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THE EVOLUTION
OF KEATS'S
STRUCTURAL IMAGERY

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To Suzanne

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Summary

The aim of this study is to trace an evolution and demonstrate its consistent pursuit in the development of Keats's poetry. The introductory chapters explore the influences to which the younger generation of romantic poets was submitted, and define the structural imagery used by their forerunners in some of their major poems. Then the notion of structural imagery is applied to the examination of Keats's works to see if they fit into the general pattern of downward journeying, followed by an ascent, which marked the spirit of many works at the time of the romantic revival. It is assumed that Keats followed the general pattern in the first stage of his creative activity, but that, through an evolution due to some crucial events of his life, he created a new pyramidal structure that could suit his mood and his aesthetic requirements.

The four parts of the book confront the works published by Keats with the theory, and also put to the same test some of those that remained unpublished, as their exclusion can throw some light on the author's critical judgement, which tends to reinforce the present thesis. *Poems 1817* was not expected to offer great coherence, but its study already reveals Keats's attention to down- and upward movements together with astonishing symmetries. The underground journey of *Endymion* stresses the growing dissatisfaction of the poet with the traditional pattern at a time when his awareness of art and architecture suggests new solutions to the artistic mind. The sentimental problems of the year 1818 concur to break the link with previous models and allow Keats to produce the pyramidal structure that will help him to build up his best poems. His original outlook makes him evolve the sonnet pattern into a more suitable medium: the Keatsian ode.

The symmetries linked with the up- and downward movements of the poems are examined, and the point of view offers re-appraisals of some of Keats's masterpieces, and most discussed poems, such as the two versions of "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" or the ode "On a Grecian Urn".

A new spirit seems to invade the last unpublished poems which may, ultimately, have altered the structural imagery; but the untimely end of the poet's life imposes prudence in the conclusion.

Preface

Tracing the evolution of a poet's genius is a fascinating enterprise, especially when, after the many distinguished critics who have dedicated their talent and care to solve the mystery of Keats's creative power, a new light seems to dawn and reveal the consistent changes leading to the successful aesthetic framework of his masterpieces.

Our point of view was determined by a detailed study of the "Ode to a Nightingale" where it appeared that a pyramidal and symmetrical structure was an important element of composition, and placing it in the forefront helped to the understanding of the poet's meaning. Immediately the idea flashed across our mind that something similar existed in other poems as well ("Ode on a Grecian Urn" for instance), and even in the arrangement, choice and ordering of works in Keats's publications (*Poems 1817*). It was but a vague and wild guess at first; but the deeper observation went into the interplay of structures and imagery, of dynamic development and symmetry, the more persuaded we grew of some truth behind the guess. The present book is the fruit of that prolonged work of maturation, as the intention was never to force the poems into forged mould to suit our intent. It little by little appeared that not only individual poems answered the notion of a symmetry or a dynamic pattern of rise and fall, but that the pattern coincided with various moments of Keats's production. Therefore the plan of this study was necessarily bent towards following the chronological order of the poet's activity, and tracing an evolution that might throw some more light on the working of the artist's brains, as Ridley¹ did in his analysis of the changes occurring in the technique of the poetic lines. Sir Sidney Colvin's² attempt at publishing Keats's works chronologically, imperfect as it is, helped greatly to grasp the reality of Keats's downward journeying and, later, elation and pyramidal symmetry in the framework of his poems. The changes that were thus noticeable could not but be

¹ M. R. Ridley, *Keats' Craftsmanship: A Study in Poetic Development* (London: Methuen University Paperbacks, 1963).

² Sidney Colvin, *The Poems of John Keats: Arranged in Chronological Order with a Preface*, 2 vols (London: Chatto & Windus, 1915).

the results of some conscious and deliberate decisions. Therefore we had to refer extensively to the correspondence, which fortunately allows us plenty of insights into the hesitations, eagerness, hopes or despair of Keats's feverish life. And this in turn obliged us to look back in time and find some of the possible influences that may have worked as models upon the imagination of the young poet.

In consequence the reader will find in the introduction an attempt at building up rapidly the background of a certain attitude of the mind among intellectual circles at the turn of the century. We have limited our choice to major poets and works as examples that were undoubtedly known to Keats and could have induced him to adopt the downward journey to the underworld as the dynamic progress of his first works. These samples helped us to define our notion of structural imagery which was the leading thread for our analysis of Keats's various poems. The experience described in the "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" or the "Idiot Boy" reflected, no doubt, a more general trend of thought — mystical creeds or neoplatonism for instance — which we have also alluded to. Then the plan of our book was organized by Keats's poetical production itself. In "Part I" we have tried to be fair to the young poet's unequal beginnings. We knew things could not at that stage fit perfectly into our pre-determined viewpoint. The surprise was rather to find that so much of the material did, and that, if the poet cannot be said to have worked according to a set pattern from the first, plenty of symmetries and falling-rising structures could be detected. The importance of writing sonnets also appeared as a determining factor of future evolution, as the unequal "symmetry" of the poem and its final flight or flourish contradicted the general pattern of fall and rise and unconsciously modelled the Keatsian type of odes.

Endymion was, of course, the greatest attempt of the poet at journeying downward, and at the same time the revelation of a dead end; the pattern contradicted Keats's changing turn of mind. New influences were at work, especially those coming from the arts. "Part II" tries to follow the modification of the poet's perspective, and to link it with his discovery of painting and sculpture, a study that was pursued extensively by Ian Jack¹. But while he traced Keats's works back to their visual sources, we have tried to show that the rules of composition of those arts influenced the methods of composition of the poet. Change of forms supposes a change of spirit too, and, therefore, Keats's biography could not be completely ignored. In fact all sorts of different circumstances concurred to creating the feeling of elation that was to turn the general structure of his poetry upside-down and lead to the pyramidal organization of later works.

¹ Ian Jack, *Keats and the Mirror of Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).

The evolution was ripe when crises broke among the family group of brothers. Six months fevered by severed family affections, bodily exertion, illness and the passage of death could not go by without marking the poet's mind with a tremendous load of determining experiences.

The results appear in the treatment of the poems of winter 1819, dealt with in "Part III". The longer poems betray an important change in their architecture compared with those of the first period. The sonnets also show the poet experimenting within the framework of the various traditional types, and finally rejecting a set pattern felt as too limited and frustrating. But the rejection blossomed into a new form of poems, the "Odes". They appeared to us as the result of Keats exploding the "fetters" of the sonnet: a liberation from the narrow limits of the fourteen-line poem into a larger more fruitful unit, subject to possible extension, that allowed the poet to produce his most endearing masterpieces. The detailed analysis of each ode fills "Part IV", and brings out the deliberate choice of the poet in favour of pyramidal structures in those masterpieces. While the modern criticism of Blackstone¹ and D'Avanzo² explained Keats's imagery as a tendency to produce cyclic, circling or closing-in impressions, clustering within a protective central bower, we have seen it as an architectural framework allowing progress along an ascending or descending line. The central apex becomes the moment of highest and deepest concentration of experience inevitably released by the never-ending flow of life in the course of time. Keats's work is profoundly marked by the natural rhythm of heaving and pitching down, ever advancing seas, of aspiration and breathing out again. The imagery creates that impression and becomes the backbone, the architectural support of the poems, on which all their most subtle inner relations repose.

These beautiful symmetrical shapes are not sustained right to the end of Keats's activity as a poet. Or it might be said that they are retained and preserved latent, while the tone and atmosphere of the poems alter. Whether the change would have affected the symmetrical structure of those poems as well will remain conjectural for obvious reasons. Our conclusion must consequently end on a prudent note, but may throw some new lights on Keats's perduring preoccupations during the period of dire illness of 1820.

All the critics of Keats would agree that there is evolution and very rapid evolution — from "Calidore" or the "Imitation of Spenser" to "Hyperion" and the "Odes". And yet they all find

¹ Bernard Blackstone, *The Consecrated Urn: An Interpretation of Keats in Terms of Growth and Form* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1959).

² Mario Louis D'Avanzo, "Recurrent Metaphors for Poetry in John Keats's Works", Diss. Brown University 1963 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1966).

it difficult to demonstrate a regular progress of Keats's art corresponding to the "regular stepping towards Truth." The pitfalls are sudden and deep in every attempt at framing a satisfactory evolutive process. There is the rejection of Hunt's influence, but the composition of "Isabella" recalls inevitably "The Story of Rimini". The heights of "The Eve of St Agnes" contrast with the abortive "Eve of St Mark". The series of the sonnets evolves towards the Shakespearian form, but this progress is interrupted by reversions towards the Miltonic or Petrarcan models. Finally where does "The Cap and Bells" fit into the fine evolutionary line? Chronologically the unfinished poem should be the crowning work of the poet. But its spirit is so different from the rest of Keats's achievements that it reads like a new start on a parallel course, not to insist on a still different way opened up by the tragedy of *Otho the Great*.

It is difficult to trace, in the quiet, successive — or simultaneous — waves of lyric, epic and dramatic poetry, composed in the short space of four years, a logical development such as to satisfy the student of literature. A smooth curve rising from the first published lines to the authority of the later work can never be drawn for any author. How could it be then, when examining the work of a young man thwarted in his enthusiastic search for beauty and the happiness of love, crushed by the material difficulties of life, the deaths of others and his own weakness of body?

It must be accepted from the first that Keats's complete poetical works present a collection of various attempts at reaching the perfection his critical mind could perceive. Successful pieces can be found side by side with lesser poems at any given period of so brief a career. That is not surprising, and it seems to us that it is not so much in the detailed comparison of each of Keats's poems set in chronological order that the answer to the problem of evolution can be found. This may come later, as a happy confirmation of a general approach and may yield further results. But the study of the broad structure of the different works should be rewarding and will not, we trust, lead us into the inevitable contradictions, the ill-fated *Otho* or the sarcastic "Cap and Bells" are bound to make us stumble on.

In the following chapters all the quotations will be, unless otherwise stated, from

Garrod H. W. *The Poetical Works of John Keats*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958.

Rollins, Hyder E. *The Letters of John Keats 1814-1821*. 2 vols. Cambridge: University Press, 1958.

Introduction

1. Romantic Initiation

With the dawn of Romanticism the overt aim of poetry seems to change; the poet, no longer attached to the elegant and fashionable circles of town society, plays a new role in the life of the nation. He sees his art as being a vital necessity. No longer merely a distinguished and witty entertainment, it takes on a quality of mystery and prophetic depth which exemplifies the new attitude of the artist towards the language and its hidden powers of revelation.

No wonder then that the legendary origins of poetry should be explored anew, and the literary revolution should be coupled with a rediscovery of sources. The poets look away from a society they feel estranged from for political and economical reasons. They could not get enthusiastic over the Parliamentary policy of their country, the failure of the French Revolution's idealistic and generous storm, the rapid growth of poverty and ugliness in industrialized towns and cities. Court life marred by the King's whims and illness could only excite sarcasm and ridicule; politics were inevitably curved towards reaction against the French expansion; practical necessity did not make for grandeur. Commerce and industry could bloom, there was less blossoming and more of squalor in the suburbs. The massacres in France had destroyed a faith in the power of reason to change the world for the better. Therefore idealistic minds could but turn towards the past for Elysian models, in a search for the paradise of origins marked by strong fervour and religious eagerness.

Art, because it can freely reject all dogmas for new ones, tends to replace the religion of a church contaminated by tradition and the worldly problems of hierarchy, social classes and a politically disturbed society. The poet feels he is the priest of a new religion or at least of a new ideal; his creative powers partake of the mystical utterances of oracles, hence the numerous theories about the part played by imagination and inspiration in the creative act of the artist. Also the pictures, often repeated, of the inspired ones with their wild eyes and long, flowing hair, phantom-like creatures haunting the poems of Romantic authors.

All this is linked with the rediscovery of the ancient character of the Celtic *bard* of legends, of the *vates* in classical literatures,

and of the religious and missionary part he plays in Greek and Latin epic poetry. Not far back in time, great religious poems in the English tradition paralleled the classical examples of antiquity and Milton's physical blindness revived the sightless "bard", Great Homer, exploring the world of mankind, seen and unseen. The epic tradition of poetry tends to give artistic expression to theological and cosmological conceptions of man's settlement on earth. The poet explores, through his hero's wanderings the empyrean realms of the gods and the mysterious depths of the underworld where the dead assemble for their endless quest or rest. With Ulysses, Aeneas, Dante's Virgil and Milton's Satan the poets used to "venture down/The dark descent", but contrary to the common mortal man their heroes were endowed with a power "up to re-ascend" with a load of unique knowledge to be imparted to their fellow-creatures. The subterranean voyage on the path to initiation leads to the mission of the poets as messengers of a revelation. It is, however, a "hard and rare" experience, reserved for the chosen ones only, for those capable of translating it so that others may grasp its essential meaning. Such pressure of necessity explains the stress laid on the language in the romantic movement. It also accounts for the feeling of poets and artists that they stand apart from society, as bolders of a truth that the world should become aware of. Through the medium of the language and the artistic, hence ambiguous, use of it, they feel impelled to deliver their message, and like the prophets of all time they find themselves struggling, in their search for a responsive public, against heavy odds of tradition, habit and indifference. The frustrating feeling of being rejected, unheard and misunderstood, is the source of that despondency which is to grow over them all and to be interpreted elsewhere as the "mal du siècle".

This very general outline of an atmosphere that hung over younger generations of poets at the turn of the XVIII-XIXth centuries is exemplified by the procession of outcasts and solitary characters, vagrants and travelling old men — the Convict, the Mad Mother, the Idiot Boy, etc. — who all know so well "what man has made of man"! They all have explored some sort of "dungeon" and discovered the healing power of nature.

Against all common sense Betty Foy¹ trusts in her Idiot Boy to get some help for Old Susan Gale who lies dying in her solitary hut. The haphazard wanderings of the boy renew the convention of the initiating quest that heals and Old Susan "as if by magic cured" joins in the haunting search of the mother for her lost son. But, for

¹ W. Wordsworth, "The Idiot Boy," in Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads: The Text of the 1798 Edition with the Additional 1800 Poems and the Prefaces*, ed. R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones, 2nd ed. rev. (1963; London: Methuen, 1965), 86-101.

him, the opposed characters of night and day are reconciled in a perception of the higher unity of nature:

*"The cock did crow to-who, to-who,
And the sun did shine so cold."* (460-1)

He stands "in his glory" towering on the mule's back above both the anxiety of the women's experience of a hellish night and the bliss of their "merry meeting"! The poor mother and her sick friend after plodding through the dark vale of death awake transported to the highest point of exultation:

*She's happy here, she's happy there,
She is uneasy every where;
Her limbs are all alive with joy.* (399-401)

Meanwhile the chosen one hovers in an absent, contemplative mood; he seems to absorb the life of nature as a whole that is beyond the logic of words and the dissecting power of language. This sort of wise passiveness works in the manner of a miracle. In her obstinate quest the mother's intuition was right. When drinking despair to the full, when "her senses fail", she retraced her steps until she found:

Him whom she loves, her idiot boy. (398)

The mother entreats her son to tell:

*"Where all this long night you have been
What you have heard, what you have seen
And Johnny, mind you tell us true."* (449-51)

She has got an intimation of the close union that must have taken place between her son and the powers of nature, whose result is the miracle of Old Susan being cured. But she is not going to receive any answer except the sybilline lines about the ululating cocks and the cold sun. In Wordsworth the boy is not submitted to the traumatic experience of death — his infirmity places him among those who know the kingdom of heaven — but the mother is. Her mad wandering through the night in search of the mule and her son is an agonizing journey where her anxiety pictures death in every corner of the vale and the moor, and grows with the passing of time to an unbearable climax, even to the sinful thought of committing suicide.

Poor Susan, abandoned dying on her bed, goes through similar pangs of anxiety, but at the same time feels the working of a supernatural force.

*And as her mind grew worse and worse
Her body it grew better. (425-6)*

She finally stands reclaimed from death.

Such quests for odd characters who "know" appear so many times in the *Lyrical Ballads* that it would be trite to insist too much. We cannot, however, pass on without discussing Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner"¹, because here again we have a poem exemplifying the traditional structure of the poet's journey downward towards death and the experience of hell, and his final surging up and renewed appearance among the living. All the imagery used by Coleridge tends to create the atmosphere of death, hell and re-birth. From the very start of the poem the description of the Ancient Mariner evokes a ghost or a mad man; the man's great age, his "long, grey beard", his "skinny hand" and his "glittering eye" with its strange power of fascination make him a creature from another world: what the word *revenant* expresses literally in French. He shows a number of the features attributed by Romanticism to the inspired. Inspiration and madness are allied to imaginative power, and they seem to be perceptible particularly in the length or unkempt condition of the hair, and the lean, often tanned appearance of the body, as if it had been withered and charred by the flames of Hell:

*And thou art long and lank and brown
As is the ribbed Sea-sand. (226-227)*

But the main force is concentrated in the eyes, the open mirror of the soul.

The epithet that recurs and is linked with the "ancient" quality of the character is "bright-eyed", "glittering eye" (or "eyes"), "whose eye is bright". In contrast, the dead crew on the phantom ship look with "stony eyes". Their reproachful stare has marked the mariner with the "curse" of damnation. The "evil looks" of the living are linked with the horrible desperation and finality of death. The curse of the dead leaves one "as dry as dust". The power of the mariner's eye is totally different. It is repeatedly acknowledged by the wedding-guest who stands and listens, mesmerized. In fact the old wanderer is no longer quite a man, but a creature belonging to the apparition Life-in-Death.

The first version of the poem² gave a clear description of Death and Life-in-Death:

¹ S. T. Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," *The Poems of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Including Poems and Versions of Poems Herein Published for the First Time*, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge (1912; London: O. U. P. 1954), 186-209.

² Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere, in Seven Parts," *op. cit.*, 528-546.

*His bones were black with many a crack,
All black and bare, I ween;
Jet-black and bare, save where with rust
Of mouldy damps and charnel crust
They're patch'd with purple and green.*

*Her lips are red, her looks are free,
Her locks are yellow as gold:
Her skin is as white as leprosy,
And she is far liker Death than he;
Her flesh makes the still air cold. (181-190)*

A few lines further the opposition of the two characters is strengthened by the passing of a gust of wind "Thro' the holes of his eyes and the hole of his mouth" (197). The empty orbits of Death contrasts with the "free" looks of Life-in-Death, and the phantom-like mariner partakes of that quality. He is the chosen one who has had a unique experience and is condemned to impart his message to mankind as a penance. Thus his message is a true revelation of his experience, a passage through death. Like Orpheus, like Satan, he has ventured "down the dark descent" and has been permitted by some supernatural will and force "up to re-ascend". After so terrible a voyage he is no longer as he used to be; he cannot be as his fellow-creatures are.

The differences between Wordsworth's and Coleridge's attitudes stand out. The former remains within the limits of an actual landscape and the reality of time. The passage through death is realized dramatically in the mad search and the inward monologues of the women. Coleridge leads us much further through the mazes of imagery to an imaginary purgatory and hell. With the mariner and the crew we are lead to death's door by the storm and the atmosphere pervading the approaches of the Pole.

The imagery of ice introduces a feeling of lethargy in which actual fears tend to merge and diminish as in a fainting-fit. Calm is restored for a time as it often is on a dead man's face, beautified and so restful after his last tormenting hours. The ship seems to escape, but Death is there in the shape of the unnatural crime: "I shot the Albatross." The ship moves on, but the imagery proves that it is only a change for the worse. After the oppressive quietness of the "shroud" of "mist or cloud", the breezes push the vessel and its crew towards damnation and the images recall the archetypal features of Hell: heat and redness. The tantalizing presence of water and torture of thirst, "slimy things" reminders of the serpent of the Fall and the companions of condemned spirits in the abode of the dead, the "Death-fires" and the "witch's oils", all create an original picture of a hellish place that could inspire a painter in the composition of

some representation of Doomsday. In spite of the unexpected setting, Coleridge no doubt has led us to follow him through death's door and explore the places where the dead assemble, and penance or absolution are distributed.

In the first three parts of Coleridge's poem we step through the pangs of agony to the meeting with the forces that finally decide on death. In the fourth part the ship undergoes the transmutation that makes the boat a "Spectre-bark" with a "ghastly crew", surrounded by the silence and solitude of the "rotting Sea" where the loathsome "slimy-things" move and live in their rich attire.

The way back to actual life starts with the recognition of beauty in life itself:

*O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare. (282-283)*

Life is beauty! The discovery of the essential truth leads to the "spring of Love" that justifies the mariner's return to the land of the living and becomes the core of his message to man. This takes place in parts five to seven. He has pierced the veil of appearance, and the apocalyptic storm, with the air bursting "into life", the hectic dance of "fire-flags" and "stars", the blackness of the clouds and torrents of rain, the cold moonlight and the blinding cataract of lightning also evokes the story of chaos and creation when God separated light from darkness. We cannot help thinking of the beginning of Genesis when the earth was without form and void: and "Darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of waters." The ship and the mariner are rejected from the womb of the universe towards the shores they had left.

The return is long and hard. The "swound" and "fit" of approaching death recur. Rebirth is as painful and fearful as death. It is a lonely path and the feeling remains of "a frightful fiend" treading "close behind him". Like Orpheus he "walks on and turns no more his head". Little by little fears mingle with the feeling of a "welcoming" and contact with the actual world is renewed. The break with the underworld is materialized by the sinking of the ship and disappearance of its "ghastly crew". The miraculous escape of the mariner brings him back to "firm land" and an ominous contact with men. It is clear from Coleridge's account that all men are not equally fitted to accept or understand his — and the mariner's — experience. The shock strikes down the pilot "in a fit"; the boy raves in a mad trance. The hermit, however, is capable of bearing the revelation of the mariner's "ghastly tale".

The saintly character of the hermit and the supernatural forces now acting in the mariner are akin. The creative imagination working in the poet has made him aware of the essential truth: the necessity

of love for life, life being beautiful and sacred, in all its varied manifestations.

We have insisted on and developed at length our opinions of Wordsworth's "Idiot Boy" and Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" in order to show that through the imagery the general structure of these long poems revives one of the old features of the tradition of epic poetry, the journey into the underworld or hell.

It may not be out of place here to point briefly to the fact that, the general climate and environment may have prepared the proper atmosphere for the unconscious choice made by the artists, as so often happens in the case of statesmen in a political revolution. A taste for mysterious and secret initiations pervades the XVIIIth century. The foundation and expansion of modern freemasonry throughout the leading nations of Europe reflects a mixture of cold rationalism and the inward need of man for mystery and secrecy. Without being versed in masonic rites, the admirer of Mozart's *Magic Flute* may get some notion of the tests the initiate is supposed to be submitted to. As in all magic or religion he must venture through the symbolic process of destruction of the old man and the regeneration of self. In the opera the purifying experience takes place in the dark vaults of subterranean caverns. The steadfastness required of the new convert must overcome obstacles and dangers, even if he is threatened by death. Then the gates open and the initiate steps firmly out of the caves towards the rays of the sun.

The journey through the maze of dark passages and cellars seem to have also been part of some of the worst practices of the Hell Fire Club, where Black Mass and orgy were celebrated in defiance, but also in imitation, of the highest mysteries of religion.

In his study of the *Hell-Fire Club*, David P. Mannix describes the elaborate artificial caves dug on Dashwood's orders into the bills of his estate at West Wycombe, with a view to suit the Hell-Fire Club's requirement. "The entrance to the caves is shrouded by sepulchral group of tall yews, always associated with death and burial."¹ After depicting in detail the ornamental features of the entrance itself, the vaulted passage-way leading to the heart of the hill and the so-called Robing Room, where the "monks" used to put on blood-red gowns, the author explains that the procession would come to a system of "tangled passage-ways called the catacombs"; guidance was needed "to find the way through there". Then they would reach the Banqueting Hall.

This place, however, was not the final stage in this underworld labyrinth. The true parody of religious initiation took place in the Triangle where "no ordinary visitors were ever allowed". It was the

¹ Daniel P. Mannix, *The Hell-Fire Club*, 10th ed. (1961; London: New English Library, 1970), 90.

deepest part of the excavation, two passages dividing, then turning sharply and rejoining to form a triangle. After the womb of the Banqueting Hall it was another significant sexual symbol.

"Beyond the Triangle, a river runs across the passageway. At the time of the monks, this river was so wide it could only be crossed by a boat which was kept moored to the bank for this purpose. The brothers called it 'The River Styx'. Beside the river is a well sunk deep into the chalk and called 'The Cursing Well'. It is filled with what the monks called 'unholy water' and here the initiate was baptized. After crossing the river by boat, the brothers then went down a short passage into the 'Inner Temple' — a circular room in the very deepest part of the hill. Here the Black Mass was celebrated and a solemn sacrifice made to the devil of the virginity of the young girl lured into the cave system. Wilkes, who was later allowed to partake of these ceremonies after his return from France, wrote: 'A village maiden said good-bye to her innocence when she visited the Inner-Temple.'¹

The whole pattern, constructed at great cost for the secret enjoyment of the blasphemous brotherhood of the Club parodies the usual initiative structure: symbols of death, underground voyage, labyrinth of forgetfulness, passage across the "Styx", finally the sacrifice of virginity leading to new life in the "blisses" of pleasure.

The development of the Gothic novel in the last decades of the XVIIIth century owes much to such examples, whether true or imagined by fancy from all the prattle that must, no doubt, have been going on about the scandalous club of Sandwich, and to the spreading power of masonic lodges.

What is important for our demonstration is the general attitude of the age, and the pattern of initiation rites which seems to have been retained and re-interpreted by artists and writers. For them the unique experience of travelling away from the world of illusions to the discovery of some superior knowledge is no introduction into the brotherhood of those in search of power or unlimited licentiousness, it becomes a personal awakening and revelation, linked with the unselfish desire of spreading the new dogmas far and wide.

The passage through death is the necessary initiation that gives the poet his deeper experience of a truth to be attained, places him on a level with a priest and justifies his activity as the revealing agent of a sacred message. That attitude is, in fact, the basic element that allows Romanticism to be considered as a *revolution* or a *revival* in literature and thought, and it has influenced artistic production down to our present century. D. H. Lawrence wrote to Katherine Mansfield after the death of her brother killed on the western front on Dec. 20, 1915: "Do not be sad. It is one life which is passing away

¹ Mannix, *op cit.*, 91.

from us, one 'I' is dying, but there is another coming into being, which is the happy, creative you. I knew you would have to die with your brother; you also go down into death and be extinguished. But for us there is a rising from the grave, there is a resurrection, and a clean life to begin from the start, new and happy."¹

Of course, as Maud Bodkin² has shown, the pattern of tidal ebb towards death through a "night voyage", followed by a re-birth, is an archetype common to the whole tribe of the human race which can be traced by psychologists into the unartistic manifestations of dreams. But if the archetypal pattern may appear as a subconscious element in the works of poets, it may also become the basic material of their creations and determine the aesthetic choice and the formal architecture of their compositions. The artist cannot come into being without that fundamental experience, and the romantics created all sorts of characters to translate their own quest for self revelation. They assume the shapes of old, solitary, disquieting figures, for ever wandering and dispensing, as they go, deep thoughts about life and its true sources and meaning. Sometimes old age is replaced by exotic features; great distance assumes the dimension of time elapsed. An example of this is Coleridge's Abyssinian maid in "Kubla Khan",³ who, in exalted dance and music, reminds one of an inspired Maenad. To the poet himself she recalls the "romantic chasm" into which he ventured to explore the caverns "measureless to man" and "caves of ice": again the imagery of the vale of Death. The artist then appears as the great magician strikingly akin to the Ancient Mariner with his "flashing eyes" and the "holy dread" he inspires. Like the heroes of old he has been admitted into the secrets and abode of the gods, and been feasted at their table with hydromel and given a touch of immortality.

*For he on honey-dew hath fed
And drunk the milk of Paradise. (53-54)*

Some may object to the interpretation of "he" as the poet. Yet it seems that Coleridge, confronted with the shattered vision of his dream unfolds the ideal relation that should exist between the readers and the artist:

¹ Nariman Hormasji, *Katherine Mansfield: An Appraisal* (Auckland: Collins Bros, 1967), 27.

² Maud Bodkin, *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry: Psychological Studies of Imagination* (1934; London: O. U. P., 1971).

³ Coleridge, "Kubla Khan", *op. cit.*, 295-298.

... with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! Those caves of ice!
And all who heard should see them there. (45-48)

At the same time, the disquieting character of the inspired one with his power of creation and illusion frightens the ordinary man, who suddenly notices the searching look and dishevelled hair. Fearful of being embarked on the poet's journey of possibly devilish exploration, he retreats and exorcises the magician ("Weave a circle round him thrice") with eyes shut, so as to escape his ascendancy. It is the poet's courage to taste the intoxication of "boney-dew" and "milk of Paradise". Maud Bodkin, through her psychological approach of poetry, reaches the same conclusion.¹

Again "Christabel"² shows the poet himself endowed with priest-like powers and attributes. Bracy, the Bard, is the only one at Sir Leoline's court to have an intimation of the true nature of Geraldine, apart from her innocent and powerless victim. "Warned by a vision", while he rests, he is aware of the menace threatening Christabel's life. Imagination, working in the passivity of sleep is the source of his revelation, and inspiration using the sacred language of poetry makes him the priest of a high rite of purification:

"... I vowed this self-same day
With music strong and saintly song
To wander through the forest bare,
Lest aught unholy loiter there." (560-563)

It is a vain attempt on his part, thwarted by the aged haron himself, whose eyes enthralled by the beauty of Geraldine cannot pierce appearance. The poet alone is the seer; the world cannot see. Both the Christian and pagan traditions have repeatedly acknowledged the fact: "Eyes have they, but they see not" (Psalms 105,5). For the ordinary man sayings are but words, not truth. Sir Leoline may repeat: "Each matin bell/Knells us back to a world of death," he does not understand the true meaning of the utterance. His statement is no experience.

This consideration, however, brings us back to the general imagery of the whole poem which drives us again towards the world of the dead and a meeting with a Geraldine, strangely akin, in the first part (dated 1797), to Life-in-Death and in the second part, written three years later to Lamia. The "Lady from a far countrée" exercises the powers of seduction and fascination that belong to the explorers

¹ Bodkin, *op cit.*, 94.

² Coleridge, "Christabel", *op. cit.*, 213-236.

of the underworld, and when she drank "the wild-flower wine", "Her fair large eyes 'gan glitter bright".

Some of the theories which were debated in intellectual circles at the end of the XVIIIth century, and were very influential among artists, have been revealed by Kathleen Raine in her study of Blake's works.¹ Her detailed analysis of "The Little Girl Lost" and "The Little Girl Found", in terms of a regeneration of the myth of Demeter and Persephone, interprets convincingly the going to sleep of Lyca as the soul entering the material world, a death in fact, waiting for the earth to "arise and seek / For her maker meek" in some future stage of evolution. Such attitude derives from the teaching of neoplatonist enthusiasts such as Thomas Taylor whose books were highly successful at the end of the XVIIIth century and contributed to tint the background values of artists and poets throughout the Romantic revival. The importance of a desire for syncretism during the age of Enlightenment trying to reconcile neoplatonicism, alchemy and the Kabbalah, inherited from the Renaissance period, has been explored by Désirée Hirst in her book *Hidden Riches*.² Religious enthusiasm in England as well as intellectual speculation and artistic imagination were stimulated to new life by such attempts at preserving old eastern and Greek ways of interpreting the mysteries of the worlds of spirit and matter, and reconciling them with the Christian theological tradition. The fall of Adam and Eve, the meaning of death and resurrection, the harrowing of hell by Christ, are in a way given new strength in "the myth of the soul which 'descends' from an eternal world or state, undergoes experience and suffering in the world of generation, and returns at last to her native purity. The figure of the soul is symbolized in a series of female figures, each a little more complex than the last — Thel, Lyca, Oothon, Vala and Jerusalem. All these experience descent, suffering, and return."³

If the studies just quoted lead to an appreciation of Blake's sources of inspiration, their conclusions are also valid to describe the general atmosphere and tone of the vivid intellectual activity behind artistic production at the end of the XVIIIth and the beginning of the XIXth century. And if it was true of the first generation of Romantic poets, the notion can be extended to the second who did not ignore their forerunners, even though they tried to escape their patronizing influences.

¹ Kathleen Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, 2 vols. (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1969), I, 126.

² Désirée Hirst, *Hidden Riches: Traditional Symbolism from the Renaissance to Blake* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1964).

³ Raine, *op. cit.*, I, 67.

2. Structural Imagery

These examples from the works of the leading influences in poetry at the beginning of the XIXth century show that in their greatest poems the authors were working on a basically identical canvas: that of the ancient legend of the voyage to the Kingdom of Hades. This is what we call *structural imagery*. We take imagery to be a combination of meaning and forms. The sensory perceptions caused by the language bring out, through their concentration, archetypal echoes in the reader's imagination. These can be arranged in sequences so as to form the architectural backbone of the poem. Thus the vagrant journeying of the Idiot Boy's mother through night and over heaths is supported by an imagery which gives the lines their deep underlying meaning and structure, from earth to hell and back to earth again. It is difficult to sever the effect produced in the reader's mind by imagery from the poet's vision which led to the use of imagery in the apparently direct narrative. But the poet, consciously or not, builds up the architecture of his work on the simplified sketch of lines drawn by the suggestions of words, far more than on the consecutive logic of a story. Image clusters have a function of "tone-setters, structural devices, and symbols", as Norman Friedman expresses it.¹

Classification of such imagery, however, is not enough. Indeed imagery is an essential part of the structure of the poem, that is to say of its definite pattern of organization; and, at the same time, it is the poet's way of perceiving an order in his experience of life, which he tries to translate. Both aspects are inseparable; the former reflects the latter. Thus by "structural imagery" we mean what is a determinant factor of composition. The recurrence of clusters of images, their oppositions, their symmetrical reappearance in a poem, seem to establish the basic architecture supporting the work, be it narrative, lyrical or dramatic. The literal, immediately apparent meaning of a poem must not be ignored, of course; but the underlying structural imagery is an important artistic element in the interactions of impressions, suggestions, remembrances, discords and harmonies that concur to the impact of a piece of work on the reader. It is part of the material

¹ Norman Friedman, "Imagery", *Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 361.

used by the poet. Thanks to its evocative and informing qualities it aims at making form and imagery a coherent whole concurring to the final perfection of the work. "Far from being itself a unifying form, it must be unified along with all the other elements of a poem."¹ Therefore it should be understood that images suggesting structures (in the sense defined above) cannot be studied independently of the formal architecture of the poem, with its patterns of symmetry or asymmetry. The following chapters will offer evidence of both types, and also disclose their subtle interplay. They will, of necessity, require considerations of a technical aspect.

In the works considered in the previous chapter, the structural imagery re-enacts the exploration of the world of death, in order to understand life better. We sink with the poets into a "swound", a fascination, where the chill of death is only relieved by some heat from hell; finally we emerge out of the trance, and the revelation either gives us hope, or prolongs our perplexity or sense of distress. The curve, the structural line sustaining the whole poem, sweeps mainly down, with a rise at the end if the movement is complete.

It is complete in Wordsworth's "Idiot Boy"; it is in Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner". The same downward and upward journey recurs in "Kubla Khan", though we seem to have only a sketch of what the poem could have been. The three years that separate "Christabel" parts I and II² certainly weigh on the unity of the general scheme; but the meeting of Christabel and the "lady strange", her destroyer, contradicts the seemingly upward movement at the beginning of the poem, speaking of May and Spring that "comes slowly up this way".

Instead of being led to the sojourn of the dead Christabel introduces Geraldine, the woman shape of Death, into her father's castle. But their progress meets with the same sorts of difficulties and symbolic obstacles as any other equivalent of Ulysses' descent to the Underworld. Their steps strive "to be, but [are] not fast"; they pass over the water: "They crossed the moat", as the dead of old were led over Acheron, and drank forgetfulness from Lethe. And it is Coleridge's originality and stroke of genius that ironically makes Geraldine experience the pangs of agony when she enters the world of the living.

*The lady sank, belike through pain,
And Christabel with might and main
Lifted her up, a weary weight,
Over the threshold of the gate. (129-132)*

¹ Friedman, 869.

² Coleridge, "Christabel", *op. cit.*, 213-236.

In spite of the apparent reversal of situations and ambiguity of life and death, we then know we are in the kingdom of the dead. Sir Leoline's old age and his mastiff's decrepitude concord with the silence, stillness and "moonshine cold" that fill the place. The ladies steal through the hall where "the brands were dying". The whole castle is "as still as death". Christabel's room prefigures that of Keats's Madeline in the "Eve of St Agnes". But while the latter's is a gorgeous shrine of warm colours, delicate and fragrant food and wine, the fitting scenery for the accomplishment of love and life, in Christabel's "the silver lamp burns dead", and the place is already haunted by her mother's ghost, which even confronts Geraldine in a vain attempt to protect her orphan daughter. However she is twice bidden "off" and Geraldine's true character is revealed; she can the bodiless dead espy". And the terrifying nature of her body springs out when her robe drops to the ground and she lies down in bed beside Christabel.

*And in her arms the maid she took
Ah, well-a-day! (263-264)*

Part I ends on the ambiguous feeling that Death has touched her victim, but Christabel does not actually die. The conclusion prolongs the suspense as "the lady Christabel / Gathers herself out of her trance", feels the blood "tingle in her feet", and clings to the hope that she is in the company of "her guardian spirit".

With Part II we wake up in the morning with the bell "that knells us back to a world of death" (333). Can the statement be more explicit right at the beginning of the passage? Like the Mariner, Christabel is going to speak the truth of her experience, which will cause her to be destroyed. Ghosts are powerless; so was her mother's. It is clear that so long as Geraldine is present we cannot rise back to the world of the living. The chosen one, the inspired one, Bracey is not listened to either. All attempts at renovating life are vain; the love that warms the heart and limbs of old Sir Leoline is but an illusion. Geraldine puts on a character that was not revealed in Part I: that of a lamia, the destroying serpent of sin.

*A snake's small eye blinks dull and sly;
And the lady's eyes they shrunk in her head,
Each shrunk up to a serpent eye. (583-5)*

Therefore the full structural imagery of the returning path back from the kingdom of the dead is not fully achieved in the added portion of the poem. In spite of the fact that Sir Leoline seems to dismiss death, abandoning the body of his dear daughter, and dismissing the warning voice of Bracey as well, his sudden energy

sounds folly and blindness in an old man, as he sails out with Geraldine, no true lover, but a new prey for her greediness.

On the whole, however, the structural imagery of the poem is once again that of a descent to the kingdom of Death, then an attempt to return to the land of the living, which expires with something of the frustration of Eurydice. What is important from our point of view is that the same general scheme should be there again as the backbone of each important work in turn, allowing all sorts of variety in themes and characters, but retaining the imagery that impresses the reader with a sense of journeying with the poet to the discovery of the mysteries of life, death and after life.

It is interesting to note that some of Wordsworth's philosophical poems preserve the same pattern, though the notion that "The Child is Father of the Man" ("The Rainbow") seems to imply a reversal of the structural line, and an ascent from infancy to the higher medium of the adult state. But it is just the outward appearance of a deeply rooted pattern. All that is valuable in the man — the "natural piety" which makes him respond to the beauty of nature — is present in the child. There is the fear that when he grows old he will lose this. And the famous "Ode on Intimations of Immortality"¹ depicts the passage of man on earth as a "fall". From the ill-defined regions whence man's soul has come to be incarnated and fulfil some human destiny, that portion of the universal mind experiences a loss that leads the poet to the desperate questioning of the first version of the poem:

*Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?* (IV, 21-2)

In the full enjoyment of natural beauty the poet feels exiled from the blisses that were. What is left is but a pale reflection of what was:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting. (V, 1)

The path goes down from childhood to maturity, which is shown, paradoxically as a state of spiritual impotence:

The things which I have seen I now can see no more. (1, 9)

It is redeemed however through the power of memory which it is one's duty to preserve. It keeps "the heritage"; it is the "Eye among the blind / That, deaf and silent, read[s] the eternal deep" (VIII, 5-6).

Exiled on earth, lost among the labyrinthine and endless lanes of "misgivings", "those shadowy recollections" are "the fountain light" that allows the presence of life on earth, — we are tempted to write

¹ Matthew Arnold, *Poems of Wordsworth* (1879; London: Macmillan & Co., 1946), 201-208.

Life-on-Earth. "In darkness lost, the darkness of the grave" man gropes, trying desperately through the visions of his memory to step on with more confidence towards the end of his "toiling" and find an immortality.

It may be argued that the image summing up Wordsworth's philosophic attitude is not the curving line going down and up again, but rather a horizontal one. His prophetic insight into the past and future is more melancholy and less dramatic than that of the previous examples we have chosen.

*Hence in a season of calm weather,
Though inland far we be,
Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither,
Can in a moment travel thither,
And see the children sport upon the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.* (IX, 33-39)

In spite of the sea-imagery however, we maintain our point of view, as the general feeling transmitted by the "Ode" is one of fall, loss, leading in stanza VIII to a cluster of images of toil between lines 9 and 21: "darkness of the grave", "slave", "pain", "yoke", "strife", "earthly freight", "weight", heaviness and cold ("heavy as frost") all linked with the pictures of death and the labour of hell. The passage contrasts with the lovely pictures of nature and childhood full of gaiety and life which explode in the first stanzas and again bring the poem to its confident conclusion.

The thing becomes still more evident if we consider the "Ode" in its chronological creation — stanzas I-IV having been written four years before V-XI. So it is composed of two separate poems linked together by an identical theme haunting the poet's mind. While the first poem expressed the feeling of separation from the beauty of nature experienced by the author, the estrangement seems to be attributed to the flow of time:

The things which I have seen I now can see no more. (I, 9)

The beauty, gaiety and "jollity" of earth exist, but the poet's despondency does not allow him to partake of it fully. There is a slight fall in the first two stanzas, an unexplained flaw, "there hath past away a glory from the earth".

Yet the next two stanzas express a wilful rise towards a recognition of the exuberant life of nature. The despondency is dismissed as a personal and individual feeling of dejection:

To me alone there came a thought of grief. (III, 4)

But if there is a fall followed by a rise in the structure, the pessimistic conclusion puts the final weight on the discouraging thought that something "is gone" for ever.

The second poem is an extension of the first, answering the anxious questions at the end of stanza IV, and this time the poet follows with a firm stride the down- and upward path that we have already described. He no longer speaks of himself "alone", but of man's fate. Stanza VIII becomes the central passage of the added poem, and as shown above its imagery plunges the reader deep into the atmosphere of death and painful labouring. This is the truth of man's actual life on earth. Life, as we commonly talk about it, is but a "semblance". The uneasy questioning of the first poem has led the poet on the way to an initiation of his own. It is now his duty to destroy the illusion and bring revelation to man. As shown at the beginning of stanza VIII, he knows the truths of the "soul's immensity", the "eternal deep", "eternal mind", the existence of "immortality" and "heaven-born freedom". But all these are revealed to the "Prophet" and "Seer"; they are not immediately perceptible to man.

In stanza VIII we are therefore at the bottom of the pit. Stanzas V-VII have led us there from that "elsewhere", guessed by the poet as the place where the great soul of the universe lives in the full glory of light and truth. The spark from it, with which we were born, allows the child to enjoy "heaven", still lying "about us in our infancy". But the "shades of the prison-house" soon make the flow of "celestial light" in stanza I dwindle and "fade", and finally "die away".

In stanza VI Earth does her best to proffer "pleasures of her own". By displaying maternal cares for the material and corporeal needs of man, she makes him "Forget the glories he hath known".

Stanza VII is dedicated to an ironical description of the infant growing into a man. The irony of the passage is important, because from the point of view of the structural imagery of the lines, it emphasizes the fall of man through his education, while the natural growth from youth to manhood seems to imply a regular stepping upward and not what it really is, a steady descent from the "shades of the prison-house" to the "darkness of the grave".

This phrase marks the middle of the second poem, that is between stanzas V and XI of the "Ode". And with stanza IX some sort of hope again appears and lights up the path towards a conviction of immortality, the immortality out of which we were wrenched, as it were, to spend some time on earth. Characteristically images of light mark every step of the poem from then onward.

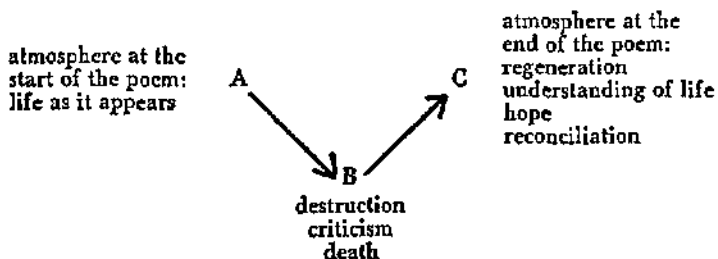
*O joy! that in our embers
Is something that doth live. (IX, 1-2)*

The last gleam of the fire can be rekindled. Though it is but a

vacillating flame of "obstinate questionings", "blank misgivings" and "shadowy recollections", it is acknowledged as "the fountain light of all our day". The full "radiance" can never be fully regained. But life is restored in stanza X owing to the poet's perception of the truth behind the material aspects of nature and human activity. He has reached the stage of a philosophic "faith that looks through death". He can therefore exult in the final stanza at "The innocent brightness of a new-born Day" and the mighty presence of material earth; "Fountains, Meadows, Hills and Groves", work for the unity of nature and the human heart under the protection of that "eye/That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality". Though melancholy still lingers through these three last stanzas, we cannot but be aware of a more optimistic outlook and the feeling of reconciliation which springs from it. Though the life of man necessarily leads towards death, it is not a fall for Wordsworth, but a passage towards the total immersion into the supreme unity of the universe, when he shall see light in its glory.

The previous examples have served to show that the structural imagery used by the influential poets of the Romantic revival reveals a common attitude. The pattern is repeated in poems widely different in form and subject. The poet means to lead his readers towards a deeper understanding of their human condition; the path to initiation leads them downward to the humbling experience of man's mortality before they can rise again and, with more confident steps, stride upward to find some light, some confidence, some truth concerning life and real existence.

A diagram summarizing the impressions created by the imagery and representing the dynamic structure of the poems would place points A and C, showing the beginning and end of a piece of poetry respectively, on the same level, while, mid-way between them, point B, representing the middle part of the poem, would appear at a lower level. The line joining A, B and C, expressing the progress of the poem, would slant down from A to B and up from B to C. Thus:



All this may well appear as rough generalization. And yet we are confident such generalization may yield positive results when scrutinizing the work of a poet whose brief life and productive activity

challenges all minute analysis and involves the scholar in endless contradictions. Such method will help us to demonstrate the changes that occurred in Keats's attitude to his art and poetry, and direct our steps in our attempt to trace an evolution in his artistry and craftsmanship.

The second generation of romantic poets could not have the same experience of life as that of their forerunners. Keats was born after the days of enthusiasm for the French Revolution, after the days of terror in Paris. When he grew old enough to take an interest in his and other countries' politics, such events were things of the past, no longer compelling excitement, but already cold history. The youthful enthusiasms of his generation stood rebuked by the reactionary spirit that was born in defence of England against the conquering forces of the new Empire on the Continent. Keats was twenty when Napoleon was defeated and Europe thought the monarchies of old could be restored. Such an environment was bound to have an influence on the general spirit of the time and its illustrators, the artists. The depressing curve we have tried to describe as underlying the general structure of poems corresponds to the disillusionment of poets who had seen their faith in man thwarted, but did not want to accept defeat.

*Have I not reason to lament
What man has made of man?*

— pursued to its final conclusions this cannot but end in suicide. But disappointment could only be considered momentary. Some sort of issue had to be found. The archetypal journey leading through destruction of the body or actual life to regeneration, hope or truth, offered a simple and powerful pattern the artists could use as a basis for their visionary interpretation of reality.

In spite of the different context of their world the younger Romantics were full of admiration for the new school of poetry that had broken openly with the traditions of the previous century. It was natural that they should imitate its most representative figures and be impressed by their teaching. Censure would come later. First their own genius was to be tried according to the models that had just proved able to "charm the ear of evening fair" and sit "in [the] western halls of gold" of Apollo ("To Apollo"). In the first stages of his development Keats's admiration for Wordsworth and, at the same time, for the Elizabethans is well-known. One of the earliest known letters (20 Nov. 1819, To Haydon)¹ contains the sonnet "Great spirits now on Earth are sojourning" celebrating:

¹ Rollins, no. 11, J, 117.

*He of the Cloud, the Cataract the Lake
Who on Helvellyn's summit wide awake
Catches his freshness from Archangel's wing.*

His youthful enthusiasm concludes:

Listen awhile ye Nations, and be dumb!

Such admiration could not go without a desire to follow in his models' steps, and, given Keats's intuition and critical mind, some, at least, of the aesthetic principles underlying Wordsworth's creations must have been clear to the young poet.

Therefore our intention was to explore Keats's main productions and see whether in his poems we could find traces of the structural imagery we have described as recurring in the works of Wordsworth and Coleridge, whether Keats rejected it as he rejected Wordsworth's "egotism" and whether this method could lead us to discover an evolutionary line in the poet's brief career. Such was the leap. The rest of this book will try to convince the reader that some insight into the working of Keats's mind could be gained that way. But the mere examination of up and down movements in Keats's poems expanded in the course of the study to include the complementary elements of symmetry that were born of the oppositions of descent and ascent, or of the pyramidal structure developed in a later stage. The detailed analysis of such features of poetical techniques seemed necessary to reveal fully the conscious efforts of the poet to compose works whose artistry could be compared to the building up of plastic or architectural masterpieces. In this Keats surpasses his models. This is no new discovery, but it stands out in a perspective that former criticism has overlooked.

The consciousness and description of the mastery of the form of Keats's works reinforced our conviction that the choices of dynamic structures symmetrically arranged for aesthetic purposes were fundamentals of his art. But our intention was never to "dissect" and "murder", but rather enhance the beauty of the works and try to find the reasons at the back of the evolution from descending-ascending patterns to elation and fall. Logically a study of Keats's ideas, best exposed in his correspondence, could help to approach and perhaps solve the problem. A permanent dialogue started in a counterpoint of poems and letters. It resulted in establishing some unexpected relations between the form of the works and the biographical events of the four "living years", particularly in connection with the hopes and frustrations of the ardent young poet.

The reader will be led the same way as we were, once the main notion of structural imagery had become the guiding thread of our reflections. Our ambition always remained to be true to the author

and his work and to avoid forcing him into some preconceived mould; also to preserve, and if possible, to unfold before the student's eyes more beauties from Keats's poetry. The reader will judge through the following chapters of this book whether the attempt can be called successful.

PART I

The Quest for Patterns
in *Poems 1817*

3. "I stood tip-toe..."

In 1817 Keats published his first collection of *Poems*. It offered the reader what Keats considered his first successful attempts. Some of them are difficult to date; they may go back to 1814. It is the case of the "Imitation of Spenser" which, Finney thought, belonged to the first months of the year 1814.¹ A large portion of the book is made up of sonnets, twenty-one in all.

If, now, we examine these poems in the light of the structural imagery we have tried to define above, there is no doubt Keats appears as a beginner. From the point of view of the dynamics of poetry there was a wisdom in the attitude of Coleridge and Wordsworth; structural imagery fitted the popular epic poetry they advocated, the ballad form based on some legendary story. Wordsworth had proved in his *Ode* that the form could be applied to lyrical and even philosophical poems as well. The down- and upward journey provided progressive pulsation to their poems.

In his first publication Keats immediately reveals what is going to be a considerable difficulty for him to overcome: his imagery is static and does not provide scope for an evolutionary process as the voyage through death did for his predecessors; "I stood tip-toe", one of the best poems of the volume, is a good example of it. The young poet's imagery is rooted in the ground; his imagination explores the earth; he sticks to the tangible delights provided by nature. Therefore he must needs experience some difficulty in his desire to move on. Hence the long list of beauties and "blisses" (54) that inform the poem. Enjoying to the full "this fair world" and the presence of "all its gentle livers" (117), it is hard for him to reach a lower or a higher sphere than this "fair paradise of Nature's light" (126). In fact there is no profound reason for him to face the test of death or destruction in order to be initiated into a higher or deeper truth. Indeed from the very first lines we feel that this life is good enough for him. From the eminence of the "little hill" (1) he can "peer about upon variety" (16) passing from the "cooling" air (2) to the "sweet buds" (3) and

¹ C. L. Finney, *The Evolution of Keats's Poetry*, 2 vol. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. P., 1936), I, 27-33.

the "clouds" "pure and white" (8) "on the blue fields of heaven" (10), from the "horizon's crystal air" (17) to the "fresh woodland alley" (20). All is fresh and clear and the poet feels "light and free" (23), "light-hearted" (25). There is an astonishing concentration of words evoking freshness and clearness in those twenty-eight first lines of the poem. The air, the streams and the wood are the three elements described, and they suggest such epithets as "cooling" (2), "fresh" (9 and 20), "starry" (6), "pure", "white" (8), "crystal" (17), "leafy" (21). "The clear brook" (9), "the leaves" (11), "the shades", "the green" (14), "the woodland alley" (20), "the bowery clefts and leafy shelves" (21), "the jaunty streams" (22), "the fanning wings" (24), all concur to "refresh" (22) the atmosphere, just as the "starry diadems" (6), "the clouds" "pure and white" (8) in the "blue fields of heaven" (10), "the clear brook" (9) and the "crystal air" (17) recreate the lightness and transparency of regenerating spring. All conduce to an impression of paradise and perfection such as must fully satisfy the heart.

More than half the poem lingers about that "world of blisses" (54) full of fragrant and colourful impressions of flowers, or shady nooks with the "quaint mossiness of aged roots" (40). The "springhead of clear waters" (41) with its "rushy banks" (62) and "swarms of minnows" (72) offers a cool mirror to the "luxury of sunny beams" (74) or the "gradual swim" of the moon (114) "coming into the blue with all her light" (115). Such are the ingredients that make "the sage or poet write" (125). The ecstasy produced by the spell of natural environment rouses the artist's sensibility to poetic creation. In turn poetry will re-create the enchantment and paradisiacal atmosphere:

*In the calm grandeur of a sober line,
We see the waving of the mountain pine;
And when a tale is beautifully staid,
We feel the safety of a hawthorn glade:
When it is moving on luxurious wings,
The soul is lost in pleasant smotherings:
Fair dewy roses brush against our faces,
And flowering laurels spring from diamond vases;
O'er head we see the jasmine and sweet briar,
And bloomy grapes laughing from green attire;
While at our feet, the voice of crystal bubbles
Charms us at once away from all our troubles:
So that we feel uplifted from the world,
Walking upon the white clouds wreath'd and curl'd.*

(127-140)

Therefore, if the beauty of nature is the source of poetic inspiration, poetry appears as the means of renewed ecstatic emotion. It is

the same attitude as Wordsworth's in his search for memories of past experiences, and Coleridge's in the last portion of "Kubla Khan"¹:

*Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song,
To such deep delight 'twould win me,
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air...*

The powerful incantation and magic of the verse justifies the poet's achievements. In its turn it stimulates men's sensitiveness and builds up an imaginary world of reinforced sensations.

This passage, it is worth noting, constitutes the middle part of that poem of 242 lines. It is preceded by a full list of natural beauties of the clear, fresh atmosphere of spring blossoming into the warmth of summer. Nothing is absent of what may be pleasant to the senses and belonging to the four elements — the vegetation of earth, the waters running everywhere, the air with light, fleeting clouds, the warmth of "sunny beams / Temper'd with coolness" (74-5). Nothing unpleasant mars "the fair paradise of Nature's light" (126). And the static descriptions are intertwined with the moving arabesques of life. The "bush of May flowers" (29) hums with the bees; "clear waters" babble (41-2); "sweet peas" are metamorphosed into butterflies: "on tip-toe for a flight / With wings of gentle flush o'er delicate white" (57-58); and the exquisite flower on its slender stem assumes its symbolic and sensuous role as ornament for brides and wedding days. The chastity of "gentle flush o'er delicate white" (58) prepares the meeting of hands or amorous embrace and exchange of rings of lines 59-60:

*And taper fingers catching at all things,
To bind them all about with tiny rings.*

"Ring-dove's cooings" (64) add to the idyllic atmosphere. Unexpected, but how remarkably described, the "swarms of minnows" (72) introduce animal life in the liquid element and their quiet presence foreshadows the silvery apparition of the moon in the pure sky (113-115). "Goldfinches" (87) "in a wanton freak" (90) display their coat of bright feathers, and introduce "the soft rustle of a maiden's gown" (95). The girl passes, nimble as a fairy, and just sufficiently real to fulfil the "innocence of thought" (100) and awakening sensuality of adolescent love.

Nature and imagination are alive guessing at "the leap / Of buds into ripe flowers" (110-111) and kept on the alert even by "the flitting / Of diverse moths" (111-112).

¹ "Kubla Khan", 42-46.

Remarkably observed as these pieces of descriptive poetry are, they remain a mosaic of impressions without any particular effort at gradation. The middle part of the poem, establishing the "dear delights / Of this fair world" (116-7) as the "Maker of sweet poets" (116), and then reversing the process to make poetry the creator of charms powerful enough to lift us from the world, is a transition justifying the existence of myths and explaining their growth. The ecstatic feeling of elation allows the poet to understand the true nature of the world and reveal it through the artistry of mythical tales, born from the enchanting powers of the earth.

Thus Keats briefly evokes the poet experiencing the myth of Psyche:

*... how Psyche went
On the smooth wind to realms of wonderment. (141-2)*

The discovery of the soft quality of "rustle through the trees" (154) made one pull the "boughs aside" (151) and he peopled the "forest wide" (152) with Fawns and Dryads. Syrinx appears, fleeing from "Arcadian Pan"; and one is tempted to think that Mallarmé and Debussy may have read Keats's lines:

*Poor nymph, — poor Pan, — how he did weep to find,
Naught but a lovely sighing of the wind
Along the reedy stream; a half heard strain,
Full of sweet desolation — balmy pain. (159-62)*

Narcissus and Echo follow bringing back the feelings of freshness and clarity, creating symmetry with the first half of the poem:

*... a clearer pool
Than e'er reflected in its pleasant cool
The blue sky. (167-169)*

The enumeration of Greek myths ends with the intimation of the great poem Keats was already dreaming of writing: *Endymion*. Here again the list of myths does not respect a progression from thwarted love (Pan; Narcissus) to love fulfilled (Psyche; Endymion). The enumeration seems due to immediate inspiration, except for Endymion who had to come last, of course, as the long poem might have started there and then, if Keats had not been hesitant about his talent.

*Was there a Poet born? — but now no more
My wand'ring spirit must no further soar. (241-2)*

Where parallelism or symmetry appears is in the quality of

freshness and the clear atmosphere of the second half of the poem. It would be vain to go any further into exact correspondence. The love myths necessarily introduce some sort of spleen that was absent from the first part, and thus the poem moves on. But the concluding passage is evocative of a calm, restrained, almost solemn type of love. It corresponds to the atmosphere of the setting sun:

The evening weather was so bright, and clear. (215)

It has nothing of the feverish passion of *Venus tout entière d sa proie attachée*.¹ The cheerful gathering of men and women is submitted to the breezes "ethereal, and pure" (221); "it cool'd their fever'd sleep" (223).

*Soon they awoke clear eyed: nor burnt with thirsting,
Nor with hot fingers, nor with temples bursting. (225-226)*

Here, there is no trace of Coleridge's "Woman wailing for her demon-lover"², or the wild dances of inspired maenads.

*Young men, and maidens at each other gaz'd
With hands held back, and motionless, amaz'd
To see the brightness in each other's eyes. (231-233)*

Chastity and innocence reign; again we are confronted with idealized adolescent love.

We could also say that the structure of the poem is adolescent; for there is some structure in that long poem, no doubt. There is a sort of balance on either side of the central passage. Starting from a high position "on a little hill" the poet watches with delight the spectacle of nature, and we are carried with him through nature's influence to a point of ecstasy which produces a movement of elation:

So that we feel uplifted from the world. (139)

It is a timid flight though; the central passage (107-140) is rooted on earth in "the fair paradise of Nature's light" (126). (Incidentally it should be noted that lines 120-121 would be the exact middle of the poem.) Then we are brought back to this world and love on earth with the heroes of myths and their creator and interpreter, the poet

¹ Racine, *Phèdre*, I, iii.

² "Kubla Khan", 16.

— in this case “a Poet who stood on Latmus’ top” (194). This suddenly reveals the importance of the first line of the poem:

I stood tip-toe upon a little hill...

Endymion, poet and lover, experienced his flight in the ecstasy of sleep on Mount Latmos; therefore the young poet materializes his approach towards identification with the hero; if he dare not yet pretend to baunt the heights of Mount Helicon and mix with Apollo’s retinue, he shows his intent and states his belief in the high position of a poet in the hierarchy of mankind. The little hill of the beginning and the Mount Latmos of the end again illustrate a parallelism which informs the whole poem, even though there is no exact symmetry. If we refer to the structural imagery we have dealt with, we find no such evolution in “I stood tip-toe...”. We practically remain on one level throughout the 242 lines of the poem. It is indeed the work of an enthusiastic young poet, enjoying to the full a world of impressions and the attempts at balancing the two movements, from nature to ecstasy, and from the inspired sleep back to sensuous life, gives the poem a dimension that other pieces in that collection do not possess. If the poet chose to place it first in his book, it was most probably in appreciation of the formal and structural qualities — timid as they are — that reinforced the rich exuberance of its contents. Keats certainly hoped it would induce the reader to explore further into the book.

4. In Search of Poetical Frameworks

It is a fact that the balancing, in "I stood tip-toe...", of two practically equal sections on both sides of a central passage shows definite progress in structure over such early attempts as the "Specimen of an Induction to a Poem" or "Calidore". Both show the eager young poet striving towards some long development of high romance; both go awry for lack of action. The fault Keats seems to have partly overcome through a balance in structure in "I stood tip-toe..." is particularly obvious in the "Specimen". The poet goes through an enumeration of what could be the ingredients of an epic tale. Yet he does not move on. Even if he "must tell a tale of chivalry" (1, 11, 45), the repeated self-determination leads nowhere. We guess at a number of disconnected scenes: knights leaving a castle at an early hour; ladies looking on the scene from "some old battlement" (15); the knight's rest by a lake — a foretaste of the Knight-at-arms of the "Belle Dame Sans Merci" in the shady atmosphere of "ashen boughs" (21), "mossiness" and "linnets' nests" (22), contrasting with the barren scenery of the future ballad, when

*The sedge has wither'd from the lake,
And no birds sing. (3-4 and 47-48)*

The knight ready for some deadly fight suddenly turns to "the honors of a tournament" (28), and is abandoned there and then for the "dying tones of minstrelsy" (32) under the "gothic arches" (33) where "light-footed damsels" (41) temper the hectic scene of drinking and "revelries" (35).

