

Keats : From the Letters (from *English Critical Texts*. D.J. Enright & Ernst De Chickera)

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INTRODUCTION

1. John Keats has not written any formal criticism, and his critical comments are confined to some letters, a review, a long poem 'Sleep and Poetry', some notes and a few comments. Unlike Wordsworth and Coleridge he has not written any formal essay or preface on the theory of poetry. However, he has made clear cut statements as to what he conceived of his task as a poet.
2. Keats was greatly influenced by Hazlitt in matters related to literary criticism and poetry. Keats held Shakespeare in great esteem and admired Wordsworth.
3. Keats has not stated anything significant on the structure and meaning of poetry, but is more concerned with the poet and the nature and function of poetry.
4. The poetic fundamentals of Keats are: i) Negative capability, ii) Beauty, iii) Imagination, iv) Sensation, v) Poetry must be impersonal, and as far as the poet is concerned he should have no identity, vi) Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing that enters into one's soul, and does not startle or amaze with itself – but with its subject.
5. In his poem 'Sleep and Poetry' Keats has emphasized the fact that the field of poetry is not reason and philosophy; its field is the free play of imagination and its main aim is creation of beauty. Keats then defines the true purpose of poetry: 'it should be a friend / To soothe the cares, and lift the thoughts of man.' Poetry needs to deal not only with beauty and joy but with darkness and death. Only by confronting painful reality can it console humanity and celebrate all that it means to be a human being.

6. It is important to understand the different critical approaches to Keats's philosophical views before embarking on the study of his letters specified above. There is a marked difference, almost opposition in the criticism before 1960s and those after the sixties that attempt to interpret Keats's philosophical and metaphysical writings.

- The earlier studies were marked with excessive spiritualization of Keats in which he was presented as an artist
 - (i) deeply influenced by Neo-Platonism and various forms of transcendentalism;
 - (ii) engaged in the quest of beauty and art;
 - (iii) who was an aesthete dreamer with escapist tendencies.

An example of this earlier trend is Bernard Blackstone's 1959 book *The Consecrated Urn, an Interpretation of Keats in Terms of Growth and Form* in which analysis of Keats's poetry is based on similarities he finds between Keats's philosophies and those of Neo Platonism, Eastern spiritual texts, the hermeticism of Cornelius Agrippa, and the more mystically inclined Romantic poets such as Blake and Coleridge.

- However, later scholars tried to place Keats more firmly in the real world and rejected the earlier interpretations.
 - (i) Newell Ford argued against transcendental interpretations of Keats's writings in his work *The Prefigurative Imagination of John Keats*. Ford attempted to reinterpret the terminology (such as "fellowship with essence") used by Keats by placing them in the world of material reality. Other scholars also portrayed Keats as either disinterested in or distrustful of religious and philosophical speculations.
 - (ii) In 1973, Stuart Sperry in his book *Keats the Poet* stated that the language Keats used to put forward his theories about poetry, life, and religion did not reflect Neo Platonic philosophies as once supposed, but rather, was based on the science Keats learned in his chemistry classes at Guy's Hospital. Faced with strong opposition to spiritual readings, and concrete proof that Keats could have encountered some of his terminology in his medical studies, critics soon discarded spiritual and philosophical interpretations of Keats's writings in favor of scientific ones.

- (iii) Later, critics such as Donald Goellnicht and Hermione De Almeida analysed the role that Keats's medical training played in his poetry, and in the process, they linked the medicine and the philosophies of the Romantic period, but they continued the tradition begun by Sperry of ascribing Keats's terminology solely to his education in chemistry. This materialist reading became almost a dogma.
- (iv) M. H. Abrams's 1998 Keats Bicentennial lecture and essay "Keats's Poems: The Material Dimensions" is an example of the overall effect this has had. He asserted the importance of "the material qualities" of Keats's writings, and warned of the dangers of "philosophizing" Keats. He reminded readers that many commentators once believed that Keats was a Neo-Platonist because of Keats's tendency to describe the imagination and the imaginative process with terms such as "ethereal," "spirit," "spiritual," "empyreal," and "essence." Chemistry, he stressed, was the key to understanding Keats's texts in which the imagination and the products of the imagination were understood to be entirely material. Abrams argued that Keats's technical knowledge of chemistry supplied him with "unprecedented metaphors for poetry" in which the imagination was portrayed as refining and purifying concepts to create an ideal, a "material sublime,". This ideal was not to be understood as spiritual and most certainly not an ideal that was Neo-Platonic.
- There is another view which attempts to synthesize both the above – mentioned approaches. Jennifer Wunder in her book *Keats, Hermeticism, and the Secret Societies* (published in 2008) tries to find a connection between the spiritual and material aspects of terminology Keats used in his poetic and philosophical writings by stating that Keats was aware of the widespread information about the secret societies of the time. Wunder says that if we accept this then the opposing interpretations of his writings can actually co-exist and be reconciled, just as they co-existed in the philosophies promoted by these secret societies. Wunder further says that Keats's metaphors draw upon a rich and full tradition of spiritual philosophy that blended hermeticism and Neo-Platonism with science, a tradition that was widely known during Keats's time. Once this is understood, it becomes possible that Keats had both the material and the spiritual in mind, and the analysis of

