachelard calls the sky "l'objet suffisant du sujet revant" or "le miroir sans tain": it is the reflection of the contemplator's imagination-will. In the empathy with the sky, the contemplator does not need to identify himself strenuously with the object: the object "automatically" identifies itself with the subject. In this case, there is no conflict nor friction between the subject and the object which is inevitable in our empathy with earthly things. The numbness and pain Keats experiences at the beginning of "Ode to a Nightingale" is caused by this friction as Keats tries to annihilate his self and to identify himself with the nightingale. There, empathy with the earthly objects is accompanied by pain. It can be achieved only through annihilating his self. This is the price he has to pay to become a timeless and spaceless being. In contrast, in empathy with the sky, Keats can elevate himself to eternity without annihilating his self or experiencing pains. For young Keats around 1817, it is yet too hard to be a selfless being even in order to transcend time and grasp the moment of eternity. It is, therefore, understandable that his eyes are first turned toward the sky which totally accepts him

¹⁶Letters. I, 387.

and fulfills all his dreams. The sky satisfies Keats's subconscious narcissism and allows his self-indulgence. In the same letter of October, 1818 in which Keats discusses the "poetical Character," he criticizes Wordsworth as representing the "egotistical sublime."¹⁷ Until then, Wordsworth was one of the poets whom Keats admired and by whom he was greatly influenced. This criticism of Wordsworth, in a way, indicates Keats's departure from self-love and self-indulgence in his earlier days. Indeed, by this time, his poetic imagination no longer seeks its release in the sky but deals with the more serious problems of annihilating the self. To reach this stage, the young Keats of 1817 still has to gain more experience of time.

iv

The dream of a flight is, in its essence, nothing but a prelude to the dream of a fall. As Keats himself calls it a "sweet reprieve" ("Oh, how I love . . .," l. 5), the escape to the sky from time and reality is only temporal. He cannot keep on escaping from the hand of time, even though the freedom obtained in the sky is too precious to lose. The dream of a flight always ends with a shuddering sense of reality, the "dragon-world of all its hundred eyes" ("As Hermes once took to his feathers light," l. 5). Imagination loses the wings which enabled the poet to fly about freely in the sky, and he falls down to the earth like

¹⁷Letters, I, 387.

Icarus in Greek mythology. The dream of a fall is a fall of imagination; it is a fall into time.

In "Sleep and Poetry," Keats's journey across the sky with a chariot suddenly ends with a sense of reality:

A sense of real things comes doubly strong,
And, like a muddy stream, would bear along
My soul to nothingness. But I will strive
Against all doubtings and will keep alive
The thought of the same chariot and the strange
Journey it went. (157-62)

The "muddy stream" that sweeps Keats back to reality is his sense of time. Time destroys all his dreams and imprisons him again in reality, where everything and everyone have to submit to the fate to decay.

In Endymion, Book I, the hero soars into the sky in his dream. He tells Peona of this strange experience:

the doors
Of heaven appeared to open for my flight,
I became loath and fearful to alight
From such high soaring by a downward glance,
So kept me steadfast in that airy trance,
Spreading imaginary pinions wide.
(I.581-86)

During the flight, Endymion meets Cynthia for the first time. The two journey in the sky until time creeps into the hero's dream and brings him back to reality:

Soon, as it seemed, we left our journeying high,
And straightway into frightful eddies swooped,
Such as ay muster where grey time has scooped
Huge dens and caverns in a mountain's side.
There hollow sounds aroused me, and I sighed
To faint once more by looking on my bliss--
I was distracted. Madly did I kiss

The wooing arms which held me, and did give
 My eyes at once to death--but 'twas to live,
 To take in draughts of life from the gold fount
 Of kind and passionate looks, to count and count
The moments, by some greedy help that seemed
 A second self, that each might be redeemed
 And plundered of its load of blessedness.
 Ah, desperate mortal! I e'en dared to press
 Her very cheek against my crown'd lip,
 And, at that moment, felt my body dip
 Into a warmer air--moment more,
 Our feet were, soft in flowers.

my sweet dream
 Fell into nothing--into stupid sleep.
 (I.648-78, italics mine)

Endymion's imaginary flight thus ends when the consciousness of time interrupts his dream. The "hollow sounds" he hears are the rhythm of time which, like the ticking of a clock, tells the lapse of each moment. Endymion gradually descends from the sky to the ground as he moves from subconscious state in his dream to conscious state. Consciousness belongs to the sphere of time. In the process of his awakening, in the semi-conscious state, Endymion still maintains his dream of Cynthia. Endymion himself feels that his dream came true like "Adam's dream"; yet it is hard to judge whether he is seeing Cynthia in reality or whether he is still half-dreaming. In either way, as soon as Endymion falls into the sphere of time, time starts to exercise its destructive power. Endymion has to "count and count / The moments" of ecstasy in order to prolong the moments; however, counting the moments already proves Endymion's fall from a timeless sky. He is a mortal being controlled by time as he himself knows. There is now a

big gap between Endymion, a being in time and Cynthia, a timeless being. As Endymion awakes from his dream into time, Cynthia, either in dream or in reality, has to leave him on the earth. Time erases all the traces of Cynthia, leaving only the doubtful memory in Endymion's mind. "Magic sleep" (I.453) which brought Cynthia to Endymion now changes to "stupid sleep." As Keats calls it "Imprisoned liberty" (I.455), even sleep can not totally liberate a man from time and reality. It always brings him back to where he belongs, the confinement of his body.

Keats often describes destructive time as "grey," as "grey time" awakes Endymion from his dream. "Grey" is the color faded by time. Saturn's hair is turned to grey after his fall:

Sat grey-haired Saturn, quiet as a stone. . . .
 ("Hyperion," I.4, italics mine)

This indicates his humanization, his fall from deity. He is now reduced to a being in time. In "Ode to a Nightingale" Keats with the bird leaves the reality behind,

Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs. . . .
 (l. 25, italics mine)

In "The Fall of Hyperion," Keats compares the antiquity of the sanctuary where he awakes to find himself, with

grey cathedrals, buttressed walls, rent towers,
 The superannuations of sunk realms,
 Or nature's rocks toiled hard in waves and winds. . . .
 (I.67-69, italics mine)

The fall into time also happens with the consciousness of the self. In Endymion Book II, the hero journeys through the underworld. If Book I is Endymion's dream of a flight and a fall, Book II is his dream after the fall. The underworld he journeys in is the realm of the flesh and the senses.

There, when new wonders ceased to float before
 And thoughts of self came on, how crude and sore
 The journey homeward to habitual self!
 A mad pursuing of the fog-born elf,
 Whose flitting lantern, through rude nettle-briar,
 Cheats us into a swamp, into a fire,
 Into the bosom of a hated thing.
 What misery most drowningly doth sing
 In lone Endymion's ear, now he has raught
 The goal of consciousness? Ah, 'tis the thought,
 The deadly feel of solitude.

(II.274-84)

The consciousness of the self comes with the consciousness of time. In the state of consciousness, the dream of the flight--what he saw and felt during the imaginary flight--seems only an illusion to the delirious mind; he cannot make sense of what he experienced beyond the sphere of time, in time and in relation to his self. The fall into time from the flight with Cynthia brings Endymion a painful sense of loss. Time seems more cruel and merciless especially after he has experienced the freedom in the sky. The consciousness of the self also binds the free spirit to the body. Endymion is acutely aware of this fact after his fall into time:

Great Muse, thou know'st what prison

Of flesh and bone curbs, and confines, and frets
Our spirit's wings.

(IV.20-22)

The human body in time and space confines the free will
from soaring into the timeless sky.

After all, Keats's longing for the eternal sky in his earlier poems ends in his fall into time. After his fall, Keats can no longer fly freely and innocently like a bird; the fall mars his imaginary wings, yet still he longs for the sky like a "sick eagle looking at the sky" ("On Seeing the Elgin Marbles," l. 5). Even so, the experience of the fall into time leads him to a self-realization which is lacking in his earlier poems.

The journey in Endymion is Keats's account of reaching this self-realization. It marks the end of his earlier, innocent days and the beginning of his new era. Endymion's journey in the sky, the underworld and the sea is Keats's journey through time. Time is the journey and not the road. Through the journey, Keats comes to realize that the escape to the eternal sky is not the means to become really free from time and reality. He also comes to realize that his longing for the eternal sky is actually based on his narcissistic self-love and self-indulgence. At the end of his wandering journey in search of Cynthia, Endymion confesses this:

I have clung
To nothing, loved a nothing, nothing seen
Or felt but a great dream! Oh, I have been
Presumptuous against love, against the sky,

Against all elements, against the tie
 Of mortals each to each, against the blooms
 Of flowers, rush of rivers, and the tombs
 Of heroes gone! (IV.636-43)

With this he finally reaches self-realization; he sees his own existence and fate in a butterfly:

Why I have been a butterfly. . . .
 My kingdom's at its death, and just it is
 That I should die with it.

(IV.937-41)

John Jones says, "The butterfly is his dream of ripeness incarnate."¹⁸ In this remark, he connects the butterfly with the myth of Psyche which is the butterfly-emblem of the human soul. However, the butterfly Endymion mentions here is yet far from ripeness. The butterfly with its colorful and somehow overly-big wings, cannot soar high into the sky like a skylark in Shelley's "To a Skylark." It can only flutter in the mid-air. The butterfly is the symbol of the "fair creature of an hour" ("When I have fears," l. 9), yet dreaming for eternal beauty and happiness. Endymion's statement rather indicates Keats's realization that he has been seeking for the simple joy of life and that he himself is an ephemeral being like a butterfly.

In the letter of May 3, 1818, Keats tells Reynolds about his view of life. He compares life to a mansion:

¹⁸ John Jones, John Keats's Dream of Truth (London: Chatto & Winduss, 1969), p. 202.

I compare human life to a large Mansion of Many Apartments, two of which I can only describe, the doors of the rest being as yet shut upon me --The first we step into we call the infant or thoughtless Chamber, in which we remain as long as we do not think--We remain there a long while, and notwithstanding the doors of the second Chamber remain wide open, showing a bright appearance, we care not to hasten to it; but are at length imperceptibly impelled by the awakening of the thinking principle--within us --we no sooner get into the second Chamber, which I shall call the Chamber of Maiden-Thought, than we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere, we see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there for ever in delight: However among the effects this breathing is father of is that tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the [head] heart and nature of Man --of convincing ones nerves that the World is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, "Sickness and oppression--whereby This Chamber of Maiden Thought becomes gradually darken'd and at the same time on all sides of it many doors are set open--but all dark--all leading to dark passages --We see not the ballance of good and evil. We are in a Mist--We are now in that state--We feel the "burden of the Mystery". . . . Now if we live, and go on thinking, we too shall explore them.

If I apply Keats's earlier poems around 1817 to this comparison, they seem to belong to the still bright "Chamber of Maiden-Thought." Keats is still content with the momentary joy even though he longs for eternity. I cannot find in these poems the intense conflict with time which is gradually increased through the later years. However, through the journey of Endymion, Keats's vision into human life gradually sharpens. At the end when Endymion realizes that he has been a butterfly, Keats also realizes his fate as a being in time. Though in Endymion Keats still remains

in the "Chamber of the Maiden-Thought," he gradually awakes to the tragedy of human time. The doors leading to the dark passages are now opening for him to explore. In the same letter to Reynolds, Keats observes as follows:

An extensive knowledge is needful to thinking people--it takes away the heat and fever; and helps, by widening speculation, to ease the Burden of the Mystery: a thing I begin to understand a little. . . . The difference of high Sensations with and without knowledge appears to me this--in the latter case we are falling continually ten thousand fathoms deep and being blown up again without wings and with all the horrors of a <case> bare shouldered Creature-- in the former case, our shoulders are fledge(d), and we go thro' the same <Fir> air and space without fear. This is running one's rigs on the score of abstracted benefit--when we come to human life and the affections it is impossible how a parallel of breast and head can be drawn --(you will forgive me for thus privately <heading> treading out my depth and take it for treading as school boys <head> tread the water(s) --it is impossible to know how far knowledge will console <as> us for the death of friend,²⁰ and the ill "that flesh is heir to(o). . . .

²⁰ Letters, I, 277-78.

Chapter II

Time's Sea: Death and the Tragedy of Human Time

i

In the process of Keats's awakening to actual time, the sea comes to have a great significance. If the sky stirred Keats's longing for eternity, it is the sea that awoke him to the tragedy of human time--its sorrows, its sufferings and the most tragic of all, death. The sea is a symbol of eternal processes of time; and from the organic point of view, it is a symbol of creative and at the same time destructive processes of time which causes perpetual change and decay. Keats is fascinated by the "myriad sea" (Endymion, III.69) even in his earlier poems.

In "To My Brother George" (Sonnet), the sea invites Keats to a meditation on the future and the past:

The ocean with its vastness, its blue green,
Its ships, its rocks, its caves, its hopes,
its fears,
Its voice mysterious, which whoso hears
Must think on what will be and what has been.

The ocean here is associated not only with the experiences of individual human life filled with various events but also with the changes of life in both universal and organic

senses. The ocean contains many of life's mysteries. As Mario D'Avanzo says, "the ocean symbolizes the source of life and the beginning of knowledge--i.e. the womb of all creation."¹ For young Keats who is about to set sail upon the voyage of life, the ocean is the unknown realm to explore, in search for new knowledge and experiences. Again, in "Sleep and Poetry" Keats sees in the sea the mysteries of life, but before the enormosity of the realm his expectation of future life in "To My Brother George" undergoes a slight change:

An ocean dim, sprinkled With many an isle,
Spreads awfully before me. How much toil,
How many days, what desperate turmoil,
Ere I can have explored its widenesses.
Ah, what a task! (306-10)

Here the ocean is a metaphor for the limitation of what man can experience in his life time. The poet is awed by the ocean. However, in this poem as well as in "To My Brother George" the ocean does not yet convey a tragic tone to Keats's mind. It does not evoke the image of death. In these poems Keats is rather attracted to the creative aspect of the sea--the womb of all creation including man's experiences through time--than overwhelmed by its destructive aspect--the tomb of all creation.

In the letter of April 17, 1817 (just one day before

¹Mario D'Avanzo, Keats's Metaphors of Poetic Imagination (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1967), p. 90.

he starts writing Endymion) written during his stay in the Isle of Wight, Keats composes a sonnet, "On the Sea." The sonnet shows a fundamental difference in Keats's perception of the sea from the last two poems:

It keeps eternal whisperings around
 Desolate shores, and with its mighty swell
 Gluts twice ten thousand caverns, till the spell
 Of Hecate leaves them their old shadowy sound.
 Often 'tis in such gentle temper found
 That scarcely will the very smallest shell
 Be moved for days from where it sometime fell,
 When the last winds of heaven were unbound.
 O ye who have your eye-balls vexed and tired,
 Feast them upon the wideness of the sea!
 O ye whose ears are dinned with uproar rude,
 Or fed too much with cloying melody,
 Sit ye near some old cavern's mouth and brood
 Until ye start, as if the sea-nymphs quired!

Keats visited Shanklin (he was staying in Carisbrooke) the day before he wrote this sonnet, and then he was fascinated by its sea. Therefore, the sea or the scenery depicted here must be the sea of Shanklin. However, even if the beauty of Shanklin's sea is the direct motive to write the sonnet, the sonnet has a strong echo of the sea in King Lear. "The passage in Lear--'Do you not hear the sea?'²--has haunted me intensely,"³ says Keats in the same letter. The quoted passage in question is spoken by Edgar when Gloster, now blind, attempts to throw himself over the cliff.

²King Lear, IV.vi.4.

³Letters, I, 132.

The sea in Keats's sonnet, like the sea in King Lear, is a symbol of the tragedy of human time.

The "eternal whisperings" of the sea are the whisperings of time. They tell of the "spell of Hecate," the Queen of Hell and darkness. Before the spell of death, all beings are helpless like the "smallest shell" whirled and then deserted by the heavenly wind and now drifting on the sea. The "shell" is a symbol of a helpless human being carried away by the tide of time only to meet his destiny, death. In "Hyperion," the true figure of now fallen Titans is also connected with the shell. In the poem, Clemene tells of her strange experience beside the shore as follows:

I threw my shell upon the sand,
 And a wave filled it, as my sense was filled
 With that new blissful golden melody.
 A living death was in each gush of sounds,
 Each family of rapturous hurried notes,
 That fell, one after one, yet all at once,
 Like pearl beads dropping sudden from their string;
 And then another, then another strain,
 Each like a dove leaving its olive perch,
 With music winged instead of silent plumes,
 To hover round my head, and make me sick
 Of joy and grief at once. Grief overcame.
 (II.278-89)

At first Clemene is enchanted by the music of time's sea, until she realizes its meaning: she is no longer a deity but a mere being in time like the fragile "shell." "Each gush of the sounds," like the ticking of the clock tells her the death of each moment; and so does she die in each moment.

The waves of the sea and the music they create lap

over man's consciousness. The waves creep into each life. As the sound of the waves awakes Clemene to her unavoidable fate, the whisperings of the sea in "On the sea" awake Keats to the tragedy of human time. The sea that whispers a story of time and death to Keats's consciousness at the same time becomes his "troubled sea of the mind" (Endymion, I.454). Here, the sea is no longer the realm of new life and experience as it was in "To My Brother George" (Sonnet) and "Sleep and Poetry." It is, rather the realm of death.

From the time of "On the Sea," Keats's sea is endowed with a dark and tragic meaning. It often symbolizes the destructive process of time or its end, death. There are many remarks about time's sea:

Blue tides may sluice and drench their time in
caves and weedy creeks.
("Lines Written in the Highlands after a
Visit to Burns's Country," l. 18)

Time's sea has been five years at its slow ebb,
Long hours have to and fro let creep the sand.
("To --," ll. 1-2)

In "To --," Keats compares human life to the ebb tide; however, he is not referring to the mere lapse of time. He is acutely aware that the "ebbing tide / Of weary life" (Endymion, I.709) carries us all to death.

Wide sea, that one continuous murmur breeds
Along the pebbled shore of memory!
Many old rotten-timbered boats there be
Upon thy vaporous bosom, magnified
To goodly vessels; many a sail of pride
And golden keeled, is left unlaunched and dry.
.(Endymion, II.16-21)

The sea is here used as a metaphor of the forgotten past. Only the events which still remain on the "shore of memory" make up our history. Oblivion is a death in the mental aspect. In this sense, the sea is again the realm of death.

The sound of the sea reminds Keats of the problem of life and death. In Endymion, Keats expresses the contrast between the music of life and the music of death in a metaphorical scenery. At the festival of Pan, a faint music of the festival gives

Its airy swellings, with a gentle wave,
To light-hung leaves, in smoothest echoes breaking
Through copse-clad valley--ere their death o'ertaking
The surgy murmurs of the lonely sea.

(I.118-11)

As Keats himself regards life as the "vale of Soul-making"⁴ the valley as well as the river is the meditative emblem of human life. The river of time, passing through the valley, at last tumbles into the vast ocean of death. The significance of death, whether it is the annihilation of existence or the stepping stone to eternity is decisively linked with the interpretation of the sea, whether it is the tomb of all creation or the womb of all creation; however, in these lines from Endymion, the "lonely sea" seems to be an antithesis of life in the valley. As the music of the festival is the music of life, the "murmurs of the lonely sea" are the music of death. There is a clear

⁴Letters, II, 102.

contrast between the two.

It is the very music of death played by the sea that ends Keats's romantic day-dream and drives him back to reality in "Ode to a Nightingale." In the poem Keats on the "viewless wings of Poesy" (33) flies to

Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas in fairly lands forlorn.
(69-70)

Mario D'Avanzo says, "'perilous sea' identifies the sea as the realm of romance, mystery and fancy"⁵; however, the "perilous sea" is also associated with time. Time's sea creeps into Keats's imaginative state; the "perilous sea" breaks the magic of the "Charmed magic casements" and invades the room of imagination where time is supposed to be suspended. The sea then brings the image "forlorn," far away in time and space. The word becomes a passing-bell to toll him back to dark reality.

While the surface of the sea--the waves and their sounds--symbolizes the eternal processes (mostly destructive) of time in Keats's poetry, the fathomless bottom of the sea presents the mysterious world of death and nothing. The profundity of the sea is a tomb into which all dead existences have glided. It is the void created by time, the great destroyer of the being. However, the void, though created by time, is no longer under the jurisdiction of

⁵D'Avanzo, Keats's Metaphors of Poetic Imagination, p. 87, n.

time. It is a space which George Poulet calls the "reverse of time"--the "other side of Nature."⁶

Space is the void which, just by ceasing to exist, that which sinks into inexistence manages to produce. Far from being, as it at first appeared, a future becoming the present, space is now a present becoming the past. It is that immense Nothing which shuts irrevocably over engulfed actualities. Space is death finally swept of all life, naked death.

The interior of the sea is a space, the world of death; however, far in the depth, the dead existences again continue a detached and isolated life beyond their death.

In Endymion Book III, the hero explores the undersea world. There he meets with Glaucus and is led by him to the crystal palace, where Sylla and other doomed lovers lie dead:

Poor lovers lay at rest from joys and woes.

Such ranges of white feet, and patient lips
All ruddy--for here death no blossom nips.
(III. 736-40)

Here is the world of death; but in this domain, these lovers maintain their life-like freshness. Time can no longer affect them. In their consummation of death, they are now free from all the consequences of becoming in time.

⁶Poulet, The Metamorphoses of the Circle, trans. Carley Dawson and Elliott Coleman (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1966), p. 340.

⁷Ibid., p. 339.

In the interior sea, in place of time, they now occupy space. The absence of time endows them with a strange, immortal existence. In this sense, the space of the interior sea is dead eternity.

In Endymion, Keats strives to give these lovers the real immortality—not the one only death could give but the one to be enjoyed without ceasing to be. Optimistically enough, he succeeds in this attempt. At the end of Book III, Endymion defeats death, and the dead revives. The sea, then, transforms itself from the tomb of all creation to the womb of all creation. However, it is not often so easy to reverse the sea's role. It is one thing to believe ideally that immortality can be achieved beyond death, but it is completely another thing to face in reality the lifeless stillness which seems eternal. In "To Ailsa Rock," written later during his Scotland tour, when Keats sees Ailsa Rock which "fathom dreams" (6) in the sea, he is struck by its deadly stillness and then connects its dead eternity with the sea. Here, the fathomless sea remains the world of death as it was in Endymion before Keats miraculously turned it into real (if I may say so) eternity.

All in all, in Keats's consciousness, the sea and time are deeply connected. The sea often awakes in him the sense of time and death. Keats is fascinated and at the same time awed by the sea, seeing in it the mysteries of time and existence. In the process of Keats's awakening to human time, as time appears more and more as a destroyer,

and death becomes more and more a threatening factor of time, Keats's sea also gains a dark, tragic tone. If the whisperings of the sea teach him a story of time and death, conversely his sense of time and death is reflected in the sea he describes.

ii

Nothing makes us aware of time more severely than when we ponder over death. On this occasion, time becomes an aspect of death as well as an aspect of life; and death becomes an aspect of time. It seems that Keats's meditation on death first began with the fear of death. He was just nineteen years old (1814) when he wrote a short poem on death:

Can death be sleep, when life is but a dream,
And scenes of bliss pass as a phantom by?
The transient pleasures as a vision seem,
And yet we think the greatest pain's to die.

How strange it is that man on earth should roam,
And lead a life of woe, but not forsake
His rugged path; nor dare he view alone
His future doom which is but to awake.

Miriam Allott includes this poem in the section of "doubtful attributions and trivia"⁸; however, if Keats really wrote this poem, death or eventually time which causes death must have been a serious proposition even in his young days. This is partly due to his circumstances. Indeed, death was abundant around young Keats: his brother

⁸Allott, ed., The Poems of John Keats, p. 744.

Edward's early death, his father's tragic death in an accident, his grandfather's death, his mother's pitiful death by consumption, and then his grandmother's death. By the time he wrote this poem, he had already lost many relatives. Here death is apparently the cessation of physical activity. It is natural that time (or death) first appeared as a powerful destroyer to young Keats who was thus forced to observe the death of the people he loved. Before the destructiveness of death, existence seems meaningless. Everything ends in death and seems to return to nothing after all. As Keats wrote later in "Stanzas on some Skulls in Beauley Abbey, near Inverness" (1818),

'Tis the same story o'er and o'er--
 They are like the others!
 (95-96)

Nevertheless, Keats's earlier years were yet colored with the joy and dream of life as we have seen in the previous chapter. He could still lose himself in both ideal and sensuous beauty. He could escape from time to the eternal sky even though the escape was only temporal. Yet, by the time Keats finished Endymion, the actual fact of time and death gradually shadowed his view of life. Then, 1818, the following year is filled with the poems on time and death. This is the period when Keats is obsessed with the fear of death:

One of the main reasons why Keats is so obsessed with

the theme of death during this period is the aggravation of his brother Tom's consumption (he died eventually in December 1 of this year). While Keats is nursing Tom, he is forced to observe the decay of life, the approaching steps of death. Before the destructiveness of time, even love or fame which Keats so covets seems nothing. Keats must have been in such mood when he wrote a sonnet on life and death (January, 1818):

When I have fears that I may cease to be
 Before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain,
 Before high-piled books, in charactery,
 Hold like rich garner the full ripened grain;
 When I behold, upon the night's starred face,
 Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
 And think that I may never live to trace
 Their shadows with the magic hand of chance;
 And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,
 That I shall never look upon thee more,
 Never have relish in the fairy power
 Of unreflecting love; then on the shore
 Of the wide world I stand alone and think
 Till love and fame to nothingness do sink.

In this sonnet, the realization and the fear of death lead Keats to ponder on the nature of time.

The first long poem Keats wrote after Endymion is "Isabella" (February/April, 1818). "Isabella" shows Keats's drastic change from Endymion. It is his observation of death rather than a tragic love-story. As Bernard Blackstone points out, everything is dead in this poem.⁹ Even the season is moving toward decay:

⁹Bernard Blackstone, The Consecrated Urn: An Interpretation of Keats in Terms of Growth and Form (London: Longman, 1959). pp. 270-72.