There is, in the final part of the poem, an intention to "follow that bright path of light" (60). Yet the poet does not seem to be equipped to do so. His degree of perception encompasses only the common setting of romance and the pleasant scenery of nature offering perennial delights. The epic tale is supposed to be woven into the fabric of a description of nature. It sounds even as if it were a mere pretext to explore the different aspects of natural scenery. The last lines prove it. They bring the piece of poetry to a conclusion with the hope of starting again:

*To see wide plains, fair trees, and lawny slope:
The morn, the eve, the light, the shade, the flowers,
Clear streams, smooth lakes, and overlooking towers. (66-68)*

This is clearly given as the fundamental canvas of the contemplated tale. Yet if a tale can move among such idyllic elements, it cannot be content with simply adding such elements to each other.

Much the same criticisms can be made about "Calidore". Its subtitle — "A Fragment" — indicates from the first that the attempt was once again unsuccessful. From the very beginning the poem is steeped in that enchanting mood that makes the poet enjoy life to the full. Calidore is seen in "healthful spirit" (2) filling his senses with "the beauty of a silent eve" (3). The last gleam of light seems itself "loath this happy world to leave" (4). Nothing mars the beauty of evening and its quiet call to peaceful rest. "The black-wing'd swallow" (14) tracing its filigree of arabesques in the twilight gives life to the static description. Here again the image prefigures future achievement: i. e. the last line of "To Autumn", "And gathering swallows twitter in the skies" (33), when the poet condenses the same picture and adds the element of sound to his previous satisfactory verses.

Now if we select the lines expressing the progress of the romance, we find them sunk amidst the sensuous description of nature:

Young Calidore is paddling o'er the lake; (1)

...
*And now the sharp keel of his little boat
... glides into a bed of water lilies; (19, 21)*

...
*... his glad senses caught
A trumpet's silver voice... (54-55)*

...
*So pushes off his boat...
And soon upon the lake he skims along. (59-60)*

From line 64 on the pace quickens, however; actions succeed each other and this time the "tale of chivalry" appears: the ladies, Sir Clerimond and the heroic figure, the brave knight Sir Gondibert, whose description again slows down the rhythm and allows the poet to gratify his penchant for descriptive poetry. He brilliantly brings to life his imaginary character.

Sir Gondibert's picture contrasts vigorously with that of the ladies. We can see him "patting the flowing hair / Of his proud horse's mane" (110-111). The "stature" and "elegance" (112) of the man, his armour "so dexterously wrought" (116) makes it difficult to believe it is "hard, and heavy steel" (118) and gives Sir Gondibert a visible presence and reality which the ladies do not have. We can feel the

manly shake of his "mailed hand held out" (126) and guess at his face partly hidden by the helmet. On the whole he stands as a sculptured figure delineated by the quality of the craftsmanship expressed in the drawing of the armour: "the visor arched so gracefully / Over the knightly brow" (130-131). The last descriptive touch creates an eerie effect. The light plays on the steel and gives the personage an appearance "quite transcendent" (133). Sir Gondibert suddenly resembles the ghost of Hamlet's father. The tough knight bidden within the artistically wrought armour assumes an immaterial quality under the lighted "lamps" (132). And in Keats's "glorious form... / In which a spirit new come from the skies / Might live" (119-121), there can also be heard an echo of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.¹

Whatever the sources Sir Gondibert's figure stands as a piece of clear solid description if we compare it to that of the ladies. They do not exist, except for privileged parts such as "lady's hand" (81), "delicate ankles" (82), "tender feet" (85), "tresses" (89) and "dimpled hand" (93) again. What ladies are really made of is a series of vague impressions translated in terms of affection. The ladies' steeds are said to have brought in their "happy burthen" (80). "A kiss" (80), a "gentle squeeze" (81) are the material shapes of young Calidore's emotion. Women's forms only exist so far as they answer the young man's sentimental need. "Whisperings of affection" (84), "tears of languishment" (88) mean more to him than any definite outline of person or dresses. Sensual and sentimental contact is the only perceptible feature of Calidore's meeting with the ladies. A gesture — "with an encline so sweet / ... o'er his neck they bent" (86-87) — is enough to send his soul into a "trance" (83) and when he helps them alight from the "palfreys" (87) they merge into a "soft luxury / That nestled in his arms" (92-93).

One cannot help thinking of Keats's self-criticism in the "Preface" to *Endymion*. "The imagination of a boy is healthy, and the mature imagination of a man is healthy; but there is a space of life between, in which the soul is in a ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted: thence proceeds mawkishness."

It is, of course, difficult to argue about the structure of an unfinished poem. And yet we get some insight into a possible development of themes in young Calidore's attitude of eager attention,

... burning
 To hear of knightly deeds, and gallant spurning
 Of all unworthiness; and how the strong arm
 Kept off dismay, and terror, and alarm
 From lovely woman. (142-146)

¹ *Hamlet*, I, i, 47-49 and I, ii, 290-1.

This seems to imply a list of successful fights and battles, episodes that can be added in succession, but no high quest about the truth of existence or exploration of a superior or inferior world such as gave consistent forms to so many great poems of Keats's predecessors. The "spurning of all unworthiness" belongs to the traditional character of the knight errant, but the "lovely woman" he is supposed to protect and probably win, partakes of the weakness of characterization of the "damsels" (147) of the poem. The "manly ardour" (148) that gleams at one point in young Calidore's eyes might lead to the metamorphosis of the adolescent boy into the hero of a romance. As he is described, he prefers to nestle within the warm and comfortable atmosphere of protective affection dispensed by the presence of "sweet-lipp'd ladies" (135). Instead of rising to action the poem sinks into the slumber of closing night. "Sweet be their sleep..." (162). There ends the fragment.

The simple list of descriptive elements is probably the first recourse of every young poet. But he must compensate for the weakness of the procedure by the formal perfection of the work. Therefore, for the first time in this study, the technical aspects of poetry must be explored, as they will later on be found to concur with the symmetries established by the clusters of images. Two interesting poems of Keats's early inspiration are good instances of it. The "Ode to Apollo" ("In thy western halls...") and "To Hope", both written in February 1815, are made up of a series of six-line stanzas with the same basic rhyme pattern, *ababcc*: a quatrain followed by a couplet. This is not preserved consistently in the "Ode to Apollo" — stanza III is made of five lines rhyming thus: *ababb*; stanza IV, *abbacc*, and stanza VIII, *aabccb*. The lengths of the lines vary: the first four being shorter than those of the final couplet, except in stanza III where four iambic pentameters followed by an alexandrine produces a total of twenty-six stressed syllables and therefore balances the other stanzas in its contents. In the quatrains each line counts between six and eight syllables, four of them being stressed with either an iambic rhythm — "Tis awful silence then again" (18) — or a trochaic one — "Next thy Tasso's ardent numbers" (36). In the couplets iambic pentameters sometimes turn into alexandrines in the concluding lines (6, 17, 29, 35, 47). It could probably be conjectured that some of these choices were adapted to suit the type of line used by the respective authors listed in the poem. Stanza III, for instance, is entirely composed of pentameters and one alexandrine, as if Keats meant to match Virgil's epic poetry by an emphasis on rhythm. The poetic instinct that made him cut the stanza short in order to keep it quantitatively equal to the other ones is well worth noting, too. Yet Homer and Milton might have deserved similar treatment, and there Keats reverts to the pattern of quatrain plus couplet. These weaknesses in the formal aspect of the poem may well have been considered as defects by the

young poet, sufficient to make him decide against its publication in 1817.

By contrast it is immediately apparent that "To Hope" looks far more satisfactory from the point of view of form, and justifies the author's choice. All of its eight parts conform to the same basic pattern. The six-line stanzas are composed of a quatrain with alternate rhyming, followed by a couplet: i. e. *ababcc*. The rhythm is also regular throughout; the poet sticks to that of rhymed iambic pentameters. Thinking of Keats's natural taste for and addiction to sonnet-writing, it may be worth remarking that such features correspond to the last six lines of Shakespearian sonnets. The passage

*O let me think it is not quite in vain
To sigh out sonnets to the midnight air! (27-28)*

may well indicate that his great model was in Keats's mind at the moment. Anyway, in this case, the poet did succeed in shaping his poem according to strict rules, something which he had not been able to achieve in the contemporary "Ode to Apollo". Formally, then, it was a piece of work worthy of being selected for *Poems 1817*.

From the point of view of contents, both poems have their successful lines in spite of the fact that they are the works of a young poet. The "Ode to Apollo" celebrates the great poets of the past, seen in the empyrean where Apollo reigns. The image is that of the beauty of the setting sun whose last rays stand for the vibrating "chords" (6) of lyres. The vision of light turns into one of music. Each "bard" of the past plays his particular type of harmony. "We listen here on earth" (44) while the Muses and the God himself join in the magic symphony. Different instruments characterize the poets' various tones. Homer "strikes the twanging harp of war" (8) to the accompaniment of trumpets far away. Virgil's "melodious" and "majestic" epic is suggested by Queen Dido's tragic end. One line is enough for the young poet to summarize the famous episode:

... he tells of grief around a funeral pyre. (17)

Such concentration of imagery in a young artist cannot be over-estimated. Other reasons must have caused the withdrawal of the piece from *Poems 1817*.

The poets of the Renaissance appear. Milton thunders and Shakespeare conducts the band of "the Passions" (26). "Silver trumpet", "martial notes" harmonize with the hymns of "a virgin chorus" (31) in Spenser, and "Tasso's ardent numbers" also turn to delicate and touching melodies.

It is important to note that all the examples chosen are those of authors of epic poems, romances or dramatic poetry. Keats looks up to the highest achievements in poetry, and his attitude of eager and

hopeful desire is typical of his early years. No heights seem impossible for him to reach. He is totally bent towards the future. The series of examples he enumerates, from Homer to Tasso are taken from the past; but placed in a sort of eternal present through the glorious setting of an Elysium of golden light, they lead in chronological order toward the time to come. The "dying tones" (45) of the Muses' choir are merged paradoxically into the opposite notion of a "birth" (47). It is in essence the structural imagery of Keats's predecessors, as defined in our introduction. Here it appears, however, in an embryonic stage. But it is interesting to find it here at the very start of Keats's work. He did not use it as a theme to build up the structure of his poem; it is a mere image of a fall leading to some new birth, appended to the list of his masters in the art of poetry. Typical of the Romantic faith in a renaissance, it is also typical of Keats's eager devotion to his art and recurring trust in his own success. From the start his letters are full of anxious statements about his possible future fame. "I have asked myself so often why I should be a Poet more than other Men, — seeing how great a thing it is, — how great things are to be gained by it — What a thing to be in the Mouth of Fame — that at last the Idea has grown so monstrously beyond my seeming Power of attainment that the other day I nearly consented with myself to drop into a Phaeton — yet 't is a disgrace to fail even in a huge attempt, and at this moment I drive the thought from me" (10 May 1817, To Leigh Hunt; no. 24, I, 136). Even his anxiety takes the shape of a down and up movement. This sort of images seem to haunt his mind repeatedly. But will and hope always bring a renewal of self-confidence.

As was said above, "To Hope" offers a more perfect form than the first "Ode to Apollo". It was published in 1817. The poem displays a list of crushing and depressing hardships that Hope can or should chase away. The young man calls to Hope for help against the gloom of solitude, despondency, disappointment, despair, death, unhappy love, tyranny and oppression. It sounds like an echo of Hamlet's soliloquy: "For who would bear the whips and scorns of time...",¹ and indeed, the first stanza bears a clear reference to Hamlet: that is the "mind's eye" (3) which is given in inverted commas and recalls the meeting of Hamlet and Horatio:²

H. Methinks, I see my father.
Hor. — O, where, my lord?
H. — In my mind's eye, Horatio.

It might also owe something to a remembrance of Wordsworth's "Daffodils" which

¹ *Hamlet*, III, i, 70.

² *ibid.*, I, ii, 185.

... flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude.¹

Yet the solitude that haunts the next line of Keats's poem conjures up a far more destructive image of despair:

And the bare heath of life presents no bloom. (4)

It sounds like a concentration of King Lear's desperate quest and "houseless poverty".²

These quotations prove the sincere devotion of Keats to his models, as expressed in his "Ode to Apollo", and his amazing capacity to renew images culled from the greatest masters in poetry. He himself was well aware of the process. In his "Epistle to G. Felton Mathew" (Nov. 1815) he gave new tribute to his preferred authors and acknowledged the necessity of their influence over his own mind:

... without incitements such as these,
How vain for me the niggard Muse to tease. (72-73)

To the alchemy of remodelling images out of reminiscences, Keats, in "To Hope", adds an attention to regularity of form that exceeds his previous attempts. Each stanza starts with a quatrain expressive of low spirit and depressing atmosphere. The final couplet then with the fervour of a prayer calls to Hope, for the protection expected and afforded by that powerful deity. Therefore the feeling of elation and the flight upwards recur in each of the eight stanzas. From the point of view of structural imagery, we have here a succession of identical movements, eager impulses trying to burst the circle of menacing despondency. The poem then is built up on a recurring pattern of upward flights — eight times repeated. It escapes classification among the poems following a single curving movement such as that symbolic of some underground journey.

Yet the wilful effort of the poet to escape from the tensions and hardships of the world is worth noting. He turns towards the "heaven-born radiance" (23) and comforting protection of Hope to which the repeated strain

wave thy silver pinions o'er my head (6, 24, 30, 48)

and other allusions give the appearance of a guardian angel.

The poems addressed to different ladies are less interesting for our purpose. They are occasional pieces, indeed elaborate and refined

¹ Wordsworth, "I wandered lonely as a cloud", 15-16.

² *King Lear*. III, iv, 26.

epistles. Powerful structural imagery cannot be expected here. Yet there is a feeling of exploration in "To Some Ladies", of an experience linked with meandering through vales and mountains — a "wild labyrinth" (9) — and into the darkness of a tender night (11-12). The "morn" (13) brings the revelation of a fine gift from the depth of the sea, a curious shell.

The same incident is again the occasion of the answer to the "copy of verses" accompanying the present of a shell sent by the ladies from their sea-side holidays: "On Receiving a Curious Shell and a Copy of Verses from the Same Ladies". The composition of the poem is particularly clear: two sequences of four quatrains allude to ancient romance and legendary faeryland respectively. The poet addresses a knight who appears in the four lines of transition (17-20) between the two passages and again in the concluding two stanzas — the very last being practically identical with lines 17-20. Sir Eric, the knight, has been identified as Keats's friend at the time, G. F. Mathew, and the poet starts with a series of questions (1-16) evocative of chivalry and legendary quests, of the exaltation such heroes must enjoy. We get a list of rich and brilliant attributes, the necessary ingredients of romantic adventures.

In his answer (21-36) the poet extols the magic powers, the spell of imaginary creations. The four stanzas recreate the faery atmosphere of Oberon's arbour, something like a parallel to Titania's bower in Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, or a reference to Wieland's *Oberon*. Music fills half the passage with the soothing charms of tender harmony.

The structure stands out in the opposition of sixteen lines of questions and a sixteen-line answer, surrounding one stanza of address which sounds like the refrain of a song when repeated in the conclusion. The contrast also exists in the outward show of the knight of legends as opposed to the intimacy of the poet's experience. As was said above, the first part certainly alludes to G. F. Mathew, transmuted, with a touch of humour, into "valiant Eric" (41), exploring in company with his sisters (the ladies) the countryside and shores near Hastings. The other passage pictures the poet left behind in London, finding comfort and remedy for his loneliness in the "tale of the wreath, and the chain" (22 and 39). This can be interpreted as being the "copy of verses" sent to him by his friends. Thomas Moore wrote a poem entitled thus, and he was one of the poets admired by the Mathew circle.

Like "To Some Ladies" the poem is composed of anapaestic quatrains rhyming *abab*. Keats used the same pattern of line for the poem "To Emma", excluded from publication at the time. It was intended for one of the Mathew sisters. The poem is not important in itself, but the decision not to include it in the collection may throw some light on Keats's way of judging his own early production. It is

a short poem of twenty lines inducing the girl to accept the poet's love. The first three stanzas again recall the *Midsummer Night's Dream* atmosphere and Titania's bower. The young man invites the girl to accompany him "Where the faeries are chanting their evening hymns" (7), and where he will "find thee a bed / Of mosses and flowers to pillow thy head" (9-10). The respectful passion of romance changes then from the "enraptured" (12) passion of a "story of love" to more tangible and pressing invitations. There is no ambiguous mawkishness in

*That mortal's a fool who such happiness misses;
So smile acquiescence... (18-19)*

It may be the reason why Keats excluded the poem from publication. The lines sounded not only occasional, but too personal. Such direct proposal would shock. Thirdly the anapaestic quatrains rhyme *aabb*, creating an impression of a succession of couplets. This is perfectly clear if we compare them with the alternating rhymes of the two pieces written to thank the Mathews for the gift of a shell. And this gives the lines "To Emma" a flavour of eighteenth century poetic diction from which the Romantic poets meant to escape. This formal consideration must have weighed more in the decision for exclusion than a feeling of impropriety. Indeed Keats will, on several occasions, disagree with his friends and editors about a policy of decency. His argument about Woodhouse's remark concerning the "Eve of St Agnes", that Porphyro's acting "all the acts of a *bonâ fide* husband" to Madeline (19 September 1819, Woodhouse to Taylor; no. 192, II, 163), would make the poem "unfit for ladies" is typical. Woodhouse gives us Keats's fierce objection to altering the passage: "He says he does not want ladies to read his poetry: that he writes for men... that he should despise a man who would be such an eunuch in sentiment as to leave a maid, with that Character about her, in such situation" (*ibid.*). The feeling expressed in 1819 is remarkably similar to that of the concluding lines dedicated "To Emma" some four years before. For Keats, propriety, we can assume, was always a secondary consideration where poetry was concerned.

"To Some Ladies" and "On Receiving a Curious Shell" are also personal and occasional pieces, yet were retained for publication. We contend that the structural features present in two of the anapaestic poems but absent from the third, were the decisive elements of choice or rejection. In "To Some Ladies" the poet joins his friends in an imaginary exploration of the "wonders of nature" (1). They pass from their walk in daylight (stanza 2) and through the magic atmosphere of night (stanza 3) to the climax of the discovery of the shell in the early morning (stanza 4). Thus three stanzas lead to the central event. There are three stanzas left to express appreciation of and gratitude

for the gift, and conclude with the bliss of friendship and remembrance. The fourth stanza is the turning point, right in the middle of the poem:

*'Tis morn, and the flowers with dew are yet drooping,
I see you are treading the verge of the sea:
And now! ah, I see it — just now are stooping
To pick up the keep-sake intended for me.*

The exclamation and the repeated, actualizing "now" could not be brought nearer the exact middle point of the lines. It divides the introductory part, evocative of the poet's memory of his friends from the second half thanking them for remembering him.

Such balance also exists in a different way in the contrast and weight of the two groups of four stanzas of the poem "On Receiving a Curious Shell...". Questions are answered after an address (st. 5) to the recipient of the "letter", and the concluding two stanzas (st. 10-11) reveal the nature of the gift: a copy of the tale of *The Wreath and the Chain*, and express again, an echo of stanza 5, thanks for the "blisses" given to Mathew and himself, the "magical powers" of poetic imagination.

The directness and realism of the last six lines addressed "To Emma" do not in the same way balance the atmosphere of romance of the other fourteen. The cut is sharp, and the frank amorous proposal brief. It leads to an abrupt departure from the warm, airy and limpid description of evening when "in the last sun-beam the sylph lightly swims" (8).

Therefore we believe that the aesthetic criterion of form must have been the determining factor in favour of excluding "To Emma" from *Poems 1817*. Otherwise it has the *Midsummer Night's Dream* qualities of its companion poems. Faeries and sylphs enchant the departing day in lines 7 and 8.

*I'll find thee a bed,
Of mosses and flowers to pillow thy head (9-10)*

is easily traceable to its Shakespearian origin, just as the introduction of "sylphs, in the moon beamy air" ("To Some Ladies", 12) and the characters of Oberon and Titania in stanzas 7-9 of "On Receiving a Curious Shell...". It is not inferior in its youthful eagerness for friendship and love in a natural setting. And the element that shows the little poem to have been preserved, and not despised, for the sake of its contents among later members of the Keats circle, is the fact that it was used again and addressed to George's future wife, simply changing Emma into Georgiana (transcript in the Keats-Wylie Scrap-book). All this seems to throw some light on the importance of struc-

tural elements — reduced though they are here to rhyme-pattern, type of stanza and balance of composition — in Keats's work, from the outset of his poetic career.

"To [Mary Frogley]" is another love poem addressed to a young lady. It is made of short lines rhyming in couplets and the theme is a description of the beauty of the beloved. It was meant for the same purpose as the lines "To Emma". The two concluding lines, out of four suppressed in the final version, asked the girl to yield to his love:

*Do not let me sigh and pine,
Prythee be my valentine.*

Different known stages of the poem show that Keats further modified it before printing. Woodhouse's transcripts give the date 14 February 1816. The versions he copied are shorter too: lines 3-36 of the text published in *Poems 1817* represent a mere sequence of eight verses. So here again we have a case of an occasional poem with the clearly definite end of winning a girl's affection. Keats could have dropped it as he did in the case of "To Emma". Yet the poem dealt with both classical mythology and medieval atmosphere: two extreme, opposite traditions that romanticism was prone to reconcile. The second part, starting line 41 in *Poems 1817*: "Hadst thou liv'd when chivalry...", did not undergo any important change except that Keats suppressed the last lines in order that the poem should lose something of its personal, occasional character. The same could have been done for "To Emma" if the poet had not decided against its publication for other reasons. "To [Mary Frogley]" depicts the heroine as a knight of romance, ready to ride in search of dragons to destroy. The imagery creates a lively picture of purity and innocence endowed with moral strength and courage. White and gold stress the symbolism. There is the "silver sheen / Of thy brodered, floating vest" (44-45), the "ivory breast" (46), "a golden cuirass" (49), a comparison with "sunbeams" (51), "milky plumes" (53), "lilly's blooms" (54) and an "alabaster steed" (57), finally "his trappings glow / Like the northern lights on snow" (59-60). Unexpectedly the knight turns out to be an enchanteress.

To the adroitly-developed medieval theme the beginning of the poem opposes the picture of a woman worthy of belonging to Apollo's retinue:

*O, if thou hadst breathed then,
Now the Muses had been ten.
(9-10 or 35-36 according to versions)*

She would have been "twin sister of Thalia"; and whatever her artistic gifts, she was worthy of being compared to the Graces:

*At least for ever, evermore,
Will I call the Graces four.* (13-14 or 39-40)

Keats seems to have tried to make the first part balance the second in his final version. Indeed it grows to be even longer (forty lines) than the second (twenty-eight). Yet what is important is his attempt to create a structure uniting, through the character of the lovely female figure, the classical and medieval traditions in two opposite pictures, two complementary pendants. His effort is marred by elaborate commonplace and artificiality, reminiscent of XVIIIth century poetic diction; some verses cannot be read without a smile. And there is some inconsistency in the images used to characterize the lady's hair. "Dark" (13) they are in her picture as one of the Muses, and her eyebrows

*Like to streaks across the sky,
Or the feathers from a crow,
Fallen on a bed of snow.* (10-12)

Then she appears in the rich garment of a warrior.

*Like sunbeams in a cloudlet nested
Thy locks in knightly casque are rested.* (51-52)

Though the hue of the hair does not appear clearly, "sunbeams" bears connotations of bright, golden colours far better suited to the description of some fair blond. The change from the vague word "light" of the transcripts into "sunbeams" also marks an intention of contrasting in a striking way the Mediterranean type and the northern one. Anyway it is interesting to notice Keats's effort to make the whole poem acceptable by picturing the girl he admired in a diptych expressive of the tones of the poetic traditions Romanticism was attempting to reconcile. Structure there is; not in the shape of dynamic journeying, but as static descriptions succeeding each other without transition: a Mediterranean mythological figure on the one hand, a knightly magician on the other. Two different atmospheres, attitudes, characters from poetical lore were used to serve the purpose of love; later the poet's sweetheart lost her identity and was transmuted into types representative of the ancient poetry of Greece and the legendary romance of the Middle Ages.

5. "Imitation of Spenser"

The fragment entitled "Imitation of Spenser" states clearly the type of training Keats was submitting himself to, and his amazing insight, as a young poet, into the art of poetry. The model is proclaimed, and must be honoured. The pattern of the stanza is given, and cannot be interpreted freely. The poet must fill the form and make it a meaningful whole. In this case Keats chose the elaborate description of an imaginary landscape. The fragment is an exercise in style; it is a challenge, and should rival its source: the Bower of Bliss in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (Book II, canto xii).

The purely descriptive character of those four Spenserian stanzas might fit into a tale:

Now Morning from her orient chamber came. (1)

But nothing of the narration is revealed, no human presence haunts the shores of the lake or the island set in it like a precious gem. The fairy reclining on the swan's back introduces the romance atmosphere and reinforces the magic aspect of that paradise of silence and crystalline purity of both sky and water. The passage is exquisitely worked out and its imagery produces a sort of downward movement, quite unexpected when so little activity is depicted. In fact we are led to plunge into the clear waters, step by step, through a series of concentric circles whose central mark is the isle.

Starting from the "lawny crest" (3) of the hill we follow the first morning rays down the slope. The "many streams" (7) that run down to join their waters into a lake shape the curve of the mountain side. The comfortable feeling of protection given by the "woven bowers" (8) circling the shore, also create a contrast between the central watery surface and the framing green of mossy woods and meadows. The paradisaical seclusion of the lake is reinforced by its being the mirror of "a sky that never lowers" (9).

The second stanza explores the narrower circle of the lake with its brilliantly coloured birds and fish. It is a royal retinue, from the king-fisher (10) to the majestic swan (14), fit for the "crowning" (3) of some god. The "plumage bright" and "brilliant dye" (10 and 11)

are enriched by the silk and gold of the fish scales and the "ruby glow" (13) of their reflection. Jet and "ebony" (17) contrast with the snow-whiteness of the swan just as its "arched" neck announces the voluptuous attitude of the reclining fairy (18). Beyond the multifarious colours there is a suggestion of jewels and ermine.

With stanza three we reach the inner circle of the isle, "an emerald in the silver sheen / Of the bright water" (25-26). The image is complete! It is a place of romantic wonder and charm, preserved from the cares of transient human life: the passion of love (Dido, 21) and the bitterness of old age and decrepitude (Lear, 22).

Also concentrating on the central element, the last stanza explores deeper, trying to see through the "glassy" limit where "verdure" (29) and ripples meet to the depths from which mysterious powers proffer the rarest of gems (35) in order to rival "the buds in Flora's diadem" (36). The ultimate word "diadem" harks back to the light "crowning" the mountain top (3) at the beginning of the poem, thus completing the last succession of ring images which make up the whole. Added to the rich imagery of warm colours, gold and precious stones the final circle, which embraces all the others, takes the suggestive form of a royal crown. Set against the rare perfection of the sky and light, the primeval freshness of foliage and grass, the magic transparency of the water are the most invaluable gems, the products of the underworld. The whole setting is that of an inverted cone where silence, quietude and the natural elements recreate an earthly paradise of pleasing beauty and eternity. Psycho-analysis would probably interpret it as an image of sexual desire, and might be justified in doing so. Our purpose, however, being to stick to the notion of structural imagery, we do not intend to be led that way. Seen in the light we mean to cast on Keats's work, it is easier to understand why the young poet selected for publication a poem that could be mistaken for a mere exercise in the practice of poetry, and to which he honestly gave an unassuming title. It must be recognized that, in a way, it achieves a kind of perfection, that lies in its structural imagery. This consideration confirms our conviction that Keats's criteria in his choice of what to publish in *Poems 1817* were primarily form and imagery.

The "Imitation of Spenser" is but a fragment, and is undated; it has generally been accepted by critics as the earliest piece of Keats's poetry we know, at least among the published poems of the 1817 collection. It is surprising that Mr Ian Jack should retain this view in his excellent chapter on Hunt's attitude about painting and poetry being sister arts.¹ He describes extremely well the atmosphere of the circle in which Keats learned to "read" prints, engravings and paintings. We feel inclined to see the four stanzas of the "Imitation"

¹ Ian Jack, *Keats and the Mirror of Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), chap. 1.

as a typical product of Keats's discussions with Hunt about the pictorial qualities of poems and of Spenser's particularly. Hunt, later on, published passages from Spenser's works¹ drawing parallels — according to the impression the extracts produced — with the style of great painters' works. Keats, imitating Spenser, tried to compose one such description. Our analysis has led us to the conclusion that he was successful in creating a three dimensional structure of imagery which already shows the pupil in advance of his tutor.

Quoting Haydon, Mr Ian Jack says that Hunt "relished and felt Art without knowing anything of its technicalities",² and adds: "Hunt's criticism — therefore — was of just the sort that was most likely to appeal to Keats".³ From our point of view, this remark hardly seems justified; the development of an imagery of concentric circles leading from the mountain tops down to the transparent waters round the island cannot be attributed to chance. It proves a remarkable consciousness of the exacting demands of poetic achievement. In spite of its being an imitation, it goes much further than "Calidore" or the "Specimen of an Induction to a Poem". The passage is an experiment in the spirit of Hunt's views and must belong to the period when Hunt's influence was stronger; the lines must no longer be rated as unimportant juvenilia. They are a limited but astonishing piece of work, if seen in the light of structural imagery; they go beyond Hunt's own perception, and herald Keats's future criticism of Hunt as a poet. Their selection for publication, once again, reveals Keats's critical awareness in relation to his own work.

Comparison with the passage in the *Faerie Queene* on which the "Imitation" was based immediately brings out the difference in structural imagery. From the beginning of Canto XII of his second book Spenser leads Sir Guyon, the knight errant, through all sorts of dangers and temptations, which follow each other in quick succession, like so many obstacles to be overcome. The hero's boat dodges between reefs and rocks, or engulfing whirlpools, before he and his companions

... *do arriue*
*Whereas the Bowre of Blisse was situate.*⁴

Once on shore the travellers are again confronted by further trials in the form of gates, guarded by some alluring character, no monster any more, but a temptor or temptress.

¹ Leigh Hunt's essays: "A New Gallery of Pictures," *New Monthly Magazine*, June 1833, and "Gallery of Pictures from Spenser," *Imagination and Fancy*, 1844.

² I. Jack refers to B. R. Haydon, *Autobiography and Memoirs*, 1, 122.

³ I. Jack, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁴ Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, II, xii, 42, 1-2.

*... in the Porch there sate,
A comely personage of stature tall.¹*

Sir Guyon, however, is not going to yield to the false pretence of such fair attitude. This progress of the hero could not appear in Keats's brief passage, of course.

Some of the colours used in the "Imitation" were already to be found in stanza 45 of the Spenser passage ("ivory" "snowy substance" "with gold besprinkled"). And the traveller now does

*... behold around
A large and spacious plaine, on every side
Strowed with pleasauns, whose faire grassy ground
Mantled with greene, and goodly beautifide
With all the ornaments of Floraes pride,
Wherewith her mother Art, as halfe in scorne
Of niggard Nature, like a pompous bride
Did decke her, and too lavishly adorne,
When forth from virgin bowre she comes in th' early morne.*

*Thereto the Heavens alwayes Ioviall,
Lookt on them louely, still in stedfast state,
Ne suffred storme nor frost on them to fall,
Their tender buds or leaues to violate,
Nor scorching heat, nor cold intemperate
T' afflict the creatures, which therein did dwell,
But the milde aire with season moderate
Gently attemptred, and disposd so well,
That still it breathed forth sweet spirit and holesome smell.²*

But this is only a stage on the way that leads to "another gate" made of "boughes and braunches" where "a comely dame did rest". The arch of "embracing vine" offers a new choice of warm colours: "some deepe empurpled", "some as the Rubine", "some like faire Eme-raudes", "some were of burnisht gold".³ The wines and fruit presented by the "dame" suggest pleasures and seductions which Sir Guyon will resist, and therefore enter "the most daintie Paradise on ground",

In which all pleasures plenteously abound.

*The painted flowres, the trees upshooting hye,
The dales for shade, the hilles for breathing space,
The trembling groues, the Christall running by.⁴*

¹ Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, II, xii, 46, 3-4.

² *ibid.*, 50-51.

³ *ibid.*, 53,6-55,1 *passim*.

⁴ *ibid.*, 58, 1, 3 and 5-7.

The ingredients of Keats's descriptions are there, it is true. But we discover them as if from the ground, in the course of the various stages of Sir Guyon's progress. There is no feeling of a descent into the centre of a natural arena, such as we get from a reading of the "Imitation of Spenser".

We find no real lake when advancing into the garden (st. 58-59), but a fountain "Of richest substaunce, that on earth might bee".¹

*Infinitt streames continually did well
Out of this fountaine, sweet and faire to see,
The which into an ample lauer fell,
And shortly grew to so great quantitie,
That like a little lake it seemd to bee;
Whose depth exceeded not three cubits hight,
That through the waues one might the bottom see,
All pau'd beneath with laspar shining bright,
That seemd the fountaine in that sea did sayle vpright.*²

In the expansion of the fountain into a laver "like a little lake" and then the impression it gives of sailing "in that sea", there is to be found something of Keats's concentric circles. However it is a passing vision, quickly forgotten as "two naked Damzelles" display their wanton charms before Sir Guyon, who cannot this time but "relent his earnest pace".

Only then does the adventurous knight come to the Bowre of Bliss, where, at this final stage, the spell is entirely based on musical imagery:

*For all that pleasing is to liuing eare,
Was there consorted in one harmonie,
Birdes, voyces, instruments, windes, waters, all agree.*³

The lure of music is the last step on the way to Acrasia's paradise of "lust and pleasure lewd" where young men

*Gather the Rose of loue, whilest yet is time.*⁴

With music, however, we have passed beyond the scope of the "Imitation", and can leave Sir Guyon to his capture of the Witch of Intemperance and her Lover.

In this way we hope to have made clear the difference between Keats's stanzas and his model, and shown that he was no servile

¹ Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, II, xii, 60, 2.

² *ibid.*, 62.

³ *ibid.*, 70, 7-9.

⁴ *ibid.*, 75, 8.

imitator, but recreated a compact and original picture out of the rich ingredients of Spenser's episode. The latter offers descriptive elements to adorn Sir Guyon's progress, and suggest the sensuous temptations he must resist: the taste of wine, the sight of naked bodies and the promise of sensual pleasures, the charm of music. As for Keats, he builds up a landscape where the accumulation of concentric forms organizes successfully a perfect example of structural imagery, coloured and adorned with the rich jewellery of nature. The content of the poem may not be of great interest; technically and artistically, however, we see it as a meaningful and important step in the poet's evolution and cannot believe such lines to be mere jottings added to the other pieces for the sake of lengthening the collection with a few more stanzas. The "Imitation of Spenser" must not be dismissed so lightly. After what has been said of other choices and rejections, we feel certain of the importance of the passage in Keats's esteem. It was a stage in the acquisition of a mastery of his art and the notion of using the form of nature to give form to the poem may well have been suggested by Spenser himself:

*One would have thought, (so cunningly, the rude
And scorned parts were mingled with the fine,)
That nature had for wantonnesse ensude
Art, and that Art at nature did repine;
So striving each th' other to undermine,
Each did the others worke more beautifie;
So diff'ring both in willes, agreed in fine:
So all agreed through sweete diversitie,
This Gardin to adorne with all varietie.¹*

¹ Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, II, xii, 59.

6. Symmetry and Proportion

Epistles belong to the literature of the Restoration and XVIIIth century more than to Romanticism. The presence of three such works in *Poems 1817* stresses the debt owed to the previous period, while it shakes the belief that the romantic revival was simply a rejection of the classical poetic diction. It also implies an attempt to absorb the patterns and canons of all ages. Keats uses the heroic couplet, freed from the strict rules established in Pope's works. Freedom there is also in the structure of those poems, which is natural, given the epistolary form of the poems. It is however immediately noticeable that the different "paragraphs" of Keats's "Epistle to George Felton Mathew" are practically equal in length. Mathew seems to have proposed to Keats a partnership, "a brotherhood in song" (2), such perhaps as linked the names of Wordsworth and Coleridge in the *Lyrical Ballads* or Beaumont and Fletcher in the world of the drama. Keats refers to the proposal in a brief introduction of ten lines. Four sections follow of twenty, twenty-two, nineteen and twenty-two lines respectively. Quantitatively there is something satisfactory in the balance thus realized. It may be the reason why Keats found it a redeemable piece of work among his juvenilia. In a letter to C. C. Clarke he wrote on 9 October 1816 "I have coppied out a sheet or two of Verses which I composed some time ago, and find so much to blame in them that the best [corrected "worst"] part will go into the fire — those to G. Mathew I will suffer to meet the eye of Mr H. [Leigh Hunt] notwithstanding that the Muse is so frequently mentioned" (no. 7, I, 113). What saved the epistle then was rather a matter of form than contents. It strongly resembles an ode, if it were not for the pattern of heroic couplets. It is the careful composition of a young poet, pretending to shake off old models, but trying the secure ways of apprenticeship, as well as observing the rules of politeness.

First (11-30) he humbly acknowledges Mathew's superiority, especially as he himself feels distracted from the tempting invitation of the muse by "far different cares" (17). In his situation both the world of mythology and that of nature seemed, temporarily at least, too remote to inspire him. Therefore he must refuse his friend's kind proposal of association.

The next passage (31-52) expresses, in a sort of antithesis the conditions that would allow the "coy muse" (32) to "condescend" (33) to live with him. They cannot exist "in this dark city" (33). "Some flowery spot, sequester'd, wild, romantic" (37), is the necessary setting of inspiration. In spite of the description of the natural ingredients that could lure the muse into the poet's company, the refusal in the previous passage is felt to turn to despondency at the impossibility of conciliation between the artist's and the medical student's activities.

Then (53-71) Keats imagines the favourable conditions realized and the possible output of poetical works that would ensue. But the opening line of the passage already announces: "Yet this is vain..." The hoped-for association is but an idle dream.

The twenty-two line conclusion completes the praises given to Mathew at the beginning. He is the beloved poet protected by the muse; the gods are with him and have allowed him to undergo all sorts of metamorphoses passing from the shape of a flower to that of a goldfish and a swan, experiencing a journey underwater that should now be the subject of his poetic production.

*... thou hast never told thy travels strange,
And all the wonders of the mazy range
O'er pebbly crystal, and o'er golden sands. (90-92)*

Between the introduction and the concluding section we have a triptych illustrating poetry. One panel depicts the artist's mythological interpretation of the world, the second the natural setting of poetry and the third its humanitarian contents. The movement goes from lofty visions down to the description of the things of nature as basic material for the poet's imagination. Then generous thoughts and reminiscence from writers and heroes of the past bring in a renewed feeling of being lifted towards higher spheres. The background atmosphere is one of refusal, abandon, discouragement reaching its nadir after the evocation of the natural setting of poetic imagination: "Yet it is vain" (53). Still the embroidery of pleasant images veils the despondent attitude of the author, and allows a slight hope to rise in the contemplation of what the poet's task could be. In spite of the allusion to "the pitiless world" (65) the modal tone of the third panel is more hopeful:

*... a place where I may greet the maid —
Where we may soft humanity put on, (54-55)*

...
With reverence would we speak of all the sages (59)

...
And thou shouldst moralize on Milton's blindness, (61)

...
*We next could tell
Of those who in the cause of freedom fell. (65-66)*

No doubt there are some elements of down- and upward journey in these lines dedicated to the poet's intentions and ambition. It may not be mere chance that the theme of a journey should appear in the conclusion describing G. F. Mathew's imagined metamorphoses. The suggestion of a subject for Mathew's inspiration finds expression in the form "a travel strange". The growth of the young man from the state of ignorance and weakness (the "flowret... wild" of line 76) to the mastery of the full-grown artist (the "black-eyed swan" of line 87) is a kind of initiation through a stage of experience and discovery (the wonders of the "mazy range" — line 91). The importance of the underwater journey is emphasized by the young poet with great skill. The metamorphosis is only stated at lines 85-86:

*... from a flower, into a fish of gold
Apollo chang'd thee.*

But the experience fills the concluding lines of the poem with a concentration of imagery very remarkable in the beginner Keats still was:

*... thou hast never told thy travels strange,
And all the wonders of the mazy range
O'er pebbly crystal, and o'er golden sands;
Kissing thy daily food from Naiad's pearly hands. (90-94)*

In this imaginative exploration of a world of mystery the poet offers a suggestive example of the creative power of poetry. Linking terms expressive of all that is rich, rare, pure and delicate (golden, crystal) to others depicting what is worthless, common, plain and rough (pebbly, sands), the poet re-enacts the old dream of the alchemist transmuting base material into gold. The reconciliation of opposites, the symbol of the profound unity of the universe, illustrates the poet's faith in his ability to perform the same transcendental changes through the power of words. The effect occurs again in the last sensuous line in the opposition between "daily food" and "pearly hands". The necessities of life are, for the poet, the precious experience of exploring the supernatural in an interpretation of nature in terms of life and beauty. The selection of the word "kissing" at the beginning of the line recalls skilfully the metamorphosis of the poet into a goldfish; it describes realistically the sucking motion of a small fish's mouth, and the image is reinforced visually by the suggestion of colour in "pearly". At the same time "kissing" combines both meaning and sound effect to introduce with exquisite tenderness the

eternal theme of love. Added to the presence of the "Naiad" it gives the line a sensual turn reminiscent of the atmosphere of the legends of Greek mythology. The semi-goddess is characterized by the adjective "pearly" which gives her a supernatural quality and links her with the mysterious sheen and glitter of underwater fauna. In a daring re-interpretation of the old traditions it also makes her appear robed in the gloss of her alluring sister Lamia.

It also sums up the poet's dependence on and submission to his inspiring muse in the rite of allegiance expressed by the words "kissing... hands" at either end of the line.

Poetry is the actual subject of the "Epistle", and all along the poet denies his ability to achieve such a high aim. And yet in the very last lines, with their concentrated power of suggestion, he seems to focus his talent in a final, sublime effort, a swan-song to demonstrate the peaks to which he could aspire.

The "travels strange" of metamorphoses are there, suggested if not fully realized. The ancient tradition of poetry haunts the young poet. A downward-upward structure also exists in the poem. We are led from the praises offered to G. F. Mathew to the rather desperate refusal of his vocation and the final demonstration and illustration of his capacity as a poet. Once more we find the poet choosing such a form to solve problems of composition in a genre that does not call for any strict pattern, falling back quite naturally on a sort of inverted pyramid-shaped structure in a context very different from that of other exploratory journeys.

About a year later when, relieved of his medical studies, Keats was passing the end of summer at Margate, he again composed two "Epistles" on the subject of poetry. One was addressed to his brother George (August 1816); the other dedicated "To Charles Cowden Clarke" is in four sections of increasing length (twenty, twenty-eight, thirty-five and forty-nine lines respectively). Like the Mathew epistle, these two express the poet's diffidence as he stands on the threshold of the career he has newly decided upon, and his admiration for the models of the past. They also pay a tribute to those who trust in his talent, though he is still a beginner (his brother), or have contributed to his apprehension of the world of poetry (C. C. Clarke).

However the construction of the two epistles differs. The epistle "To my Brother George" is cut, practically, in the middle, between paragraphs III and IV. The couplet of lines 67-68 serves as a hinge:

These are the living pleasures of the bard (67)

refers to the first half, and more particularly to parts II and III (i. e. 19-66);

But richer far posterity's award (68)

to the other, ending line 121 where the caesura corresponds to the start of the concluding description of the landscape near Margate. Therefore, though it is not immediately visible, we again get an impression of a careful composition balancing an eighteen-line introduction with a conclusion of twenty-one and a half lines, including a valediction of two lines (141-142). In-between the main theme is articulated round the central hinge (67-68): forty-eight lines dedicated to an exalted apology of his models and of the poet's revelations through inspiration; fifty-two and a half lines foreseeing the poet's fame secured at his death thanks to his varied modes of expression: ballads, lyrical poems, songs and sonnets. The symmetry of the poem, with its two parts of practically equal length, is not due to mere chance. It seems on the face of it that there is, typographically, one cut too many in the first half of the poem — that between lines 53 and 54 —, and in the second half one missing at the end of the enumeration of the various styles at the poet's disposal. The first one, however, separates the living interpretation of nature inspired by the warm and glorious world of daylight, from

The revelries, and mysteries of night. (64)

The other would have created two incomplete lines (as stated above, the conclusion begins at the caesura of line 121). Had these slight changes been made in the printing of the epistle, its remarkable symmetry would be immediately evident. We have:

- an introduction expressing the fears of the young poet (eighteen lines);
- the mysterious grace of inspiration transmuting nature into poesy (forty-eight lines);
- the central articulation (67-68);
- the various ways in which the poet transforms poesy into poetry (fifty-two and a half);
- a conclusion where the poet realizes his dream in a sample describing his immediate surroundings (nineteen and a half);
- valediction (141-142).

This interpretation of the structure of the epistle shows again how careful Keats seems to have been to give balance to his composition. There is here, no structural imagery, such as we have defined it. The idea of the poet's death is evoked (70). But it is not used in the way we have described in other poems. However it may be worth noting that it appears at the very middle of the whole.

*What does he murmur with his latest breath,
While his proud eye looks through the film of death?*

*"What though I leave this dull, and earthly mould,
"Yet shall my spirit lofty converse hold
"With after times." (69-73)*

An epistle is not the proper frame for a journey to death's gate. Yet the experience is there, though it is just a passing hint. There is no movement leading down, then up again. The introduction was loaded with spleen and disquiet. The theme of creative poetry on the contrary introduces a note of high excitement, of inspiration. The poet, dreaming of fulfilled ambition cannot but exult at the thought of achievement and fame. And the final description of the country round Margate justifies Keats's choice of career, and realizes the wish expressed in the "Epistle to Mathew":

To find a place where I may greet the maid (54)

— meaning the muse.

Though the main themes of the "Epistle to Charles Cowden Clarke" resemble those of the "Epistle to George", there is a marked difference in the structure of its composition. The introduction expresses diffidence and the fear of aiming too high. And the theme is treated through the image of a swan floating in a leisurely way on the surface of crystal-clear water and unable to secure one of the diamond drops that run on its feathers and down into the lake. The poet feels the same.

*Still scooping up the water with my fingers,
In which a trembling diamond never lingers. (19-20)*

His friend's knowledge, practice and appreciation of the art of poetry is therefore his excuse for not dedicating an epistle to him before; and the enumeration of Clarke's favourite poets reveals how the son of the headmaster of Enfield school tempted Keats into an incurable love of "the bay" ("Epistle to George", 19). From this characterization of their model poets, ranging from antiquity through Italian literature (Tasso), and the English Renaissance (Spenser, Shakespeare), to the Romantic movement (Leigh Hunt), Keats passes to a description of the different "genres" a poet can excel in. The "rapier-pointed epigram" (65) recalls the XVIIIth century tradition, and the vast unfolding of romance, the early days of English literature. Choosing from his list he proclaims "that epic was of all the king" (66) and thanks C. C. Clarke for teaching him, hoping that his own achievement might be judged worthy of his master and friend's attention. Finally he expresses his pleasure at wandering in the inspiring countryside that recalls the memories of the past, when the experience of music produced similar effects, when a friend's

guidance and enthusiasm already promised the ominous meeting with the muse. The re-enacting of the scene of departure,

*Your accents bland
Still sounded in my ears, when I no more
Could hear your footsteps touch the grav'ly floor, (122-124)*

unmistakably echoes Wordsworth's "Solitary Reaper" and adds a final tribute to the great masters of the Romantic revival. Two months later Keats will pen his sonnet to Haydon, starting "Great spirits now on earth are sojourning" where Wordsworth again appears as chief model:

Upon the forehead of the age to come. ("Sonnet XIV", 10)

It is that spirit, that bold scanning of the future, which seems to correspond to the special composition of the epistle. Each separate part grows in bulk and increases in momentum. The memory of the decisive night with Clarke who "chang'd the footpath for the grassy plain" (126) is the climax and comes at the end. The parting scene with its inevitable melancholy acts as a break leading into the rapid farewell. Instead of the symmetry of the former epistles we have structural growth corresponding to a tone of progressively mounting confidence, though the themes are much the same as before. Once again the form seems to be deliberately chosen. The increase in length from one section to the next is not simply a matter of uncontrolled enthusiasm, but appears to have been worked out within strict limits by the poet. Each section shows an increase in length of one third when compared with the immediately preceding one. Part I has twenty lines; one third more would give the second twenty-seven; it has twenty-eight. One third more would raise the number to thirty-seven; it goes up to thirty-five; and the final one should reach forty-seven or forty-nine, and the exact length of paragraph IV is forty-nine lines. It is hard to think that it is mere chance and that it does not correspond to a conscious effort on the part of the author. Unbridled abandon to an unqualified trust in his inspiration must have appeared dangerous to the young man, critical of his performance and doubtful of the quality of his poetry. Thanks to critical insight he seems to have tried to secure at least a certain hold over the form of his poems, their frame or inward structure. Thus his poetry owes something to the classical tradition of the XVIIIth century, much more than was generally admitted by Romantic authors. The different views of the two periods could be reconciled in the belief that

*Some beauties yet no precepts can declare,
For there's happiness as well as care.
Music resembles poetry, in each*

*Are nameless graces which no methods teach,
And which a master-hand alone can reach.
If, where the rules not far enough extend
(Since rules were made but to promote their end),
Some lucky licence answer to the full
The intent proposed, that licence is a rule.¹*

In *Poems 1817* Keats, one can guess, tries to find out different rules or methods that would ensure guidance till the "master-hand" could reach "nameless graces", the fruit of some "lucky licence".

¹ Alexander Pope, "Essay on Criticism", *Poems, Epistles and Satires* (1924; London: Dent, 1935), 141-149.

7. The Sonnet Pattern

Now it is clear that the sonnet form is not going to help us much in our research into the sort of structural imagery we have described. This pattern is indeed suited to expanded schemes of poetry, capable of evolving and developing freely. We have repeatedly spoken of a voyage, of a passage through or an exploration of the underworld. The mere notion of a journey calls for some sort of epic poetry, for a ballad, or for a verse form which lends itself to extension into books or numerous stanzas. Such are the poems we have examined and proposed as models of structural imagery. The sonnet, on the other hand, involves a fixed form which does not allow the poet to wander; it calls for discipline and restraint, economy and concentration. And yet in its rigidity it proposes a pattern which may have been more important in the young man's growth as a poet than has been recognized in critical works. The very necessity of concentrating all the tension of the sonnet in view of its fall in the last sentence creates a limited, but dynamic pattern which was going to mark the future evolution of the artist. Keats himself defines

*... the sonnet swelling loudly
Up to its climax and then dying proudly.*
(*"Epist. to C. C. Clarke"*, 60-61)

The image is well-chosen. It gives us a model in direct opposition to the one we have described; the line is drawn upward, with an abrupt fall at the end.

It may also be interesting to note that the mastery Keats acquired by writing sonnets seems to have made him more and more partial to the rhyme scheme of the quatrain of the Spenserian and Shakespearian sonnets. The Spenserian stanza uses it too and Keats had recourse to it for the "Eve of St Agnes" and "The Cap and Bells". It is even more remarkable in the odes, particularly the achievement of the great "Odes" ("To a Nightingale", "On a Grecian Urn", "To Psyche", "To Autumn", "On Melancholy"), Keats does not build up in a haphazard way as could be done with such an ill-defined

genre, but reverts to the strong foothold he had mastered in sonnet-writing, and always starts on firm ground with the rhyme scheme *abab*. It is also the basis of the eight line stanza of "Isabella".

We have argued elsewhere that Keats's search for a total domination of poetic technique can be traced in the poet's progress towards a regular stanza for the ode.¹ The schooling he had gone through in trying to achieve perfection in the sonnet brought mastery in other forms as well. His attempts at changing the pattern of the sonnet in his letter of 30 April 1819 ("If by dull rhymes our English must be chain'd..." and "To Sleep") are interesting indications of his desire to go beyond his models. Wisely he abandoned the idea, but what we know is sufficient to show that Keats felt confident enough to attempt a sort of revolution in the strictest and best defined of poetic forms, as if he had drained all its possibilities and virtues dry, and meant to instil into it what his genius perceived as a further regenerating step in the evolution of poetical patterns.

What can be retained for our purpose from Keats's attachment to the sonnet quatrain, is the lasting mark this type of poem was going to leave on his work as a whole. Hence the importance of his brief definition of that type of poem as one "swelling loudly / Up to its climax" (note the very prominent position of "up" at the beginning of the line) and then "dying proudly". If we read Keats's sonnets carefully it will be noticed that the two statements are not mere "florid style". They correspond to the traditional and formal division of the sonnet into octave and sestet. The former generally offers a gradation of impressions ending with a powerful statement or concentrated image, the key-note of the poem. The sestet comments on it in a different mood with a renewed movement of elation towards the conclusive statement. So the rising movement is not continuous. There is a distinct break after line 8. Once a certain level of intensity is reached, a slight rest is called for and a new start achieves a change of mood or outlook, pressing on towards the "clinching" lines. This development is important, leading as it does to an unexpected fall, or an abrupt silence. In the Shakespearian version of the sonnet, it even tends to assume the character of an epigram in a final couplet, slightly detached from the introducing quatrains.

We could, of course, produce numerous examples of sonnets and discuss their features at length in order to relate them to the broad structural imagery we have already depicted. Let us choose the best known of the 1817 series to illustrate the above lines; others will be dealt with in due time. The famous sonnet "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" starts on an image of geographical exploration that prepares in a remarkable way the final picture of the adventurer

¹ F. Matthey, "Interplay of Structure and Meaning in the 'Ode to a Nightingale'," *English Studies*, XLIX (1968), 305-307.

and discoverer staring "at the Pacific" (12). But at the beginning we are simply surveying, with the poet, a vast expanse of foreign land.

*Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen. (1-2)*

This is the first level and it is strongly attached to the earth by the words "realms" - "states" - "kingdoms". And yet the "realms of gold" imply something wider and deeper. "Gold" is there for its rare and precious qualities, and suggests the treasures of Golconda; it is also a reminder of the colour of the sky at sunset in the "western halls" sung by the poet in his "Ode to Apollo" (Febr. 1815). We cannot forget that Apollo is the

*God of the golden bow
And of the golden lyre
And of the golden hair
And of the golden fire. (1-4)*

Therefore the "realms of gold" are those of poetry, this being immediately confirmed by the presence of Apollo in line 4 of the sonnet. The first two lines seem to allude to the classical and foreign traditions of poetry, while lines 3-4 include the northern tradition kept by the "bards" in the western islands. That Apollo should have abandoned the Grecian Mediterranean shrine to nurture poetry in northern Europe fits the apparent course of the sun in the sky. One day is seen as a microcosm of the millennium of art and beauty, so that a syncretic acceptance of the mythic image of Apollo reigning over the Celtic tradition of the bards and the sacred language of romantic poets as well becomes possible. The chivalry of the Middle Ages, one source of romantic inspiration, is also evoked through Apollo's relationship of suzerainty to his faithful adorers.

*Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold. (3-4)*

We must admit that the concentration of these four lines is very successful and the load of imagery enormous. If, however, the expanse of ground already covered is wide, the exploratory journey remains on a purely horizontal plane, and Apollo's "fealty" does not produce any effect of elated rising towards the Elysium of the Gods. The word is, however, the first vertical element introduced up to this point.

The second quatrain starts with the same image of *terrae ignotae* to be explored, but concentrates on one particular kingdom or "demesne", the world of Homer.

*Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne. (5-6)*

"Deep-brow'd" is an impressive picture of the traditional mask of the blind poet, and implies the cerebral, intellectual powers of a genius. In a more subtle way, "deep" is also the first word in the poem that may be felt as producing the impression of a sudden motion. From that "depth" we are flung up to the peaks in the next line "Yet did I never breathe its pure serene" (7) in which we assume the power of Ariel to wander through ethereal regions of the sky. "Breathe", "pure", "serene", all three words belong to the imagery of the higher spheres of imagined heaven. And when, in the next line, "Chapman speak[s] out loud and bold" (8), it is with an authority akin to that of Apollo. It puts Chapman and Homer on the same plane as the god so that we must needs look up to find out from which high throne, Olymp or Ida, the commanding voice echoes out.

The impression created thus at the end of the octave is immediately translated from auditory to visual imagery in the next line, which opens the sestet:

*Then felt I like a watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken. (9-10)*

From the admirer of poetry we pass to the astronomer and his discovery of some new celestial body. The situation changes, but the register remains the same; we are still in the higher spheres, where Chapman and Homer have now been admitted. Also the feeling of exaltation is preserved, and this leads on to the evocation of Cortez, the adventurer, a sphinx-like, ecstatic figure on the mountain-top, looking downward over the new-discovered ocean. He is a god-like, Olympian figure again, his "eagle-eye" creating an unconscious link with Jove. All is static, calm, silent now. After the expectant attitude of the "watcher of the sky" whose observation appears due to an unexpected and rewarding motion of the star (the new planet "swims into his ken"), Cortez stands out against the background of the sky and ocean as a domineering Titan. His figure rises atop the "peak", the apex of a towering pyramid. At the same time he hovers ("with eagle eyes / He star'd at the Pacific") above the world. Thus this "stout" and proud figure, "Silent, upon a peak in Darien" (14), is opposed to the image of "Bards in fealty to Apollo" of the first quatrain. The structural line of the sonnet that had started there to "swell" very slightly has now reached tremendous intensity and power. Apollo beld the "bards" "in fealty", but Cortez' men are felt as a herd of frightened creatures under the domination and the protection of the semi-god. There seems to be a fall near the end when the attention is drawn towards

... all his men
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise. (12-13)

The insertion of this note within the last sentence describing the hero is particularly effective. Instead of a fall the distance between the crowd at the foot of their chief, looking about uncomprehendingly, both bewildered and wonder-struck, and their leader, unshakeable ("stout") and unattainable ("silent") in his ecstatic contemplation of some revelation, grows gigantic. "Upon a peak" (14) places him far above them; the mountain itself becomes the throne of a semi-god; and his silent fascination strikes with awe the rough companions of his conquest. The very name of the ocean adds to the feeling of calm domination and pacification. And thus the sonnet dies into silence, after "swelling loudly"; but dies "proudly". If ever a poem was true to the definition of its author, it is this one. What an extraordinary choice of word that last stroke "Darien"! It is wrong from the point of view of objective historical facts; from the point of view of auditory effect it suggests "daring". It, thus, stands in immediate opposition to the "wild surmise" of the men, and even to the Pacific, which here personifies acceptance, a surrender to that new master of the world who dared gaze over its wide expanse without a wink and take possession of it with "eagle eyes". Cortez, the imperial bird, challenges victoriously the other face of the world, while a useless crowd struck dumb, fears and waits. No one can deny that the fourteen lines correspond exactly to Keats's description of the sonnet in his "Epistle to C. C. Clarke". The final image is worthy of the noble and massive statues and monuments of Egypt that were being brought to England at the time. (A pyramid was to be erected in Trafalgar Square).¹ Thus the structural imagery of the sonnet, so well described by Keats in the "Epistle to Clarke" is achieved by way of a rise up to a high summit of tension followed by a sudden fall into silence. Apparently the poem dies with the climactic flourish of line 14, and yet the echoes of its concentrated world of images prolong its end till they dissolve and vanish.

Similar considerations could be drawn from a large number of the seventeen sonnets published in *Poems 1817* as a group. It may be because of the directness of their allusions and lack of a deep and more elaborate dimension that the three poems on women ("Woman! when I behold thee...", "Light feet, dark violet eyes...", "Ah! who can e'er forget...") were excluded from the series. They were attached to the early poems such as the "Imitation of Spenser", "Calidore", "Specimen of an Induction to a Poem", etc. In the use of images and symbols they do not reach the high power of suggestion of the other sonnets; the clinching lines do not open on that rare quality of silence

¹ Reference is made to Blunden, p. 496, in Rollins, op. cit., no. 29, 1, 149, note 4.

where meaningful whisperings build up an imaginary world of its own. In verse 14 of "Woman! when I behold thee...": "Might I be loved by thee like these of yore," all is said. We have read of the young poet's thrill in his love of idealized women. Yet we are still on the level of description; clever description it is, but we are not touched by the dimension of experience. Even the swelling to a final climax is not striking:

... to be thy defender
*I hotly burn — to be a Calidore —
A very Red Cross Knight — a stout Leander.* (11-13)

Except for the sake of the rhymes the order of the terms of comparison could be altered without any loss of meaning. Is there real gradation from Calidore to Leander?

The *Midsummer Night's Dream*-inspired end of "Ah! who can e'er forget..." already looks forward to the future dimension of Keats's sonnets. But its hypothetical form takes away some of the strength the same allusion lends to the conclusion of "Sonnet II" of the numbered series. We read it with a feeling of unreality, and are left with mere facts.

*Had I e'er seen her from an arbour take
A dewy flower, oft would that hand appear,
And o'er my eyes the trembling moisture shake.*
(*"Ah! who can e'er forget..."*, 12-14)

The difference with the following lines is striking:

*Ah! I will taste that dew, for me 'tis meet,
And when the moon her pallid face discloses,
I'll gather some by spells and incantation.*
(*"Sonnet II"*, 12-14)

The determination to risk the intoxication of the love philtre, the disquieting presence of an ill-looking moon produces the complex imagery suggestive of fatal passion that carries away the reader's imagination. We go far beyond the adolescent yearning for a girl's love, beyond the prank performed by Puck with the magic juice. Love appears with its irrepressible power, a product of unescapable dark mysterious forces. After love's pleasures expressed in the clear image of "Hybla's honied roses" (10), enjoyed richly, the last lines introduce a notion of witchcraft necessarily attached to love. They remind us of the complexity of emotion, that bliss is not to be isolated from the mad trance of passion.

The preoccupation expressed in "Sonnet 11" is very close to that of the three sonnets on women, but it has that quality of dying into active silence that corresponds to Keats's definition of sonnet structure which we have already mentioned. The "Sonnets on Women" borrow the form, but do not achieve the full purpose of true sonnets; hence, we suggest, their separation in the printed text from the series entitled "Sonnets".

Other sonnets are known, too, that were excluded from publication at the time. A few belong to Keats's earliest attempts. "As from the darkening gloom..." and "To Lord Byron" are dated 1814, "To Chatterton" and "On Peace" 1815.