previous scholars as well as more recent ones may be in some sense correct, because both the spiritual and material were part of the cultural context of hermeticism during the Romantic period. Wunder further says that likely sources for Keats's vocabulary seem to be Paracelsian, Rosicrucian, and Masonic ideas and texts with explicit examples of alchemical metaphors illustrating the benefits the imagination and the imaginative process could provide to man's spirit.

Definition /Explanation of Some Terms used:

- **Hermeticism:** **Hermeticism** is a set of philosophical and religious beliefs based primarily upon the writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus. This movement is generally traced to Alexandria in the first centuries of the Common Era, where it unified elements of Jewish and Christian mysticism with Hellenistic philosophy and Egyptian occult beliefs. The resulting composite tradition proved to be both persuasive and enduring, as it proved compelling to both Muslim scholars in the early Middle Ages and European intellectuals at the dawn of the Renaissance. In particular, the notion that the universe operated based on orderly principles — in this case, represented as cosmic vibrations in the substance of the All — was instrumental not only to western occultism, but also to the development of the modern scientific method. This connection can be seen most clearly in the hermetical and alchemical treatises written by some of the most influential thinkers of their respective eras, including Giordano Bruno, John Dee, Francis Bacon and Isaac Newton.

Paracelsus: **Paracelsus (Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim)**, was born on November 11 or December 17, 1493 in Switzerland—died September 24, 1541, in Austria. He was a German-Swiss physician and alchemist who established the role of chemistry in medicine.

Free Masons: **Freemasonry** is the teachings and practices of the secret fraternal (men-only) order of Free and Accepted Masons, the largest worldwide secret society. Freemasonry has always been religious in character, though it subscribes to no particular orthodoxy. To become a Freemason, the applicant has to be an adult male and must believe in the existence of a supreme being and in the immortality of the soul. The

teachings of Freemasonry enjoin morality, charity, and obedience to the law of the land. It is not, however, a Christian institution, though it is often taken to be such.

- **Rosicrucian:** was a person (in the 17th and 18th centuries) who belonged to a secret society laying claim to various forms of occult knowledge and power and professing esoteric principles of religion. He may be a member of any of several later or modern bodies or societies professing principles derived from or attributed to the earlier (Rosicrucians, especially of an organization (**Rosicrucian Order or Ancient Mystic Order Rosae Crucis**) that is active in America.)
- **Neo Platonism:** The term “Neoplatonism” refers to a philosophical school of thought that first emerged and flourished in the ancient Greco-Roman world of later period, roughly the middle of the 3rd to the middle of the 7th century. Neoplatonic philosophy is a strict form of principle-monism that strives to understand everything on the basis of a single cause that they considered divine, and indiscriminately referred to as “the First”, “the One”, or “the Good”. Since it is reasonable to assume, as the Neoplatonists did, that any efficient cause is ontologically prior to, and hence more real, than its effect, then, in the hierarchy of being, the first principle, whatever it is, cannot be less “real” than the phenomena it is supposed to explain.

Summary and Discussion

From Letter to Benjamin Bailey. 22 November 1817:

- This letter is considered as one of the most significant letters in which Keats has put forward his poetic faith and philosophical views. Jennifer Wunder states that this letter represents one of his rare and detailed expositions about religious questions and his philosophy of life that scholars rely upon for guidance when they study these issues in his letters and then apply their analyses to his poetry.
- Earl R. Wasserman in his article ‘Keats and Benjamin Bailey on the Imagination’ published in *Modern Language Notes* states that Keats had spent a month in Oxford quarters in which

Bailey was studying for the Church, and it is probable that he was acquainted with his friend's ideas on theology and the function of imagination before the exchange of letters.