In the mid days of autumn, on their eyes,
 The breath of winter comes from far away
 And the sick west continually bereaves
 Of some bold tinge, and plays a roundelay
 Of death among the bushes and the leaves,
 To make all bare before he dares to stray
 From his north cavern. (249-55)

"Isabella" is indeed a "roundelay / Of death." The music increases its tempo especially after Lorenzo, Isabella's lover is murdered by her brothers. Isabella sees Lorenzo's apparition in her dream. His body is already affected by "hungry Death" (357). Here Keats describes the decay of dead flesh in detail:

The forest tomb
 Had marred his glossy hair which once could shoot
 Lustre into the sun, and put cold doom
 Upon his lips, and taken the soft lute
 From his lorn voice, and past his loamed ears
 Had made a miry channel for his tears.
 (275-80)

Keats observes the grotesque and blood-chilling fact of death without averting his eyes from it. This realistic observation of destructive death is continued to the scene when Isabella uncovers Lorenzo's body. The scene is too morbid to be called the manifestation of eternal love between the lovers. The process of uncovering Lorenzo's dead body is, as Keats himself says, "all this wormy circumstance" (385). After uncovering his body, Isabella cuts off his head and takes it home with her. Then, she examines his half-decayed skull:

She calmed its wild hair with a golden comb,

And all around each eye's sepulchral cell
 Pointed each fringed lash. The smeared loam
 With tears, as chilly as a dripping well,
 She drenched away--and still she combed, and kept
 Sighing all day--and still she kissed, and wept.
 (403-08)

The grotesqueness of death seems to be increased all the more because of Isabella's love for it. Keats might have wished to find beauty and pathos in Isabella's devotion to Lorenzo, but it seems to me that Keats totally failed in creating this effect. His acute personal awareness of the destructive fact of death is related to his failure to avoid the merely sentimental. Later, in a more detached frame of mind Keats would find in the poem an "amusing sober-sadness."¹⁰

After examining and cleaning Lorenzo's head, Isabella buries it in the pot of basil:

And so she ever fed it with thin tears,
 Whence thick and green and beautiful it grew,
 So that it smelt more balmy than its peers
 Of basil-tufts in Florence, for it drew
 Nurture besides, and life, from human fears,
 From the fast mouldering head there shut from view.
 (425-30)

The basil takes nourishment from Lorenzo's head. Keats might have intended to show that the basil is the proof of the immortality of love and life; however, the growth of basil suggests the shadow of death in the core of life rather than life springing from death. We cannot but feel

¹⁰ Letters, II, 174.

that death is always waiting behind life.

Blackstone indicates a "curiously biological motif" in "Isabella," noticing that Isabella and Lorenzo are "helpless in the grip of a biological destiny."¹¹ As he points out, theirs is not a human tragedy to struggle against the cruel fate; they lack the strength and courage to stand up against time and situation. They are passive, "responding to vegetative rather than strictly human or even animal drive."¹² Isabella and Lorenzo's attitudes toward time and death reflect Keats's attitude toward them in this poem. In "Isabella," Keats sticks to the observation of death in the physical aspect. He has not yet reached the metaphysical question of life and death in this poem. Death is here perceived as nothing but destruction. Aileen Ward suggests that Keats's detailed and realistic description of death--the process of Isabella's emaciation and other images of sickness--are greatly affected by his nursing and observing Tom who was suffering from consumption.¹³ It seems that in "Isabella" Keats could not overcome the fear of death to try a real detached meditation on death when he was thus forced to face the physical fact of death.

¹¹Blackstone, The Consecrated Urn, p. 269.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Aileen Ward, John Keats: The Making of a Poet (London: Viking, 1963), p. 174.

Miriam Allott arranges Keats's poems in chronological order in her edition (according to the date when they were written and not when they were published). According to her arrangement, while Keats was still writing "Isabella," he finished two other poems—"To J. H. Reynolds, Esq." (March 25) and "To James Rice" (April 20). These two poems, like "Isabella," show his acute awareness of destructive time. Keats must have been in an especially negative mood about life in this period.

In "To J. H. Reynolds, Esq." Keats suddenly sees eternal destruction in nature. The vision smashes his happy moment beside the shore and throws him into despair:

'T was a quiet eve;
 The rocks were silent; the wide sea did weave
 An untumultuous fringe of silver foam
 Along the flat brown sand. I was at home,
 And should have been most happy, but I saw
 Too far into the sea--where every maw
 The greater on the less feeds evermore . . .
 But I saw too distinct into the core
 Of an eternal fierce destruction,
 And so from happiness I far was gone.
 Still am I sick of it; and though today
 I've gathered young spring-leaves, and flowers gay
 Of periwinkle and wild strawberry,
 Still do I that most fierce destruction see:
 The shark at savage prey, the hawk at pounce,
 The gentle robin, like a pard or ounce,
 Ravening a worm. . . . (89-105)

Here, Keats sees the destructive power of death behind life as he saw that Isabella's basil took its nourishment from Lorenzo's head. Keats's fear of death is intense in this poem. To his eyes, the law of nature appears as eternal

destruction. In the letter of March 19, 1819 to his brother George, Keats again refers to the law of nature; however, in this letter, he somehow overcomes the fear of nature's destructiveness. He puts up with its necessity to keep the balance of nature; for without the destructiveness of nature,

the Hawk would loose his Breakfast of Robins and
 the Robin his of Worms The Lion must starve as
 well as the swallow--The greater part of Men
 make their way with the same instinctiveness,
 the same unwandering eye from their purposes,
 the same animal eagerness as the Hawk. . . .¹⁴

This statement shows Keats's attempt to accept the cruelty of life as inevitable. However, the Keats who wrote "To J. H. Reynolds, Esq." is far from this--whether calm or not--acceptance. Before the cruel reality surrounding him, before Tom's suffering, all the existences including his own must have yet seemed too helpless for him to overcome the fear of destructive death.

If death is destruction, time which causes death is a destroyer. For Keats who was then obsessed by the fear of death, time was a great enemy. In "To James Rice" written following "To J. H. Reynolds, Esq." Keats wishes for the annihilation of time or at least time's prolongation to the extent that the brief experiences of human life are so protracted as to be all but unrecognizable as the ordinary human condition:

¹⁴Letters II, 79.

Oh, that a week could be an age, and we
 Felt parting and warm meeting every week!
 Then one poor year a thousand years would be,
 The flush of welcome ever on the cheek.
 So could we live long life in little space,
 So time itself would be annihilate,
 So a day's journey in oblivious haze
 To serve our joys would lengthen and dilate.

In little time a host of joys to bind,
 And keep our souls in one eternal pant!¹⁵

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, "flush" is a transitory color. It is the symbol of the transiency and fragility of joyous life. Keats says in his letter:

Mankind may be made happy--I can imagine such happiness carried to an extreme--but what must it end in?--Death--and who could in such a case bear with death.¹⁶

If everything ends in death after all, as Keats himself says, it is understandable that he wishes for the annihilation of time in order to escape from destruction.

Indeed, the fear of destructive time and death is the dominant factor in the poems written around the time of "Isabella." These poems show Keats's awareness of the tragedy of human time, something not vividly perceived in his earlier poems around 1817. However, in early 1818,

¹⁵ This poem is somewhat difficult in that Keats seems to be speaking of three possibilities with respect to time: (a) that ordinary time be protracted so that brief experiences last much longer, (b) that time be utterly annihilated, and possibly (c) that our brief moments be so intense as to seem to encapsulate lengthy time ("In little time a host of joys to bind. . .").

¹⁶ Letters, II, 101.

this awareness is gained only through the observation of his surroundings and not much through his own experiences. Keats is still passive about the mysteries of life and death; he is overwhelmed by the fact of death before he ponders over what life is, what death is and eventually what time is. In order to overcome the fear of death and to try to understand its meaning, he first has to face actual time through his own experiences. In this sense, the Scotland tour following the completion of "Isabella" gave Keats a precious opportunity to gain more experiences of actual, sometimes severe life.

iii

Keats's Scotland tour was taken from June to August, 1818. He was accompanied by his friend, Charles Brown. At the beginning, they planned a four-month long tour; however, during the tour Keats caught cold and he returned to London alone earlier than they first planned. It seems that Scotland's severe nature, unfamiliar to Keats, as well as the decline of his health strongly influenced his view of time and existence, and many of the poems written during the tour reflect his increasingly negative mood. In these poems, Keats is always threatened by the shadow of death, and here his fear of destructive time and death is more intense and personal than in "Isabella."

In "On Visiting the Tomb of Burns," Keats finds in summer winter's dominant power:

Now new begun
 The short-lived, paly summer is but won
 From winter's age for one hour's gleam.
 Through sapphire warm their stars do never beam;
 All is cold beauty; pain is never done.
 (4-8)

Even summer's sun cannot warm Keats, for he is already feeling the coldness of winter and death. In this poem, the restorative cycle of nature is all but forgotten. There is no hope of spring or rebirth, and time is perceived only as a lineal movement toward ultimate decay.

As Keats feels death's coldness in mid-summer in "On Visiting the Tomb of Burns," so in "Ailsa Rock" he sees only two "dead eternities" in sky and ocean; all else is "dead asleep":

Hearken, thou craggy ocean pyramid!
 Give answer from thy voice, the sea-fowls' screams!
 When were thy shoulders mantled in huge streams?
 When from the sun was thy broad forehead hid?
 How long is it since the mighty power bid
 Thee heave to airy sleep from fathom dreams--
 Sleep in the lap of thunder or sunbeams,
 Or when grey clouds are thy cold coverlid?
 Thou answer'st not, for thou art dead asleep.
 Thy life is but two dead eternities--
 The last in air, the former in the deep,
 First with the whales, last with the eagle-skies.
 Drowned wast thou till an earthquake made thee steep,
 Another cannot wake thy giant size.

The antiquity of the "craggy ocean pyramid" overwhelms Keats with its coldness and insensitiveness. The poet is now vividly aware of the negative side of eternity: the rock can be timeless only because it is lifeless. All other living things like "this mortal body of a thousand

days" (the sonnet with this starting line was written soon after "Ailsa Rock") are destined to decay in time. When Keats calls the Grecian Urn "cold pastoral" (45) later in his ode, he again remembers the high price to be paid for being eternal. Ailsa Rock teaches him that eternity on this earth can be achieved only by abandoning the warmth of life. This new perception indicates Keats's drastic change from his earlier days when he simply longed for eternity.

Thus, in facing destructive time and death, Keats is now forced to be skeptical about the freedom of imagination. "Lines Written in the Highlands after a Visit to Burns's Country" is Keats's desperate prayer for the truth of imagination. In the poem, as in other poems written during the Scotland tour, time is again perceived as a destroyer. Throughout the poem, there is a haunting image of glooming death:

Blood-red the sun may set behind black mountain peaks;
Blue tides may sluice and drench their time in
caves and weedy creeks.
(17-18)

Sun and blue tides which promise fair, end negatively; the sun in blood obscured by the mountain, the tide locked in cave and creek. As Keats rejected the restorative cycle of the seasons in "On Visiting the Tomb of Burns," he here rejects the promise in cycle of days. "Blood-red" of the sun is an omen of death (note that when Hyperion grieves over

the fall of his tribes and fears his own fate, his palace also glares a "blood-red through all its thousand courts, / Arches, and domes, and fiery galleries" ["Hyperion," I. 179-180]). We cannot change the tide of time. It carries us all toward one equal end, death. These two lines tell of Keats's now pessimistic awareness of the irreversibility of time.

Nevertheless, in "Lines Written in the Highlands after a Visit to Burns's Country," in continual threat of destructive time, Keats tries to find a refuge in imagination. It is, for him, a "mid-desert shrine" (22). The desert surrounding it is menace of time's reality. Yet, even in this poem, Keats is well aware of the danger he would be in, in his seeking for such a sanctuary. The realm of imagination stands on the verge of madness and death. Only the "gentle anchor" (40) of memory narrowly links him to sanity, while in the realm of imagination,

One hour, half-idiot, he stands by mossy waterfall
But in the very next he reads his soul's memorial.
(41-42)

In spite of the risk he has to take, he still tries to find hope in imagination and wishes that in the realm there is room "for a prayer / That man may never lose his mind" (45-46). In this poem, Keats is now not simply submissive to the pressure of time, since he at least prays for the strength to defy menacing time even though he also admits the impossibility of permanent escape from it. As Ushiro

Takahashi points out, "Lines Written in the Highlands . . ." marks the end of Keats's idealistic apprenticeship-days as represented by Endymion,¹⁷ for Keats is no longer ignorant or innocent about actual life as he was in his earlier poems, nor is he passive to a so-called "biological destiny"¹⁸ as he was in "Isabella." He is now struggling against time, trying to find a path to connect between reality and imagination, time and eternity. Even though Keats's sense of time and existence is yet overshadowed by his acute awareness of death to the extent of morbidity, he is facing their problems with awakened eyes.

Then, in the sonnet written on the summit of Ben Nevis, Keats desperately tries to grasp the meaning of time and existence:

Read me a lesson, Muse, and speak it loud
 Upon the top of Nevis, blind in mist!
 I look into the chasms, and a shroud
 Vaporous doth hide them; just so much I wist
 Mankind do know of Hell. I look o'erhead
 And there is sullen mist; even so much
 Mankind can tell of heaven. Mist is spread
 Before the earth beneath me; even such,
 Even so vague is man's sight of himself.
 Here are the craggy stones beneath my feet--
 Thus much I know, that, a poor witless elf,
 I tread on them, that all my eye doth meet
 Is mist and crag, not only on this height,
 But in the world of thought and mental night.

What he learns here is the limitation of man in time. Keats

¹⁷Yushiro Takahashi, John Keats: Transfiguring of Ego and the Idealism (Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1977), p. 61.

¹⁸Blackstone, The Consecrated Urn, p. 269.

here expresses man's life-time in a metaphorical scenery. Life-time is regarded as lineal stretching from birth to death, from the past to the future. As the top of Ben Nevis is covered in mist, Keats cannot tell what the future holds, what death leads to. As the chasms are also hidden in mist, he cannot recall the past. The past is now gone to nothing. Even memory cannot totally defy time. It fades in time. Worse than all, Keats cannot be even sure of the present. The present is also in the mist like the past and the future. He is lost in the mist of time. He can no more know his being than know his becoming. He now recognizes the gulf between being and knowing. The anguish he feels is the anguish of a being in time. The mist surrounding Keats in the sonnet is the same mist that later causes agony and fear of fall in Hyperion's mind. In Hyperion's palace, the mist starts arising from the floor as if an omen of his fall:

And from the mirrored level where he stood
 A mist arose, as from a scummy marsh.
 At this, through all his bulk an agony
 Crept gradual, from the feet unto the crown,
 Like a lithe serpent vast and muscular
 Making slow way, with head and neck convulsed
 From over-strained might.

("Hyperion," I. 257-63)

Hyperion's agony is exactly what Keats experienced on the summit on Ben Nevis, even though the agony is more intensified. Keats started writing "Hyperion" soon after he returned from the Scotland tour. In this sense, "Hyperion"

seems to be a product and summation of his experiences through the tour. The poem shows Keats's desperate effort to recover his identity which he felt he had lost in the process of his awakening to actual time.

The mist surrounding Keats in "Read me a lesson . . ." also verifies Keats's state in the "Chamber of Maiden-Thought." Let us remember that in the letter of May 3, 1818 (which was written just before his departure for Scotland), Keats compared human life to a "large Mansion of Many Apartments."¹⁹ In the letter he refers to the "infant or thoughtless Chamber" and the "Chamber of Maiden-Thought" and confesses he himself is now in the latter; however, the "Chamber of Maiden-Thought" has already lost the brightness it once had, and the doors on all sides are left open for him to explore the dark passages beyond them. Keats says that he is in a mist, feeling the "burden of the Mystery." The sonnet written on the summit of Ben Nevis indicates that he is now in this state. He is beginning to grope his way through the dark passages. The uncertainty of existence he feels then is the "burden of the Mystery" as Keats called it in the letter. This mystery is not only the mystery of existence but also the mystery of time. In this sonnet as well as in other poems written during the Scotland tour, Keats is yet too overwhelmed by this burden to overcome his fear of destructive time and death. On the contrary, it seems that as Keats's

¹⁹ Letters, I, 280-81.

health declines during the tour, his view of time and existence becomes more and more pessimistic. As Keats looks into Hell through the chasms in "Read me a lesson . . .," his view is somehow affected by his morbid sensibility.

Finally, in August 7, 1818, Keats gives up his Scotland tour and sets out for London. In "Stanzas on some Skulls in Beauley Abbey, near Inverness" written just before he breaks off his tour, he mocks death. He gives an account of the life-tale of each skull until he cries out, "Enough! Why need I further pore?" (91). It seems to me that this cry is exactly what Keats felt about his tour. Throughout the tour he experienced enough sorrows of time--how tragic human time can be. Scotland taught him a severe lesson. Though the lesson gave him a deeper insight of life, the truth of life was too painful for him. Wherever he looked around, he found there death waiting for him. For Keats who had been obsessed by the fear of death, Scotland was a cold and merciless teacher.

iv

Death does not always appear as a mere destruction in Keats's poetry. There is also another kind of death, more benign and less frightening death--death as an easer or death in ecstasy. There is a longing for death as well as the intense fear of death in Keats's mind.

In Endymion Book II, Keats perceives the quietness of

death as a contrast to the harshness and cruelty of life. After the butterfly-turned-into-a-nymph has disappeared from his sight, Endymion laments as follows:

But this is human life: the war, the deeds,
The disappointment, the anxiety,
Imagination's struggles, far and nigh,
All human; bearing in themselves this good,
That they are still the air, the subtle food,
To make us feel existence, and to show
How quiet death is. (II.153-59)

This does not mean that Keats prefers death to the suffering of life; but neither is death a monstrous enemy to be feared. Death is not nothingness but rather the rest after the struggles of life, so precious and appreciated only because it is painfully won.

Keats's longing for the quietness of death in Endymion is still vague and remote. Death itself is not keenly perceived as his personal matter. Almost seven months later after the Scotland tour, in the letter of March 19, 1819, Keats writes down a sonnet on death, "Why did I laugh to-night?" In this sonnet he further develops his idea of death as a gain in Endymion. It seems to me that this sonnet is the kind of answer Keats finally found for his tormenting question of death throughout the tour.

Why did I laugh? I know this being's lease
My fancy to its utmost blisses spreads;
Yet could I on this very midnight cease,
And the world's gaudy ensigns see in shreds.
Verse, fame, and beauty are intense indeed,
But Death is intenser--Death is Life's high need.

Keats is here laughing in darkness and solitude. It is

hard to tell whether this is the laughter of despair or the laughter of ecstasy; however, in this sonnet, death is not perceived as a mere antithesis of life. It is not loss or returning to nothingness. Death is rather the ultimate experience of life, its culmination. We will never fully appreciate what life offers or what life really is without braving death, the inevitable and yet the most intense experience of life. Then, beyond death, existence is released from the pains and toils of life's harsh reality. In this sense, death is indeed "Life's high meed." In this sonnet, Keats tries to overcome his fear of destructive death by accepting death as a fulfillment of life. Even though the idea itself is still abstract, this sonnet shows Keats's remarkable empirical spirit.

As Graham Hough points out, "the romantic poet's desire for death is not a longing for extinction, it is the desire to make a happiness that he knows to be transient last for ever."²⁰ Keats's longing for death in the last sonnet is in part this case. In another sonnet, "Bright star! . . ." (the first version by Brown's manuscript), this idea is more clearly expressed:

To hear, to feel her tender-taken breath
Half passionless, and so swoon on to death.

Here death is a kind of ecstasy and no longer a painful destruction to be feared. In death time stops its step

²⁰Hough, The Romantic Poets, p. 175.

and seems to crystallize into eternity. Death is a state much desired since in life time will never stop, and nothing will remain the same.

If death could stop all-consuming time, to die seems no longer so fearful. In "Ode to a Nightingale," he thus longs to die in ecstasy:

Darkling, I listen; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Called him soft names in many a musèd rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain. . . .
(51-56)

Here death is "easeful," "soft" and "rich." "Easeful Death" not only erases all the agonies of life but also seems to be the only way to ensure Keats's happiness with the nightingale's music.

However, in this ode, as Keats himself says, he is only "half in love" with death. The other half of himself is always aware of the destructiveness of death. No matter how desperately he tries to convince himself of the richness of death, he cannot escape his haunting fear of death as nothingness. Keats's longing for death in ecstasy is miserably betrayed by this fear. In the ode, Keats knows that the reality which he leaves behind with the nightingale is the world of decay:

The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and
dies. . . .
(23-26)

Clearly here, time is a monstrous destroyer and death, the completion of its work which causes nothing but pain. Even soon after Keats declares his longing for noble, "easeful Death," he contradicts this longing with the awareness of his own returning to nothing with death:

Still would thou sing, and I have ears in vain--
To thy high requiem become a sod.
(59-60)

If Keats becomes a sod after death, even the nightingale's requiem is meaningless. Ecstasy in death suddenly changes into fear and repulsion. Keats is forced to go back to his "sole self" (72), painfully reaffirming his fate which is anything but eternal ecstasy and which is totally different from the nightingale's.

After all, in spite of his ideal view of death as a release from time and painful reality, Keats is too much a realist to overlook the actual fact of death. Death is apparently physical destruction and a loss for those that are left behind in this world. It is natural that Keats's fear of death should increase in years with Tom's death and the decline of his own health. It can never be wiped out in any case, even in the moment of ecstasy. Keats's conflict with death such as in "Ode to a Nightingale" continues throughout his life. In September 30, 1820 Keats writes a pathetic letter to Charles Brown while sensing his pressing time:

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. Land and Sea, weakness and decline are great separators [sic],²¹ but death is the great divorcer for ever.

²¹ Letters, II, 345.

Chapter III

The Island of the Moment: The Paradoxes of Time

1. Paradoxes of the Imaginative Moment

i

I scarcely remember counting upon any Happiness
--I look not for it if it not in the present,¹
hour--nothing startles me beyond the moment.¹

As these passages from his letter of November 22, 1817 to Bailey indicate, Keats's absorption into the present moment is prominent even in his earlier days. Nothing is real to him unless he feels it in the present moment. Something already gone or yet to come is meaningless. In a perpetual forward movement which is called time, everything is subject to the law of change and becoming and is destined to die eventually. Nothing remains the same beyond the moment. Even the happiness he now feels soon slips away. Where, then, is the proof of life and existence if not in the present moment? Only the present moment of experience is real and true. The future is nothing, and the past is also erased into nothing. The present moment which is suspended between

¹Letters, I, 186.

these two nothings is the only one reality. Instead of being perceived as a duration, existence then seems to be confined in the moment; and a duration seems to be merely a chaplet of moments. What we call time, then, seems to be a certain impulse which transports an existence from one moment to another. In this case, it becomes imperative to live in the moment in order to feel actual existence.

How, then, can we delay the movement of time, if we cannot stop it nor escape from it long enough to experience in the arrested moment the essence of being without the apprehension of becoming? This question becomes more serious to Keats with his increasing fear of destructive time and death: the more the destination of becoming seems to be mere nothing, the more feverish becomes Keats's desire to retain the moment in order to search for the significance of being. Keats seeks the answer in the exalted power of imagination.

Keats is already well aware in Endymion that in the ultimate state of imagination, the self can break through the barriers of time and enter the mystical state of "Quiet" in which "the external world seems to get further and further away: till at last nothing but the paramount fact of his own existence remains."² In this state, the existence is released from the jurisdictions of the chronicity

² Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness (1955; rpt. New York: New American Library, 1974), p. 318

of time and remains, as it were, on the "island of the moment" in time's sea "which isolates him but which fills with his presence."³ Keats expresses this state symbolically as the "Cave of Quietude" (IV.548):

There lies a den,
 Beyond the seeming confines of the space
 Made for the soul to wander in and trace
 Its own existence, of remotest glooms.
 Dark regions are around it, where the tombs
 Of buried griefs the spirit sees, but scarce
 One hour doth linger weeping, for the pierce
 Of new-born woe it feels more inly smart.
 And in these regions many a venom'd dart
 At random flies; they are the proper home
 Of every ill; the man is yet to come
 Who hath not journeyed in this native hell.
 But few have ever felt how calm and well
 Sleep may be had in that deep den of all.
 There anguish does not sting, nor pleasure pall.
 Woe-hurricanes beat ever at the gate,
 Yet all is still within and desolate.
 Beset with plainful gusts, within ye hear
 No sound so loud as when on curtained bier
 The death-watch tick is stifled. Enter none
 Who strive therefore--on the sudden it is won.
 (IV.513-32)

This "Cave of Quietude" the soul wanders in is the self-enclosed world of the moment. It is surrounded by the "dark regions" of time, yet it is secluded from the cruelties of all changing and destroying time. Once inside, pleasure which is destined to vanish in the outside world remains. "Woe-hurricanes" caused by time never disturb its stillness; and since time is suspended, even death portended by the clock-like ticking of death-watch is no longer a threat. In this "Cave of Quietude" the

³Poulet, Studies in Human Time, p. 15.

existence is content with being without the apprehension of its becoming.

Yet even here Keats presents a condition for entering the world of the moment in "Quiet." It is achieved only by those who have passed through all the misery and despair caused by time and finally have reached the state of apathy: the state of "Quiet" is accompanied by the sense of emptiness and pure passivity. This total surrender of the self, that is, self-annihilation in the state of "Quiet" leads to "Negative Capability" Keats so values as the "poetical Character" (Keats first mentioned it in the letter of December 27, 1817, soon after he completed Endymion). Keats's "Negative Capability," "when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason,"⁴ is indeed the state of "Quiet" when man, divested of time's effect, is in the world of the moment. In such a state of imagination, free from becoming, man faces only his fundamental being. Even so, as Keats says in the episode of the "Cave of Quietude," "Negative Capability" is achieved only by losing the identity of the self which is under the jurisdiction of time, and ironically by means of the pains of time. Thus, the self-annihilating process of imagination enables Keats to enter the world of the moment. Once inside, he is then endowed with the freedom of timeless, spaceless and selfless

⁴ Letters, I, 193.

being, and

unconfined,
 Can make a ladder of the eternal wind,
 And poise about in cloudy thunder-tents
 To watch the abysm-birth of elements.
 (Endymion, III.25-28)

In the ultimate state of imagination, the moment is directly connected to eternity. Though the moment can never be eternity, it is often endowed with the efficacy of eternity; and in the arrested moment in imagination, Keats is able to receive the value and significance of eternal being, by sublimating his earthly existence to the level of eternity. Such experience of eternity in the imaginative moment gives him a renewed hope for the immortality of love, beauty and poetry which he desperately prays for, yet which seems unthinkable in time-controlled reality.