H. W. Garrod in the chapter of Introduction to his critical edition of *The Poetical Works of John Keats* entitled "The Composition of *Poems 1817*"¹ discusses the exclusion of nine early poems that can be dated and could then, we know for sure, have been printed with the rest. He could have added the sonnet "On Peace" whose subject clearly points to Napoleon's deposition and 1815. He says: "One or two of them are of obviously inferior quality; though all of them, it might be urged, are better than the best of 'the short pieces in the middle of the book'." Our treatment of the three "Sonnets on Women" and the "Imitation of Spenser" is an incitement to look further into the matter. Where does the inferiority lie? Is it as obvious as all that? Among the nine poems listed, the "Ode to Apollo" ("In thy western hall...") has already been dealt with. What about the sonnets?

Here, and it is important for our demonstration, problems of form seem to have been the main factors of elimination. The rising structural pattern of imagery cannot be achieved if the delicate balance of octave and sestet is broken. The division could not be preserved by the young poet in "To Lord Byron" and "On Peace". In the piece addressed to Byron the rhyme scheme is perfect in its way: *abba abba cdcdcd*; but the meaning and punctuation divides the fourteen lines into three groups of five, seven and two lines respectively. Of course, the publication of *Poems 1817* follows close on the outburst of scandal around Byron's private life and his proud departure from "Albion's lessening shores".² The poem, then, may not have been considered likely to attract sympathy among circles of prospective readers. Byron's success in poetry, however, was not impaired by the philistine reaction to his divorce, and the theme of the sonnet can hardly be deemed a sufficient cause for rejection, for Keats explores the very ambiguity of feelings that is going to haunt his works — the inseparable duality of pain and joy. The "sweetly sad"

¹ H. W. Garrod, *op. cit.*, p. lxxxiii.

² Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (London: Warne & Co., no date), Canto III, i, 9.

melody (1), the "tale of pleasing woe" (14) cannot be thought to have been condemned by the future author of the "Odes", whose "heart aches" by "being too bappy" ("To a Nightingale", 1 and 6). In spite of the important evolution in Keats's attitude, from an emphasis on grief as a pleasure in itself to the notion that the intensity of happiness can turn it to pain, it is impossible to believe that the poet discarded his early poem for that reason. The theme was too dear to him. Yet it is important to see that the structural imagery of the sonnet gets necessarily entangled in the impossible evolution, in this case, of the theme of the co-existence of pain and pleasure. The poem cannot rise "Up to its climax", if we start from sweet sadness to reach pleasing woe. And here "To Lord Byron" undoubtedly fails. We therefore conclude that the problems of form and structural imagery justified disregard for the sonnet far more than considerations linked with the attitude of the time towards Byron or any abandonment of the idea expressed in the sonnet.

As far as "On Peace" is concerned, the political aspect of the poem cannot have justified exclusion, otherwise "To Kosciusko" and the sonnet "Written on the Day that Mr Leigh Hunt Left Prison" should not have been printed either. Nor can it be said that the problems set by the elimination of Napoleon from the European scene were out-of-date. Therefore once again it appears that the impossibility for Keats to improve on the form — the first quatrain is followed by a group of five lines which overlaps the normal division of octave and sestet — was the cause of his dissatisfaction with the poem. To fit rhyming and meaning also seems to have created difficulties, as line 13 was left incomplete; Keats seems to accept only reluctantly the word "great" rhyming both with "state" (11) and "fate" (14). In the three known transcripts it was added in pencil and not in Keats's hand.¹

The extension of the first sentence over nine lines mars the sonnet "On a Leander Gem" (March 1816). Indeed,

'Tis young Leander toiling to his death, (9)

evidently brings the "octave" to its conclusion. The structural imagery also fails to rise "up to a climax". The curve goes down definitely with the depressing description of the lover struggling to his death. And the poet's desperate attempt, in the last line, to change the downward course of the imagery —

He's gone: up bubbles all his amorous breath!

— is anything but convincing. It should be tragic; yet it is impossible

¹ Garrod, *op. cit.*, p. 527, note.

to feel it so. The light "bubbles" of "amorous breath" swimming up to the surface destroy the powerful picture of the lover's anxious and desperate efforts to reach the shore and his love. The last image is too close to a pun to suit the grave and true description that precedes.

*His body dips
Dead-heavy; arms and shoulders gleam awhile
He's gone. (12-14).*

The conclusion breaks the mood, and by contrast sounds ridiculous. Apart from these problems of form and structural imagery, the subject matter of the poem can be compared with the published occasional sonnet "To a Friend who Sent Me Some Roses".

"Sonnet I" of *Poems from "Literary Remains" 1848*, "Oh! how I love, on a fair summer's eve..." apparently conforms to the normal division of octave and sestet; and yet the punctuation hides the fact that the whole sonnet is but one long sentence, extending from line one to line 14. On the exclamation "Oh! how I love" (1) depends the whole series of infinitives which inflate the idea of escape to its final flight "on the wing of Poesy". There is no real separation between the love "to leave / All meaner thoughts", and "take a sweet reprieve / From little cares" (4-6), "to find... / A fragrant wild... / And there... my soul deceive" (6-8) and the sestet. "To warm my breast with patriotic lore" (9) and "on the wing of Poesy upsoar" (12) still depend on the main clause — "how I love" (1) — of the very beginning. There is a rise in imagery, but the full stop at the end of line 8 does not actually preserve the normal division octave-sestet, as it does in all the sonnets published in 1817.

Some similarity exists between the sonnet "To Chatterton" and that written on the death of Keats's grandmother ("As from the darkening gloom..."). Both are early pieces — 1815 and Dec. 1814 respectively. Both were excluded from publication. Formally they are more satisfactory than the poems dealt with above. Both express a belief in a heavenly paradise of souls that echoes Milton's sonnet *On his Blindness*. Yet this faith is not rooted sufficiently strongly in the young poet to resist comparison with actual feelings and the reality of life on earth. At the end of each sonnet despondency weighs down the comforting picture of the dead's happiness in heaven. "Wherefore does any grief our joy impair?" ends the sonnet on the poet's grandmother's death, and contrasts with the "superior bliss" (11) that seemed to be the accepted lot of the dear deceased old woman.

The feeling is very similar in the two quatrains "On Death". It is hard to guess why that poem was discarded. It is perfect in its brevity. It concentrates on the eternal theme of the paradox of the appearance and reality of death, as if reminiscent of Hamlet's "dread of something

after death".¹ And yet for Hamlet, life is not a dream. For our poet pain bears a heavier weight of reality than bliss. In the line,

The transient pleasures as a vision seem, (3)

he conveys Wordsworth's feeling that man on earth

*... by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended,²*

so that the poem epitomizes the famous statement:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting.³

The first line,

Can death be sleep when life is but a dream, (1)

leads to the clever echo and ambiguous answer of the last about man's "doom which is but to awake" (8).

Though the statement seems to open on a sort of credo concerning man's "future doom", it is hardly possible not to feel the impending menace in the word, or treat too lightly the stress laid on the realities of life. The fine symmetry of lines 1 and 8 may hide them behind shades of Christian beliefs and Platonic principles. In the dilemma between what *seems* what *is*, man thinks "the greatest pain's to die" (4) and dare not "forsake / His rugged path" (6-7). Keats always seems to shy at expressing in verse a definite, fixed attitude about his possible religious faith. His creeds are all about poetry. This may well have been the cause of his forgetting these perfect lines preserved in Georgiana Wylie's scrap-book. The same prudent reserve about religion will appear elsewhere.

Identically the belief expressed in "To Chatterton" that the poor young poet's soul had been exalted "among the stars / Of highest Heaven" (9-10) where he could go on singing "to the rolling spheres" (10) answers the requirement of the sonnet to rise "up to its climax". But the elated feeling breaks down when confronted with naked reality

*On earth the good man base detraction bars
From thy fair name, and waters it with tears. (13-14)*

¹ *Hamlet*, III, 1, 78.

² Wordsworth, *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*, ed. Matthew Arnold (1879; London: Macmillan, 1946), v, 16-17.

³ *ibid.*, v, 1.

One cannot help thinking that "the good man" in its grammatical singularity is a rare bird and that "base detraction" retains an overwhelming superiority over idealistic creed in the blisses of future life.

The sonnet written "In Disgust of Vulgar Superstition" belongs to the poems composed in playful challenge among the circle of Hunt's friends. The pieces of verse were to be completed within a given time — in this case somebody has added a note on the autograph manuscript: "written in 15 minutes." Other instances are the sonnet "To the Nile" (1818), that "On the Grasshopper and Cricket" (Dec. 1816) and "On Receiving a Laurel Crown from Leigh Hunt". For all we know, the last of the three may have been written after the publication of *Poems 1817*. Even if it were not so, the subject would have been a sufficient cause to avoid publication. Indeed the "Ode to Apollo" ("God of the golden bow...") expresses clearly the ridicule experienced by the poet after the intoxicating fumes of enthusiasm in the privacy of a circle of friends had cooled, and the demonstrative occasion appeared foolish in the fresh light of the morning. The same reason for preserving such poems for private memory applies to the sonnets addressed "To the Ladies Who Saw Me Crown'd" and "To a Young Lady Who Sent Me a Laurel Crown". Again the dates are unknown, but they may very well belong to some time after the publication of March 1817. Anyway the "Ode" cannot be dated before the spring of that year:

*The seeds and roots in Earth
Were swelling for summer fare, (27-28)*

and H. W. Garrod¹ thinks that the three sonnets must be related to the same circumstance. It is difficult, however, to imagine that a young lady sent a laurel crown with a view to a formal ceremony, where she would be present with two other ladies, while Hunt placed the wreath on the young poet's brow. Woodhouse's account of another circumstance when both Hunt and Keats were surprised by two gentlemen of their acquaintance as they were crowning themselves must not be discarded either. It was the cause of the "Ode to Apollo". And this particular occasion may have put an end — so far as Keats was concerned anyway — to a game Hunt's easy sentimentalism had introduced into his circle of enthusiastic ladies and artists. Whatever the date — or dates — of the sonnets, they are unsatisfactory from the point of view of content. Occasional, rapidly composed, they are all based on negative statements, as if the poet could not find any true inspiration in the subject, and could only manage to express what the theme was *not* like. This, of course, prevents the sonnet from rising "up" to any climax!

¹ H. W. Garrod, *op. cit.*, 519.

It must be clearly stated that rapidity of execution did not necessarily impair the quality of the product. In some way, respect for the pattern is stronger in these extempore wagers than in many other sonnets. "On the Grasshopper and Cricket" was published in *Poems 1817*. Quatrain and sestet answer each other. The modest cricket hidden among the stones of the stove recalls the atmosphere of summer in the midst of the frost and silence of the winter evening. In spite of the first rhyme (dead) which sounds rather queer when echoed by "mead" (4) — still there is meadow! — "lead" (5) and "weed" (8), the general pattern is firmly set: *abba abba cde cde*. The second quatrain adds precision to the summer atmosphere of the first. The starting line of the sestet,

The poetry of earth is ceasing never, (9)

is a strong reminder of the theme set in line 1. We have stepped up one degree towards immortality with the replacement of the static "never dead" by the dynamic double negative "ceasing never". The formal and rigid character of the transition is counterbalanced by the supple handling of run-on lines: 3-4 in the first quatrain, 5-6 and 6-7 in the second, then 10-11 and 11-12 together with the inseparable clinching lines (13-14) which summarize very satisfactorily the whole atmosphere of pleasant warmth and idleness, and the reigning power of nature, born of the songs of invisible insects. Such repeated wagers are proofs enough of the mastery acquired by the young poet. Here the problems both of form and of structural imagery have been overcome.

It may then appear strange that Keats should have left aside the sonnet "Written in Disgust of Vulgar Superstition". As Miss Lowell observed, it is a vigorous sonnet, a powerful rejection of accepted religious creed. Its structure is firm and clear, though the rhyme sequence of the sestet is rather unique: *cdcdde*. In no other sonnet of the period does Keats introduce a couplet just before the final line. Yet this cannot be considered a sufficient justification for not publishing the poem. The aggressive tone and violent attack against the church was probably the result of Keats meeting with Shelley at one of Hunt's parties. Keats often speaks of his principle of negative capability, that produced identification with the people, or objects, immediately influential. He felt himself a cameleon in the presence of others. The strong personality of Shelley must have impressed him, especially touching on a subject which had already roused many doubts in his heart. The sonnets "To Chatterton" and on the death of his grandmother ("As from the darkening gloom...") are instances of his increasing inability, hard though he tried, to believe in the bliss of souls in Heaven. Overwhelmed by the powerful presence of

Shelley's personality, Keats reacted on the spur of the moment. He may even have contemplated publishing the sonnet. Yet we know, from Haydon's unpublished journal,¹ that a few days later (Jan. 20), Haydon was inflamed by Shelley's deprecation of religion. Keats was present at the dinner-party. Haydon's personality was a match for the "bectic, spare, weakly yet intellectual-looking..." atheist, and the cameleon poet was driven away from the rebellious aristocrat of letters, though he still met him several times at the beginning of 1817. His friendship with and admiration of Haydon was rapidly growing in their communion over the plastic arts and the ideal of beauty. Keats could not have published the sonnet "Written in Disgust of Vulgar Superstition" without wounding Haydon profoundly. He could not print it side by side with the two sonnets (XIII and XIV) he had addressed to the painter. Then it is an important coincidence that Haydon should take him to see the Elgin marbles one or two days (March 1 or 2) previous to the publication of *Poems 1817* (March 3). It is difficult not to see some sort of connection between Keats's attitude and Coleridge's as expressed in his *Apologetic Preface to "Fire, Famine and Slaughter"*. Making excuses for not publishing two poems, Coleridge produces the following explanation: "... because there are passages in both which might have given offence to the religious feelings of certain readers. I myself indeed see no reason why *vulgar superstitions* [my italics] and absurd conceptions that deform the pure faith of a Christian should possess a greater immunity from ridicule than stories of witches, or the fables of Greece and Rome. But there are those who deem it profaneness and irreverence to call an ape an ape, if it but wear a monk's cowl on its head; and I would rather reason with this weakness than offend it."² Coleridge's "Preface" was written for the first edition of *Sibylline Leaves* in 1817. Was the preface known to some participants in the discussions at Hunt's or Haydon's during the last months of 1816? We feel very much inclined to see more than mere coincidence in the "vulgar superstitions" of Keats's title and Coleridge's text. Is the young poet's outburst not a breach of the "immunity from ridicule" and his restraint from making the sonnet public a desire not to "offend"? Moreover from what has been said about Keats's doubts concerning his creed and what we know about his attitude towards art, it is evident that he would discard a poem about religion more easily than one touching on the problems of poetry or art.

Mastery also appears in the jocular sonnet entitled "Nebuchadnezzars' Dream". If we accept Finney's argument, it may have been

¹ The episode is related in Timothy Hilton, *Keats and his World* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), 36-37.

² E. H. Coleridge, ed., *The Poems of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (1912; rpt. London: O. U. P., 1954), 600.

written just early enough to be inserted into the published collection.¹ In spirit, of course, it could hardly fit in there. We must however admire the virtuosity of the young poet at the time. Written in the presence of Henry Stephens it ranks, so far as form and structure are concerned, with the best of the extempore verse of Hunt's circle, and proves technical ability acquired through regular practice. With this brief compliment paid to a brilliant hoax, expostulating Keats's anger at Richard Abbey's patronizing attitude, we leave those sonnets that could have been chosen by the author for his first volume of verse, but were rejected. In most cases — nine out of eleven — the flaw lies in the defective pattern of the sonnets, which tends to show how heavily considerations of form weighed on Keats's selection of the works for publication.

The same conclusion can be reached through an examination of the seventeen sonnets published in *Poems 1817*, though the load of imagery of most cannot be compared to that of the Chapman's Homer sonnet. The dedication "To my Brother George" recalls the mood at the end of his "Epistle" to the same. The sonnet certainly is that "best lov'd employment / Of scribbling lines for you" ("Epistle to George", 120-121). The two quatrains describe nature objectively, as he does in the "Epistle" (121-138). The poet gives us a picture of the morning sun that leads to a perspective of the vast horizon of the sea and the nearer details of the shore. The vision widens in the second quatrain with an apprehension of the echoes roused by the "voice mysterious" (7) of the ocean. The immensity of the sea suggests a vision of the past and future, embracing thus the vastness of time. The sestet allows a new start; as we had the beauty of the morning sun kissing "the tears / That fill'd the eyes of morn", we now have an image of night with the moon, half guessed-at, behind or between the clouds. It is also suggestive of amorous embrace — "bridal night" (11), "half-discover'd revels" (12) — and, in that way, parallels lines 2-3 of the first quatrain. The final couplet — it is the only sonnet of the collection that, in this respect, follows the Shakespearian model — passes the "realm of Flora" and peeps into the "strife of human hearts". The "wonders" seen this day (1) and the "wonders of the sky and sea" (14) that are the core subject of the poem would be worthless "without the social thought of thee" (13). The poet's gratitude to his brother explodes in the last line, as we guess that Keats's invaluable and decisive experience of countryside and seascape at the end of his medical studies must have been due, particularly, to his brother's encouraging him to yield to the call of his vocation. The

¹ C. L. Finney, *The Evolution of Keats's Poetry*, 2 vol. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. P., 1986) I, 142-143. See also Miriam Allott, ed., *The Poems of John Keats*, 2nd rev. ed. (1970; London: Longman, 1972), 288-289; she thinks Finney's argument unconvincing, but dates the sonnet: end 1817.

poem ends on a question mark... and dies proudly into silence, avoiding embarrassing eulogy and thanks.

The charm of the "maiden's eyes" (8) of "Sonnet II" addressed once again to an unnamed lady, swells to the "intoxication" (11) and the "spells" and "incantation" of the clinching line. The palpable "dew" (11-12) and the atmosphere of night created by the sudden presence of the moon leads the reader to an awareness of *Midsummer Night's Dream* characters silently performing their magic. Here again it can be said that the poem reaches a climax, then leaves the imagination to its silent workings.

The imprecations against the politics of the Regent and all his "wretched crew" in the "Sonnet Written on the Day that Mr Leigh Hunt Left Prison" blows an unexpected trumpet of revolt. The poem is built on a contrast between the material coercion of the "prison walls" (6) and the "immortal spirit" (8) they cannot prevent from dwelling with Spenser and Milton. Images of high flights mark the progress of the sonnet. In contrast with the "minion of grandeur" (5) so "unwilling" (7) to release the poet, Hunt "shut in prison" (2) rises "free" (3) and "elate" (4) "as the sky-searching lark (4). The poem has been lifted to a first climax: "far happier, nobler was his fate" (8). The evocation of poets of old, Spenser and Milton, recalls and gives precision to the "immortal spirit" of the beginning. If the sestet starts on the level of pleasant wandering through Spenserian scenery, Milton and Hunt are depicted as moving "through the fields of air" (11). "Daring" (11) characterizes Milton and recalls the huge figure of Satan escaping "the Stygian Pool".¹ The weak adjective "happy" attributed to Hunt's "flights" (13) cannot bear any further the rising imagery. It is an unwished-for anti-climax; yet the intention is clear. For in the final contrasting attack on England's authorities and masters, the notions of fate (8) and immortality (8) emerge again in the violent opposition of Hunt's figured future "fame" (13) "when thou art dead" (14). In a final effort the line swells again adding to the abhorred Prince or King "all thy wretched crew". Though less perceptible in that early sonnet the pattern defined as a rise to a climax and a death into silence is present. Keats can be said to have already absorbed the true spirit of the fourteen-line structure and to be in a way mastering its exacting requirements.

The same growth or rise suddenly ending in echoing silence is again typical of "Sonnet IV": "How many bards gild the lapses of time!" The quatrains end with a reverberating image: "It's a pleasing chime." It sums up the impression of the poet when he thinks of all his admired forerunners. From that point on, the lines consist of an enumeration of sounds. Starting with "the songs of the birds" (10) and the ampler "whisp'ring of the leaves" (10) the imagery grows to

¹ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, III, 14.

the "solemn sound" (12) of the "great bell" (11). It builds up a vast symphony and we feel we have passed from the chime of line 8 to "music" (14). Yet the amplitude of the difference "chime" "music" is lessened by the mild epithet "pleasing" applied to both. Very skilfully Keats has kept back a winning trump card. The "wild uproar" of the last words create the necessary flourish expected at the end; but the possibly unpleasant meaning is corrected by the negation "pleasing music, and not wild uproar" (14). One cannot deny that the gradation is fully achieved and the silence that settles allows the reader to listen to the harmony of nature answering that of the poet's songs.

We did not mean to scrutinize each of the seventeen sonnets of the collection, and if, instead of analyzing a few of the most famous of them, we have chosen to review them rapidly, in the sequence in which they were published, it is simply to show that Keats was true to his concept. His idea of the sonnet as summarized in lines 60-61 of his "Epistle to C. C. Clarke" does appear actually realized in his own work. Further, what was said above concerning Keats's reasons for discarding certain sonnets, finds confirmation in the description of the structural imagery of the selected poems. Therefore we shall examine a few more examples.

The private feelings expressed in the sonnet addressed "To a Friend who Sent Me Some Roses" are again bathed in the *Midsummer Night's Dream* atmosphere of many of the poems Keats wrote at about that time. The flight upward appears in the description of nature at the beginning, with the "skylark" (2) rising from the dewy fields; and the "musk-rose" (6) is submitted to transmutation and becomes a magic sceptre: "The wand that queen Titania wields" (8). The sestet starts with the fragrance of the flower suggesting nature tamed in a garden; therefore from the musk-rose we pass on to the sophistication of a "garden-rose" (10), itself being easily related to the roses sent by his friend. The sense of fragrance is heightened, and, just as the musk-rose had assumed the status of Titania's wand, the roses take on a magic quality:

My sense with their deliciousness was spell'd. (12)

The clinching lines bring us one step further; we leave behind the world of Flora and enter that of humanity. The warm atmosphere of friendship fills the last line and gives a new dimension to the symbolic gift of some flowers. Their unobtrusive presence suggests affection and quiet intimacy. There is no trumpet blowing here, but a mere whisper (14). And yet the line develops fantastic dimensions through the bliss attending the present:

... peace, and truth, and friendliness unquell'd. (14)

The last word extends the limits of the horizon indefinitely, and gives the three abstract virtues a visual and tangible character that links the end with the sensuous world and its magic. The unexpected "unquell'd", with its connotations of generosity and grace abounding, sets off new echoes at the point where the poem sinks into silence. Thus, here again, realisation agrees with the poet's definition.

The quatrains of "O Solitude!" lead us up to "the steep, — / Nature's observatory" (3-4) whence as in "I stood tip-toe..." the poet may let his eyes dwell on the landscape below. The rising motion is repeated at the end of this first part with the images of the leaping deer (7) and the flight of the "wild bee" (8). The sestet explores another level of human experience: "images of thoughts refin'd" (11). The final lines concentrate on a climax of elation by grouping the connotations of "highest bliss" (13), "spirits" and "flee" (14). The solitary flight of the bee "from the fox-glove bell" (8) is answered by the humanitarian image of friendship and love: the couple flying up to the baunts of solitude (14). Difference of level and value there is also in the transmutation from the sexually charged image of the bee forcing its way into the intimacy of the fox-glove bell to the idealized couple of "spirits" experiencing abstract pleasures of the soul. The whole sestet rises, supported by an atmosphere of intellectual enjoyment that has left behind the pleasures of the flesh: "converse", "innocent mind" (10), "words", "images of thoughts", "refin'd" (11), "soul's pleasure" (12), "highest bliss of human-kind" (13), "kindred spirits" (14). The opposition between the "jumbld heap / Of murky buildings" (2-3) and the "highest bliss of human-kind" where "kindred spirits" may "flee" (13-14) is striking and bears witness to the character and dynamics of the structural imagery Keats meant to evolve and stick to.

The strict observance of the general structure may even appear more surprising in this poem where Keats seems to have tried to please Hunt's taste for freedom of form more than in any other of the series. Nowhere else do enjambments break the usual pattern of quatrains and sestet in such a way. The first sentence starts after the two-foot caesura of line one, and extends to line 3; the next statement with its parentheses — "Nature's observatory" (4) and the whole of line 5 — reaches to the middle of line 6, suppressing the habitual pause mark between the quatrains. Lines 6-7 and 7-8 are again run-on lines. The usual parts of the sestet are also welded by the sentence of lines 10-12 ending at the caesura. Yet the exterior reaction against the fixed rules and form does not lead to a negation of the "sonnet swelling loudly / Up to its climax and then dying proudly".

There are three occasions on which the poet actually expresses in words the proud death into silence of the finely chiselled poems. In the second sonnet addressed to Haydon ("Sonnet XIV") his

applause of the "great spirits now on earth [...] sojourning" (1) swells to the powerful, mysterious, disquieting "hum / Of mighty workings" (12-13). Then encouraged by Haydon (21 November 1816, To Haydon; no. 12, I, 118), Keats suppressed the weak second hemistich of line 13. The mute sequence unexpectedly and dramatically realizes the anticlimax of silence. The last line expresses it "proudly" indeed:

Listen awhile ye nations, and be dumb. (14)

Another instance can be found in "Sonnet X" where the last image is that of a shooting star:

*... like the passage of an angel's tear
That falls through the clear ether silently.*

Here again we must first recognize the swelling movement of the sonnet to a proud death. The first quatrain had already directed the poet's eyes to the gratifying contemplation of the "open face of heaven" (3). In the sestet again he looks at the clouds sailing by. Some weariness had crept into the second quatrain linked with the bliss of escaping into the world of imaginary romantic love ("tale of love and languishment", line 8). The same disappointment at the rapid elapsing of time leads to the wonderful image of the "angel's tear" (13) which at once carries us back to the imagined "tale of love and languishment", and up to the heavenly depths of the evening sky where the meteorite traces its mysterious sign. The fall is succeeded by the adverb that can best summarize the magic of the phenomenon: "silently" (14). The necessary amplitude is achieved by the sudden presence of the star in the growing darkness and the eerie light sinking to annihilation. The impressive vastness of the experience is enhanced by its silent performance.

The third example belongs to the conclusion of "Sonnet XII". The poem has been disprized by critics. It is true that it does not compare favourably with others because of the far-fetched attempts to describe empyrean regions with the pageantry of sensuous female seraphs. It is a transposition of a party at Hunt's. There the poet pretends to enjoy the bliss of inspiration. What is important for our purpose is to note how Keats retains the general internal structure of the sonnet by filling the high regions of his imaginary flight with music. The "hymning angel" (4), the "strings of heavenly harp" (5), the strains of music that "wander round our ears" (9) inspire his poetic creation:

*And as it reaches each delicious ending,
Let me write down a line of glorious tone.* (10-11)

The "wonders of the spheres" of line 12 can relate both to the divine communion with beauty to which poets can attain and prepare the climax of the exclamatory:

For what a height my spirit is contending! (13)

It can also be linked with the music of the spheres of ancient cosmology and thus add to the musical imagery of the sonnet. Consequently the fall of the last line:

'Tis [my spirit] not content so soon to be alone, (14)

not only stresses the loneliness of the young man, leaving his friends at an early hour (see the title of the sonnet), and his sense of frustration at the loss of the inspiring female presence, but also the silence invading his solitude.

The last lines of the five remaining sonnets (i. e. VIII "To my Brothers", IX "Keen, fitful gusts...", XIII "Addressed to Haydon", XVI "To Kosciusko" and XVII "Happy is England...") would suffice to show that the rising movement is successfully achieved in all of them. The peaceful chimney corner atmosphere of "To my Brothers" (18 November 1816), with its silence and whisperings pervading the whole poem, suddenly expands with the intrusion of "the great voice" (13) which

From its fair face, shall bid our spirits fly. (14)

It replaces the "whispers of the household gods" of line 3 dramatically, but without breaking the confident acceptance of life among "fraternal souls" (4). The subtle mixture of happiness and "care" (8) of the quatrains is repeated in the sestet in "a finer tone", to use Keats's phrase and Earl Wasserman's title. "This world's true joys" (13) happen to be, paradoxically, a festive day on which nothing takes place, except the comfortable contemplation of flames crackling on the hearth. The climactic end threatens final destruction of the ecstatic mood; and yet it breathes confidence and opens onto immortality. In a new key, the poet renews the complexity of the pleasure-pain theme. The impressive "great voice" (13) proceeds from a reassuring "fair face", and utters a command that both reminds us of our common mortality and sets the soul free from all the fetters of the flesh. Elation is once more perfectly realized.

"Sonnet IX" starts with the direct impressions of the poet walking back home in the freshness of early morning, and the sestet recalls the party of friends, the enthusiastic admiration of revered poets: Milton and Petrarch. The dry, cold winter scenery of the night is warmed by the memory of the bright hours spent in the "little cottage"

(10). The enthusiastic emotion grows rapidly from the friendly reception to a perception of ideal love. Milton's elegy precedes Petrarch's adoration of Laura. The inspiration caused by death leads to that of unending faith. Here again there is heightened tension towards the end of the poem. The homage of a wreath, probably laid on the brows of a bust of Petrarch during the party, takes us beyond the limits of the improvised ceremony itself. It speaks of the perennial value of the work of art, so that the final picture of

... *faithful Petrarch gloriously crown'd* (14)

aims at creating a feeling of immortality. Once again the structural imagery leads up to the realms of the gods.

It is also the case with "Sonnet XIII", "Addressed to Haydon", where the generous attitude of the painter is said to place him far above the "money-mong'ring, pitiable brood" (8):

*Unnumber'd souls breathe out a still applause,
Proud to behold him in his country's eye.* (13-14)

Keats's praise raises his friend on a pedestal that contrasts with the humble "people of no name" (3),

In noisome alley, and in pathless wood, (4)

of the first quatrain.

In the sonnet "To Kosciusko", the feeling of immortality is there from the very beginning. It sounds like a "glorious pealing" (3), "an everlasting tone" (4) from the first. It is thus more difficult to preserve the necessary rising movement in the imagery. This is achieved by speaking of the other heroes that deserve to be sung together with the great Polish patriot; and the auditory imagery of their names, changed to "harmonies" (7), develops in the sestet into the "tremendous birth" (12) of

*... a laud hymn, that sounds far, far away
To where the great God lives for evermore.* (13-14)

The amplitude of the song, its ubiquitous presence immediately banish "the earth" (10) and the saddening shadow attached to "the great of yore" (11). But the last line brings the whole image to its acme: the eternal life of the world of poetry and beauty. It is a triumphant end in a case where it was difficult for the imagery to evolve satisfactorily.

The rise in structural imagery is also realized in the last poem of the section, "Happy is England". The two quatrains are opposed

to each other just as the last three lines of the sestet are opposed to lines 9-11. The natural scenery of England (1-4) in its beauty does not prevent the poet from yearning after the milder climate of Italy (6) or the higher perspective of the Alps (7). The sestet parallels the quatrain with the same device of praise and longing for some more elevated experience. The loveliness of English girls, with all the sensuous attractions of human desires, directs the poet's thoughts further up towards an idealized meeting with the inspiring muses and graces.

*Yet do I often warmly burn to see
Beauties of deeper glance, and hear their singing
And float with them about the summer waters. (12-14)*

The elfin character of the female creatures, the magic of their songs, lead to the ecstatic sublimation of desires in a vision of hovering spirits. This time it is a floating impression that retains the warmth of love, the maturity of summer and the penetrating "glance" (13) of the inspiring ones.

We hope this rapid survey has given sufficient evidence of the consistent attitude of the young poet in his choice of sonnets for his first volume of verse. Only those corresponding to his own definition of the sonnet form were selected to be printed in the section entitled "Sonnets". Three sonnets on women were printed with the group of poems of various descriptions. A few—only two in fact—were discarded for personal reasons, although they were satisfactory enough from the point of view of form and structural imagery. The others, preserved privately by the poet or his admiring friends, were deficient in one or both respects.

8. "Sleep and Poetry"

"Sleep and Poetry" is Keats's "Ars poetica" in *Poems 1817*. So, very aptly, it closes the collection and states the poet's beliefs at the end of a first period of experience and development. Even more than in "I stood tip-toe...", the free use of heroic couplet particularly reflects Leigh Hunt's influence and exemplifies the young poet's will to free himself from XVIIIth century models. There is, indeed, no other poem of this first period where the young poet shows such liberty in his handling of that type of verse. If the beginning of the poem retains something of the concise expression typical of the two-line sentence rhythm, the poet then seems to take real pleasure in breaking up the classical pattern and going as far as he possibly can in the way of run-on lines. In some passages the statements practically never come to a stop at the end of a line, but always at the caesura; or, if they do, the couplet is split in two, the stop occurring after the first rhyme:

*The visions all are fled -- // the car is fled
Into the light of heaven, // and in their stead
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 that same chariot, // and the strange
Journey it went. (155-162)*

That is the eighth section of the poem, and the examples could be multiplied. One gets an impression that the poets, retaining the notion of rhymed poetry and rhyming couplets, mean to fit into this pattern the long Miltonic flight. A change in typography would turn such lines into blank verse very easily. Thus:

*The car is fled into the light of heaven
And in their stead a sense of real things
Comes doubly strong, and, like a muddy stream,
Would bear along my soul to nothingness.*

Wordsworth took the step in "Tintern Abbey". Yet blank verse does not easily fit the requirements of lyrical poetry; it suits dramatic pulsation or narrative poetry far better. Hence the decided attachment to the couplet. Here again we find the Romantics trying to reconcile extremes, and justifying modifications in the name of freedom. Such synthesis is realized for the sake of breaking up the hard and fast rules established by their predecessors. The new poets meant to replace the forms of poetic diction of the XVIIIth century by something that could be called organic growth. Yet Keats's process show that instinctively they clung to the various elements of the old rules and tried to improve on them by applying them differently. They were still, however, the backbones of their experiments.

In "Sleep and Poetry" Keats seems to revel in his demonstration of freed couplets, more especially in the central part of the poem, when he alludes to the classical school of the English XVIIIth century, influenced by the French critic and poet Boileau:

Beauty was awake!
Why were ye not awake? But ye were dead
To things ye knew not of, — were closely wed
To musty laws lined out with wretched rule
And compass vile: so that ye taught a school
Of dolts to smooth, inlay, and clip, and fit,
Till, like the certain wands of Jacob's wit,
Their verses tallied. Easy was the task:
A thousand handicraftsmen wore the mask
Of Poesy. Ill-fated, impious race!
That blasphemed the bright Lyrist to his face,
And did not know it, — no, they went about,
Holding a poor, decrepit standard out
Mark'd with most flimsy mottoes, and in large
The name of one Boileau! (192-206)

Now, this is indeed an attack and a challenge. Rarely do we find the rules of heroic couplets so wilfully transposed. The rhyme "awake" (192) sounds again at the caesura of the following line; we pass from run-on line to run-on line; the sense repeatedly extends from one caesura to another, and the cuts vary from verse to verse (for instances see lines 194, 196, 198, 201); when the meaning seems to close at the end of a couplet and a rhyme (202), a sudden extension of the thought carries it on to the middle of the next line. The abhorred name of Boileau, the "standard" of an "impious race", ends the rebellious utterance. Ironically, it is the despised craftsman in Keats who succeeds in exemplifying so brilliantly the "blasphemed" "Lyrist's" technique, after lulling the reader into a sense of false security by complying to the rules of the closed couplet in the first forty lines

of the poem. "Sleep and Poetry" turns out to be not only the theoretical "Ars poetica", but the practical demonstration of the poet's voluntary and conscious rupture with the XVIIIth century tradition. Pope's moderate attitude towards the rules is pushed aside, and his tribute to his masters, particularly "Boileau still in right of Horace sways"¹, the only thing remembered. And Keats's apostrophe in "Sleep and Poetry": "Ill-fated, impious race!" (201), recalls another passage of the *Essay on Criticism*:

*Moderns, beware! or if you must offend
Against the precept, ne'er transgress its end;
Let it be seldom, and compell'd by need.*²

Was Keats impelled by need? Perhaps, if we think of the necessity of rebellion at certain stages of development. It is clear that "Sleep and Poetry" puts an end to *Poems 1817* as well as to a period of exploration through carefully worked out poetry, especially attentive to the practice of technique, composition and balance of internal structure.

Still, to comply with the stormy enthusiasm of the young lyricism, the handicraftsman was to be hidden and openly rejected. That, possibly, is the reason why the composition of the poem is difficult to plot. Whereas "I stood tip-toe..." was divided into nine paragraphs, "Sleep and Poetry" is cut into nineteen unequal parts varying from four to forty-two lines. Finney divides the whole into three main parts³: one developing the theme of poetry from the points of view of inspiration, material at the poet's disposal and realms to explore (1-162). The next (162-312) is seen as a critical survey of the schools of English poetry: the Italian influence extending from Chaucer to Milton, the French models governing the poetry of Dryden and the XVIIIth century, the new school of the Romantic poets breathing "rich benedictions" (222). Finally a third part deals with a description of Hunt's cottage and a tribute to its owner, Keats's mentor at the time (312-404).

It is true that lines 162 and 312 mark important articulations in the composition of the poem; and yet both are placed in the middle of a line, so that the next idea developed in the poem starts after a caesura. It looks as though Keats had tried, in this too, to shake off the tradition of composition, as he was doing with the rules of the couplet. "I stood tip-toe..." also uses the same type of prosody as "Sleep and Poetry". Yet in the opening piece of *Poems 1817* the sequence of ideas is clearly marked by a division of full-line para-

¹ Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* (London: Dent, 1935), line 714.

² *ibid.*, 163-165.

³ Finney, *op. cit.*, I, chap. 2.

graphs, each of them ending after a complete couplet. Here in the last poem of the collection we are struck by the variety of lengths that characterizes the various passages. Of the nineteen paragraphs five end with a split couplet, the last line rhyming with the first of the next part; three end at the caesura. The poet seems to have tried to avoid any immediately visible structure in composition, or to have hidden it by devices analogous to those he was using to break up the traditional heroic couplet. Hence it is still more difficult than in "I stood tip-toe..." to discern the true structure of the poem. The thought of the poet seems to wander carelessly, one idea calling in the next one and allowing the author to linger, to dwell at leisure on some of his preferred themes. For example, his hope of "immortality" immediately suggests the brevity of actual life, and Keats indulges in a parenthesis of eleven lines (85-95) in which he tries to define life and its fragility. Some of them can compare with the best of the XVIIIth century's concise utterances:

Life is the rose's hope while yet unblown. (90)

That series of definitions of Life also recalls by its technique the famous monologue of Macbeth about Sleep after Duncan's murder.¹ This static transition allows him to start again with renewed vitality:

*O for ten years, that I may overwhelm
Myself in poesy. (96-97)*

It leads to the exploration of the realms of poetry (96-121), his view of his own development from lyrical poetry to the experience of a "nobler life" (122-154). The end of his exalted "vision" serves as a transition (155-162) to the exploration of three phases of English literary history: a time when "high imagination" could "freely fly" (164) in romance and Milton's epic poetry (162-180), the second (181-206) nurtured by "foppery and barbarism" (182), and a third that is a "fairer season" (206-229) whose products are examined critically (230-247) and found

*...forgetting the great end
Of poesy, that it should be a friend
To sooth the cares, and lift the thoughts of man. (245-247)*

Having thus examined what had been and was, the poet can once more turn to his own personal case and propose his own outlook of things:

*... they shall be accounted poet kings
Who simply tell the most heart-easing things. (267-268)*

¹ *Macbeth*, II, 2, 35-40.

The passage starting "Yet I rejoice" (248) ends with an exclamation:

O may these joys be ripe before I die, (269)

that echoes that of line 96:

*O for ten years, that I may overwhelm
Myself in poesy. (96-97)*

The first person "I" has again been pushed into the foreground. It is dominant in the lines expressing Keats's doubts as to his presumptuous attitude, but also his determination to be the poet he imagines, whatever the cost and whatever his fate. He is aware of the difficulties; yet he has fallen in love with Poetry and has become its irrecoverable worshipper!

The end of the poem deals with the value of friendship and the pleasant opportunities (312-404) it gives to revel in the poetic exaltation of "Pleasure's temple" (355), Hunt's house. With it we revert to a list of "luxuries" (347) such as we had in "I stood tip-toe...", except for the fact that works of art, pictures especially, replace the inspiration born of direct contact with nature.

What is striking from the point of view of composition is the central passage attacking violently XVIIIth century poetry. The final spiteful cry of contempt—

*Ill-fated, impious race!
That blasphemed the bright Lyrist to his face,
And did not know it, — no, they went about
Holding a poor, decrepit standard out
Mark'd with most flimsy mottos, and in large
The name of one Boileau! (201-206)*

—occurs at the exact middle point of the poem. Before and after are exposed the cases of less barbarous ages, when "the Muses were nigh cloy'd / With honors" (178-179). This passage about English poetry consists altogether of eighty-five and a half lines (162-247) (four paragraphs counting eighteen and a half, twenty-five and a half, twenty-three and a half and eighteen lines respectively). The poet does not interfere personally. The first person singular is never used, and the rapid survey is seen objectively in general terms. The brief history of English poetry recreates the pattern of an exploration starting with the high standard reached in Renaissance England and goes down to the pit of the Augustan period, to trace again the upward journey of the Romantic revival.

The three paragraphs that precede (sixty-six and a half lines in all) (96-162) and the two that follow (sixty-four and a half lines)

(248-312) deal, on the contrary, with the poet's definitions of his plans and his views concerning poetry. In both, the imagery of an exploration and journey plays an important part. The poet enjoys the realms "of Flora, and old Pan" (102) and twenty lines further will "pass them for a nobler life" (123). Apollo himself takes a dive with his car from the height of heaven to approach and know more of the "delight", "mystery" and "fear" (138) of mankind. Strangely enough, under the eyes of the Sun-God and charioteer, men pass like shadows "before a dusky space" (139) or "atwart the gloom" (146). Inconsistent inhabitants of some Hades they "murmur, laugh, and smile, and weep" (142) fascinated by an Orphean spell;

... as they would chase
Some ever-fleeting music on they sweep. (140-141)

Suddenly all vanishes; the driver "is fled / Into the light of heaven" (155-156) and the poet feels "a sense of real things" (157) invade his whole being. He must struggle not to allow such influence to "bear along / [His] soul to nothingness" (158-159). From the general context the image of the "muddy stream" (158) takes on the character of some infernal river, a "Stygean pool"¹ out of which the poet, a new Orpheus, or a new Satan must escape, but never forget "the strange / Journey it went" (161-162).

It is in a different atmosphere that the "strange journey" recurs. The poet explores the material of the poetry he now advocates to make it a "friend"

To sooth the cares, and lift the thoughts of man. (246-247)

The crystalline and fresh poetry of "I stood tip-toe..." evocative of spring and the "fair paradise of Nature's light" ("I stood tip-toe...", 126) is there again. It is the realm of Flora opening the way to another exploratory journey:

... th' imagination
Into most lovely labyrinths will be gone. (265-266)

The total immersion of the poet in the inner life of the simple things of nature is an experience in itself, a subtle and profound step to be taken before venturing into other realms. And if the latter were to be denied by fate, it seems that this first exploration would suffice to bring the poet bliss.

O may these joys be ripe before I die. (269)

¹ *Paradise Lost*, III, 14.

However, the "vast idea" (291) is there in front of him where he perceives "the end and aim of Poesy" (293), and the image of possible failure, Dedalus precipitated from heaven, recalls the journey of the chariot in the parallel passage about the nobler achievements of poetry. The ocean with its many isles to be discovered, "spread awfully before me" (307), is another temptation, that of adventure and the risks of the unknown.

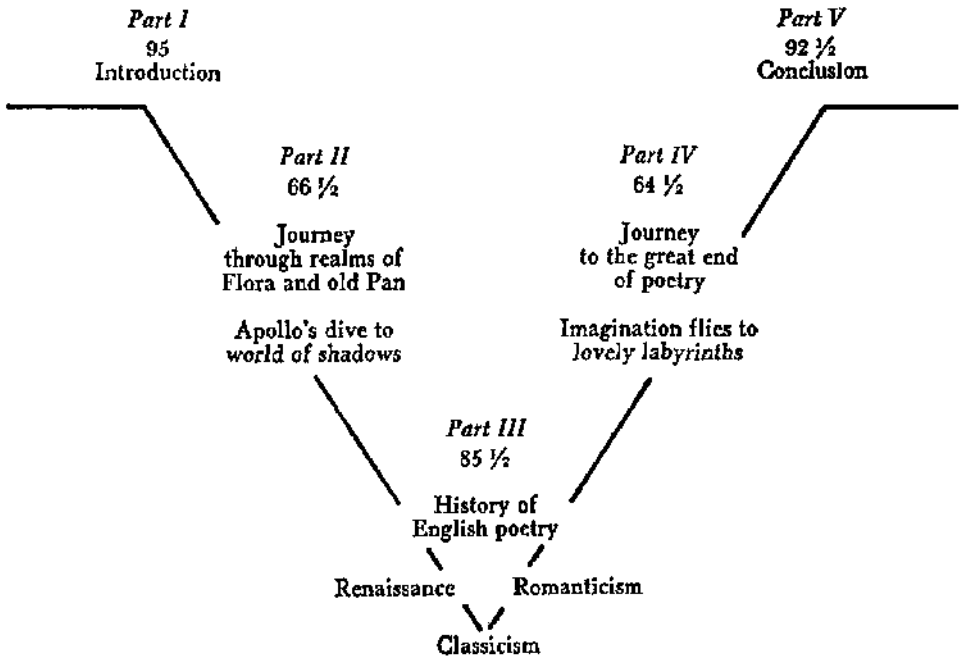
*How much toil!
How many days! what desperate turmoil!
Ere I can have explored its widenesses. (307-309)*

With this image we come to the concluding passage (312-404) which recalls the night spent at Hunt's house, the friendly mood, the artistic atmosphere and the sleepless hours that ensued: the very ingredients able to "nourish up the flame / Within my breast" (398-399). The passage, numbering ninety-two and a half lines, parallels the opening paragraphs of the poem (1-95) in quantity, and also in the fact that the earlier passage deals at length with the themes developed at the end, i. e. poetry and the sources of inspiration, sleep being one in the mysterious workings of its powerful inactivity.

Therefore what appeared at first a shapeless and tormented suite of more or less developed ideas turns out to be a well-balanced construction, camouflaged as it were, by the tricks of prosody advocated by Hunt. The introduction deals with the themes of sleep, poetry and the power of inspiration; the conclusion adds the proper atmosphere necessary to foster them (ninety-five and ninety-two and a half lines respectively). The two intermediate passages stress the existence of the poet himself, the realms to explore, the means, ways and aims of poetry (sixty-six and a half, and sixty-four and a half lines). The central part constitutes a brief history of English poetry in the form of a journey into the bottomless pit of classical poetry in England compared to the peaks of the Renaissance and Romanticism. Under the complicated prosody used by the author we have found once more the symmetrical construction, the symbolic journeys, the structural imagery we feel was the recurring basis of Keats's art.

The figure of an inverted pyramid representing the general movement of the poem is fully realized. There is no particular direction up- or downward in both introduction and conclusion; the central passage clearly leads the imagination down-, then upwards — classicism being the lowest level of the curve. This is prepared for by the second part of the poem where the imagery of journeying through the "realm... of Flora, and old Pan" evolves towards poetry exploring a dim country of shadows. The "fairer season" (221) of romantic poetry encourages the poet to look further up for the "great end / Of poesy" (245-246). The wings of imagination will reveal to him "lovely

labyrinths" (266). Higher and higher goes the path. The flight upwards to his "vast idea" (291) may be too much and end in failure. However the fear of being perhaps too presumptuous, does not undermine his determination to achieve his high aim. With the conclusion confidence and a calmer mood are reinstated, a pendant to the harmonious atmosphere set by Sleep in the introduction.



This survey of *Poems 1817* leads then to a reinforcement of our previous feeling that patterns and the interplay of images were all-important elements of Keats's art from the very first stage of his preoccupations as a poet. They stand out as being used by the young author as a critical basis for his choice of poems for publication. The symmetrical composition of most of the pieces seems to be repeated as an echo in the disposition of the book itself. "I stood tip-toe..." and "Sleep and Poetry" answer each other, in a way, at either end of the volume. Unequal quantitatively, they are, however, the two longest poems and belong to the same period of relaxed easy-flowing couplets. Both discuss poetry and aim at defining the poet's program. So do the three "Epistles" with grateful acknowledgement of friendly influences and help. They have some bulk, and give weight to the collection by being placed in a central position. The shorter poems fill the space

between "I stood tip-toe..." and those three letters in verse; just as the sonnets balance the symmetry between the "Epistles" and "Sleep and Poetry". Keats appears to have chosen to place first his unfinished or abandoned pieces. "I stood tip-toe..." ends on a note of renunciation; it introduces the theme of *Endymion*, but the poet stops, as if recoiling from the contemplated task:

*Was there a Poet born? — but now no more,
My wand'ring spirit must no farther soar. — (241-242)*

The titles of "Specimen of an Induction to a Poem" and "Calidore — A fragment —" speak for themselves. Then the author placed finished poems of different types, chosen for their formal qualities and the internal coherence of their imagery. We have shown that the downward journey appears in some of them, short as they are ("To Some Ladies", "On Receiving a Curious Shell") and is realized in pure structural imagery in the "Imitation of Spenser". Symmetry of composition is a striking feature of "To Some Ladies", "On Receiving a Curious Shell..." and "To... [Mary Frogley]". The seventeen sonnets followed by "Sleep and Poetry" do not equal the first part in total length. In quality, however, they weigh more and thus balance cannot be said to be lacking.

It is important to note that the book ends with a poem in which the down- and upward journey appears in a symbolic way, but to its full extent, in the survey of English poetry, and that it also appears in the "Epistle to G. F. Mathew" and that "To George Keats". The structural imagery in the shape of an inverted pyramid is the most frequently repeated pattern of composition. There are exceptions, of course, as could be expected in a young poet's first publication: the timid attempt at a rise and fall in "I stood tip-toe...", the recurring elation of "To Hope", the growing structure of the "Epistle to Charles Cowden Clarke".

The sonnet structure with its definite rise and abrupt fall into silence introduces a marked change in perspective, and a reversal of the pattern. The selection made by Keats proves the importance he had fully understood and worked out. Bearing in mind the future achievements of Keats's odes, whose stanzas tend to assemble a sonnet quatrain and a sestet, (see "Ode to a Nigbtigale", "Ode on a Grecian Urn") one cannot but emphasize the importance of his mastery of such pieces at this time. But the sonnet is too short and too sharply interrupted to allow the full structural imagery of a pyramid that will become a characteristic of Keats's mature works.

PART II

From Underground Journeying
to a Reversal of Structure

9. A Difficult Exploration: *Endymion*

In his dreams of future fame Keats seems to have relied mainly on composing some extended piece of poetry, some work that could match *The Faerie Queene* or *Paradise Lost* in length and contents.

*Spenserian vowels that elope with ease,
And float along like birds o'er summer seas;
Miltonian storms, and more, Miltonian tenderness;
Michael in arms, and more, meek Eve's fair slenderness.*

(“Epistle to C. C. C.”, 56-59)

Lines, songs, sonnets were never despised and all necessary care given to chiselling their neat features. The elaborate filigree of lyrics was brought to utmost perfection, and yet the final aim, the fascination of the poet, remained the massive bulk of a number of cantos, or books. Only that type of poetry seems to have deserved in his view the name of a Poem. The “Epistle to Mathew, is referred to as “a sheet or two of Verses” (9 October 1816, To C. C. Clarke; no. 7, I, 113). Sonnets are called by their own name; that is natural. For instance his intention of reading *King Lear* demands “the prologue of a Sonnet” (23 January 1818, To George and Tom Keats; no. 56, I, 214). The surprise of seeing a lock of Milton's hair produces what the letter writer calls an “Ode” (23 January 1818, To Bailey; no. 55, I, 211). Other circumstances will inspire an old song: “O blush not so...” (31 January 1818, To Reynolds; no. 58, I, 219) and prevent him from writing “a serious poetical Letter”. ...“I cannot write in prose. It is a sun-shiny day and I cannot so here goes,

Hence Burgundy...” (ibid., 220)

The lyric “Souls of Poets dead and gone” is introduced as “the Mermaid lines” (3 February 1818, To Reynolds; no. 59, I, 225). Light verse written in a “rhyming fit” (“Where be ye going, you Devon Maid?”) are slightly and jokingly addressed to Haydon as a “doggrel” and a “B...hrell”! (21 March 1818, To Haydon; no. 70,

I, 250). Often the pieces of poetry sent to Keats's friends are given abruptly after a brief comment, thus:

"I went yesterday ta [D]awlish fair — Over the hill and over the dale, / And over the bourn to Dawlish —" (24 March 1818, To Rice; no. 72, I, 256), or the well-known "I had no Idea of the Morning and the Thrush said I was right — seeming to say — O thou whose face bath felt the Winter's wind..." (19 February 1818, To Reynolds; no. 62, I, 233).

None of such works seems to have been considered as deserving the title of a *poem*. "Poems" appears only when the poet talks of a collection: "Shakespeare's Poems" (22 November 1817, To Reynolds; no. 44, I, 188), or "My Poems [he means *Poems* 1817] are known in the west country" (14 February 1818, To George and Tom Keats; no. 51, I, 227). The word "Poem", in the singular and with a capital letter, always refers to a long piece of work. "Mr H. [Hunt] has got a great way into a Poem" — he alludes to *The Nymphs* (25 March 1817, To C. C. Clarke; no. 19, I, 126). In the letters written from Autumn 1816 to Spring 1818, the word is mostly used to speak of the composition of his own *Endymion*. "Not begun at all 'till half done', so according to that I have not begun my Poem [...] I revoke my Promise of finishing my Poem by the Autumn" (10 May 1817, To Haydon; no. 26, I, 141-142). "We lead very industrious lives he in general Studies and I in proceeding at a pretty good rate with a Poem which I hope you will see early in the next year" (10 September 1817, To Fanny Keats; no. 32, I, 154). In the cancelled Preface to *Endymion* he also stresses the difference between short occasional pieces — "A Morning work at most" (8 October 1817, To Bailey; no. 38, I, 170) — and his "Poetic Romance": "About a twelve month since, I published a little book of verses", and further on he turns to his new work "this Poem must rather be considered as an endeavour than a thing accomplished". As he already contemplated writing "Hyperion" he adds: "I would redeem myself with a new Poem." Again the word points to a work in several Books. The list of quotations could be extended.

One more instance, however, is necessary. In a now unknown letter to his brothers whose contents have been partly preserved, as Keats quoted extensively from it when he wrote to Bailey on October 8, 1817, the poet explains the virtues he sees in the effort of composing long works. "As to what you say about my being a Poet, I can return no answer but by saying that the high Idea I have of poetical fame makes me think I see it towering to[o] high above me. At any rate I have no right to talk until *Endymion* is finished — it will be a test, a trial of my Power of Imagination and chiefly of my invention which is a rare thing indeed — by which I must make 4000 lines of one bare circumstance and fill them with Poetry" (no. 38, I, 169-170). He adds a few lines later: "a long Poem is a test of Invention which I take to

be the Polar Star of Poetry, as Fancy is the Sails and Imagination the Rudder" (idem, 170). It is evident that Keats when he launched all his energies into writing *Endymion* was seeking a definite proof of his talents and genius, and that it could be given him only by a total exertion of his creative faculties. The fame of the great writers he admired in the past rested on their works of some bulk. He thought of Homer in Chapman's translation, Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Shakespeare's poems and plays. "Did our great poets ever write short Pieces?" (8 October 1817, To Bailey; no. 38, I, 170). When inspiration was lacking the memory of such vast enterprises of his forerunners upheld his own attempt. "At Canterbury I hope the Remembrance of Cbaucer will set me forward like a Billiard Ball" (16 May 1817, To Taylor and Hessey; no. 27, I, 147). The letter to Bailey quoting another one to his brother George (8 October 1817, To Bailey; no. 38, I, 169), shows that in order to fulfil his purpose he set himself a very definite task: "I must make 4000 lines", and from what we know of the finished *Endymion* it is clear that from the very beginning Keats must have had some view of the composition and the general unfolding of the mythological theme.

It cannot be mere chance either that the four Books number practically one thousand lines of verse each. Actually Book I has 992, Book II 1023, Book III 1032 and Book IV 1003; altogether 4050 lines as foretold. What is striking is the deliberate and arbitrary decision about the size of the work, and the effort to respect the self-imposed extent and limits before the young man could really know whether the enterprise was possible or not. This reinforces our impression that Keats, from the beginning, rejects the attitude of improvisation that could derive from a superficial rating of Wordsworth's famous statement: "All good Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings."¹ After what we concluded from our study of *Poems 1817*, Keats might have changed the phrase into something like "the controlled outflow of powerful feelings into set frames". To Bailey he writes on 22 November 1817: "I am just arrived at Dorking to change the Scene — change the Air and give me a spur to wind up my Poem, of which there are wanting 500 Lines" (no. 43, I, 187). Again it is evident that he works wilfully on a definite pattern, a design he sees standing in front of him, like a picture in Haydon's studio.

This explains part of his resentment towards Hunt who would have liked to patronize and guide the poet's new flight, and at the same time modify his prefigured scheme. "When he met Reynolds in the Theatre John told him that I was getting on to the completion of 4000 Lines. Ah! says Hunt, had it not been for me they would have been 7000! If he will say this to Reynolds what would he to

¹ Wordsworth, "1800 Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*," ed. R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones (London: Methuen, 1965), 246.

other People?" (8 October 1817, To Bailey; no. 38, I, 169). Indeed Hunt's attitude betrays his disappointment at feeling young Keats escaping his influence. His attempt to draw towards himself some of the future praise for Keats's achievement is a blemish on his character, but proof enough of his belief in the young man's capacity. A letter to George and Tom shows that Hunt's and Shelley's resentment as to Keats's independent attitude in the conceiving and making of *Endymion* had not abated by the time the work was complete. "The fact is he [i. e. Hunt] & Shelley are hurt & perhaps justly, at my not having showed them the affair officiously & from several hints I have had they appear much disposed to dissect & anatomize, any trip or slip I may have made" (23 January 1818, To George and Tom Keats; no. 56, I, 214). All that can be said is that the greatest minds are not exempt from petty jealousy. This, however, establishes the consecutive stepping of the poet from the conception of his "vast idea" to its fulfilment within the limits set for it by a decision of his own. As a skilful craftsman, he builds up a general structure and then realizes it down to the last details: the lay out of the pages and the place of commas. "Your alteration strikes me as being a great improvement — the page looks much better. And now I will attend to the Punctuations you speak of" (27 February 1818, To Taylor; no. 65, I, 238).

In spite of the irregularity of Keats's work in the making of the poem, we feel that he meant to respect his first plan. Moments of inspiration were followed by periods of feverish and sterile agitation; the difficulties about money, the cares of ill-health settling on the family, called him back to the town where the bustle of life prevented regular work; then weeks spent out of London permitted further spells of renewed inspiration and stubborn efforts to bring his intended plan to a conclusion. The Isabella Jones episode in May-June must not be overlooked. It is the actual materialization of that passage from a boy's imagination to "the mature imagination of a man", the poet speaks of in his published Preface to *Endymion*. The discovery, and perhaps experience of a love more powerful than the vague idealized melancholy and self-satisfying dreams of women he had been content with up to the summer of 1817, must have troubled the young poet extremely. How could he manage to evolve his poem towards a picture of love less tinted with the adolescent yearnings he could no longer accept as valid?

Indeed a new outlook seems to have freed him from his hesitations and doubts; *Endymion* Book III was written in three weeks. It must not be thought that this renewed activity was the normal progress of the author's plan. It rather sounds like a forced attempt at finishing off an insipid dish. "You will be glad to hear that within these last three weeks I have written 1000 lines — which are the third Book of my Poem. My Ideas with respect to it I assure you are very low —

and I would write the subject thoroughly again but I am tired of it and think the time would be better spent in writing a new Romance which I have in my eye for next summer — Rome was not built in a Day and all the good I expect from my employment this summer is the fruit of Experience which I hope to gather in my next Poem" (28 September 1817, To Haydon; no. 37, I, 168). Nothing can be clearer. *Endymion* has become little more than a punishment imposed on a school-boy. If he goes on, it is only to fulfil his promise to himself, a challenge which can be made beneficial, if the task is brought to a conclusion. It is also evident that the evolution described as operating between *Endymion* and "Hyperion" was already working in the poet's mind. It shaped a number of elements in the second half of the "Poetic Romance".

All this occurred at a time of great interior tension in the summer of 1817, as said above. It helped him to solve some of the problems of his quest as a poet. It set him thinking of a new, more powerful work. And yet, though he felt in himself the powerful change of his attitude towards poetry, and towards love, and therefore, could measure the failure of his great attempt long before he came to write the final episodes of his poem, he remained attached to his first notion of completing four books of about one thousand lines each. The forced nature of his final effort he expressed both in his letters and in the poem itself. His determination to bring *Endymion* to its conclusion is evoked side by side with the sigh of relief he will heave to see it finished. To Bailey he wrote on 28 October: "I don't suppose I've w[r]itten as many Lines as you have read Volumes or at least Chapters since I saw you. However, I am in a fair way now to come to a conclusion in at least three Weeks when I assure you I shall be glad to dismount for a Month or two" (no. 39, I, 172). He quotes, in the same letter the beginning of Book IV, his prayer "Muse of my native land", which ends:

*O Muse thou knowest what prison
Of flesh and bone curbs and confines and frets
Our Spirits Wings: despondency besets
Our Pillows and the fresh tomorrow morn
Seems to give [forth] its light in very scorn
Of our dull uni[n]spired snail paced lives.
Long have I said "how happy he who shrive[s]
To thee" — but then I thought on Poets gone
And could not pray — nor can I now — so on
I move to the end in Humbleness of Heart. (IV, 20-29)*

This is the text as it appears in the letter. A month later however, Keats was still in the midst of his last book, looking for some incentive to inspire a fit ending to the tale. "I am just arrived at Dorking to

change the Scene — change the Air and give me a spur to wind up my Poem, of which there are wanting 500 Lines" (22 November 1817, To Bailey; no. 44, I, 187).

It is evident that the hazards of composition, and the time taken to complete the poem make it vain to search in *Endymion* for the exact and detailed symmetry of construction which we have found in some of Keats's early poems. Yet even a superficial reading reveals the existence of the structural imagery of the journey, leading from the ethereal flight of Endymion's vision of love in Book I to the airy riding with the Indian maid of Book IV. In-between the prolonged exploration of the underworld with its successive trials of initiation reminds us inevitably of the cold passage through death, a "rare and hard" experience that guides the steadfast, chosen ones towards a rebirth into the bliss of mortality overpowered and vanquished.