- **The significant terms used in lines 1 to 5 are ‘holiness of Heart’s affections’, ‘truth of Imagination’, ‘truth’, ‘Passions as of Love’ and ‘Beauty’. The term ‘sublime’ signifies the highest in any particular category. In line no. 5 Keats states that in their highest quality all passions including Love create ‘essential’ Beauty.** Keats has related creation of Beauty to passions or the affections of heart. He is certain of the ‘holiness’ of heart’s affections and the truth of Imagination. He has established an underlying link between Imagination, passions, Truth and Beauty. What is grasped by Imagination must be true according to Keats.

ANALYSIS:

- Many critics have understood ‘heart’s affections’ to stand for love and use of the word ‘holiness’ as another example of Keats’s penchant for religious vocabulary.
- However, Robert M Ryan in his article ‘Keats and the Truth of Imagination’ has stated that the expression has been of great significance both to Keats and Bailey to whom this letter was addressed. He refers to an unpublished treatise ‘An Essay on Moral Principle’ written by Bailey in which he follows the ‘moral sense’ school of ethical theorists who used ‘affection’ to stand for a variety of impulses such as compassion, parental love, patriotism, devotion to arts, desire for wealth etc.
- The term ‘holiness’ can be comprehended in terms of heavy emphasis placed on the role of heart’s affections in religion. These affections (compassion, parental love, patriotism, devotion to arts etc) were understood as indispensable aids to the mind in its attempt to comprehend that which cannot be grasped through sense experience. When our imperfect understanding fails us, it is the heart’s affections that provide new insights into transcendent reality. There is a part of knowledge in the religious sphere, which defies our understanding, and can be attained only by the heart. This ‘heart-knowledge’ is more emotional than intellectual, related more to piety. Christian graces as faith, hope and charity emanate from the heart alone according to Bailey. Thus the affections of the heart are holy and Keats refers to this holiness of heart’s affections.

- Ryan has explained the lines ‘What imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth.....essential Beauty’ in the following way : Traditional religion has taught us that those who go to heaven are made totally and perfectly happy. The nature of this supreme blessedness is usually seen as involving the satisfaction of our noblest earthly desires and aspirations. What seems beautiful to us will seem beautiful in the next life though according to a higher, more satisfying aesthetic. Besides, since our imagination is creative, we can conceive of beauty that does not actually exist now, but that beauty will have to exist for us hereafter since our happiness in heaven must be perfect and total. In this way the connection between ‘heart’s affections’ and ‘imagination’ becomes clear: whatever the heart develops an affection for, even if it is a non existing beauty conceived by imagination, must be present in the after life, if mind and heart are to be totally at rest.
- Jennifer Wunder refers to the philosophy of Paracelsus and the Rosicrucians to explain Keats’s statement. What the imagination derives from the senses and what it creates based upon them takes precedence over materiality. As the “Creative Power,” imagination exists “in the perfect spirit.” Imagination takes precedence over all else. Moreover, it is the means by which man could discern the signs of the true, invisible world and ultimately take part in the spiritual life.
- Keats believes that the poet has the ability to perceive this ubiquitous, ever-present principle of beauty in nature and art. Imagination is the means through which such an insight and perception are possible. Besides, this beauty which imagination perceives is the Truth.
- Wunder has provided another interpretation in the light of Paracelsus when she says that ‘imagination’ mentioned by Keats is same as Paracelsus’s “Creative Power” that draws upon sensation, and when in “perfect spirit,” or to use Keats’s terms when “in their sublime,” the passions interacting with the imagination yield an “essential” beauty. Furthermore, Keats believes that this is **true** “whether it existed before or not,” regardless of whether it is a product of the imagination and not independent of it. Here again he echoes Paracelsus who believes that things “obtained by means of imagination can give true results.”

- In line nos. 6 and 7 Keats refers to ‘my first Book’ and ‘the little song’ which, he says, express what he is implying. By his first Book he refers to Book I of *Endymion* and the little song is the poem ‘O Sorrow’ of *Endymion IV*. Book I of *Endymion* begins with the following lines:

*A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:
 Its loveliness increases; it will never
 Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
 A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
 Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.*

- The ‘little song’ that he has mentioned is given below:

O SORROW,
 Why dost borrow
 The natural hue of health, from vermeil lips?—
 To give maiden blushes
 To the white rose bushes? 5
 Or is't thy dewy hand the daisy tips?