At this point arises a serious problem. The arrested moment in imagination (as it is often called "timeless time") has a paradoxical structure within itself. While in imagination the moment can be sublimated to the eternal present, in reality it is always nothing but the passing moment which follows the previous one and is followed by the up-coming one: while in imagination Keats may live in "vertical" time (if I may still call its timelessness "time"), he also belongs to "horizontal" time in reality; and the moment he stirs from the imaginative state, the arrested time which transports him from one moment to another again starts moving. The ecstasy in the imaginative

moment is partial ecstasy. The moment soon dies away, and its meaning with it. The moment will never be repeated. Ironically, imagination which was a liberator from destructive time finally ends up as its victim as do all other existences in time and vanishes into nothing.

The moment in imagination seems to be set down at the point of intersection of eternity with time. The poet asks whether the vision of eternity he experienced in the fleeting moment was really there or a mere delusion? There seems to be no actual evidence of the experience left behind, yet he cannot deny the sensation he felt in the moment. How, then, can he solve such ontological paradox of the imaginative moment? In the same letter of November 22, 1817 that I quoted at the beginning of this chapter, Keats asserts as follows:

What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth. . . . The imagination may be compared to Adam's dream—he awoke and found it truth.

When Keats compares imagination to Adam's dream, he is referring to the episode in Milton's Paradise Lost. In Book VIII, God promises the still single and lonely Adam a companion. Adam then falls into sleep, and in his dream he sees God create a woman out of his own rib. From a glance at her figure, Adam feels a sweet sensation never felt before, yet soon the dream fades away:

⁵Letters, I, 184-85.

She disappeared, and left me dark, I waked
 To find her, or for ever to deplore
 Her loss, and other pleasures all adjure:
 When out of hope behold her, not far off,
 Such as I saw her in my dream, adorned
 With what all earth or heaven could bestow
 To make her amiable. (VIII.478-84)

This woman is Eve. Here God fulfills his promise; Adam's dream is materialized. When Keats calls imagination Adam's dream, he also believes in its truth; that imagination is "a Vision in the form of Youth' a Shadow of reality to come."⁷ After the reference to Adam's dream, in the letter Keats then compares imagination with reasoning. He wavers between poetry and philosophy, dream and reasoning; and finally he chooses sensation rather than thought: "O for a Life of Sensation rather than of Thought!"⁸ Keats decides at least at this point that the sensuous experience of the imaginative moment should be enough proof for its truth.

For young Keats in earlier days, such solipsistic solution might have been still possible to accept. He could be content with the sensuous experience of the luxurious moment. As early a poem as Endymion is informed with the persistent question, "Is imagination Adam's dream or the 'fog-born elf / Whose flitting lantern . . . / Cheats us' (Endymion, II,278-80)?" He could yet conclude the story as a triumph of imagination as he did in the November

⁶ John Milton, The Poems of John Milton, ed. John Carey and Alastair Fowler (Harlow: Longman, 1968).

⁷ Letters, I, 185.

⁸ Ibid.

letter (he completed Endymion soon after he wrote that letter). Yet, as Keats's sense of time and existence grows more and more pessimistic through 1818 with his increasing fear of death, he also becomes more sceptical about the truth of imagination. Before the apparent destructiveness of time in reality, the moment in imagination seems meaningless. In "To J. H. Reynolds, Esq." Keats admits his fear of imagination as a delusion:

Or is it that imagination brought
Beyond its proper bound, yet still confined,
Lost in a sort of Purgatory blind,
Cannot refer to any standard law
Of either earth or heaven?

It is a flaw
In happiness to see beyond our bourn--
It forces us in summer skies to mourn;
It spoils the singing of the nightingale.

(78-85)

Here, Keats is keenly aware of the paradoxical nature of the imaginative moment: it is self-enclosed and self-limited, yet it still denies limitation. Imagination seems a curse rather than a gift. Keats becomes sceptical about finding happiness in the imagination. At the same time in this poem, he also fears that the experience of the imaginative moment which seems almost heavenly will leave him discontent with the earthly happiness. "After a glimpse of eternity, even the nightingale's song which usually enchants him seems lacking in its quality.

In spite of such agonizing doubt, a contrary voice in Keats in "Lines Written in the Highlands after a Visit to

Burns's Country" still clings to faith in imagination. He prays that in imagination he will never lose touch with reality and that what he beholds is an awakened man's vision and not "sickly imagination" ("On Visiting the Tomb of Burns," l. 11) nor a madman's dream. Thus by 1819, Keats's annus mirabilis, the tormenting question of the truth of imagination is now intensified, and Keats is more than ready to concentrate on the problem. He then devotes himself to the moment as the intersection of eternity with time and strives to find out what the moment in imagination is. Consequently, such effort involves Keats in a paradoxical situation. The ambiguity and ambivalence, the opposing voices so intense in many of his poems in this period are, in fact, caused by Keats's struggle to find a solution to the paradox of the imaginative moment and to prove the truth of imagination.

ii

Between April and May, 1819, within the amazingly short period of one month, Keats writes some of his great poems: "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" and the great odes (except "To Autumn" which will be written later in September). All of these poems are indeed concerned with the problem of what the moment in imagination is; and they show the trace of Keats's struggle with time in his search for the truth of imagination.

"La Belle Dame Sans Merci" is obviously closely

connected with the sonnet written previously: "As Hermes once took to his feathers light." In the sonnet, with the wings of imagination Keats flies away from the "dragon world of all its hundred eyes" to the "second circle of sad hell."

"La Belle Dame sans merci" who puts a man in thrall is definitely perceived as the embodiment of imagination as "deceiving elf" ("Ode to a Nightingale," l. 74). "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" differs from the odes, in not being about his experience in the imaginative moment but about his experience after the imaginative moment. In this ballad, Keats tells of a bitter experience of the negative aspect of the imaginative moment: no matter what value it could receive in imagination, in reality the moment is only temporal and soon vanishes into nothing. Imagination, then, seems to be mere delusion. Even though the knight experiences the moment of happiness with the lady he met in the meads, the dream she makes him dream is a nightmare; moreover, when he awakes, he finds that the lady is not there and that he is left alone on the cold hill side:

And I awoke, and found me here
On the cold hill side? (43-44)

Once the imaginative moment has passed, it will never be repeated, nor can we reverse the movement of time to recapture it. To hold on to the moment that has already passed is therefore to live in the past and what is now nothing. The knight clings to his recollection of the

blissful moment that has passed, but it only brings him the pain of loss. The knight is now surrounded by the winter scenery. As he grieves over the loss of the blissful moment, the sadness of the dying season is deepened by the recollection of the past seasons:

The sedge has withered from the lake,
And no birds sing!

The squirrel's granary is full,
And the harvest's done. (3-8)

Here, Keats is aware of another fact of life in the moment. In the world of becoming, the moment an action is fulfilled, it is destined to decay. Once the moment has been consumed in fulfillment, it vanishes in the past of nothing. To feel the satisfaction of fulfillment in the moment is simultaneously the moment to lose it. What is done cannot be undone. Since the harvest is done in autumn, it is now winter. Since the knight has consumed his love in kisses exchanged with the lady, he is now in desolation. Since the lily and the rose have achieved the state of full bloom, they are now withered to become images of sickness and decay:

I see a lily on thy brow,
With anguish moist and fever-dew,
And on thy cheek a fading rose
Fast withered too. (9-12)

"La Belle Dame Sans Merci" is based on Keats's painful recognition that imagination as well as love and beauty is only ephemeral and that once the moment of imaginative

experience has passed, its meaning also vanishes into nothing with it.

In the odes written following "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," Keats indeed devotes himself to the arrested moment in imagination and continues to search for the significance of being. Consequently, these odes show the various modes of Keats's being in the imaginative moment; and his perception of being also varies in each ode. In these odes, Keats uses his "Negative Capability" to the full extent in order to release himself from time and remain in the world of the moment. By this time, however, he has further developed it from the pure receptiveness in the state of "Quiet" (which he symbolically described as the "Cave of Quietude") to the more active participation of empathy; if the state of "Quiet" is the primary state of "Negative Capability," in the secondary state he identifies himself with another object through the self-annihilating process of the primary state.

In "Ode to Psyche," the earliest of the odes, Keats experiences the moment of eternity in dream-like imagination. In this ode, even from the beginning of his imaginative experience, Keats has already left harsh reality and is wandering in a forest. This forest is the world of imagination where time is arrested in the present moment. When this imaginative wandering begins, Keats has already achieved the primary state of "Negative Capability," the state of "Quiet." The pain of reality which Keats says

in the episode of the "Cave of Quietude" is required to enter the world of the moment, is erased by the dream-like quality of the whole experience. At the beginning of the poem, Keats himself wonders of his experience:

Surely I dreamt to-day, or did I see
The winged Psyche with awakened eyes?
(5-6)

In dream-like imagination, while wandering in the forest of the moment, Keats suddenly finds

two fair creatures, couchèd side by side
In deepest grass, beneath the whispering roof
Of leaves and trembled blossoms, where there ran
A brooklet, scarce espied.
(9-12)

At this point, Keats still does not know who they are. However, the bower where these lovers are sleeping peacefully turns out to be one of "immortal bowers to mortal sense" (Endymion, l. 438):

They lay calm-breathing on the bedded grass;
Their arms embracèd and their pinions too;
Their lips touched not, but had not bade adieu,
As if disjoinèd by soft-handed slumber,
And ready still past kisses to outnumber
At tender eye-dawn of aurorean love.
(15-20)

Keats then finds out that the boy is Cupid and the maiden, Psyche. These divine lovers, unlike human lovers, live in eternal love and happiness, since their world is in the eternal present. Even sleep does not part them. "Aurorean" dawn is near and promises the fulfillment of the arrested

kiss in slumber.

In "Ode to Psyche" Keats experiences the value of eternal being in the arrested moment in imagination. However, in this ode, the serious ontological question which the paradox of the imaginative moment inevitably causes, does not arise. His original encounter with Psyche and Cupid reposing in the world of the eternal present is obscured by the dream-like quality of the whole experience, and it lacks a sense of actuality even to him. The rest of the poem is in fact dedicated to Keats's conscious effort to recapture the moment of eternity, this time with the intensity of poetic imagination and not in a dream.

First, Keats identifies himself with Psyche before she is united with Cupid and is elevated to a goddess, by making his soul her sanctuary (however, since Psyche is the embodiment of his human soul longing for eternal love itself, in this case he does not need to annihilate his self to merge into her):

Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane
In some untrodden region of my mind. . . .
(50-51)

Nevertheless, to be a human soul in eternal love, Psyche has to be yet united with Cupid. Then to be united with Cupid, Keats creates by imagination such an "immortal bowef" as he has seen in the forest:

And in the midst of this wide quietness
 A rosy sanctuary will I dress
 With the wreathed trellis of a working brain,
 With buds, and bells, and stars without a name,
 With all the gardener Fancy e'er could feign,
 Who breeding flowers will never breed the same. . . .
 (59-63)

However limited the power of fancy is, this "rosy sanctuary" is an artifice of eternity, where "none of the customary limitations operate in the natural or in the human modes of being."⁹ Then, in the moment in imagination, in "quietness," Keats opens his soul's casement to "let the warm Love in" (67). This casement opens toward heaven and not toward the reality of time. Keats is waiting with Psyche in passivity, for the arrival of Cupid. The poem ends here with expectation, when Keats himself is still in the primary state of "Negative Capability"; however, if it happens, Keats will totally identify himself with Psyche, a goddess whom he has seen in the forest and will make her bliss of eternal love his own. The possibility is always open.

In "Ode to a Nightingale," the second of the group, as if to fulfill the possibility left open at the end of "Ode to Psyche" Keats succeeds in sublimating the essence of his being to the level of eternity by means of the intensity of his poetic imagination. In the process described in this ode Keats releases himself from time and enters the world of the moment; he progresses from the primary state

⁹ Patterson, The Daemonic in the Poetry of John Keats, p. 155.

of "Negative Capability" to the secondary. Such numbness of senses as felt in the "Cave of Quietude" is first experienced, yet Keats passes through this stage and finally identifies himself with the nightingale.

At the beginning of the poem in order to reach the primary state of "Negative Capability," Keats takes the process identical to entry into the "Cave of Quietude." Keats experiences despair until it numbs his senses:

My heart aches, and drowsy numbness pains
 My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
 Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
 One minute past, and Lethe-ward had sunk.

(1-4)

Here "hemlock," "opiate" and "Lethe" (oblivion) indicate the process to abstraction; yet in its process numbness is at first accompanied by pain. Keats then says that the painful numbness is the result of happiness not for himself but for the nightingale's happiness! Such happiness so intense as to become painful is, however, based on his despair of his own mortality. As intense suffering from time in reality was demanded to enter the "Cave of Quietude," Keats himself is at the beginning in the depth of despair. The reality surrounding him is only death and decay. As further proof of this, in the third stanza, Keats expresses his painful recognition of the destructive time in reality:

The weariness, the fever, and the fret
 Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
 Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
 Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;

Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
 And leaden-eyed despairs;
 Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
 Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.
 (23-30)

Keats is already in such despair when he hears the nightingale's song at the beginning. His despair and emptiness turn into ecstasy the moment he hears its song. His happiness becomes all the more painfully intense because of the great contrast between the nightingale, the symbol of the immortal being, and himself, a mortal being. This numbness is accompanied by pain--the pain of his own despair and the pain of his happiness for the nightingale.

From this point, Keats changes his attitude from pure passivity to active participation. He longs to merge himself into the nightingale in order to make his happiness complete. Keats first tries to remove the pain and fall into painless abstraction. He seeks the power of wine:

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

As Keats says in the letter of February 19, 1819 that Claret makes a man a Hermes,¹⁰ the wine helps his transformation to a selfless, timeless and spaceless being. The final transformation, however, is achieved by the help of imagination:

¹⁰ Letters, II, 64.

Away! away! For I will fly to thee,

On the viewless wings of Poesy. . . .

(31-33)

Keats is now ready to enter the world of the moment to be with the nightingale.

Following the nightingale, Keats wanders in the "forest dim," where he finally succeeds in identifying himself with the bird: "Already with thee!" (35). The empathy through "Negative Capability" is now accomplished. This forest, like the forest in "Ode to Psyche," is the world of the moment secluded from the outside world in which Keats finds only despair caused by destructive time. It is "Dark Paradise" (Endymion, IV.538) of the "Cave of Quietude." It is only in this forest of the moment that Keats is able to join the immortal bird and share with it its heavenly happiness.

The forest, then, turns out to be an "immortal bower" like the one Keats found in "Ode to Psyche." Because of darkness, Keats cannot see what flowers are at his feet; yet by their scent he can

guess each sweet
 Wherewith the seasonable month endows
 The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild--
 White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
 Fast-fading violets covered up in leaves;
 And mid-May's eldest child,
 The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
 The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.
 (43-50)

Here, in this forest, "fast-fading violets" and "coming

musk-rose" serenely mingle with other flowers in full bloom. In mid-May, there is even the song of summer. Time which withers beauty is now arrested in the eternal present. In this forest, Keats can indulge in beauty without the sorrow of loss.

Thus, in "Ode to a Nightingale," with the intensity of imagination, the moment is, so to speak, lifted above time and is sublimated to the eternal present; and Keats experiences the nightingale's bliss of eternal being in that arrested moment. At this point, in this ode, Keats wishes for "easeful Death" (52) to make the moment of eternal bliss completely his own. However, ironically because of this wish, the magic of the enchanted moment starts to lose its power. Keats is soon confronted with the paradox of death: though he longs for death in ecstasy, he cannot forget the actual fact of death, death as destruction. He is forced to remember his own mortality. The nightingale's song then seems to sound like a requiem:

Still would thou sing, and I have ears in vain--
To thy high requiem become a sod.
(59-60)

Awareness of death as destruction gradually brings back to Keats the consciousness of time and self which he managed to forget. Keats's vision flies back to the faraway past. He thinks of emperor and clown and Ruth who would have heard the same nightingale's song. He thinks of "fairy lands forlorn" (70) now lost in the remote past. However,

when the moment is connected to the past, the arrested moment loses its timeless status. As the word, "forlorn" implies, the thought of the past is inevitably accompanied with the sense of loss. The thought of the past leads to the thought of the future; and Keats becomes aware of his isolated state in the imaginative moment, and the moment lifted above time goes back to time's perpetual forward movement. As a dream of flight ended in a fall into time in Keats's earlier poem, "Ode to a Nightingale" actually ends in the moment's and also Keats's fall into time. Keats returns to reality in time, leaving the nightingale behind:

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

The repetition of the word, "forlorn" indicates Keats's awareness not only of the isolated state of the imaginative moment but also of its coming-loss.

The moment he stirs from the imaginative state, the moment in imagination vanishes into the past of nothing. Once back in reality, the Fancy seems to be a "deceiving elf" (74). As he was confronted with the paradox of death, he is here confronted with the paradox of the moment. At the end of the poem, he asks himself:

Was it a vision or a waking dream?
. . . Do I wake or sleep?
(79-80)

This question is caused by Keats's perplexity with the paradox of the imaginative moment. Since he cannot solve the paradox, in "Ode to a Nightingale" he cannot prove the truth of imagination.

Even though in "Ode to a Nightingale" Keats is confronted by the paradox of the imaginative moment, the poem itself ends when Keats is still in perplexity. However, at this point, if he tries to hold on to the moment that has already passed, he inevitably has to suffer from the pain of loss. Perplexity turns into despair; and then Keats finds himself in the same position as the knight in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" who suffers from the painful recollection of the blissful moment.

One of the major reasons why Keats cannot solve the paradoxical situation he finds himself in in "Ode to a Nightingale" is in the contrast between the nightingale as a symbol of immortal being and the nightingale in reality. From the beginning of the poem, Keats simply assumes that the nightingale is an immortal bird; however, as Graham Hough points out, this assertion is based on an audacious paradox

that the nightingale, so far from being immortal, has a considerably shorter life than man, and that its song is immortal in the sense that through history there have always been nightingale's songs and that they have always had the same power of enchantment.¹¹

¹¹Hough, The Romantic Poets, p. 175.

In this sense, though Keats in the imaginative moment made the nightingale's happiness of eternal being his own by identifying himself with the bird as a symbol, the moment he returns to reality of time, he cannot but notice that the bird itself is as fragile as or more fragile than Keats himself. Unlike "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," in "Ode to a Nightingale" Keats awakes from the dream and may find the nightingale still there, but the nightingale in reality does not offer him a living proof for the truth of imagination.

As if he would provide the answer at the end of "Ode to a Nightingale" and prove the truth of imagination, in "Ode on a Grecian Urn" Keats presents a work of art as a proof of eternal being. In the sonnet, "To James Rice" written in April, 1818, Keats wishes that if only a week could be an age, and one year a thousand years, time would be annihilated:

So time itself would be annihilate,
In little time a host of joys to bind,
And keep our souls in one eternal pant! . . .

Although "one eternal pant" is only a dream in this sonnet, in "Ode on a Grecian Urn" Keats seeks to show that it is not a dream in the world of art. Eternal being in this ode is not a fitful longing in the sonnet nor is it represented by the nightingale only as a symbol; but it is actually achieved by an existence on this earth--an urn. The urn

achieves it by crystallizing the moment of life into the eternal present. Therefore, in its world, to be "for ever panting, and for ever young" (27) is truth. Keats wishes to make the eternal love and beauty of its world his own, by identifying himself with the urn.

At the beginning of the poem, Keats is speculating on the stillness of the urn, and with its stillness, he is also moving into the state of "Quiet." It is of interest to note that the pain of time caused by the contrast between the urn and his mortal self, which is the prerequisite element of "Negative Capability" was already experienced two years earlier in "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles." In that sonnet, facing the statuary's steadfastness, Keats grieves at the limitations of being human:

My spirit is too weak--mortality
Weights heavily on me like unwilling sleep,
And each imagined pinnacle and steep
Of godlike hardship tells me I must die
Like a sick eagle looking at the sky.

Moreover, Keats is well aware (as he laments in the ode) that in reality all breathing human passion "leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloyed, / A burning forehead, and parching tongue" (29-30). With such pains of time, in "Ode on a Grecian Urn" Keats gradually merges himself into the urn. His eyes move from the total urn, the form of which is still the "foster-child of silence and slow time" (2) in the actual sense: to the frieze on the urn and finally to figures on the frieze. It should be noted that to the urn as

distinct from human life time is rather a preserver than a destroyer.

The world depicted on the frieze is the world of the eternal present where all the figures, free from the destructive effect of time, are enjoying the ecstasy of eternal love and beauty. Keats asks whether it is "Tempe or the dales of Arcady" (7). Earl Wasserman points out that Tempe, the region which Apollo favored, is an earthly heaven; and Arcady, the region which man thought to approach most nearly a paradise, is a heavenly earth.¹² In these two regions, both the divine and the mortal are present. These two regions are, in other words, the world of the moment which is at the point of intersection of eternity with time. To join such world of the urn Keats also has to be divested of time. With the intensity of imagination, he gradually decelerates the movement of time surrounding him and gets further and further away from the external world. Keats conveys this process by slowing the movement of the poem. Wasserman, in his detailed study of this ode, analyzes the process as follows:

First, the swelling tempo of the first stanza, accelerated by the staccato breaking of the questions, gives way to the slower harmony of the second, and then smoothes itself out in the orderly, sharply comparted phrasing of the third. The final sense of a controlled order in the third stanza is aided by the slow,

¹² Earl R. Wasserman, The Finer Tone: Keats's Major Poems (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1953), p. 17

deliberate movement that results from the clear ordonnance, from the repetition of "happy," and from the recurrence of the two patterns ["happy" and "for ever"]. . . .¹³

Then, when Keats has succeeded in arresting the movement of time and has achieved the state of timeless, spaceless and selfless being, he finally merges himself into the urn:

Ah, happy, happy boughs, that cannot shed
Your leaves, nor ever-bid the spring adieu;
And, happy melodist, unwearied,
For ever piping songs for ever new!
More happy love, more happy, happy love!
For ever warm and still to be enjoyed,
For ever panting, and for ever young. . . .
(21-27)

In this world of the urn, Keats shares eternal happiness with the bough, the melodist and the lovers and at the same time elevates his own human passion which is controlled by time to the level of eternity. Keats's experience of eternal being in the arrested moment in imagination gives him a conviction of the immortality of love and beauty.

However, again in "Ode on a Grecian Urn," the moment Keats merges himself into the urn's world of the eternal present, he also becomes aware of the negative aspect of eternal being achieved on this earth. Keats's imagination leads him to the little town these figures on the urn would have left behind:

¹³Wasserman, p. 28.

What little town by river or sea shore,
 Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
 Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?
 And, little town, thy streets for evermore
 Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
 Why thou art desolate can e'er return.
 (35-40)

The desolate little town reveals that eternity achieved by the urn is dead eternity like Ailsa Rock he encountered in Scotland. As he was then struck by the cold steadfastness of the Rock, Keats is now struck by the death-like coldness of the town. Keats realizes that the urn's eternal being is assured only by abandoning the warmth of life. As the thought of death became a prelude to bring him and the arrested moment in imagination back to the movement of time in "Ode to a Nightingale," in "Ode on a Grecian Urn" the thought of death caused by the emptiness and desolateness of the little town forces Keats to leave the world of the urn and to come back to reality of time. Once back in time, the urn's eternal happiness turns out to be "Cold pastoral" (45).

Unfortunately, once again in "Ode on a Grecian Urn" Keats is confronted by the paradox of being. This time, unlike the nightingale, the urn actually exists in front of Keats with the appearance of eternity even when the moment in imagination has already passed; however, the eternal being of the urn itself is based on the paradox of lifeless life. The lives depicted on the urn, like the lovers Endymion found at the bottom of the ocean of nothing,

are endowed with the efficacy of immortality only because in their consummation of death, they are now beyond the reach of time's destructiveness. Since they are already dead, in the world of the urn, "death no blossom nips" (Endymion, III.740). In this sense, even though the urn succeeds in arresting the moment of life and enclosing it in its circle of solitude, the world of the eternal present enclosed in the urn is, in the outward sense, the world of the moment which has already died and therefore has become absolute in its death. The lives depicted on the urn are rather the creatures of space created by the dead moment. They simply occupy the space. However, in spite of the fact that they are nothing, they actually are: they are content to be, without the past and without the future, having no other jurisdictions than their own presence. Thus, eternity as manifested by the urn is, in fact, based on its assertion that nothing is something, that within what outwardly seems death, there is life. However, Keats cannot but realize that in reality it is nothing nonetheless.

In "Ode on a Grecian Urn" the urn also reveals another paradox of being. While the eternal being of the urn is achieved by abandoning the warmth of life, and therefore the urn in fact insists upon the being, as it were, of non-being, eternal love in the world of the urn is likewise achieved by giving up the joy of fulfillment: in this sense, the urn again confounds being with becoming though it eventually recognizes their disparity:

Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
 Though winning near the goal--yet do not grieve:
 She cannot fade, though thou has not thy bliss,
 For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair.
 (17-20)

Thus, even though love will never wither in the world of the urn, yet it is not completed. The lovers are not allowed to exchange a kiss even if they want to. Indeed, their love is "still to be enjoyed" (26). As Cleanth Brooks points out, the word, "still" well expresses the paradoxical situation of their love: it simultaneously means both "forever" and "yet" (in the sense of "not quite"), and it indicates that their love is eternal only because it is unsatisfied.¹⁴

The satisfaction of fulfillment is about to come in the near future, and only when it happens, will their love become complete. However, in the world of the urn, it will never happen. The urn proclaims eternal love only by making us believe in fulfillment as a potentiality.