The memory of his sensual dream of love confronts Endymion with his earthly condition of mortal man, unable to reconcile his human condition with the high ideal he has evolved in his solitude. There is no choice left, but to start on the lonely quest of the knight errant. His faith in "wandering far" that may lead to a reward of his love will be his only help and support. He is mysteriously ordered to venture underground into the "silent mysteries of earth" (II, 214).

The pangs of the passage into the forbidden realms of Hades are there: "he fled / Into the fearful deep," (216) soon to feel as if drawn "into the bosom of a hated thing" (280). If it were not for a number of "miracles" supporting his faith in the divinity that protects him he would succumb to the deadly silence of the mineral landscape that surrounds his solitude. From abyss to abyss his way leads him to a confrontation with the fatal dangers encountered by lovers: abandonment, jealousy, selfishness, leading possibly to death, as in the case of Adonis. Fortunately sleep is a boon, recurring to assuage the moments of deepest anguish as it allows the imagination to escape for a moment from the oppressing realities of the surrounding world. Yet the remembrance of earthly happinesses brings a melancholy which deepens with the discovery of Alpheus' love for Arethusa — thwarted by his own divine protectress, his gentle goddess, Diana. No wonder then that passing into the watery depths of the "giant sea" (1023), he should encounter a scene of wreck and ruin, and in the midst of it all that most decrepit of all unhappy lovers: Glaucus. The most fearful event of the underworld passage is, however, the moment when new hope gleams and smiles. The trial is crushing; still Endymion is no longer alone, and if successful he cannot but be carried along with the pageant of resuscitated and reunited dead lovers.

It is not unnatural, therefore, to find the fourth book dedicated to the trials of a couple of mortal lovers. What may be found more astonishing is the poet's choice of having them mount winged horses

for a flight to the Empyrean. The rise from the bottom of the sea back to the coolness of the forest green (III, 1029) was not enough to establish the symmetry that we feel must have existed in Keats's mind from the very beginning as a criterion by which to judge of the acceptability of a poem. To the solitary vision and dream of Book I he opposed the bliss and pain of lovers rising in their sleep to the highest spheres of the air.

The feeling that all this was a clear pattern from the first and was worked out in spite of the difficulties the poet met with in the fulfilment of his task is reinforced by a rapid estimation of the number of lines used to express both experiences. In Book I Endymion describes his vision of love from line 516 to the end, i. e. 477 lines altogether. In Book IV the flight with the Indian maid comes to a fateful end after 512 lines, which is a fair match, if we consider the length of the poem and the complicated plot — and even more so if the disillusioned introduction to Book IV is considered simply as a necessary breathing space in an exhausting climb to a peak still hidden in clouds.

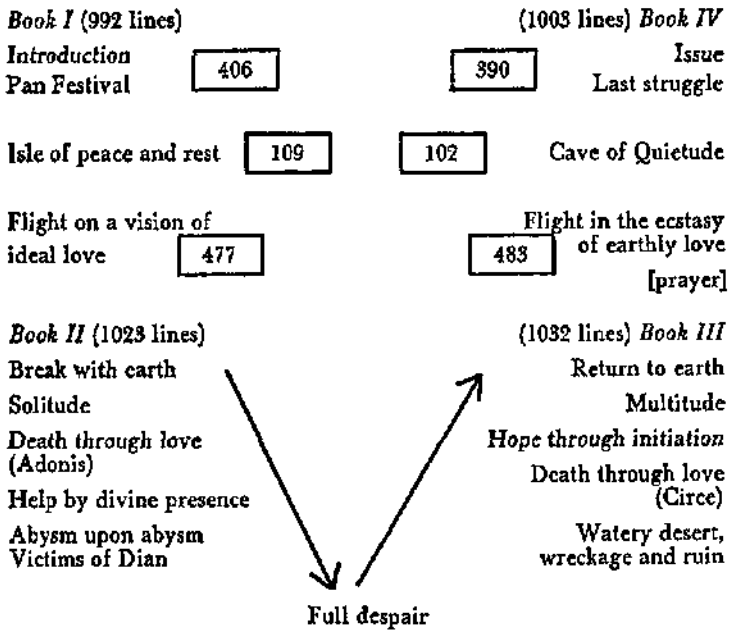
Twenty-nine lines taken out of a total number of 512 brings the episode to a total of 483, very near the 477 of Endymion's confession of love. Can it be mere chance that the shepherd's disclosing of his love to his sister, the illusion of love with a divinity, should fill a space practically equal to the tale of his fulfilment of love with a mortal? Moreover both passages are placed symmetrically before and after the underground journey, filling the second half of Book I and the first of Book IV. One is the cause of the quest; the other the result of the successful initiation.

Again, if we move from the central part of the poem, i. e. the junction of Books II and III, towards its beginning and end, we find that solidity of conception that already marked the early works of the poet and the symmetrical disposition we have observed elsewhere. Book II and Book III embrace the moment of full despair when Endymion discovers that Diana, his idealized image of love, can be an enemy of lovers, as she has proved in the case of Alpheus and Arethusa, and he proceeds on his way into the wrecks piled at the bottom of the sea. The quest through the deserts of rocks and minerals, and those of rocks and sand fills the two books. One looks to be a kind of purgatory where the prisoners, as with Adonis, are not totally severed from the power of love. The other welcomes the young man as a new saviour capable of breaking open the gates of hell.

Coming to Books I and IV we have, as has been said before, Endymion's two widely different experiences of love expressed in a practically identical number of lines. Moving outwardly one step further we find two passages of transition: In Book I Peona leads Endymion away from the Pan festival to an island so as to offer rest and sleep, and induce confidence. In Book IV the disappearance of

the Indian maid and fall of her steed is followed by the episode of Endymion being led to the Cave of Quietude. Again the symmetry is remarkable, all the more so since Endymion is brought back to his native hill in 102 lines, while Peona needed 109 lines to restore her dear brother's confidence. Then there are 406 lines in Book I to introduce the tale (1-62) and set up the scenery and atmosphere of the Pan festival (63-406). It takes the poet 390 lines at the other end of his work to unfold the mystery of the Indian maid and her true identity. The balance of masses is impressive.

THE STRUCTURE OF *ENDYMION*



These broad views do not seem inadequate in the discussion of a piece of work that was elaborated in the turmoil of youthful enthusiasm, thwarted by material difficulties and brought to its conclusion by the wilful determination of the author only. The story of the composition of *Endymion* seems to deny all attempts at looking into the poem for detailed symmetry and exact balance of themes: the size of the poem makes it a cumbersome structure to handle. It is therefore the more interesting to discover a piece of work far more carefully built up than a rapid reading through will reveal. We find in the poet's way of dividing the different parts of the story the

alternation of shorter and longer episodes he had used in "I stood tip-toe..." and "Sleep and Poetry", as if to camouflage a structure which might appear too well organized and not spontaneous enough. The impression remains that the broad outline of the composition was present in the poet's mind when he decided on "making 4000 lines of one bare circumstance and fill them with Poetry" (8 October 1817, To Bailey; no. 38, 1, 170). The "bare circumstance" was a mythological tale that would allow a youthful heart to expand on the theme of love; the ingredients to fill it "with Poetry" were "the Sun the Moon the Stars, the Earth and its contents [...] materials to form greater things" (11 May 1817, To Haydon; no. 26, 1, 143). This enumeration, given to Haydon at the time Keats had left the Isle of Wight and started on his poem for good, sketches the first half of Endymion's exploration. It may be mere chance, but it reveals how the poet's mind was working on a structural imagery that went down from the heavenly sphere to the realities of the earth and the traditional underground journey of epic poetry. This downward slanting progress describes exactly the realms through which Endymion is going to be led, and implies, no doubt, that to reach his goal the hero will have to "re-ascend". Only thus can the "romance" be brought to its happy conclusion.

The fact that the plan was finally completed, in spite of all obstacles and after protracted efforts, does not make *Endymion* any better. The clear-sighted judgment of the author himself remains: "a feverish attempt, rather than a deed accomplished". But it is important to see that Keats worked on a set plan similar to others he had used before, and kept to it. The changing moods that a few months' work were bound to bring could not be foreseen, nor the new outlook on love that would grow from the meeting with Isabella Jones. Each would bear heavily on the poet's regularity of work, and hamper the whole process of composition. But new perspectives and attitudes, if they complicated the issue, did not change the general plan of the passage of initiation through the world of the dead so that Endymion could again wreath "a flowery band, to bind [himself] to the earth" (I, 7). After the darkness and silence of the underground passages, and the solitude of abysses, it is under the sea that Endymion experiences the coldness of death. Initiation takes place after the meeting with Glaucus, and justifies the necessary vagaries of the poet and his hero through the different spheres: the light of ether, the green shades of the earth, the gleaming gems of the world of darkness and the icy emerald of the watery desert. The key to escape death is given in the book Glaucus has saved from the ship-wreck:

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

In a sense this passage is a justification of the poet's attempting such imaginary exploration of the totality of the surrounding world and its transmutation into poetic essence. When Keats writes to Haydon about his "materials for greater things" (the Sun, the Moon, the Stars, the Earth and its contents) he adds: "— that is to say ethereal things — but here I am talking like a Madman greater things that [sic] our Creator himself made!" (11 May 1817, To Haydon; no. 26, I, 143). This, of course, is the exultation of the poet being just launched on his enterprise — a song of innocence. After the trial of the summer months of 1817 the tone is different; its corresponding echo can be found in Endymion's words after he has regained the earth and fallen in love with the Indian maid, breaking definitely all belief in the sufficiency of ideals:

*Why am I not as the dead,
Since to a woe like this I have been led
Through the dark earth, and through the wondrous sea?
(IV, 89-91)*

This anguish is the fruit of experience; but still the stress is laid on the necessary initiatory voyage; only this could mature the shepherd and make him recognize love in the beautiful creature with her "curls of glossy jet" (60) and "lovely eyes in swimming search / After some warm delight" (63-64). Add to these the exotic origin of the girl and the mystery attached to her presence there; she is a sister of that "Abyssinian maid", the unexpected inspirer of the poet in Coleridge's "Kubla Khan". If the journey goes on, as fits the structure, towards a flight on winged horses, the idealization is no longer the same; the girl's presence introduces the complexity of human feelings, now that another being must be taken into account. The climax is reached when at the very seat of the Gods, Diana appears "crescented" (430), while Endymion's human love is there sleeping at his side. He cannot break off his affection for either, and realizes the necessity of accepting the ambiguous quality of life and its contradictions. Sincerity forces recognition of both sensual and ideal love at the same time. There is no betrayal in this:

*By truth's own tongue
I have no daedale heart. (IV, 458-9)*

It leads to the acknowledgement that the world of abstract ideas is not necessarily the path toward truth. The totality of human experience teaches that there is misery, even "upon the bourne of bliss" (IV, 461). And here, for the first time, there appears in the poem the notion of "negative capability" which Keats found so necessary to the essence of poetic inspiration and which henceforward informed his aesthetic attitude.

*What is this soul then? Whence
Came it? It does not seem my own, and I
Have no self-passion or identity. (475-477)*

10. Negative Capability and the Change in Structure

"No self-passion or identity" is precisely that quality Keats recognizes as existing in Shakespeare and which is several times experienced and described by the poet, an ever-present receptivity which allows him to fuse with the characters of people present or events occurring near-by. "The setting sun will always set me to rights — or if a Sparrow come before my Window I take part in its existence and pick about the Gravel" (22 November 1817, To Bailey; no. 43, I, 186). Woodhouse also reported of Keats (KC, I, 59): "He can conceive of a billiard Ball that it may have a sense of delight from its own roundness, smoothness, volubility & the rapidity of its motion." It is not known when Keats said this, but the billiard ball image may be linked with the poet's hope that at Canterbury "the Remembrance of Chaucer will set me forward like a Billiard Ball" (10 June 1817, To Taylor; no. 28, I, 147). These examples are taken from objects and nature. In fact, until he went to Oxford and wrote the third Book of *Endymion*, the insistence remained on the influence of the natural world. Nature appears as a powerful enough presence to chase away the oppressive shade born of the "whips and scorns" of life. "In truth the great Elements we know of are no mean Comforters — the open Sky sits upon our senses like a sapphire Crown — the Air is our Robe of State — the Earth is our throne and the sea a mighty Minstrell playing before it — able like David's Harp to charm evil spirits from such Creatures as I am — able like Ariel's to make such a one as you forget almost the tempest-cares of Life" (14 September 1817, To Jane and Mariane Reynolds; no. 34, I, 158). The sequence once again offers a sketch of the path followed by Endymion on his quest in the first three Books. Moreover, in the same letter to the Reynolds sisters, Keats praises his new friend Bailey's influence. "He delights me in the Selfish and (please god) in the disinterested [sic] part of my disposition" (*ibid.*, 160). Nature answered the "Selfish" part of his being; the disinterested portion of his self needed to take part in the life of others; their presence and their influence over the young man grew into an awareness of the necessary dissolving of

the poet's personality. The perfection of the natural world is completed by the recognized imperfections of fellow-companions. "Failings I am always rather rejoiced to find in a Man than sorry for; for they bring us to a Level" (21 September 1817, To Reynolds; no. 36, I, 162-163).

This intimate experience took a more explicit form after Keats had gone back to London. It was most probably the result of hours of discussion in Oxford, and found expression in his letters of Autumn 1817, particularly to Bailey, with whom conversation was prolonged from Hampstead through a series of important letters. The moral and religious character of Bailey's studies bent the poet's thoughts towards a humanitarian attitude. The atmosphere of discord that had spread among his friends in London during his absence proved a test: instead of taking sides he tried to explain and understand. "What occasions the greater part of the World's Quarrels? simply this, two Minds meet and do not understand each other time enough to prevent any shock or surprise at the conduct of either party — As soon as I had known Haydon three days I had got enough of his character not to have been surprised at such a Letter as he has hurt you with. Nor when I knew it was it a principle with me to drop his acquaintance although with you it would have been an imperious feeling" (22 November 1817, To Bailey; no. 43, I, 184). Such discords gave him scope for a determined attitude of generosity and open-mindedness. For long he had recognized and accepted that "The web of our Life is of mingled Yarn" (8 Oct. 1817, To Bailey; no. 38, I, 169). The Shakesperian echo sounds more like an acceptance than an embittered comment on "the thousand natural shocks / That flesh is heir to". His criticism of Hazlitt's judgement on Wordsworth's "Gipsies" shows three weeks later, that he recognized the value of the immediate pressure exercised by others over his own personality, though it was a thing of the moment, not necessarily of lasting influence. "It is a bold thing to say and I would not say it in print — but it seems to me that if Wordsworth had thought[t] a little deeper at that Moment he would not have written the Poem at all — I should judge it to have been written in one of the most comfortable Moods of his Life — it is a kind of sketchy intellectual Landscape — not a search after Truth — nor is it fair to attack him on such a subject — for it is with the Critic as with the poet had Hazlitt thought a little deeper and been in a good temper he would never have spied an imaginary fault there" (29 October 1817, To Bailey; no. 39, I, 174).

Thus there is no blame to either critic or author; both have been impressed differently by the actual scene and the literary experience. Both have reacted on the spur of the moment and only thus can the incentive bring out creative works. There is no temptation in Keats to bear judgement either on the Gipsies, or Wordsworth, or Hazlitt, but to profit by other men's experience by sharing their feelings.

There is no escapism in this; Keats knows too well at the time how petty his best friends may prove. There are Hunt's and Shelley's jealousies, Haydon's quarrels with Bailey about Cripps, the harsh criticism of Blackwood's *Edinburgh Magazine* against the Cockney School of Poetry, Tom's illness and the growing anxiety about it, last but not least the financial imbroglio with Abbey. "The Man who thinks much of his fellows can never be in Spirits" (29 Oct. 1817, To Bailey; no. 39, postscript, I, 175). It is not surprising that Keats should have tried to find a way out of such worrying problems destructive of some of his adolescent ideals. A generation before Wordsworth had chosen to turn his back on his fellow-men and take refuge in nature with the disconsolate rejection of "What man has made of man".¹ Even to his sincere admirers he could appear distant and patronizing, "with a stiff Collar" (5 Jan. 1818, To George and Tom; no. 48, I, 197). Keats in his growing admiration of Shakespeare was looking for an answer in what he thought was the very essence of his master's art: the recognition of "the poetical in all things" (8 Nov. 1817, To Bailey; no. 41, I, 179). This is the only fruitful reconciliation with the world, as Shakespeare's works testify.

The song from *Endymion* Book IV that Keats sent at the time to both Bailey and Jane Reynolds is that of the Indian maid, but Keats put into it his new mode of looking at the surrounding world.

*To Sorrow,
 I bade good-morrow,
 And thought to leave her far away behind;
 But cheerly, cheerly,
 She loves me dearly;
 She is so constant to me, and so kind:
 I would deceive her
 And so leave her,
 But ah! she is so constant and so kind. (IV, 173-181)*

The pathetic mockery of the stanza shows a surrender of all attempts at escaping from man's fundamental condition: "a mingled Yarn". A proof that the poet thought this passage a major element of his evolution can be found in his very important letter to Bailey of 22 Nov. 1817 (no. 43), in which he discusses at length some of his haunting questions, among others "the authenticity of Imagination": "I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination — What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth — whether it existed before or not — for I have the same Idea of all our Passions as of Love they are all in their

¹ Wordsworth, op. cit., "Lines Written in Early Spring," line 24.

sublime, creative of essential Beauty -- In a Word, you may know my favorite Speculation by my first Book and the little song ["O Sorrow"] I sent in my last" (no. 43, I, 184). It may be unexpected to see that Keats refers to the beginning of his poem, and to the end as well. It proves that there is no rejection but rather extension of his former beliefs.

A rapid examination of the value attributed to "sleep" in the two Books may help us to understand something of this evolution. The central passage of Book IV (512-562) introduces a description of that privileged region where the memory of all injuries inherent in man's life encounters the boon of sleep. The heavy yoke imposed, at times, by society is a common experience:

*... the man is yet to come
Who hath not journeyed in this native hell. (IV, 522-523)*

And yet through the receptive inactivity of the slumber which invades the hero the reconciliation of opposites can take place. Recognizing within himself the double sincerity of his feelings, he discovers the passive power of acceptance.

*But few have ever felt how calm and well
Sleep may be had in that deep den of all. (IV, 524-525)*

How different is the sleep through which Endymion finds relaxation of his "fixed trance" (403) in Book I. He is led by his sister Peona to an island and there

Soon was he quieted to slumbrous rest. (I, 442)

It is only the soothing persuasion of sisterly love that brings him to accept, like a disconsolate child, submission to the power of a tender voice. While in Book IV Endymion is as if abandoned to the overcoming strength of sleep at the climax of a crisis.

*... a grievous feud
Hath led thee to this Cave of Quietude. (IV, 547-548)*

It is interesting to compare more closely the two passages, which, by the way, are placed in remarkable symmetry in the "Poem". Praise is given to Sleep in Book I, 453-461, that is to say about 530 lines from the end of the Book; in Book IV, 537-545, it is the experience which is praised, not the mere phenomenon, as is the case in the following lines:

*O magic sleep! O comfortable bird
 That broodest o'er the troubled sea of the mind
 Till it is hush'd and smooth! O unconfin'd
 Restraint! imprison'd liberty! great key
 To golden palaces, strange minstrelsy,
 Fountains grotesque, new trees, bespangled caves,
 Echoing grottos, full of tumbling waves
 And moonlight; aye, to all the mazy world
 Of silvery enchantment. (I, 453-461)*

Here sleep opens the gates of imagination. It is still the world of *Poems 1817*: Nature transmuted into a setting for mythology and old legendary tales, full of sensuous qualities of picturesque colours, sounds and motions.

Five months later, sleep in the Cave of Quietude has become a far more deeply rooted experience.

*Happy gloom!
 Dark Paradise! where pale becomes the bloom
 Of health by due; where silence dreariest
 Is most articulate, where hopes infest;
 Where those eyes are the brightest far that keep
 Their lids shut longest in a dreamless sleep.
 O happy spirit-home! O wonderful soul!
 Pregnant with such a den to save the whole
 In thine own depth. (IV, 537-545)*

It is not a sudden taste for antitheses (pale, bloom, silence articulate, etc.) though these reinforce the impression that the second passage is a deliberate pendant to the earlier one, but the new approach of the maturing artist and man.

The same extension of value occurs on the level of love. The vision of Endymion's ideal love is as true artistically as the blossoming of affections that accompanies the hero's attachment to a human creature. All passions are identically "creative of essential Beauty" as appears in Shakespeare's characters. Imogen and Juliet, for instance, are discussed humorously — and yet in a revealing way — in a letter of September 1817 addressed to the Reynolds sisters. "Imprimis — I sincerely believe that Imogen is the finest Creature; and that I should have been disappointed at hearing you prefer Juliet. Yet I feel such a yearning towards Juliet and that I would rather follow her into Pandemonium than Imogen into Paradize" (14 Sept. 1817, To Jane and Mariane Reynolds; no. 34, I, 157). A similar comparison will appear one year later in a letter to Woodhouse (27 Oct. 1818; no. 118, I, 386-8) which shows how important and lasting the new orientation of Keats's perspective was. Speaking of the "poetical

Character itself (I mean that sort of which, if I am any thing I am a Member)", he insists on the passivity of the artist confronted with possible moral or aesthetic judgements to pass on the surrounding world of things and human beings. The neutral pronoun "it", used throughout the passage, makes it still more striking; everything concentrates on the will to neutralize his own apprehension of reality and accept the outer world as it stands. "It [the poetical Character] has no self — it is every thing and nothing — It has no character — it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated — It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher, delights the camelion Poet." In the autumn of 1817 the theory has not yet reached such clarity of assertion, though the all important letter to Bailey (22 Nov.; no. 43, I, 184) points to the same conclusion: "I must say of one thing that has pressed upon me lately and increased [sic] my Humility and capability of submission and that is this truth — Men of Genius are great as certain ethereal Chemicals operating on the Mass of neutral intellect — [but] they have not any individuality, any determined Character. I would call the top and head of those who have a proper self Men of Power —". This feeling that the first quality for a poet was to be capable of the passive absorption of the outer world in all its contradictory shapes and effects was settling more and more powerfully as a basic theory in Keats's mind and he found a name for it in a letter to his brothers written a month later about Christmas 1817 (no. 45, I, 193): "At once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously — I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason." This belief was going to shape Keats's attitude towards poetry to the end of his poetic achievement: a capacity of suspending judgement, of relying on powerful "Sensations" that, he felt, would open the way to the apprehension of some particle of truth. Immediately after coining the phrase "Negative Capability" he chooses Coleridge as an example of a character unable to submit to such voluntary renunciation of the power of reason. "Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery from being incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge" (I, 194).

One of those sudden revelations was taking form in the last Book of *Endymion*: the unexpected meeting of a beautiful woman would wipe away all theories about love, and Endymion was to be subjected to such hazard, whether or not it was the author's own fresh experience. The change that Keats introduced in Book I during the revision and printing of his poem (30 Jan. 1818, To Taylor; no. 57, I, 218) shows clearly the poet's effort to bring the beginning of

Endymion's adventure nearer the modified attitude of the end.
Lines I, 777-780 ran:

*Wherein lies happiness? In that which becks
Our ready minds to blending pleasurable:
And that delight is the most treasureable
That makes the richest Alchymy.*

They became:

*Wherein lies happiness? In that which becks
Our ready minds to blending pleasureable:
A fellowship with essence; till we shine,
Full alchemiz'd, and free of space.*

The first version put the stress on pleasure and delight, on the rich and precious quality necessary to the "Alchymy". It is followed in the poem by a passage describing the "blending pleasureable".

*... hist, when the airy stress
Of music's kiss impregnates the free winds,
And with a sympathetic touch unbinds
Eolian magic from their lucid wombs:
Then old songs waken from enclouded tombs;
Old ditties sigh above their father's grave;
Ghosts of melodious prophecyings rave
Round every spot where trod Apollo's foot;
Bronze clarions awake, and faintly bruit,
Where long ago a Giant Battle was;
And, from the turf, a lullaby doth pass
In every place where infant Orpheus slept.
Feel we these things? — that moment have we slept
Into a sort of oneness, and our state
Is like a floating spirit's. But there are
Richer entanglements, enthralmments far
More self-destroying, leading, by degrees,
To the chief intensity: the crown of these
Is made of love and friendship, and sits high
Upon the forehead of humanity.
All its more ponderous and bulky worth
Is friendship, whence there ever issues forth
A steady splendour; but at the tip-top,
There hangs by unseen film, an orb'd drop
Of light, and that is love: its influence
Thrown in our eyes, genders a novel sense,
At which we start and fret; till in the end,
Melting into its radiance, we blend,
Mingle, and so become a part of it. (I, 783-811)*

This makes it clear why the poet in the letter of 22 Nov. to Bailey referred to "my first Book and the little song I sent in my last". So many things are already germinating in these lines, the allusion to the "Giant Battle" being the more evident. For our present purpose, we find there a first intimation of the poet's future theory of negative capability, but it is illustrated only by the enumeration of sweet impressions. One dimension is lacking. The few disquieting touches are transmuted into solemn "old songs" and "ditties" which lose the sinister quality attached to "enclouded tombs" and "father's grave". The "richer entanglements" of the second stage of experience are the pleasures of "friendship" and finally the highest glory of "love". If the "blending", "mingling", "becoming a part of it" is a foresight of the future "negative capability", for the time being it implies no mixed feelings of ideal and sensual love, of Iago and Imogen. The corrected lines insist on the intensity of the experience that can alone lead to an intimate perception of the "essence" of things, whether good or bad, "high or low", "mean or elevated". The printed text was made to correspond to the poet's new vision of things such as he described them in the letter to Bailey (22 Nov. 1817; no. 43, 1, 185): "O for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts! It is 'a Vision in the form of Youth' a Shadow of reality to come — and this consideration has further convinced me for it has come as auxiliary to another favorite Speculation of mine, that we shall enjoy ourselves here after by having what we called happiness on Earth repeated in a finer tone and so repeated — And yet such a fate can only befall those who delight in sensation rather than hunger as you do after Truth."

The opposition between "Sensations", which are immediate and neutral of all intentions, and "Thoughts", which imply a more distant outlook, a reflection in time and a judgement, is the touchstone here. The passage has, of course, been extensively dealt with by critics, but they have often left out or given little importance to the words "and so repeated". The insistence of Keats seems to suggest that immortality can only be conceived as preserving the working of our senses. "In a finer tone" perhaps, but without them there is no possible apprehension of truth or bliss. What can be perceived here below is "a Shadow of reality to come". And yet men can taste something of immortality through the powers of imagination, set on its wanderings by sensuous reactions to the pressing influences of the world. Indeed Keats goes on: "Adam's dream will do here and seems to be a conviction that Imagination and its empyreal reflection is the same as human Life and its spiritual repetition." The alchemy of Adam's dream — "he awoke and found it true" — is therefore fundamental. It gives a new structure to the old "blending pleasureable" that was a simple "melting into the radiance" of love, with a vague guess at its possible results as to the perception of natural beauty. Speaking of those who could have acted politically or socially for the benefit of society, but

*Have been content to let occasion die,
Whilst they did sleep in love's elysium, (I, 823-4)*

the poet adds with an amazing foresight of his future "Ode to a Nightingale":

*And, truly, I would rather be struck dumb,
Than speak against this ardent listlessness:
For I have ever thought that it might bless
The world with benefits unknowingly;
As does the nightingale, upperched high,
And cloister'd among cool and bunched leaves —
She sings out to her love, not e'er conceives
How tiptoe Night holds back her dark-grey hood.
Just so may love, although 'tis understood
The mere commingling of passionate breath,
Produce more than our searching witnesseth:
What I know not: but who, of men, can tell
That flowers would bloom, or that green fruit would swell
To melting pulp, that fish would have bright mail,
The earth its dower of river, wood, and vale,
The meadows runnels, runnels pebble-stones,
The seed its harvest, or the lute its tones,
Tones ravishment, or ravishment its sweet,
If human souls did never kiss and greet? (I, 824-842)*

A world of metamorphoses or miracles surrounds us, independent of consecutive reasoning. What was mere impression when Keats was completing Book I has become a clear conviction by the end of the year, and the consequence is, for the future, a fundamentally new organization of the poetic material. Instead of an underground journey of exploration and initiation, the power of imagination can be applied to an apprehension of experience in its "finer tone"; instead of plunging towards the dark recesses of the underworld, the poet should escape "full alchemized, and free of space" to the higher spheres where our life of "Sensations" finds its true intensity. The trance will resolve itself in a repetition of the experience on another level. "To compare great things with small — have you never by being surprised with an old Melody — in a delicious place — by a delicious voice, felt over again your very speculations and surmises at the time it first operated on your soul—do you not remember forming to you[r]self the singer's face more beautiful tha[n] it was possible and yet with the elevation of the Moment you did not think so — even then you were mounted on the Wings of Imagination so high — that the Prototype must be here after — that delicious face you will see" (22 Nov. 1817, To Bailey; no. 43, I, 185).

The belief of the poet in the power of imagination is clear; it acts as the forerunner of things existing but still hidden from man's perception. It explains the turn given to Endymion's tale. The merely abstract vision of love had become reality for the young man during the summer months of 1817. Hence the more tangible realization of love in the character of the Indian maid. But "the Prototype" does not cease to exist; it has to shine through the features of Endymion's new love; hence the complicated process of Book IV to reconcile and blend Cynthia and the maid into one radiant characterization of earthly and immortal love:

*... into her face there came
Light, as reflected from a silver flame:
Her long black hair swell'd ampler, in display
Full golden; in her eyes a brighter day
Dawn'd blue and full of love. (IV, 982-986)*

In the first draft of *Endymion* (Woodhouse's collation) line 985 ran thus:

*... while it turned
Golden — and her eyes of jet dawned forth a brighter day
Blue — blue — and full of love.*

In the necessary shortening of the middle line, the blackness of the woman's eyes disappears, but the coexistence of clear and more sombre symbols had just been prepared for the reader. She is a "dark-eyed stranger" in line 977, and she addresses Endymion "by the lily truth / Of my own breast" (980-1). The complementary elements of ethereal and warm-blooded passion are fused together at the moment of metamorphosis. The vision has entered the world of reality; imagination has added its own truth to human experience, and made it richer.

It is therefore very true for Keats to say that his favourite speculations can be found in Books I and IV. In the light of his convictions when making his final effort to finish *Endymion*, the beginning of the tale still answered his views, though in a restricted way, and he made the end fit his new outlook. If he does not refer to the underground journey, it is simply that it was no longer necessary. The true initiation is henceforward to be found elsewhere, in the sudden sensation that could at times open up a heaven of perceptions able to modify the most disquieting experience and make it acceptable. The "camelion poet" would then operate on the spur of the "truth of Imagination", and mix intimately the newly apprehended light with his former impressions.

If we now refer to the symmetry found in so many of Keats's poems in the first phase of his creative activity, and think — as we

do — that he was still attached to that general plan for the composition of his poems, the scheme should now start on rather a low level, rise up to a climax, then revert to the first stage of experience, transmuted and enriched by the suddenly sensed truth. Instead of the down- and upward journey, passing through the sojourn of the dead, it is now possible to anticipate a flight towards some illumination. The path of imagination sketches a pyramid-like figure, for the central revelation can be but a "Sensation", a thing of one moment, that throws light on the event, but cannot sustain its intensity for long. "On the sudden it is won" (IV, 532).

11. The Example of Architecture

Keats's views of poetry itself were also maturing rapidly and what had been acceptable when he had conceived his treatment of the mythological tale of Endymion could not satisfy the quick evolution of his outlook on his art. Mr Ian Jack¹ quotes Richard Woodhouse's appreciation: "It ["Hyperion"] is that in poetry which the Elgin and Egyptian Marbles are in Sculpture." Now we must not forget that Keats started thinking of a new poem in the same summer of 1817. Comparing the "Poetic Romance" and the epic fragment, Mr Ian Jack measures the tremendous change in the quality of Keats's poetry: "We pass from one visual world to another, from a world of Arcadian landscapes and classical forms that is often on the point of dissolving into incoherence or commonplace prettiness, to a world dominated by great statuesque forms set against a sublime and superhuman background. We pass from a visual world inspired by paintings and prints to a visual world more often inspired by great sculptural masses." The critic could have added to the adjective sculptural another one which fits our idea of structural imagery better still: architectural. The impact of Keats's visits to the Elgin Marbles with Haydon and Severn cannot be overrated. Greek and Egyptian sculptures offered the visitors the contrast of "the radiant humanity of the Greeks¹ and the massive architecture of Egyptian art. The exhibits, representative of the two civilizations could not have failed to provoke passionate discussion among Keats and his friends. A proof of the widespread interest for those ancient forms of art among literary circles can be found in newspaper articles of the time² and in some of the poems being composed by contemporaries; such a poem is Shelley's "Ozymandias" which may have been inspired by discussions at one of the dinners where Keats's friends used to gather at the time, or may even have been read there. In autumn and winter 1817-1818 Keats saw Shelley several times on such occasions. It is easy to ima-

¹ Ian Jack, *Keats and the Mirror of Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 161.

² Helen Darbishire, "Keats and Egypt", *The Review of English Studies*, iii, no. 9, Jan. 1927, 10.

³ *ibid.*

gine the exotic appeal of the middle East among young people through the evocation of travels in mysterious Arabia, and of the possible discovery of some "colossal wreck" "half sunk" in the sand ("Ozymandias", 3 and 4). Indeed, Shelley's poem was published by Hunt in his *Examiner* of January 1818, which places the date of composition in the last months of the previous year. It is also well-known, that, on 4 February 1818, Shelley, Hunt and Keats competed in the writing of a sonnet on the subject of the Nile, the "Stream of the Pyramid and Crocodile", as Keats defined it in his own poem. Although iconographical research must not veil the impact of other more immediate and familiar influences, this is proof enough of the attention given to Egypt by Keats's circle at a time when we feel Keats preoccupied with related forms and ideas. As a result the massive grandeur of Egyptian sculptures and its fitness to sustain architectural designs imposed itself on Keats's mind when he came to think of his second "vast idea". The tone is given at the beginning of "Hyperion". The world of the Giants is a pre-human stage in the evolution of mythology. The first character to approach Saturn is "a Goddess of the infant world" ("Hyperion", I, 26). Her giant stature is described in a comparison with the

... *Memphian sphinx,*
Pedestal'd haply in a palace court,
When sages look'd to Egypt for their lore. (31-33)

The change of outlook was already reflected in the passage from *Endymion* that Keats wrote in September. In the watery desert Glaucus' figure appears with the motionless, indifferent features of a sphinx.

He saw far in the concave green of the sea
An old man sitting calm and peacefully.
Upon a weeded rock this old man sat. (III, 191-193)

And in his lap a book, the which he conn'd
So stedfastly, (214-15)

that *Endymion* can approach without being noticed by the awful, hieratic shape whose "features were so lifeless" (220). It is already in its essence the massive form of Saturn in "Hyperion", the same silence as if eternity had petrified each mortal form for some everlasting rest:

*Deep in the shady sadness of a vale
Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn,
Far from the fiery noon, and eve's one star,
Sat gray-hair'd Saturn, quiet as a stone,
Still as the silence round about his lair;*
(*"Hyperion"*, I, 1-5)

*Upon the sodden ground
His old right hand lay nerveless, listless, dead,
Unscaptred; and his realmless eyes were closed;
While his how'd head seem'd list'ning to the Earth,
His ancient mother, for some comfort yet.* (17-21)

One with the stones or rocks on which they are sitting, both Glaucus and Saturn are rooted to the ground with their eyes fixed in some dream of long forgotten mysteries, lost in a memory of the origins of the world and concentrated on the slow chthonian forces some magic alone can loosen. Such an impression Egyptian sculptures will give when they still preserve the monolithic quality of the hard raw material out of which they have been carved. The rigid inward stare of the sphinx, scanning eternity itself, the heavy lionesque mane of the huge figures, opposed in some way, but also answered, the "wild eyes" and "flowing hair" of so many romantic inspired characters. Glaucus' "white hair was awful" (*End.* III, 194). "Hoary-head"[ed] Glaucus and "gray-hair'd Saturn" are near relatives, and were born of the same changing perspective in Keats's mind. Is there no Egyptian influence in the ample gown worn by Glaucus? It is described in a way that recalls the background walls of Egyptian decorations covered with hieroglyphs.

*... ample as the largest winding-sheet,
A cloak of blue wrapp'd up his aged bones,
O'erwrought with symbols by the deepest groans
Of ambitious magic: every ocean-form
Was woven in with black distinctness.* (*End.*, III, 196-200)

All the moods of the sea, all its inhabitants are "emblem'd in the woof" (203), "every shape / That skims, or dives, or sleeps, 'twixt cape and cape" (203-4). Champollion's discoveries were not yet available to the ordinary visitor of the Gallery of Egyptian Antiquities and the mingling of statuesque figures with highly intriguing symbols must have corresponded to the taste of the Romantic writer for the dark mysteries of the alchemy of the Middle Ages.

When Mr Ian Jack discusses the iconography that can possibly be linked with *Endymion* Book III, he thinks especially of the characters, Glaucus and Scylla, or Neptune painted with Venus or

Amphitrite. He does not give a source for the description of Neptune's underwater palace, which is the first extended architectural description in Keats's works. In *Poems 1817*, buildings play practically no part at all; we are wholly in the world of nature, except for a few features of traditional medieval scenery as in "Calidore" where the young man "turns a jutting point of land, / Whence may be seen the castle gloomy, and grand" (64-65):

*... his light shallop reaches
Those marble steps that through the water dip:
Now over them he goes with hasty trip,
And scarcely stays to ope the folding doors:
Anon he leaps along the oaken floors
Of halls and corridors. (67-72)*

With the "court" (76) where he rushed to welcome the ladies whose "palfreys" have just passed the "threat'ning portcullis" (79), it is the only thing approaching a complete description of a building before *Endymion*. Allusions to man-made architectural elements are extremely rare and are often used to help describe natural phenomena, as in the "Epistle to G. F. Mathew":

Beneath the curved moon's triumphal arch. (30)

Nature is everywhere the shrine which the muse haunts and where she will accept to live with the poet, away from "this dark city" (id. 33), or the "murky buildings" of "Sonnet VII" ("O Solitude", line 3).

In *Endymion* Books I and II the perspective is the same. The only architectural features are those of a marble altar, or a temple, set in a glade. They resemble the fabrics of XVIIIth century romantic parks. It is the case of the "mimic temple" Endymion finds on his subterranean journey in the world of minerals:

*... far off appear'd,
Through a long pillar'd vista, a fair shrine,
And, just beyond, on light tiptoe divine,
A quiver'd Dian. (II, 259-262)*

This cannot be called real architecture, though, and only exemplifies the character of Keats's ornamental fabrics in his first pieces of poetry. Nature sometimes happens to copy some of man's works:

*... streams
Collecting, mimick'd the wrought oaken beams,
Pillars, and frieze, and high fantastic roof,
Of those dusk places in times far aloof
Cathedrals call'd. (II, 622-626)*

Nature such as romantic artists painted and engraved it is the focal point here, not the cathedral, which is evoked only to help the poet describe a landscape similar to the fantastic, abysmal caves of a John Martin:

*... on he hies
Through caves, and palaces of mottled ore,
Gold dome, and crystal wall, and turquois floor,
Black polish'd porticos of awful shade,
And, at the last, a diamond balustrade,
Leading afar post wild magnificence,
Spiral through ruggedest loopholes, and thence
Stretching across a void, then guiding o'er
Enormous chasms, where, all foam and roar,
Streams subterranean tease their granite beds.*
(End. II, 593-602)

There is no actual, complete building here; elements of architecture are suggested for the sake of the rich and coloured material they are made of. "Palaces", "dome", "wall", "floor", "porticos" and "balustrade" are picturesque forms allowing the poet to give prominence to the "mottled ore", "gold", "crystal", "turquois" or "diamond". The "loopholes", "void" and "enormous chasms" are far more important at that stage of the hero's progress. The seemingly human structure vanishes in the splashing of fountains, streams and waterfalls that delight for a moment the amazed eyes of the solitary Endymion.

Is it not surprising, then, to find a completely different description in Book III, a picture which is announced and proclaimed so as to draw the reader's attention inevitably towards it?

*Behold! behold the palace of his pride!
God Neptune's palaces! (III, 833-4)*

It extends over fifty-five lines (833-887). The first things we perceive, as we advance with the crowd of re-united lovers are the "proud domes" (836) that arise in the distance, reflecting light, as if they were covered with precious stones and gold, like a brilliant city out of the Arabian Nights.

The notion of dome-like shapes had already been used by Keats before, especially to picture the azure sky. Now they are "Rich opal domes

*... on high upheld
By jasper pillars, letting through their shafts
A blush of coral. (III, 841-843)*

And the crowd of resuscitated lovers can enter a huge architectural structure

*... that far far surpass'd,
Even for common bulk, those olden three,
Memphis, and Babylon, and Nineveh. (III, 847-849)*

The interest of Keats, at the time, for the civilization of Egypt and Mesopotamia is evident, and can be linked with paintings of the period, such as Martin's *Fall of Babylon*, with their perspectives of terraced courts and gardens, arcades and towering zikkurats. There is no reason to suppose, as Ian Jack does, that such influence made itself felt only when Keats began composing "Hyperion".¹ Lines such as those quoted above add to our conviction that the impressive pictures of the pyramids of Egypt and Assyrian tower-temples were shaping new vistas and lighting the way towards possible new aesthetic structures in the young poet's mind. The summer months of 1817 stand as a real milestone on the path of poetical experience. As architectural settings again become extremely rare in *Endymion* Book IV, and the poet seems to revert to Arcadian landscapes, we risk the suggestion that Bailey, plunged in his theological studies, may have had something to do with the new vision developing in Book III. Conversations about the stories of the Old Testament, Moses' exodus and the people of Israel exiled in Babylonian towns may have revived in Keats the memory of Egyptian sculptures and other ancient monuments at the British Museum. From the beginning of Book III, composed at Oxford in September, we meet with

*... sculptures rude
In ponderous stone, developing the mood
Of ancient Nox, (End., III, 131-133)*

so different from the "light tiptoe divine" of "quiver'd Dian" (II, 261-262). And Glaucus, we hear, tried to win bashful Scyllia's love

*Round every isle, and points, and promontory,
From where large Hercules wound up his story
Far as Egyptian Nile. (III, 405-7)*

It can be said that at that time Keats also "looked to Egypt" for a way out of his dilemmas. Sentimentally, artistically he was stepping towards something for which *Endymion* was no longer adequate. We agree with Miss Darbishire: "To Keats Egypt brought a new

¹ Ian Jack, *op. cit.*, 171-173.

world of plastic forms at a moment of special need. When he began to brood over the subject of *Hyperion*, his mind, we may imagine instinctively groped for images to fit his vast conceptions of the early gods. Greek art might supply images for Apollo and his golden lyre or Neptune in his chariot, but how convey the larger majesty of Hyperion, 'Giant of the Sun', or of Thea or of Saturn? The colossal sculpture and architecture of Egypt met his need and passed into his poem."¹

Is it mere chance that Keats who in May saw "the Cliff of Poesy Tower[ing]" above him (10 May 1817, To Haydon; no. 26, 1, 141) signed in August another letter to the same friend (no. 29, 1, 149) "Your's like a Pyramid"? This image of stability and steadfastness is very striking. In a note to his edition of *The Letters of John Keats*, H. E. Rollins quotes Blunden: "The signature [...] reflects not Keats's mind alone; [...] there was even a scheme to erect a pyramid in what is now Trafalgar-square." It may be so, but what is certain is that the pyramid shape was a vivid image in Keats's mind in summer 1817. In addition to the valediction in the letter to Haydon the same word appears, shortly after, at the beginning of September, in a jocular note to Jane Reynolds (no. 33, 1, 156) scribbled on a letter from Bailey to Jane: "You must not expect that your Porcupine quill is to be shot at me with impunity — without you mean to question the existance of Pyramids or rout Sir Isaac Newton out of his Coffin." This second allusion to the highly symbolic structure typical of Egyptian architecture has passed unnoticed by critics. It is used in a joke, it is true; but it proves that the geometrical figure firmly set on earth, with its summit towering high above the soil, and pointing to the sky had taken hold of the poet's imagination. Structurally it outlines a shape in direct opposition to the traditional underground journey. It may well have appeared instinctively and symbolically as the beginning of a solution to the dissatisfaction he felt concerning *Endymion's* structural imagery and the pressure his maturing sentiments and intellectual powers were undergoing.

Pyramids, domes, arches become a feature of Keats's vocabulary and imagery only from *Endymion* onwards. The presence of such words in the earlier poems is extremely rare. Baldwin's *Concordance* gives no example of "pyramid" in the poems before the sonnet "To the Nile" (line 2; 6 Febr. 1818). "Dome" had been used twice (in "On Receiving a Curious Shell" (33), and "Epistle to my Brother George" (5). In *Endymion* a dome appears for the first time in the passage quoted above (*End.*, 11, 595), descriptive of huge caves and abysses where streams of water "with changed magic interlace" (11, 613), that is to say in Book II. There are other domes in Book III

¹ H. Darbishire, *op. cit.*, 2.

(836, 841, 886) and IV (38). The curve of the arch, which recalls the up and down outline of the pyramid, is the most frequent figure of the three. But it, too, is very scarce in the early poems. Baldwin gives one reference in the "Epistle to G. F. Mathew", another in the "Specimen of an Induction to a Poem" (38). The participle "arched" is linked with the description of the brow ("Specimen of an Induction to a Poem", 49), and Sir Gondibert's visor ("Calidore", 130). "Sleep and Poetry" (238) has the "archings of her eye-lids"; and the "Imitation of Spenser" describes the "arched snow" of the swan's neck (14). These forms have therefore very limited power of suggestion as structural imagery.

Later on Ailsa Rock will conjure up the vision of a "pyramid" ("To Ailsa Rock", 1). Pyramids and obelisks, together with arches and domes are marked features of Hyperion's palace ("Hyperion", I, 177 and 180). They naturally recur in the corresponding passage of "The Fall" (II, 25 and 28). Otho needs a marble column to prop his "empire's dome" (*Otho*, I, 2, 161). Otherwise the word and image, six times present in *Endymion*, disappear from the vocabulary of Keats's work. The arched shape is used more extensively; but the arch itself belongs to *Endymion*, "Hyperion" and "The Fall of Hyperion" (five instances in all). Arched ways and roofs occur in "The Eve of St Agnes", "St Mark", "Lamia" and *Otho* (six times too). The other cases are the archings of brows.

Statistics give limited numbers of occurrences; it is, however, interesting to note that they are all to be found in works written within a certain period. Thus, we again come to the conclusion that the characteristic rise and fall features of the pyramidal shape belong to the period of *Endymion* (from Book II on), and the first elaboration of "Hyperion", whether it be the text of "Hyperion" itself or that of *The Fall* which is accepted as such. It haunts Keats's reflections in the letters of the same months. His comments on Milton's passage relating the episode of Adam's dream (22 Nov. 1817, To Bailey; no. 43), illustrating the highest boon of a possible apprehension of truth through some "Sensation", develop round that key notion which becomes a recurring theme of his correspondence in the early days of 1818. The idea of a journey is not abandoned; it is several times described as a travel upward. "Many a man can travel to the very bourne of Heaven, and yet want confidence to put down his half-seeing" (3 February 1818, To Reynolds; no. 59, 1, 224). What is found at the climactic point is an immediate perception, "the shadow of reality to come", as said in his end-of-November letter to Bailey. It is a new outburst of Keats's against "consequitive" thinking, and logical reaching after definite conclusion. Truth can only be seized in a passing vision. Henceforward, then, the journey must tend towards that ecstatic point of intense perception.

At the same time the idea that a certain generosity in the outflow

of poetry is not out of place, and a vast enterprise a richer experience, remains vivid in spite of the difficulties encountered in the composition of *Endymion*. After all he had proved capable of carrying out his plan, and in a more subtle way than would be apparent to the ordinary reader. And above all Keats means to resist the temptation of using poetry for the purpose of imposing attitudes and ideas. "Poetry should be great and unobtrusive", says he in the same letter to Reynolds; and he compares modern and older poets: "the antients were Emperors of vast Provinces", which leads him to reject the coercive influence of Wordsworth and Hunt. It is easy to guess that he is still haunted by the desire to realize his "vast idea" which the petty jealousies of living poets can but spoil, divert or binder. To achieve the full alchemy of poetry is Keats's sole aim, and through it he hopes to reach to the level of "half truths". That is enough for him and proudly he shakes off all other considerations. "I don't mean to deny Wordsworth's grandeur & Hunt's merit, but I mean to say we need not be teared with grandeur & merit — when we can have them uncontaminated & unobtrusive. Let us have the old Poets & Robin Hood." And we imagine Keats, in a generous and high-spirited mood, immediately setting out to write the "Lines on the Mermaid Tavern" and "Robin Hood". They are a tribute to that large-mindedness he felt was a characteristic element of past life. "Modern poets differ from the Elizabethans in this. Each of the moderns like an Elector of Hanover governs his petty state, & knows how many straws are swept daily from the Causeways in all his dominions" (3 Febr. 1818, To Reynolds; no. 59, 1, 224). That cannot be the way for great poetry; the causeway is there for the adventurous man who dares set on his travel towards wide horizons and not for the mean job of counting and saving straws. The political allusion shows Keats eager to break with impositions of all kinds, and a feeling that an artist's work could be tainted, without his being aware of it, by the mood of the nation, of the public. Wordsworth's "stiff collar", Hunt's disposition to "dissect and anatomize any strip or slip", as Keats's had written (23 Jan. 1818, To George and Tom; no. 56, 1, 214), had revealed an unacceptable tendency to conform and compromise with the times and think oneself the centre of the world. In an outburst of independence Keats turns his back on the past and means to show he is no one's protected sycophant. Whim or rodomontade, as Woodhouse called such fits, it was leading towards the spirit of the first "Preface" to *Endymion*, sent to Taylor on March 19: "It has been too much the fashion of late to consider men biggotted and adicted to every word that may chance to espace their lips: now I here declare that I have not any particular affection for any particular pbrases, word or letter in the whole affair. I have written to please myself and in hopes to please others, and for a love of fame." When one remembers the pains Keats took to copy, correct and check proofs to the least detail, as "There should be no comma

in 'the raft branch down sweeping from a tall Ash top' (4 March 1818, To Taylor; no. 65, I, 239), it is evident that "affection" he had, but only for the sake of his own inward feeling of sense and beauty. "I will take care the Printer shall not trip up *my Heels*" (ibid.). As for the public, Keats remains distant, and refuses to comply with their well-meaning desires or advice.

The two lyrics "On the Mermaid Tavern" and "Robin Hood" are illustrations of the new mood. They are full-blooded poems evocative of carousing and revelry, of warm sympathies and rebellious independence. There is no delicate *lip-toeing* in the "merry morris din", and nothing affected or supercilious about "Maid Marian". She rather partakes of the vigorous merriment of such poems as "O blush not so..." (31 Jan. 1818, To Reynolds; no. 58, I, 219), and other jocular or trivial lines written during the Teignmouth weeks. If most of those poems were not retained by Keats for his publication of 1820 "The Mermaid Tavern" and "Robin Hood" were, which proves Keats's partiality for the new spirit manifested in his work, something more weighty, loaded with the generous gifts and warmth of earthly life. Even though "Robin Hood" starts with the sad feeling of some forever-past-and-gone Paradise, it ends with a hymn to the qualities and virtues of such life. In the letter, contrary to the later publication, it preceded the "Mermaid Tavern Lines" and came as a reinforcement of the repeated "honours" offered to the "The Sherwood clan" (60). The "Spirit of Outlawry" (3 Febr. 1818, To Reynolds; no. 59) could still be revived on occasion and Keats's choice was definitely on that side. It alone could drive the 'Titans' renewed upward assault against the new masters of heaven; only it could change the traditional downward journey through destruction into a flight up to the illumination of truth. The absorption of the adolescent poet into the womb of the earth will be replaced, at his more mature stage of development, by a resolute search for the risky, but rewarding ascension towards heavenly conquests, and the acceptance of bliss as a passing moment.

*What Elysium have ye known,
Choicer than the Mermaid Tavern?*

(2 and 4, repeated 24 and 26)

Is there any better comment on the value given to a temporary pleasure, an evening among friends in a warm atmosphere, than to prefer it to the eternity of Elysium! Such momentary summits of tension are to be aimed at, as truer to our human status. Even though the momentary perception cannot be sustained, it is accepted as the only possible way for man towards some recognition of the higher truth he guesses at, but is naturally unable to apprehend and retain fully. Hence the dramatic feeling of the inescapable failure in everything earthly which so often finds an outlet, at a time of high enthusiasm and boisterous exuberance.

12. The Upward Flight

The letter to Reynolds of January 31 is a good instance. Instead of writing as usual, joking or discussing poetry, the poet cannot but rhyme. After the teasing naughtiness of the poem entitled by Colvin "Sbaring Eve's Apple" ("Oh, blusb not so...")¹ Keats stops and apologizes: "Now I purposed to write to you a serious poetical Letter — but I find that a maxim I met with the other day is a just one 'on cause mieux quand on ne dit pas *causons*'... Yet I cannot write in prose, It is a sun-shiny day and I cannot so here goes" (no. 58, I, 220). And the poet indulges in another outburst of poetry: the lines "Hence Burgundy, Claret and Port...", which allow him to rise "On the Green of the Hill" (12) whence he urges his friend to

... drink our fill
Of golden sunshine
Till our brains intertwine
With the glory and grace of *Apollo!* (13-16)

This extraordinary upward flight is immediately followed by the poem "God of the Meridian", which is practically one with the previous sixteen lines.

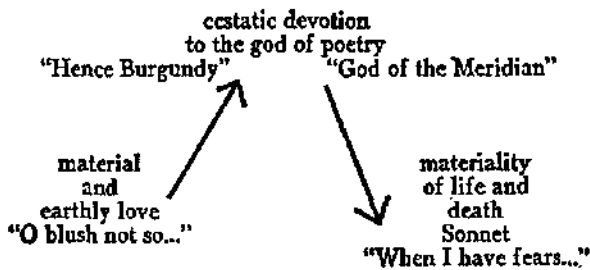
Then the poet seems to start a new letter. "My Dear Reynolds, you must forgive all this ranting" (*ibid.*, 222) and in a more settled mood he gives his friend a piece of deeper and more elaborate sort of poetry, his "last sonnet": "When I have fears that I may cease to be." The letter gives us an unexpected example of Keats's spirit in his future works. Starting from a poem on the enjoyment of life and amorous teasing, he rejects the earth in an ecstatic meeting with the god of all poetry, Apollo:

*God of the Meridian
And of the East and West
To thee my soul is flown* (1-3)

¹ Sidney Colvin, ed., *The Poems of John Keats: Arranged in Chronological Order*, 2 vol. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1915).

(or 17-19, if we consider the two groups of sixteen and twenty-five lines respectively, as one poem only). Then, seized by the feeling of the fleeting character of the highest human experience he turns his thoughts back, in the sonnet, to the realities of earth and the temporal character of actual lives.

For the first time we have a sort of structural imagery in direct opposition to the one we have described, and a pyramidal movement is built up in the letter.



It is noteworthy that the poems themselves seem to conform to the new structure. Stanza 3 of "O blush not so...", which counts five, is nearest to the accomplishment of the pressing wish expressed in st. 1 and 2:

*By those loosen'd hips you have tasted the pips
And fought in an amorous nipping. (11-12)*

But stanza 5 brings the lovers down to the reality of separation:

O what can be done, shall we stay or run? (19)

The tranced desire for a purer, less earthly "beverage" (4) than Burgundy and other wines, and a full intoxication of "golden sunshine" (14) is a far more powerful image of the upward flight:

*My Wine overbrims a whole Summer
My bowl is the sky. (6-7)*

Space and time have been overcome; there is no limit to the poetic vision. The "delphian pain" of inspiration will keep him for a moment, but "my body is earthward press'd" (second part 4) and "that terrible division" (sec. part 6) leads to a prayer for a less tumultuous and destructive experience. Yet is that possible?

*God of Song
Thou bearest me along
Through sights I scarce can bear. (sec. part, 17-19)*

Can one approach the sun without being singed? It is a choice that Keats has now decided on: greater intensity at any cost. "Madness" (17) — a word which he uses with the meaning of *inspiration* — is a very apt word to describe the state of inevitable division created by the spell of poetic vision and the "earthward" pressure of mortality:

*... when the Soul is fled
To high above our head
Affrighted do we gaze
After its airy maze. (sec. part, 9-12)*

"Ranting", Keats says, speaking of these lines; and yet, if we consider the song "Hence Burgundy..." and "God of the Meridian" as a sort of shapeless ode whose parts were not clearly divided and divided, it is possible to trace the upward and downward figure of the new structural imagery. Ten lines urge us to the "delphian pain", while the last nine express doubts about such untempered experience. The invitation to follow the poet, the praise of Apollo, God of the Meridian, together with the ambiguous feeling of ecstasy, fills the middle part. It is not possible to speak of exact balance, of course, but Keats never considered the extempore lines quoted here as worthy of publication.

The sonnet sent to Reynolds is more interesting in that perspective, as it is not a poem composed on the spur of the moment. Keats says, "I will copy my last sonnet". Now if one refers to the definition given in the "Epistle to C. C. Clarke", i. e. "the sonnet swelling / Up to its climax and then dying proudly" (60-61) and to the numerous illustrations of this couplet in *Poems 1817*, it can be seen, that here also Keats has altered the structural imagery. The climax used to be reached practically at the end of the sonnet, and it died into silence. Here Keats uses the Shakesperian form, which extends the length of the concluding lines. The three quatrains and couplet are there for the rhyme scheme, together with the Miltonian freedom for enjambments and the clinching lines starting after the caesura of line 12. The first quatrain is dedicated to Keats's works; they are compared with the harvest, to ripe corn stored in the granaries. The second quatrain concentrates more particularly on his persistent goal, the writing of a "high romance" (6). As we know, this is the type of poems, on which he felt his fame should rest. The ingredients of the "high romance", tightly summarized in the four lines are suggestive of a journey heavenward:

*When I behold upon the night's starr'd face
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
And feel that I may never live to trace
Their shadows with the magic hand of Chance. (5-8)*

At that time "Hyperion" is on his mind, with the now well-known difficulties of such an enterprise. Hence the doubt that can be perceived through the verses and the highly ambiguous words "magic hand of Chance", which express at once the hazards of composition, the wizard-like quality of poetic creation, the unreliability of success, the supernatural element expected in romances, and the tragic events that should inform the plot.

The sestet, or rather the third quatrain, introduces a new dimension, "the fairy power / Of unreflecting Love" (11-12). It is a still higher degree of bliss, and with it we reach the climax; once again we are lifted from the earth by the magic ecstasy of love, imbued with a sense of being out of time. The tranced lover is in a blissful state of absence. Love is all.

From there the poet steps back to "the Shore / Of the wide world" (12-13), and his disillusionment finds expression in the two and a half lines of the couplet. Loneliness and vanity are abruptly on the other side of the pyramid. Fame, then love had raised the poet to the top of his ascension; love, then fame are found on the way down, in the powerful last line:

Till Love and Fame to Nothingness do sink.

The fall is complete with the last word, reinforced by the annihilating blow of "nothingness". The sonnet dies necessarily into silence, but not in the same way as those we have already examined. The downward steps are present in the poem in a condensed form. There is no equal balance between rise and fall; there is no equal balance in a sonnet either. Moreover it could be argued that the fall is sensed throughout the verse owing to the negative impression created by the "fears that I may cease to be" (1), which from the very beginning conditions the whole atmosphere. The "high piled Books" may not come to be written, ever. The recurring "never" of lines 7, 10 and 11, like a sinister toll more urgent towards the end, plays an important part, as an anti-climax to the happiness that could be, and prepares, in undertones, the desperate conclusion.

Thus Keats, unconsciously perhaps, realizes in his letter to Reynolds, and in each of its parts the new structural imagery that had been working in his mind since the summer months of 1817.

M. B. Forman thought that the letter of 31 January should be dated February 7, thus following that containing the "Robin Hood" and "Mermaid Tavern" lyrics. The order of our discussion may give the same impression to the reader. It was not our purpose. A correction made by Keats in the concluding sentence of the letter of Febr. 3, gives the assurance that the outburst of "outlawry" came after the "God of the Meridian". Keats had ended his message thus: "In the hope that these scribblings will be some amusement for you this

Evening — I remain copying still" (3 Febr. 1818; no. 59, I, 225). He crossed out "still" and corrected "on the Hill". He was at Hampstead at the time, but certainly not writing on the top of the heath! "On the Hill" can only refer to the previous correspondence when he had invited his friend Caius (Reynolds used to sign thus) to follow him and assume the same attitude towards poetry:

*Then follow my Caius then follow
On the Green of the Hill
We will drink our fill
Of golden sunshine
Till our brains intertwine
With the glory and grace of Apollo!*
(“Hence Burgundy...”, 11-16)

“On the Hill” in the letter of Febr. 3 is a reminder of the central exultation of his letter of January 31, then. It follows closely the praises to the “Sherwood-clan” and the temporary Elysium of the Mermaid Tavern. Every movement is directed upward. “Still” might have translated some weariness; “on the Hill” fits the elated mood of the poems. It belongs to the imagery of upward movement. We must not be misled by the presence of the theme of death in the sonnet “When I have fears...”; it is a commonplace of lyrical poetry, just like the love theme, or that of time elapsing too quickly. It is difficult, at that time, to imagine a dispirited Keats. He was going to see *Endymion* published. The presence of a sick brother did not weigh on him, and the news from Devon was not bad. The circle of admiring friends or acquaintances was growing. “Honors rush so thickly upon me that I shall not be able to bear up against them.” (mid-Febr. 1818, To his Brothers; no. 61, I, 227). He had become aware of a new path that would free him from the traditional and artificial pattern of subterranean explorations. He was justified in feeling enthroned “on the hill”, and actually experiencing the lofty flight in his pulse and body.

It is rare to read of a more comfortable serenity and happiness than in the next letter to Reynolds (19 Febr. 1818; no. 62, I, 231) where assurance and maturity inspire Keats's lines. It should be quoted extensively, but the following extracts will do:

“When Man has arrived at a certain ripeness in intellect any one grand and spiritual passage serves him as a starting post towards all the ‘two and thirty Pallaces’. How happy is such a ‘voyage of conception’, and what delicious diligent Indolence!”