O Sorrow,
 Why dost borrow
 The lustrous passion from a falcon-eye?—
 To give the glow-worm light? 10
 Or, on a moonless night,
 To tinge, on syren shores, the salt sea-spry?

O Sorrow,
 Why dost borrow
 The mellow ditties from a mourning tongue?— 15
 To give at evening pale

Unto the nightingale,
That thou mayst listen the cold dews among?

O Sorrow,
Why dost borrow 20
Heart's lightness from the merriment of May?—
A lover would not tread
A cowslip on the head,
Though he should dance from eve till peep of day—
Nor any drooping flower 25
Held sacred for thy bower,
Wherever he may sport himself and play.

To Sorrow
I bade good morrow,
And thought to leave her far away behind; 30
But cheerly, cheerly,
She is so constant to me, and so kind:
I would deceive her,
And so leave her, 35
But ah! she is so constant and so kind....

Come then, Sorrow!
Sweetest Sorrow!
Like an own babe I nurse thee on my breast:
I thought to leave thee 40
And deceive thee,
But now of all the world I love thee best.\

- Keats compares Imagination to Adam's Dream in lines 9 and 10.

- This dream is described in *Paradise Lost*, Book VIII. With closed eyes, Adam watches as God painlessly extracts a rib from his side and forms it into Eve. He then wakes, and finds that Eve does exist, and is just as beautiful as she was when he was dreaming. Keats over here is making the claim that what is imagined by the poet will be found to be true.
- **Keats states in line no 11 and 12 : ‘..I have never yet been able to perceive how anything can be known for truth by consecutive reasoning – and yet it must be.’**
 - As has been said earlier, the “Creative Power,” imagination exists “in the perfect spirit.” And imagination takes precedence over all else. Moreover, it is the means by which man could discern the signs of the true, invisible world and ultimately take part in the spiritual life. Thus the imagination reveals “traces” of the “real,” and true invisible world, which is unattainable by simple, “corporeal understanding” or consecutive reasoning.
 - However, Keats accepts that ‘consecutive reasoning’ may also bring us close to truth but the philosopher has to encounter several doubts and objections before his views are accepted.(lines 11 to 15)
- **Keats declares (line nos. 15 - 16) : ‘ O for a life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts!’ . .**

EXPLANATION: Different Views

- **Beyer** in his *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, LI (1952) states that Keats uses the word ‘sensations’ in the sense of ‘intuitive perceptions through the senses’. Keats prefers to intuitively perceive the truth through senses rather than lead a life given to reasoned thought. This intuitive experience will be joyful. In other words, intuitive sensory perception is a joyful experience and it brings us close to truth, and is preferable to seeking truth through rational thought processes. In his November 3 letter, Keats writes of “the great Consolations of Religion and undepraved Sensations. of the Beautiful, the poetical in all things.”
- **J. M. Murry** in *Studies in Keats*, VI states ‘Abstract thinking, in the ordinary sense, was quiet alien to Keats; the movement of his thoughts was richly imaged, and amazingly concrete – “sensations rather than thoughts”.’

- Robert Ryan in *Keats :The Religious Sense* argues that “Keats seems to mean that a clear perception of the beauty to be found everywhere in the universe – a beauty that is regular and orderly and therefore the work of a Creator ... is enough to convince anyone whose sensations are not depraved ... that a benevolent deity presides over our destiny.”
- Stuart Sperry addresses the issues surrounding Keats’s conception of sensation in the opening chapter of his work *Keats the Poet*. He acknowledged both the importance of the term in any study of Keats’s letters and poetry and the lack of agreement among scholars when it comes to just what Keats meant by the term. As Sperry notes, some such as Sir Sidney Colvin have argued that “what [Keats] means are intuitions of the mind and spirit ... independent of all consecutive stages and formal processes of thinking.”
- Clarence Thorpe defined Keats’s use of the term as “feelings or intuitions, the pure activity of the imagination.”
- On the opposite end of the spectrum were opinions such as those offered by Walter Jackson Bate who believed Keats followed “Hazlitt’s constant use of the word ‘sensations’ in the traditional empirical sense – as virtually equivalent to concrete experience.”
- Sperry offers his own assessment. He says that “Keats’s use of the word, while denoting specific physical impressions, moves beyond the realm of sense experience,” and “encompasses much more – feeling, sensibility, and the world of interior consciousness.” Ultimately, Sperry concludes that while Keats appeared to conceive of sensation as “a process, an assimilation of outer stimulus and inner response,” he “never use[d] ‘sensation’ to refer to anything that might be described as immediate apprehension of a higher reality,” and “there is no need for, nor does Keats’s metaphor advance, any transcendental hypothesis to account for it.” At the most basic level, sensation was understood as Hazlitt and Bate described it, but it progressed by degrees to encompass much more including the emotional and intellectual aspects Sperry recognizes in Keats’s use of the term, and stimulating the sensations was understood as a vital way for man to approach an “apprehension of a higher reality.”
- Wunder states that other philosophies like the one of the Freemasons proposed a progression through the senses in conjunction with a refinement of the imaginative powers as a vital part of the physical and mental improvement of men. She also claims that the Rosicrucian and Masonic texts and the underlying hermetic philosophies made an even more