Thus, even though the urn succeeds in arresting the moment of life, it has to pay the high price to achieve it. The urn is free from the hand of time by giving up the satisfaction of fulfillment (as well as the warmth of life); for in reality, the moment an action is completed, the moment of fulfillment vanishes into nothing. Keats is well aware of this fact. He grieves that all human passion "leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloyed" (29). Human

¹⁴ Cleanth Brooks, "Keats's Sylvan Historian: History without Footnotes," in The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in Structure of Poetry (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1947), pp. 158-59.

passion controlled by time, unlike love in the world of the urn, can be "cloyed," but one has consequently to suffer from the pain of loss. The moment of satisfaction is at the same time the moment of loss. Thus, ironically, in our human world, the pain of loss caused by time is compensated by the satisfaction of fulfillment which the urn can never have! Instead, the urn has to be content with the potentiality of fulfillment in order to be in the arrested moment. This is the reason why the urn remains a "still unravished bride of quietness" (1) like the maiden depicted on it who is not even ravished by a kiss. This is one reason the music in the world of the urn must be soundless. Every action depicted on the urn is nearest achieving the joy of fulfillment because it is about to be fulfilled; however, because it has not yet been fulfilled, it is free from the pain of loss.

To sum up, the ambivalence and ambiguity in "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is caused by the paradoxical nature of the existence of the urn itself. Even though the urn actually is endowed with the appearance of eternity, it is in fact claiming the being of non-being in both the past and future senses. As a paradox is self-limited and yet denies limitation, to talk about the urn causes an endless digression and is made possible only with the use of paradoxes. Indeed, as Cleanth Brooks's detailed study of the paradoxical structure of the poem shows, "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is

full of rhetorical paradoxes.¹⁵ However, at the end of the poem, as if to solve the paradoxes of being presented by the urn, Keats brings forward the famous and much discussed aphorism:

'Beauty is truth, truth beauty'--that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.
(49-50)

Whether Keats means the urn or the reader by "ye" (I personally prefer to believe that with "ye" Keats is addressing not only the urn but also all the lives contained in its world), he finally answers the problem of being and not-being with the solipsistic assertion of beauty-truth equivalent which sounds quite similar to his remark in the letter of November 22, 1817: "What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth. . . ."¹⁶ It seems that in "Ode on a Grecian Urn" Keats cannot accept paradoxes as they are. At the end he clings to his old yet firm belief in the truth of imagination and beauty. To avoid falling into the paradoxes of being, in this ode, he rather chooses to fall into still worse solipsism.

While the first three odes, "Ode to Psyche," "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn," in one way or another, deal with the moment sublimated to the eternal present in imagination, "Ode on Melancholy" which follows

¹⁵ Brooks, pp. 151-66.

¹⁶ Letters, I, 184.

them shows Keats's completely different perception of the moment. In this ode, he rather resigns himself to time and accepts that the moment in reality is only temporal. He no longer wishes for "easeful Death" ("Ode to a Nightingale," l. 52) to make the moment's happiness eternal or to forget the pain of loss caused by the temporality of the moment. "No, no, go not to Lethe" (1), says Keats at the beginning of the poem. He thus rejects death, for death will "drown the wakeful anguish of the soul" (10). Death destroys not only beauty but also the epistemological function of the mind which will recognize its truth. Instead, in this ode, to find out the truth of beauty Keats prefers to be awake in the fleeting moment even if it brings pain; and then he reaches a paradoxical affirmation of beauty, that the joy of beauty can be truly appreciated all the more because it is ephemeral.

As melancholy is the object of Keats's contemplation, in this ode Keats merges himself into the sorrow of time. Melancholy springs from the realization that neither beauty nor joy remains the same beyond the moment:

She dwells with Beauty--Beauty that must die;
And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
Bidding adieu. . . . (21-23)

As these lines show, the moment perceived in this ode is not the moment lifted above time and endowed with the eternal value by imagination but the moment in time which is about to pass away and vanish into nothing. While

"anguish does not sting" (Endymion, IV.526) in the "Cave of Quietude" (in all of the former three odes, once Keats is in the world of the moment in imagination, he is thus free from the pain of time), in "Ode on Melancholy" anguish is always awake. In this sense, if the painless (or pain-transcending) state of "Quiet" in the world of the moment is the primary state of "Negative Capability," it may be said that "Negative Capability" is rejected in this ode. Keats here prefers the epistemological experience of the moment to its merely sensuous experience. In fact, the one aids the other. Still, it may be possible to consider that Keats merges himself into personified Melancholy through "Negative Capability"; however, in this case since melancholy itself is based on the recognition of the temporality of the moment, empathy into melancholy still inevitably involves an epistemological function. Whether the empathy with melancholy is regarded as "Negative Capability" or not, in "Ode on Melancholy" unlike in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," Keats accepts the anguished knowledge that the moment of joy of beauty is only temporal; for it is the inevitable complement of the moment of fulfillment:

Aye, in the very temple of Delight
 Veiled Melancholy has her sovran shrine. . . .
 (25-26)

Only the one who has tasted "Joy's grape against his palate fine" (28) is the sufferer from the pain of loss and therefore from melancholy. Since he quotes the proverb at the

beginning of the sonnet, "How fevered is the man who cannot look," Keats is well aware that "you cannot eat your cake and have it top." If to be forever, we have to give up either the warmth of life or the satisfaction of fulfillment (like the Grecian Urn, Keats now much prefers feeling the satisfaction of fulfillment and then losing it, to not feeling it at all.

Hence, in "Ode on Melancholy" Keats does not strive to hold on to the moment; he is content to enjoy the moment that is about to pass. Keats says the soul of the one in melancholy is "among her cloudy trophies hung" (30). This statement indicates Keats's contentment with his precarious state in the fleeting moment. The moment is suspended between two nothings of the past and the future, and once the moment is consummated, it has to disappear into nothing; however, the moment of fulfillment in time itself is more perfect in its intensity than the most "eternal" moment ever achieved on this earth, and an enjoyment of such intensity and depth "makes the moment eternal in quality if not in duration."¹⁷

After all, melancholy makes Keats aware not only of the loss but also of the precious gain which each moment brings about. He is therefore content to be in melancholy. He may feel the pain of loss, yet he does not strive to retain the moment which is about to pass. He enjoys living

¹⁷ Hough, The Romantic Poets, p. 178.

each fulfilled moment. Such acceptance by Keats of time and his contentment to be in the fleeting moment in "Ode on Melancholy" give indication of the maturation of his sense of time and existence which will soon come fruition in "To Autumn."

Even in "Ode on Indolence," the last and generally regarded as the least important of the odes written in the same period, Keats's absorption into the present moment is quite obvious. In fact, Keats's "Negative Capability" which Patterson says is rejected in this ode,¹⁸ is still at work; he is in its primary state, the state of "Quiet"; however, in this case, the negative aspect of the state of "Quiet" that is, the sense of nothingness, strongly dominates his mind, and he is in the luxurious contentment with the moment of being:

Oh, for an age sheltered from annoy
That I may never know how change the moons,
Or hear the voice of busy common-sense!
(38-40)

Thus in "Ode on Indolence," as in his other odes, time in reality stands in front of him as a tormentor. In this ode, to escape from all the troubles caused by time, Keats steep himself in "honeyed indolence" (37):

Ripe was the drowsy hour;
The blissful cloud of summer indolence

¹⁸Patterson, The Daemonic in the Poetry of John Keats, p. 164.

Benumbed my eyes; my pulse grew less and less;
Pain had no sting, and pleasure's wreath no flower. . . .
(15-18)

Indolence leads him to the state of lethargy, in which he loses the pains of time and enjoys the sense of emptiness. Even Love, Ambition and Poesy--the usual objects of Keats's obsessions--cannot stir him from his indulgence in the moment:

Oh, why did ye not melt, and leave my sense
Unhaunted quite of all but--nothingness?
(19-20)

Keats dismisses these three from his mind, since they threaten to restore him to the state of consciousness (especially the consciousness of time and self) which he seeks to evade.

The sense of nothingness Keats feels, then, is the negative aspect of the self-annihilating process of "Negative Capability." Only by destroying his self, is Keats now in the world of the moment. In this state of "Quiet" he is actually ready, if he wants, to move to the secondary state of "Negative Capability"--the active participation through empathy--as he did in "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn" ("Ode to Psyche" ends in its process); however, in "Ode on Indolence," Keats chooses to remain in passivity and nothingness. He is too content with being. His sole purpose in this ode is to escape from time and forget everything else except the paramount fact of his own existence. Keats does not use his "Negative Capability"

as a driving force to experience the value and significance of eternal being in the imaginative moment. He just enjoys the "faint visions" (58) indolence creates. In this case, his imagination never reaches its highest intensity.

Moreover, since his intention in this ode is not to seek for the significance of being, nor does the ontological question often caused by the paradoxical nature of the imaginative moment arise. In this sense "Ode on Indolence" is essentially different from the other odes (even from "Ode on Melancholy" in which Keats at least strives to find out the significance of being from the realistic point of view). Therefore, it is understandable that Keats excluded this ode when he published the others in 1820.

2. Diana-Triplex of the Moment

i

After all, the moment is set down at the point of intersection of eternity with time; and when an existence has to be transported from the moment, the moment has three directions: (1) upward: with the intensity of imagination, the essence of being is sublimated to eternal being; (2) backward: an existence holds on to the moment which has already passed into the past of nothing; (3) forward: it moves to the next moment with the movement of time. In Endymion when the hero feels himself torn between his love for Cynthia and his increasing love for the Indian maid,

he exclaims that he has a "triple soul":

'Goddess, I love thee not the less! From thee
By Juno's smile I turn not--no, no, no--
While the great waters are at ebb and flow.
I have a triple soul! Oh, fond pretence--
For both, for both my love is so immense,
I feel my heart is cut for them in twain.'
(IV.92-97)

Quoting these lines, Patterson points out that a "triple soul" indicates Keats's awareness of the Cynthia-Diana-Hecate triplex and that the three fold realm of Diana coincides with the three regions of action in the poem, the Heaven, the earth and the underworld.¹⁹ Such Cynthia-Diana-Hecate triplex also applies to the three aspects of the moment. Cynthia represents the celestial mode of being in the moment: upward movement. Hecate, the queen of Hell and darkness represents the negative mode of being in the moment: backward movement. Diana represents the earthly mode of being in the moment: forward movement. As the ambivalence and ambiguity of the odes imply, Keats is well aware of the Diana triad of the moment. To study Keats's three major poems, "The Eve of St. Agnes," "Lamia" and "Hyperion," especially the section concerning Apollo's transformation at the end of the poem from the point of Keats's view of time and existence, is to find that they present the process of life in each mode of the moment.

¹⁹Patterson, pp., 76, 84-96.

Cynthia: "The Eve of St. Agnes"

It may be presumptuous to say that "The Eve of St. Agnes" presents Cynthia's mode of being in the moment; that Keats's intention in the poem is to convince himself and the readers that the essence of being, especially in this case love, could transcend time. The ending of the story is too ambiguous to be decisively judged in this way: though the lovers, Madeline and Porphyro are happily united in the poem, they finally escape the harsh reality surrounding them only to disappear into the storm, and the actual ending, the death of Angela and the Beadsman, is rather sombre. The ambiguity of this ending has been much discussed. According to Jack Stillinger, the differing interpretations of the conclusion of the story are summarised as follows: (1) the lovers transcend the world of mortality entirely and enter another world of eternal felicity; (2) they face reality, perhaps even perish, in the storm; (3) they face penance in "that second circle of sad hell" ("As Hermes once took his feathers light"), the circle of carnal sinfulness in the fifth canto of the Inferno; (4) they find a happy life in the human world.²⁰ Each interpretation sounds plausible; however, as far as the time-scheme in the poem is concerned, it seems to me that the first view is closest to Keats's original intention.

²⁰ Jack Stillinger, The Hoodwinking of Madeline and Other Essays on Keats's Poems (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), p. 87, n. 24.

"Love is my religion,"²¹ says Keats in a letter. As if to confirm this belief, in "The Eve of St. Agnes" he performs the rites of love. The story itself is based on a popular superstition that on the Eve of St. Agnes, through certain ritual practice, virgins can see their future husband in their dream. Accordingly, in the poem, Madeline performs her rites of love; and she not only follows each step of the rites of St. Agnes' Eve and dreams of Porphyro, but also finds out that the dream is truth. Madeline is united with him, and here the truth of love is attained through her rites of love. Yet even here we have to notice the complexity of the poem: while "The Eve of St. Agnes" tells about Madeline's (and also Porphyro's) rites of love, the poem itself enacts Keats's own poetic rites of love. Keats is well aware that in spite of his belief in eternal love, love in reality is as ephemeral as beauty:

For there the lily and the musk-rose sighing,
Are emblems true of hapless lovers dying. . . .
("To My Brother George"--Epistle, ll. 89-90)

Both "lily" and the "rose" are in fact most fragile creatures. Perhaps Keats's real attempt in "The Eve of St. Agnes" is through his poetic rites of love to envision the essence of ephemeral love (symbolized by the "lily" and the "rose") freed from the destructive hand of time and sublimated to eternity. Madeline and Porphyro, in this sense, become the

²¹Letters, II, 223-24.

"emblems true of hapless lovers dying." Indeed, in the poem, Madeline's body is described as "lily white" (52); and when Madeline and Porphyro are finally united, Porphyro is compared to the rose and Madeline to the violet:

Into her dream he melted, as the rose
 Blendeth its odour with the violet. . . .
 (320-21)

In time-controlled reality, the moment their union is consummated, the moment of love seems to vanish into nothing. In "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" the lily and the rose as the emblems of love fade away after the knight's union with the fair lady. However, in "The Eve of St. Agnes," in the moment of union the essence of love is etherialized; and Keats affirms the truth of love in the arrested moment of poetic imagination.

As Wasserman points out, the structure of "The Eve of St. Agnes" is a series of concentric circles.²² Near the center is Madeline's chamber where the rites of love are performed, and precisely in the center is Madeline's (and also Porphyro's) dream materialized in their union. Theirs is the world of the moment secluded from the harsh reality of time and space: it is the "mid-desert shrine" ("Lines Written in the Highlands after a Visit to Burns's Country," l. 22); it is the self-contained world of imagination. To reach this sacred chamber, we have to first

²² Wasserman, The Finer Tone, p. 101.

pass through the "chapel aisle" (13) where coldness of death dominates everything. As has been noted, the images of the first four stanzas of the poem are influenced by Lasinio's engraving of Orcagna's "The triumph of Death,"²³ the chapel aisle is indeed the world of immense nothingness that surrounds the island of the moment. Here, death is the only one reality:

The sculptured dead, on each side, seem to freeze,
Imprisoned in black, purgatorial rails.
(14-15)

These sculptures are imprisoned by the coldness of death, and their stillness tells only of dead eternity. Even the Beadsman, who is the only one still alive in this moribund world, is already claimed by death:

already had his deathbell rung,
The joys of all his life were said and sung. . . .
(22-23)

Yet, even in this world of dying there is a slight suggestion of the possibility of the salvation of the human soul through death:

Numb was the Beadsman's fingers, while he told
His rosary, and while his frosted breath,
Like pious incense from a censer old,
Seemed taking flight for heaven, without a death. . . .
(5-8)

The image of the Beadsman's breath taking flight for heaven,

²³Allott, ed., The Poems of John Keats, p. 451.

added to the religious atmosphere surrounding him, seems to suggest that even though his body is doomed to be destroyed by death, his soul, the essence of his being itself is free from its destructive hand.

Having passed through the darkness of death, we next enter into the world filled with the sparkling light and gay music. The "level chambers" (32) filled with guests are indeed the world of the flesh and blood, life in reality still controlled by time. Here we can hear the sounds of the "silver, snarling trumpets" (31). As it is a "thrill of trumpets" ("Lamia," II.27-28) that precludes the end of Lamia's and Lycius's enchanted dream-love, the sound of the trumpet is the music of life-in-reality. Among the guests, is Madeline. However, even though she is in time like the others, her spirit is freed from the movement of time, "Hoodwinked with fairy-fancy" (70). Stressing that the word "hoodwinked" means "blindfolded," Jack Stillinger points out that Madeline is a victim of deception not only perpetrated by Porphyro but also by herself and the superstition she trusts in; thus he develops the aspect of scepticism in "The Eve of St. Agnes."²⁴ However, the word "hoodwinked" also indicates Madeline's state in the self-enclosed world of fancy (in this case, also imagination) where time is arrested in the present moment.

While Madeline is thus preoccupied with her fancy,

²⁴ Stillinger, The Hoodwinking of Madeline and Other Essays on Keats's Poems, pp. 67-93.

Porphyro arrives at the castle. He has come to grasp "one moment in the tedious hours" (79) in which he can gaze on and worship Madeline. To grasp the moment, he seeks the entrance to Madeline's chamber. He achieves it with the help of old Angela. However, to reach her timeless chamber of the moment, he also has to pass through immense nothingness that surrounds the world of life and then the world of life in time. When he happens to see Angela, he is standing behind a pillar "far beyond / The sound of merriment and chorus band" (94-95). He is just outside the world of life. Angela then takes him to a "little moonlit room, / Pale, latticed, chill, and silent as a tomb" (111-112). This little room which seems to be located outside the "level chamber" where the revelry is taking place is indeed the world of death like the "chapel aisle"; and Angela to whom this room seems to belong is, like the Beadsman, already claimed by death. Angela, "Whose passing-bell may ere the midnight toll" (156) has no place in the world of gay life. She takes Porphyro to Madeline's chamber. Obviously, her chamber is located in the center of the castle as the poetic world of the moment is in the recess of the soul. The passage leading to her chamber is like a labyrinth: they have to pass "Through many, a dusty gallery" (186). Then, finally when Porphyro gets to her chamber, he hides himself in the closet. Eventually Madeline also retires to her chamber. This chamber where she performs the rites of love is the world of the moment free from the

"jurisdictions of time and space. In this chamber, there is no sound nor light save the silver light of St. Agnes' moon. It is the "paradise" (244) "in the retired quiet of the night" (274). In this chamber, Madeline is in the state of "Quiet" and dedicates herself to the "hallowed hour" (66).

Here, to perform the rites of St. Agnes' Eve, there are certain strict rules to be followed:

As, supperless to be they must retire
 And couch supine their beauties, lily white,
 Nor look behind, nor sideways, but require
 Of Heaven with upward eyes for all that they desire.
 (51-54)

Thus, Madeline is not allowed to look behind. This warning is important, and it is repeatedly mentioned in the poem: "But dare not look behind; or all the charm is fled" (234). The action to "look behind" is deeply connected with the past and death. In myth and the Bible, it is often related how fatal the action turns out to be. Orpheus failed to retrieve his wife, Eurydice from Hades only because he looked behind at the last moment. Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt only because she disobeyed the warning and looked back to see the destruction of Sodom (Genesis xix.26). Keats is well aware of the significance of the action. In Endymion, after the journey through the underground world, Endymion turns back only to find himself in the sea of nothingness:

He turned--there was a whelming sound. He stepped--
 There was a cooler light; and so he kept
 Towards it by a sandy path, and lo!
 More suddenly than doth a moment go,
 The visions of the earth were gone and fled--
 He saw the giant sea above his head.

(II.1018-23)

Likewise in "Lamia" when Lycius first encounters Lamia, he passes her by without noticing her, and she begs him to "look back" (I.241). He looks back, and this is the original cause of the tragedy of their love which ends in Lycius's death.

Thus, the action of looking back is often related to death. To look behind is to look back to the past or worse to face death. If Madeline looks behind, even if the action does not cause her death, at least the magic of the enchanted moment dies away, by being connected with the past. In this sense, the action of looking behind is relevant to the recollection of the past. As the thought of the past becomes the cause to bring down the moment lifted above time by imagination to the movement of time in "Ode to a Nightingale," so the action of looking behind can change the "hallowed hour" to the ordinary hour. Therefore, Madeline obeying the rules, does not look behind while Lycius does. Here is the fundamental difference between Madeline's love and Lamia's.

By following the rules of the rites of St. Agnes' Eve, in the dark paradise of the world of the moment, Madeline is then gradually etherialized. She looks "all akin / To

spirits of the air, and visions wide" (201-02). She kneels for "heaven's grace and boon" (219) "so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint" (225). In this timeless world of the moment, Madeline is thus sublimated to pure essence and thereby achieves the state of immortal being. She then lies on her bed in "sort of wakeful swoon" (236).*

Meanwhile, from the closet, Porphyro is watching the process of Madeline's etherealization. Now, he comes out from the closet, and in order to be united with Madeline who has already been sublimated to the essence of love, he performs his own rites of love. For him, Madeline becomes the goddess of love to be worshipped, and her chamber, a "silver shrine" (337):

Thou art my heaven and I thine'eremite.
(277)

However, to be united with Madeline, Porphyro has to be etherialized, too. In the letter of March 13, 1818, Keats refers to "Ethereal thing." He says "every mental pursuit takes its reality and worth from the ardour of the pursuer --being itself a nothing", and continues as follows:

Ethereal thing may at least be thus real, divided under three heads--Things real--things semireal--and no things--Things real--such as existences of Sun Moon & Stars and passages of Shakspeare [sic]--Things semireal such as Love, the Clouds &c which require a greeting of the Spirit to make them wholly exist--and Nothings which are made Great and dignified by an ardent pursuit. . . . 25

²⁵ Letters, I, 242-43.

Madeline, now the essence of love thus requires a greeting of Porphyro's spirit to be true, while Porphyro, who has come from nowhere and is actually a "nothing" (in the sense of the letter above), has to be sublimated to being by his ardent pursuit. For this purpose, Porphyro gives a feast.

The part of a feast (the stanzas, XXX and XXXI) in "The Eve of St. Agnes" is much discussed. According to Gittings the feast, which repeatedly occurs in the poems written from January to September, 1819, is deeply connected with Keats's relationship with Isabella Jones,²⁶ while Beyer finds here the influence of Wieland's Oberon.²⁷

However, it seems to me that there is a deeper meaning to the feast taking place in Madeline's chamber of the moment. Lionel Trilling in The Opposing Self points out that "the ingestive appetite is the most primitive of our appetites, the sole appetite of our infant state, and a preoccupation with it, an excessive emphasis upon it, is felt . . . to imply the passivity and self-reference of the infantile condition."²⁸ He then notices that Keats, unlike Aldous Huxley, T. S. Eliot or Graham Greene, did not share our culture's fear of the temptation to the passive self-reference of infancy but rather made the knowledge of felicity evoked

²⁶ Robert Gittings, John Keats: The Living Year (London: Heineman, 1954), pp. 168-74.

²⁷ Werner W. Beyer, Keats and the Daemon King (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1947), pp. 174-75.

²⁸ Lionel Trilling, "The Poet as Hero: Keats in His Letters," in The Opposing Self: Nine Essays in Criticism (New York: Viking Press, 1955), p. 17.

by food, the foundation of his quest for truth.²⁹ As an example, Trilling gives "The Eve of St. Agnes" and about the feast-scene he states as follows:

And in that famous scene the whole paraphernalia of luxurious felicity, the invoked warmth of the south, the bland and delicate food, the privacy of the bed, and the voluptuousness of the sexual encounter, are made to glow into an island of bliss with the ultimate dramatic purpose of making fully apparent the cold surrounding darkness; it is the moment of life in the infinitude of not-being.³⁰

Thus, Trilling finds out that in Keats's case, the feast--whether it implies his infantile condition or not, or whether it is deeply connected with sexuality or not--does not remain mere sensuous indulgence; it is an important medium for Keats to grasp the moment of being, and in the ultimate case, it even enables him to perceive in the moment of bliss the essence of being. Trilling then concludes as follows:

He lived to perceive ultimate things, essences. This is what appetite, or love, was always coming to mean for him.³¹

After all, Trilling's account of the feast in "The Eve of St. Agnes" in terms of appetite seems to reveal its ritual nature. Porphyro's feast taking place in Madeline's

²⁹ Trilling, p. 18.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., p. 19.

chamber of the moment is, in fact, an indispensable element of his rites of love to be united with Madeline, the essence of love. According to the Greek-mythologist, Carl Kerényi,³² the feast has an element of the rite even if it may not be called a rite in itself; the feast, whether it is a sacrifice or not, requires the presence of god. In such rites, there is a translucence which makes it possible to see the vision of eternity. In Greek religion, there is also a mystic notion of the union between a man and a god, and its absolute form is "hénosis."

Basing his view on Kerényi's interpretation of such rites, Katsuzo Sakata finds in the feast given by Porphyro, his own attempt of "hénosis."³³ It may seem that "The Eve of St. Agnes" lacks the presence of gods which is the fundamental element of the feast. However, for Porphyro who is the "eremite," Madeline is his "heaven"; therefore for him the feast is an indispensable element for the "hénosis" with his heaven, Madeline.

After he thus has performed his rites of love with the feast, Porphyro wakes up Madeline with music. Madeline wakes up and finds Porphyro there. In this sense, Madeline's dream is "Adam's dream." She wakes up and finds the dream is truth. However, Madeline grieves over the change between

³² Carl Kerényi, Die antike Religion, trans. Hideo Takahashi (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 1972), pp. 170, 211-16, quoted by Katsuzo Sakata, John Keats, pp. 129-30.