The clinching lines of Milton's *Sonnet on his Blindness* must have been a recurring thought throughout Keats's active years:

They also serve who only stand and waite.

Moreover the allusion to "the Cherub Contemplation" in the letter of February 3 shows Keats's reminiscence of "Il Penseroso" (l, 54), where Milton evokes Ezekiel's vision and "Him that yon soars on golden wing" (52). Such pictures would reinforce the poet's desire for a prophet-like revelation.

*Dissolve me into extasies,
And bring all Heav'n before mine eyes.¹*

One should also remember that Ezekiel was given the printed roll to eat, and that God would command over his servant when to speak. Is there a better image of inspiration? With it we go back to Coleridge's "Old Mariner" and one of the most important axioms of Romanticism :

*I have strange power of speech:
That moment that his face I see,
I know the man that must hear me:
To him my tale I teach.²*

The revelations of the open sky are but partial knowledge. They are like the "points of leaves and twigs" that support the spider's web. This again belongs to the series of images used by Keats in his letter to Reynolds, expressing his confidence in his own poetical powers. "Now it appears to me that almost any Man may like a Spider spin from his own inwards his own airy Citadel" (19 Febr. 1818; no. 62, l, 231). The upward flight is not for the poet only then; if men started on similar spiritual journeys, in spite of their diversity, their many paths would cut each other "in numberless points" and finally meet. Mutual understanding could, then, exist: "Every human might become great, and Humanity instead of being a wide heath of Furse and Briars with bere and there a remote Oak or Pine, would become a grand democracy of Forest Trees" (ibid., 232).

After pleading for communal generosity — "The flower I doubt not receives a fair guerdon from the Bee" —, Keats reverts to his notion of active indolence: "Let us open our leaves like a flower and be passive and receptive." Rollins, in a note to his edition of the letters, thinks Wordsworth's "wise passiveness" was in Keats's mind.³ Why should we not rather think that Milton was the real source at that time when the poet had precisely said "I will cut all this — I will have no more of Wordsworth or Hunt in particular" (3 Febr. 1818, To Reynolds; no. 59, l, 224). The conclusion of the "Sonnet on his

¹ Milton, "Il Penseroso", 165-166.

² Coleridge, "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," vii, 587-590.

³ Wordsworth, "Expostulation and Reply," 24.

Blindness" seems to us nearer the imagery of Keats's letter than the poem out of the *Lyrical Ballads*. In particular,

... *his State*
Is Kingly; thousands at his bidding speed
And post o'er Land and Ocean without rest,

is more akin, we feel, to "It is more noble to sit like Jove than to fly like Mercury — let us not therefore go hurrying about and collecting honey-bee like, buzzing here and there impatiently from a knowledge of what is to be arrived at" (19 Febr. 1818, To Reynolds; no. 62, I, 232). Or what about *Il Penseroso*?

Hide me from Day's garish eie,
While the Bee with Honied thie,
That at her flowry work doth sing,
...
Entice the dewy-feather'd Sleep.

The final passage of Milton's poem preserves the same mood and in "the peaceful hermitage"

Where I may sit...
Till old experience do attain
*To something like Prophetic strain.*²

This tends to give first importance to Milton's influence over the young poet's mind at that time. His passion for the great XVIIIth century *bard* had certainly been revived since the Oxford stay with Bailey. *Paradise Lost* was the work in which the preoccupations of both the poet and the student of theology could meet and that could offer them common interest. In that light an unconscious reminiscence could also be traced back to the biblical episode of Mary, Martha's sister, "which also sat at Jesus' feet", having chosen the one thing needful.

On that occasion the "guerdon" for Keats was the unrhymed "sonnet" inspired by the "Thrusb's voice": "O thou whose face hath felt the Winter's wind". Each quatrain starts on a note of cold, darkness and ignorance, and rises higher and higher towards spring, warmth and the apotheosis of a calm evening. As in the sonnet "When I have fears...", the concluding lines expand on two and a half verses and introduce melancholy, peace and the antithetic wakefulness of alert inactivity:

¹ Milton, "On his Blindness," 11-13.

² Milton, "Il Penseroso", 141-143, 146; 170, 173-174.

*He who saddens
At thought of Idleness cannot be idle
And he's awake who thinks himself asleep. (12-14)*

Here again Milton's echo sounds powerfully.

The interesting point technically speaking is the attempt at writing a sonnet without an effort to endeavour and meet with the rhyming requirement of such poetry. Keats is still in his "spirit of outlawry", and a feeling of masterful maturity. The poet can dispense with the usual rules. At the same time he illustrates the beauty that can result from powerful indolence. Poetry should come "naturally" and be "unobtrusive". A sonnet cannot normally come exempt of effort. "What the Thrush Said" is there to exemplify the new axioms about poetry that Keats was getting more and more positive about, and that were going to find concise expression in a letter to Taylor, dated February 27. They deal with the unobtrusiveness of poetry, which "should strike the Reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a Remembrance" (no. 65, 1, 238). To make the reader fully content, Keats thinks a poem should follow a certain curve, exactly the rising curve we have seen taking hold of his vision throughout the winter months: "the rise, the progress, the setting of imagery should like the Sun come natural to him — shine over him and set soberly although in magnificence leaving him in the Luxury of twilight." What was perceived as being born in the course of the composition of *Endymion*, guessed at, then reflected on and discussed in Keats's correspondence finds here its final definition.

The third point of the "axioms" we have already found expressed several times, i. e. "that if Poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree it had better not come at all". Very wisely the poet adds: "it is easier to think what Poetry should be than to write it". It is clear that we cannot expect to find all the future works of Keats's conforming to the new structural imagery described so well to his editor and friend John Taylor. We hope, however, to be able to show that this perception of the beauty of a Poem was going to direct Keats's steps in his steadfast efforts to reach the highest peak of poetry.

Milton's *Il Penseroso* and his sonnet *On his Blindness* can be traced, we think, as influential over Keats's evolving attitude; and *Paradise Lost* ranks high as an archetype of a great "Poem". The freedom of the blank verse must have appeared to the young poet an answer to his quest for an apparently "natural" form of poetry. It may very well be directly responsible for the blank verse form of the sonnet "What the Thrush Said" ("O thou whose face..."). But the beginning offered far more; it offered the example of an epic poem starting from the depth of Pandemonium to rise on Satan's wings to the discovery of the truth about God's creation.

We have already linked (see p. 117-118) Keats's architectural description of Neptune's palace in *Endymion* Book III with the poet's change of perspective, and the Oxford days at Bailey's with discussions about the Christian religion and its poetical expression in Milton's work. In our introduction we showed that the underground journey is a theme to be found throughout the ancient epic tradition; Milton's Satan joins with Ulysses or Aeneas in this. But in *Paradise Lost* we are in the nocturnal realms of Hell at the beginning and Satan's journey is an upward flight to find again the light he has been deprived of through his rebellion against God. The Oxford weeks must be rated as a time of revaluation of Milton's poetry, and the new understanding of his works meant a sort of illumination for the young poet.

Indeed we have said that the spirit of the future "Hyperion" invades Keats's work with the composition of *Endymion* Book III. But the direct influence of *Paradise Lost* can be traced in the same Book. For example it is difficult not to find a parallel between the "host" (*End.* III, 828) or "multitude" (*ibid.*, 818 and 821) of resuscitated lovers moving towards the gates of Neptune's palaces, and the vision of God's only Son foreseeing the resurrection of the dead and their innumerable procession towards the glorious seat of Heaven:

*Then with the multitude of my redeemd,
Shall enter Heav'n, long absent, and returns,
Father, to see thy face, wherein no cloud
Of anger shall remain, but peace assur'd
And reconcilment.*¹

Can we doubt the influence of this passage on the episode of *Endymion*, "A youth, by heavenly power lov'd and led" (*End.* III, 708), breaking the spell that retains Glaucus and the dead lovers at the bottom of the sea? It is Death's time-marked end. Milton had said: "Death his death's wound shall then receive,"² and Keats: "Death felt it to bis inwards" (*End.* III, 787). Milton:

*While, by thee rais'd, I ruin all my Foes —
Death last, and with his Carcass glut the Grave.*³

Keats echoes:

Death fell aweeping in his charnel-house.
(*End.* III, 788)

¹ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, III, 260-264.

² *ibid.*, III, 252.

³ *ibid.*, III, 258-259.

Glaucus then calls to the "raised" lovers to follow him and "pay / Our piety to Neptunus supreme" (*End.* III, 807-8).

*They shoulder'd on towards that brightening east.
At every onward step proud domes arose
In prospect, — diamond gleams, and golden glows
Of amber 'gainst their faces levelling. (End., III, 835-838)*

There opens the elaborate architectural description we discussed above, and we think it interesting to confront these lines with the picture of the gate of Heaven:

*Farr distant he [Satan] descries
Ascending by degrees magnificent
Up to the wall of Heaven a Structure high;
At top whereof, but farr more rich, appeerd
The work as of a Kingly Palace-Gate,
With Frontispice of Diamond and Gold
Imbellisht.¹*

The stairs ascending to it rise from "a bright Sea [...] / Of Jasper, or of liquid Pearle"², which reinforces the impression that "Neptune's palaces [...] that far far surpass'd' [...] Memphis, and Babylon, and Nineveh" owe something to the architect who designed the entrance to Heaven "with sparkling orient Gemmes".³ Let us add to this a few more instances of striking influences from *Paradise Lost*. Milton's description of a monstrous character prefigures Keats's "Lamia".

*The one seemd Woman to the waste and fair
But ended foul in many a scaly fould
Voluminous and vast—a Serpent arm'd
With mortal sting.⁴*

The chaotic confusion of the "hoarie Deep"⁵ where Satan ventures after the miraculous opening of the gates of Hell is akin in atmosphere to the elfinstorm that engulfs Porphyro and Madeline at the close of the "Eve of St Agnes". And though the nightingale haunts several of Keats's poems before the celebrated "Ode", no passage is nearer its spirit than Milton's feeding

¹ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, III, 501-507.

² *ibid.*, III, 518-519.

³ *ibid.*, III, 507.

⁴ *ibid.*, II, 650-653.

⁵ *ibid.*, II, 891.

... on thoughts, that voluntarie move
Harmonious numbers; as the wakeful Bird
Sings darkling, and in shadiest Covert hid
Tunes her nocturnal Note.¹

"Darkling", more particularly, seems to have remained sounding, a powerful echo, till its full weight of suggestion exploded at the very beginning of the sixth stanza of the "Ode". The Titans of "Hyperion" — "Earth-born that warred on Jove" — and the Giants of *Paradise Lost*² also spring from the crowd of proud rebels. Finally the notion of a close parentage of poetry and "sensation" may well have received strong incitement from the lines:

*Thir Song was partial, but the harmony
(What could it less when Spirits immortal sing?)
Suspended Hell, and took with rapture
The thronging audience. In discourse more sweet
(For Eloquence the Soul, Song charms the Sense,
Others apart sat on a Hill retir'd.*³

The corollary to "Song charms the Sense" is necessarily the influence of high sensations on inspiration, as expressed in the letter to Bailey of 22 November 1817: "O for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts!" There does the poet's imagination plunge its roots, and the earth is the fertile nourishing soil from where sensations, "in a finer tone", will bloom.

If all this, as we believe, worked in the young poet's mind and prepared Keats's future achievements, it points to the basic importance of *Paradise Lost* for the poet's evolution in general, and, more particularly, the evolution of the structural imagery of his poems. Among the various models of ascending structures that we have already explored, none seems to surpass that of Satan's efforts to escape "the Stygian Pool".⁴ The image is decisive both as a motion and for the character of its hero. The upward urge is the recurring movement of Books II and III. Many of the fallen angels "give not Heaven for lost"⁵ and the solemn meeting of Book II tries to decide on

... who shall tempt with wandring feet
The dark unbottom'd infinite Abyss,
And through the palpable obscure find out
His uncouth way, or spread his aerie flight
Upborn with indefatigable wings
Over the vast Abruapt, ere he arrive
The happy Ile.⁶

¹ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, III, 37-40.

² *ibid.*, I, 198; III, 463-465.

³ *ibid.*, II, 552-557.

⁴ *ibid.*, III, 14.

⁵ *ibid.*, II, 14.

⁶ *ibid.*, II, 404-410.

The start from the "palpable obscure", the "aery flight" "with indefatigable wings" is the recurrent imagery that reverses the structure of the underground journey and the exploration of the world of the dead. Milton uses it as the beginning, not as an episodic passage in the course of the epic story. The mysterious "happy Ile" slowly emerges as a place where light overcomes darkness, and reigns:

*Long is the way
And hard, that out of Hell leads up to Light.*¹

Satan's yearning for the "place of bliss / In the Purlieus of Heav'n"² merges more and more with the poet's search for the ecstatic moment of illumination and inspiration. Hence the enthusiastic vigour of the imagery of the flight, as when he

*With fresh alacritie and force renewd
Springs upward like a Pyramid of fire.*³

The prelude to Book III is the yearned-for moment of ecstasy that explodes into a song of praise to re-discovered light, the "palpable" sign of God's existence and presence, and "the first principle of life". Therefore the flight becomes the way towards a perception, an immediate apprehension of the truth "taught by the Heav'nly Muse".⁴ She, alone, can transport the poet from the realities of the fallen state of man to the dazzling vision of the inspired seer. She can transmute the palpable world of our disgrace into sensations "in a finer tone" in a more direct way than through the obscure mysteries of initiatory journeying. Satan's song of victory "Hail, holy Light"⁵ is the key opening wide the gate onto the path of excellence the poet must follow. It recalls Shakespeare's invocation at the beginning of *Henry V*:

*O for a Muse of Fire, that would ascend
The brightest heaven of invention.*⁶

Milton feels it to the point of being absorbed by the experience, and becoming one with "the flying Fiend",⁷ and the symbolic escape from obscurity becomes the poet's own quest.

¹ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, II, 432-433.

² *ibid.*, II, 832-833.

³ *ibid.*, II, 1012-1013.

⁴ *ibid.*, III, 19.

⁵ *ibid.*, III, 1.

⁶ Shak., *Henry V*, I, 1, 1.

⁷ Milton, *P. L.*, II, 643.

*Thee I [Satan] revisit safe,
And feel thy sovran vital Lomp; but thou
Revisit'st not these eyes [Milton's] that rowle in vain
To find thy piercing ray...¹*

The whole passage swarms with images that apply both to Satan's and the poet's pursuits. We can sense what Blake meant when noting down the famous paradox about Milton: "The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it."² In some way this is also true of Keats; the religious background and motive do not exist in his case; but it can be safely contended that the reappreciation of Milton's work, and of *Paradise Lost* particularly, was the all-powerful experience which worked as a catalyst of the many different influences we have disclosed acting within the young poet's mind to reverse the structural imagery of his poems: the rising of sonnets "up to a climax", the pyramidal architectural structures of the ancient civilisations of the Mediterranean and the Middle East, *Paradise Lost*, the only successful modern epic poem, etc. Some inkling of the rising structure he himself was going to use dawned when he was working on the second half of *Endymion* and contemplating writing a new "Poem", "Hyperion". It developed throughout the winter months of 1817-1818, and found first complete application in the letter of January 31, 1818, and full theoretical expression in the letter to Taylor of February 27. "The rise, the progress, the setting of imagery" are the principles Keats was going to apply to nearly all his major works, which were to appear in his third and last publication, that of 1820.

¹ Milton, *P. L.*, III, 21-24.

² Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell", *Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. G. Keynes, 192.

13. A Growing Awareness of Structure

It may be thought that for the sake of demonstration too much importance has been given to Milton's influence; and yet the letters to his friends during the spring of 1818 offer ample evidence of, and testify to, Keats's dedication to his XVIIth century model. At the end of the letter dated March 14 the line: "You know enough [of] me to tell the places where I haunt most" (To Reynolds; no. 68, I, 246), is a clear confession of the power of *Paradise Lost* over him at the time. It refers the reader to the passage where Milton, speaking through the character of Satan, complains of being denied light. "Yet not the more/ Cease I to wander where the Muses haunt",¹ the blind poet exclaims; the resemblance of the two sentences is surely more than coincidence. No doubt the allusion was perfectly clear for Reynolds. Addressing James Rice, on the 24th March, Keats jokes about the greatness of Milton, whose genius is linked to a theory on the quantity of matter and intellect having been created once and for all. Therefore "that which was in Miltons head could not find Room in Charles the seconds — he like a Moon attracted [the] Intellect to its flow — it has not ebbd yet — but has left the shore pebble all bare" (24 March 1818, To Rice; no. 72, I, 255). The praise may taste of some bitterness, but the power of the great poet over his young admirer is all the more recognizable. The "watery labyrioth" of the letter of 27 April to Reynolds is another reminiscence of *Paradise Lost* (II, 584) and the description of the streams that divide and protect the realms of obscurity. Moreover Keats expresses a wish that his friend might help to fulfil. "I long to feast upon old Homer as we have upon Shakespeare, and as I have lately upon Milton" (no. 79, I, 274).

The long letter to Reynolds of May 3 is in some way the conclusion of this stage of Keats's development. Writing from Teignmouth in a hopeful moment between two relapses of Tom's illness, he seems to be in a rather nervous state of mind. The tone is one of anticipation; he means to look over his medical books again to "keep alive the little I know". But about poetry he is convinced and settled: "I feel it would not make the least difference in my Poetry" (no. 80, I, 276-7). More knowledge can only help to control the flight of "high

¹ Milton, *P. L.*, III, 26-27.

Sensations". Indeed the poet had been exercising this control more or less instinctively, as we have shown, but a consciousness of the mechanism of creation had always presided over the composition of the poems. A deeper and deeper analysis of this mechanism was now going to "load" his poetry "with ore" through a profound understanding of rhythmic caesuras and the repetitive or symmetrical use of consonants and vowel sounds.¹ Furthermore with knowledge "our shoulders are fledged, and we go through the same air — Keats had started writing 'Fire' — and space without fear". (It is another image from Satan's flight.) This is the point he had arrived at, and the correction is revealing, so far as going through "fire" could belong to the imagery of destruction and purification; while the journey through "air" and "space" implies a completely different escape towards some apprehension, or recollection of light.

In the same text an appreciation of the geniuses of Milton and Wordsworth leads to the young man expressing his conviction as to the necessity of experience — "for axioms in philosophy are not axioms until they are proved upon our pulses" (*ibid.*, I, 279). Experience, however, is inscribed in the world of reality, and in that context it ends inevitably in the feeling of satiety, which Keats describes here as sickness — "until we are sick, we understand not". Such is the starting point, and out of that, imagination will build up higher and higher: "[...] chequer work leads us naturally to a Milkmaid, a Milkmaid to Hogarth Hogarth to Shakespeare Shakespeare to Hazlitt — Hazlitt to Shakespeare and thus by mere pulling an apron string we set a pretty peal of Chimes at work" (*ibid.*, 280). And the chime will go on even though we are forced back to earthly realities; which should give the inevitable downfall a richer load than could be perceived in the symmetrical ascent.

Keats's judgement of Milton and Wordsworth in the same letter is based on the idea of the chronological development of poetry. Just as each human being passes in his individual life through the various stages he compares to a "Mansion of Many Apartments", poetry also explores the "passages" and labyrinth born of each new generation. Wordsworth's part in his day was to "think into the human heart", just as Milton's had been acting in the context of triumphant protestantism. "It proves that a mighty providence subdues the mightiest Minds to the service of the time being, whether it be in human Knowledge or Religion" (*ibid.*, 282). We can infer from Keats's conclusion that the subject matter of poetry will inevitably be urged upon the poet's imagination by the general atmosphere of his days. His own responsibility lies in the shaping of the material, and the new choice of structural imagery appears here and there in some of the poems sent to his friends from Teignmouth.

¹ Walter J. Bate, *John Keats* (London: O. U. P., 1967), 413-416.

The sonnet "Four Seasons Fill the Measure of the Year" addressed to Bailey (13th March 1818), fulfils the new up and down scheme owing to the cyclic evolution of time. Man likewise has his "lusty spring" and revels in the luxuriousness of summer. Autumn offers the "repose" of "mists" and "idleness". Finally the "pale Misfeature" of winter brings him back to harsh realities. Once again the sonnet does not rise up to stop suddenly and fall into ominous or perplexing silence, but it leads the reader smoothly through melancholy to a reminder of "his mortal nature".

The "Epistle to Reynolds" (March 25) is another example of a former pattern transformed. The symmetry found in the former epistles is still there, but the curving line shaping the mood is no longer the same. As Keats himself concluded: "Of bad lines a Centaine dose / Is sure enough" ("To J. H. Reynolds Esq.", 112-113); we do not intend to analyse this text at length; it is sufficient to remark that the poet starts jokingly with the evocation of unconnected realities mixing as in a dream or a nightmare. Little by little the vision becomes better organized, until the memory of Claude's *Enchanted Castle* fills the scene. The picture dissolves gradually into melancholy thoughts of the impossible and unavoidable quest of the poet:

*Things cannot to the will
Be settled, but they tease us out of thought* (76-77)

...
*It is a flaw
In happiness to see beyond our bourn —
It forces us in Summer skies to mourn.* (82-84)

The last part of the epistle plunges down "into the sea"

*... where every maze
The greater on the less feeds evermore —.* (94-95)

The distinct vision of the eternal law of "fierce destruction" creates a powerful balance to the amusing, "disjointed" picture of the beginning:

*... Alexander with his night-cap on—
Old Socrates a tying his cravat...* (8-9)

The extempore epistle should not be taken too seriously; indeed Keats excuses himself for the "unconnected subject, and careless verse". And yet the poet reaches the *Enchanted Castle* in twenty-four lines, dedicating the same number of lines to his conclusion — if we exclude the last four, which are a valediction and do not belong to the main theme at all.

This, of course, was but a rapid performance, testifying to the growing impact of Keats's new outlook on composition. But it must not be forgotten that at that time Keats was bringing to an end a work of greater importance: the poetical version of Boccaccio's *Pot of Basil*. It was finished while at Teignmouth, but we know that the beginning had been composed before his stay in Devon, since he refers to the "first few stanzas" in two letters to Reynolds (27th April and 3rd May). Now the choice of Boccaccio's "Pot of Basil" of all the tales from the *Decameron* is strange, for Isabella's story, clearly, can hardly fit the new pattern of rise and fall, as it is a downward journey from the highest bliss of love to the experience of death, most bitter and pathetic. Of course, it could be argued that the subject was not quite chosen by Keats of his own volition, that it was suggested by Reynolds for a publication in common, and that Keats had to respect Boccaccio's unfolding of the plot. All this could excuse a pattern which, at first glance, appears contrary to the new tendency and the newly evolved pyramidal symmetry. And yet even rapid investigation shows that the balance of stanzas on both sides of a central pivot is immediately striking. The first thirteen ottava rima tell of the birth of tender feelings in both Isabella's and Lorenzo's hearts and their mutual confessions of love. Then in nine stanzas (XIV-XXII) the brothers appear in the characters of cruel and proud misers; they discover their sister's passion and decide to murder Lorenzo. "So on a pleasant morning..." (177) they invite him to accompany them; he is slain and buried in the forest, and the brothers return,

Each richer by being a murderer. (224)

They inform the young woman of the necessary departure of Lorenzo on a long journey of affairs. The dramatic action has taken seven stanzas (XXIII-XXIX). With them we reach the central five paragraphs (XXX-XXXIV) dedicated to Isabella: how she loves in loneliness, and weeps at the separation; and how

*Sweet Isabel
By gradual decay from beauty fell,
XXXIII
Because Lorenzo came not. (255-257)*

It is worthwhile noting the trick the poet used to link stanzas XXXII-XXXIII, the middle of the work. The enjambment is unique in the poem, and now starts the decline of the girl's spirits and health.

Stanza XXXV starts dramatically: "It was a vision". The focus is on Lorenzo and his ghastly revelations for seven stanzas again

(XXXV-XLI). Isabella's decision to look for the body and bring back the unearthed head fills a series of nine groups of ottava rima (XLII-L); while Isabella's worshipping of the pot of basil to her death completes the symmetry in thirteen paragraphs (LI-LXIII).

The exact balance of the parts (thirteen, nine, seven, five, seven, nine, thirteen stanzas respectively) is perfectly worked out and absolutely unobtrusive. Groups of stanzas answer each other with a difference. Isabella reigns at the centre between two passages dedicated to Lorenzo. One, however, narrates objectively the betrayal and his death; the other is the sensational revelation of a ghost. The former is dynamic; the latter more static. It is followed by the mad trip of the young woman to her lover's grave, which balances the passage descriptive of the brothers' characters. Beginning and end concentrate on the passion of love: a song of innocence and one of dire experience. Therefore we pass from the reality of young and genuine love to the realistic and gruesome adoration of a corpse till death puts an end to the unnatural passion. Characters and dramatic actions create an elaborate interplay which gives the story its inward pulsation. Can it be said, too, that the structural imagery draws the up- and downward line we now expect to find realized in Keats's works? Lorenzo is killed before the middle of the poem; and this, of course, suggests, at first impression, a return to the downward movement of the underground journey, supported by the general theme of youthful passion thwarted and destroyed. But this is only appearance, and a sort of counterpoint to the main theme and focus of the poem, that is to say Isabella. We can paraphrase W. J. Bate vindicating the title of "Hyperion" and say "The poem, after all, was named for *her*; and Keats, when he named a poem after a character, was invariably direct: from 'Calidore' through 'Endymion' and 'Isabella' to 'Lamia', the personal names in his titles apply to the main character..."¹ The heroine embodies beauty and love, and the rising passion of the two young people is not broken by the dry announcement of lines 217-218:

*There was Lorenzo slain and buried in,
There in that forest did his great love cease.*

The poet immediately comments:

*Ah! when a soul doth thus its freedom win,
It aches in loneliness. (219-220)*

Suffering replaces the bliss of the lovers, but it is not destructive of Isabella's love. That is the reason why the imagery goes on rising

¹ Bate, *op. cit.*, 406.

in the central passage where she lives in imagination the pleasures of love:

She brooded o'er the luxury alone. (236)

Paradoxically sensuality is more powerful in solitude than when the two lovers met at the beginning of the tale. Tormented in her flesh, Isabella adds to her own desires of reunion — "She fretted for the golden hour" (243) — a vision of Lorenzo's own yearnings. It is the moment of paroxysm, the sudden "sensation" — "a richer zest" (246) — "passion not to be subdued" (247) — in which the initial impulse of selfishness culminates in an apprehension of others' tragedies. It is a step towards maturity and that love of humanity Keats was discussing in his correspondence with Bailey.

It also means that the heroine has gone as high in her abstract experience as she can. Her power of imagination has fed full on her "sensations" of love. Mortality must now press on her, as maturity possesses in itself the germs of destruction. Hence the image of "autumn" and the first signs of the coming "winter" (249-250) in stanza XXXII that lead to the turning point of the poem quoted above (end of XXXII - beginning of XXXIII). At the same time the image links the evolution of passion with the decay of the seasons in their inevitable cycle.

The vision prevents the young woman's dying in ignorance, and adds a dimension which also finds an echo in the letter to Reynolds mentioning the completion of "my Isabel". "Until we are sick, we understand not; — in fine, as Byron says, 'Knowledge is Sorrow'; and I go on to say that 'Sorrow is Wisdom' — and further for aught we can know for certainty! 'Wisdom is folly'" (3 May 1818; no. 80, 1, 279). The formulas savour of Blake's paradoxes, but we feel an intimate link between these aphorisms and the fate of poor Isabella. She experiences the powerful truth of high sensations, even to the extreme of the mad passion that can but lead to her morbid self-destructive "luxury" and hence, ultimately, to deliverance.

We may then conclude that Keats successfully adapted his new vision of poetry to a subject that was not particularly well-suited to the pyramidal structure of imagery. "Isabella", nevertheless, builds up a world of "sensations" between two earthly realities. One, the great happiness that "Grew, like a lusty flower in June's caress" (72); the other, the disconsolate and woeful woman watering with tears the plant symbolic of her love, that grew "thick, and green, and beautiful" (426), while she dwindled forlorn and would "die a death too lone and incomplete" (487). Here again, as in the case of Lorenzo's murder, we meet with the complexity of two movements crossing in opposite directions: the growth of the plant seems to contradict the ominous approach of Death. But we had been warned

from the first that "there is richest juice in poison-flowers"! (104); and Isabella's is the leading voice, she sings to the accompaniment of more and more entangled tunes, the reflection of the complexity of life itself.

Keats, it is well-known, hesitated before allowing his friends to publish "Isabella" in the 1820 collection. His doubts may have been caused by a feeling that the poem was but a tale retold in verse and therefore no original work of his. His address to Boccaccio (IX-XX) does not incline that way, however. With humbleness Keats vindicates his enterprise:

*... it is done — succeed the verse or fail —
To honour thee, and thy gone spirit greet;
To stead thee as a verse in English tongue,
An echo of thee in the north-wind sung. (157-160)*

Or did he still mean to preserve it for a publication with Reynolds, as they had planned, but knew already too much about his state of health to persist in the scheme? Did he feel the "wormy circumstance" (385) too gruesome on second thoughts? The cancelled stanza of the "Ode on Melancholy", with its "uprootings from the skull / Of bald Medusa" gives the probability some weight. Keats may have feared that an appreciation of such detailed "gothicism" was not what he was looking for when thinking of his future fame. On the other hand the conformity of the structural imagery to that of the other pieces collected in the 1820 volume, may well have been a positive factor in his final decision to include the "Pot of Basil" between "Lamia" and the "Eve of St Agnes".

PART III

Pyramidal Structure

14. A Sentimental Journey

The letters (27th April and 3rd May) in which Keats informs Reynolds of the completion of "Isabella" put an end to the young poet's evolution, so far as the structure of his poems is concerned. Indeed events take a dramatic turn as Keats and his brother Tom leave Devon unexpectedly on May 4 or 5, rushing back to London. And the next few weeks seem to have been a very busy time. The cause of the turmoil is the sudden change brought about by George's plans and the introduction into the group of a new partner, his young wife Georgiana. May letters are extremely scarce. On the 17th Tom informs Marian Jeffrey of George's departure for America, of John's projected trip to Scotland and of his own intention of crossing over to the Continent in order to recover his health. Only on the 21st does the poet write to Bailey, and the tone is very different from the usual discussions about poetry. The retirement and confinement imposed by Tom's sickly life, explode into activity. A whirlwind seems to take hold of the brothers' destinies: George, "out of employ", decides on emigrating and "will marry before he sets sail"; John himself will start with Brown for a long walking tour. The decision appears as a necessary remedy against the depressing feelings provoked by George's plans. "I am now so depressed that I have not an Idea to put to paper — my hand feels like lead — and yet it is an unpleasant numbness it does not take away the pain of existence" (21 May 1818, To Bailey; no. 83, 1, 287). The heart-ache has nothing of the virtues of indolence and the creative dreams of imagination in "Sleep and Poetry".

Contradictory sentiments struggle within the poet's mind. The letter is interrupted and resumed four days later. Generously the elder brother has encouraged George in his scheme of settling in America ("This for many reasons has met with my entire consent"), but the strain already imposed on him by Tom's illness, — "Lord what a Journey I had, and what a relief at the end of it" (4 June 1818, To Marian and Sarah Jeffrey; no. 84, 1, 290) — added to the despair of losing George's company in the circumstances, leads him to the very verge of suicidal thoughts: "I am in that temper that if I were under Water I would scarcely kick to come to the top" (25 May 1818,

To Bailey; no. 83, I, 287). Moreover, topping the anguish of Tom's state of health and the void of George's absence, a third sentiment seems to gnaw at the poet's heart: his more than tender feelings for Georgiana Wylie, George's young wife. It is not one separation that George's plan now means, but two: "I feel no spur at my Brothers going to America and am almost stony-hearted about his wedding." Though he immediately adds "All this will blow over", his incapacity to concentrate on any other subjects shows how deeply the event moves him. The many invitations of these weeks prove the kind attempts of his friends to overcome his depressed state of mind, and prevent him from retiring "into the backward Bin", to be like wine in the cellar, "the more falerne... at the drinking" (*ibid.*, 288). The joke is a smile through tears, a play on words inspired by his intimate forlornness and the Horatian evocation of Falernian wine *Interiore nota Falerni*.¹ Like all deeds requiring much courage the pun left a profound mark on Keats till it found an outlet in the "Ode to a Nightingale". The seclusion of the "draught of vintage, / Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth" (12), also finds its counterpart in the "forlorn" (71 and 72) mood of the last part of the poem.

For the time being Keats appears divided between a will to assert his authority as the head of the family and a need for warm understanding and love, for the comfort of "throwing oneself on the charity of one's friends" (*ibid.*, I, 288). There is no room for aestheticism in all this; it is a very human reaction to the bitterness of separation, and Bailey must remain content with the hope of a problematic visit, "for we must have many new thoughts and feelings to analyze, and to discover whether a little more knowledge has not made us more ignorant" (*ibid.*, 288). The "little more knowledge" can only be the experience of the unforeseen total change in the course of life, and the ignorance derives from the birth of powerful contradictory feelings through the tangled web of which the young man cannot see, and to some extent refuses to see.

Is it exaggerated to say that intimate preoccupations blocked Keats's evolution at that time; that he stuck to the truths he had evolved about poetry and the structural imagery that should support it, till things would settle in his heart and make it possible to explore some other dark passage of the "Mansion of many Apartments"? A sort of irritability can be felt throughout the correspondence written in the weeks preceding his departure for Scotland with Brown. Important letters, as we have said, are very few. Bailey is again the recipient of his confidence a fortnight later. The depressed and depressing mood has not abated. "Now I am never alone without rejoicing that there is such a thing as death" (10 June 1818; no. 86,

¹ Horace, *Odes*, II, 3, 8.

I, 293). The letter again swarms with the expression of personal feelings and attempts to analyze and understand his relations with those nearest to his heart. It seems evident that he already knew his brother Tom was condemned, but never said so clearly and hid the fact from George in order not to upset his plans and spoil his fresh happiness. We can then re-live the division of the young man's affection: "My Love for my Brothers from the early loss of our parents and even for earlier Misfortunes has grown into an affection 'passing the Love of Women' (ibid., 293). And here can be judged his clear sense of the future: "I have a Sister too and may not follow them [his brothers] either to America or to the Grave — Life must be undergone." It is hard to understand why H. E. Rollins chooses to interpret "a sister" as being his recently married sister-in-law, Georgiana Keats.¹ Undoubtedly, the sister he is referring to is Fanny whom he does not want to abandon in the custody of Richard Abbey. Together with Tom, but for different reasons she requires the poet's care; for the sake of both of them he must reject the insinuating thoughts of death.

But there is a new partner in the family group, one that has become very dear to Keats's heart, amazingly rapidly in fact. "I had known my sister in Law some time before she was my Sister and was very fond of her. I like her better and better — she is the most disinterested woman I ever knew — that is to say she goes beyond degree in it — To see an entirely disinterested Girl quite happy is the most pleasant and extraordinary thing in the world — it depends upon a thousand Circumstances — on my word 'tis extraordinary. Women must want Imagination and they may thank God for it — and so may we that a delicate being can feel happy without any sense of crime. It puzzles me and I have no sort of Logic to comfort me" (ibid., 293). The endearment is certain though the praise is not quite explicit. What does Keats mean? This quality of disinterestedness supposes a disposition free from prejudice and self-seeking which must have responded in all simplicity to the young man's thirst for affection and human warmth in his present perspective of bereavement. He had just given praise to Bailey for a similar attitude. "The world is malignant enough to buckle at the most honorable Simplicity... Yes, on my soul, my dear Bailey, you are too simple for the World — and the Idea makes me sick of it... You have all your Life (I think so) believed every Body — I have suspected every Body" (ibid., 292), which, of course, is a deprecation of himself caused by the stress of the time. That simple response to his need for friendship made him morbidly irritable when talking to his friends for fear of sentimentality. Kindness in a girl would provoke a sentimental reaction approaching love. Was the poet aware of a greater

¹ H. E. Rollins, *op. cit.*, I, 293, footnote 1.

depth in his sudden affection than he would confess? The phrase about Georgiana "feeling bappy without any sense of crime" tends to show that Keats was conscious of somewhat ambiguous sentimental entanglements on his side. The coldness of separation at Liverpool — "I left the next morning before George was up for Lancaster" (2 July 1818, To Fanny Keats; no. 94, I, 310) — may be attributed to a desire to breaking with his brother without any unmanly sentimentality. On the 26th he will confess to Tom: "I in my carelessness never thought of knowing where a letter would find him on the other side" (26 July 1818, To Tom; no. 100, I, 351). Bewildered hurry is evident. But was it on account of George only? Hardly three days have elapsed when he addresses George and Georgiana, hoping they have not sailed yet (27 July 1818; no. 92, I, 303). The young wife is the object of an outburst of deep affection. The letter is in fact meant for her: "Ha! my dear Sister George, I wish I knew what humour you were in that I might accomodate myself to any one of your Amiabilities." The acrostic to Georgiana's name follows, a weak poem in de Selincourt's opinion. This is very true, and its weakness derives from a divided feeling and the difficulty of not betraying too much of that

Great Love in me for thee and Poesy (5).

The possible declaration to the inspiring "muse" is reined in by the acrostic form which imposes a mask of convention, making the poem a mere *tour de force*. It is remarkable that he hardly ever troubled his poor brother Tom with a confidence of his feelings for their sister-in-law. Yet it is possible to read between the lines of the abrupt declaration: "With respect to Women I think I shall be able to conquer my passions hereafter better than I have yet done" (26 July 1818, To Tom; no. 100, I, 351). With his friends he was more open about the extraordinarily quick affection he had experienced in the case of George's wife: "I have felt the pleasure of loving a sister in Law. I did not think it possible to become so much attached in so short a time.—Things like these, and they are real, have made me resolve to have a care of my bealth" (13 July 1818, To Reynolds; no. 96, I, 325). For a desire to see George and Georgiana again has already seized him. The notion of a "visit to America" is brewing: "I intend to pass a whole year with George if I live to the completion of the three next" (22 July 1818, To Bailey; no. 99, I, 343). The sense of bereavement haunts him throughout the Scotland trip; he abandons the description of landscapes and people, rarely discusses problems of poetic creation, but is preoccupied by his own inward trouble. It makes him more and more interested in his friends' marriage plans (13 July 1818, To Reynolds; no. 96, I, 325; and 18 July, To Bailey; no. 99, I, 342), and causes him to

analyze his attitude to women. The whole of his letter to Bailey of July 18 treats of his shyness in the society of women on account of his small size and of his aggressive reaction to the "evil thoughts" and "malicious spleen" engendered by their presence. It is amazing to see what a clear conscience he had of his psychological complex. Among women he says, "I cannot speak or be silent — I am full of Suspicions and therefore listen to no thing — I am in a hurry to be gone — You must be charitable and put all this perversity to my being disappointed since Boyhood — Yet with such feelings I am happier alone among Crowds of men, by myself or with a friend or two [...] I must absolutely get over this — but how? The only way is to find the root of evil, and so cure it 'With backward mutters of dis severing Power'. That is a difficult thing; for an obstinate Prejudice can seldom be produced but from a gordian complication of feelings, which must take time to unravell and care to keep unravell'd" (ibid., I, 341-2).

Such personal analysis of his own predicament was, of course, what saved Keats from the destructive influence of the ghosts he was living with, but shied from when confronted with their embodied persons. The allusion¹ to a passage of *Paradise Lost* meant to refer to his situation and that of Bailey betrays underlying levels of pre-occupation. The lines belong to the description of Paradise (IV, 268-272):

*Not that faire field
Of Enna, where Proserpin gathring flours
Her self a fairer Floure by gloomie Dis
Was gatherd, which cost Ceres all that pain
To seek her through the World.*

Did he not think of himself as of a disconsolate Ceres contemplating sailing to America in order to see again the Proserpine his brother Dis had untimely "gathered"? Even in the lines sent in the same letter, the traumatic break from those he love haunts his imagination which seems at times to contemplate a plunge into madness.

*Aye if a madman could have leave to pass a healthful day
To tell his forehead's swoon and faint when first began decay,
He might make tremble many a Man whose Spirit had gone forth
To find a Bard's low Cradle place about the silent north.
Scanty the hour and few the steps beyond the Bourn of Care,
Beyond the sweet and bitter world — beyond it unaware;
Scanty the hour and few the steps because a longer stay
Would bar return and make a Man forget his mortal way.*

¹ "When I see you the first thing I shall do will be to read that about Milton and Ceres and Proserpine" (no. 99, I, 340).

*O horrible! to lose the sight of well remember'd face,
 Of Brother's eyes, of Sister's Brow, constant to every place,
 Filling the Air, as on we move, with Portraiture intense
 More warm than those heroic tints that fill a Painter's sense—
 When Shapes of old come striding by and visages of old,
 Looks shining black, hair scanty grey, and passions manifold.*
 ("Lines written in the Highlands", 25-38; no. 99, I, 345)

The wound was never healed in spite of the pleasure of discovery offered by the walking tour with Brown. It focused the young man's attention on problems of self-analysis which supplanted the preoccupations about poetry itself. Scenery and a deeper consciousness of humanitarian problems in those poorer districts of the north were every day's accumulating lore. The land- and seascapes roused enthusiastic response, particularly the steep rise of crags and peaks. In Keats's descriptions of nature mountains are strikingly prominent; they were the as yet unknown features of the natural surroundings. Their shapes coincided with the imagery instilled during the past winter and spring. The link between theoretical views on poetry and a renewed experience of the truth of such abstractions could but reinforce the poet's convictions. In fact immediate reality proved difficult to turn into verse — "I cannot write about scenery and visitings" (13 July 1818, To Reynolds; no. 96, I, 325) — except when the scene happened to correspond to the high architectural structure of his dreams. Ailsa Rock inspired one of the few successful poems of that period: "Hearken thou craggy ocean pyramid..." (1).

The sonnet suggests the cataclysmic emergence of the mountain. The rock belongs to the world of immortality; it has the dramatic compactness of the risen Titans stunned to silence by defeat. The "heave to airy sleep" (6) — "Sleep in the Lap of Thunder or Sunbeams" (7) — relates it to the Giants whose epic had been maturing in the poet's mind throughout the previous months.

The sestet hesitates between rising and falling movement until it dies into the silence of the thunderstruck indestructible mass:

*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 —
 Drown'd wast thou till an earthquake made thee steep,
 Another cannot wake thy giant size. (10-14)*

The sonnet is less pyramidal in its structural imagery than the crag it describes. The reversion to the Petrarchan form of the sonnet seems to have made the poet hesitant as to whether he should move slowly downward, or after a marked rise die abruptly into silence. The final effect recalls the Chapman's Homer sonnet; the "giant"

shape towers up impressively. But line 11 with its backward movement breaks the rhythm of the otherwise steady rise. The inverted symmetry of line 12 is certainly skilfully worked out, yet not quite as "unobtrusive" as might be wished.

Such scenery suggestive of epic grandeur was met with day after day, and it is surprising that the poet did not often find himself equal to the occasion. The weariness of the traveller may explain his inability to cope with the immediate experience. However his enthusiastic admiration for the rough magnificence of the country explodes in his letters. The description of the isle of Staffa with Fingal's cave "arched somewhat gothic wise" and the pillars of basalt "rising immediately out of the crystal" shows how sensitive Keats was to its suggestions of legends and myths, and how he linked it with the vaulted architecture of the Middle Ages. In the poem inspired by the place the description builds up an imagery that culminates in the line:

This Cathedral of the Sea. (38)

But Lycidas "the pontiff-priest" of the monument cannot bear the "sacrilegious presence" of mortals:

*... the stupid eye of mortal
Hath pass'd beyond the rocky portal. (45-46)*

He will therefore abandon the place, and the poem plunges to its end! Structurally after rising to the vaulted roof of the high nave, the movement drops steeply down to the water.

Keats himself was severe in his judgement of those verses: "I am sorry I am so indolent as to write such stuff as this" (26 July 1818, To Tom; no. 100, I, 351). The phenomenon is rather easy to explain: reality pressed too much on the "camelion poet" for him to be roused to full poetic inspiration on the spot. Keats was perfectly aware of the fact and re-inforced in his belief in the power of imagination as a way towards the apprehension of truth. "Fancy is indeed less than a present palpable reality, but it is greater than remembrance — You would lift your eyes from Homer only to see close before you the real Isle of Tenedos" (13 July 1818, To Reynolds; no. 96, I, 325). Therefore reality needs no comment or ornament; it is there, and there's an end of it. Fancy is creation, which remembrance is not. In poetry alone could be found a solution to his troubles, and forced back to London by ill-health, he soon plunged into the composition of "Hyperion".

Creative activity, writing was a necessity. With his own sore-throat to nurse and the company of his ailing brother, life was hardly tolerable. His anguished cry to Dilke (21 Sept. 1818; no. 107,

I, 369) gives some idea of the extent of his distress: "I wish I could say Tom was any better. His identity presses upon me so all day that I am obliged to go out — and although I intended to have given some time to study alone I am obliged to write, and plunge into abstract images to ease myself of his countenance his voice and feebleness." Negative capability was working its worst. His own spleen as to his brother and sister-in-law's absence had not subsided and his aching heart needed the outlet of his long October letter to allow his affection to speak out. "If you were here my dear Sister I could not pronounce the words which I can write to you from a distance; I have a tenderness for you, and an admiration which I feel to be as great and more chaste than I can have for any woman in the world" (14 Oct. 1818, To the George Keatses; no. 120, I, 392). It is a declaration of love with an effort to make it brotherly at the end. The young man's heart was no doubt far from being at rest, and a need for womanly presence and affection overcomes all other thoughts. It is not astonishing, therefore, to find the same letter relating the poet's meeting with Jane Cox, then with Isabella Jones, and his response to the presence of "disinterested" women endowed with "magnetic Power". But the imaginary character will always surpass the tangible reality. "As a Man in the world I love the rich talk of a Charmian; as an eternal Being I love the thought of you. I should like her to ruin me, and I should like you to save me" (ibid., no. 120, I, 396). Evidently he was making an effort to clear up troublesome feelings. It was easier to see things in that light from this side of the Atlantic.

The criticism of *Endymion* in the literary reviews could not contribute, of course, to soften the bitterness of Keats's soul, in spite of his proud and dignified attitude in the circumstances. "My own domestic criticism has given me pain without comparison beyond what Blackwood or the Quarterly could possibly inflict" (8 Oct. 1818, To Hessey; no. 110, I, 374). And all this was a mere nothing compared to his distress at the growing weakness of Tom and the increasing certainty of the approach of untimely death. It is a wonder then to think that "Hyperion" could be conceived even in its incomplete form during that period. But, as we have said, he was "obliged to write" to abstract himself from the reality of the sick man's room.

15. Towards Ethereal Regions: "Hyperion"

"Hyperion" is the fruit of the previous maturation of Keats's views on poetry, to which was added the experience of the grand scenery of the Scottish shores and mountains. It is difficult to judge a work that was never completed. But it is sufficient for our purpose to examine the general pattern of evolution of the poem, and confront it with the upward movement that could be expected at that stage of Keats's development. The Miltonian model followed in the first two Books corresponds to the imagery of defeated rebels crushed in despair in a world of darkness, then awakening at the call of some powerful spirit and refusing to succumb; and the discussions and plans that ensue. Therefore the rise is evident. The imagery of the beginning of Book I is entirely devoted to the creation of the funereal atmosphere of an underworld of the dead. The note of defeat is struck at the outset, with impressions of depth, darkness and hopelessness evoked in the very first line:

Deep in the shady sadness of a vale. (1. 1)

The scene creating the appropriate atmosphere by a concentration of images which stress the three elements enumerated above extends over the first twenty-one lines. The "vale" (1) is "sunken" (2) "far from the fiery noon" (3). And the "fallen divinity" (12) of the god whose "bow'd head seem'd list'ning to the Earth" (20) reinforces the downward movement. Darkness and sadness combine to make the deep recess a sort of grave; no noise, no motion, away from the light of "morn" and its "healthy breath" (2), from the fire of the sun at the zenith, and the mild eyes of the stars. "Forest on forest" (6), "cloud on cloud" (7) enclose Saturn in their shades as in a natural tomb. And there silence and immobility reign. The god sits

*... quiet as a stone,
Still as the silence round about his lair. (4-5)*

His presence is suggestive of an Egyptian colossus in some funeral temple. "His old right hand lay nerveless, listless, dead" (18); there is "no stir of air" (7) and the rivers flow "voiceless" (11). The shadow

of death has pervaded the imagery. Everything is deprived of life: "where the dead leaf fell, there did it rest" (10). And in lines 11-13 — where the elements of darkness, silence and downfall are again intimately united — the noise from the stream is

... deadened more
By reason of his fallen divinity
Spreading a shade. (11-13)

Time came to a stop when Saturn dragged his shattered self to the hiding-place "and slept there since" (17), and the place enjoyed "the healthy breath of morn" (2) no longer.

It is important to note that Keats was confronted with a difficulty that did not exist in the model of a universe used by Milton in *Paradise Lost*. Milton's fallen angels were precipitated into a totally different world that imagination could describe in the most fantastic way. He was moving his characters in a cosmography that established a hierarchy of different worlds; his actors would travel through space and explore regions of light or obscurity. Keats was dealing with a mythological situation rooted in the earth. All his epic had to evolve in the same world. The only hierarchy could be the vertical disposition of elements, and such imagery alone could create the atmosphere of death, awakening from lethargy and conquest of areas of light and life. In fact what Keats does is to write the epic of the progress of beauty in the world, from primitive forms to more subtle and elaborate ones. It answered his views about the exploration of the "Mansion of many Apartments". Primitivism of life and shapes he had just experienced on his trip through Scotland. Happiness was not absent from the misery of Scottish cottages, true palaces when compared to the Irish ones. Mildness of colouring and shades of light softened the most rugged landscapes, and the flight of the eagle combined smoothness and majesty. The simplification of sharp divisions was nowhere to be found. Saturn is in a "vale", and not in some far away Pandemonium. Therefore the poet is obliged to play skilfully with the sensations produced by the natural elements, which are his basic material, in order to make the setting acceptable; he must render the rebirth credible without contradicting the normal picture of our surrounding world. Light does not necessarily exclude darkness; the qualities of silence are audible; and life exists in the presence of death.

That is why the "healthy breath of morn" exists (2), but the place is "far sunken" from it (2). Similarly Saturn's lair is "far from the fiery noon, and eve's one star" (3). The mention that Saturn is "grey-hair'd", by its very suggestion of great age, leads us to suppose that the god is not dead. Keats resorts to the negation of positive elements to reinforce the impression he means to produce, as in

*Not so much life as on a summer's day
Robs not one light seed from the feather'd grass. (8-9)*

The exuberance of a "summer's day" turns to nothingness, as it is reduced to a breath of air so weak, that it proves unable to blow away even one particle from the fluffy down of the dandelion's fleece! And the "vale" where death and defeat reign has not been deserted by the naiads peeping timidly from behind the curtain of the reeds. But the refreshing figures do not break the spell; on the contrary their presence adds to the mood of respectful silence through the absence of their wanton laughter. Their cool bodies do not deny the coldness of death:

*The Naiad 'mid her reeds
Press'd her cold finger closer to her lips. (13-14)*

The whole attitude is one of profound respect inspired by misfortune and sorrow. Saturn, massive and statuesque, contemplates some inward vision, and his seeming lifelessness contains a deeper level of slumberous power:

*His realmless eyes were closed;
While his bow'd head seem'd list'ning to the Earth,
His ancient mother, for some comfort yet. (19-21)*

A hidden potentiality of strength lies embedded in these lines where one feels the primitive forces of material earth still capable of gigantic heavings.

In the first section Keats has remarkably prepared the way for the subsequent development of his plot. The feminine form of Thea can now come and with her the huge stony statue will assume a more human and living aspect. She is, too, a hieratic figure, but she moves and her colossal shape escapes its matrix of hard, heavy stone.

*But oh! how unlike marble was that face:
How beautiful, if sorrow had not made
Sorrow more beautiful than Beauty's self.
There was a listening fear in her regard,
As if calamity had but begun;
As if the vanward clouds of evil days
Had spent their malice, and the sullen rear
Was with its stored thunder labouring up. (34-41)*

A momentous capacity of action is condensed in the imagery of these lines, and they reveal a new way that Keats has found to humanize his massive characters by degrees and make them move

into the unfolding plot. It takes time, like the slow rise of the tide against a cliff. The first real upward movement is Thea's command, "Saturn, look up!" (52). But the command is soon dismissed as a useless violation of the god's "slumbrous solitude".

The dramatisation of the poem through the many speeches is far more developed than in any of Keats's previous works. Each character expresses his or her own nature in adequate words; description tends to be limited and deals with the outward appearance, while the poet demonstrates his powers of "negative capability" in creating a variety of living well-defined personages. Each reveals a different personality through the medium of direct speech, and the human attitudes are true enough to show Keats's progress towards the drama. Thea's speech seems to die into silence and immobility, but it has moved something in great Saturn's heart, and slowly, but momentarily the giant god will move into action:

*And still these two were postured motionless,
Like natural sculpture in cathedral cavern;
The frozen God still couchant on the earth,
And the sad Goddess weeping at his feet:
Until at length old Saturn lifted up
His faded eyes... (I, 85-90)*

It is the first pulsation of life in the crushed god. He, in turn, calls to Thea to "Look up!" (I, 97 and 98). And though his speech is all despair at first, it ends with a vision of great deeds and actions, of "Gods thrown down" (I, 127), of "golden victory" (I, 126), of some other god

*"... making way
With wings or chariot fierce to repossess
A heaven he lost erewhile." (I, 122-124)*

Inflamed by his revived hope, he gets up; and the change of attitude, the proud call for "another Chaos" (I, 145) out of which he could "fashion... another universe" (I, 142-143) sounds as high as Olympus. Some courage returns and the sunken shape of Thea also rises. She leads the way, and the image used to describe the dramatic and ominous change is one of upward flight:

*... the mist
Which eagles cleave upmounting from their nest.*
(I, 156-157)

This takes place very near the middle of Book I, which numbers 357 lines altogether.

Now the second half of the Book shows another primeval god, Hyperion, threatened in his ancient "sovereignty, and rule, and majesty" (I, 165), but not yet vanquished, ready to act in support of Saturn. In this again the movement is an ascending one, and the imagery of Book I, in its totality can be considered as slowly climbing the upward slope. In his wrath Hyperion stands ready to startle the world with an untimely rising of the sun,

*Full six dewy hours
Before the dawn in season due should blush,
He breath'd fierce breath against the sleepy portals,
Clear'd them of heavy vapours, burst them wide
Suddenly on the ocean's chilly streams. (I, 264-268)*

Yet the motion launched by the god's as yet unconquered power, and his will to vanquish the younger generation of immortals is thwarted, for in spite of his rising determination he has to submit to a greater order of things, so that "The sacred seasons might not be disturb'd" (I, 298).

His power is reined in and, if he is commanded by Coelus to rescue Saturn's fallen race, he must also abandon his manifested powers of light and venture down. "To the earth!" is Coelus' order (I, 345); and after Hyperion has been assured that his "bright sun" (I 347), his "bright, patient stars" (I, 353) will be kept watch on,

*Forward he stoop'd over the airy shore,
And plung'd all noiseless into the deep night.*
(I, 356-357)

Darkness was the imagery at the beginning of Book I, and it is there at the end. But, at the same time, the will to fight against despondency and preserve hope has permitted a more spirited mood to swell higher and higher in the course of the passage, preparing the following events of the epic.

The steady rise of the god's determination to resist destruction and death shapes the structural needs of the poem as a whole, and the upward movement has slowly been set in motion. The Book itself, however, is composed on the up and down symmetry we have already met with and described. The "Look up" (I, 52, 97 and 98) and slow awakening of the fallen gods from death-like slumber is answered by the intimation at the back of Hyperion's mind:

"Fall! — No, by Tellus and her briny robes!" (I, 246)

And his last act in the Book is to submit to Coelus' advice and "plunge" downward into darkness towards the earth. The Book has

in fact its own up and down structure as if it were a separate poem in itself. Its centre is occupied by the impressive description of Hyperion's palace. It is the point of equilibrium where, for an instant, the passions expressed by the different characters are replaced by an image of the high dwelling of the old god of the sun. The vision is one of colourful light which contrasts with the darkness at both ends of the Book. At the same time the architecture builds up the expected summit of the pyramidal structure.

*His palace bright
Bastion'd with pyramids of glowing gold,
And touch'd with shade of bronzed obelisks,
Glar'd a blood-red through all its thousand courts,
Arches, and domes, and fiery galleries.* (I, 176-180)

"Pyramids", "arches", "domes" all three images are compressed here — precisely in the lines of Book I already mentioned on p. 120. The rise and fall of the composition is given its full equivalent in the three architectural elements chosen by the poet. And it appears then that Keats tries to combine a subtle interplay of pyramidal structures: the Book itself starts a general upward movement that should lead to the ancient gods' uprising and their final defeat by the new forces of a more elaborate world of beauty — unless Keats contemplated a reconciliation of the diverse generations! — and at the same time it is worked out on the model of an independent piece of verse with high flight from the glooms of death and a final descent into darkness again. This symmetry belongs to the subject itself. The curving path of the sun in the sky fashions the up and down inward motion. Hyperion himself makes it a characteristic feature of the perfection of his "lucent empire" (I, 239). His intimation of approaching defeat and decrepitude is expressed by the sudden absence of the regal qualities.

*"The blaze, the splendor, and the symmetry
I cannot see."* (I, 241-242)

This highest palace of light is exactly what the poet is trying to build up out of the heavy material of nature and life, and the aim of his exertions is to transmute chaos into a consciously organized work of art.

The chaotic world of primeval forms is the scenery fit for the meeting of the fallen gods in Book II. It brings us back to a vision of Thea and Saturn reaching

*... that sad place
Where Cybele and the bruised Titans mourn'd.* (II, 3-4)

There the defeated host is roused by Saturn's presence. To his cry "Titans, behold your God" (II, 110), they answer with grief and reverence, and raise their chained or fallen bodies. Saturn's speech brings life, his voice "grew up like organ" (II, 126), but his discourse hesitates between a call to fight and a yielding to the battered Titans' sufferance. Oceanus' and Clymene's speeches also preserve the subdued tone of acceptance. But Enceladus' wrath gives a new impulse to the action and fresh impetus to the dwindling upward movement of the epic.

*"What, have I rous'd
Your spleens with so few simple words as these?
O joy! for now I see you are not lost:
O joy! for now I see a thousand eyes
Wide-glaring for revenge!" — As this he said,
He lifted up his stature vast, and stood. (II, 320-325)*

But this huge figure is not the final image; topping the swelling mass of discontented giants, an unexpected vision obliges all eyes to be raised. With it comes the recollection of Hyperion's unvanquished powers; the god of light himself appears. He stands on "a granite peak" and dominates the silent misery of the "fallen tribe" (II, 100) in an attitude that calls to mind the final image of the "Chapman's Homer" sonnet.

However the feeling is not totally one of hope in victory. There is a violent upward impetus created by Enceladus and some of his companions stepping up to meet the "King of Day", striding together

To where he towered on his eminence. (II, 386)

But Hyperion himself is described as "dejected", and the hailing call to "Saturn" (II, 388 and 391) sounds echo-less "from their hollow throats" (II, 391). Thus here again the upward trend is held back, and the rising pressure towards revolt restrained and thwarted. The parallel with the final return to darkness in Book I is striking.

Just as we had a pyramidal and symmetrical structure in the imagery of the first Book, a kind of climax is realized in the middle of Book II. It is to be found in the central and all important passage of Oceanus' speech, which tells of the ancient order, and tries to make it acceptable that the new sovereignty should be overcome in turn. The old story of the rise and victory of Saturn's tribe over the former generation of gods fills lines 190-201.

*"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 touch'd
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 beautiful realms."*

Speaking from the dark and chaotic vale of the defeated, Oceanus then places at the centre of Book II the praise to that supreme power given from high: Light. The debt to Milton — *Paradise Lost* (opening of Book III for instance) or *Samson Agonistes* (83-100) — cannot be clearer; but the way Keats transforms the Christian symbol into one of aesthetic beauty is worth noting. The imagery is the same as that of Satan's speeches glorifying Light or Samson's complaining of being deprived and exiled from Light, the sensuous perception of God himself. Here, however, the application of the corresponding imagery bears no relation to the Christian faith and myths. It is used to describe the passage from original chaos to an order of beauty, fine though still primitive in its forms. Now one of the poet's difficulties in going on with "Hyperion" might well reside in this theme, and in the impossibility for Keats to escape the Miltonian parallel. In terms of the Christian faith, Light has vanquished once and for all. Satan then could easily rise from various layers of shade and darkness towards the sphere where light reigns barring immediate contact with the unapproachable divinity. Keats in his perspective of the progress of artistic beauty, and never dreaming of rejecting the force and power of primitive beauty, was confronted with the impossible task of piling realms of light on top of each other. Hadn't the generation of Saturn and Hyperion already established an early domination of artistic beauty over original chaos?

It is practically impossible to guess what the whole of "Hyperion" would have been like. But if we accept the idea that some sort of rising structure of imagery would have ordered the composition of the whole — and we have shown it can be traced in the patterns of the two completed Books — it seems that Keats had in mind to build a mythological tale exemplifying the rise of achievement in poetry through ages of artistic development, as he had done briefly in "Sleep and Poetry". But instead of undergoing the fate of that generation when "A thousand handicraftsmen wore the mask / Of Poesy" ("Sleep and Poetry", 200-201), the poet seems to have meant to explore the new realms of the poetry of his days. After the "Strange thunders from the potency of song" (*ibid.*, 231) were described the "poet Kings / Who simply tell the most heart-easing things" (*ibid.*,

268). In other words the imagery of "Hyperion" corresponds in our opinion to the growth of poetic achievement in England, Romanticism being interpreted as the time of Apollo, succeeding Milton's grand style. We cannot agree with the critics who see in "Hyperion" Book III an inability of Keats to preserve the Miltonic tone of Books I and II, and a sort of decline of Keats's faculties. In Book III the poetry is different because it exemplifies the recent development of English poetry. The Delphic realms of the Muses replace the dark vale awakened by Hyperion's setting light. It is the world of "Flora and old Pan" again.