explicit link between the “Sensations” and the spiritual. The alchemical philosophies put forth by Paracelsus stressed that Sensation, even at its most basic, was understood as a portion of the spirit. The senses were viewed as the means by which the imagination was stimulated, and because their inlets were in the physical body of man, they formed a necessary conduit between the material and the spiritual. That is why Keats desires a life of sensations rather than of thoughts.

- **Keats states in line no 116 to 21 : ‘ It is a Vision in the form of Youth’.....so repeated’**
- Here Keats makes Sensations take precedence as “‘a Vision in the form of Youth’ a Shadow of reality to come,”. Keats’s reasoning can be interpreted in the following manner: the Sensations stimulate the imagination and he who leads a life of sensations can discover the traces and signatures of the invisible world’s “reality” within this visible world. Keats’s perception of Sensations contains within it both the traditional senses as well as the suggestion that they affect the spirit; later (in lines 26 to 37) when he compares “great things with small” he offers the example of a melody placed within a context engaging all the senses that “operated on the soul” at that moment. And the traces and signatures of the invisible world (which a man of sensation discovers) also seem to be Keats’s “Shadow of reality to come,” and their similarity is reinforced by Keats’s “auxiliary” “Speculation” that “happiness on Earth” will be “repeated in a finer tone” in the afterlife. Keats is arguing that this world is an imperfect version of the invisible world, it is a “Shadow” of “reality,” and what we perceive here exists in the purer or “finer tone” there.
- **Keats states in line no 19 to 23 ‘that we shall enjoy hereafter by having what we call happiness on Earth repeated in a finer tone and so repeated. And yet such a fate can only befall those who delight in Sensation, rather than hunger as you do after Truth’. He further states in lines 23 to 25: ‘Adam’s dream will do here.....Imagination and its empyreal reflection is the same as human Life and its Spiritual repetition.’**

EXPLANATION

- According to Jonathan Wordsworth (in his article ‘The Romantic Imagination’) Keats suggests in lines 24 and 25 that human imagination is in the same relation to its ‘celestial’ reflection, as human existence is to heaven. In other words it is not the human life reflecting the divine but just the opposite.
- Wunder has provided the following explanation -Keats certainly believed Beauty and poetry could provide solace in this life, they served an equally vital role in the spiritual growth necessary for life to be “repeated in a finer tone” in the next. Keats is willing to believe in an immortal soul. Keats writes of an afterlife when he says **“having what we call happiness on Earth repeated in a finer tone and so repeated”**. –Throughout the letter, Keats has been asserting the power of the Imagination to arrive at a truth, so long as the processes, the compositions and mingling of the imagination that he puts forth , are followed. Certain alchemical philosophies have stressed that all creation, including man, was comprised of two bodies – the visible and the invisible, the material and the spiritual, the corporal and the eternal. As stated above, ‘Sensation’, even at its most basic, was understood as a portion of the spirit. The senses were viewed as the means by which the imagination was stimulated, and because their inlets were in the physical body of man, they formed a necessary conduit between the material and the spiritual. As the “Creative Power,” imagination exists “in the perfect spirit.” Imagination takes precedence over all else. Moreover, it is the means by which man could discern the signs of the true, invisible world and ultimately take part in the spiritual life. This experience, which can be termed spiritual, provides joy and delight. This is probably what Keats is implying when he says **‘such a fate can only befall those who delight in Sensation’**. When Keats says **“And yet such a fate can only befall those who delight in sensation rather than hunger as you do after Truth,”** it is not the desire for the truth that Keats argues against. Rather, he is reassuring Bailey that the gradations of sensations and the imagination’s interactions are a valid way to reach that truth. Keats is not expressing doubt in the truth or dismissing an abstract truth. He is telling Bailey it cannot be arrived at if Bailey does not go about it the proper way – **“such a fate can only befall those who delight in sensation.”**
- According to Wunder although “Adam’s dream” is traditionally cited as a reference to Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Adam was considered in Rosicrucian texts and Masonic histories the original possessor of knowledge and had the gift of prophecy, the original man imbued with “Wisdom ... the Breath of the Power of God, and a pure Influence ... an undefiled Mirror of the Majesty of God, and an Image of his Goodness,”. Keats also describes Adam’s dream in terms of gaining insight