³³ Sakata, pp. 129-31.

the Porphyro of her dream and the Porphyro in the wakeful moment:

How changed thou art! How pallid, chill, and drear!
 Give me that voice again, my Porphyro,
 Those looks immortal, those complainings dear!
 Oh, leave me not in this eternal woe,
 For if thou diest, my love, I know not where to go.
 (311-15)

Here, Wasserman interprets the ambiguity of Porphyro's "immortal" look and Madeline's "eternal" woe as follows:

Immortality belongs to heaven's bourne and describes Porphyro's spiritual appearance; immortality has to do with a realm where existence is not merely endless, but where death and time are irrelevancies. Eternity, on the other hand, is an earthly measurement, and the two words underscore Madeline's precarious balance between two conditions--the atemporality that belongs to her vision of Porphyro and the temporality in which the earthly Porphyro exists.³⁴

What Wasserman here calls "heaven's bourne" is, in other words, the world of the moment, sublimated to the eternal present. However, the moment Madeline wakes up from her dream, the moment sublimated to the eternal present returns to the moment in time. In ordinary reality, the moment then vanishes into nothing; yet in Madeline's chamber where time is always in the present moment, the moment still remains. Madeline's perception of Porphyro's "immortal" looks and her own "eternal" woe therefore indicate not only Madeline's precarious balance but also the precarious

³⁴Wasserman, The Finer Tone, p. 106.

balance of the moment contained in her chamber, between atemporality and the temporality. Even though Madeline's chamber of the moment is endowed with timelessness in itself, it is still surrounded with the reality of menacing time.

It is in Madeline's timeless chamber where Porphyro succeeds in sublimating himself to ethereal thing by the intensity of his pursuit. He arises

Ethereal, flushed, and like a throbbing star,
Seen mid the sapphire heaven's deep repose. . . .
(318-19)

When he thus has become an essence like Madeline, the two are united:

Into her dream he melted, as the rose
Blendeth its odour with the violet,
Solution sweet. . . . (320-22)

Porphyro's hénosis with his heaven, Madeline, is now accomplished through his rites of love. By this union, both Madeline, the essence of love which is yet semireal and Porphyro, nothing himself are also made to wholly exist.

The moment they are united, the magic of the enchanted moment vanishes: "St. Agnes' moon hath set" (324). In the world of becoming, the moment love is consumed; it withers away; however, in "The Eve of St. Agnes," at the moment of union love is sublimated to eternal being. Porphyro and Madeline, who are now the emblems of truth of love, escape the reality of time where there are "sleeping dragons all

around, / At glaring watch" (353-54) to the realm where they achieve the state of timeless, spaceless and selfless being. Wasserman studies this process in detail in terms of Keats's devices of time-scheme.³⁵ As the poem approaches its end, first by the introduction of the passive verb, the sense of their presence is dimmed: "In all the house was heard no human sound" (356, italics mine). Then by the subtle manipulation of the past tense and the historical present (the stanza XLI: "glide," "lay," "rose," "shook," "owns," "slide," "lie," "turns" and "groans"), the reader is put in a confusion with the sense of time, and finally is made to realize that the lovers are now outside the context of time. "And they are gone" (370): their being gone is outside time.

However, here arises a problem. As I mentioned at the beginning, the whole meaning of "The Eve of St. Agnes" becomes ambiguous since the poem actually ends in a rather sombre fashion. The death of the Beadsman and Angela reveals the ugly, destructive fact of life. For this reason some readers are made sceptical about Keats's intention in the poem. We should bear in mind Frank Kermode's saying in The Sense of an Ending that "the End is a fact of life and a fact of the imagination working out from the middle, the human crisis."³⁶ The ending of "The Eve of St. Agnes" is

³⁵Wasserman, pp. 123-25.

³⁶Frank Kermode, The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction (1966; rpt. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), p. 58.

actually a fact of life and a fact of imagination. Here, we have to remember true complexity of the structure of the poem: while "The Eve St. Agnes" is about Madeline's and Porphyro's rites of love, the poem itself enacts Keats's own poetic rites of love. The poem is, in this sense, a symbolic expression of Keats's own experience of "fellowship divine, / A fellowship with essence" (Endymion, I. 778-79) such as he pursued in Endymion:

That moment have we stepped
 Into a sort of oneness, and our state
 Is like a floating spirit's. But there are
 Richer entanglements, enthrallments far
 More self-destroying, leading, by degrees,
 To the chief intensity. . . .

(I.795-800)

Porphyro (who has sublimated his nothingness to being with the intensity of his pursuit in order to merge himself into Madeline, the essence of love) is the celestial mode of Keats's own being. However, while Keats envisions his poetic rites of love, in which the essence of his being is sublimated to eternal being in its union with love, Keats himself eventually has to come back to reality in time unless he loses his mind (a fear he expresses as "Lines Written in the Highlands after a Visit to Burns's Country"). To be recreated in art, imagination first has to die. Thus, even though Madeline and Porphyro are etherialized and leave the mortal world altogether, the poem still ends in the world of reality where death is inevitable. The end of "The Eve of St. Agnes" is therefore a fact of life and a

fact of imagination: the moment of bliss arrested and lifted above time by imagination comes back to the movement of time as in "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn." However, unlike these two odes, in "The Eve of St. Agnes," Keats does not question the truth of his experience. He accepts the fact of imagination as a fact and describes it as such; for if Keats himself could not live happily ever after like Porphyro, he could be at least hopeful for the immortality of love and the soul who lives in love. Thus he sets Porphyro, his essence, free from the jurisdictions of time through his poetic rites of love. In "The Eve of St. Agnes," the emphasis is placed upon the ritual nature of imagination.

iii

Hecate: "Lamia"

Among Keats's poems, no other has so far received so many differing interpretations and evaluations as has "Lamia." While Clarence Thorpe thinks that in the odes and in "Lamia," Keats had most nearly found himself,³⁷ Graham Hough slights it, saying "it remains . . . a rather purposeless poem, and it looks rather like an exercise in verse-narrative."³⁸ De Selincourt regards it as "the

³⁷ Clarence D. Thorpe, The Mind of John Keats (1926; rpt. New York: Russel & Russel, 1964), p. 177.

³⁸ Hough, The Romantic Poets, p. 167.

utterance of a mood rather than a settled conviction."³⁹ Colvin places it below "Isabella" and "The Eve of St. Agnes," noting "the bewilderment in which it leaves us as to the effect intended to be made on our imaginative sympathies."⁴⁰ While Gittings, who often connects Keats's works with his real experience, denies this factor, saying "It is the most consciously artistic of all his productions, and he was not likely to allow unconscious autobiography to stay in,"⁴¹ Murry thinks it is Keats's "imaginative autobiography" and regards Lycius as Keats, Lamia as Fanny Brawne and Apollonius as the realist, Charles Brown.⁴² According to Douglas Bush,⁴³ the various interpretations of "Lamia" are classified as follows: "Lamia" is (1) a literal romantic narrative, with ethical overtones perhaps but with no general parable, a poem in which Keats was concentrating his forces on technique and popular appeal; (2) a condemnation of cold philosophic reason; (3) a condemnation of feeling and the senses;

³⁹E. de Selincourt, ed., The Poems of John Keats (1905; rpt. London: Methuen, 1961), xlii.

⁴⁰Sidney Colvin, ed., The Poems of John Keats (New York: Macmillan, 1915), p. 408, quoted by Allott, ed., The Poems of John Keats, p. 615.

⁴¹Gittings, John Keats: The Living Year, p. 155.

⁴²J. M. Murry, Keats and Shakespeare (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1925), p. 157, quoted by Michio Tsuda, John Keats (Osaka: Sogensha, 1974), p. 212.

⁴³Douglas Bush, "Keats and His Idea" in Major English Romantic Poets: A Symposium in Reappraisal, ed. Clarence D. Thorpe, Carlos Baker and Bennett Weaver (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1957), pp. 241-42.

(4) a condemnation of a divorce between reason and feeling;
 (5) an incoherent expression of Keats's unresolved conflicts, emotional and philosophical; (6) a contrast between the immortal and perfect love of Hermes and the nymph and the mortal, imperfect love of Lycius and Lamia.

Thus, the ambiguity and ambivalence so notable in "Lamia" have evoked many differing arguments: I have no intention here of contradicting rival interpretations since each interpretation while it is appropriate to one aspect of "Lamia," cannot by itself solve the complexity of the poem as a whole. It seems to me that such ambiguity and ambivalence are caused by Keats's absorption into the moment in his pursuit of the significance of being and by the paradoxical situation in which he inevitably finds himself by such effort. As far as the time-scheme of the poem is concerned, I find that in "Lamia" Keats presents the negative mode of being in the moment.

In reality, the moment is only temporal, and once it has passed away, it will never be repeated. To hold on to the moment that has passed is therefore to live in the past, death and what is now nothing. Lamia's tragedy originates in her defying the movement of time and still living in the moment of love and happiness which in reality has already vanished into nothing.

When we compare Keats's "Lamia" with its original material, Burton's The Anatomy of Melancholy, the thing we notice in their difference is that Keats begins the poem

when Lamia is still a serpent. In Keats's case, the story does not begin simply from the scene when on one evening, a beautiful woman appears in front of a young Corinthian who is hurrying for home. Keats attaches as a prelude the process whereby Lamia is transformed from a serpent into a woman. Within the description of this process, Keats tells the story of the immortal love of gods, as a contrast to the human, mortal love between Lamia and Lycius which will follow it.

When she is still a serpent, Lamia is living on the "Cretan isle." Symbolically speaking, the "Cretan isle" is the island of the moment surrounded by the immense sea of nothing; even though it is isolated, within itself it contains a timeless, terrestrial paradise. The island of the moment is directly connected to heaven. On this island, Hermes is now looking for a beautiful nymph with whom he is in love. It seems most appropriate that Keats chose Hermes among the gods and goddesses of Olympus for the one who comes on this island of the moment. He is the guiding spirit of transmutation; and as the name, "Hermes" signifies "interpreter" or "mediator,"⁴⁴ he presides in the supra-terrestrial region of celestial initiation.⁴⁵ In this sense,

⁴⁴J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, trans. Jack Sage, 2nd ed. (1962; rpt. London: Rowledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 207.

⁴⁵Edouard Schuré, The Great Initiates: A Study of the Secret History of Religion (West Nyack, N.Y.: St. George Books, 1961 [1889]), p. 134, quoted by Barton Levi St. Armand, "Usher Unveiled: Poe and the Metaphysic of Gnosticism," Poe Studies, Vol. 5, No. 1 (June, 1972), 4.

he is a symbol of the celestial mode of being. He can freely travel in "vertical" time (if I can still call its timelessness time) which connects the moment and heaven.

Hermes finds out his nymph with the help of Lamia. Here Keats, as if to contrast a man's dream with a god's dream, tells that the dream of gods is truth:

It was no dream; or say a dream it was,
Real are the dreams of Gods, and smoothly pass
Their pleasures in a long immortal dream.
(I.126-28)

These gods are immortal, and so is their love:

Into the green-recessed woods they flew;
Nor grew they pale, as mortal lovers do.
(I.144-45)

The woods they flew in are the "immortal bowers to mortal sense" (Endymion, II.438) like the one where Keats found Psyche and Cupid reposing in "Ode to Psyche." The "immortal bowers" exist only in the world of the moment. By being united with Hermes, the nymph who was invisible before Lamia breaks the magic, who is, in a way, the essence of beauty, is now sublimated to immortal being even if she is visible.

Because Keats thus emphasizes the bliss of immortal love of gods, Lamia's love seems to be doomed even from the beginning; however, Keats does not mean Lamia is just an ordinary being. She is not preordained to be mortal. Her mortality is actually acquired later not for what she is

but for what she wants to become. Lamia, the serpent is a creature on the island of the moment. As the island of the moment is self-enclosed and self-limited, Lamia is confined in the "sepent prison-house" (I.203) and laments the state of isolation and confinement; however, as the island of the moment is timeless and limitless within itself, Lamia is endowed with the freedom of timeless and spaceless being:

How, ever, where she willed, her spirit went;
 Whether to faint Elysium, or where
 Down through tress-lifting waves the Nereids fair
 Wind into Thetis' bower by many a pearly stair;
 Or where God Bacchus drains his cups divine,
 Stretched out, at ease, beneath a glutinous pine;
 Or Where in Pluto's gardens palatine
 Mulciber's columns gleam in far piazzian line.
 (I.205-12)

Thus, as long as she stays on the island of the moment and remains a serpent, she can keep the joy of eternal being, since she is free from the jurisdictions of time. Even Lamia's love for Lycius will never wither if she is content to love him in her vision. Instead, she chooses to become a woman. By becoming a woman, she loses all the privileges (which seem only curses to her) given on the creatures on the island of the moment.

In the process when Lamia is transformed into a woman, she loses all the glorious colors decorating her serpent-body and is covered with the yellow hue. Yellow, like grey (the hair-color of fallen Saturn ["Hyperion," I.4]), is the color faded by time. This process indicates Lamia's


fall into time from a timeless status. Then, she leaves the island of the moment:

She fled into that valley they pass o'er
 Who go to Corinth from Crenchreas' shore. . . .
 (I.173-74)

While the Cretan isle represents the world of being, the valley where Lamia now finds herself is the world of becoming which is temporal and subject to change. Keats calls life the "vale of Soul-making."⁴⁶ The valley is thus a metaphor of life as a duration, life being transformed with the movement of time.

Since Lamia is in the valley of becoming, she is now under the jurisdictions of time; however, she does not know or just ignores the movement of time surrounding her:

There she stood
 About a young bird's flutter from a wood,
 Fair, on a sloping green of mossy tread,
 By a clear pool, wherein she passion'd
 To see herself escaped from so sore ills,
 While her robes flaunted with the daffodils.
 (I.179-84)



Lamia thus tries to see the reflection of herself on the pool. Even though Keats identifies Lamia with a daffodil and not with a narcissus, her action still evokes the image of Narcissus. Narcissism is closely connected with a mirror-image, and Lamia's action of seeing her own reflection indicates her narcissistic state of self-absorption

⁴⁶ Letters, II, 102.

and self-reference. Her action also indicates that Lamia is still confined within herself as she was on the island of the moment. She is blind (or wants to be blind) to the outside world; therefore, she hoodwinks herself with the reflection of herself. In spite of the fact that she is now a woman who lives in time, Lamia herself believes she is still a timeless being in the self-confined world of the moment.

While Lamia comes to the valley from the Cretan isle, Lycius is on his way home from "Egina isle" (I.225):

whither he had been awhile
To sacrifice to Jove, whose temple there
Waits with high marble doors for blood and incense
rare.
(I.226-28)

"Egina isle" where Jove's temple is erected and where Lycius performed his rites also represents an island of the moment like the Cretan isle. As Porphyro's prayer was realized only in Madeline's chamber of the moment surrounded by menacing time in "The Eve of St. Agnes," the communication with gods through the rites is possible only in the timeless world of the moment. Thus, Lycius, on the island of the moment, performed his rites, and "Jove heard his vows, and bettered his desire" (I.229).

Now Lycius is passing the valley where Lamia is waiting for him. Once he has returned to the valley, he is also back in the reality of time. Keats here chooses as a setting "the moth-time of that evening dim" (I.220), the part of a

day which makes us most aware of destructive time. Yet, Lycius, like Lamia, is still preoccupied with himself and is unaware of the reality surrounding him, with "his mind wrapped like his mantle" (I.241). Consequently, he passes by Lamia without even noticing her. This process symbolically indicates that because of his preoccupation with himself, Lycius has missed the moment of encounter with Lamia and the moment has vanished into the past. Lamia then calls him from behind to look back, and he does:

'Ah, Lycius bright,
And will you leave me on the hills alone?
Lycius, look back, and be some pity shown!
He did--not with cold wonder fearingly,
But Orpheus-like at an Eurydice. . . .
(I.244-48)

As I mentioned earlier in terms of Madeline's rites in "The Eve of St. Agnes," the action of looking back is closely connected with the past and death, and it often turns out to be fatal either for the person concerned or for the crucial moment at stake. While Madeline does not look behind to maintain the magic of St. Agnes' Eve, Lycius does in order to see Lamia. He does so to recapture the moment of his encounter with Lamia which, in reality, has become the past. His looking back to see Lamia proves to be the origin of the tragic end of their love and of his own death.

Lycius then strives to hold on to the moment of his encounter with Lamia. He fears she might vanish into the air:

Even as thou vanishest so shall I die.
 Stay! Though a naiad of the rivers, stay!
 To thy far wishes will thy stream obey.
 (I.260-62)

Ironically, Lycius here compares Lamia to a nymph of the rivers. The comparison, even though Lycius himself is not aware, is quite valid. The river is often regarded as a metaphor of the stream of time. Lamia, now a woman, is a creature controlled by time like a nymph of the river. However, Lycius begs Lamia to defy the movement of time. He thinks she can; she thinks she can; but actually she cannot. She is no longer a timeless being on the island of the moment.

In spite of the fact that Lamia is now "a real woman, lineal indeed / From Pyrrha's pebbles or old Adam's seed" (I.332-33), she still pretends that she is an immortal being like a goddess. She calls the reality controlled by destructive time "this floor of clay" (I.272) and complains that she cannot live in "these hills and vales, where no joy is-- / Empty of immortality and bliss!" (I.277-78). Lamia thus unwisely admits that the vale she is now in is the world of becoming. She then pretends as if she would fly away: "she rose / Tiptoe with white arms spread" (I.286-87). However, as was mentioned before in terms of Keats's longing for the eternal sky, "tiptoe" is an action of a mortal being longing for eternity. This action proves Lamia's humanization and the mortality consequent upon her fall into time.

Lamia and Lycius still hold on to the moment of their encounter, which unfortunately has already passed into nothingness. They are totally absorbed in themselves. When they pass the city gate, "blinded Lycius" (I.347) does not even notice it:

They passed the city gates, he knew not how,
So noiseless, and he never thought to know.
(I.348-49)

Thought has completely fled from Lycius. He loses the sense of time and continues to live in the moment which is now actually nothing. Even when he passes by Apollonius, a philosopher and his guide, he hides himself from his instructor, "muffling his face" (I.362) and shrinking "closer . . . / Into his mantle" (I.366-67). Philosophy and thought belong to the sphere of time. Apollonius represents all that is concerned with time. Lycius avoids him, for Apollonius is a threat to restore to him the sense of time which he wants to forget in order to keep the moment of happiness with Lamia. Lamia and Lycius then create their own paradise of the moment, "Shut from the busy world" (I.397).

However, in spite of Lamia's effort to eternalize the moment of happiness, time eventually invades their "palace of sweet sin" (II.31): "too short was their bliss" (II.9). Part II thus begins with Keats's own prediction that love is only "Time's fool"⁴⁷:

⁴⁷William Shakespeare, Sonnets, CXVI.

Love in a hut, with water and a crust
 Is--Love, forgiye us!--cinders, ashes, dust;
 Love in a palace is perhaps at last
 More grievous torment than a hermit's fast.
 (II.1-4)

Whether it is sinful or not, their palace has been the
 "golden bourn" (II.32) and, secluded from the outside world
 dominated by time, it has always contained "warm, cloistered
 hours" (II.148) within itself. However, in "the even tide"
 (II.17) they were almost asleep,

When from the slope side of a suburb hill,
 Deafening the swallow's twitter, came a thrill
 Of trumpets. . .
 (II.26-28)

The sound of the trumpet, as in "The Eve of St. Agnes," is
 the music of life in reality; it is "the tug of mortality
 that draws man out of his vision of a beauty that is truth"⁴⁸
 which he can have only in the world of the moment. Since
 Lycius has heard the sound, he feels "the gentle anchor
 pull" ("Lines Written in the Highlands after a Visit to
 Burns's Country," l. 40) him back to the reality of time:

His spirit passed beyond its golden bourn
 Into the noisy world almost forsworn.
 (II.32-33)

Lamia grieves this, for she is well aware that "but a
 moment's thought is passion's passing-bell" (II.39). Lycius's
 thought of reality eventually shatters the magic world of

⁴⁸Wasserman, The Finer Tone, p. 170.

love which Lamia and Lycius built themselves. As the thought of the past tolled Keats back to his sole self in "Ode to a Nightingale," the thought of reality, like a passing-bell, tolls Lycius back to his self. The thought then awakes in Lycius the consciousness of the self. The moment of magic suddenly falls into the moment of consciousness which tries to investigate everything.

In the process Lycius awakes to the consciousness of the self, the epistemological function of his mind also awakes, and Lycius undergoes self-examination as well as the examination of Lamia. Fundamental self-reference is closely connected with a mirror. Indeed, the rest of the poem is full of mirror-images. First of all, when Lycius sees Lamia grieve at his interest in the outside world, he soothes her, "bending to her open eyes, / Where he was mirrored small in paradise" (II.46-47). Lycius is here actually looking not at Lamia but at his own image. He is no longer "blinded Lycius" as far as his consciousness of the self is concerned. Also after Lycius has awakened to the consciousness of the self, Lamia decorates their palace with mirrors, which endlessly reflect all that they contain within themselves. From this point, the world of enchanted love which Lamia and Lycius built, changes into the world of Lycius's consciousness. At this point, discussion of the details of Lycius's epistemological process in "Lamia" will be deferred to be dealt with later in terms of the epistemological paradox which is involved in the question

of the truth of imagination.

Lycius's awakening to self-consciousness is then accompanied by egotism. In spite of Lamia's sorrow, Lycius determines to display her to the outsider:

Besides, for all his love, in self-despite,
Against his better self, he took delight
Luxurious in her sorrows, soft and new.
(II.72-74)

Finally "at blushing shut of day" (II.107), Lycius invites the guests to their self-enclosed palace of the moment (note that Keats again chooses evening-time as the time of catastrophe): The prying eyes of the guests which would threaten to destroy the moment of magic are, however, dimmed with the power of wine; and in the palace the guests also forget the sense of time, "every soul from human trammels freed" (II.210).

The final catastrophe then happens with the appearance of Apollonius as an uninvited guest. He destroys the moment of magic with his cold philosophic, investigating eyes. However, as Wasserman points out, he does not simply burst into Lycius's world without any condition to accept him there: "Only when Lycius has opened the palace to the world of the senses, has taken on a proper self, and has mastered Lamia, can Apollonius enter."⁴⁹ In fact, the appearance of Apollonius is merely the completion of Lycius's awakening to consciousness. The consciousness of the self is

⁴⁹Wasserman, p. 172.

accompanied by the consciousness of time: thus, Apollonius who represents all which is concerned with time enters Lycius's palace. By the invasion of Apollonius, the moment of magic which is enclosed in the palace falls into the hands of time. The moment of ecstasy turns into the moment of nightmare. Lycius who has been living in the moment, which in reality is now nothing dies tragically, still confined in the moment he has clung to. Lamia vanishes into nothing. After all, if the moment of magic finds its fulfillment in eternity, the moment in reversed time reveals its true mode in death and nothing. In "Lamia," the tragic end of both Lamia and Lycius shows the fate of the negative mode of being: to hold on to the moment which has passed is to live in the past, death and what is now nothing.

iv

Diana: "Hyperion"

If the moment suspended between two nothings, the past and the future is the only one reality we can perceive, a duration is a mere chaplet of these moments. What we call time then transports existence from one moment to another. However, to be reborn in the next moment, the existence of one moment first has to die. The transformation of Apollo in Book III, "Hyperion" shows this process: he gets out of the self-enclosed world of the moment with the help of Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory. In this poem, Keats presents Diana's mode of being. He accepts time and

becoming, for he finds out he can cover the gulf between each moment of being with the power of memory.

In contrast with the now-fallen Titans who are wandering about "bewildered shores" (III.9), Apollo lives alone on the isle of Delos:

Throughout all the isle
There was no covert, no retir'd cave,
Unhaunted by the murmurous noise of waves,
Though scarcely heard in many a green recess.
(III.38-41)

This is the island of the moment surrounded by time's sea. In the recess of the island the murmurs of the sea which tell the story of human time are not heard; however, standing on the shore and listening to those sounds, Apollo now sheds tears. The sound of the waves and of time makes him wonder of the outside world. Apollo is aware of his own, self-enclosed and self-limited state on the island of the moment. He asks, "Are there not other regions than this isle?" (III.96). He is also aware of the gulf between being and knowing:

For me, dark, dark,
And painful, vile oblivion seals my eyes.
I strive to search wherefore I am-so sad,
Until a melancholy numbs my limbs. . . .
(III.86-89)

Since he does not have the measuring point outside the self-enclosed world of the moment, he cannot know his being. Therefore, Apollo is "on the shores / In fearless yet in aching ignorance?" (III.106-07).

Apollo then wishes to be free from the self-limited state:

Oh, why should I
 Feel cursed and thwarted, when the liegeless air
 Yields to my step aspirant? Why should I
 Spurn the green turf as hateful to my feet?
 (III.91-94)

Apollo appeals to Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory for help. Only she can cover the void of the "unfooted sea" (III.50). Only through memory, can he live in the infinitude of time which seems eternal:

Knowledge enormous makes a God of me.
 Names, deeds, grey legends, dire events, rebellions,
 Majesties, sovran voices, agonies,
 Creations and destroyings, all at once
 Pour into the wide hollows of my brain,
 And deify me, as if some blithe wine
 Or bright elixir peerless I had drunk,
 And so become immortal.
 (III.113-20).

At the end of "Hyperion," Apollo attempts to identify himself with Mnemosyne through the contemplation of her features. He begins to transform himself:

Soon wild commotion shook him and made flush
 All the immortal fairness of his limbs--
 Most like the struggle at the gate of death;
 Or like still to one who should take leave
 Of pale immortal death, and with a pang
 As hot as death's is chill, with fierce convulse
 Die into life.
 (III.124-30)

The poem itself ends unfinished in the process of Apollo's transformation; but by identifying himself with Mnemosyne,

Apollo finally makes all the past his own. By accepting the past he also accepts the future. He dies in the moment and like a phoenix is reborn in the next. However, when he is reborn, he is no longer a timeless yet self-confined being. His memory connects each moment of his being, and he finds freedom outside the self-enclosed island of the moment.