*Let the rose glow intense and warm the air,
And let the clouds of even and of morn
Float in voluptuous fleeces o'er the hills;
Let the red wine within the goblet boil,
Cold as a bubbling well; let faint-lipp'd shells,
On sands, or in great deeps, vermilion turn
Through all their labyrinths; and let the maid
Blush keenly, as with some warm kiss surpris'd.* (III, 15-22)

After the homage due to his master, John Milton, this is the poetry of young John Keats as evolved through his admiration of romantic models. And it is the natural setting of Apollo's domain. But as Keats had hinted in previous poems and in his correspondence, this natural setting was not enough; it was necessary to pass onward and bring light to the darker passages of the "Mansion of many Apartments". Once again the striving god looks upward.

*"Are there no other regions than this isle?
What are the stars? There is the sun, the sun!"* (III, 96-97)

The mere descriptive qualities of poetry are no satisfactory step; the exaltation of the young god reasserts the general rising tide of the epic. "The green turf" (III, 94) is not enough for his "step aspirant" (III, 93). He feels "in aching ignorance" (107); and the miraculous transmutation takes place:

"Knowledge enormous makes a God of me." (III, 113)

This is the next stage to be reached, but a terribly abstract one that requires an overwhelming exertion of the imagination. The transformation of young Apollo into a God capable of reigning over the old Hyperion is expressed in terms which remind us of some of the lines discussed in connexion with Keats's early poems. It was

*Most like the struggle at the gate of death;
Or liker 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, 126-130)*

Attention must be drawn to the fact that death into life takes place at the summit of the structure built up by the imagery in the portion of Book III that we possess, which we can infer, would have been near the middle of the Book. The young god is precisely being lifted to ethereal regions when the poem abruptly ends. The last word is "celestial". It is evident then that the "dying into life" theme is completely reversed if compared with Keats's early works. It no longer happens in some dark and cold underground recess, but "with a pang / As hot as death's is chill", and in some clear region of ether.

There, however, is the rub. Imagination cannot perpetually procure material for brighter and higher ethereal shrines; it must be acknowledged that the world of nature and the underworld offered wider and more varied scope for concrete images to the poet. Inspired by Milton's model Keats had already imagined the architectural brilliance of Hyperion's palace. The fresh setting of romantic nature had created the light, aerial atmosphere of Delos. Keats was now caught in the trap of needing to erect castles in the air ever more lucent, evanescent and impalpable. And if a more refined and light-hearted type of poetry had replaced the gigantic power of Miltonian rhetoric, was he, young Keats, actually able to match the "vast idea" ("Sleep and Poetry", 291) he had been following since the publication of *Poems 1817*? Or would he only fail and make himself ridiculous, and look unbearably pretentious? The symbolic light of *Paradise Lost* had given him a start, but directed him into what turned out, owing mainly to the impossibility of sufficiently renewing the descriptions of ethereal regions, to be a blind alley. Describing the descent into the various realms of natural elements was no doubt a far easier task than to convey the temptation of leaving the earth

*"... when the liegeless air
Yields to my step aspirant." (III, 92-93)*

The newly evolved pyramidal structure could but prove a failure so far as epic poetry was concerned; at least it could not offer sufficient scope for a prolonged sojourn of the imagination among the realms of light, in the thin transparency of ether.

16. Overlapping Structures in "The Eve of St Agnes"

Far more successful was Keats's attempt at using the same structural imagery for his tale in Spenserian stanzas, the "Eve of St Agnes". The subject is rooted in earth; it is a poem of love and life, and not a myth on the progress of poesy under the inspiring domination of succeeding gods, with all the difficulties of building up their palaces in airy places and of solving the bierarchical problems of value between ancient and modern canons of beauty. The theme of passion in the witching hour of night is perfectly adapted to the mood of a young lover whose family affections have just been submitted to repeated maiming separations: the departure of George and Georgiana, and Tom's death. The sad experience of mortality had found morbid expression in the verse version of Boccaccio's tale *The Pot of Basil*, under the title of "Isabella", and could now be dismissed. His own eager heart, youth and vitality had gone to a recent acquaintance, Miss Brawne. Her presence met naturally with the young man's warm need for affection and, for easily understandable reasons already dealt with, for feminine affection. The new aesthetic plan of composition evolved by the poet fitted the subject of love admirably. What other higher summit of fulfilment could there be in the circumstances, than love at its warmest!

Thus the form of the poem fits, naturally and easily, the theme. There is a slow rise from the grave up to a paroxysm of passion, which subsides and dissolves again in the doubts inherent in all the paradises to which in mortal life we can attain. The progression starts in the middle of the wintry season, 21st January, and the curve followed by the poem is going to match the natural rhythm of the year: the awakening of spring, the splendour, then the full maturity of summer and autumn, till the approach of winter calls up some disquieting thoughts as to man's final destiny.

The start is given by the date "St Agnes' Eve" and the "bitter chill" of line 1 announces cold images, near relations of death. The owl is "a-cold" (2), the grass "frozen" (3), the Beadsmen's fingers "numb" (5), his breath "frosted" (6) and the visible mist thus pro-

duced looks like his soul departing "for heaven" (8). Silence is the usual accompaniment to such a tomb-like environment. The hardly perceptible, upward flight of the breath, however, has set the pace onward. And slowly, very slowly, in stanza II, the "patient, holy man" (10) rises from among the statues of "the sculptur'd dead" (14) and something moves in the low chapel of the castle. His "lamp" (11) throws the first gleam of light and life under the vault inhabited by death. All the descriptive words are condensed expressions of death: the attitudes of both the Beadsman and the statues in prayer, the "meagre", "wan" (12) aspect of the man, the rows of "sculptur'd dead" (14), the prison-like atmosphere, the dumbness of the knights and ladies' prayers, the darkness and coldness of every detail that makes any witness's spirit become "weak" and "fail" (17). The "purgatorial" atmosphere is admirably translated into concrete terms in the last lines of the stanza through the poet's capacity to evoke "how they may ache (the sculptur'd dead) in icy hoods and mails" (II, 18) — another example of negative capability.

Very gradually life creeps in: sounds from "Music's golden tongue" (III, 20) reach "this aged man and poor" (21). But the dead are left alone to care for themselves and do penance for their sins. "Another way he went" (25). Thus we are left with an intimation of some rising from the grave. The curve leads upward: "scarce three steps" (20), but it is enough to indicate clearly the direction. The living world is above with its preparations for the reception of "a thousand guests" (IV, 33). Noise and light for a moment pour from the crowded world, down into the severing darkness and solitude of the silent vault. Four stanzas have thus been necessary to set up the symbolic scenery, the worlds of the living and the dead.

Then come the lovers. Both also belong to a world of estrangement. Their love is as yet but an idealized dream of passion which sets them apart from the rest of mankind, and separates them from the boisterous atmosphere of "revelry" (V, 37). Madeline walks in a mesmerized sort of state, indifferent to other people's presence. Though looking forward to "visions of delight" (VI, 47), she retains some links with the coldness of the underworld. The old and the "virgins" (47) seem to hold some mysterious communication, and suffer from the same separation from the warmth of life. Madeline is described as "lily white" (52); she keeps her "maiden eyes" "fixed on the floor" (VII, 57 and 58); she cools the ardour of many an "amorous cavalier" (60); she looks all languor with "vague, regardless eyes" (VIII, 64); her breathing is "quick and short" (65); she "sighs" (66) and appears "all amort" (70) "save to St Agnes" (71). And it is in this last circumstance that all the difference between her and the Beadsman lies. Life is there in front of her, near at hand, if the spell that keeps her within touch of the "purgatorial rails" (II, 15) can be broken.

Porphyro has already stepped bigger into the warmth of life. If Madeline was intent on "visions of delight" (47), desires (54), "dreams, the sweetest of the year" (63), waiting for "the hallow'd hour" (66) and "all the bliss to be" (72), she remained very vague as to what all this could actually represent. Porphyro "with heart on fire" (75), "ventures in" (X, 82) with far more tangible purposes: "speak, kneel, touch, kiss" (81). His path stretches through real life, not that of music and revelry, but one of dangers and merciless enemies. He also, however, will have to compromise with impending death. He stands bidden

... far beyond
The sound of merriment and chorus bland (XI, 94-5)

and the way towards bliss passes through the "lowly arched way" (XIII, 109) resembling the narrow winding passage that allowed music to reach down to the chapel. His guide, "the old beldame" (90), is also a character closely connected with the grave, an "aged creature" (91) whose attribute is "an ivory-headed wand" (92), and we shudder in imagination at the touch of "ber palsied band" (97). The place where they step to shelter and talk is

... a little moonlight room,
Pale, lattic'd, chill, and silent as a tomb. (112-113)

Undoubtedly bliss is first of all an escape from the grips of death that marks profoundly all the elements of our mortal life. Stanza XV still retains some trace of the chill and death. Though "the aged crone" (129) laughs, and thus is transformed into a good old grand-mother, "As spectacl'd she sits in chimney nook" (131). Madeline's imagined dream is still described as "enchantments cold" (134). But at this stage old Angela loses something of the hag-like character which she retains, however, throughout the tale; she is attracted into the sphere of half-forgotten youth and life; her name suggests, perhaps, a debonair angel prone to forbearance of human weaknesses. She is irresistibly drawn to the side of life and full-blooded love by Porphyro's cajoling promises and threatening words (st. XV-XVI). The turn is marked in stanza XVI by the accumulation of bright and warm, colourful imagery:

*Sudden a thought came like a full-blown rose
Flushing his brow, and in his heart
Made purple riot.* (136-138).

Angela still remains "A poor, weak, palsy-stricken churchyard thing" (XVIII, 155); but she will exact her last energies to help love

to be victorious, and she busies preparing Porphyro's stratagem. Activity replaces the whispering of the conjuration. That we are slowly led upward towards some ceremony of blissful initiation is shown by her final determination:

*"Ah! thou must needs the lady wed,
Or may I never leave my grave among the dead."
(XX, 179-180)*

Porphyro can then be led up to "the maiden's chamber" (XXI, 187). It still retains some of the attributes of mortality; it is "silken, hush'd, and chaste" (187).

Madeline herself very gradually makes her way towards her room. She meets "old Angela" (XXII, 191) and kindly goes all the way down "to a safe level matting" (196). Only then can she escape fully the mortal influences and run "like ring-dove fray'd and fled" (198) towards full abandonment to the intensity of life. The dramatic entrance of the girl into her room marks an end:

*Out went the taper as she hurried in;
Its little smoke, in pallid moonshine, died:
She clos'd the door. (XXIII, 199-201)*

Death is left, then, at the door, together with the retarding influence of old age and reason. The girl feels like bursting: "she hurried in" (199), "she panted" (201), "her heart was voluble" (204). She experiences in her pulse the entrancing pain of approaching bliss.

Strangely enough intensity of feelings calls back another image of death which balances that at the beginning of the stanza. She feels "As though a tongueless nightingale, should swell / Her throat in vain, and die, heart-stifled, in her dell" (206-207). But this is the death Keats would have called "rich" ("Ode to a Nightingale", 55) because it comes from excess of life and not from its lingering frustrations. It is a death which is in fact a melting into overflowing life.

The immediately following stanzas exemplify the feeling in a sensuous description of Madeline's room. The "high and triple-arch'd" window (XXIV, 208) with its stained glass panels shuts out "the wintry moon" (XXV, 217) and its light is transmuted into warm colours splashing "splendid dyes" (212) everywhere in the room: "Madeline's fair breast" (218) is touched with a tint of "warm gules" (218); "rose-bloom fell on her hands" (220) "and on her silver cross soft amethyst" (221), "on her hair a glory" (222). The painted statues and a "thousand heraldries (214) "blus'd with blood" (216). The rich decoration of carved "fruits and flowers" (210) announces the feast Porphyro is going to prepare for his conquered bride (st. XXIX-

XXX). Even the "diamonded" panes of the window adds to the richness of the imagery. Madeline's undressing attracts attention to the precious clothes she wears: "wreathed pearls" (XXVI, 227) in her hair, "warm'd jewels" (228) without forgetting the perfume of "her fragrant hoddice" (229). Her naked body does not stand in Pre-Raphaelite whiteness under the cold moonlight. "Her rich attire creeps rustling to her knees" (230), she stands "like a mermaid in sea-weed" (231), a cool image perhaps, yet suggestive of a scintillating rainbow. And when she lies on her bed, "the popped warmth of sleep" (XXVII, 237) calms down her eager desire and preserves something of the red colouring of the general atmosphere. And there she remains "As though a rose should shut, and he a bud again" (XXVII, 243). It is real "paradise" (XXVIII, 244), but one feels all round the praying clutches of mortality. Porphyro creeps out of his hiding place, "Noiseless as fear in a wide wilderness" (250); "dim, silver twilight" (XXIX, 254) pours down from "the faded moon" (253). The noises from the revelry underneath "affray his ears" (260). But the young man wards off those dispiriting reminders in building up a sort of altar dedicated to his beloved. The preparation is described by the poet in a way that rouses all our senses in a complete unity of perception: the colours and shapes of the tablecloth, fruits and dishes; the scents from the ripe fruits, "lavender'd" linen (XXX, 263), spices and wood; the palatable meal of "delicates", exotic "dainties" (269 and XXXI, 271); the smoothness of material and the music in the background, as well as Porphyro's song (XXXIII). All the details tend to merge into a synaesthetic effect of uniquely powerful fascination.

It leads straight to the paroxysm of happiness, which paradoxically cannot be expressed otherwise than through the feeling of pain: "so my soul doth ache" (XXXI, 279). And Porphyro reaches a new level of sensation, while Madeline experiences the spell of St Agnes' "midnight charm" (XXXII, 282). She will awake to music (XXXIII), and reality very nearly mars her dream of love.

*There was a painful change that nigh expell'd
The blisses of her dream. (XXXIV, 300-301)*

Signs of mortality reappear:

*"How chang'd thou art! how pallid, chill and drear!"
(XXXV, 311)*

Therefore she betrays an anxious desire to go back to the visions of her sleep with their seeming touch of eternity — "Those looks immortal" (XXXV, 313) as she calls them. At the same time the unrealized dreamings bring the pangs of "eternal woe" (314). In

consequence, at the end of this excruciating journey of voluptuous passion there can be only a fall: either the dream remains a frustrating illusion,

"For if thou diest, my Love, I know not where to go;" (315)

or it finds its accomplishment, and for a brief moment, actually satisfies the unbearable tension of the senses. It is the very last step up the ladder; further on there is only a tumbling down of sensations, a difficult adaptation to reality, and the memory of a lost paradise.

Stanza XXXVI brings both achievement and destruction:

*At these voluptuous accents, he arose,
Ethereal, flush'd and [...]
Into her dream he melted, as the rose
Blendeth its odour with the violet.* (317-318, 320-321)

*... Meantime the frost-wind blows
Like Love's alarum pattering the skarp sleet
Against the window-panes; St Agnes' moon hath set.* (322-324)

The outside world of mortality presses in from every side. Darkness and cold have suddenly replaced the warm colourings of the stained-glass windows. A feeling of deception invades Madeline, no longer "ring-dove" flying lightly to her nest, but "A dove forlorn and lost with sick unpruned wing" (XXXVII, 333). Awakening is a sour experience, and Porphyro does his best to keep to the voluptuousness gained through his "quest" (XXXVIII, 338). He assumes responsibility and feels like "Thy beauty's shield, heart-shap'd and vermeil dyed" (XXXVIII, 336). Yet the image sounds empty now that the dream has been shattered. There is no escape except through the storm over "the southern moors" (XXXIX, 351).

The storm that rages outside will help the lovers to flee;

*"... 'tis an elfin-storm from faery land
Of haggard seeming, but a boon indeed."* (343-344)

However the atmosphere is one of panic and defeat. Madeline hurries "beset with fears" (XL, 352). The lovers rush "down the wide stairs" (355) among slumbering shadows of enemies, the flickering of lamps, ghost-like figures springing alive from a fluttering "arras" (358). Themselves "glide, like phantoms" (XLI, 361). Death, like sleep and silence, weighs heavily over the mortals sprawling everywhere, while "the wind's uproar" (359) drowns every other noise. "And they are gone" (XLII, 370), carrying away life

and its possible escaping flights into moments of bliss and illusions of eternity. There is nothing left behind but woe, nightmare and the ultimate reality of death.

... *Angela the old*
Died palsy-twitch'd, with meagre face deform;
The Beadsman, after thousand aves told.
For aye unsought for slept among his ashes cold.

(XLII, 375-378)

Here the images of the beginning recur; we have come back to the reality of passing time and old age, sickness and death. We have moved gradually from the silent and chilly cell of the underground chapel to the high chamber lit from beaven, an Eden of colours and profusion, a paradise secluded for a brief moment of bliss from the menace of the world and of reality. But the threat has always been there, ever present, repeatedly menacing the passionate ascent towards the ecstatic accomplishment of love. The position of the chapel, the dark passages and "level chambers", and Madeline's room allow the up and downward movement to take place. The growth of the imagery from the cold and darkness of death to the intensity and warmth of Madeline's room, from the barren stones haunted by lean characters to the splendour of the decoration upstairs and the rich variety of food, from the silence of the grave to the noise and turmoil of the reception, and up to the communication of souls through Porphyro's song, also correspond to the upward flight; on the contrary the escape down to the gates of the castle and out into the dark landscape of moors swept by the howling storm leads towards the last images of nightmare and death. Therefore we again have a composition based on a pyramid-shaped structural imagery. But this time the interplay of pyramidal structure and symmetry of composition is not quite what we have been accustomed to expect. It is more complex.

First of all the symmetry found in other works does not exist apparently. The slow rise of intensity up to the climax of the melting into Madeline's dream extends over thirty-six stanzas out of a total number of forty-two. The fall is abrupt; six times shorter than the upward climb to the "ethereal" moment. Is it, however, mere imagination to suppose a relation of proportions with the type of sonnet-form towards which Keats had evolved at the time? In *Poems 1817* all the sonnets were of the Petrarchan form: two quatrains followed by a sestet. And we have argued that the structural imagery corresponding to Keats's definition was consequently rising "up to its climax" to fall abruptly into silence. Since then Keats had drifted towards the Shakespearian pattern: three quatrains and a couplet which created the possibility of imagery rising throughout the first

twelve lines, with a less abrupt effect in the ending couplet. The sonnets written after the Scotland tour, in the winter and spring 1818-1819, are mostly of that kind. Now twelve lines to two is the exact proportion of rise and fall we find in the "Eve of St Agnes", i. e. six to one. Moreover the Spenserian stanza chosen for the poem bears some relation to the Shakesperian sonnet in the rhyme scheme which resembles closely the pattern of two quatrains, and of the ninth line, extended to an alexandrine, which allows an effect similar to that of the couplet in that it often rounds up the stanza as a complete sentence, and sounds as a conclusion. In the "Eve", for instance, there can be found but three cases of real enjambment where the eighth line of the stanza runs on into the alexandrine (see st. VI, XXIII and XXXVI). Therefore it can be said that the long final line plays a part similar to that of the couplet, and it is interesting to see that the proportion — which here must be counted in syllables — is again close to that of the sonnet (slightly nearer seven to one than six to one). The choice of the unit and the number of units finally retained for the complete poem might very well not be a matter of mere chance, and the influence of the sonnet form over the whole of Keats's evolution again appears prominent. The careful chiselling of the poem is testified to by the notes of Garrod's critical edition: whole stanzas were abandoned to attain the final unequal balance of rise and fall in the poem.

Had Keats then renounced the careful symmetry evolved elsewhere in his works? Not really; the poem starts with three stanzas picturing a world of cold, transfixed forms, and ends with three stanzas leading back to the same ghostly atmosphere, made even more nightmarish owing to the deception worked on Madeline's purity and the unsettled future that mars the elation of the lovers and their flight. If we now jump to the middle of the poem, we find that stanza XXI ends the six stanzas dedicated to the preparation of Porphyro's plan, while the six following ones are filled with Madeline's own arrangements for the St Agnes' Eve miracle dream. And thus little by little the very carefully worked out symmetry underlying the rise and fall of the structural imagery appears, partly unfolded, in a very elaborate type of composition. The plan of the poem can be described as follows:

The introduction (st. I-III) is the slow awakening of a frozen world. No theme is very well defined, the only link with the title being the cold atmosphere of winter time. The last line of stanza III shows the Beadsman sitting among "rough ashes"

And all night kept awake, for sinners' sake to grieve. (27)

This is undoubtedly a sort of concluding mark of the episode. The first line of stanza IV turns away from the previous picture and

points to a new direction, the link with the introduction being preserved through the image of the man himself:

That ancient Beadsman heard the prelude soft. (28)

From stanza IV till the end of stanza X the poet has taken great care to blend one stanza intimately into another whenever a new element could have created a pause. The revelry in the castle fills stanzas IV and V, but in the middle of the latter the attention focuses on Madeline and through her we learn about the legend of St Agnes (VI) and her intention to comply with the rites attached to it (VII, VIII). But Madeline is still there at the beginning of stanza IX.

*So, purposing each moment to retire,
She linger'd still. Meantime, across the moors,
Had come young Porphyro. (73-75)*

At the end of stanza X, on the other hand, the pause can be sensed. We know Porphyro to be in the midst of enemies

Save one old beldame, weak in body and in soul. (90)

This creates an instant of expectation that dissolves in the exclamation at the start of the next stanza:

Ah, happy chance! the aged creature came. (91)

Then the meeting of old Angela with Porphyro takes a dramatic turn as she entreats the young lover to flee, till at the end of stanza XIII, he evokes St Agnes' day, and thus changes the old guardian angel's mood (XI-XV).

The very beginning of stanza XVI marks a neat departure along a definite line. The first word stresses the transition:

Sudden a thought came like a full-blown rose. (136)

Porphyro's plan and Angela's acceptance and arrangements for its accomplishment fill the six stanzas that bring the reader to the exact middle of the poem (XVI-XXI). And, as already suggested, Madeline's own preparations also require six stanzas until she goes to sleep in the perfect equilibrium and neutrality of a work of pure art.

*Blissfully haven'd bath from joy and pain;
Clasp'd like a missal where swart Paynims pray;
Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain,
As though a rose should shut, and be a bud again. (240-243)*

This passage answers in practically exact symmetry, if we consider the total number of lines of the poem, the frustration felt by Porphyro when hearing of Madeline's purpose:

... *he scarce could brook*
Tears, at the thought of those enchantments cold
And Madeline asleep in lap of legends old.

XVI

Sudden a thought came like a full-blown rose,
Flushing his brow, and in his pained heart
Made purple riot. (133-138)

Can it be mere chance that the "rose" image should appear at both lines 136 and 243, equidistant from the beginning and the end of the poem? Here again we touch on the unbelievable precision of Keats's artistry.

The diptych of Porphyro and Madeline in the centre of the poem is bound together by the presence of old Angela who, having guided the young man up to his hiding-place, retreats:

His poor guide hurried back with agues in her brain.
(XXI, 189)

The secondary character thus realizes in filigree the symmetrical ascent and descent in the middle of the plot. And the intricacy of the two overlapping structures stands out at the poem's central turning point.

Her falt'ring hand upon the balustrade,
Old Angela was feeling for the stair,
When Madeline, St Agnes' charmed maid,
Rose, like a mission'd spirit, unaware. (190-198)

The downward movement that brings back Angela to the dark passages of oblivion and final death crosses the rising steps of Madeline and the brightening intensity of passion that will crumble only in the final stage of the story.

From the picture of Madeline asleep, we pass without transition to Porphyro, "Stol'n to this paradise, and so entranced" (244), that five stanzas (XXVIII-XXXII) are filled with the adoration of his sleeping beauty, the building of the altar as if for a sacrifice and the enjoyment of delaying "woofed phantasies" (288).

Another "chapter" starts with stanza XXXIII:

Awakening up, he took her hollow lute. (289)

It shows Madeline's slow awakening, and discovery of her lover's presence, the reality of her dream. Though it reaches to the top of intensity with the melting of Porphyro into her dream, it also shows the disappointing confrontation of dream and reality, and the end of the blissful state of ecstasy. The cruel change occurs in the last three lines of the stanza (XXXVI), which naturally end in the urgent call of Porphyro to his love:

*"Awake! arise! my love, and fearless be,
For o'er the southern moors I have a home for thee."
(350-351)*

These seven stanzas end with this last dramatic utterance. The concluding three describe the flight in the narrative style, and die into silence.

If we now sum up this analysis, we discover, underlying the structural imagery of the growth and release of tension, another pattern based on a strict symmetry:

3 stanzas	introduction
7 stanzas	presentation of the theme and characters
5 stanzas	Angela's ambiguous defense
6 stanzas	Porphyro's plan
6 stanzas	Madeline's preparation
5 stanzas	Porphyro's adoration
7 stanzas	union of the lovers (blissful, then anxious)
3 stanzas	escape and conclusion

This points to the growing complexity of structure in Keats's art. The subtle parallelism and overlapping of two different plans of composition that he had mastered and often made to coincide before, opens a wider field of the potential meaning and ambiguity in his poetry. The architectural symmetry is there, a reliable support to any voyage of exploration and discovery along the clear or darker passages of his famous "Mansion of many Apartments". The imagery shows that the highest intensity is to be attained with the union of two ecstatic states of desire, but that it means a break in the idealizing dream. Such is the fate of all passionate, human quest for an impossible eternity: the paradoxical realization of immortality in the instant.

17. "La Belle Dame Sans Merci": The Letter Version and the *Indicator* Text

"The Eve of St Agnes" inevitably leads to the "Belle Dame Sans Merci". The title is quoted in the tale (st. XXXI11, 292), and the subjects of the romantic poem and the ballad have more than one point in common. The theme seems to have been borne in the poet's mind since the Scotland tour with Brown; indeed the letter addressed to his brother Tom (10 July 1818, no. 97, 1, 327) starts with a sort of folk-song in forged local dialect, telling the strange cavalcade of a young bride to her wedding through "blustering weather" (38). Though it is for a "happy wedding" (42), the wild scenery of the beginning and the sudden sorrow that invades the poet at the end prefigure the cold solitudes of both the "Eve" and the "Belle Dame", and the tense despondency of their conclusions:

*Whilst I — Ah is it not a shame? —
Sad tears am shedding.*

("Ah! ken ye what I met...", 43-44)

The lively picture of the galloping horses fills the central portion of the song with the figure of the bride "wrappit in her hood" (25); with her cheek "flush wi' timid blood" (27) she experiences the same emotion as Madeline, and when she turns "ber daz'd head full oft" (29) towards her "bridegroom soft" (31), she reminds us of the "sidelong would she bend" ("La Belle Dame...", 28) describing the Belle Dame on the "pacing steed" (*ibid.*, 21).

The poem, inspired by a wedding met on the way near Ballantrae, was to be sent to Dilke as a hoax, but Keats knew his friend would see through it, that it was no genuine folk-song. Yet he thought it good enough to while away a moment of Tom's sickening days. The last line ("Sad tears am shedding") proves once again how deeply affected and in some way frustrated the poet had been by George's marriage. It is not astonishing then that the subject should have baunted his subconscious mind to surge up in the spring of 1819 when his own heart was becoming definitely involved in his love for

Fanny Brawne, and the problem of reconciling the "unpromising morning" of his life (13 Oct. 1819, To Fanny Brawne; no. 203, II, 223) and the impossibility of living without her. In the "Eve of St Agnes" Keats deals with the dream of intimate union with the beloved. The theme is the same in the "Belle Dame Sans Merci", but the break after the realization of bliss is more nightmarish. In fact everything is made more striking by the compactness of the ballad which numbers only twelve brief stanzas.

The plan of composition is clear and seems simple; the first three stanzas where the cold and withered landscape speaks of nearing winter, the dead season, are balanced by the last three. These dramatically plunge the reader into a charnel-house atmosphere inspired, perhaps, by a memory from the Scottish tour, the visit to Beaulieu Abbey near Inverness, on the day before Keats sailed back to London. It inspired Charles Armitage Brown with a number of grim stanzas describing the characters of the dead monks, now skulls and bones. Keats contributed a few lines to his friend's poem. One of his stanzas is interesting for us:

*This lily-colour'd skull, with all
The teeth complete, so white and small,
Belong'd to one whose early pall
A lover shaded. (X, 1-4)*

Is it not a foretaste of the knight-at-arms, with his paleness, his aching and "haggard" (II, 6) quest in the withering season of the year?

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

And what about the final vision when the blissful ecstasy breaks down among the shouting of the "death-pale" (X, 38) host of "kings", "princes" (X, 37) and "warriors" (X, 38) who resemble Porphyro's enemies:

*That night the Baron dreamt of many a woe,
And all his warrior-guests [...]
Were long be-nightmar'd. ("Eve", XLII, 372-5)*

In the ballad they are described with gruesome details; their "starved lips" (XI, 41), the "horrid warning gaped wide" (XI, 42) make them near brothers of the skeletons of Beaulieu. And the coldness and silence of the beginning stretches again over the "lake" and the "wither'd sedge" where "no birds sing" (XII, 48).

Those two groups of three stanzas flank the six stanzas describing the adventure of the knight-at-arms meeting the lady, that "faery's child" (IV, 14) who has all the attributes of beauty, and also of that inspired, and inspiring character that baunts the tradition of romantic poetry: long hair, wild eyes, and a way of stepping that belongs to some unearthly part of the universe. Her "language strange" (VII, 27) is made of "moans" (20), songs and sighs. But her entrancing meaning, "I love thee true" (VII, 28), is an irresistible spell, a spell which finally lulls the knight to dreamful sleep (IX, 33). The symmetry is perfect. In stanzas I-III the knight-at-arms is questioned; there is no word here whose imagery does not belong to the sphere of cold, pallor, decay, silence, solitude and suffering. From IV to VI the knight narrates the story of his meeting with and wooing of the lady. Each starts with the personal pronoun *I*, while the next three stanzas (VII-IX) still tell of their growing passion with the lady at the centre of the picture. *She* has replaced the knight, reduced to passive enjoyment of total love. The imagery is entirely devoted to liveliness, and pleasant sensuous perceptions, until the spell breaks in the middle of stanza IX. The brusque change of pronouns from "And there she lulled me asleep" (IX, 33) to "And there I dream'd" (IX, 34) in two very similar lines of great simplicity provokes the sudden apprehension of a new solitude, and the exclamatory "Ah! woe betide!" (IX, 34) prepares us for the abandonment "on the cold hill side" (IX, 36).

Thus the nightmarish fall of the last three stanzas where the imagery of the first part recurs starts a little earlier than exact symmetry would require. Identically the initial *I* of st. IV-VI was already present in st. III, but representing another character. The *she* pronoun of st. VII-VIII also sounds for the first time in the second half of st. V. And the insistent repetition of "and there" in st. IX sounds twice before in st. VIII (30 and 31). Thus Keats develops what he had succeeded in doing in the "Eve of St Agnes", a subtle mixing of regularity with irregularity which is a characteristic feature of all great achievement in art.

Similarly, the very middle of the poem (st. VI) builds up a sort of perfect feeling of communion, the same idealized love as in the middle of the "Eve", where we have an identity of expectation in both Madeline and Porphyro. Here, in the ballad, the lady performs the sacrificial rite of dedication:

*She found me roots of relish sweet,
And honey wild, and manna dew. (VII, 25-6)*

Therefore she assumes the responsibility of seduction and drives the bewitched knight towards the full accomplishment of love. But the climax is not reached without allowing a few disquieting

features to creep in. The "elfin grot" (VIII, 29) sounds less innocent than the "faery's child" (IV, 14). The fact that "she wept, and sigh'd full sore" (VIII, 30) also gives the repeated "wild wild eyes" (VIII, 31) a new ambiguity. It can be interpreted either as overflowing passion, or the fear of some threat unknown to the knight with a shade of repentance, and the menace of impending madness. But the soothing "kisses four" (VIII, 32) seem to revalue everything in the light of passionate love-making. However, it can be said, as in the "Eve", that a perfect symmetry exists. It brings the knight to woo the lady, and then the lady to ensnare her prey. However, this well-balanced pyramid coincides with the wave of growing passion which extends the rising sensuality up to stanza IX where the climactic point of the poem is reached. The fall fills the last quarter. But along with the steady growth of the spell a sort of downward line is being drawn from the elation of the ride to the accompaniment of "a faery's song" (VI) down into the "grot" of stanza VIII, and thus the final awakening into the nightmare of man's mortality is unobtrusively prepared.

Are such detailed elements of the artistry of "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" sufficient to exemplify fully the growing subtlety of Keats's use of intricate rising and falling imagery combined with symmetrical patterns? And one may well wonder why the poem was not selected for the 1820 edition of Keats's works, together with "Isabella" and the "Eve of St Agnes"! It seems to us that the answer is simply a feeling of Keats's that his first letter version, perfect as we think it can be estimated, could still be improved. His comment in the letter to the George Keatses in America (21 April 1819, no. 159, II, 95) seems to point that way. Under the heading "Wednesday Evening", Keats writes the ballad and then adds jokingly: "Why four kisses — you will say — why four because I wish to restrain the headlong impetuosity of my Muse — she would have fain said 'score' without hurting the rhyme — but we must temper the Imagination as the Critics say with Judgment. I was obliged to choose an even number that both eyes might have fair play: and to speak truly I think two a piece quite sufficient — Suppose I had said seven; there would have been three and a half a piece — a very awkward affair — and well got out of on my side" (ibid., II, 97). All this is good fun, and it is pleasant to find Keats so high-spirited at the time. It also proves, however, that the poet was still undecided about some of the details of his ballad, that he thought it good enough for the entertainment of his brother and sister-in-law, but not yet sufficiently polished for his exacting critical taste. The poem was probably left dormant and was still in the same state when the manuscript was gathered for the 1820 publication. Blunden¹ fixes

¹ Blunden, *London Mercury*, IV (1921), 141.

the date of his sending it to Taylor and Hessey on 27 April 1920. A fortnight later "La Belle Dame" appeared in Hunt's *Indicator*. It was the "wretched wight" version. It certainly means that Keats, trying to resume work, had dispatched the manuscript of "Lamia", and the other poems of the 1820 volume, and then had unearthed his ballad and reshaped it, in a less medievalistic mood. Is Pre-Raphaelitism responsible for the strong tradition of the knight-at-arms version? or are modern readers more romantic than the Romanticists themselves? Modern editors seem to choose one text or the other according to unjustified personal preference, when they do not make a mixture of the two, selecting some of the *Indicator* corrections ("is withered" (3), "who cried" (39) etc.) and preserving the figure of the knight errant of ancient romance!

If one examines attentively the variations introduced by Keats in the light of the interplay of symmetries and imagery, it is immediately striking that his inverting of stanzas V and VI of the first version improves the balance at the centre of the poem. Stanza VI now describes the lover's offerings of "garland", "bracelets" and "fragrant zone" to his beloved; in stanza VII the lady presents her adorer with "roots of relish sweet", "honey wild and manna dew". The two scenes of wooing lovers make a fine diptych at the centre of the poem. The change of pronouns we commented on above is reinforced in the new order of stanzas. We pass from initial *I* of

I met a lady in the meads... (IV)
I set her on my pacing steed... (V)
I made a garland for her head... (VI)

to initial *she* within stanza VI

She look'd at me... (VI)
She found me roots... (VII)
She took me... (VIII)

It ends with the dramatic reversal

And there she slumber'd on the moss
And there I dream'd. (IX)

The change also proposes a more satisfactory progression along the path of seduction: the light foot, long hair and wild eyes of stanza IV lead naturally to the admiring contemplation of the lines:

I set her on my pacing steed
And nothing else saw all day long.
(Indicator: V, 17-18)

Then comes the faery's song. Entranced the young man adorns the lady's beauty; to the excitement of the senses of sight and touch ("For sideways would she lean" is a certain improvement, adding languor and weight, over the "sidelong would she bend" of the first version), then of hearing, the poet thus adds the scent of flowers in "garland", "bracelets" and "fragrant zone". The lady responds with the tasty offerings of delicate food. The avowal of love opens the "elfin grot". Contrary to the frustration of deprived nature in the opening and concluding parts of the poem, the central passage is a festival for the senses.

The contradiction that existed in the first version of the lover shutting "her wild wild eyes" (31) and the lady then lulling him "asleep" (33), has now disappeared. In the "elfin grot" the lady does not weep over the "victim"; she is now a real maiden yielding to the power of love:

She gaz'd, and sighed deep. (30)

And the lover acts his part, as expected of a lover:

*And there I shut her wild sad eyes
So kiss'd to sleep.*

IX

And there she slumber'd on the moss. (31-33)

The accumulation of sibilant sounds cannot pass unnoticed, it creates the soothing effect of silence invading the bower of bliss and the heart of the lovers, when there is nothing more to say.

Inevitably the meaning of the scene changes with the altering of the imagery. The lady is no longer a sort of "lamia" entrapping some youth in destructive love of herself. She is left lying in her sleep, an image of gratified love, abandoned in full bliss, while her lover experiences the pang of separation owing to the awakening through his dream. In fact the evolution towards the abrupt fall into nightmare has been made more subtle. There are no tears and sore sighing, but a gaze which may be one of wonder or expectation, a deep sigh which denotes the final abandonment to overwhelming passion. The "wild wild eyes" have lost something of their madness in "wild sad eyes", to put on the first real touch of anxiety, or simply anticipation of the climactic, inevitable end of love experienced. Anyway the sadness leads to soothing sleep and the lady disappears in a far more tender mood than in the letter version of the poem. "She slumber'd on the moss" is all sweetness.

It is difficult not to attribute the changed atmosphere to Keats's situation in spring 1820, when he had recognized the true nature of

his illness, and had declared himself condemned.¹ The commiseration felt in the choice of "wretched wight" instead of the medieval figure of the knight, may bear the mark of a feeling of self-pity; moreover the whole poem becomes more of a human experience, especially in the simple bliss and sadness of true lovers. The dream becomes an irrepressible cry of anguish on the part of the young man who, beside his sleeping love, is suddenly invaded by his knowledge of the truth about himself and the approach of Death. "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" (39), who, now is not necessarily to be identified with the beautiful "faery's child". The inversion, emphasizing the pronoun, in the next line — "Thee hath in thrall" (40) — suppresses an unpleasant accumulation of "th" 's in close succession, and corresponds now to a tragic cry from the depth of the poet's heart. *Thee* has really become himself.

Seen in that light the *Indicator* text should be accepted as Keats's final version of "La Belle Dame Sans Merci". He has polished the lines that sounded unsatisfactory to his exacting ear (for instance "hill's side" has become "bill side"), replaced the improbable knight-at-arms of the Middle Ages by a "wretched wight", his near kinsman; his beautiful lady, idealized by love into a fairy, turns out to be a sweet maid yielding to his passionate embrace, and she is left in blissful sleep while he follows the solitary path leading to the inevitable meeting with another ominous love, "La Belle Dame Sans Merci". The symmetry has been improved; the imagery made more coherent; so has the subtle interplay of regularity with irregularity, which creates the climax of painful bliss in stanza VIII, as was the case in the letter version.

If a date must be proposed for this unearthing of the poem and its revision, reference could be made to an April letter to Fanny Brawne (no. 257, II, 286) where Keats talks of some improvement in his health and is looking forward to "taking a walk with you upon the first of may". He goes on: "in the mean time undergoing a babylonish captivity I shall not be jew enough to hang up my harp upon a willow, but rather endeavour to clear up my arrears in versifying and with returning health begin upon something new; pursuant to which resolution it will be necessary to have my or rather Taylor's manuscript, which you, if you please, will send by my Messenger either today or tomorrow." This was done; Taylor received the manuscript on April 27. Is it not possible to imagine Keats going on "clearing up arrears in versifying" as his poor state of health permitted? And the result shows that his powers as a poet were not dwindling, but were simply thwarted by illness. Some of the feelings expressed in the "Belle Dame" second version can be compared to

¹ Keat's first hemorrhage occurred on 8 February 1820, according to Brown's *Life of John Keats*, quoted in Rollins, op. cit., II, 251, footnote 3.

Keats's anxious feelings about his love addressed to Fanny Brawne during the same period. A March letter (no. 247, II, 277) comments on his disease and contemplates the horrid chance there was "of slipping into the ground instead of into your arms — the difference is amazing Love — Death must come at last." In their naked brevity the three statements could apply pretty well to the themes of the ballad. At a year's distance it echoes the lines of the 21 April 1819 letter to the George Keatses in which the original form of the poem appears. "I can imagine such happiness carried to an extreme — but what must it end in? — Death" (no. 159, II, 101). The identity of perspective is remarkable in spite of the sad evolution from the "living year" of 1819 to the despair of 1820. All this can only be conjectural, of course, but the suggestion is just probable enough not to be left out of this study. Whatever the time of the revision, it seems a confident assertion to state that the "wretched wight" version should be selected for all future editions of Keats's poems.

18. The "Fetters" of the Sonnet

The example of "La Belle Dame Sans Merci", as a case of an 1820 revision of a poem, is not unique, though Keats's activity was at a very low ebb owing to bad health. A few weeks after the publication of the ballad in the *Indicator* another of Keats's poems was delivered to be printed, the sonnet "On a Dream" ("As Hermes once..."). It had been composed shortly before the ballad, and must have been very dear to Keats and his circle of friends, seeing the number of transcripts that have remained. Keats seems, then, to have agreed to let Hunt offer it to the public after a last careful revision. One line shows an important and significant change from our point of view. Line 7 was altered from

But not olympus-ward to serene skies
(Dante manuscript in Ashley Library)

to

Not unto Ida with its snow-cold skies.
(in *Indicator*)

What is interesting here is, on the one hand Hermes' upward flight in the middle line of the sonnet, and on the other hand the cold image attached to it. Instead of the separation of lethal and life-blooded imagery, a sort of reconciliation of extremes takes place in the centre of the poem.

Hermes is a link between the nether and upper worlds in the ancient tradition of the Mediterranean. He then is a character well-suited for a poem that establishes an equivalence between the regions of ecstatic escape and the maiming deliverance of death. The god is shown shaking off, it seems, the ponderous fetters of this world for the bright, life-giving influence of the highest spheres. And yet Mount Ida is not the goal we have learnt to expect; the Muses' inspiring haunt is devoid of its usual qualities. Keats suppressed the epithet "pure" that had qualified the mountain in some intermediate version. Still, purity exists in the "snow-cold skies" that surround its peak. The epithet, however, offers an image also suggestive of frustration. And therefore the summit of the pyramid coin-

cides with dazzling frost and apparently empty desert. What should culminate in full intensity, meets with disappointing sterility. The negation at the beginning of the line prepares the refusal of the high aim to which Hermes was entitled to aspire. Opposite feelings are compressed together and made to coexist. Consequently the structural imagery of the sonnet modifies the rising line followed by similar pieces in *Poems 1817*. Instead of the elation rising to a climax, and the abrupt death into silence at the end, it reproduces the elaborate evolution encountered in longer poems. In spite of the negations, the imagery is there to build up the pyramidal structure, the curve rises in the first two quatrains to fall again. The third Shakespearian quatrain and the couplet are linked together to form a sort of sestet opposing the octave. Petrarchan and Elizabethan models are reconciled in a typically romantic synthesis.

It is evident that the sonnet bears close relation with the spirit of "La Belle Dame" and "The Eve of St Agnes". Indeed the "second circle of sad hell" (9),

*Where in the gust, the whirlwind, and the flaw
Of rain and hail-stones, lovers need not tell
Their sorrows, (10-12)*

resembles in an extraordinary way the atmosphere of Madeline and Porphyro's flight. The extended couplet retains something of the morbid dream of the "wretched wight":

*... pale were the sweet lips I saw,
Pale were the lips I kiss'd. (12-13)*

The sonnet ends, however, in an ambiguous impression of strange magic with the lovers floating "about that melancholy storm" (14). The lady has preserved "her fair form" but seems to undergo a sort of swoon nearing death, and the "storm" has lost some of its terror to answer the epithet of "melancholy". The floating impression cannot be assimilated to the imagery of a fall. It corresponds to that intermediate stage introducing the sestet: "the second circle of sad hell" (9), which sounds less desperate in its marginal position than hell itself.

What is found in the sonnet, then, is a great variety of former tendencies. Pyramidal structure and symmetry there are; but the imagery is not so clearly defined as in the other poems. The use of negative forms takes away the potential force of the rising movement; the fall is also assuaged by images which lessen the desperate depths of death and hell. Antitheses reconcile the pallor and sweetness of the lips, the entrancing beauty of the lady with the gust and storm, the sunny peak of Ida with the snow and the cold, the

pleasant shade of Tempe with Jove's grief (8). Opposites exist side by side so that the imagery of rise and fall does not stand out so clearly as in Keats's other works of the same period.

Another element which also points to the spirit of experimentation in sonnet-writing is the breaking of the fourteen lines into irregular groups from the point of view of meaning. The first sentence extends with a marked enjambment right to the end of line 5. Then three further lines give the octave its normal dimensions. Yet the "but" at the start of the sestet is closely related to the negations of the previous lines:

Not unto Ida...

Not unto Tempe...

But to that second circle of sad hell. (7-9)

Thus the traditional division is abolished. The third quatrain itself is of barely three and a half lines; in consequence the couplet is considerably augmented in length. When we refer to the fastidious considerations of Keats for the choice of the sonnets in *Poems 1817*, the publication of "On a Dream" during his life-time shows a renewed spirit of adventure, and a disdain of formal criticism on the part of the public, which is in line with his objection to the last sentence of the preface composed by his editors for his last volume of verse. Speaking of "Hyperion" they thought it a kindness to the poet to forestall the remarks of critics in the following apology. "The poem was intended to have been of equal length with *Endymion*, but the reception given to that work discouraged the author from proceeding." We hope our argument about the abandonment of the poem would have met with better approval on the part of the poet.

"On a Dream" is also an interesting poem for us, because it again stresses that perpetual tendency of Keats's art to evolve. He is found once more in the act of exploring the dark passages of the "Mansion of many Apartments". As already said (p. 170) Keats had turned towards the Shakespearian form of the sonnet, and thus towards a different perspective from that defined in the "Epistle to C. C. Clarke" (60-61). The couplet offered the possibility of a less abrupt break in the end. A rapid exploration of sonnets published posthumously will reveal something of the effort Keats devoted to experimenting new structures and interplay of images within the strict and limited pattern of such poems.

A good example of the new rise and fall of the imagery is given by a sonnet written in 1818 (September: "Four seasons fill the measure of the year". From the eagerness of spring in the first quatrain, one rises to the luxury of summer in the second. Here the poet feels that man approaches "his nearest unto heaven" (8). And yet summer time feeds on the memory of the previous season, and is only made of "Spring's honied cud of youthful thought" (6).

Therefore it is to be wondered whether the "quiet coves" (8) of autumn are not the most bliss-inspiring nooks where man enjoys maturity and fulfilment, untouched by the agitation and feverish eagerness of the growing process: "... contented so to look/On mists in idleness" (10-11).

The line sounds like an epitome of the future ode "To Autumn". The poet feels like suspended out of time, protected by his own inward passivity, enjoying beauty undisturbed; letting "fair things/Pass by unheeded" (11-12). The couplet is definitely a fall with the images of winter's "pale misfeature" (13) and man's mortality as the final key note. But this is prepared in the third quatrain where the "coves" (8) of autumn — note the early start of the quatrain —, call to mind the seclusion of caves without the darkness attached to them. The feeling of furling "wings" (9) and the "mists" (10) also suggest a protective nest. And if beauty can exist "unheeded" (11), it also takes on a certain coldness; the "brook" naturally warbles and runs lively and pure, but its freshness has a cooling influence. It is not surprising to find it so near the evocation of winter time.

Thus this sonnet offers the pattern of a rise to the middle of the poem, repeating, in part, the movement of Petrarchan octaves. Then it reaches a sort of balance in the ambiguous third quatrain, a detached ecstasy, and dies smoothly in the couplet.

It is difficult to know which sonnets Keats would have preserved for publication eventually; but his Shakespearian sonnets offered him, undoubtedly, a field for trying all the variants that his "teeming brain" ("When I have fears...", 2) suggested. All types of different image-interplay are used. In his answer to a poem of Reynolds' (8 Febr. 1818), "Blue! 'Tis the life of heaven...", the imagery related to the blue colour drops from the wide expanse of the sky (1-4) to the level horizons of seascapes (5-8), and finally withdraws into the forest (9) and the most secret of blue flowers: the violet (12). The couplet — which extends over two and a half lines — concentrates on that "mere shadow" (13), the blue colour, that can speak in a girl's eye (14), and thus love opens wide the immense hope secreted in "fate" (14). The imagery here corresponds to a descent, or rather to a sort of distillation of the colour, which, as it diminishes in quantity is purified to its essence, and thus increases in intensity. Finally the perspective widens again as the distillate evokes life and intimations of future happiness (14). The last word "fate", though, is never completely exempt from disquieting undertones, so that here again, a certain ambiguity remains in spite of the healthy enthusiasm swelling outward from a "mere shadow" (13).

The two sonnets, written during the same period, in which appears the lady whom Keats had known at Hastings five years before, also end with extended couplets. "Time's sea bath been five years at its slow ebb" follows a nearly identical pattern of imagery. The first

quatrain introduces the circumstances. Then the poet searches for remembrance, first, in the sky (5), then in the rose (7), and finally in the "budding flower" (9). Now that very concentration of perception leads to annihilation:

*But my fond ear...
... doth devour
Its sweets in the wrong sense. (10-12)*

"Delight" (13) and "darling joys" (14) exist, but they suffer an "eclipse" (12) and are tainted "with grief" (14). The co-existence of opposite feelings becomes the key to the conclusion. Trying to analyse his sentiment, the poet goes down into the very core of intensity and seems to reach that limit of perception which engenders a numbness of the senses, — "the feel of not to feel it"; as Keats put it in a stanza probably written in November or December 1818 ("In drear-nighted December", 21). It sounds like a pun, and Keats's friends and editors have altered the line to avoid the unpleasant noun "feel". Yet it should be preserved as the manuscripts have it, and accepted as one of those desperate attempts of artists' to express the inexpressible. "Delight" in the sonnet is "eclipsed" by "sweet remembering", and brings "grief". It sounds paradoxical; but, as can be seen in the "Eve" or "La Belle Dame", it is a feeling which increasingly haunts the poet.

The other poem of love, born of the same occasion, "When I have fears...", preserves an octave with rising imagery. After the evocation of his possible future works, compared to the reaping of rich corn and the filling of vast "garners" (1-4), the poet lifts up his eyes towards the sky with its strange constellations and mysterious shapes of clouds and darkness. The deciphering of the depths of the universe and the "magic" (8) of the exploration bring the poem to a first climax. Fame was the theme, while that of the second part of the diptych is love.

The poem rises anew to "the faery power / Of unreflecting love!" (11-12). And there we are suddenly left facing the endless solitude of the "shore / Of the wide world" (12-13). The image of the extended couplet (12-14) suggests the anguish of that tremendous void of a limitless horizon, before which the high bliss of fame or love vanishes, and both "to nothingness do sink" (14). This is still very similar to the rise and fall of "Time's sea hath been...". The fall does not occur without due preparation, as in other instances; in this case, the repeated negative words, or phrases, play an important part: "I never look" (5), "I cannot look" (7, 9). It is also the case in "When I have fears...". The haunting pressure of the "fears that I may cease to be / Before..." (1-2, and 3) recurs in the repetitions of "never" (7, 10 and 11). The negations destroy the imagined feelings

of pleasure or bliss; it therefore introduces a coexistence of opposites, and this seems to become a characteristic feature of Keats's sonnets during the years 1818-1819.

In "To Homer", the rise and fall take place in the octave where the perspective of the sea in the first quatrain is replaced by that of Jove uncurtaining Heaven (6) for the blind poet, in the second. This rise, however, is counterbalanced in each quatrain by an imagery directed toward the depths of the sea or the earth. The "giant" ignorance of line 1 slopes down on the "dolphin-coral in deep seas" of line 4. Jove in Heaven (6) precedes Neptune and the "spumy tent of the sea" (7), and Pan with "his forest-hive" (8). So the sestet starts on the level of "the shores" (9), reminding us of the situation of the poet at the beginning of the sonnet, who saw himself "as one who sits ashore" (3). But this time the shores are "the shores of darkness", which do not exclude "light" (9). This sort of antithetic interplay fills the third quatrain.

*Aye, on the shores of darkness there is light,
And precipices show untrodden green;
There is a budding morrow in midnight;
There is a triple sight in blindness keen. (9-12)*

The balance is strict to the last detail: the imagery of darkness comes first in lines 9-10, second in 11-12. The power of imagination transcends all the obstacles set up by obscurity to annihilate the poet's vision.

The couplet assimilates Homer's perception to that of Diana, described with the attributes of the triple Hecate, "Queen of Earth, and Heaven, and Hell." The pyramidal imagery reappears in that summary of the three domains explored by the poet.

The March 1819 sonnet "Why did I laugh to-night?" is entirely based on negative antithetic statements. The poet gets no answer to his question:

*No God, no Demon...
Deigns to reply from Heaven or from Hell. (2-3)*

The next stage is to shrink from such extremes and try the inward core of one's self, the heart. The octave ends with an evocation of the triple, voiceless worlds of "Heaven and Hell and Heart" (8). If there is a pyramidal structure here, it is an inverted one. But the real rise and fall of the sonnet occurs in the sestet. It starts with the opening question "Why did I laugh?" (9) and immediately opposes actual life, "this Being's lease" (9), with the weight of its mortality, to "the utmost blisses" (10) reached through the powers of the imagination. The initial "yet" of the next line establishes the irre-

versible downward trend of the whole poem, though the couplet reveals in a vigorous antithesis the highest intensity of death:

*Verse, Fame and Beauty are intense indeed,
But Death intenser — Death is Life's high meed. (13-14)*

Thus the paradox is driven to its utmost capacity of suggestion. Rise and fall coincide: the usually crushing experience of mortality is assimilated to the crowning climax of life's intensity.

The April 1819 letter to the George Keatses swarms with poetry, among which five sonnets. That entitled "On a Dream" we have already discussed (see p. 182-183). Two bear the same title "On Fame". Both of these start in the Shakespearian manner, and in the first two quatrains follow the traditional presentation of the themes, with a clear interaction of imagery between octave and sestet. Both end with clinching lines dismissing fame and its enslaving worship. They therefore give an impression of freedom and elation in their conclusions.

The sonnet "On Fame", numbered XIII in the *Literary Remains* edition of 1848 should, we think, come after the other and be numbered XIV; in the letter it comes after the one beginning "How fever'd is the man". In some way it answers the question ending this same sonnet:

*Why then should man...
Spoil his salvation...? (13-14)*

The worshipping of Fame is a mistaken creed; running after Fame is useless; salvation is to be found in acceptance of the world as it is. Once this has been achieved, it is not impossible to imagine Fame crowning the contented poet without his toiling for it. Fame is personified: "She is a Gipsy" (5), and "like a wayward girl" (1) she remains indifferent to those who woo her, and yields to those whose "heart" is "at ease" (4), and capable of being "content without her" (6). The third quatrain is marked by the insistent phrase "A very Gipsy is she" (9) and establishes the necessity of scorn. This is the articulation between the two parts of the sonnet. The octave had concentrated on Fame herself, the sestet proposes a line of conduct; the wanton should be despised and forgotten. It culminates in the couplet which advises disdain as a way to win her love.

The sonnet is rather direct in its meaning without any rich interplay of imagery. But it can be said to be firmly built, and it organizes itself round the opposition of what Fame is like and how it should be treated; it proves once again, if that were necessary, Keats's virtuosity in handling the delicate and exacting poetical structure of the sonnet.

The other sonnet "On Fame" starting "How fever'd is the man" shows that the task of reconciling form and content could be too much for the poet, and that he had to decide for himself whether the imagery and meaning should be coerced into the traditional rhyme patterns, or whether strict respect of form should be subordinated to more important considerations of beauty. At the time Keats must have felt the sonnet form as an overpowering burden, a restrictive ruling authority instead of a subtle mould to force the poet's message into shape. Hence a sort of revolt that shakes the rhyme pattern of three sonnets out of the five transcribed in the April letter to the Keatses in America.

In that second poem "On Fame" (number XIV in *Literary Remains* 1848), the sestet is effected by the poet's incapacity to insert his meaning into words fitting the normal, echoing rhymes. The third quatrain starts as usual (*e f e*), but the fourth line does not rhyme though it clearly ends what should be a quatrain. The "crystal space" of line 12 is echoed by the last word of the next line: "grace" (13). This, however, cannot be called a couplet from the point of view of meaning. And the last word "miscreed" (14) rhymes with "feed" (10). The scheme goes thus: *e f e g g f*. Even in the variations of Petrarchan sestets used by Keats in his early sonnets no such liberty had been taken with the traditional form. The lines struck out and corrected in the autograph manuscript testify to the poet's hesitations and struggle with the rhymes of the last lines. He finally decided in favour of meaning and imagery over strict formalism. Whether he would ever have published such a sonnet is impossible to say, but in its final stage it seems to us far more "loaded with ore" than its companion.

Indeed the sonnet offers a series of antithetic images in the octave. Each term is soon contradicted; the fever of line 1 is opposed to the "temperate blood" of the next; the completeness of "life's book" is destroyed in its "leaves" (3); "maidenhood" and "rob" (4) sound still more violently contradictory. The second quatrain preserves the theme of self-destruction, but applied to a natural imagery that makes it unbelievable and unacceptable: "the rose" plucking herself (5), "the ripe plum" wiping off its "bloom" (6). In contrast with the fresh beauty of the bashful "Naiad" (7), who would not soil her "pure grot" with "muddy gloom" (8), the "elf" (7) is a sinister hobgoblin. The turn is marked at the beginning of the sestet by the stressed "but" (9), and the images of the "rose" (9) and the "ripe plum" (11) reappear to express the confident abandonment of natural things to their earthly condition, content to be generously what they are. The rose offers herself to the greed of bees and the kisses of the wind (9-10). The bloom covering the "ripe plum" may be "dim attire" (11); still it has its incomparable perfection of delicacy: touch it, it is gone for ever. "The undisturbed lake" of line 12 could

be the cool haunt of the Naiad (7), and the image is suggestive of that passiveness which culminates in acceptance of all the goodness of the earth and enticing, comforting guesses at profound truths. The smooth surface of the lake has "crystal space" (12) which opens immense scope towards both the depths of the watery world and the limitless heights of the reflected sky. All this is pure negative capability absorbing the material world and turning out to be a source of ultimate, if transitory, knowledge and wisdom. The clinching lines implicitly conclude in favour of such reconciliation with mortality in a question:

*Why then should man, leasing the world for grace,
Spoil his salvation for a fierce miscreed?* (13-14)

"Grace", "salvation", "miscreed" — which implies the existence of a true creed —, the theme is ultimately a religious one, the confession of the poet's faith, a reconciliation with the "forked" nature of man.¹ It may be noted that we have abandoned Garrod's reading in line 13, i. e. "teasing the world for grace", for Rollins' "leasing". We think that the regular interplay of opposites throughout the poem justifies the latter's deciphering of Keats's handwriting. "Tease" and "spoil" go the same way towards destruction, while "lease" offers a more positive attitude of exchange and eagerness regarding "grace" which is suddenly discovered menaced in the next line. It fits in with the preceding contrasts of images.

The structure of the sonnet is remarkably firm, with its answering echoes between octave and sestet, in spite of the irregularity of the rhyming pattern in the latter part. If it ends with a certain feeling of elation, it is more an interior feeling than a clear, sensuous image. On the contrary the octave apparently plunges towards the "meddling" influence creative of darkness and "muddy gloom": and the sestet ends with the lease unfortunately spoiled by a "fierce miscreed". But the interaction of antitheses, negations of negative imagery and questioning provokes a general effect similar to that of the lake image (12), which strikingly conjures up out of the clear depths of its waters a perspective of the pure span of the sky and air. The conclusion then is a warning, and therefore offers the possibility of escape from the dangerous quicksands of a "fierce miscreed".

"To Sleep" is another irregular Shakespearian sonnet. The first two quatrains follow the traditional pattern *abab cdcd*. Then there is one line rhyming with *b*, and one rhyming with *c*. And the sonnet ends with a third quatrain *efef*. The abortive draft in the Hampstead *Milton* — 12 lines only — is a witness of the poet's entanglement in

¹ *King Lear*, III, iv, 3 quoted by Keats in the journal-letter to the George Keatses of 21 April 1819; No. 159, II, 101.

the struggle of rhymes and meaning. In that version the third quatrain is left unfinished. In the (30 April) letter version lines 9 and 10 of the draft —

*Then shut the hushed casket of my soul
And turn the key round in the oiled wards*

— have been practically preserved, but have become respectively lines 14 and 13:

*Turn the key deftly in the oiled wards
And seal the hushed casket of my soul.*

These lines were a fit conclusion for the poem. They are perfect in their imagery and harmony to let the sonnet slip away into silence and sleep. However they did not rhyme as a couplet, and the solution we now have, unconventional as it is, was probably built up backwards from the conclusion, to fill the missing link between the octave dedicated to a eulogy of sleep and its beneficial action, and the ideas now given prominence at the end. Sleep appears as a divinity to be worshipped and praised, capable of bringing moments of bliss: "forgetfulness divine" (4). The imagery is centered on the soothing power of darkness and silence: "embalmer" — "still midnight" (1) — "careful fingers and benign" (2) — "gloom-pleas'd eyes" — "embower'd from the light" (3) — "enshaded" — "forgetfulness" (4) — "soothes sleep" (5) — "poppy" (7) — "bed" — "lulling" (8). Then the tone of invocation turns to religious awe: "forgetfulness divine" (4) — "if so it please thee" (5) — "thine hymn" (6) — "wait the amen" (7) — "charities" (8). The concentration of words tending to create the atmosphere of calm serenity, of regenerating power and high submissive gratitude is extreme.

Then the sestet introduces the tension of sleepless nights. It is very skilfully linked to the worshipping of the previous lines by the prayer "save me" repeated twice (9 and 11). The disturbing agitation of the day appears like light shining "upon my pillow" (10); darkness increases the questioning of the mind and works blindly "burrowing like a mole" (12). Though Keats comments on these last sonnets saying: "I have for the most part dash'd of [f] my lines in a hurry", the last two lines of "To Sleep" are most remarkable for the density of their imagery. They sum up the silent and stealthy invasion of sleep which occurs in the octave — "Turn the key deftly in the oiled wards" (13) — recalling the "careful fingers" of the beginning (2); and the "hushed casket of my soul" (14) stresses the silence and suggests the secrecy and mysterious torments already present in the sestet: "many woes" (10) — "burrowing like a mole" (12). Inevitably there creeps into the mind a remembrance of Sha-

kespearian caskets teasing everyone into a search for the hidden truth and beauty secreted in one of them. If this was written "in a hurry", how far could perfection of achievement be brought in such a poet!