into reality through imagination or creativity. According to Wasserman Keats is implying that our mortal and post mortal existences (i.e life after death) are not merely analogous but are connected causally. Human life is a series of sensuous intensities culminating in the final intensity death and thereafter there is only this changeless intensity; thus our post mortal existence or life after death is a repetition of our mortal existence (i.e life on earth) in a 'finer tone' and so repeated. The imaginative perception of that finer tone of life after death (life hereafter) is truth.

- **In lines 29 to 31 Keats states that an old song by a beautiful voice heard again re-creates and repeats the emotions, expectation and supposition that it created when it was first heard.**
- **In lines 32 to 37 Keats has combined the ideas presented in lines 16-17 ('It is a Vision in the form of Youth', a Shadow of reality to come - ..') and 19-21 ('we shall enjoy hereafter by having what we call Happiness on earth repeated in a finer tone and so repeated..').**
- The face of the singer is imagined as more beautiful than it actually is and this beautiful face, or its prototype, is encountered in the life to come. In other words Imagination works on the material of present and earthly realities and prefigures the finer realities of the future life or life hereafter.
- Another explanation is as follows: Sensations take precedence as "a Vision in the form of Youth' a Shadow of reality to come," and Keats's reasoning is that the Sensations stimulate the imagination and he who possesses this can discover the traces and signatures of the invisible world's "reality" within this world. Moreover, Keats's perception of Sensations contains within it both the traditional senses as well as the suggestion that they affect the spirit; when he compares "great things with small" he offers the example of a melody placed in a situation when all the senses "operated on the soul" at that moment. The traces and signatures of the invisible world also seem to be Keats's "Shadow of reality to come," and their similarity is reinforced by Keats's "Speculation" that "happiness on Earth" will be "repeated in a finer tone" in the afterlife. Keats is arguing that this world is an imperfect version of the invisible world, it is a "Shadow" of "reality," and what we perceive here exists in the purer or "finer tone" there.

- **Keats in line no.38 to 46 is discussing a ‘complex’ Mind– one that is imaginative and at the same time careful of its fruits – who would exist partly on sensation partly on thought.....,”**

EXPLANATION

- Keats is describing the composition of a complex mind which will in due process turn philosophic, that is – one which is imaginative as well as thoughtful. So he recommends to Bailey that he may drink this ‘old Wine of Heaven’, which is a redigestion of their ‘ethereal’ musing on earth, and he may also continue with his pursuit of knowledge.
- The term ‘ethereal’ means something delicate and light or related to heaven or the spirit. Sperry and Goellnicht have argued that when Keats uses the term “digest” he is employing chemical meanings involving a gentle heat and a moisture that dissolve materials in order to purify and then recombine them. This end product, the “Wine of Heaven,” is created from “ethereal Musings”, that is, made of substances already purified and in airy form. Keats has prescribed this Wine to Bailey to “drink.” It is obvious that by the expression the ‘redigestion’ of the ‘Wine of Heaven’ he is implying that this heavenly wine is constituted by dissolving and recombining of the profound perception they have had of Sensation, Imagination, Truth and the other world. However, this prescription for happiness by Keats is directed to Bailey, not to himself. Wunder says that the reference to drinking may be understood as literal because according to Paracelsus the ethereal quintessence formed the basis for medicines that were then administered to the patient whose stomach became, in turn, the alchemist that “joined together” and “brought into mutual agreement” both the spirit and body and nature and man. Keats recommends to Bailey a wine or elixir created from the fruits of the Imagination that works on the body and spirit together with a course of mental development.