3. "Negative Capability" and Epistemological Paradoxes

If I call the paradox of the imaginative moment evolved by the problem of being and not-being the "ontological paradox," the question of the truth of imagination also causes the problem of being and knowing and involves another kind of paradox: the "epistemological paradox." There is no doubt that for Keats the truth of imagination is a life-long problem he has to prove. However, to prove the truth of imagination, he has to undergo the process of self-examination. He has to justify the self out of time with the self in time. It is only in time that he can make sense of what he feels or sees outside of time in imagination. Thus, self-examination itself is a paradox. The self has no other external view-point outside itself to measure its operation, since it deals with itself both as a subject and as an object. Fundamental self-examination inevitably contains in itself the "epistemological paradox, in which the mind, by its

operation, attempts to say something about its operation."⁵⁰

Imagination is generally regarded as an exalted power to enable the poet to free himself from the jurisdictions of time; however, unfortunately in Keats's case, "Negative Capability," which he so values as the source of poetic creativity and which is supposed to enable him to retain the moment of being, has also an aspect of self-examination within itself. First of all, "Negative Capability" implies the self-annihilating process of imagination. Keats identifies himself with the object of his contemplation through this process. However, to identify himself with the object involves the paradox that the contemplator is at the same time the one being contemplated. While he is contemplating a certain object, he is also contemplating himself identified with the object. Such procedure evokes the contemplator's self-consciousness and operates as self-examination.

In Keats's poetry, the aspect of self-examination in "Negative Capability" eventually causes a double point of view. Beside the Keats as a person in imaginative experience, there always exists the Keats as a spectator. He is well aware of this division. In "God of the meridian"⁵¹ he confesses as follows:

God of the meridian,
And of the East and West,

⁵⁰ Colie, Paradoxia Epidemica, p. 6

⁵¹ The title of the poem is given according to H. W. Garrod, ed., Keats: Poetical Works (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1956). Allott includes this poem in "Hence burgundy, claret, and port."

To thee my soul is flown,
 And my body is earthward pressed.
 It is an awful mission,
 A terrible division,
 And leaves a gulf austere
 To be filled with worldly fear.
 Aye, when the soul is fled
 To high above our head,
 Affrighted do we gaze
 After its airy maze. . . .

(17-28)

Thus, even when Keats merges himself into the object through "Negative Capability" and achieves the state of timeless, spaceless and selfless being, the other Keats, the spectator who is still in time is analyzing his other half's experience in order to find out the truth of imagination. In this case, even with "Negative Capability," he does not succeed in totally annihilating his self. For example, in both "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn" when Keats is supposed to make the beings of the nightingale and the urn his own by destroying his self, he is not completely free from "I" or the analytical self. It may seem that in "Ode on a Grecian Urn" unlike in "Ode to a Nightingale" there is no "I," that the poet himself is absent from the poem; however, instead of talking of the object through "I" "Ode on a Grecian Urn" takes the form of continuous questions. Keats asks questions to the urn, but in fact, he is asking the questions to himself identified with the urn as well as to the urn. By so doing, he is examining himself. After all, as Patterson points out, "in neither poem is the identification of the speaker and the object complete to the

point of delusion, for "Negative Capability" does not entail the entire loss of self-consciousness but only most of it."⁵²

Imagination is a liberator from time, but once the poet is forced to return to the reality in time, it also ends as a victim of time. However, what causes him his fall into time, especially in Keats's case, is not an external factor. It lies in the very paradoxical nature of his imagination, "Negative Capability." After all, "Negative Capability" contains in itself the element of self-examination, and the very process of epistemology inevitably caused by self-examination puts him in a paradoxical situation, since there is no way to get to a solution when one tries to examine the mind's operation by means of the mind's operation. Moreover, the paradox contains in itself the fate of self-denial. As a result, the more Keats tries to destroy his self and be freed from time by intense contemplation of the object, the more he becomes aware of the analytical self who is trying to prove the truth of imagination and yet who binds the Keats in imagination to the reality in time and eventually destroys his timeless status. This is the reason why in both "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn" the moment Keats has succeeded in identifying himself with each object turns out to be the moment he is forced to detach himself from it and return to reality. This is the reason, in spite of his great effort

⁵²Patterson, The Daemonic in the Poetry of John Keats, p. 167.

to connect being and becoming by identifying himself with Moneta, the goddess of memory, Keats ended up abandoning "The Fall of Hyperion" unfinished. To continue the poem it was required of him to endure the great tension between the Keats in imagination and the Keats as a spectator, and it seems that Keats could no longer summon the strength to do so. Keats's imagination contains in itself an impulse to self-destruction. This characteristic of Keats's imagination reminds me of a sentence from Poe's "Eureka": "In the Original Unity of the First thing lies the Secondary Cause of All Things, with the Germ of their Inevitable Annihilation."⁵³ Keats's imagination is creative and at the same time destructive. From this paradoxical nature of his imagination springs the Janus-like vision in his poetry.

Among Keats's works, "Lamia" is the most remarkable example of the self-destructive nature of his imagination. In this poem Keats displays the process of self-examination in order to find out the truth of imagination. Viewed from the point of Keats's pursuit of the identity of imagination, "Lamia" in fact can be regarded as an analysis of the process of poetic creation when imagination appears in consciousness and crystallizes into a form. In the poem, Keats undergoes a painful but inevitable process of epistemology --an effort to know what is imagination.

Lamia is, in a way, the embodiment of imagination

⁵³ Edgar Allan Poe, "Eureka," The Science Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. Harold Beaver (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 211.

itself. She does not belong to the human world. She lives in the timeless world in the recess of the mind. Nevertheless, she still dreams of human love, "beyond its proper bound, yet still confined" ("To J. H. Reynolds, Esq.," l. 79).

As imagination is both a liberator from time and at the same time a victim of time, Lamia is endowed with a double character: even though she is a tempter of Lycius (but still his liberator from time), at the end she also turns out to be a victim of her own dream.

Lamia falls in love with Lycius. As D'Avanzo points out that "Lycius" is another name of Apollo,⁵⁴ Lycius is a poet-figure. For him Lamia transforms herself into a woman and leaves her proper home. The pain she suffers in the process of her transformation is the pain caused by the friction with time when imagination crystallizes into a form. She then reveals herself to Lycius as a woman, though she is not "a real woman" (I.332) but is still a serpent in essence. She entices him "by playing woman's part" (I.337). Lamia displays the self-dramatizing and self-transmutable nature of the imagination. She creates for Lycius the world of fiction.

As imagination gradually appears in consciousness and takes a form, Lycius becomes aware of his self. At one time; he contemplates Lamia (as the poet does through "Negative Capability"), "bending to her open eyes" (II.46),

⁵⁴D'Avanzo, Keats's Metaphors for the Poetic Imagination, p. 52.

but at the same time he finds that in her eyes he is "mirrored small 'in' paradise" (II.47). Thus, he starts to contemplate his own image even while he is contemplating Lamia. Lamia and Lycius are fused into one in his mind, but with his awakening to the consciousness of self, also springs his desire to know the identity of Lamia:

'Sure some sweet name thou hast, though, by my truth,
I have not asked it, ever thinking thee
Not mortal, but of heavenly progeny,
As still I do.' (II.85-88)

In his effort to know the identity of Lamia, imagination, Lycius actually starts to reflect himself, his mind. From this time on, Lamia becomes a mirror for his own self-examination.

As was earlier noted, self-examination and a mirror are closely connected. Rosalie Colie in Paradoxia Epidemica states the relation as follows:

The reflexive self-reference is, as the term suggests, a mirror image; as in mirror images, self-reference begins an endless oscillation between the thing itself and the thing reflected, begins an infinite regress.⁵⁵

Thus, to know the identity of Lamia, Lycius starts to reflect upon himself, observing himself as in a mirror, taking external, objective, separate elements as mirrors in which to observe himself. Indeed, the rest of the poem is full of mirror images. Lamia decorates their palace with various

⁵⁵ Colie, Paradoxia Epidemica, p. 355.

devices which tell the "mirror action of all artistic imitation."⁵⁶

Fresh carved cedar mimicking a glade
Of palm and plantain, met from either side,
High in the midst, in honour of the bride. . . .
(II.125-27)

Between the tree-stems, marbled plain at first,
Came jasper panels. . . .
(II.138-39)

Before each lucid panel fuming stood
A censer fed with myrrh and spiced wood,
Each by a sacred tripod held aloft,
Whose slender feet wide-swerved upon the soft
Wool-woofed carpets; fifty wreaths of smoke
From fifty censers their light voyage took
To the high roof, still mimicked as they rose
Along the mirrored walls by twin-clouds odorous.
(II.175-82)

Thus not only Lamia but also the palace itself mirrors Lycius. The palace covered with mirrors and the things contained within reflect one another endlessly. Such infinite regress is the very process of epistemology inevitably caused by self-reference and self-examination. Epistemology is a chinese-box mirror process with all the limitations as well as the limitlessness that such a process implies.

Finally, with the appearance and help of Apollonius who may be regarded as Lycius's analytical self or intellectual consciousness, Lycius makes the last attempt to

⁵⁶Colie, p. 363.

know the identity of Lamia, imagination:

He gazed into her eyes . . .
 More, more he gazed; his human senses reel. . . .
 (II.256-58)

Once again by looking into Lamia's eyes, Lycius is looking at his own reflection. The more intently he gazes into her eyes, the more strong becomes his consciousness of the self. Lamia then, before the accusation of Apollonius, implores him to be silent:

She, as well
 As her weak hand could any meaning tell,
 Motioned him to be silent. . . .
 (II.301-03)

Here I wonder who Lamia indicates by "him." Is he Lycius or Apollonius? From the context of the poem, it is somehow obscure. It seems to me that here Lycius and Apollonius are fused into one as are Lycius and Lamia. Such ambiguity tells that all these events are taking place in the mind of Lycius. Still Lycius persists in his effort:

He looked and looked again in a level No!
 'A serpent!' echoed he. . . .
 (II.304-05)

The moment Lycius cries out, Lamia vanishes into the air, and Lycius falls dead. He dies, believing Lamia is a serpent; but is she a mere serpent? The serpent is generally regarded as a symbol of the tempter. Lamia, imagination might be, in essence, a serpent or nothing, but did she not create

something out of nothing? She materialized herself into a woman and her vision into a decorated palace. By denouncing Lamia as a serpent, Lycius recognizes only the negative aspect of imagination. By so doing, he is also denying himself, his own existence. In the self-closing structure of epistemology, Lycius cannot find an external reference point from which to measure his contemplative object, Lamia, his imagination. In the end, he falls into madness (he is called "O senseless Lycius! Madman!" [II.147]) and perishes not by an external crisis, which is the inevitable fate of a man who falls into epistemological paradoxes; Lycius dies unable to break through the self-closing structure of the paradox. Lamia, his imagination vanishes only to return to her "serpent prison-house" (I.203) which is in the recess of the mind, leaving an art, her decorated palace behind as a proof of her existence.

Thus, in "Lamia," Keats's effort to know imagination itself ends in a failure, since it is impossible to know the unknown and therefore unknowable something beyond time. The end of "Lamia" is a fact of imagination and also a fact of self-examination; it ends in a fall into an epistemological paradox or at worst solipsism. The ending of "Lamia" is completely different from that of "The Eve St. Agnes" either as a love story or as an allegory, even though the both deal with the process of poetic creation. The essential difference between these poems is that while "The Eve of St. Agnes" is Keats's experience of hénosis of imagination,

that is, his experience of imagination through the senses, "Lamia" is his attempt of gnosis. Imagination can not be known. This is the reason why Lycius failed in keeping their love and ended up destroying both Lamia and himself, while Porphyro, in his union with Madeline escaped the mortal world altogether. However, I still have to point out that "Lamia" is both Keats's analysis of his poetic creativity and at the same time a product of his creativity itself. A part of Keats might die with Lycius in his failure to know imagination, but still he recreates his own imaginative experience with poesy. "Lamia" itself is a paradox as is any poem dealing with the process of poetic creativity.

After all, Keats's absorption into the present moment in his search for the truth of being and the truth of imagination only leads him to endless paradoxes (ontological, epistemological and eventually rhetorical). If he still dares to solve the paradoxes with the self which can perceive only the present moment, he is forced to reduce himself to solipsism: he has to rely either on the total-negation of imagination as in "Lamia" and in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" or on the total-affirmation of imagination as the aphorism at the end of "Ode on a Grecian Urn." Yet, to really solve the paradoxical situation and find out the truth of being, Keats has to break through the self-closing structure of the moment. Keats finds the power in memory. Only memory can cover the gulf between each moment. Thus, like Apollo

in "Hyperion," Keats with the help of memory tries to break out of the island of the moment, seeking the external measuring-point outside of it from which to observe his being.

Chapter IV

The Panorama of Time: Memory

i

The moment, however long it may be prolonged by imagination, will eventually pass away. Never will it be repeated. The past moments constitute the past, and we can keep the precarious contact with them only through memory. Georges Poulet in his Studies in Human Time asserts that memory is in a sense the "great discovery" of the eighteenth century:

Each new moment of awareness reveals two distinct features: not only the new sensation which is the kernel of the moment, but also the ensemble of sensation already lived, whose resonances prolong themselves within it and surround it with their nebula. The great discovery of the eighteenth century is the phenomenon of memory. By remembering, man escapes the purely momentary; by remembering, he escapes the nothingness that lies in wait for him between moments of existence.¹

Memory covers the gulf between each moment, and gives an existence a sense of continuity. If we cannot arrest the moment of being, then from the effort to seize the moment that is about to pass, we eventually resign ourselves to the effort to seize the permanent value from the past.

¹Poulet, Studies in Human Time, pp. 23-24.

It becomes imperative that we grasp the meaning of eternity and the meaning of existence from the past which is precariously reserved by memory.

Frank Kermode, in The Sense of an Ending, discusses the sense of existence in terms of the concordance between beginning, middle and end as follows:

it [the concordance] is hard to achieve when the beginning is lost in the dark backward and abysm of time, and the end is known to be unpredictable. This change our views of the patterns of time.

In "Read-me a lesson . . ." written during the Scotland tour, Keats experiences a perplexity with time and existence and suffers from his inability to make out the concordance. He finds that the beginning, like a chasm is completely hidden in mist and the end, like the top of Nevis is also covered with mist. To his dismay, he realizes that he is not sure even of the present, for the earth beneath his own feet is also covered with mist. To know the end which is his own death and perhaps to know the middle, the present, he has first to search for the beginning. "Hyperion" and "The Fall of Hyperion" are, in this sense, Keats's search for the beginning in order to grasp the meaning of existence. In these two poems, by using the goddess of memory (Mnemosyne or Moneta) as a perspective on time, Keats attempts to cover the gulf between being and not-being, and between

²Kermode, The Sense of an Ending, p. 30.

being and knowing so that he can deduce the destination of becoming not only in the individual sense but also in both universal and historical senses.

Before I proceed to the discussion of "Hyperion" and "The Fall of Hyperion," however, first I want to survey what memory generally means to Keats. For some of the Romantics like Proust and Wordsworth, memory is not merely the reproduction or recall of the past; it is the recreation and refeeling of the past; therefore, it gives the past its present meaning. Memory enables them to envelope their life-long consciousness or feeling of duration in the sphere of the present moment. The moment of sensation which is temporal by itself, by being repeatedly recalled by memory, is endowed with an eternal value. Thus, Wordsworth in poems like "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" and The Prelude finds in the memory of the past, the insight and knowledge of the immortality of the soul. In Keats's case, the difference is that unlike Wordsworth, for him memory of the past can never fully compensate for the loss of the moment.

"Memory should not be called knowledge,"³ says Keats in the letter of February 19, 1818. In spite of this assertion, later in "Hyperion," Keats has Apollo say, "Knowledge enormous makes a God of me" (III.113), and Apollo gains the knowledge with the help of Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory: here we can find the fundamental change in Keats's perception

³Letters, I, 231.

of memory. All in all, memory, for Keats, does not bring him a sense of continuity in existence; it rather renews the pain of loss, the pain of recognition that the moment of bliss is lost forever. Memory might save a man from the sense of total nothingness, but still it is always threatened by destructive hand of time:

Wide sea, that one continuous murmur breeds
 Along the pebbled shore of memory!
 (Endymion, II.16-17)

Memory is only precariously preserved from decay; thus it can not be regarded as a reliable source of man's search for the truth.

In Endymion, the hero suffers from the recollection of the moment of happiness with Cynthia and grieves over its loss:

Ah, where
 Are those swift moments? Whither are they fled?
 I'll smile no more, Peona, nor will wed
 Sorrow the way to death, but patiently
 Bear up against it--so farewell, sad sigh,
 And come instead demurest meditation,
 To occupy me wholly, and to fashion
 My pilgrimage for the world's dusky brink.
 No more will I count over, link by link,
 My chain of grief, no longer strive to find
 A half-forgetfulness in mountain wind
 Blustering about my ears. (I.970-81)

Memory only brings Endymion the pain of loss; therefore, he decides that he will no longer live in recollection of the past. Here, at least he tries to accept the irrevocability and the irreversibility of time. However, in spite of his brave resolution, Endymion still continues to suffer from

the memory of Cynthia, even when he is with the Indian Maid:

Oh, thou could'st foster me beyond the brink
Of recollection, make my watchful care
Close up its bloodshot eyes, nor see despair!
(IV.306-08)

No matter how hard Endymion tries, he cannot shake himself free from the recollection of Cynthia and the pain of loss it would cause: "For yet the past doth prison me" (IV.691). Before such intense suffering, destructive time then seems almost to be welcomed. Time and forgetfulness heal the pain:

Time, that aged nurse,
Rocked me to patience. Now, thank gentle heaven!
These things, with all their comfortings are given
To my down-sunken hours. . . .
(I.705-08)

Oblivion is death in the mental aspect. Ironically, time which in reality destroys the moment of happiness is, in retrospect, regarded rather as a merciful healer, simply because it also kills the pain of loss.

In "Isabella," Isabella, like Endymion, clings to the memory of happy time with Lorenzo:

She fretted for the golden hour, and hung
Upon the time with feverish unrest. . . .
(243-44)

Because of the memory she eventually withers away. In "In drear-nighted December," Keats envies the trees and the brooks, the nature surrounding him, for they do not remember the happiness of the past seasons. He wishes to be like

them:

Ah, would 'twere so with many
A gentle girl and boy!
But were there ever any
Writhed not of passèd joy?

(17-20)

Memory thus spoils happiness rather than preserves it. Even nostalgic reminiscence of the old days which is often welcomed by the Romantics with warmth and affection, merely evokes the sense of loss and change which cannot be undone. In this vein Keats begins "Robin Hood" with the familiar lament of loss:

No, those days are gone away,
And their hours are old and gray,
And their minutes buried all
Under the down-trodden pall
Of the leaves of many years.

(1-5)

In "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," the knight wanders the winter hill in despair because of the painful memory of the kisses exchanged with the lady. In "Ode to a Nightingale," nostalgia for the far-away past when the same nightingale would have sung for Ruth or emperors, renews the sense of loss in Keats's mind and consequently breaks the magic of the imaginative moment.

Sleep is a kind of temporal oblivion. It offers Keats the refuge from the haunting memory. In the sonnet, "To Sleep," Keats appeals to sleep for "forgetfulness divine" and "lulling charities":

Then save me, or the passèd day will shine
Upon my pillow, breeding many woes. . . .

In Keats's later years,, all his anguishes are, in some way, derived from his love for Fanny Brawne and his memory of her. In "To [Fanny]," Keats's memory of her makes him acutely aware of her present absence and of his desperate need of her:

What can I do to drive away
Remembrance from my eyes?
Touch has a memory. Oh, say, love, say,
What can I do to kill it and be free
In my old liberty? (1-6)

In the letter of November 30, 1820 (one of his last letters), feeling the approaching steps of death, Keats talks in a pathetic tone about his memory of Fanny and the anguish it causes:

There is one thought enough to kill me--I have been well, healthy, alert &c, walking with her --and now--the knowledge of contrast, feeling for light and shade, all that information (primitive sense) necessary for a poem are great enemies to the recovery of the stomach.

Thus, affective memories of the past cause Keats nothing but pain--the pain of loss and the pain of longing. Unlike Wordsworth, he never finds in the past moment revived and given the present meaning by memory the assurance of the immortality of existence. In his case, the momentary' repossession of the past by memory ends in the realization of

⁴Letters, II, 360.

dispossession; it ends in the sense of loss renewed. This reminds Keats afresh of an infinite distance separating the present from the past. Of course, Keats does not always regard memory as painful. It sometimes has its own usefulness. As Keats says in "Lines Written in the Highlands after a Visit to Burns's Country," only the "gentle anchor" (40) of memory saves a man on the verge of insanity when he strays too long in the sphere of imagination. Also Keats sometimes accepts the pain of loss renewed by memory as the inevitable. In "Ode on Melancholy," Keats persuades himself that melancholy springing from the realization of loss is, in fact, based on the sense of fulfillment. Nevertheless, all in all, Keats's memory of the past is the painful memory of loss. To the pain of the past is added the anguish of the future. Keats has to endure the anxiety of a man who exists in the middle. When he recalls the past, he cannot do so with calm serenity as does Wordsworth. Therefore, when he recalls the past in "Hyperion" and "The Fall of Hyperion" with the help of Mnemosyne or Moneta, first of all he relives the pain of loss. In this sense, nothing is more suitable to this theme than the fall of the Titans. In these two poems by reliving the pain of loss Keats tries to find out in retrospect the meaning of loss so that he can in consequence understand becoming. By understanding the cause, we can anticipate the effect. These two create the direction of becoming. Before he asks "what is existence?" Keats now asks "what is loss?"

"Hyperion" begins with the description of the now fallen Saturn lying in total defeat. His features and the atmosphere surrounding him clearly tell his fall from deity and his humanization as a result. He is now stamped with a mark of mortality: his hair has turned to "grey" (I.4); his tongue has become "palsied" (I.93); his beard shakes "horrid with such aspen malady" (I.94). He is sunk in misery in the "shady sadness of a vale" (I.1) where "the dead leaf fell, there did it rest" (I.10). Saturn now belongs to the vale of becoming where silent death is lurking behind. He is accompanied only by Thea, a "Goddess of the infant world" (I.26). She too suffers from the anguish of fall:

One hand she pressed upon that aching spot
Where beats the human heart, as if just there,
Though an immortal, she felt cruel pain. . . .
(I.42-44)

Thus, like Saturn, Thea has become humanized by the fall.

"O aching time! O moments big as years!" (I.64), she grieves. She now has the sense of time and duration like regular mortal beings. She is no longer a deity, a timeless being.

Saturn who grieves over his lost majesty is, in Keats's personal sense, the figure of the romantic poet who has just fallen from the exalted state in imagination. In the imaginative moment, the poet is sublimated to a timeless and spaceless being, endowed with god-like power and freedom; however, once he has returned to reality, that is, has fallen

into time, the moment of his exalted being vanishes into nothing, and so its meaning with it. As was discussed in the previous chapter, to pursue the problem of being only leads him to solipsism or a paradoxical situation. Saturn now questions the cause of his fall:

Who had power
To make me desolate? Whence came the strength?
How was it nurtured to such bursting forth,
While Fate seemed strangled in my nervous grasp?

I am gone
Away from my own bosom; I have left
My strong identity, my real self,
Somewhere between the throne and where I sit
Here on this spot of earth.

(I.102-16)

He feels that he has lost his identity, which is the exalted self and not the pitiful existence controlled by time. He strives to resume his power and be again the master of his own fate:

'But cannot I create?
Cannot I form? Cannot I fashion forth
Another world, another universe,
To overbear and crumble this to naught?
Where is another chaos? Where?'

(I.141-45)

In his struggle to restore his former grandeur and his exalted state which is to be forever, he even dares to dream to be the beginning, the first Cause, although what he actually has to do is to resign himself to becoming as the effect of his fall. To make sense out of his present status and to re-establish his identity (which may be actually completely

different from what he thinks himself), he has to understand the cause of the fall of the Titans.

While Saturn and the other Titans thus suffer from the pain of loss, Hyperion, the only one member of the tribe who still manages to maintain his power, lives in fear of his coming fall. His palace, unlike the vale of becoming where Saturn is now, is the world of being. It is that narcissistic, ego-centric world which has been all the Titans'. Here, in "This cradle" (I.236) of his glory, Hyperion has been able to indulge himself in beauty which is truth. Now, however, his palace begins to show the omens of disaster which will soon strike and cause his fall: "horrors portioned to a giant nerve" (I.175) make Hyperion ache; his palace glares a "blood-red" (I.179). Hyperion's solipsistic world begins to crumble, and he gradually awakes to the epistemological paradox of being:

Hyperion is now aware of the gulf between being and knowing:

!O dreams of day and night!
 O monstrous forms! O effigies of pain!
 O spectres busy in a cold, cold gloom!
 O lank-eared phantoms of black-weeded pools!
 Why do I know ye? Why have I seen ye? Why
 Is my eternal essence thus distraught
 To see and to behold these horrors new?
 (I.227-33)

Hyperion's terror is not caused by any external factor. It has its cause within himself. Hyperion's terror is the terror of terror, the terror of his premonition; and to

understand this cause, he has to examine himself. However, the mirror by which he observes himself is now dimmed:

And from the mirrored level where he stood
A mist arose, as from a scummy marsh.
(I.257-58)

Mist is symbolic of the "inevitable obscuring of the outlines of each aspect and each particular phase of the evolutive process."⁵ Hyperion is losing the sense of his identity, his exalted self. He is engulfed in the evolutionary process of becoming.

At this, through all his bulk an agony
Crept gradual, from the feet unto the crown,
Like a lithe serpent vast and muscular
Making slow way, with head and neck convulsed
From over-strained might. (I.259-63)

As he falls from the timeless state of being, mortality gradually creeps upon him. He senses "darkness, death and darkness" (I.242).

In desperation, Hyperion then attempts to control the "meek ethereal Hours" (I.216) at his own will:

Fain would he have commanded, fain took throne
And bid the day begin, if but for change.
He might not. No, though a primeval God,
The sacred seasons might not be disturbed.
(I.290-93)

Even he is not allowed to rebel against time; that he wishes to do so itself is a sure sign of his fall. He is now

⁵Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 212.

conscious of the movement of time and of the pains it would cause. He senses his helplessness before its power:

And the bright Titan, frenzied with new woes,
Unused to bend, by hard compulsion bent
His spirit to the sorrow of the time. . . .
(I.299-301)

Mighty Hyperion now has to bend to time. Coelus, his father now finds in his son the sign of mortality as he perceived in all other Titans:

For I have seen my sons most unlike Gods.
Now I behold in you fear, hope, and wrath,
Actions of rage and passion--even as
I see them, on the mortal world beneath,
In men to die. . . .
(I.328-35)

Coelus encourages Hyperion to "oppose to each malignant hour / Ethereal presence" (I.339-40) and to restore the former grandeur for all the Titans. To combat with time, Hyperion dives into time like a "diver in the pearly seas" (I.355) "at the self-same beat of Time's wide wings" (II.1), leaving his world of being behind. The pearls he seeks there are the cause of the Titans' fall and their former glory which is lost in time.