And yet the difficulty of complying with the requirements of such strict form as the sonnet implies found expression in the last sonnet copied in that same journal letter, extending from Febr. 14 to May 3 1819: "If by dull rhymes...". It is preceded by a brief comment "I have been endeavouring to discover a better sonnet stanza than we have. The legitimate does not suit the language over-well from the pouncing rhymes — the other kind appears too elegiac — and the couplet at the end of it has seldom a pleasing effect — I do not pretend to have succeeded." The sonnet is a very interesting testimony to Keats's virtuosity at the time. He rejects the rhyme pattern, but not rhyming. The new scheme sounds as follows: *abc abd cab cde de*. Three rhymes are repeated three times, one only twice; the arrangement of sentences and rhymes corresponds closely to the intention mentioned in the poem, i. e. to "find out"

*Sandals more interwoven and complete
To fit the naked foot of poesy. (4-6)*

The poem is more than a clever *tour de force*. It exemplifies what it precisely discusses theoretically. Instead of hovering in high abstraction, the poet shows what he means, and though the attempt was not repeated, it is a gallant piece of work with beauties of its own. Once more its qualities lie in the correspondence and interplay of images which also answer the notion of "sandals more interwoven"; the phrase could easily be taken for a motto describing Keats's efforts to load more and more his poetry "with ore" (see his later remark: 16 Aug. 1820, To Shelley; no. 285, 11, 323). The first tercet introduces the subject, and compares the strict arrangement of verse lines in a sonnet to Andromeda in fetters. The beauty of the prisoner is not denied, but it means sufferings; and, if, as said above, the rhymes are qualified as "dull" (1), this applies to their arrangement in rigid patterns. The virtue of rhyming lines is not rejected. The image of the "sandals" in the second tercet is closely related to that of the chained, naked princess on the legendary rock. The sandals seem to be made for Andromeda and not only for "the naked foot of poesy" (6). Poesy still sounds in the reader's memory when he meets with "the lyre" in the next line (7); the necessity of industry and "attention" (9) in the practice of the instrument makes the passage to the fourth tercet easy. "Sounds" and "syllables" are indeed the poet's material, rare and precious like gold: "Midas' coinage" (11). Hence the "misers" (10) that poets should be, using their "ears" (9) to clean away all that could mar the beauty of poetical form: "Jealous of dead leaves in the bay wreath crown" (12). Otherwise they would

produce again "pained loveliness" (3). And the clinching lines concentrate on the necessity to "free" poetry (13). Total freedom however is impossible; anarchy would go against the very essence of poetry. But instead of the chains and fetters of the beginning, the restrictive reins should be made of "garlands", which preserves the interweaving image of line 5. As in the second sonnet "On Fame" (XIV) and in "To Sleep" the imagery of the conclusion refers to that of the octave. Here the "wreath crown" (12) and the "garlands" (14) echo, while they contrast with, the chains and fetters of the first tercet, and hark back to the "interwoven sandals" of the second. In a sort of symmetry the problems of restricting rules embrace the evocation of the music of poetry. In fact the whole technique of the writing of poetry is touched on in a discussion of its strictest model in prosody. The "If by dull rhymes..." sonnet could be described as composed of two sestets dedicated respectively to form and sounds, the raw material of the poet's job. The last two lines conclude. The logic of the poem is also worthy of notice. The hypothesis of the first tercet leads to the three proposals:

Let us find out... (4)

Let us inspect... (7)

... let us be (11)

The third is skilfully placed at the end of the line to avoid the rigid monotony of regularity. The conclusion is well marked by the initial "So" (13) of the last sentence. All this may be refused the name of a sonnet, but it proves Keats's understanding and mastery of poetic technique, his ceaseless search for a perfection that would unite shape, music and meaning, his capacity for invention and his disdain of inevitable condemnation on the part of readers. The poet in some way explodes a form that can no longer resist the inward pressure of the load of meaningful imagery he intends to force into it. The odes written in 1819 and printed in the *Lamia* volume are the ripe fruit of his intense struggle with the exacting forms of poetical patterns. It is also typical of him that he printed no sonnet in the collection and seems to have considered them at the time as experiments to polish further in later days.

PART IV

Balance and Complexity

19. The "Couplet" Odes

Whatever the reason for Keats's not printing his sonnets in the *Lamia* volume — we know he intended to publish a book of short pieces later on (2 Jan. 1819, To the George Keatses; no. 137, II, 26) — it is evident that they helped him to work out the formal solutions that led to the choice of rhyme scheme for the 1819 "Odes". It is immediately visible that the free mould of the "ode" and the variations adopted by romantic poets tend in Keats's work towards a firm model of stanza, culminating in the regularity and mastery of form of the "Ode to a Nightingale".¹ If the same rhyme pattern is preserved throughout the eight stanzas of this ode (*abab cdecde*), it suffers a few exceptions in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and "To Autumn". In the former poem stanzas I and V run thus: *abab cdecce*; III and IV agree with each other: *abab cdecde*; II ends in *cdecde*. In the latter the first stanza differs slightly from the other two: *abab cdecce* against *abab cdecde* in II and III. Identical observations can be made in the "Ode on Melancholy", including the cancelled first stanza, and the "Ode on Indolence".

It is also immediately striking that the stanzas strongly resemble the alternate rhymes found in the octave of Shakespearian sonnets, followed by the varied schemes of Petrarchan sestets. M. R. Ridley, in his study of *Keats' Craftsmanship*, has fully discussed this point and he describes the Keatsian ode "as a loosely connected series of variously reformed sonnets".² Ridley refers only to the experimental sonnets written in the same journal letter to the George Keatses (Febr.-May 1819) and seems to forget previous explorations: indeed the 1818 fragment of the "Ode to May" could be classed as an irregular sonnet of the experimental type. It numbers fourteen lines (including four short ones), but the sestet is placed first; or it can be described as composed of three Shakespearian quatrains, the first being followed by a couplet, the octave coming last (*ababcc dedefjfg*). It can be objected, of course, that the short lines exclude its being considered as a sonnet; yet the specific choice of the rhyme pattern

¹ F. Matthey, op. cit., *ES*, XLIX (1958), 306-307.

² M. R. Ridley, *Keats' Craftsmanship* (1933; London: Methuen, 1963), 205.

cannot but lead to such comparisons. The poet himself talks of an "ode", and seems to be satisfied with his achievement, as he contemplates finishing the poem "in good time" (3 May 1818, To Reynolds; no. 80, I, 278). The events of 1818 stopped the process, but the memory of such an intention was brought back to life when the 1819 wave of inspiration and intensive work drove the poet powerfully onward again.

The early "Odes to Apollo" offer no such comparisons with the art of the sonnet, though quatrains play an important part in the composition of their stanzas, either the *abab* type of "In thy western hall..." or the *deedfggf* type of lines 4-10 of each stanza in "God of the golden bow". The extempore ode however, written "On Seeing a Lock of Milton's Hair" in January 1818, appears as the first step toward Keats's preference of the ten-line stanza in his later and greatest achievements in the ode form. The fact that it was an extempore composition also calls to mind the sonnet contests at Hunt's parties. Keats may very well have been induced through habit to fall back on something resembling the rhyming scheme usual on such occasions. Three of the four stanzas contain ten lines — the second stanza being the exception (eleven lines) — as in most of the future great "Odes"; each starts with a quatrain of alternate rhymes followed by a sestet based on various arrangements of *c*, *d* and *e* rhymes. The beginning of the ode "On Seeing a Lock of Milton's Hair", it must also be remarked, closely echoes Wordsworth's lyric "A slumber did my spirit seal." Borrowing the very words, brief lines and rhyme pattern of that short meditation over the relics of a dead friend, Keats adapted to them the customary interplay of final syllables in Petrarchan sonnets. The irregularity of the unrhyming short line in the middle of the second stanza (17) — which caused the unnecessary pencilled addition of "I swear" (22) — may well have been accepted by the poet as a remedy for the regularity of couplets invading the poem at that stage. On the whole the "ode" was a daring challenge, successfully met, and some pride can be felt in Keats's comment: "This I did at Hunt's at his request". And the next sentence does not seem to express profound dissatisfaction: "perhaps I should have done something better alone and at home." On the whole he sounds well pleased and possible weaknesses may be excused owing to the conditions of the composition. Therefore it appears that the path towards the final original form developed by Keats starts a full year before the fruitful period of spring 1819, and is marked by the encouraging prospect opened up by the abortive "Ode to May".

The other odes published in the *Lamia* volume do not compare with the stanza type in depth and concentrated "ore". Written in rapid heptasyllabic couplets "Fancy" and "Bards of Passion..." sound very much like the songs about "Robin Hood" and the "Mermaid

Tavern". The tone is less that of a popular ballad, the subjects closer to Keats's preoccupations about his art, but the rhythm is identical. It is a lax form that can run on and on indefinitely and does not require the poet to answer happily the compulsion of the stanza type ode. "Fancy" is typical of the couplet type; the enumeration of all the blisses fancy can bring to the chimney-corner dreamer on a winter's day could be pursued far beyond the thirty-six lines (31-66) devoted to it. Similarly the fourteen lines suppressed in the *Lamia* volume (lines 94-107 of 2 Jan. 1819 journal letter, no. 137, II, 24) are not necessary to the development of the idea. We tend to think that Keats's friends and editors thought them slightly improper as was the case on other occasions, and that Keats may have been unaware of that suppression or have accepted it on the grounds that mawkishness had again crept into his work, or perhaps for more personal reasons. Still it must be acknowledged that the balance of the two parts of the poem is better preserved in the letter version addressed to the George Keatses in America (no. 137, II, 21-24). Structurally the poem consists of two main parts in which the imagery leads twice from a feeling of disappointment to one of elation. Fancy is the means to escape, the remedy for the transient character of everything both in nature and in human relations. Some lines already sound like a foretaste of the "Ode on a Grecian Urn":

*Where's the maid
 Whose lip mature is ever new?
 Where's the eye, however blue,
 Doth not weary? Where's the face
 One would meet in every place?
 Where's the voice, however soft,
 One would hear so very oft? (70-76)*

The disappointed questions correspond to the description of nature subject to the laws of passing time in the first half.

*Summer's joys are spoilt by use,
 And the enjoying of the Spring
 Fades as does its blossoming;
 Autumn's red-lipp'd fruitage too,
 Blushing through the mist and dew,
 Cloy's with tasting. (10-15)*

In both cases Fancy is shown as creative of an eternity of sensations both in the experience of natural beauty and in that of the enjoyment of love:

*O the Ravishment — the Bliss!
Fancy has her [his Mistress] there she is —
Never fulsome, ever new.*

(101-103 of the letter version)

The ecstasy repeats on the level of love the elation of the first part of the poem when she (Fancy) brings at the time of frost all the "Beauties that the earth hath lost" (30). The poem is clearly based on two sequences of rising spirit and imagery. The second part leads to the highest bliss of love's experience and explodes in the conclusion.

*Break the mesh
Of the Fancy's silken leash;
Quickly break her prison-string
And such joys as these she'll bring.
Let the winged Fancy roam
Pleasure never is at home.*

(89-94 of the published version)

The last couplet is a repetition of the first two lines of the ode and rounds up the whole composition, which comprises an introduction of eight lines followed by the two succeeding rising movements of the main themes, both starting with the same exclamation:

O sweet Fancy! let her loose.

(9 and 67 of the published version)

The nature theme develops over fifty-eight lines; the second, dedicated to the ideal mistress, over twenty-eight in the *Lamia* volume version. The conclusion starts in the middle of a line and is thus intimately linked with the second part of the poem (five and a half lines altogether). Even if the suppressed fourteen lines of the letter version do not make the poem any better, they undoubtedly preserve a more satisfactory equilibrium of its two halves and bring it to a higher degree of sensuous elation.

No date is given for the ode; we only know when it was copied for the Keatses in America: 2 January 1819. But it can be safely conjectured that it must be one of the poems he speaks of in the same letter. Relating the despondency that followed Tom's death and the necessity for him to start again with his poetry, he adds "I have however a few Poems which you will like and I will copy out on the next sheet" (no. 137, II, 12). As the verses sent with the letter are "Fancy", "Lines on the Mermaid Tavern" and the song "I had a Dove", he must have had these pieces in mind. If we knew who was the "mistress fair" of the fourteen suppressed lines, it would help to decide on a date. Could it be Fanny Brawne with whom he had

"an understanding" on Christmas Day that month? ¹ It seems impossible that he should have referred to her in such an idealized sort of way, as a creature of his fancy only. The two persons that could fill his bereaved heart with a feminine presence just before and after Tom's death were Isabella Jones whom he had met at the end of October 1818, and the memory of his sister-in-law, Georgiana. It is symptomatic that he places them on the same level and that speaking of one leads to the other. After the evocation of their meeting and walk to Islington (24 October 1818, To the George Keatses; no. 120, I, 403), he comments: "I have no libidinous thought about her — she and your George are the only women *à peu près de mon age* whom I would be content to know for their mind and friendship alone." This partakes of the resignation of absence, which also built up the idealized figure of Georgiana. In the long journal letter of the beginning of 1819 he several times writes to his sister-in-law more "particularly" (no. 137, II, 13); and just before copying "Fancy" a few lines seem to make her the ethereal woman of some immortal love: "I never forget you except after seeing now and then some beautiful woman — but that is a fever — the thought of you both is a passion with me but for the most part a calm one" (no. 137, II, 21). The word "both" has been taken as a reference to George and Georgiana, but we do not doubt that "the beautiful woman" seen "now and then" is Isabella Jones of whom he had said in his previous letter to America: "I expect to *passer* some pleasant hours with her now and then" (no. 120, I, 403). The need to confide, in an off-hand way, one's love for a woman to another loved one is psychologically justified, especially when both are distant, idealized figures. And if there remains some hesitation about accepting a relation between the "mistress fair" passage of the ode on "Fancy" and the Hastings lady the description of what happened on October 24 and the cancelled lines should remove it: "As I had warmed with her before and kissed her — I thought it would be living backwards not to do so again — she had a better taste: she perceived how much a thing of course it was and shrunk from it — not in a prudish way but in as I say a good taste — She contrived to disappoint me in a way which made me feel more pleasure than a simple kiss could do — she said I should please her much more if I would only press her hand and go away. Whether she was in a different disposition when I saw her before — or whether I have in fancy wrong'd her I cannot tell" (24 October 1818, no. 120, I, 403). Compare "Fancy":

¹ See H. E. Rollins' calendar of "Events in the Life of Keats," in his edition of the *Letters*, I, 47.

*Mistress fair,
Thou shalt have that tressed hair
Adonis tangled all for spite;
And the mouth he would not kiss,
And the treasure he would miss,
And the hand he would not press
And the warmth he would distress,
O the Ravishment — the Bliss!*

(94-101 of the letter version)

We therefore conjecture that "Fancy" can be dated some time after the Islington meeting and before Tom's death, and that it was kept in Keats's papers till a day when he felt the need to confide in his beloved "Sister", become at a distance a sort of understanding motherly presence. Therefore he gave her in the December-January and January-April letters both the "rival" characters of Isabella Jones and, in a casual way, that of his new love, Fanny Brawne (18 December 1818, no. 137, II, 13).

"Bards of Passion" is built up on the same pattern as "Fancy". Four lines, repeated at both ends of the poem, serve the purpose of introduction and conclusion. They enclose two passages of eighteen and fourteen lines respectively. Thus, as is the case in "Fancy", the second part is slightly shorter than the first. Again the poet's imagination bears the reader on high to a paradise where

*... the rose herself has got
Perfume which on earth is not.* (15-16)

Opposed to the static description of the Elysium of poets in the first part, the second proposes to listen to the inviting voices of bards of old and join with them in a communion of all mortal experience, sad or happy. The call towards elation creates once more a rising structure of imagery, however primitive when compared to other poems.

The form makes it a near relation of "Fancy", and it must have been written some time after Tom's death as it corresponds closely in spirit to the feelings expressed at the beginning of the December 1818 to January 1819 journal-letter. After relating their brother's end, Keats confirms his belief in "immortality of some nature or other" (no. 137, II, 4), and further down discusses the nature of separation. "There you are with Birbeck — here I am with Brown — sometimes I fancy an immense separation and sometimes, as at present, a direct communication of spirit with you. That will be one of the grandeurs of immortality — there will be no space and consequently the only commerce between spirits will be by their intelligence of each other" (16 December 1818, no. 137, II, 5). "Bards of Passion" certainly springs from that baunting preoccupation since

his brother's departure, now renewed and reinforced by Tom's death. When the poem was written is impossible to state exactly, but the idea of communication between distant worlds appears in the letter of Jane Porter forwarded to Keats by Richard Woodhouse on 10 December 1818. He meant to comfort him and instil confidence at a difficult moment. She was giving praise to *Endymion*. There is no doubt that the poet was not indifferent to the good opinion of the lady writer, as he chose to copy part of the letter for George and Georgiana a week later. Setting Keats and Chatterton side by side, Jane Porter wrote "great talents have a Commission from Heaven (see no. 137, II, 10, footnote 7). The timely and tactful intervention of Woodhouse was successful; the journal-letter testifies to the new spur given to the poet's activity. On the day he copies Miss Porter's letter he speaks of setting to work again. He means "Hyperion" but, as mentioned above, he alludes to other works, and "Bards of Passion" could very well have been inspired by Miss Porter's allusion to mysterious links with Heaven. The model of the recent ode to "Fancy" was there to suggest an easy-flowing structure. We should then date it between 10 and 17 December 1818.

Therefore we conclude that the odes written in couplets were products of the last months of the year 1818, and must be considered as efforts on the poet's part to turn hardship into creative activity. They are the start of a new chapter in his life and work; hence the rising imagery. In a state of bereavement fancy and memory alone could supply him with the comfort of living nature, or of a motherly mistress's presence. His touching and eager will to keep a diary and thus organize a sort of communication across the Atlantic ocean is akin to the desire for an escape through imagination and extra-terrestrial perception of inspiring voices. "I shall read a passage of Shakespeare every Sunday at ten o'clock — you read one at the same time and we shall be as near each other as blind bodies can be in the same room" (no. 137, II, 5). What "Fancy" had spelled out on the level of nature and love is developed on a higher plane in "Bards of Passion":

... the souls ye left behind you
Teach us, here, the way to find you. (25-26)

Yet the two poems remain among the less impressive works of Keats's 1820 volume. They give rise to his remark at the time of copying his "Ode to Psyche": "I have for the most part dash'd off[f] my lines in a hurry" (Journal-letter 30 April 1819, no. 159, II, 105-6), and himself seemed surprised to find "Fancy" rather a considerable piece of verse: "I did not think this had been so long a Poem" (*ibid.*, 2 Jan. 1819, II, 24). The rapid easily stretched addition of couplets corresponded, no doubt, to the poet's growing objections against the constraint of set forms, the sonnet particularly,

which was, perhaps also a consequence of his despair and weariness of spirit at the end of the year 1818. The quotation he inserted in his journal-letter on 29 December (the precise date is conjectural), testifies to his rebellion against restriction and external compulsion in artistic matters. He applauds one Dubois's advice to players: 'In singing never mind the music — observe what time you please. It would be a pretty degradation indeed if you were obliged to confine your genius to the dull regularity of a fiddler — horse hair and cat's guts — no, let him keep *your* time and play *your* tune — *dodge him*' (no. 137, II, 16). Evidently Keats in his discouragement saw only "horse hair and cat's guts" in the exacting rules of the sonnet and its limited dimensions. His couplet odes allowed unrestricted development of imagination and extension of fanciful thoughts. In the letter he does not speak of "Fancy" and "Bards of passion..." as odes. "These are specimens of a sort of rondeau which I think I shall become partial to — because you have one idea amplified with greater ease and more delight and freedom than in the sonnet" (ibid., II, 26). *Rondeau* is justified here by the fact that the poems are rounded off by a final repetition of the opening lines; otherwise the pattern is a very lax one. "Bards of passion..." was printed in the *Lamia* volume under the title "Ode", which shows that the poet was actually keeping *his* time and playing *his* tune.

From what has been said of Keats, in this study, however, it is clear that form could not be entirely wiped off or done without for a long time in one who linked more and more closely his eager search after truth and the "clear perception of Beauty" (ibid., II, 19). Keats's genius was already groping toward an original solution to his problem. To Haydon he expresses discontent as to his late work: "I smoke more and more my own insufficiency — I see little by little more of what is to be done, and how it is to be done, should I ever be able to do it" (10 January 1819, To Haydon, no. 140, II, 32). It was with that confidence in new, possible progress that the pace is set for the writing of "Isabella" and the "Eve of St Agnes" — and we have seen how the pyramidal pattern of imagery evolved from the one to the other. The achievement of such poetry also proved that the "ottava rima" and the Spenserian stanza favoured the poet's imagination and gave firm support to his inspiration. The abandonment of the "Eve of St Mark" on the contrary tends to attract attention to the lack of such formal device and attribute the failure to the illimited freedom of couplets and their inadequacy at shaping the poet's intentions. And yet the theme promised as much as that of the "Eve of St Agnes". The structural imagery starting in the "chilly sunset" (7) of very early spring and the "silent streets" (14) of a "Sabbath" morning, with "staid" (15), "demurest" (17) and "patient folk" (20) going to "vesper prayer" (18), allows us to guess that Bertha was probably to experience some warmer life

and to sense death as the final stage of the story. What is perhaps different from the imagery of the "Eve of St Agnes", and may have caused some difficulty in the pursuit of the composition, together with the boundless rhyming echoes of couplets, is the fact that the cold imagery of the half-dead city and the warm description of the illuminated manuscript and rich architecture and furniture succeed each other in contrapuntal effects, destructive of the pyramidal pattern. The comfort of the room stands in opposition to the darkening still-life of the surrounding streets and cathedral close. The blossoming of Bertha's maidenhood — "poor cheated soul" (69) — in some ecstatic meeting with a lover could produce the expected rise of the image structure. And the vision of

... the Phantom and image
Of ilka gent and ilka carle
Whom coldè Deathè hath in parle, (98 h-j)

she will probably see from the "arched porch and entry low" (19). All this leads us to anticipate some trance and the bliss of love under the menace of ominous death. Whether we are led astray by a fit of gothicism, we shall never know; but the immediate, if subtle, mixture of brilliant and subdued atmosphere coupled with the absence of compulsion from a set pattern of stanzas seem to have let the poet down after a promising start. Anyway the early months of 1819 opened new vistas, renewed confidence, and another chapter of experimentation was launched.

The comment that precedes the copy of the "Ode to Psyche", in the Journal-letter to the Keatses in America (no. 159) on 30 April 1819, testifies to the way in which Keats set down very rapidly the drafts of his odes on paper, and then paid careful attention to the working out of some chosen subject. "The following Poem ["Ode to Psyche"] — the last I have written is the first and only one with which I have taken even moderate pains — I have for the most part dash'd of[f] my lines in a hurry" (no. 159, II, 105-6). The variants in Garrod's critical edition of Keats's work show, however, that more pains were to be taken before the manuscript of the *Lamia* volume was sent to its publishers. The first poem to reach a stage judged by the author sufficiently satisfactory to be printed was the "Ode to a Nightingale", published in Elme's *Annals of Fine Arts* in July 1819; the next the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" which appeared in the same magazine in January 1820. The others were sent to Taylor and Hessey for the publication of the 1820 collection of poems in April of that same year. Yet all were conceived in spring 1819, except "To Autumn". One gets a feeling that Keats groped his way towards the ten-line stanza ode through the "Ode to Psyche", some new freedom being then taken touching the number of lines ("To Autumn") or lengths ("To a Nightingale", "To Fanny").

20. The Search for a New Pattern: "To Psyche"

The poet considers the "pains" he has taken in the composition of the "Ode to Psyche" as successful in loading his poetry "with ore": "This I have done leisurely — I think it reads the more richly for it and will I hope encourage me to write other thing[s] in even a more peac[e]able and healthy spirit." The insistence therefore is on content and not particularly on form. It is true that the "Ode to Psyche" is a puzzling assemblage of unequal parts. It is composed of four "stanzas" of irregular length — twenty-three, twelve, fourteen and eighteen lines respectively. It is, however, immediately striking that a sort of symmetry exists: two longer sequences embrace two shorter ones. (Even more so if the first six lines are detached as a *captatio benevolentiae* introducing the subject). Let us now examine the rhyme scheme of the first part, the longest; we find it a curious mixture of two Shakespearian quatrains (*abab*) (*cdcd*), followed by a Petrarchan sestet on two rhymes (*eggeeg*), if we take into account the manuscript and transcript version (the word "fan" — line 10 — was replaced by the unrhyming word "roof" in view of the 1820 publication). The sestet extends into an unrhymed supplementary line. Two couplets follow; finally another quatrain of alternate longer and shorter lines ends the passage. Thus, at first appearance, the poem suggests a relation with Keats's experiments on the sonnet form at the time.

A rapid look at punctuation and meaning shows that the division does not quite coincide in reality with these features. Four lines play the part of a rhetorical excuse for the poet's audacity. The next two end the introduction with a question and introduce the subject.

*Surely I dreamt to-day, or did I see .
The winged Psyche with awaken'd eyes? (5-6)*

It savours of the hesitation between "wake" and "sleep" concluding the "Ode to a Nightingale" (79-80) and is one more element of proof showing that the odes were conceived at much the same time. Yet in "To Psyche" the doubts are expressed at the beginning. Certitude grows throughout the lines describing the experience: the discovery

in an Arcadian landscape of an embracing couple. The last three lines are dedicated to the identification of the "fair creatures" (9): Eros and Psyche. In between, fourteen lines describe the poet wandering "in a forest thoughtlessly" (7) — which offers an opportunity for a description of nature (10-15) —; he comes across the two lovers "couched side by side" (9), pictured in more details in lines 15-20. The meeting symbolizes the suddenness of inspiration, and stands in contrast with the thoughtless attitude of the poet. Therefore the core of part I corresponds to the dimension of a sonnet without being one, unless we keep in mind Keats's rejection expressed when copying the *Andromeda* sonnet "If by dull lines...", freedom being extended to the shortening of one line (12). One feels instinctively that a link exists with the sonnet form whose elements are there scattered about, dissimulated, as it were, by the poet in his will to escape the model imposed by habit.

The next two passages of twelve and fourteen lines are remarkable for their parallelism and both contain reminders of the techniques of sonnet writing. One is made up of three Shakespearian quatrains, the other could be yet another attempt "to discover a better sonnet stanza than we have" (no. 159, II, 108). The justification of the *Andromeda* sonnet immediately follows the copy of the "Ode to Psyche" which we have just quoted in the journal-letter; the statement is interesting for its assimilation of the sonnet to a stanza, which seems to imply the eventuality of its use as an element of a longer piece of verse. And if we come back to part III of the "Ode", its fourteen lines are composed of a Shakespearian quatrain (*abab*), a Petrarchan one (*cddc*), and a sestet (*efghgh*) which reproduces in an echo the enumeration of lines 30-35 of part II. A note of the apparatus criticus shows that there was some hesitation about repeating one more echoing line to give a further *f* rhyme. Here again we are not confronted with an exact sonnet pattern — some lines being shorter than the usual pentameters; but the passage is reminiscent of elements related with it and recurring again and again in Keats's works. Parts II and III are a sort of hymn in honour of Psyche, and the last six lines of each sound like a chorus marking a symmetrical opposition. The first part expresses the poet's regret at the neglect of this goddess of classical Greek mythology:

... temple thou hast none,
 Nor altar heap'd with flowers;
 Not virgin-choir to make delicious moan
 Upon the midnight hours;
 No voice, no lute, no pipe, no incense sweet
 From chain-swung censer teeming;
 No shrine, no grove, no oracle, no heat
 Of pale-mouth'd prophet dreaming. (28-35)

Then in the next section, he vows to make the injustice good by dedicating himself to Psyche's worship:

*So let me be thy choir, and make a moan
Upon the midnight hours;
Thy voice, thy lute, thy pipe, thy incense sweet
From swung censer teeming;
Thy shrine, thy grove, thy oracle, thy heat
Of pale-mouth'd prophet dreaming. (44-49)*

The repetition recalls the "rondeau" type of poem Keats thought he would "become partial to". Indeed everything that was seething in the poet's mind at the time appears gathered in "To Psyche". It will probably be objected that what is here called a sestet in part III possesses two unrhyming lines (44 and 45), and is composed of alternating longer and shorter lines, thus partaking of the freedom used by other Romantic poets, for instance Wordsworth in his "Ode on Immortality". So much is true, but it must also be noticed how the running-on of longer lines into shorter ones suppresses the impression the second brief element could produce, and how the accumulation of verbs, nouns, adjectives or adverbs loads every syllable with weight and tends to limit the importance of grammatical links. To this there must be added the compensation of triphthongs and feminine rhymes which prolong shorter lines. If the words "moan" (44) and "hours" (45) do not rhyme in that portion of the "Ode", they are, however, the rhyming echo of part II and thus create a link and a unity between the two central passages and the twofold aspect of the worship theme.

The last portion of the poem is practically equal in length to the first, if we except from it the six introductory lines (eighteen against seventeen). It again seems to owe much to the sonnet, being composed of two Shakespearian quatrains and a sestet in the form of a couplet plus another such quatrain. Finally a quatrain with two shorter lines recalls the verse structure recurring at the end of each previous part, and strongly resembling a song burden. Therefore if we except the conclusion (64-67), the poet's promise to "build a fane" to Psyche (50-63) is made in a form very similar to the experimental "To Sleep", copied in the journal-letter immediately before the ode. Both retain the Petrarchan division after eight lines, but use three Shakespearian quatrains: two at the start and one to end the poem. The two intermediate lines rhyme with the first quatrains in "To Sleep" (*abab cdcd bc efef*) and with each other in "To Psyche" part III (*abab cdcd ee fgfg + hih*). Once again we are on the verge of the possibilities offered by the art of the sonnet, but the poet seems to have tried hard to get away from the exact pattern as much as possible, in order to veil skilfully the indebtedness

of the ode to his mastery in the art of the sonnet. Abandoned as an individual poem, but offering a limited and well-structured unit of thought for longer compositions, the sonnet has become the "sonnet stanza".

From the point of view of imagery, the poem evolves from the descriptive narration of a personal event — or at least of an event presented as a personal, direct experience (I) —, towards a hymn to the goddess (II-III) and ends in a promise of dedication to her (IV). Symmetry exists then; it is reinforced by the poet's presence in parts I and IV; to "I wander'd in a forest thoughtlessly" (7) corresponds "Yes, I will be thy priest" (50). Parts II and III are devoted to the goddess: "O latest born and loveliest vision" (24) and "O brightest" (36) give the tone of the central ecstasy of adoration. Within that hymn (24-49) the poet also appears absorbed in the flight of the admired one:

*Yet even in these days so far retir'd
From happy pieties, thy lucent fans,
Fluttering among faint Olympians,
I see, and sing, by my own eyes inspired. (40-43)*

All the song exalts Psyche above "all Olympus' faded hierarchy" (25). In the universe of darkness where she hides, she is the "loveliest vision" (24),

*Fairer than Phoebe's sapphire-region'd star
Or Vesper, amorous glow-worm of the sky. (26-27)*

And the absence of "temple" (28), "altar" (29) and "cult" (30-35) makes her glory still purer and more detached from the weight of earth: "O brightest!" (36). To reach such heights of exaltation the poet has described the palpable, natural setting where the couple embrace. They are on earth fully, with all senses alert: depth of grass (10), fragranciness and colours of blossoms (11) and "flowers" (13-14), "whispering" of leaves, blossoms (10-11) and "brooklet" (12) and their unobtrusive motion, mystery and silence of "hush'd", cool "forest" (13 and 7). The same sensuous "calm" (15) and softness presides over the picture of the satisfied couple of lovers (15-20). The choice moment when the poet espies them is one of rest, balanced between the sensed memory of just past enjoyment and the expectation of renewed delights.

*Their lips touch'd not, but had not bid adieu,
...
And ready still past kisses to outnumber. (17 and 19)*

The wings of the lovers — "pinions" (16), "winged boy" (21) — are the only features that prepare us for the rise to the bright, ethereal "vision" of the central hymn. The sensuous qualities are not forgotten in the song of adoration: the mystery of the "midnight hours" (31 and 45), "shriae" and "grove" (34 and 48), the "delicious moan" of the choir (30 and 44) together with the "voice", "lute" and "pipe" (32 and 46), the perfume of incense and motion of the "swinged censer" (32-38 and 46-47). Every element is repeated in "a finer tone"; the amorous "slumber" (18) is alchemized into the dream of a prophet "pale-mouth'd" in the "beat" of his trance (34-35 and 48-49). The imagery of the hymning song is the same as that of the narrative passage; but it realizes a vertical relation between the goddess and her priest that opposes and re-enacts that of the "two fair creatures, couched side by side" (9). Lines 36-39 establish the earth-heaven relation of religious "vows" (36), and the high inspiration of poetry — "fond believing lyre" (37) — making "holy" (38 and 39) the natural elements: the "forest boughs" (38), "air", "water" and "fire" (39).

The absence of cult deplored in part II enhances the divine quality of Psyche, while the desire to establish the natural condition of worship leads to the downward slope of the pyramid. The last part of the "Ode" is situated in this world with the poet's decision to be a "priest" and "build a fane" (50). Therefore the highest pitch of elation is realized by the repeated negations of lines 28 to 35 annihilating the material causes of enjoyment. Abstract existence of the goddess is not enough, reconciliation with the earth necessary. Hence the wished-for descent and the role of the poet as a priest capable of reconciling high abstraction and its presence in the world. The exploration is not of the subterranean regions, but of the empyrean.

Though the last portion of the poem is situated on earth again, it is loaded with the experience of the upward journey gathered up in the vision of the goddess with "lucent fans",

Fluttering among the faint Olympians. (41-42)

The full delight of the first scene, and the frustration concerning the unheeded goddess are linked together in the rich description of the promised temple, "new grown with pleasant pains" (52). The "pains" are no longer attached to the "hard and rare" reascent after the exploration of infernal regions and the toil of a passage through destruction and death, but they suppose venturing beyond and above the material world of sensual experience to discover the true nature and immortal background of bliss. Futurity contrasts with a past of forgetfulness; the "fane" (50) is to be built "In some untrodden region of the mind" (51), which implies the fresh eagerness

and anxiety of any voyage of discovery. If we are back on earth, the "new grown" (52) feeling shows no total abatement of elation. Time is not destructive, and the descent to reality carries out the structural imagery of the pyramidal pattern, but does not destroy the hopeful rise of spirits. The contemplated renascence of the myth is prolonged by the image of the "dark-cluster'd trees" (54) which "fledge the wild-ridged mountains" (55). The ruggedness of the "mountains" (55) and "pines" (53) are replaced by the protecting intricacy of "branched thoughts" (52) and "cluster'd trees" (54). With them the forest of part I reappears. The "slumber" (18) of the "fair creatures" (9) finds an equivalent in the "Dryads [...] lull'd to sleep" (57). Yet the seclusion of the "sanctuary" expands in the "wide quietness" (58) it offers; and the "wreath'd trellis" (60) is no prison, but the fruitful cell adorned by nature to incite the free "working" of the "brain" (60). Among the sensuous pleasures offered by the "murmur of the wind" (53) in the branches, the lulling song of "zephyrs, streams, and birds, and bees" (56), the mystery of the "dark-cluster'd trees" (54), the inviting softness of the "moss" (57), the fragrantcy of the "rosy sanctuary" (59), the colourful light and shapes of "flowers" (63), "buds and bells, and stars" (61), Fancy reigns, rooted in the rich soil of sensations. His activity — compared to a gardener's — "Who breeding flowers, will never breed the same" (63) — appears both a toil and a bliss, and echoes the impression given by the lovers "ready still past kisses to outnumber" (19). The slightly ambiguous feeling is summed up in the concluding quatrain:

*And there shall be for thee all soft delight
That shadowy thought can win,
A bright torch, and a casement ope at night
To let the warm Love in. (64-67)*

"Soft delight" (64) in some way opposes "shadowy thought" (65), though they are complementary. The bright and lively warmth of the one seems to contradict the cool illusion and slumbering vagueness of the other. At the same time, delight is heightened by the working of imagination. The last two lines are both a remarkable epitome of the legend of Eros and Psyche and a summary of the rich oppositions of the "Ode". Psyche is there, invisible, in the expectation of Love's intrusion. The warmth of life forces its way into the cold conceptions of the mind that needs it and asks for it. The "torch" (66) is there, an attracting flame perhaps, hiding in its brightness the danger of inescapable curiosity. The shades of obscurity (66) surround and protect the accomplishment of the mystery and the "casement" (66) links the confinement of the "sanctuary" (59) with the "wide quietness" (58) of "midnight hours" (31 and 45).

Therefore we believe we are right in saying that the "Ode to Psyche" develops a basic up- and downward imagery: parts I and IV answer each other as belonging to the world of sensuous perceptions. Parts II and III hover in the high flight of guessed-at truths. And yet there is no brutal fall from the poet's wish to be the priest of a new worship, but a complex vision of the possible coexistence of actuality and ideal. The movement rises towards the future which remains tinted with the certitude given by the discovery of the embracing couple and the promise of renewed delight, "at tender eye-dawn of aureorean love" (20). This belief supports the structural imagery of the "Ode" and makes it more optimistic than the others where the notion of passing time introduces a more disquieting mood. There is no exact symmetry of form, nor equality of parts, though the pyramidal structure is present. Keats seems to stand on the verge of giving shape to a new pattern of poems, abandoning the sonnet whose difficulties and restrictions could not be satisfactorily overcome, and using some of its typical features to fashion a "sonnet stanza" capable of serving more ambitious perspectives. Is it mere chance if the "Ode to Psyche" was copied after three timid attempts at breaking the traditional frame of sonnets, and just before the revolutionary irregular "sonnet stanza" "If by dull rhymes..."? But whereas, then, Keats did not "pretend to have succeeded", his comment on the "Ode" denotes a more confident spirit.

21. The Rise of the "Stanza" Ode: "On Melancholy"

On 8 March Keats could write to Haydon: "What Imagination I have I shall enjoy, and greatly, for I have experienced the satisfaction of having great conceptions without the toil of sonnet-teering. I will not spoil my love of gloom by writing an ode to darkness" (no. 149, If, 43). The last sentence has generally been understood as meaning that the poet was not going to write an ode on darkness. We really wonder whether it is not the first allusion in the correspondence to the writing of the stanza odes, and more particularly to the "Ode on Melancholy", the black humour of old. Keats insists on the limitations imposed by the sonnet, too strict a barrier against the outflow of inspiration. Compressing what he perceives of the creative powers of the melancholy mood into mere fourteen iambic pentameters would be "toil" indeed, and would eventually mar the rich possibilities of the theme. It would "spoil the poet's love of gloom". No such disappointment with an ode on the subject! "Writing an ode on darkness" cannot bring such feeling of frustration, as the poem can be extended to suit the rich texture of images and complexity of thoughts. It can rise "up to a climax", but also offer scope for a return to a more earthly, less ethereal mood.

Typically the cancelled — originally first — stanza of the ode is built on an imagery of melancholy linked with the infernal world of legends. The phantom ship of death with her bone ribs (1), blood-stained sails (3-4) and gibbet mast (2) belongs to the dark passages of gothicism and the dragon (5) to the subterranean caverns of Tartarus. The black waters of "Lethe dull" add to the gloom of the general imagery.

In the published version Lethe is still present with its dark suggestion of a landscape in the world of the dead, adorned with wreaths of poisonous plants and haunted by night birds and insects. Melancholy, as an incitement to self destruction is rejected, though. The negative marks the stanza strongly. The temptation to yield to the inviting beverage of "poisonous wine" (2) or taste the "ruby grape of Proserpine" (4) is preceded by the warning call: "No, no, go not to Lethe..." (1). But the imagery of that first stanza is still one of

darkness. "Lethe" (1) belongs to the underworld; Proserpine (4) reigns there; Psyche (7) bides in the dark. The black shadow of the yew-tree (5) enhances the "poisonous" character of its "berries" (5), after the enumeration of "wolf's bane" (2) and "nightshade" (4). Death lingers in each line; the "tight-rooted" plant of line 2 is disquieting; the word "twist" in the previous line has prepared the impression of some serpentine knot and emphasizes the lethal agony attached to "wolf's bane"; the "pale forehead to be kiss'd" (3) implies some dying figure and the verb "suffer" still bears a notion of pain in spite of the negation. Death-moths and beetles (6) are the suitable insects for this context; Psyche is seen "mourning" (7); and the "owl" (7) is ready to preside over ominous "sorrow's mysteries" (8). Even the redness of the "wine" (2), and "ruby grape" (4) suggests less the gay colour of some palatable claret, than that of running blood. The "rosary of yew-berries" (5) inevitably speaks of some *miserere*. The conclusion of the stanza summarizes the suicidal suggestion:

*For shade to shade will come too drowsily
And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul. (9-10)*

Suddenly melancholy appears as a desirable power to be courted and cared for. The "anguish of the soul" can be a source of wakefulness. The shadows of death must not be allowed to destroy the inward alertness and attention which can accompany the languor and spleen of indolent hours. As Keats linked sleep and poetry in earlier days, he now seems to couple poetic imagination with indolence. A year before he had already described to his friend Reynolds, in a charming way, the happiness of what he called "a voyage of conception": "What delicious diligent Indolence! A doze upon a Sofa does not hinder it, and a nap upon Clover engenders ethereal finger-pointings — the prattle of a child gives it wings, and the converse of middle age a strength to beat them — a strain of musick conducts to 'an odd angle of the Isle' and when the leaves whisper it puts a 'girdle round the earth'" (19 February 1818, no. 62, I, 231). The events of the second half of 1818 had provisionally changed his outlook. Melancholy of the darkest sort had overcome pleasurable indolence. Spring 1819 seemed to reinstate the luxury of spinning "airy Citadels" and weaving "a tapestry empyrean" (*ibid.*, I, 231-2). But now the poet makes a difference between the possible moods of indolence. "An indolent day — fill'd with speculations even of an unpleasant colour — is bearable and ever pleasant alone" (*Journal-letter*, no. 159, II, 77) Is it venturing too far to name melancholy that indolence "of an unpleasant colour"? The ode precisely shows that melancholy is not despair and can be turned to fruitful perception of the world of beauty.

Stanza 2 is still linked with the previous lines by allusions to sadness. It falls "sudden [...] like a weeping cloud" (12) over "droop-headed flowers" (13). But if the "fit" (11) is like a shroud, it also comes from "heaven" (12) and "fosters" (13) the growth of flowers; it simply "hides" (14) the greenness of spring; it is "an April shroud" (14). Therefore destructive elements are closely interwoven with more optimistic allusions and the latter prepare the second half of stanza 2 where rich sensations are displayed and revelled in. With the "morning rose" (15), "the rainbow" suddenly perceived in the rolling "wave" (16), the full blossoming of crimson "peonies" (17) and the fascination of a passionate woman (18-20), we are lifted away from the annihilating suggestions of stanza 1. Line 15, which is the perfect middle of the ode in its final state, is the point of equilibrium where the poet passes from a destructive melancholy to a creative one:

Then glut thy sorrow on a morning rose. (15)

Sadness is overcome by a fine excess. The imagery of "morning" and light ("rainbow") creates a feeling of new birth, and the poem explodes in a fire-work of sensuous experience. Colours burst out in the "rose" (15), the "rainbow" (16), the "wave" (16), the "peonies" (17) — the redness has lost its sinister connotations here — and the "peerless eyes" of line 20, though ill-determined, offer the varied transparency of their mysterious colouring. Shapes are sketched in by the "rainbow" (16) and the "globed peonies" (17); and the "sand-wave" introduces motion and noise, which the rich passion of the maenad-mistress takes up again and prolongs: "rich anger" (18), "let her rave" (19), "feed deep" (20). Touch is evoked in "emprison her soft hand" (19) and the depth of penetration suggested by the lovers' eyes lost in endless contemplation. The sensation of taste is excited by the "salt sand-wave" (16) and the amorous "feeding" upon the mistress' eyes (20). Hearing is roused by the "sand-wave" (16), and the wild "raving" of the woman, in striking contrast with the silence of her lover. A feeling of plenty invades the lines owing to the "wealth of globed peonies" (17), the mistress' "rich anger" (18) till the mad passion is tempered by the soothing caress and patient delight of the poet.

*Emprison her soft hand, and let her rave,
And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes. (19-20)*

The highest ecstasy of the lover is then fully realized in stanza 2, which thus reaches up to the summit of the pyramidal structure already sensed in Keats's 1819 poems.

Stanza 3, indeed, concludes on a downward movement which

brings us back to some perception of the inevitable character of mortality. Stanza 2 had emphasized the rich possibilities of melancholy and established her relation with Beauty. Now line 21 blows a trumpet of victory — "She dwells with Beauty" — and immediately runs on into the evidence: "Beauty that must die". The abrupt fall "on th'other side" is temper'd by the interplay of opposites that fill the stanza. The destructive and creative are closely linked to carry out that complex totality of experience which is typical of Keats's great "Odes". The downward slant of the pyramidal structure is so contrived as to retain the full wealth of the ecstasy, while mingling with it the recognition of the temporal decay of what man wishes eternal. Immortality lies in the artistic realisation, not in the experience described. Joy (22 and 28), Pleasure (23), Delight (25) preside over stanza 3, but their happy influence is tinted with disquieting perspectives. Joy, in an image suggestive of lovers waving kisses, is "ever" "bidding adieu" (22-23). "Aching Pleasure" (23) suggests both the satisfaction of enjoyment and its unbearable satiety. Therefore pleasure is evoked as "Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips" (24). The atmosphere of stanza 1 reappears: if the bee contrasts with the death "beetle" and "moth" of line 6, the poison awakes a memory of lethal beverage and plants. The sensuous sipping ends in destruction. "Veil'd Melancholy" (26) recalls the "mournful Psyche" (7) of the beginning; she, however, dwells in the "temple of Delight", but the word "shrine", in spite of the rich connotations attached to the word in general, is evocative of death too. The image of the chosen one, "whose strenuous tongue / Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine" (27-28), answers, on the living and sensuous side, the imagery of "ruby grape of Proserpine". The inspired romantic poet once more appears as a daring explorer of the many-sided and untrodden paths of the universe. Capable of the finest appreciation of all sensations, only he is "strenuous" enough to risk bursting "Joy's grape" and sip the dangerous juice. The experience will necessarily teach him to bear "sorrow's mysteries" (8) which recur in the last line but one:

His soul shall taste the sadness of her might. (29)

It is worth noting the fine reminder of the grape image in "taste". And the recompense of the poet's exertions will be everlasting fame, the accomplishment of his dream of immortality. His soul being "among cloudy trophies hung" (30). Even here, the adjective "cloudy" sounds very near the atmosphere of shades (9) of stanza 1 and completes the repetition of imagery at both ends of the ode, not in exact symmetry though, as the various elements recur in practically the same order: the drinking image — "poisonous wine" (2), "grape of Proserpine" (4), "Joy's grape" (28) and "to poison while

the bee-mouth sips" (24); the separation image — "forehead to be kiss'd / By nightshade" (3-4) and "whose hand is ever at his lips / Bidding adieu (22-23); the disease image — "pale forehead" (3) and "aching Pleasure" (23); the adoration image — "rosary" (4), "sorrow's mysteries" (8), "sovrän shrine" (26), and "temple" (24); the depressed spirit image — "mournful Psyche" (5) and "veil'd Melancholy" (25); the soul destiny image (9-10 and 29-30). The difference of tone of the two stanzas is striking, however, when the comparison shows that the total negativeness of stanza 1 is contradicted in stanza 3 by the vigorous suggestions of words such as temple of *Delight*, *sovrän shrine*, *strenuous tongue*, *Joy's grape*, *palate fine*, sadness of her *might*, *cloudy trophies*. Undoubtedly, the downward slope of the pyramidal structure is a subtle intricacy of feelings born of the rise and elation from stanza 1 to stanza 2. This elation reigns in the middle of the poem, borne aloft by the rich trance of sensuous perceptions.

This can explain Keats's decision to strike out the phantom ship stanza. The sacrifice produced the new pattern of poems Keats was in need of. Longer than a sonnet it preserved a lighter sequence of rhymes echoing the Italian and Elizabethan models; it balanced the rise and fall of structural imagery; and in the three remaining stanzas took up in a way the Greek lyrical tradition and the succession of strophe, antistrophe and epode in the ode form — though Keats's odes cannot be called Pindaric. The cancelled stanza also proves that the pyramidal structure, as the "Ode" proposes it in its final form, is an afterthought, a decision difficult to date, in view of the *Lamia* publication. Reading Keats's 1819 spring letters produces the impression that the main themes of the odes were haunting the poet's mind, and that he must have worked at several poems in rapid succession, alternating with periods of draft revisions and corrections. Allusions to wine (II, p. 64, 90), allegory (p. 67), indolence (p. 61, 77, 78, 79, 113, 116), Greek vase (p. 79), darkness (p. 80), stars (p. 101), nightingales (p. 88), vision in dreams (p. 91), poppies (p. 123), etc., keep recurring from the middle of February to the end of June. Some of the themes and images caught the poet's fancy and peopled his odes. The poems were not all brought to a stage of perfection considered sufficient for publication. They are nevertheless interesting witnesses of the poet's critical attitude and activity.

22. A Case of Failing Apex: "On Indolence"

One that never reached completion is the ode dedicated to "Indolence", one of Keats's main subjects of discussion in the journal-letter (no. 159). It can be linked more particularly with the notes written on 19 March 1819, during a period of enforced idleness due to his being hit in the eye by a cricket ball. "My passions are all asleep from my having slumbered till nearly eleven and weakened the animal fibre all over me to a delightful sensation about three degrees on this side of faintness. [...] In this state of effeminacy the fibres of the brain are relaxed in common with the rest of the body, and to such a happy degree that pleasure has no show of enticement and pain no unbearable frown. Neither Poetry, nor Ambition, nor Love have any alertness of countenance as they pass by me: they seem rather like three figures on a greek vase" (II, 78-79). The lack of incitement in the pursuit of Love, Ambition and Poesy is the subject of the "Ode on Indolence", and the theme itself could hardly fit a collection of poems dedicated to Poesy, inseparable from Love, and whose publication could not suggest a haughty disdain of success and fame. This may be cause enough to justify Keats's abandonment of his draft. We can, however, trace aesthetic reasons for dismissing the subject in the end.

The two transcripts we have testify to the poet's hesitations in building up the structure of his poem. The order of the stanzas changes. If we refer to the 1848 first edition of the poem, the original order (Ch. Brown's transcript) went thus: 1 - 2 - 5 - 6 - 4 - 3. This was altered in the second transcript to 1 - 2 - 4 - 5 - 3 - 6. Woodhouse cannot be held responsible for the variations; he was too respectful of Keats's manuscripts for that. Therefore, though we can only guess at the reason for the change, it is probably an attempt by the poet to remedy the lack of the pyramidal structure of imagery which he had now evolved. This second transcript was revised again, and for the publication of *Shorter Poems from Literary Remains* in 1848 the order chosen was that of the corrected version of Brown's transcript.

Now the imagery of stanzas I and II is characterized by the rigid two-dimensional "shades" (I, 8) like figures "on a marble urn" (I, 5).

They stand in opposition to the more realistic semblance of sculptured statues: "Phidian lore" (I, 10). The mood is one of reserve and serenity. They "stepp'd serene" (I, 8),

With bowed necks and joined hands, side-faced. (I, 2)

No rush, no enthusiasm; they pass "in placid sandals" (I, 4); no festive colouring, they walk "in white robes graced" (I, 4). Silence is the mark of stanza II. Why do the inconsistent "shadows" (II, 1) come "muffled in so hush a masque" (II, 2)? Like ghosts they "steal away" (II, 4). "Was it a silent [...] plot" (II, 3) to rouse the poet to inspiring madness?

Pain had no sting, and pleasure's wreath no flower. (II, 8)

Drowsiness (II, 5), "indolence" (II, 6) establish a death-like numbness (II, 7); my pulse grew less and less (II, 7). A sensation of total abandonment and disintegration invades the last lines (II, 9-10):

*O, why did ye not melt, and leave my sense
Unhaunted quite of all but — nothingness?*

The last word expresses such finality and annihilation that it is difficult to see any sign preparing the expected central elation in the poem. If we believe that a pyramidal structure of imagery would have been Keats's aim and a criterion according to which he would accept or reject the poem for publication the order of stanzas, as we have it in Woodhouse's transcript shows a marked improvement over the original one in Brown's; that of the printed text may well be the best that could be proposed with the material as it was left.

Indeed the third stanza sees the figures coming once more, and they are presented as disturbing the enjoyment of powerful sensations. Uncertain sensations they are, as they issue from a state of passivity:

*My sleep had been embroider'd with dim dreams;
My soul had been a lawn besprinkled o'er
With flowers, and stirring shades, and baffled beams:
The morn was clouded, but no shower fell,
Tho' in her lids hung the sweet tears of May;
The open casement press'd a new-leav'd vine,
Let in the budding warmth and throstle's lay.* (III, 2-8)

The paradisiacal atmosphere is troubled by the dimness of the "dream" (III, 2), the "shades" and "baffled beams" (III, 3) the "clouds" (III, 4), the "tears" (III 5). Yet bliss goes as far as human happiness permits, and the last line make us realize that the choice

moment could not be perpetuated. Stanza III is however the moment of high sensations that should stand in the middle of the "Ode". It is not impossible therefore to guess at the reason for the original order, where stanza IV, used to precede stanza III, so that the identification of the three mysterious figures led on naturally to the poet's regrets about their disturbing him:

A third time came they by; — alas! wherefore? (III, 1)

In the final solution, stanza III coming first, the wish to leave the ecstatic numbness of indolence and take flight to the ethereal world of allegories becomes the central element and turning point of the poem. The true nature of the three characters is revealed. Though they pass silently, the poet burns "to follow them" (IV, 3), aching "for wings" (IV, 4). Identification gives the "shadows" (II, 1) a more palpable shape, though they do remain abstractions; they do not belong to "Phidian lore" (I, 10), which is a flaw, and in our opinion spoke against the selection of the poem; the high pitch of sensations at the heart of the poem could not be achieved satisfactorily through such allegorical figures. Moreover their only characteristics are static, cold and depressing, and contradict the desire for "wings" (IV, 4). "Pale of cheek" (IV, 6), "fatigued eye" (IV, 7), "most unmeek" (IV, 9) are not the sort of qualifications that excite the senses towards a high apprehension of truth. The rich qualities of Love, Ambition, Poesy appear in stanza V, but each is spoken of in a deprecating way. Though the poet still insists that he "wanted wings" (V, 1), the three personages are looked down upon: "What is Love? and where is it?" (V, 2). The neutral pronoun is revealing. Ambition is but a "short fever-fit" (V, 4); whereas Poesy "has not a joy" to offer (V, 5). The highest sensations are to be found in the sweetness of "drowsy noons" (V, 6),

And evenings steep'd in honied indolence. (V, 7)

We are back to the experience of indolence in stanza III. Yet such numbness, as seen above, leads to annihilation, and its only virtue lies in the protection it offers against the passing of time (V, 9) and the satiety of life (V, 10). In fact Keats finds it hard to escape the journey into destruction and death characteristic of an earlier period of his development. Hence the feeling that in spite of the "wings" (IV, 4 and V, 1), the pattern remains on the verge of a down- and upward journey. There is no solution. Indolence prevents the flight; it numbs sensation.

The dismissing of the "ghosts" (VI, 1) in stanza VI comes as a relief, as they are unable to rouse the poet into active sensuous experience:

*Ye cannot raise
My head cool-bedded in the flowery grass. (VI, 1-2)*

Abstract ideas have no inspiring powers for the poet; they are but "phantoms" (VI, 9) asked to "fade softly" (VI, 5) and "never more return" (VI, 10).

The theme itself made a pyramidal structure impossible. The many changes in the ordering of stanzas prove it. They can be shuffled like a pack of cards, and rearranged without ever creating a satisfactory structural imagery. The solution we have is probably the most acceptable from the point of view of the place of the apex; acceptable but no more. The very core of the "Ode" is loaded with too deep disappointment to create the proper elation:

*O Shadows! 'twas time to bid farewell!
Upon your skirts had fallen no tears of mine. (III, 9-10)*

If the wish to safeguard the bliss of indolence concludes the stanza in the proper mood and prepares the descending path towards the dismissal of the allegories, the regret anticipating so conspicuously the conclusion of the poem could not be placed more awkwardly. Trying to analyze the "Ode", we get a strong feeling that Keats's failure was due to the contradiction existing between the subject and the structure he had become partial to. Unable to rebuild its structural imagery in a positive way, he gave it up with its repetitions and unpromising pageantry of cold-blooded shadows. But failures pave the road to success, the ten-line stanza ode was undoubtedly well on the way.

23. Blissful Ecstasy: "On a Grecian Urn"

The "Ode on Indolence" leads naturally to that "On a Grecian Urn". This time the figures are visible on the artifact and no longer impalpable abstractions intruding into the poet's blissful state of laziness and languor. Herein lies an important difference; the urn itself experiences indolence, which preserves its integrity from the harsh pursuits of busy life and the mortality attached to the passing of time. In "On Indolence" the poet himself was in the numbed state and therefore could not but be disturbed by the call to activity suggested by the reproachful apparitions of Love, Ambition and Poesy. There is also certainly some link between the "Ode" and the sonnet written by Keats in the same months and addressed "To Sleep", the "soft embalmer of the still midnight" (1), capable of sealing "the hushed Casket" of the soul (14). It is an old theme, very dear to the poet's heart; sleep used to be the "soft closer of our eyes" ("Sleep and Poetry", 11) presiding over the flight of imagination; it therefore allowed the young poet

*To see the laurel wreath, on high suspended,
That is to crown our name when life is ended.*
(*"Sleep and Poetry"*, 35-36)

But time has passed and it is clear that fame cannot be courted and won so easily.

*Fame, like a wayward girl, will still be coy
To those who woo her with too slavish knees.*
(Sonnet xiii, "On Fame", 1-2)

In consequence Keats rejects her troublesome sollicitation, and scorns the "Gipsy" (ibid. 11). The poet must be like the lilies of the field, neither toiling, nor spinning; poetry must come naturally or not come at all — a principle Keats repeats in his correspondence. And another sonnet on the same subject of Fame sings the confidence of the rose that

... leaves herself upon the briar
For winds to kiss and grateful bees to feed.
(Sonnet xiv, "On Fame", 9-10)

Poetry then hides in the very intimacy of things, and must be looked for there. Indolence can help to discover it. It creates that state of receptivity in which "the fibres of the brain are relaxed in common with the rest of the body and to such a happy degree that pleasure has no show of enticement and pain no unbearable frown" (19 March 1819, To the George Keatses; no. 159, II, 78-79). We are strongly reminded of the phenomenon of "negative capability". And Keats adds a few lines further: "This is the only happiness; and is a rare instance of advantage in the body overpowering the Mind" (ibid. 79). In the "Ode on Indolence" the presence of Love, Ambition and Poesy prevents the mind from being totally "overpowered". Their stirring and mysterious appeal troubles the "visions" ("Ode on Indolence", VI, 7-8) that is to say the deep sensations that alone procure an apprehension of truth. Therefore the allegories of "On Indolence" are asked to "be once more / In masque-like figures on the dreamy urn" (VI, 5-6).

The Grecian urn, as a piece of art, realizes a state of indolence. It experiences the bliss of perfect passiveness. As E. Wasserman has shown so well, it exists in "that region where earth and the ethereal light and darkness, time and no-time become one."¹ The perfect and delicate balance that escapes mutability is there, in the work of art; it gathers in its painted or sculptured form the dynamic and dramatic process of creation and the fixed state of its completion. Through the power of "negative capability" the poet can enjoy the blissful passivity of the object and sense emphatically the dramatic meaning of the scene. Paraphrasing Wordsworth one could speak of "the inward eye" of indolence, stirring to life a world of sensations. The figures on the urn are no allegories born of the poet's drowsy consciousness and destructive of his happiness; they have objective existence and belong to the beautiful form of the artifact, which itself partakes of their potential sensuous activity. Thus the urn itself is an "unravished bride" (1) because the scene depicts a girl about to be kissed and the "maidens' loth" (8); and the experience of the urn asleep in its perfection escapes the maddening fret of the world, as it can wake to life whenever it is empathetically admired. In turn the Grecian form lends that essence of "life's fitful fever" the complicity of its "quietness" (1) and the protection of "silence and slow time" (2). Using the rich material of sensations, the poet builds up the imagery that will carry the reader up to the

¹ E. Wasserman, *The Finer Tone: Keats' Major Poems* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1953), chap. 2.

full enjoyment of sensuous perceptions. But he cannot be blind to the fact that they are and are not, that their full and high delight is an illusion, the dream of what actual life is not. Therefore the oxymoronic process of linking contraries in the vocabulary and images (for instance "still unravished bride") must extend to the whole structure of the "Ode" and can be expected to be found in the analysis of the poem. The pyramid of structural imagery answers the scheme perfectly, and we hope to be able to show that it is there. We also presume that the method may throw some light on the disputed conclusion of the poem.

It is evident that the opening lines of the poem create a feeling of repose and peace — "quietness" (1), "silence", "slow time" (2). The forest atmosphere — "sylvan" (3), flowers (4), "leaf-fring'd" (5), "Tempe", "dales of Arcady" (7) — reinforces the impression of fresh secluded calm. Tales (4) and legends (5) are pleasant entertainment and have lulled many a child to sleep. But from the very start the restful and cool quietude is pregnant with the warmth of life; "still unravished bride" of line 1 hints at a potential passion; the rapid passage through "slow time" (2), from the implications of "bride" (1) to "child" (2) and the adult state and load of past implied in "historian" (3), completes the imagery of life being engendered out of numbness. The closed womb of quietude and silence of the start expands into the vastness of life and even immortality with the figures of "deities or mortals" of line 6. Tension grows rapidly; the rhythm accelerates in the series of brief questions that end the stanza. "Slow time" is broken up in the rush of anxious interrogations. Instead of the silence and the drowsy insight into the past we hear of "loth" (8), "mad pursuit" (9), "struggle" (9), "pipes and timbrels" (10) leading to some "wild ecstasy" (10). The quickening pace of the lines together with the apparition of the figures of gods and the final stroke of the word ecstasy that suggests another suspended state, on a higher level, drives upwards towards the summit of the pyramid. If ecstasy does indeed mean a renewed stasis, this time all the senses are alert, absorbing to the full the world of life-giving experience.