Summary and Discussion:

From Letter to George and Thomas Keats., 21 December, 1817

Keats states : ‘.....what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously-I mean *Negative Capability*, that is, when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason. –Coleridge, for instance let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetrallium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge. This pursued through volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration.

- Keats is speaking of the quality of ‘Negative capability’ which a ‘Man of Achievement’ possesses. The term ‘Negative capability’ is paradoxical, as it implies ‘capable of being negative’ in the sense of absence, of being devoid of or lacking in any particular distinct attributes. This quality is being in a state of uncertainties and doubts without straining to gain support from fact and reason. It is precisely the capability of not being certain that allows a ‘Man of Achievement’ to feel what he does without the intrusion of reason and thought. Keats implies that Coleridge has ‘**negative incapability**’, that is he is incapable of losing one in the act of creation. There are other different interpretations of this state of ‘**Negative capability**’ by different thinkers.
- Reuven Tsur in his article ‘Two Critical Attitudes: Quest for Certitude and Negative Capability’ has explained the term ‘Negative capability’ in the context of literary criticism. Using psychology, Tsur says ‘What Keats gives in these words is a masterful description of what psychologists of “Perception and Personality” call *delayed closure*. (One major difference between scientific and literary thinking concerns *rapidity of closure*.....once the scientist reaches his conclusions, ignorance is dispelled in that particular respect; whereas being in ‘uncertainties, Mysteries and doubts’, making up one’s mind about nothing is an essential part of reading literature....)’. This means that ‘Negative capability’ is the ability to accept alternative and conflicting hypotheses and views. The Man of achievement thus has the ability to accept alternative, opposing, contrary views which finally lead him to achieving beauty.
- According to Brooke Hopkins the use of the expression ‘being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts’ implies that Keats is not talking about activity but about the whole being in a particular state. The expression ‘irritable reaching after fact and reason’ suggests activity, that is, the action of impatiently reaching out for facts to support the truth that should be experienced from within by the

whole being. The term ‘verisimilitude’ means ‘the appearance or quality of seeming to be true, and the idiom ‘let go’ signifies ‘stop holding something’. Coleridge wants to be ‘certain’, and he stops continuing to be in or lets go of the state of ‘half – knowledge’ and also the state of uncertainties and doubts. He seizes whatever appears to be a momentary truth from the inner recesses of ‘uncertainties, Mysteries and doubts’. According to Brooke Hopkins in his article ‘Keats’ “Negative Capability” and Winnicott’s Creative Play’ this need for certainty on the part of Coleridge makes him incapable of seizing truth from the inner recesses of mystery, whether of his own mind or of the external world. It may be said that Coleridge is incapable of creative play, of letting the truth seize him and allowing it to become a part of his being.

- According to Jennifer Wunder this state can be explained if we use Rosicrucian and Masonic explanation. She states that when Keats writes of “Negative Capability,” he is discussing the ability of a “Man of Achievement,” like a “Man of Genius,” who can make an imaginative leap rather than rely solely on “consequitive reasoning.” Those men who insist upon “fact and reason” miss the truths to be grasped by apprehension of the beautiful and the operations of the imagination that may be caught from the “Penetralium of mystery.” Keats’s “Penetralium” is a variation upon “penetralia” which signifies the inner sanctum of a temple. According to Wunder the following interpretation can also be given: the followers of the Rosicrucian doctrine were supposed to find themselves in just the state Keats describes of “uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts” through which they persevered until they gained a sudden insight and “the transfiguring ecstasy ... struggle and opposition – suddenly blossom with the rose of love, harmony and beauty.”
- The state of being ‘**content with half-knowledge**’ suggests the state when one becomes open to whatever sensation may arise.
- Keats states : ‘... **with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration.**’

Brook Hopkins explains the statement in the following manner: the word ‘consideration’ means ‘the act of considering’ or ‘continuous and careful thought’. The state of being in ‘Negative capability’ can only take place when thought and the attendant self-consciousness is obliterated. Only in this condition the individuals are free to lose their habitual orientation towards the world

around them and experience the lack of identity from where 'creation' begins. This state of creativity leads to the experience of an overwhelming sense of beauty which leads a great poet to create beauty in his works.

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