The scene when the Titans hold a conference to discuss the cause of their fall is most important to understand Keats's intention in "Hyperion." The Titans are now hiding themselves in a "den where no insulting light / Could glimmer on their tears" (II.5-6); and the den is surrounded by

the solid roar
Of thunderous waterfalls and torrents hoarse,
Pouring a constant bulk, uncertain where.
(II.7-9)

In spite of the fact that they have fallen into time, the Titans still lock themselves up in the self-centered world, hiding themselves from the "torrents" of menacing time. They grieve over the loss of their dignity and the memory of their defeat.

Among them, Saturn, the "Supreme God" (II.92) is struggling against grief, rage, despair and all other emotions which make him almost human:

Against these plagues he strove in vain; for Fate
Had poured a mortal oil upon his head,
A disanointing poison. . . . (II.96-98)

He asks himself the cause of their fall:

'Not in my own sad breast,
Which is its own great judge and searcher-out
Can I find reason why ye should be thus. . . .'
(II.129-31)

The problem of Saturn is that he still regards himself as omnipotent. He never realizes that his so-called knowledge is the solipsistic one. He never admits (or rather ignores) the epistemological paradoxes he inevitably would face in his self-reference. His suffering and perplexity are relevant to those of Keats when he tries to cling to the memory of his exalted being in imagination after his fall into time. Saturn is still absorbed in being, ignoring becoming. As

long as he takes this attitude, he can never know the cause of his fall, nor can he break out (unfortunately he does not wish to either) of the self-enclosing structure of paradox or, in his case, still worse solipsism.

In contrast with Saturn, Oceanus accepts becoming. He is the god of the ocean; therefore, he presides over the transmutation and becoming of life as if he were time itself. He now teaches the Titans the cause of their fall:

Yet listen, ye who will, whilst I bring proof
How ye, perforce, must be content to stoop;

We fall by course of Nature's law, not force
Of thunder, or of Jove. Great Saturn, thou
Hast sifted well the atom-universe;
But for this reason, that thou art the King,
And only blind from sheer supremacy,
One avenue was shaded from thine eyes,
Through which I wandered to eternal truth.
At first, 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.
From chaos and parental darkness came
Light, the first fruits of that intestine broil,
That sullen ferment, which for wondrous ends
Was ripening in itself. The ripe hour came,
And with it light, and light, engendering
Upon its own producer, forthwith touched
The whole enormous matter into life.
Upon that very hour, our parentage,
The Heavens and the Earth, were manifest;
Then thou first-born, and we the giant race,
Found ourselves ruling new and beauteous realms.
Now comes the pain of truth, to whom 'tis pain--
O folly! for to bear all naked truths,
And to envisage circumstance, all calm,
That is the top of sovereignty. Mark well!
As Heaven and Earth are fairer, fairer far
Than chaos and blank darkness, though once chief;
And as we show beyond that Heaven and Earth
In form and shape compact and beautiful,
In will, in action free, companionship,
And thousand other signs of purer life;
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.

For 'tis the eternal law
That first in beauty should be first in might;
 Yea, by that law, another race may drive
 Our conquerors to mourn as we do now.

(II.177-231, italics mine)

Oceanus thus not only admits change and becoming through time but also through change finds a progress toward a universal maturation. This theory of evolution is also applied to the individual case. Keats calls the world the "vale of Soul-making."⁶ Keats finds in Saturn, his own figure which has been absorbed in the present moment in imagination. God is both the beginning and the end; Saturn while he desired this god-like status did not achieve it and accordingly he fell. Keats also wanted to elevate himself to a timeless being with the power of imagination. In Keats's case, however, through the painful experience of fall into time, he learned the paradoxes inevitably caused by his pursuit of being, while Saturn remained in solipsism. Therefore, to solve the paradoxes, Keats leaves Saturn and all that he represents behind, seeking for the more mature mode of existence. Thus, Apollo and Mnemosyne appear in the following scene, and Hyperion has to fall only to be replaced by the former.

Apollo, unlike the Titans who have fallen into time, still enjoys the exalted status of timeless being. Clemene,

⁶Letters, II, 102.

standing on a "pleasant shore" (II.262) is enchanted and at the same time grieved by the music of the sea, the music of becoming played on a "mouthed shell" (II.270), until she hears from an "island of the sea" (II.275) the melody played by Apollo. As was mentioned earlier, the small shell is a symbol of a helpless human being controlled by the tides of time. The contrast between the melody of time's sea which is the melody of becoming and the melody played by Apollo which is the melody of being, reminds Clemene afresh of her fall and her mortality attached to her as a result.

In contrast with Clemene, Apollo is still free from the sorrows of human time though he is not content with his present status. This is the essential difference which distinguishes Apollo from the Titans before fall and saves him from the fate that fell upon them. If he were to stay on the island of the moment and were to be content with the "beauty is truth" solipsistic conviction, he would then share the same fate as did all the Titans; but he does not. Apollo is uniquely aware of the self-confined and self-limited state of his being, and of the epistemological paradoxes he would fall into, were he to know the truth of being. Apollo, accordingly, wishes to break out of the self-enclosing paradox of being, to seek more knowledge. There will be no need to repeat the process of Apollo's transformation and escape, since it has been discussed in terms of both ontological and epistemological paradoxes of being. In the process Apollo acquires deity with the help

Mnemosyne; he even overcomes death which is the inevitable aspect of becoming. When he is reborn, he is able to live in the total union of being and becoming.

In the letter of March 19, 1819 (at this time, Keats was writing the last part of "Hyperion"), he wrote a sonnet, "Why did I laugh to-night?" In the sonnet, he asks the reason why he laughed to "Heaven and Hell and Heart in vain." None of them can answer, especially not his human heart. How can his heart measure itself truthfully? Keats is confronted by the limitation of epistemology. In the same letter, Keats tells about the motive to write the sonnet as follows:

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

Thus, to seek knowledge, Apollo-Keats breaks out of the self-enclosed world of the moment with the help of Mnemosyne, first seeking for the external measuring-point from which to observe his being. By memory, Keats relives the painful experience of the Titans; that is, his own experience of fall into time from the exalted state in imagination; and by so doing, he strives to overcome the pain of loss and to use it as a stepping-stone so that he can progress toward personal maturity. As Poulet observes:

⁷Letters, II, 81.

"To exist is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to create oneself endlessly." If the being endlessly draws its existence out of the past, it is not as one draws the consequences from a principle or as one copies the image of a pattern. It is a free adaption of past resources to present life, in view of the future.⁸

This is what memory means to Keats personally, if not to Apollo, the godhead. As he says in the letter, "That which is creative must create itself."⁹

iii

Keats begins to rewrite "Hyperion" three months later in a dream-version: this is "The Fall of Hyperion." In this poem, in place of Apollo, Keats himself encounters Moneta (Mnemosyne), and the story of the Titans' fall is told through Keats's vision of memory. With this method, Keats gives "Hyperion" more personal meaning; yet also because of this, the construction of the poem itself becomes more complicated.

In "The Fall of Hyperion," before the sad story of the Titans' fall begins, Keats writes the process of his journey which leads him to the altar of Saturn where Moneta is the priestess. After a somewhat self-conscious introduction (which he himself calls a "sort of induction"¹⁰) Keats first finds himself in the Eden-like garden. This garden is

⁸ Poulet, Studies in Human Time, p. 35.

⁹ Letters, I, 374.

¹⁰ Ibid., II, 172.

often regarded as representing the "beauties of Nature."¹¹ Here, Keats indulges himself in sensuous beauty and appetite until he drinks "transparent juice" (I.42) and falls into a swoon. He then awakes and finds himself in completely different surroundings: he is in an "old sanctuary" (I.62).

Here arises the first problem. In "The Fall of Hyperion," it is not clear where the dream begins. It may be that the juice he drinks is, like the wine in "Ode to a Nightingale," the invitation to the imaginative world. Keats himself declares, "That full draught is parent of my theme" (I.46). If so, the rest of the poem is the dream he dreams in swoon, that is, his imaginative experience. Thus he starts up, after recovering from swoon, "As if with wings" (I.59). "The Fall of Hyperion" then has or would have (because he did not finish the poem) the same structure as "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn."

On the other hand, it may be that Keats's experience in the garden itself is already a dream. The rest of the poem is merely the continuation of the dream or a dream within the dream. While the garden represents the "beauties of Nature," the sanctuary Keats next finds himself in is regarded as the "temple of Knowledge."¹² Keats's process from the garden to the temple, in this sense, represents his personal history as well as the history of

¹¹Allott, ed., The Poems of John Keats, p. 658, n.

¹²Ibid.

humankind. In the dream, Keats retrieves the journey of his personal development through time. Through this process, Keats leaves the immature Keats who indulges in mere sensuous beauty behind in the garden and awakes to the pains and sufferings of human time. At the same time, Keats retrieves human history since Adam and Eve in Eden. The "transparent juice" he drinks is, then, the "forbidden fruit," the knowledge. Keats's awakening in the temple is both Adam's fall from Eden and at the same time his own fall from ego-centric indulgence in beauty and imagination. Thus, Keats not only finds in himself the whole history of humanity but conversely also finds in the history of humanity his own entire history. As Stuart Sperry points out, Keats now sees "an important analogy between man's Original Sin and the primal act of poetical conception, between the fruit of knowledge of good and evil and the power of imagination."¹³ Whichever is the course that leads him to the temple, Keats is now in the "temple of Knowledge." It is the collective knowledge of humankind throughout history, and in spite of its antiquity it remains truth. In "that eternal domed monument" (I. 71), all that are contained within withstand time: "in that place the moth could not corrupt, / So white the linen" (I. 75-76).

Since it is a dream, Keats is also outside the context

¹³ Stuart M. Sperry, Keats the Poet (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press, 1973), p. 320.

of time; and from this shrine, he can see a panorama of time:

once more I raised
My eyes to fathom the space every way--
The embossed roof, the silent massy range
Of columns north and south, ending in mist
Of nothing, then to eastward, where black gates
Were shut against the sunrise evermore.
Then to the west I looked, and saw far off
An image, huge of feature as a cloud,
At level of whose feet an altar slept. . . .
(I.81-89)

The columns of the temple continue endlessly, and so do the stores of human knowledge throughout time; however, at the moment Keats understands none of them. To have an insight into enormous knowledge (which made a god of Apollo), Keats's dream has to be yet connected with memory. The "black gates" in the east which open to the past are now shut forever. That they are shut means that Keats cannot see the past (or the beginning or the life in the garden), nor is he allowed to return to it. Therefore, he moves westward to the future where the altar of Saturn is and where Moneta (at this point, Keats does not know who she is) awaits him.

As soon as Keats gets to the shrine, the priestess warns him that unless he ascends the steps leading to the altar, he will perish to nothing on "that pavement cold"

(I.113);

The sands of thy short life are spent this hour,
And no hand in the universe can turn
Thy hourglass, if these gummed leaves be burnt
Ere thou canst mount up these immortal steps.
(I.114-17)

Keats is thus forced to choose either to die indulging himself momentarily into "Forgetfulness of everything but bliss" (I.104) caused by "Mian incense" (I.103), or to struggle for life climbing up the "immortal steps." Keats chooses the latter and undergoes the same ordeal as Apollo endured in the process of his transformation into a deity. He strives hard against a "palsied chill" (I.122), against the "sharp anguish" (I.126) and then against the "numbness" (I.128). He finally makes it:

One minute before death, my iced foot touched
The lowest stair; and as it touched, life seemed
To pour in at the toe. I mounted up,
As once fair Angels on a ladder flew
From the green turf to Heaven.

(I.132-36)

Ridley interprets these steps (also including the process which led Keats to the shrine) as the "stepping of the Imagination toward a Truth,"¹⁴ quoting Keats's own words from the letter.¹⁵ To climb these steps, Keats has completely to shed his inclination toward sensuous indulgence in being. As Apollo broke out of the self-confined state of being through his transformation to seek truth, Keats is also compelled to overcome his self-absorption in his own free will. If he is content with the sensuous bliss evoked by "Mian incense," he will end, so to speak, in closed death

¹⁴M. R. Ridley, Keats' Craftsmanship: A Study in Poetic Development (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1933), p. 273.

¹⁵Letters, I, 218.

which is solipsism.

Keats then asks the goddess, who is still the "veiled shadow" (I.141) to him, the reason of his survival or in this case more appropriately, the reason of his resurrection. Her answer is this:

'Thou has felt
 What 'tis to die and live again before
 Thy fated hour. That thou hadst power to do so
 Is thy own safety; thou hast dated on
 Thy doom.' (I.142-46)

To acquire through memory an intuition of becoming, an "intuition about the ultimate nature of reality,"¹⁶ Keats was first required to experience and overcome the inevitable aspect of becoming, death; and he has done it. Through absolute consenting to change and becoming of his state and in his consummation of death, Keats goes beyond the limitation of being and reappears endowed, if not with immortality like Apollo, at least with a deeper insight into human existence. Keats is now one step nearer to truth. He is ready to observe the meaning of existence by seeking the external measuring-point in memory.

After his survival of ordeal, the veiled goddess and Keats exchange a dialogue about the difference between the dreamer and the poet. She accuses him of being a dreamer: "Thou art a dreaming thing, / A fever of thyself" (I.168-69):

¹⁶Kenneth Muir, "The Meaning of 'Hyperion,'" in John Keats: A Reassessment, ed. Kenneth Muir ([Liverpool]: Liverpool Univ. Press, 1958), p. 113.

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

Because Keats is a dreamer or rather she thinks he is, he is now at the altar of Saturn. What Moneta means by the "dreamer" here is actually the visionary who indulges himself in the imaginative moment and who, even after he has returned to reality, merely grieves over the loss of the moment. The dreamer cannot overcome the painful experience of fall from the exalted state in imagination; nor can he make something out of the experience eventually to progress toward personal maturity. Therefore, to make the dreamer realize the universal meaning of fall and loss, Moneta invites him to the altar of Saturn and tells him the story of his fall in retrospect. In this sense, veiled Moneta is similar to veiled Melancholy in "Ode on Melancholy." As Melancholy eventually made Keats realize that the pain of loss is the inevitable complement of fulfillment, Moneta now leads Keats to self-realization and the realization of universal law.

For this purpose, Moneta finally unveils herself.
 Memory is thus, for a man, a revealer:

But yet I had a terror of her robes,
 And chiefly of the veils, that from her brow
 Hung pale, and curtain'd her in mysteries,
 That made my heart too small to hold its blood.
 This saw that Goddess, and with sacred hand
 Parted the veils. Then saw I a wan face,

Not pined by human sorrows, but bright-blanced
 By an immortal sickness which kills not.
 It works a constant change, which happy death
 Can put no end to; deathwards progressing
 To no death was that visage.

(251-61)

Moneta's eternally wasted face records all the experience
 of the universe throughout time; she not only represents
 ceaseless change and becoming of time itself but also carries
 the burden of endless human woes and sufferings which can
 never be wiped out. Seeing her face, Keats wishes to under-
 stand what she keeps in herself:

So at the view of sad Moneta's brow
 I ached to see what things the hollow brain
 Behind enwombed; what high tragedy
 In the dark secret chamber of her skull
 Was acting, that could give so dread a stress
 To her cold lips, and fill with such a light
 Her planetary eyes. . . .

(I. 275-81)

He, therefore, begs her to let him see "what is thy brain
 so ferments to and fro" (I.290), swearing total submission
 to her power.

Moneta starts to reveal the story of the Titans' fall.
 At this instant, Keats totally merges himself into Moneta,
 the goddess of memory:

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

(I. 302-06)

By identifying himself with Moneta, Keats now acquires the external point of view to observe being and becoming of existence. Thus, the poem is hereafter followed by a slightly differed version of "Hyperion." The story of Saturn's fall is told through Keats's vision, with Moneta as a interpreter or chorus.

What, then, does Keats intend to show in "The Fall of Hyperion" by enveloping the story of Titans' fall into his own vision of memory? Here, we have to remember that the fall of Saturn from deity is also symbolic of both the fall of humankind from Eden and the fall of Keats himself from the exalted state in imagination. By viewing Saturn's defeated figure through memory, Keats is also re-viewing and re-experiencing his own fall and the pain of loss he had suffered in the consequence. By so doing, he is also trying to observe the meaning of fall and loss from the objective point of view and understand it in relation with the present. In "The Fall of Hyperion," with the help of Moneta (memory), Keats himself develops from the dreamer to the poet. However, the most cunning point of "The Fall of Hyperion" is that the poem is not a mere record of Keats's progress toward self-realization and the realization of the universal law of becoming; it is at the same time a result of his progress. To prove to the world that he is not a dreamer but a poet, Keats displayed in "The Fall of Hyperion" the process of personal maturation through becoming. He offered (or tried to offer) the poem as a proof

that he could turn the pains of fall and loss into creativity, and that memory enabled him to turn the loss into a gain. Keats said in the introductory part of the poem:

Poesy alone can tell her dreams,
 With the fine spell of words alone can save
 Imagination from the sabled charm,
 And dumb enchantment. (I.8-11)

He at least proved this, did he not?

iv

In spite of his great effort to connect being and becoming with the power of memory, Keats abandoned both "Hyperion" and "The Fall of Hyperion" unfinished. Why could he not complete these poems? It seems to me that all the problems lie in his dealing with time which is one of the most crucial elements of organizing a poem or a novel.

First of all, the major cause of the failure of "Hyperion" is the disharmony between the form and the idea. "Hyperion" takes a form of narrative, consisting of Books. In a narrative, all the characters are placed in the context of time, and the events proceed in chronological order. On the contrary, "Soul-making" process Keats intended to display in "Hyperion" cannot be defined by objective, historical time. It is Keats's inner experience and belongs to the sphere of subjective time. Therefore, when Keats writes this process in a narrative form, he inevitably faces a difficulty in expressing his inner turmoil while relating it to each character. Indeed, in "Hyperion," the relation-

ship between Saturn and Keats, the relationship between Apollo and Keats, and ultimately the relationship between Saturn and Apollo in terms of Keats's self-development are not quite clear. It is left solely to the readers to guess what is going on behind the simple facade of narrative, and if Keats expects them to do so, he is asking too much; it must be hard for them to fathom Keats's intention, unless they understand the past history of his poetic development. Of course, it is always possible, if one wants, to consider that "Hyperion" is not Keats, that it is a "splendid tour de force"; then the poem may be regarded as "derivative" and "artificial." However, I still firmly believe, as Douglas Bush does, that "Hyperion and its complement . . . are the culmination of Keats's poetic progress, the last and greatest statement of his conflicting instincts and ambitions."¹⁷

Another problem of "Hyperion" lies in the function of Mnemosyne. At first, Mnemosyne, as one of the fallen Titans, is perceived as a figure in chronological time (Keats mentions her only once before she appears in front of Apollo: she is "straying in the world" [II.29]). However, by the time we get to Apollo's transformation scene, we come to realize Mnemosyne's real function in "Hyperion." She is a goddess of memory, and she alone can help Apollo to achieve deity. Mnemosyne-memory is, in some way, the

¹⁷ Douglas Bush, Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry (New York: Cooper Square, 1937), pp. 115-116.

infinitude of time itself, and at the same time the negation of time; therefore, she should not be under any jurisdiction of chronological time as a character in a narrative is; she should be a figure out of time. Otherwise, how can she even have the power to make a god of Apollo?

According to D. G. James,¹⁸ the defects of "Hyperion" are summarized in three points: (1) it was imperative to remove Mnemosyne from the narrative and the chronicity of time which controls it; (2) Mnemosyne is, in any case, too mysterious and unexplained; (3) Apollo is a disguise for Keats in particular and poetry in general. In his effort to improve these problems all at once, Keats remolds "Hyperion" into a dream-version, which is "The Fall of Hyperion."

First, by taking a form of dream, Keats now can introduce himself as a central figure. By so doing, it also becomes clear to the readers that all the following events are taking place in Keats's own mind, that the poem is his inner psycho-drama. "The Fall of Hyperion" turns out to be Keats's exploration of the imaginative world like some of his lyrics. In Keats's dream-world, Mnemosyne (whose name is changed into "Moneta" in this version) is now perceived as what she really is. In dream, she is endowed with the freedom of a kind of fourth dimensional traveller as memory should be. Moreover, since the story of Saturn's

¹⁸D. G. James, "The Two Hyperions," in Keats: A Collection of Critical Essays, Twentieth Century Views, ed. Walter Jackson Bate (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1964), p. 162.

fall is told through Keats's vision, the contact between Moneta and Keats itself always keeps the present sense. Memory should not be the mere reproduction of the past; it should be the recreation and refeeling of the past, and therefore it is important for Keats to give his vision of memory the present meaning. Thus by converting "Hyperion" into a dream-version, Keats at least solves the first two problems.

To make clear the relation between Apollo and Keats himself, which was obscure in "Hyperion," in "The Fall of Hyperion" Keats then shows the readers that Apollo is indeed his better mode of existence. He undergoes Apollo's ordeal and transformation himself. He is reborn and is then allowed to gain the vision of Saturn's fall. By his taking Apollo's place, it also becomes possible to connect Apollo with Saturn. In "Hyperion," these two figures have nothing to do with each other; therefore, it is hard to tell how these two are related to the two modes of Keats's existence. Now in a dream-version, assuming that Apollo is Keats, we understand that Saturn is Keats's past, that Keats is recalling his solipsistic and immature self through memory.

All in all, "The Fall of Hyperion" is given more personal value than the former version. In the poem, Keats could display his "Soul-making" process as he intended. Then, why did he have to abandon this new version as well? Ironically, the main reason for the failure of "The Fall of Hyperion" lies in the very improvement he inflicted upon

"Hyperion" in order to solve its problems. Even though Keats saved his vision of memory from the jurisdictions of time by remolding it in a dream of his mind, by so doing he also ended up by making the structure of the poem more complicated. As I already mentioned, in "The Fall of Hyperion," it is difficult to figure out where the dream starts. Beside this problem, since it is all dream, in the process the truth of his vision again comes into question.

In "The Fall of Hyperion," Keats identifies himself with Moneta through his "Negative Capability." By being memory itself, Keats gains the external measuring-point to observe Saturn, his former self. However, how, then, can he measure his present self, which is re-living and re-experiencing the pains of loss of the past through memory? After all, no matter how far in the past Keats can recall by memory, it is the present experiencing self which measures the moment of the past. To prove the truth of his vision of memory so that he can tell the world the effect of the painful experience of the past, Keats has to understand the present experiencing self which is seeing the vision in a dream. Here, I have to again point out that Keats's "Negative Capability," which is the source of his imagination, contains within itself the nature of self-examination. In "The Fall of Hyperion," while Keats recalls the past by contemplating Moneta, the goddess of memory and thus observes from the objective point of view, his past, Saturn's fall and agony, he is also contemplating his present self which

is identified with Moneta and is re-living his painful memory now at this moment. In the latter case, he has no measuring-point outside himself. To continue writing "The Fall of Hyperion" as a dream vision, Keats is therefore forced to endure the great tension between the Keats as a spectator and the Keats in imaginative experience. It might have been possible to do so in shorter poems (and indeed he did as the odes and the other great poems show), but in the grand scale poems like "The Fall of Hyperion," the tension is too painful and too long-stretching. It seems to me that Keats could not summon the strength to combat with the tension any longer than he did; for his health was quickly declining in those days.

Beside all these problems I have so far mentioned, we can presume one more reason why Keats abandoned "The Fall of Hyperion." We cannot prove, for sure, that this is also the reason, because Keats gave up the poem before he reached the part in question. This is Apollo's deification scene. In "The Fall of Hyperion," Keats took Apollo's place and already in Canto I, underwent the transformation Apollo did in "Hyperion." How, then, was he going to deal with Apollo when he came up to the scene? Of course, he would not erase Apollo totally from "The Fall of Hyperion," but I do not think that he would repeat the transformation-process either. As Kenneth Muir points out, the problem is that "he had already used up the climax of the first poem in the first

canto of the second version."¹⁹

Frank Kermode, in The Sense of an Ending, discusses myths and fictions and asserts their difference as follows:

Fictions can degenerate into myths whenever they are not consciously held to be fictive. . . . Myths operate within the diagrams of ritual, which presupposes total and adequate explanations of things as they are and were; it is a sequence of radically unchangeable gestures. Fictions are for finding things out, and they change as the needs of sense-making change. Myths call for absolute, fictions for conditional assent. Myths make sense in terms of a lost order of time, illud tempus as Eliade calls it; fictions, if successful, make sense of the here and now, hoc tempus.²⁰

If I use Kermode's definition of myths and fictions, it seems to me that Keats abandoned "Hyperion" because he sensed the danger of its falling into a myth. If Keats's original intention in "Hyperion" was to display his "Soul-making" process, he must have realized that the result itself is far from it. "Hyperion" could not fully express Keats's encounter with himself nor his finding-out process, itself being subject to the limitations of narrative. In spite of his noble idea of the universal law of evolution, "Hyperion" rather remained in dealing with the thing of the past, with a "lost order of time." To "make sense of the here and now" or to make human sense, Keats attempted to recreate "Hyperion" as his mind's invention in imagination, thus even facing

¹⁹Muir, "The Meaning of 'Hyperion,'" p. 120

²⁰Kermode, The Sense of an Ending, p. 39.

himself to the fictiveness of a fiction. Unfortunately, it seems that this great effort involved him in other large problems.

Chapter V

The Aesthetics of Time: Songs of the Four Seasons

Oh, may no wintry season, bare and hoary,
See it half finished, but let autumn bold,
With universal tinge of sober gold,
Be all about me when I make an end.

(Endymion, I.54-57)

Endymion is usually regarded as the poem which marks the start of Keats's career as a serious poet; it seems that in this poem he had already had foresight of the course of his career and ultimately his own life.

From the middle of August in 1819, Keats had been staying at Winchester. He finished "Lamia" in September 15. By this time, he had faced the difficulties of "The Fall of Hyperion" (he actually abandoned it on September 21). He was in the autumn of his life, even though he was still twenty three years old. His health was rapidly declining. On Sunday, September 19, a clear autumn day, Keats strolled out of the town, enjoying the beautiful scenery surrounding him and what is more important, his comparatively better condition. Two days later, in September 21, Keats wrote to Reynolds about his memory of the day's walk as follows:

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.

The poem he refers to in this letter is the last of his great odes and perhaps the greatest (at least as far as the maturity of Keats's sense of time and existence is concerned) of his great poems: "To Autumn." "To Autumn" presents the final stage of Keats's pursuit of his identity. In this poem, he finally comes to term with his former nemesis, time. He finds the meaning of his existence in the warmth and beauty of the autumn day, and he is totally content with himself and the world. In this sense, "To Autumn" is the fruit of Keats's painful struggle with time, the objet d'art created by the harmony of Keats and time.

Unlike our human time which seems lineal, nature has its own pattern of time. The natural world possesses its own cycles and rhythms such as the alternation of day and night, the turning of the seasons, the life cycle of plants and metabolic cycle of animals. Since a man lives in harmony with this seasonal and daily changes of nature, he cannot but be affected by natural cyclical time. How, then, does Keats perceive the cyclical time of nature, or in this case more precisely, the changing of the seasons?

¹Letters, II, 167.

What do the four seasons mean to him? He says in a sonnet beginning with these lines:

Four seasons fill the measure of the year:
There are four seasons in the mind of man.

To really appreciate the aesthetics of time finally achieved in "To Autumn," it may be therefore appropriate first to review Keats's attitude toward nature's cyclical time which seems so different from our human time, before proceeding to the details of the ode.

In as early a poem as "On the Grasshopper and Cricket," Keats finds the immortality of nature and takes delight in its endless song. In summer he enjoys the grasshopper's song, and then in winter the cricket delights his ears, bringing back the joys of summer to his lonely heart. "The poetry of earth is never dead," rejoices Keats in the poem. Moreover, "After vapours have oppressed our plains," written soon afterward, shows that Keats seeks relief from the hardship of winter in the resurrective cycle of nature. He regards winter as a sickness cured by spring:

After dark vapours have oppressed our plains
For a long dreary season, comes a day
Born of the gentle South, and clears away
From the sick heavens all unseemly stains.

To nature, the barrenness of winter is not the end of life or death but merely a period of distress. Keats is well aware of this aspect of nature. Nevertheless, as with his earlier poetry, these two poems remain as sensuous expressions

of his encounter with nature. Here Keats's understanding of natural, cyclical time never goes beyond his delight in it. He does not yet try to define the difference between the cyclical time of nature which renews itself endlessly and human time which seems lineal and what is more painful, seems to end suddenly in death for the individual; nor does he try specifically to read in the cyclical time of nature, an apocalyptic message for a human existence. However, as Keats's understanding of life deepens from his struggle with human tragic time, his perception of natural, cyclical time also greatly changes. It comes to have a more personal meaning. Keats's view of cyclical time thereby often reflects and is intertwined with his view of human time.

During 1818 when Keats was especially obsessed with the notion of destructive death, his descriptions of nature and its seasons in some of the poems clearly tell his negative and somewhat morbid attitude toward life in this period. In "On Visiting the Tomb of Burns," Keats feels the coldness of winter in the midst of summer:

Now new begun
The short-lived, paly summer is but won
From winter's ague for one hour's gleam.

Winter is no longer perceived as a sickness cured by spring as was in "After dark vapours have oppressed our plains." It is the dominant factor of nature and life which always lurks behind the ephemeral life of summer. In this pessimistic mood, even the daily resurrective cycle of nature

seems uncertain to Keats. In "Lines Written in the Highlands after a Visit to Burns's Country," he describes the setting sun as "Blood-red" (17). He is haunted by the sense of catastrophe as if there would be no tomorrow. Later, when Keats writes "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" tormented by the doubts about the truth of imagination and love, the scenery or the season he depicts in the poem also mirrors his own mind. The poem begins and ends with the desolation of winter, the sadness of which moreover deepened by the memories of the past seasons:

Oh, what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
 Alone and palely loitering?
 The sedge has withered from the lake,
 And no birds sing!

Oh, what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
 So haggard and so woe-begone?
 The squirrel's granary is full,
 And the harvest's done.

(1-8)

In this poem, the resurrective cycle of nature is completely forgotten as if the advance of the seasons were merely lineal, and after winter there would be no spring coming and only death awaits. This is all because Keats himself now feels that he has no hope for tomorrow and may only grieve over the memories of yesterday.

All in all, in later poems, Keats's view of cyclical time of nature is greatly influenced by his view of human existence. The season depicted in a poem is therefore the "season" of Keats's mind rather than the mere objective

description of his surroundings. It has too great significance to be dealt with impersonally. It is with this notion in mind that Keats's "To Autumn" should be approached. Keats himself gives us a cue in the poem when he tells us what the presence of autumn means: "whoever seeks abroad may find / Thee" (13-14). Patterson refers to the significance of this statement as follows:

This shadowy presence, the "whoever seeks abroad" . . . that "may find / Thee," does indeed find the essence, spirit, and deeper meaning of autumn conceived as fulfillment. That is, the seeker finds it within himself in his responses to all that is going on about him, and quite rightly; for autumn is really a matter of human perceiving and value-making placed upon the physical development of the time; without this human perceiving and valuing, the great vortex of nature considered in its mere materiality does not have the meanings which the human consciousness alone can give it.

In short, the beautiful and warm scenery of a serene autumn day painted in "To Autumn" is the picture of Keats's soul, and this is what Keats really conveys to us in the poem. Therefore, in order to understand the state of Keats's maturity in the final stage of his self-development, all that is now left for us to do is to examine and appreciate the beauty of the picture.

ii

One of the great achievements in "To Autumn" which distinguishes the poem from the other odes is that in this

²Patterson, The Daemonic in the Poetry of John Keats, p. 233.

poem Keats's "Negative Capability" which could be only partially attained so far is finally successfully accomplished. Let us remember Keats's "Negative Capability" contained within itself the aspect of self-examination, and this often caused a double point of view: while Keats destroyed the self and merged into the object of his contemplation through the empathy of "Negative Capability," there always existed the other Keats, the spectator who tried to analyze the Keats in imaginative experience. Keats was always driven by the need to justify his experience in imagination and prove its truth. As a proof of this, to justify his experience, in the other odes Keats had to demonstrate the whole process in which he destroyed the barrier of time and self and entered the world of the imaginative moment (where he could identify himself with the contemplative object) and finally returned to reality. Unfortunately, such efforts to examine himself led him to various irresolvable paradoxes, especially epistemological ones. By comparison, in "To Autumn" Keats is totally free from the analytical self. He does not even bother to present us the process of "Negative Capability" as if the poem, the product itself, is the enough evidence of his imaginative experience. As Walter Jackson Bate observes:

The poet is completely absent; there is no "I," no suggestion of the discursive language that we find in the other odes; the poem is entirely concrete, and self-sufficient in and through

its concreteness.³

Moreover, Keats achieves all these states of "Negative Capability" now not by escaping from time but by identifying himself with time itself. Keats chooses as the object of his contemplation, autumn, the embodiment of ephemeral time.

According to Davenport,⁴ autumn is summarized as follows:

The central element in the concept of Autumn . . . is that the season is a boundary, a space between two opposite conditions, a moment of poise when one movement culminates and the succeeding movement has scarcely begun.

Autumn is a momentary repose between fulfillment and decay. What autumn represents is actually what Keats pursued in the other odes. In its essence autumn is parallel to the moment of imagination, love or beauty which is about to pass away. The moment is precariously suspended between the past and the future, and in reality once it is fulfilled, it vanishes into nothing. "Ode on Melancholy" was also written with this realization, although in this poem Keats found a consolation in the fact that loss is the inevitable complement of the moment of fulfillment. Autumn with its gain and loss is actually the melancholic season. By identifying himself with autumn through "Negative Capability," Keats again puts himself in the world of the moment that is

³Bate, John Keats (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1963), p. 581.

⁴Arnold Davenport, "A Note on 'To Autumn,'" in John Keats: A Reassessment, ed. Kenneth Muir ([Liverpool]: Liverpool Univ. Press, 1958), p. 96.

about to pass, his mind "hung" ("Ode on Melancholy," l. 30) in the mid-air like the one who dwells in melancholy. Yet, in "To Autumn" Keats overcomes melancholy. There is no "wakeful anguish of the soul" ("Ode on Melancholy," l. 10) as there was in "Ode on Melancholy." If "Ode on Melancholy" is the epistemological experience of the moment, in "To Autumn" Keats is now able to appreciate the moment of beauty that is about to pass, through his senses, without any pain, or regret.

From the first line of the first stanza of this ode, the concept of autumn with the two opposite elements is richly described. The season is of "mists and mellow fruitfulness" (1), of shade and light, and of winter and summer. Throughout the stanza, Keats builds up these images. Davenport studies this in detail.⁵ For example, "Close bosom friend" (2) is "Conspiring" (3); the old "mossed" (5) trees bear apples, yet the fruits "bend" (5) them; "later flowers" (9) are "set budding more" (8). Keats dedicates this stanza to the description of nature in autumn. The essence of autumn is also perceived in the moment of suspense. All the fruits described here are filled with "ripeness to the core" (6); the "hazel shells" (7) are plumped with a "sweet kernel" (8) until it seems that they would explode with a mere touch. Keats finds autumn in the moment that has just been fulfilled and now is about to become. Yet, in the world

⁵Davenport, pp. 96-97.

of imagination, this moment is arrested until it seems to be the eternal present, until Keats himself thinks like the bees enjoying the rich honey of flowers that "warm day will never cease" (10). Nevertheless, Keats is also aware that this is only wishful thinking. The moment of fulfillment is only temporally arrested and prolonged by the power of Keats's imagination. As the imaginative moment eventually fades, so the repose of autumn is soon replaced by winter; for "summer has o'er-brimmed their clammy cells" (11).

Keats accepts the prolonged moment of beauty and fulfillment as it is. Keats is content with the given chance to appreciate autumn to fullness. For this he is grateful for the gift of imagination. Compared with the richness of experience aided by imagination, the coming loss in winter is nothing to mourn. In "Isabella" Keats perceived autumn as the falling leaves playing a "roundelay / Of death" (252-53). Almost a year and half later in "To Autumn," Keats values the ripeness of the season above all things. His maturity during this period is great.

The second stanza brings in the image of harvesting already implicit in the fruits introduced in the first stanza. Patterson here indicates that the idea of "mellow fruitfulness" in the first stanza develops to the first line of the second, "Who had not seen thee oft amid thy store?" (12) and that this line serves to tie the two stanzas with

a key word, "store."⁶ Then, autumn is personified and perceived as a young woman in four various postures who reposes during harvest. The activities of all these figures of autumn are arrested in the moment of Keats's imagination. The first one is "sitting careless on a granary floor" (14). The second is

on a half-reaped furrow sound asleep,
Drowsed with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
Spare the next swath and all its twined flowers. . . .
(16-18)

David Perkins finds in this figure of autumn the image of death; that "the dominant image is of autumn as the harvester --and a harvester that is in a sense another reaper, death itself."⁷ Indeed, as an image, the figure of autumn reaping the harvest with a hook is similar to the figure of death described on a Tarot card which is reaping the human skulls with its scythe. It is true that this is also an aspect of autumn, but is that all Keats tries to convey to us here? In this point, Patterson disagrees with Perkins. He notices in this figure of autumn, the breathing of life:

The breast of the harvester "on a half-reap'd
furrow sound asleep" gently rises and falls in
breathing, though the reaping hook is laid aside
in stillness and thus "spares the next swath"
and its "twined flowers."⁸

⁶Patterson, The Daemonic in the Poetry of John Keats, p. 230.

⁷Perkins, The Quest for Permanence, p. 292.

⁸Patterson, p. 231.

Since autumn is a repose between summer and winter, between growth and decay, both Perkins's and Patterson's assertions are quite correct. Autumn's hook both harvests and destroys sheaves. Yet, considering the images of ripeness Keats has conscientiously built up in the first stanza, it seems to me that Patterson's account is closer to Keats's value-making of autumn. Though autumn may be in a way the executioner, its image described here, the woman asleep in repose does not present a menacing figure. Even if autumn is death, death is also calmly slumbering. In the stilled moment arrested by Keats's imagination, the richness of fruits yet to be harvested overwhelms the menace of death. When the magic of the stilled moment eventually breaks, and autumn awakes from her slumber, the harvest again begins; the day of autumn draws to a close. Keats is aware of this, and he appreciates the moment of fulfillment prolonged by his imagination all the more for this. Autumn has to fade, for even in the stilled moment it is very much alive, unlike the lifeless figures on the frieze of the Grecian urn. In this world, they alone are allowed to remain in the world of the eternal present; but remember that to achieve their state of eternal being, they had to abandon the warmth of life and what is more, the satisfaction of fulfillment. The stilled moment of autumn may not last forever, yet the sense of fulfillment prolonged and intensified by Keats's imagination makes the moment almost eternal in its quality if not in duration.

The third figure of autumn in the second stanza is described as a gleaner:

And sometime like a gleaner thou dost keep
Steady thy laden head across a brook. . . .
(19-20)

Critics identify this figure with Ruth both in Bible and in Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale." In the latter, when "sick for home, / She stood in tears amid the alien corn" (66-67), she heard the nightingale's song. As Davenport indicates, "Ruth stands as an example of the transient individual, consoled in her grief by the unchanging song of the nightingale."⁹ In "To Autumn," Ruth is also drooping her head like the ripe sheaves because of the very burden of the harvest she is carrying on her head. She is autumn itself. As she was consoled by the nightingale's song in "Ode to a Nightingale," in "To Autumn" her sorrow is almost erased by her feeling the richness of harvest. It looks as if she bows her head in appreciation. The fourth figure of autumn is watching "by a cyder-press, with patient look" (21) "the last oozings hours by hours" (22). Here, Bate sees the approaching end of autumn:

There is a hint that the end is approaching--
these are the "last oozings"--and the pervading
thought in what follows is the withdrawal of
autumn, the coming death of the year. . . .¹⁰

⁹Davenport, "A Note on 'To Autumn,'" p. 97.

¹⁰Bate, John Keats, p. 583.

Again Patterson disagrees with this negative interpretation of autumn, pointing out that this would be disturbingly out of harmony with the major image of the preceding two stanzas.¹¹ I agree with Patterson, though the negative aspect of autumn should not be entirely discounted. Keats is too much a realist to omit this fact of life. Nevertheless, in autumn watching the "last oozings" of its harvest, greedy appreciation of the present moment of gain prevails over the sadness for the future loss. Keats, with autumn, is watching patiently, trying not to miss tasting even one drop of nectar. Because beauty has to die, Keats wishes to prolong the moment; therefore, in this opportunity given by his imagination, he enjoys the last glitter of autumn beauty to his heart's content. In the fourth figure of autumn is found the image of Keats himself as a pure and eager aesthete.

In the second stanza of "To Autumn," all the images tell that harvest is about to be done. Yet, there is no apprehension of what would come. Keats's desolation of "The squirrel's granary is full, / And the harvest's done" (7-8) in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" is now replaced by his satisfaction about the richness of harvest. All the images of ripeness Keats has built up throughout the two stanzas give an impression that the harvest is not the end of growth but rather the reward given by the "maturing sun" (2), as

¹¹Patterson, The Daemonic in the Poetry of John Keats, p. 232.

a result of progress in both individual and universal senses. Keats has already learned in "Hyperion" and "The Fall of Hyperion," this is all that becoming signifies.

In the third and last stanza of "To Autumn," Keats's attention shifts from the sight and taste of the season to its music:

Where are the songs of spring? Aye, where are they?
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too. . . .
(23-24)

These two lines tell all about Keats's matured state in his final stage of self-development. He neither indulges in making the moment of sensuous beauty eternal, nor does he agonize over its loss. What he learned in "The Fall of Hyperion" through Saturn's suffering over his fall is that crying over the loss is meaningless and that to use the experience of loss as a means to develop oneself toward personal maturity is all that is important. Keats now accepts life and beauty as they are, as time brings. He is content with the present moment. Keats's mind is exactly like the autumn clouds he describes in this stanza:

barr'd clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue.
(25-26)

The clouds here have more than autumn. They stir the unexpected memory of the past seasons. The evening clouds color the stubble field of autumn in "rosy hue" and change it into a rose garden in the height of spring. These clouds have

one more dimension than their visual image. They have memory. They tell that autumn is the completion of the past seasons. Like the clouds, Keats has his own memory, too. Yet without grieving over his lost youth, he listens to the songs of autumn and marvels at the beauty of their own:

Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
 Among the river shallows, borne aloft
 Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
 A full-grown lamb loud bleat from hilly bourn;
 Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft
 The red-breast whistles from a garden croft;
 And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.
 (27-33)

As Davenport suggests, the music of autumn described in these lines is "a music of living and dying, of staying and departure of summer-winter."¹² He further interprets the fragile "small gnats" as "a beautiful symbol of the generations that fall and rise and in Autumn yield place, the old to the young."¹³ Compared with the other creatures described here, "the life-span of the gnats is indeed much shorter; their autumn may be simply the evening of the others. Nevertheless, in the autumn of their life, all these creatures reach the culmination of their growth. The "full-grown lamb" is about to turn out to be a ewe or a ram. The "Hedge-crickets," as Davenport observes from "On the Grasshopper and Cricket," are the creatures who abide in autumn between

¹²Davenport, "A Note on 'To Autumn,'" p. 98.

¹³Ibid.

the grasshopper of summer and the cricket of winter.¹⁴ The "red-brest" is getting ready for his winter. The "gathering swallows" are busy making preparation for the day of departure to the south soon coming. Yet in all of these images which still predict the arrival of winter, the most noticeable thing is the breathing of autumn. It may be possible to hear in the wailful mourn of the gnats, a requiem of autumn, but Keats's appreciation of the moment's full growth caught by his imagination changes this into a hymn of autumn. The songs of autumn he hears in this last stanza give to the stilled moment of autumn ripeness, the breathing of life which was so far scarcely felt in the previous stanzas. Keats makes us aware that autumn is alive even in its stillness. As he tries to taste the richness of autumn to the "last ooziings" in the second stanza, here he gratefully observes the last burst of activity of life revealed in the songs of autumn, yet without averting his eyes from another fact of life that the moment of fulfillment is at the same time the moment of loss, and autumn has to give way to winter in return for the richness of growth and harvest she was so blessed with.

Thus in "To Autumn," Keats finds himself in total harmony with the opposite elements of the season. He accepts life as it is, both gain and loss and values it all the more for its becoming. In this poem, the intense and rich

¹⁴Davenport, pp. 98-99.

experience of the moment of ripeness and beauty is enough for him; therefore, he does not mourn the "soft-dying day" (25) of autumn. Pointing out the word "soft-dying," Patterson considers that Keats applied the term only to the day and that the "soft-dying day" is not to be mourned since it is actually dying into life in an oncoming day.¹⁵ It is true that in the daily resurrective cycle, the evening which is the autumn of the day is reborn in the next. However, like the "soft-dying day," autumn will eventually die. Keats indicates this with the word "soft-dying" as well, yet at the same time he is also aware that in the resurrective cycle of the year, autumn is reborn in the spring and in the autumn of the next year, the same rich fruits bless the land. Then, what about the autumn of his own life? Can he ever again enjoy the rich contentment of life and the fruits it brought to him? Keats does not know, nor does he try to know; for even if he wants to know, there is no way of knowing now. If ever there is a greater cycle of human time, only by living it through he will know his destination. In "To Autumn," Keats therefore totally submits himself to time without any struggle. He merges himself into the essence of autumn and allows time to carry him along afterward. He is a little hopeful as he ends this poem with the song of swallows. Though they depart, surely they will return in spring. In "To Autumn," there is no "sorrow of

¹⁵Patterson, The Daemonic in the Poetry of John Keats, p. 236.

the time" ("Hyperion," I.301) which tormented Hyperion, the sun god. The sun is now maturing. Keats accepts time as it is since it also brought him to the ripeness of autumn. He appreciates each moment, each day and each season of his life which teach him so much meaning and value of life, without longing for the lost time. He is grateful for the gift of imagination which enables him to become aware of the full value of life.

Keats's soul painted in "To Autumn" reposes in contentment, "rich in the simple worship of a day" ("Ode to May"). Keats was also in this mood when he wrote his first ode dedicated to May.¹⁶ However, it is easy to be content with the moment of beauty in the spring of life when life has just begun and is filled with many expectations and hopes. The greatness and maturity achieved in "To Autumn" is that Keats can still feel like this in the autumn of his life when he is aware that he will soon have to bow his head before the scythe of death only to be harvested. He now accepts double time, neither merely hellish nor heavenly. He no longer tries to "see as a God sees" ("The Fall of Hyperion," I.304). In the quiet moment in "To Autumn," Keats's imagination receives the full blessing of life, not by lifting him above time but by still remaining in time. If he loves beauty, he also loves the beauty of time. It seems to me that after his painful struggle with time, in

¹⁶The title, "Ode to May" is given according to Allott's edition. This ode is also known as "Ode to Maia": See E. de Selincourt, ed., The Poems of John Keats (1905; rpt. London: Methuen, 1961).

"To Autumn" Keats has finally reached the stage that he is able to throw himself on the grace of God, a Maker of time and all existences.

iii

Keats's calm acceptance of time and the appreciation of life he learned in "To Autumn" seem to sustain him throughout the rest of his life. In the "Bright star!" sonnet, the poem generally regarded as Keats's last composition (though there is a former version of this sonnet), in the end he prefers his earthly life to eternity:

Bright star! Would I were steadfast as thou art--
 Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night
 And watching, with eternal lids apart,
 Like nature's patient, sleepless eremite,
 The moving waters at their priestlike task
 Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
 Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask
 Of snow upon the mountains and the moors;
 No--yet still steadfast, still unchangeable,
 Pillowed upon my fair love's ripening breast,
 To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
 Awake forever in a sweet unrest,
 Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath
 And so live ever--or else swoon to death.

The "Bright star" which in this case must be the North Star is symbolic of the eternal present. It is in a way God himself. It always keeps an eye on all the activities on this earth. The rain and the snow which cover the earth fall from the sky as if they were the messages from the heaven. In Keats's poetry, the waters (the ocean or the river) are usually closely connected with process time. The "moving waters at their priestlike task" are therefore

the image of time which by oblivion absolves us mortals from the pain and anxiety of earthly life and eventually leads us to some destination. In the former version which was transcribed by Brown, the "moving waters" are described as the "morning waters." The change from the "morning" to the "moving" indicates the movement of the tides even in the stillness of the sea, and this is more suitable to express the image of time. The snow which covers the land, also like water, purifies the earth rather than freezes it. With its beauty, the snow hides under it, sometimes painful and harsh reality.

The "Bright star" shines above all of us over the waters and the snow, as if it would preside over the destiny of our lives. Keats longs for the eternal steadfastness of the star, yet in this sonnet, he declines the coldness and loneliness of eternity. The beauty of the star seems to him the "lone splendour." He cannot bear the solitude. Instead, here Keats chooses the warmth of earthly life. He much prefers to be cradled in the lover's breast, wishing the moment of love would last for ever.

Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever--or else swoon to death.

In the former version, these last two lines are thus:

To hear, to feel her tender-taken breath
Half-passionless, and so swoon to death.

As these lines indicate, in the former version, death is

perceived as "easeful Death" ("Ode to a Nightingale," l. 52) to make the moment of happiness eternal. In the final version, Keats rejects such romantic illusion of death. He recognizes death as a fact. Keats is aware that the moment of love or happiness will be only momentary. Yet in spite of this recognition, in the final sonnet, he has no bitterness about it. He is content with the warm feeling of the present moment and calmly accepts whatever the future holds. Keats is totally at peace with the world.

Bachelard interprets that in the world of imagination, everything that sheds light is a look.¹⁷ Looking up the night sky, Keats finds the "Bright star" gazing upon him. Yet, here he no longer stares it back to merge himself into the star and make its eternity his own as he tried before. Cradled in the bosom of the earth and nourished by the richness of life, Keats is content to be gazed upon by the star and ultimately by God himself.

In February 23, 1821, Keats passed away. He was still only twenty five years old. It was revealed after autopsy that his lungs were completely destroyed because of consumption and that his will alone had kept him alive so long. Before he died, he asked his friend, Joseph Severn that his epitaph should be this: "Here lies One whose name was writ in water." There is no name attached to it. These words usually interpreted as Keats's bitter reflection on his

¹⁷Bachelard, L'air et les Songes, p. 210.

failure to achieve identity through post-mortal fame as an English poet, need not be construed so negatively. In these words, there is no ostentation or sentimentality. It seems to me that Keats meant just as the words say. Water is the symbol of destiny, not only of the destiny that causes transiency with time but also of the essential destiny which transforms the substance of existence. Life is born from water and returns into water. Keats at last found his identity in water; that non-identity was his identity. First starting from his narcissistic longing for the sky which seemed eternal to his idealistic mind and which fulfilled all his dreams, Keats recognized the tragedy of human time and strived to seek the significance of being. His absorption into the present moment made him realize the self-enclosed and self-limited state of being, and ultimately he reached the realization that becoming is the progress toward maturity. Therefore, he learned to flow with time like water and to accept being and becoming at the same time, because as in water, becoming was with being, because becoming was, in its essence, being. Keats did not know what he would become after his death or whether there would be a greater cycle of the universe which would enable him to be reborn. Keats left all the time behind which the unknown providence works. It seems to me that only of one thing was Keats sure--his "great Maker's presence" ("Sleep and Poetry," l. 43).

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