Stanza 2 explains the refined quality of ecstatic sensations. Through them everything is transmuted into essences: "unheard" melodies are sweeter than heard ones (11-12); the forest cannot shed its leaves and "be bare" (16). Even the most desirable experience of love seems to be made perfect by making passion an eternity of warm eagerness. Inward concentration of perception has brought sensual enjoyment to a peak, and the repeated negations of the stanza reverberate like a drumming pulse when the heart feels like bursting: "... play on / Not to the sensual ear..." (12-13); "thou canst not leave / Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare" (15-16); "never, never canst thou kiss" (17); "she cannot fade" (19).

The voice of nature already spoke "more sweetly" than the poetical language in stanza 1 (4). Now the inward melody spiritualizes the power of hearing. The pipes must "play on" "more endear'd/... to the spirit ditties of no tone" (13-14). The perennial greenness of the trees denies sterility, and heightens the leaf decoration of stanza 1 to the rank of some paradisiacal garden. Love comes last and draws enthusiasm highest, as it is etherealized to the point of evading mortality. The harping negations explode into their contraries in the last line of the stanza:

For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair! (20)

The high pitch of elation fills the central stanza. Happiness is the mark of those lines. It is "no cheap gaiety, but the *summum bonum*, the opposite of the weariness, the fever and the fret that are inherent attributes of the unhappy mortal world".¹ The poet has brought sensations "all human passions far above" (28). The negations of stanza 2 still linger in the happiness of boughs which "cannot shed" their leaves "nor ever bid the spring adieu" (21-22); and the trumpets of "for ever"s, blown a first time at line 20, resound gloriously in the middle of the "Ode".

*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 enjoy'd,
For ever panting, and for ever young;
All breathing human passion far above... (23-28)*

The subdued violence compressed in "still unravished" blossoms in the trance of love's full delight.

Twenty-two lines precede that song of unequalled bliss, twenty-two follow. The last trace of our unhappy mortal state can be found in the word "unwearied" (23), which inevitably drags behind it a shadow of the weariness of the world. And our imperfect status of created beings shows in exact symmetry in the "breathing human passions" of line 28. The words already point at the downward path, as we are reminded of the actual results of all enthusiasm on earth

*... a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue. (29-30)*

The generous warmth and bliss of elation are already disintegrating and a new bitterness creeps into the poem. The weight of mortality

¹ E. Wasserman, *The Finer Tone: Keats' Major Poems* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1953), chap. 3.

once more interrupts the flight and draws the poet irrecoverably back to the earth. We suddenly remember that the lover was described as unable to kiss, "though winning near the goal" (18). The poet entreated him not to "grieve" (18), which was encouraging, but not actually free from impending sorrow. Was there no frustration in the fact that, though the girl could not escape, "thou hast not thy bliss" (19)? In the very flight towards the highest peak of passion and sensuous apprehension, there was a germ of failure; and if we forget it in the transports of trumpeted happiness in stanza 3, the flaw cannot but expand over the last two stanzas of the "Ode".

The transition to the second scene, that of sacrifice, has often been deemed brutal. It is true that it produces a surprise; the scenery is so totally different. Yet the parallelism with the sacrifice of maidenhood, suggested in the very first line, must not be overlooked. And for those reacting sensitively to the imagery of the end of stanza 3 ("a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd, / A burning forehead, and a parching tongue"), the question:

Who are these coming to the sacrifice? (31)

is a happy break slowing down the rapid disillusionment that inevitably succeeds the greatest bliss. The stately pace of the procession is both a step in the direction of some further high degree of trance, a cool-headed religious one, and a return downward to the reality of life and natural setting. The "sacrifice" (31), "altar" and "mysterious priest" (32) evoke a subdued enthusiasm and solemn internal experience. But there is present, too, in the imagery a faint suggestion of death that echoes the shades of sorrow, negated and dismissed, but still lingering in stanza 2. The mad music and songs that caught the imagination are replaced by the sinister and monotonous "lowing" (33) of the sacrificial victim; the white flash of "her silken flanks" (34) conjures up purity and recalls the "maidens loth" (8) of stanza 1; the "garlands" adorning the "heifer" (33), the greenness of the "altar" (32) also parallel the "sylvan" (3) and flowery (4) imagery of the beginning. But the mood has changed; we are no longer stepping towards "wild ecstasy" (10) under the exuberance and protection of leafy trees; we tread no more towards the pantheistic scenery of "the dales of Arcady" peopled with the gods and mortals of legends, but towards a new quietness that is not pregnant with the mad pleasures of creative life. The open landscape of "sea shore" (35) shows no living human activity; and the buttresses of the "mountain-built" "citadel" (36), though "peaceful", offer no equivalence to the secrecy of the clearing echoing with the festive trance of "pipes and timbrels" (10). After the flux the ebb has definitely set in. The quality of silence (39) spreading through that "pious morn" (37) calls to mind the grim statement of the sonnet written in the journal-letter on 19 March 1819:

*No God, no Demon of severe response,
Deigns to reply from Heaven or from Hell.*
(“Why did I laugh...”, 2-3)

Silence, emptiness, solitude and desolation are really compacted at the end of stanza 4. Even the slow procession has disappeared:

*... not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.* (39-40)

This completes the lethal connotations that pervades the “Ode” at that stage. Why did they laugh indeed to the accompaniment of pipes and timbrels? To forget? To escape?

Stanza 5 tries to answer; but it is evident that the mood is still on the downward slope. Shapes, attitudes (41), “marble men and maidens” (42), the “silent form” of the urn itself have transformed the merry festival and made its imagery the decoration of a funeral monument. Again echoes from stanza 1 can be heard: the “brede / Of marble men” (41-42) recalls the “bride” of line 1; the “forest branches” and “weed” parallel the “sylvan” bower and “leaf-fring’d” arbour. But now the weed is “trodden”, the actors “overwrought” (42), that is to say exhausted. “Slow time” (2) has been re-established by the solemn pace of the procession; “silence” (2) reigns and, as in the sonnet, the questioning spirit gets no answer.

*Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity.* (44-45)

Beauty is still there; “Attic shape! Fair attitude” (41), “silent form” (44) express aesthetic appreciation. The rich word “overwrought” (42) also translates admiration for the artistry of the urn. However it has undertones of exhaustion and weariness too and these complete the downfall of spirits at the end of the poem summarized in “Cold Pastoral” (45): Arcady deprived of its piping shepherds.

This brings us to the conclusion where the passing of generations (46) is contrasted with the immortality of the work of art. The urn, or any other artifact, is made “a friend to man” (48), and the poet makes it deliver the famous and so much disputed message:

*“Beauty is truth, truth beauty,” — that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.*
(Punctuation from the *Lamia* volume 1820)

We agree with J. Stillinger¹, that the printed tradition of punctuation — texts most probably corrected by Keats himself — is more reliable than that found in the transcripts. It can easily be shown

¹ J. Stillinger, “Who Says What to Whom at the End of ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn?’”, *The Hoodwinking of Madeline and Other Essays on Keats's Poems* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1971), 167-173.

that punctuation in transcripts is often erratic. Therefore "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" forms one statement, a sort of aphorism spoken by the urn in its new role of "a friend to man". Apart from E. Wasserman, modern critics (counting among others Cleanth Brooks, C. M. Bowra, Douglas Bush, W. J. Bate and D. Perkins) attribute the last sentence to the urn addressing the readers, and not to the poet, as was the tradition (for instance J. Middleton Murry). We find it impossible to agree with those who see in the final words an address from the poet to the urn, or to the figures on the urn.¹ From our point of view, whether the last statement comes from the poet or from the urn itself does not seem to be a fundamental question. The problem is to know whether it is an enthusiastic conclusion, the solution of Keats's anxious quest, the concise motto expressing his faith. Our method of analysis has brought us along the downward slope of the pyramid and we cannot but expect to find in the concluding lines a more dispirited statement than has been judged most of the time. "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" has been exemplified by the urn itself. The work of art was able to rouse the poet's senses till he felt, through the powers "of the body overpowering the Mind" (12 March 1819, To the George Keatses; no. 159, II, 72), the apprehension of a higher truth than can be given by the consecutive reasoning of philosophy. The fever of the ecstatic insight "into the life of things", in turn, abated, and left behind a clearer, if colder, perception of formal beauty, and of the unanswerable questions it raises: "teasing" "as doth eternity". Logical truth has been given no answer in the "Ode". We still do not know "what men or gods are these?" (8). The "what" questions of stanza 1 remain as mysterious as the "who" and "why" questions of stanza 4. But in-between there has taken place an experience of full-blooded truth, a truth that opened on further questioning, and darker "passages", intimations of death. Reconciliation occurs through the medium of the perfection and beauty of the scene. The hackneyed statement "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" summarizes remarkably, in its concise twofold pattern, the aesthetic line structuring the whole poem. At the same time it reintroduces the ambivalent feeling created at the beginning by the oxymoronic phrases such as "still unravished bride" where the meaning can be sensed far better than explained.

As for the last thirteen words, they can now be interpreted as a disillusioned statement. "All", at the end of line 49 must be understood as meaning "the little you know on earth"; and the words "on earth" again insist on the restrictions imposed by mortality. And yet that limited "all" is very much, being the minimum necessary to man's survival. Greater things may be revealed hereafter.

¹ See references in J. Stillinger, *op. cit.*

*Verse, Fame and Beauty are intense indeed,
But Death intenser — Death is Life's high meed.*
(“Why did I laugh...”, 13-14)

We are back to the sonnet of 19 March and cannot overlook the comments that precede it: “Nothing ever becomes real till it is experienced — Even a Proverb is no proverb to you till your Life has illustrated it” (19 March 1819, To the George Keatses; no. 159, II, 81). Undoubtedly Keats had not rejected the conclusions drawn in his correspondence to Reynolds of spring 1818 where the parallel sentiment appears: “Axioms in philosophy are not axioms until they are proved upon our pulses” (3 May 1818, no. 80, I, 279). In the great “Odes” Keats reiterates in the form of works of art his convictions about human life, and man's capacity to know truth.

In the “Ode on a Grecian Urn”, as in the sonnet “Why did I laugh...?” the quest of the poet rises to the heights of a revelation of Paradise, and guesses at the pitfall of Death. Aesthetically he expresses his exploration through a complex imagery in the shape of upright and inverted pyramids — the upright one being the immediately perceptible one. Truth reigns at the apex of elation based on the experience of beauty; whereas beauty alone, insufficient as it is in its cold perfection, is the necessary medium. The little the poet gains in that way is very much, all important even, to make life bearable at all, till the intenser revelation of death. Thus we do understand the message of the “Ode”.

The introduction of a religious ceremony, with its reminder of the mortal condition of man produces an effect of expansion which contradicts in some way the downward trend of the imagery. As has already been observed about other poems built on the same up and down pattern, the second half of the “Ode” remains loaded with the weight of the previous experience. The upward flight does not allow the descent to bring the poet and the reader back to the initial level. The inquisitiveness of feelings is still there, but its nature has changed. The urn was an ambiguous object at the start: it was a “bride”, a “child”, a “historian”. Its relation to the poet and man was manifold and ill-defined as the bride was “still unravished”, the child a “foster-child”, and the historian called “sylvan”, assuming thus a close relationship of nature and time, in the shape perhaps of some Celtic bard of old! In the last stanza the relation has been cleared up; the urn has become simply “a friend to man”. At the same time the significance of its message has been enriched with the experiences of full-blooded elation and blissful ecstasy, but also with the lethal background of guesses at eternity. Hence the wide ambiguity of the last lines and their grim humourous tone full of disillusionment.

24. Interwoven Subtleties: "To a Nightingale"

Some years ago we showed how we saw the "Interplay of Structure and Meaning in the 'Ode to a Nightingale'." ¹ The scrutiny led to the conclusion that the "Ode" offered a subtle example of pyramidal structure in its imagery. We even thought its perfection surpassed that of the "Ode on a Grecian Urn", and still think so. Formally, it is a unique example of artistry among the great odes. Keats slightly altered the pattern of the ten-line stanza. He made line 8 of each a six-syllable line with three stresses only, thus freeing himself from the massive sonnet stanza tutelage, and inserting an element suggestive of the irregular warbling of the bird. On the other hand the regularity of the rhyme-pattern was kept with the utmost rigour throughout the poem. Indeed, we showed (op. cit.) that the seeming irregularities of stanza VI are only apparent, and that numerous examples from other poems by Keats allow its rhyme-scheme to be considered identical with the other seven parts of the poem.

Indeed the "Ode to a Nightingale" develops smoothly from beginning to end, and presents no such break as is found in "On a Grecian Urn"; after the ecstatic climax and the trance-like state it induces the poet and readers to start on the downward slope to a new apprehension of the passing world of mortality. The maenad-like enthusiasm, suddenly replaced by the stately procession, may be effective, but it upsets the balance. In this respect also the "Ode to a Nightingale" is a unique achievement. Stanza I ends with the intimation of the presence of the bird singing, unseen, "in full-throated ease" (10). The next stanza opens with: "O for a draught of vintage!..." (11). The image of the *full throat* emitting the entrancing notes and that of the full-flavoured *draught* relate the two sections closely and achieve that perfection of unobtrusive poetry Keats had been in search of so eagerly. The imagery dispenses the same feeling of total abandonment and deep relief: on the one hand, the fascinating song fills the shadows with its magic, on the other, the throat absorbs the thirst-quenching "vintage". The same organ

¹ F. Matthey, op. cit., ES, XLIX (1968), 303-317.

changes function, but proposes corresponding feelings of relish and liberation. From II to III the link is realized auditively through the repetition of "fade away" (20 and 21). The same devices are used in the other symmetrical part of the "Ode". The repetition of "forlorn" echoing from line 70 to 71 achieves the formal link between stanzas VII and VIII. It is true, as T. P. Harrison has noted¹, that both "fade away" and "forlorn" change senses in the process, which allows the normal development and movement of the poem. One passes from one theme to another through associations of ideas. Though more obvious than the throat image the transitions are just as subtle and rich in meaning. The passage from VI to VII also goes through an interplay of associated images and ideas. Stanza VI ends with: "To thy high requiem become a sod" (60), which summarizes the death-call imagery. It is a definite conclusion, and a desperate one. The next line enhances the existence of its very opposite: immortality. But the word "death" is still there, prominent in the very centre of the line: "Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird" (61). Deliberately, delicately and effectively the two stanzas are linked in spite of the different moods and themes they deal with. In close juxtaposition birth, death and immortality epitomize in a masterly way the numerous connotations and echoes awakened by the "Ode" in the reader's consciousness.

Now if we examine the transitions from stanza III to IV and from V to VI there is a difference. A gap seems to divide the despairing views about "Beauty" and "Love" which bring stanza III to its pessimistic end, and the impatient desire to escape:

Away! away! for I will fly to thee. (31)

No word sounds to raise an echo from line 30 to 31. The desire to join the nightingale "on the viewless wings of Poesy" follows logically the desperate clear-sighted apprehension of the reality of life; the poet's reaction is one of disgust and vigorous rejection. And yet for the careful listener "Away! away!" recalls the distant "Fade away" (20) and "Fade far away" (21) ten lines before. They are fleeting sounds, but audible ones. What was perhaps a faint haunting memory receives new strength from the immediately following "for I will fly to thee". Imaginary desire is translated by determination into reality: "already with thee".

Symmetrically the transition from line 50 to 51 is not obvious either. The colourful, fragrant, sensuous description of stanza V ends with a beautiful line that conjures up the rich colours of the sky-line, the warmth of the season and the busy hum of insects:

The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves. (50)

¹ T. P. Harrison, "Keats and a Nightingale," *ES*, XLI (1960), 353-359.

It is the final brush-stroke of a condensed picture of nature's endearing "sweets", the core of stanza V. The collection of pleasant sensations has been ordered so as to place the audible one last. And thus "murmurous" still drones in our ears when stanza VI starts:

Darkling I listen. (51)

As in the case of "away" echoing at the beginnings of stanzas III and IV, again the negative "I cannot see" (41) has prepared, ten lines earlier, an exchange of sensory relations with the positive "I listen" (51). Moreover "darkling" calls to mind the general atmosphere of "embalmed darkness" (43) which pervades the whole poem and endows every other sense with the power of vision. "Shadows numberless" (1), "forest dim" (20), "verdurous gloom" (40), "passing night" (63), plus the death images arising from them, weave a web that blurs the sight. The hearing faculty is stimulated, and the song of the bird rises from the background of obscurity.

It is, however, necessary to point out the difference in degree between the tie joining stanzas I and II for example, where the association of ideas is organic and more tangible, and that more evanescent, intimate feeling born of the two stanzas we are now considering. The poet does not listen to "the murmurous haunt of flies", but to the bird's song, turning into death's call. The reader does not for a moment mistake the one for the other.

We are now confronted with the middle section of the "Ode". Stanza V cannot be separated from IV: they are interknit; the last three lines of stanza IV run into the first three of the next part: "I cannot see..." (41), "But, in embalmed darkness, guess..." (43) follows logically "But here there is no light" (38). Thus the pyramidal pattern stands clearly before us. Two central stanzas form an indivisible whole, from the triple point of view of theme (the enthralling moment of bliss), logical link ("there is no light" [...] "I cannot see"), and imagery (sensations heightened by darkness). They are, to some extent, isolated. Three stanzas (I-III) precede; three (VI-VIII) follow. The symmetry is perfect.

Another element concurs to strengthening this formal analysis; the poet has chosen to mark the starting point of each part of the triptych by his own personal intrusion into the poem. He is there at the start, of course.

*My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My senses, as though of hemlock I had drunk. (1-2)*

Only after sharing his sufferings can the reader turn to the bird. The next two stanzas explore the realms of forgetfulness through the intoxication of wine and the consciousness of life's reality. But

at the start of the central section (IV-V) the poet rushes to the forefront again. His determination — "Away! away! for I will fly to thee" (31) — gives a new impulse to his dispirited meditation, which now rapidly develops into enthralling rapture; and we are made to understand that the happy instant of full bliss is realized in the intimate sensuous perception of the natural world pressing all around. It is a receptive trance; powerful passivity has been forced upon him by the negative "I cannot see". In stanza VI bliss does not exactly die out — "ecstasy" remains the key word of line 58, made more conspicuous by the short hexasyllabic verse. Yet the contrapuntal theme of death — "easeful" (52) though it is — shatters the perfect mood. Activity is resumed; the opening words of the stanza drive onward with a new pulsation: "Darkling I listen" (51). Lost among the shades the poet concentrates on his hearing faculty, and this perception does not plunge him back into some sensuous apprehension of the surrounding world, similar to that provoked by the blurring of his sight; paradoxically it rouses his cerebral activity. The consciousness of the blissful ecstasy leads to a desire for death, as if the experience could thus be turned into an immortal one. It is the recurring temptation, but threatens to turn into the mere revelation of nothing after death. The ecstasy is prolonged, but we feel it belongs more and more to the bird and less to the perplexed listener. The sequence described by Mrs. Miriam Allott¹ is here realized with both rigour and imagination. The search of a "swoon" or a "sleep" stamps its mark in the introduction to the poem; it should procure forgetfulness and bliss. The central meditation achieves it, and the concluding stanzas parallel the moods of the first ones, but with increased complexity, loading thus the poem with that "ore" Keats recommended in his famous letter to Shelley (16 Aug. 1820). It is a totally successful piece of artistry where the "high meed" of the trance stands out, poised above an admirable symmetry.

If we look into the imagery in detail, we discover stanzas IV and V hovering in bliss; the passage is filled with the transcendent beauty of the starry night, and the perceptions of earthly "essences". They produce an impression of deep communion with the whole universe in a vertical apprehension of interstellar space and the commonest elements of earthly scenery. The poet bathes in an atmosphere of deep satisfaction which coincides with the revelation of truth. His senses, in a state of extreme receptivity, absorb the most secret messages that speak of nature's perfection. The "things of beauty" are not abstract ideas; they are real, tangible, sensuous objects of delight; they summarize the freshness of spring and the promise of summer. Time is stopped and full life condensed in the enclosed space. The

¹ Miriam Allott, "'Isabella', 'The Eve of St Agnes' and 'Lamia,'" *John Keats: A Reassessment*, ed. K. Muir (Liverpool: Liverpool Univ. Press, 1958), 39-62.

author's unique experience is transmitted with unequalled power of suggestion.

The communion between the poet and the outer world is a moment of grace in which contrasting feelings intermingle. Just as time seems to stop and space to be reduced to a point by the suppression of vision, alternating bright and sombre images convey a sense of reconciliation of opposites. Bliss is made a complex whole where contradictions cease to destroy each other. The triumphal escape on Bacchus' chariot (32), the enthusiastic flight to the nightingale on "the viewless wings of Poesy" (33) is submitted to the slowing down of the decisions of reason: "the dull brain perplexes and retards" (34). From "Away! away! for I will fly to thee" (31) to "Already with thee" (35), the flight upward is sudden and quick. The enthralling moment supersedes the wishful desire. But immediately after comes the slower movement of "tender is the night" (35). Even here the tenderness, the intimacy of the soft beauty of the illuminated night sky is contradicted by the very presence of the bright celestial bodies (36-37). And in turn the happy congregation of moon and stars contrasts with the darkness which presses around the poet's solitude (38). Darkness, however, is the proper medium for the imagination working on the suggestions of sensuous perceptions. Though "there is no light" (38), space is filled with presence: the swift breath of the breeze (39), its rustle through the "verdurous glooms" (40) — note the touch of colour, and of mystery — the meandering paths made more silent and inviting by their carpet of moss (40). Flowers blow white, pink or purple blue, present though unseen (41); their fragrance penetrates to the soul, and, in spite of the atmosphere of "embalmed darkness" (43), discreet hues tint a chiaroscuro picture of soft "grass", prickly bushes and blossoming "fruit trees" (45). These are the adorning wreaths of the sacred temple of nature where the poet feels the spell and guesses at truth, and the "incense" (42) both heightens and softens perception. The goddess, spring, distributes (44) her gifts with profusion reconciling the rough virginity of hawthorn and the tender blush of fragile eglantine (46). The swoon-like disappearance of the timid violet and its burial under a cover of "leaves" (47) is made more acceptable by the promise of the future, symbolized in the musk-rose. Its colour and fragrantcy, "full of dewy wine" (49), recalls the merry intoxication of stanza II, and the figure of Bacchus (32). It also lures to activity the fertilizing insects which come with the warmth, the glory and the sweetness of a dying day in summer (50).

Paradoxically enough the nightingale seems to be forgotten. The bird's song was used, like the tempting fragrantcy of the musk-rose, to attract the poet's imagination, and act as a catalytic element to absorb him totally into the trance. Thus he can realize that complete acceptance and immediate participation in the existence of

natural objects. Here again we sense what Keats meant by "negative capability", that state of absolute receptivity which corresponds to the intensity expressed in Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*, "the sense faints picturing them" (III,8). The bird's song itself is no longer consciously heard. It was the vehicle to the moment of communion; having roused the senses to a sort of blending of perceptions it is submerged temporarily.

What immediately precedes and follows the "tender night" of happiness contrasts violently with its blissful mood. Both stanzas III and VI deal with the destructive night of death. The poet's own experience of life haunts the despairing lines of stanza III. Through them we inevitably recall his brother Tom's illness and death and guess at the young man's anxiety and feverish tension caused by his new love for Fanny Brawne. The seeming relief obtained by the evocation of "Beauty" (29) and "new Love" (30) is shattered by the negative "cannot keep her lustrous eye" and "[cannot] pine at them beyond tomorrow". "Fade away" (21) echoes the end of stanza II where the vanishing process was linked with the pleasant shades of the "forest dim" (20). Then it had nothing of the sinister meaning attached to darkness in other parts of the poem. Now "fade away" progresses through "fade far away" towards "dissolve" (21). The inviting mystery of the "forest dim" evolves towards the dangerous temptation of annihilation. The escape will come through the determination of imagination to join the bird "on the viewless wings of Poesy".

On the other side of the blissful ecstasy, death also reigns. It has become through the magic filter of participation in the realm of nature — a subtle attraction hard to resist, were it not for the clear foresight of its annihilating force. Ecstatic death is a tempting hope; but the empathic communion with beauty on earth has revealed an important truth: death made void and vain by the loss of sensations. It cannot be "Life's high meed" to become "a sod" (60).

Symmetrically again and one step farther on either side of the centre of the "Ode", stanzas II and VII deal with two thematic pendants: evasion, escape. Before thinking of death, evasion from the harsh actuality of life could be imagined through the artificial paradise of intoxicating wine, and its accompaniment of merry-making, singing and dancing. "Sunburnt mirth" (14) exults in the clear poetry of the South. The attraction of the Mediterranean literary tradition prepares the allusions of stanza VII. Indeed, after the dismissal of death, as no solution, at the end of stanza VI, the poet still remembers the quality of the central inspiring moment: it is the escape towards immortality. The voice of inspiration, as it comes from the bird, was heard in former days, has been heard far and wide, as Keats succeeds in summarizing in eight wonderful lines. All the sources of inspiration of our western civilization are there:

"emperor and clown" (64) suggests the classical world reinterpreted by the Elizabethan dramatists; "Ruth" (66) concentrates in her character and figure all the poesy of the biblical tradition; "faery lands" contains the magic of popular and Arthurian legends of the Middle Ages, the northern sagas and the oriental tales of the Arabian nights as well. This interpretation is supported by the important digression of Keats's journal-letter (21 April 1819), where he speaks to George of "the use of the world", which is not only a "vale of tears" but a "vale of soul-making". The sense of immortality in man leads "one part of the human species" to "have their carved Jupiter"; another part "the palpable and named Mediator and saviour, their Christ their Oromanes and their Vishnu" (no. 159, II, 103).

This passage helps to clarify the complete meaning of the word "forlorn" which echoes from the end of stanza VII to the beginning of VIII. The "faery lands forlorn" of line 70 appear as far away countries, remote in space and time, attached to dreams of eastern magic, or to the legendary world of romance. Thinking of the mastery of form Keats had now achieved in relatively short poems through the evolution of the early months of 1819, it is not out of place to guess that in "forlorn" there is the meaning of *abandoned*, relating to the tradition of mediaeval tales with their profusion, their lack of restraint or strict architecture; that was to be put aside, at least temporarily. *Abandoned* is the prominent meaning of the sad exclamatory "forlorn" that opens the last stanza. The poet is left alone; the bird and its song have lost their entrancing power of attraction. The painful separation from the inspiring source is accomplished.

What remains in the concluding lines of stanza VIII is the ambiguous atmosphere that existed at the very beginning, when pleasure and pain were blended intimately:

*My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense... (1-2)*

*'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thine happiness. (5-6)*

This painful excess of joy is precisely the cause of the complex development of themes and images. Here also can be found an echo of the sonnet we could not help linking with "On a Grecian Urn".

*Heart! Thou and I are here sad and alone
I say, why did I laugh?*

("Why did I laugh...", 5-6)

And the symmetrical equivalent to the first lines sounds in the hesitation, the undecided ambiguous atmosphere of the very last lines:

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

A memory of the blissful moment is still hovering: not only about the peaceful elements of landscape enumerated there, but also in the poet's mind. Unwilling to accept the return to full reality, abandoned by the "deceiving elf" of passing inspiration, Keats ends on an unanswered question. At the same time he coins the exact and necessary balance of imagery with the beginning of the "Ode".

In fact both stanzas I and VII are divided into two practically equal parts, and this is done by the use of words suggesting in each case a separate complex of images. There is an accumulation of disquieting allusions in the first lines: "ached", "drowsy numbness pains" (1), "hemlock" (2), "dull opiate", "emptied... to the drains" (3), "Lethe-wards", "sunk" (4), "envy" (5). The imagery suddenly develops into a series of pleasant suggestions: "happy lot" (5), "too happy in thine happiness" (6), "light-winged Dryad" (7), "melodious plot" (8), "beechen green", "shadows numberless" (9), "singest of summer", "full-throated ease" (10). Line 5 in the middle marks the change as it includes both "envy" and "happy lot".

The same sequence, not exactly in the same spirit of course, recurs in the last stanza. One half bathes in a regretful mood: "forlorn" (71), "toll", "back from thee" (72), "adieu", "cheat" (73), "deceiving elf" (74), "adieu! adieu! the plaintive anthem fades" (75). And yet the "elf" (74), the "anthem" (75) (which includes the meaning of song of praise), and further on the "meadow" the "still stream" (76), the "hill-side" (77), the "valley-glade" (78) recall the happy mood of the ecstatic moment; the atmosphere, naturally enough, bears the stamp of the indelible deceptive experience; hence the last lines with their pervading melancholy: "Vision", "waking dream". The words suggest respectively the blinding intuition of truth and the illusion of momentary intoxication. So the last words of the poem — "Do I wake or sleep?" (80) — actually express the aching question of the very nature of the poet's experience; they sum up the whole interplay of images throughout the "Ode". The significant experience of the start, the double-sided impression made by the nightingale's song, called for analysis and development. The process ends in an irresolute state of mind; the communion with the world is possible, but it is transitory, and so desirable that such momentary, but perfect reconciliation cannot be discarded so quickly and easily; neither can its magic supernatural influence be ignored. Hence the twofold feeling of man's "forked" nature: the necessity to awaken and the desire to remain in the swoon of ecstasy.

What must not be overlooked is the part played by the bird's song. Like Ariadne's guiding thread it circuits throughout the "Ode", disappearing in the central passage as said above, to make room for

swooning away, which the dissolving elements of reality turn towards the depths and pangs of morbid experience. In consequence there follows the liberation of stanza IV and its imaginary flight into a sky peopled with legendary deities, while the surrounding darkness becomes alive with the refined intoxication of "sensations". Stanza VI is a fall indeed, until the temptation of "easeful Death" (52) loses its spell with the consciousness of the loss of all perceptions. "I can imagine [...] happiness carried to an extreme — but what must it end in? — Death" (no. 159, II, 101). The "Ode" illustrates it totally. A belief in immortality drags the poet up out of the pit of despair, and seems to encourage new explorations of the world of imagination, even though the spell of "magic casements" (69) may open on "perilous seas" (70). And just as an actual nightingale's song follows ascending and descending variations we are brought back to the ambiguous necessity of accepting a world of anxious questioning. A mere pyramidal structure would have been too simple a device for the high complexity of meaning enclosed in this great work of art. The skilful interweaving of up and downward movements into the whole fabric of the "Ode" makes it a matchless piece of controlled mastery without impairing the high quality of inspiration.

25. Pregnant Perfection: "To Autumn"

After the achievement of the "Ode to a Nightingale" it seems impossible that the poet should repeat such a high feat of craftsmanship and inspiration. And yet the last of the printed "Odes", "To Autumn", also reaches perfection. Keats modifies the form of the stanza once again; instead of making it lighter, as was the case in "To a Nightingale", he uses, on the contrary, full iambic pentameters and adds another similar line, making the unit more weighty, as if the swelling "of the gourd" had to pass into the formal pattern of the poem. The main features of the ode-stanza are retained. In "To Autumn" each starts with a Shakespearian quatrain and is followed by the basic interplay of three rhymes found in the Petrarchan sonnet. But here instead of a sestet, we have a septet where one rhyme appears three times. It is worth noting that all three stanzas follow the *cde* pattern and end with the *e* rhyme. In the interval we find *dec* for stanza I, and *cdd* for the other two. It is a very slight variation which maintains a sort of couplet just before the closing verse. Variety within the limits of secure habits, already put to the test, again marks the choice of the poet; the evolution has progressed step by step, has produced masterpieces, and the author's selection for publication shows his awareness of the fact. What corresponded to the pattern leading to an apprehension of truth was retained, the rest left as material for future inspiration.

"To Autumn" is limited to three stanzas only, and lacks any wide movement to compare with "To a Nightingale". Keats seems to have concentrated on the moment of revelation, so that the "Ode" corresponds to the central part of the last odes we have described. It is just as if the core experience of intimate contact with reality through the antennae of the senses was enough and offered the only and sufficient opening of our mortal condition towards a guess at truth. There is no anguish or despair from which to climb up to some summit of elation. All concentrates on a total apprehension of truth through sensations, as if it were "all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know"! Reflection and thought are limited to a minimum. Only at the beginning of stanza III does there appear a rhetorical question betraying some distrust and the need for a reasonable answer:

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they? (28)

It is immediately dismissed in the next line: "Think not of them" (24). And the poet abandons himself to the sense of hearing in order to get at more profound truths.

Still, the triptych we have here retains something of the pyramid that had become Keats's pattern of ordering efficiently the imagery of his poems. The composition in three parts places the image of the season in the middle. There Autumn has become a deity, a statuesque figure endowed with the serene authority of attitude and gesture of some mythological character. Her "soft-lifted" hair (15), her head nobly loaded, and crowned, with ears of corn (19-20) compares with the Greek tradition of goddesses. She reigns over autumnal activities, and her "wise passiveness" once again recalls the sovereign hovering of the poet's mind in the moments of blissful trance. The overpowering quality of drowsiness that pervades that central stanza is due to the accumulation of static imagery. Autumn enjoys the fulfilment of the natural cycle of the year and the process of maturation. Amid her "store" (12), "on a granary floor" (14) or some "half-reap'd furrow" (16), crossing "a brook" (20) or "by a cyder-press" (22), she is there, lost in the delight of plenty pouring in from all parts, absorbed in the pleasure of abundance deprived of toil and sweat. She is "sitting careless" (14), or "sound asleep" (16), "drows'd with the fume of poppies" (17)! She is seen with a "hook" in her band; but she is not "over the sickle bending". The happy "Solitary Reaper" of Wordsworth is shown in the full activity of a farm lass. Keats's figure "Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers" (18). Thus she bathes in the beauty of the season and lives to the full its inward revelation of total goodness. She herself turns into a fine picture of an idealized gleaner sketched when crossing a "brook" (20), erect with her load of sheaf well-balanced on her head. She has nothing of a miserable woman bending over the stubble. The vision is transmuted into a sphere where nothing counts, but the plentiful bounty of nature and time; a time that is alchemized into near eternity by her endless and "patient" watch (21) by the "cyder-press" (21). "The last oozy hours by hours" (22) slow down the rhythm of time and season till it seems to reach the limits of some never-ending present.

Calm enjoyment, total delight also "oozes" from the quiet atmosphere of Winchester, the country city where Keats had found a refuge at the time; the mood of the stanza suits the idle life of the streets and country lanes, and a certain exhaustion of the poet after the busy summer of 1819. On 24 August he comments in a letter to J. H. Reynolds: "I feel my Body too weak to support me to the height; I am obliged continually to check myself and strive to be nothing" (no. 185, II, 147). Once more he is hinting at the passivity leading to an absorption of sensations; once more he is trying to control the feverish passions of his temper. And the control is so

much more necessary as that "state of excitement" is "the only state for the best sort of Poetry" (*ibid.*). "What can I say but what I feel?" (*ibid.*) Hence the anxious search for the deepest sort of feeling. Keats's statement may sound very paradoxical indeed; for it seems to place him at the centre of a poem, from which he appears precisely to be absent. But he is the medium through which poetry comes to existence. The quality of the feeling and its intensity justify the process. "Negative capability" comes first, and what he feels will set the imagination working on the sensuous models of real life. The source of Keats's poetic inspiration is based more and more willingly on an entire abandonment to sensory perceptions of the outer world.

The working of the senses towards a revelation of the supreme qualities of autumn is given in the two symmetrical panels of the triptych. Stanza I revels in the enumeration of full, round shapes, pleasant to the eyes, suggestive of fragrant, delicious maturity. They invite the hand to finger the mellowness and rich weight of appetizing fruits. The "mists" (1) of the season take away the sharpness of shapes and make them more inviting. An internal complicity with the process of maturation links the poet and the fructifying couple — the sun and his "close bosom-friend" (2). The ripening is felt as a loading (3), a filling (6), a "swelling" (7); the movement goes from the inside out. But it also reaches to the "core" (6) of "apples" (5) and "gourds" (7), and to the "sweet kernel" (8) of "hazel shells" (7). The "conspiracy" (3) of the sun-season couple in bringing nature to full "ripeness" (6) suggests a time process starting in the past. Spring is present in the distance, through the "budding" of flowers (8) and the fertilizing presence of "bees" (9). Summer is there too, with its warmth (10) and luxurious suggestions of prolonged, indolent satiety. We also feel "warm days will never cease" (10).

Time passes slowly throughout the stanza, giving it the necessary rhythm and progression. It is implicit in the change of the seasons that preside over the "maturing" evolution. The divine-like process is seen as something almost divine, an etherealized mystery and a blessing (3) which gives free play to the delight of all the senses. Touch is active everywhere, from the testing of "mellow fruitfulness" (1) to the "clammy cells" of line 11. The tenderness of outward surfaces (skin of the fruit and moss of "cottage-trees" (5) and plumpness (7) of the pulp is simply irresistible. Sight caresses the curving lines evoked by the different varieties of fruit, and "the vines that round the thatch-eves run" (4). Even the word "bosom" (2) fits the imagery. Taste and smell are not forgotten in the enumeration of fruit or flowers. And the impression of plenty is summarized in the "o'er-brimmed" of the last line. There is even a suggestion of humming attached to the presence of the "bees" (9). This perception of the ear is carried on through the second stanza where "the

winnowing wind" (15) and the warbling "brook" (20) maintain a remembrance of faint motion and noise in the spell of ecstasy, prolonged in a very delicate way by the hardly perceptible "oozings" from the cider press (22).

But the poet has preserved the sense of hearing for the third stanza where he suddenly listens for "the songs of Spring" (23). Music runs through time; Wordsworth (in his "Solitary Reaper") also made it a powerful waker of recollection and dreams in "the bliss of solitude". It creates a unity in the "Ode to a Nightingale", where the words qualifying the song become more numerous towards the end — when paradoxically the melody itself fades! Here the music simply fills stanza III. As the "music" (24) of Autumn, it assumes a certain melancholy and thus, in a very subtle way, the downward movement answers the growth of maturity. Music is made of the "wailful choir" of "small gnats" (27), of the water flowing over the "river shallows" (28), the breaths of "light wind" (29), the bleating of "lambs" (30). Crickets "sing" (31), "the red-breast whistles" (32);

And gathering swallows twitter in the skies. (33)

The musical images press closer and closer towards the end, and the last ones unexpectedly, perhaps, sound more and more lively. As in the greater "Odes" the complexity of the poem increases after the core vision and revelation. There is a sudden break; melancholy, undoubtedly, invades the vision. "Where are the songs of Spring?" (23) expresses regret and could turn to despondency. "Think not of them" (24) stops the process, but is no answer. And the "barred clouds" (25), "the stubble plains" (26), the mourning of the "wailful choir" (27), the bleating of "full-grown lambs" (30) are no signs of joy and life. The "dying day" of line 25, in spite of its "soft" passing away points toward mortality and the term of the tidal time process that slows down to near eternity in stanza II. But sensations have revealed the central vision, and made the time evolution more complex. If autumnal abundance hints at past seasons, it is remarkable that Summer is named first, just before the impressive figure of the presiding goddess appears standing "amid [her] store", whereas Spring is mentioned in the line that immediately follows stanza II. Thus Autumn reigns in the middle, profiting by Summer's maturing warmth, and leading, as it were, to a futurity of Spring over a blank of Winter. Spring is remembered, which awakes the nostalgia; but the new birth is sensed through the culmination of ripeness; hence the new complexity of stanza III in which opposites of depression and elation appear in close connection.

The nostalgia for the "songs of Spring" (23) is checked by the recognition of the "music" of Autumn (24). The impending menace

of "barred clouds" (25) vanishes in the blooming serenity of a "soft-dying day" (25), though the suggestion of death lingers behind. The sterility of "stubble-plains" turns to chaste virginity ("rosy hue", 26) at the touch of the last rays of the sun. The cloud of humming insects is "borne aloft" (28) to sink again, just as the "light wind" both "lives and dies" (29). The "lambs" of spring are now "full-grown" (30) and their whining call now sounds "loud" among echoing hills. The "gathering swallows" of line 33 are evocative of departure, and seem to symbolize sadly the inevitable end and death of the luxuries of the year. But a contrapuntal movement occurs in the last lines of the poem that suddenly widens the prospect and rushes towards a feeling of elation into limitless space. From the "hedge" (31) a song invites us into a "garden-croft" where a whistling and "treble soft" (32) can be heard; and then the pitch heightens tremendously into the twittering of swallows in the sky. The last line evokes both departure and coming back, death and new birth of the year; the whirling motion takes its flight upwards into wide and open space, as if the limited frontiers of the "billy bourn" (30) and "garden croft" had suddenly exploded from the internal pressure of the vision of eternal truth. The downward movement exists in the third panel of the triptych, but it is strongly counter-balanced by the central experience and revelation of a profound permanence; it ends on a hopeful note. The ambivalent surprise of the last line corresponds to a similar feeling in line 1 of the poem where the "mists" of the season could not but be tinted with some sadness and melancholy.

In conclusion the passage from the "luxuries" and "sensations" of the first part to the mythic vision of the second, and the complex acceptance of the third re-enacts the main symmetries and patterns of the 1819 poems. But never had the imagery been so dense. Our study could make use of practically every verb, adjective or noun in an interplay of connotations that may well evade complete analysis for ever. Subtle themes in undertones run from one end to the other and weave the three isolated panels into one whole: from the immobility and the closed-in atmosphere of the "mists" we pass to the whirling flight of the "swallows" into free "skies"; from the silence of the maturing process to the high-pitched twittering; from Summer to a renewal of Spring; from the "luxuries" of stanza 1 to the auditive festival of stanza III. In fact after the central vision and communion with truth, the experience of the senses can be repeated in "a finer tone". It prevents the morbid remembrance of mortality from becoming all powerful. "To Autumn" appears a poem practically limited to the central vision; it evolves between less distant extremes than the other "Odes", and shows Keats focusing his attention on that all important moment of receptive communion with the tangible world.

PART V

Towards New Attitudes
and Forms

26. Disintegrating Irony: "Lamia"

When the 1820 publication of his poems was in preparation, Keats chose to place one of his latest works first in the collection. Therefore the book opens with "Lamia"; and this is a sign of the importance given by the poet to this tale which must be examined in the light of what he was writing to Bailey: "One of my Ambitions is to make as great a revolution in modern dramatic writing as Kean has done in acting — another to upset the drawling of the blue stocking literary world — if in the course of a few years I do these two things I ought to die content" (14 August 1819, no. 181, II, 139). The difference in tone that is found in "Lamia", and has been observed by all critics, may well be interpreted as the starting point of that reaction against "the drawling of the blue stocking literary world". The choice of rapid and flippant couplets to tell the story has been attributed to the influence of Dryden's poetry.¹ It is certain that the spirit displayed in the poetical tale shows a sort of detachment from the subject which is new on the part of the poet. Keats looks at his heroes from the outside; and their adventures are observed sympathetically but critically, with an irony that did not exist in the "Eve of St Agnes". At times the tale takes on a sort of grotesque garb unknown before in Keats's poems, as when the serpentine Lamia is described in all her variegated gloss, "a gordian shape of dazzling hue", in which we suddenly discover "a woman's mouth with all its pearls complete" (60). It is not possible to take such incongruous figure too seriously. The very first lines also bathe in the mood of the mock epic poetry.

*Upon a time, before the faery broods
Drove Nymph and Satyr from the prosperous woods,
Before King Oberon's bright diadem,
Sceptre, and mantle, clasp'd with dewy gem,
Frighted away the Dryads and the Fawns
From rushes green, and brakes, and cowslip's lawns,
The ever-smitten Hermes empty left
His golden throne, bent warm an amorous theft. (1-8)*

¹ W. J. Bate, *John Keats* (Oxford: O. U. P., 1967), 546-547.

There is a light-heartedness in the treatment of themes that used to be very dear to Keats which surprises. Western legends and Mediterranean mythology sound like splendid jokes, pregnant with amusing possibilities for the poet. Keats used to take the gods and goddesses of poetry and nature far more seriously; it is difficult to imagine him addressing his prayer for inspiration to the "ever-smitten Hermes" starting on a search for some "amorous theft", with the detachment of some XVIIIth century rake. The god's thwarted desire is another pleasant satire on the apparent might of man-imagined deities.

In fact what is never denied throughout the poem is a certain view of the woman character in *Lamia*. Her desire is to be made a real woman; but she has the power of a witch. She cannot get rid of her connection with the serpent kind, which of course relates her strongly to the biblical tradition. She is irresistible temptation, so Lycius is immediately involved in the deepest passion. She transforms the lover's existence and makes the material world of every day life a dream. She is happiness of the most dangerous sort, because of her egotism which causes her lover to lose all individual freedom. And even though, as a woman, she disappears in the end, the woman's character and its serpent qualities of fascination and attraction remain the immortal truth of the tale. Gods and men alike are victims and must submit. One power only is capable of defeating the spell: it is cold philosophy which alone can see through the essence of the beloved to the risk of destroying love itself. With these considerations we are back to Keats's intention of upsetting "the drawing of the blue stocking literary world". How can one explain Keats's sudden cynicism tolling the death of romantic love?

The correspondence of the early summer months of 1819 repeatedly shows his desire to reorganize his life in order to solve his growing money troubles by taking up some rational and rewarding occupation, to escape from town life and the disturbing presence of too many friends calling on him (see letters to Sarah Jeffrey, 31 May and 9 June, and to Fanny Keats, 9 June and 17 June). However the rational notion of finding "a Situation with an Apothecary" or sailing on an Indiaman rapidly vanished under the pressure of his own inward call and the encouragement of his friends. The inward division between rational and irrational decisions appears less clear when matters of heart are concerned. But it is not impossible to guess at the troublesome background of Keats's divided sentimental life at the time.

Indeed it seems to us that "*Lamia*" more than any previous work of Keats reflects the complexity of feelings that were assaulting his heart. His need for some woman's affection has already been discussed, and it is clear that since the time (18 Dec. 1818) when he gave George and Georgiana a portrait of Miss Brawne in one

of his journal-letters, the two young people had become better acquainted and were now deeply in love. So much so that, after six months had elapsed, the young man felt he must do something about it, and could not help contemplating marriage. But Keats recoiled; family life he considered as the inevitable end of his ambition. And how could he cope with the necessity of earning a living when he could not even support himself! when the little he could gather from his guardian had been lent generously, but thoughtlessly to a number of friends who, apparently, were in no hurry to send borrowed sums back, or were simply incapable of doing so! The sudden decision of Keats to try and find a place in the country where to live in retirement seems to be an attempt to solve both the financial and the sentimental situations: cheap board and lodging, and an end to the overpowering presence of Fanny Brawne. We do not mean to say that the girl pestered him and invaded his privacy; we rather think that Keats could not bear feeling her so near, while he himself was absorbed in his work by will and necessity. In the struggle of heart and reason, reason decided that he should go away, and never come back unless he was in a situation to make their love materially possible. "As I told you a day or two before I left Hampstead, I will never return to London if my Fate does not turn up Pam or at least a Court-Card" (1 July 1819, To Fanny Brawne; no. 172, II, 123). It is a wilful separation, meant to re-instate peace and calm in the poet's heart. In fact it simply inflamed his imagination, and the strange, spiteful attitude he assumed concerning Bailey's marriage (14 August 1819, To Bailey, no. 181) or Haslam's fiancée (17 September 1819, To the George Keatses, no. 199), and the cruel tone of his passionate correspondence with Fanny Brawne betray the interior divorce and turmoil of feelings tearing his heart to pieces: "Ask yourself my love whether you are not very cruel to have so entrammelled me, so destroyed my freedom" (ibid., no. 172, II, 123). The letters have surprised and scandalized; they should not. They are the true picture of overwhelming love confronted with the decisions of reason and their seeming wisdom. To Sarah Jeffrey he had written on 31 May: "I have the choice as it were of two Poisons (yet I ought not to call this a Poison) the one is voyaging to and from India for a few years; the other is leading a fevrous life alone with Poetry" (no. 164, II, 112-3). The alternative left no room for love. But the decision did not suppress the feelings that were brewing in his heart, and a spleen invaded the poet as soon as he found himself settled in the Isle of Wight: "I am glad I had not an opportunity of sending off a Letter which I wrote for you on Tuesday night — 'twas too much like one out of Ro[u]sseau's Heloise. I am more reasonable this morning. The morning is the only proper time for me to write to a beautiful Girl whom I love so much: for at night, when the lonely

day has closed, and the lonely, silent unmusical Chamber is waiting to receive me as into a Sepulchre, then believe me my passion gets entirely the sway, then I would not have you see those Rapsodies which I once thought it impossible I should ever give way to, and which I have often laughed at in another, for fear you should either [think me] too unhappy or perhaps a little mad" (1 July 1819, no. 172, II, 122). The letters to Fanny Brawne swarm with such distress, and show the young man torn between his irrepressible love and his efforts at modelling a life in accordance with the advice of his reason. "Man is originally 'a poor forked creature'" (no. 159, II, 101) he had quoted in the April journal-letter. He was experiencing it more and more profoundly.

"Lamia" translates into poetic terms the drama of man divided between love which requires abandonment and a clear perception of passion which cannot but kill it. Lycius and Apollonius are the two aspects of man's problem when confronted with the woman character. On the one hand he would like "a brighter word than bright, a fairer word than fair" (1 July 1819, no. 172, II, 123) to speak of his love; on the other he cannot admit that his freedom be so impaired. As to the woman character, it is interesting to note that Keats's picture in "Lamia" is tinted with the reminiscence of Milton's Eve in *Paradise Lost*. The link of Eve and the serpent is biblical tradition. But Milton gave epic dimension to the parental relation of Satan and Sin. Satan gives birth to Sin, "the Snake Sorceress", who

... seemd Woman to the waste, and fair,
But ended foul in many a scaly fould.¹

Lamia is very much the woman with the Miltonian background of "snaky sorceress" attached to the tradition of the fall. In *Paradise Lost* Eve discovers her own beauty in a pool of clear water before she meets with Adam. Just the same Lamia, metamorphosed into a real woman, delights in her own beauty:

There she stood

...
*Fair, on a sloping green of mossy tread,
By a clear pool, wherein she passioned
To see herself... (I, 179, 181-3)*

Milton's Eve approaches Adam not "uninformd"

*Of nuptial Sanctitie and marriage Rites.*²

¹ Milton, *P. L.*, II, 724; II, 650-651.

² *ibid.*, VIII, 486-487.

Lamia is described as

*A virgin purest lipp'd, yet in the lore
Of love deep learned to the red heart's core.* (I, 189-190)

The flaw in the woman character, therefore, is twofold; there is her narcissism, her consciousness of superior entrancing beauty, and her disquieting relation with sin, and these spring from her intimate connection with the serpent.

Paradise Lost also shows Eve disregarding the use of consecutive reasoning; it does not seem to be one of her attributes.

*So spake our Sire, and by his countenance seem'd
Entring on studious thoughts abstruse; which Eve
Perceiving...
Rose, and went forth among her Fruits and Flours.*¹

Lamia also evades problems:

*Lycius, perplex'd at words so blind and blank,
Made close inquiry; from whose touch she shrank,
Feigning a sleep.* (II, 102-4)

She is all seduction and enjoyment of sensations, just like Milton's Eve. Therefore the presence of Apollonius, with his power of reason that can pierce her through terrifies her.

Keats at the time seems to embody the characters of both Lycius and Apollonius: eager for love as he had never been and exerting his strength to resist giving away his liberty before realizing his dream of fame: hence the objective narration and the irony felt in the poem. The letters show how clear-sighted he was concerning his own plight; he put much of the situation into "Lamia", and as a defence against his self-imposed loneliness, looked at it with a grim smile. The happiness of his friends yielding to the call of love was answered with biting remarks that betray a jealous heart; Haslam and his future wife become "a pattern of Lovers". A picture of the "young woman" suggests the comment: "I think she is, though not very cunning, too cunning for him", and the couple inspires ridicule:

*Pensive they sit, and roll their languid eyes
Nibble their toasts, and cool their tea with sighs,
Or else forget the purpose of the night
Forget their tea — forget their appetite.*
(17 September 1819, To the George Keatses; no. 199, II, 187-8)

¹ Milton, *P. L.*, VIII, 39-41, 44.

The same fierce humour and wit was going to develop in "The Cap and Bells" whose subtitle, "The Jealousies", reveals the poet's mood during the summer of 1819.

Jealousy, indeed, is linked with the flaw in the woman character; it regularly invades the letters to Fanny Brawne. And the tragedy concocted by Brown and Keats during the summer months, *Otho the Great*, also treats of jealousy at the court of a meek, generous and victorious king. All the activities of the poet seem now centred on the problem of love, which is closely linked to, but in a way has replaced, that of beauty. If intimations of truth could be discovered through beauty, could truth be also experienced through love, woman's character being what it is? "Lamia" tends to explore the field and tries to avoid complete self-destruction by placing the author in the situation of assuming an objective point of view; reinforced perhaps by the parallel effort of writing a dramatic work. "Shakespeare and the [P]aradise Lost every day become greater wonders to me" (14 Aug. 1918, To Bailey; no. 181, II, 139); both models fulfil precisely conditions of objectivity and detachment.

Now if "Lamia" treads on a new path in the course of Keats's evolution, and introduces a different tone and general spirit, does it point to some new structure in composition, and does the imagery help to trace it? The poem is made up of two unequal parts (397 and 311 lines respectively). At the beginning of Part I, the first three paragraphs form a separate episode (145 lines altogether). It is an introduction to the tale establishing the supernatural origin of Lamia and the immortality of the serpent in the woman character. The rest consists of a long passage (150 lines), preceded and followed by three briefer groups of verse very similar quantitatively (twenty-five, fourteen, fifteen; and twelve, sixteen, twenty lines). Therefore it could be concluded that the Lamia-Lycius story of part I obeys a sort of symmetry comparable with what we have met repeatedly in this study.

The second half of the poem was written later, after an interruption due to Keats's intense work in order to complete *Otho the Great*. It is also made up of ten sections of unequal length. Again the first group of three paragraphs (fifteen, ninety, forty lines) seem to form a separate whole of 145 lines. It deals with the outward world intruding into the lovers' bliss and causing Lycius to desire the public consecration of his love. It ends when all is ready for the feast.

*Approving all, she faded at self-will,
And shut the chamber up, close, hush'd and still,
Complete and ready for the revels rude,
When dreadful guests would come to spoil her solitude.*

II, 142-145)

Then the story takes a new turn; Apollonius appears on the threshold, uninvited; and the drama grows tense through six short sections till it unfolds and rushes to its fatal end in the final longer episode (seventy-three lines). It is not possible to discover a symmetry in these various passages. Apart from the introductory episodes of both parts of the poem, there are no formal features of composition that stand out clearly. To some extent, then, both parts of the poem run parallel. Both start with a 145-line episode establishing Lamia's supernatural origin on the one hand, and Lycius' worldly attachment on the other. Both aspects condition the ensuing developments of each part.

Now if we turn towards the general mood of the story supported by the imagery, it is immediately evident that the bliss created by Lycius and Lamia's love spans from part I to part II, and fills the central portion of the whole poem. Therefore the evolution starts with the secondary theme of Hermes' conquest of the nymph; then the metamorphosis of Lamia places the subject in its human context. Her capture of Lycius' attention and heart, their life of luxury in Corinth raises the whole atmosphere to an intensity that should be the apex of elation. But the pressure and realities of the world interfere with bliss, and finally Apollonius' presence breaks the spell and the poem reaches its sad conclusion. On the whole the poem follows the structure described as the main trend of Keats's 1819 poems. But in detail things do not appear as clearly; the rise and fall elements are blended in a way that creates the condition for the new outlook of objective irony that the poet projects on his heroes.

Hermes' successful expedition draws a downward curve from Olympus to the vales of Crete, while to all appearances his quest takes a favourable turn; he is not only "winning near the goal", he experiences the full accomplishment of sensual pleasures. After a last recoiling movement, the nymph,

*... like new flowers at morning song of bees,
Bloom'd, and gave up her honey to the lees.* (I, 142-143)

We cannot forget either that Hermes, as a messenger of the gods, belongs at once to the upper and lower worlds. The poet calls him "star of Lethe" (I, 81), which groups both the attributes of heaven and hell. The ambiguity as to the direction pointed at by the imagery remains throughout the poem. Lycius, though intoxicated by his sudden love for Lamia, experiences an unexpected fit that brings him to death's door when he hears the haughty refusal of his beautiful companion to "roam"

*"Over these hills and vales, where no joy is, —
Empty of immortality and bliss."* (I, 276-278)

In fact her protests are mere showing off on the part of the cruel lady because her divine character has not procured the fulfilment of her desires. Joy does not exist away from the real sensations of this world. Hermes had to leave the heights of Elysium to find a Nymph to fondle, the Nymph he has been dreaming of; and it is only in the valleys and woods or "on the shores of Crete" (I, 12) that the tangible delights of love can be experienced: "It was no dream" (I, 126). The poet adds — but it must be understood in the light of the new irony that creeps into "Lamia" —

*... or say a dream it was,
Real are the dreams of Gods, and smoothly pass
Their pleasures in a long immortal dream.* (I, 126-128)

If after all it is a dream, it is simply because everything that appertains to the gods is a dream, and so is immortality. This was established in the very first lines of the poem. Gods are pleasant characters that generations push aside and replace; their immortality depends on man's faithfulness to them. It is on earth that Hermes rouses the Nymph to "warmth" (I, 141). She is rushed blooming "like new flowers at morning song of bees" (I, 142) giving up "her honey to the lees" (I, 143), "into the green-recessed woods" (I, 144). "Nor grew they pale, as mortal lovers do" (I, 145): the setting is fully in reality. The imagery awakens the senses to all the delights of colours, sounds, taste, fragranciness and hidden caresses. And if the couple is left to enjoy it without end, it is simply because they are part of the commonplaces of mythology and are granted the sort of immortality that goes with it.

Lamia must be made a woman in order to enjoy love. It is her ardent wish from the first.

*"When from this wreathed tomb shall I awake!
When move in a sweet body fit for life,
And love, and pleasure, and the ruddy strife
Of hearts and lips!"* (I, 38-41)

In spite of her mysterious powers that allow her to bargain with a powerful god, her pursuit is to become a real woman, in whose body alone will be given her the full delight of her dreams. This is very different from what we had been accustomed to. Instead of repeated efforts to fly up into some idealized high sphere away from reality, Keats turns to reality itself, out of which it is no use trying to escape. The trance used to be produced by a sublimation of the perceptions of the senses roused to excess. Why not take the same impressions at their face value? In that light we may understand the sentence Keats wrote to Reynolds just when he had finished the first part of "Lamia" (11 July 1819, no. 175, II, 128): "I have of late been

moulting: not for fresh feathers and wrings: they are gone, and in their stead I hope to have a pair of sublunary legs. I have altered, not from a Chrysalis into a butterfly, but the Contrary having two little loopholes, whence I may look out into the stage of the world". Lamia also does not plead for a higher status among immortals, but her sole aim is to become as real a woman as possible. When she baits Lycius by playing the superior being —

*"Alas! poor youth,
What taste of purer air hast thou to soothe
My essence?"* (I, 281-3)

— she nearly loses her lover who faints to death for pain. Like Hermes she must leave off "feathers and wings", and recalling Lycius to life turn herself into a woman "chrysalis",

*... bidding him raise
His drooping head, and clear his soul of doubt,
For that she was a woman, and without
Any more subtle fluid in her veins
Than throbbing blood, and that the self-same pains
Inhabited her frail-strung heart as his.* (304-309)

Taking life as it is, with its delights and pains, and seeing the beauty of it in spite of the clear-sighted penetration of the rational and piercing look, may well be the revolution Keats intended to introduce into the literary world, if a few more years were given him to achieve his poetical aim.

In "Lamia" all is made to converge towards the earthly condition. There are similarities between Lamia, "the demon's self" perhaps (I, 56), Lamia the serpent, and Hermes the god. Lamia considers herself as buried in her rainbow-coloured skin:

"When from this wreathed tomb shall I awake!" (I, 38)

and she weeps

As Proserpine still weeps for her Sicilian air. (I, 68)

She also wears other insignia that establish her connection with the powers of heaven.

*Upon her crest she wore a wannish fire
Sprinkled with stars.* (I, 57-8)

In the same way Hermes, that "bright planet" (I, 87), can swear by his "serpent rod" (I, 89). He is the "star of Lethe" (I, 81). His

realized dream gets lost in "the green-recessed woods"; he and the nymph are left to their bliss. The convergence of the heavenly and subterranean elements in Lamia leads to the metamorphosis from a serpent into a woman. The pangs to which she is submitted in the process recall the passage through death in the tradition of downward explorations. But now Lamia passes through destruction in order to attain mortal life:

*Left to herself, the serpent now began
To change; her elfin blood in madness ran,
Her mouth foam'd, and the grass, therewith besprent,
Wither'd at dew so sweet and virulent;
Her eyes in torture fix'd, and anguish drear,
Hot, glaz'd, and wide, with lid-lashes all sear,
Flash'd phosphor and sharp sparks, without one cooling tear.
The colours all inflam'd throughout her train,
She writh'd about, convuls'd with scarlet pain:
A deep volcanian yellow took the place
Of all her milder-mooned body's grace;
And as the lava ravishes the mead,
Spoilt all her silver mail, and golden brede,
Made gloom of all her frecklings, streaks and bars,
Eclips'd her crescents, and lick'd up her stars:
So that, in moments few, she was undrest
Of all her sapphires, greens, and amethyst,
And rubious-argent: of all these bereft,
Nothing but pain and ugliness were left.
Still shone her crown; that vanish'd, also she
Melted and disappear'd as suddenly. (I, 146-166)*

This is a remarkable piece of colourful imagery — though atrocious gothicism too — in which the hellish powers in her are not forgotten: sulphur is the main colour and active substance in the alchemy that transmutes her through "pain and ugliness" (I, 164). She reappears "a maid"

*More beautiful than ever twisted braid,
Or sigh'd, or blush'd, or on spring-flowered lea
Spread a green kirtle to the minstrelsy. (I, 185-8)*

She has escaped "the serpent prison-house" (I, 203), and at the same time, lost her starry diadem. Both extremes converge towards the earthly qualities of the woman. Her character, however, remains tinted by her origin:

*Not one hour old, yet of sciential brain
To unperplex bliss from its neighbour pain;
Define their pettish limits, and estrange
Intrigue with specious chaos, and dispart
Its most ambiguous atoms with sure art,
As though in Cupid's college she had spent
Sweet days a lovely graduate, still unshent,
And kept his rosy terms in idle languishment.* (I, 191-199)

Her intuitive knowledge makes her an expert of sentiments and passions.

As for Lycius he appears as a philosopher's disciple whose thoughts remain rooted on earth:

*His phantasy was lost, where reason fades
In the calm'd twilight of Platonic shades.* (I, 235-236)

While he is immediately won by the beautiful creature he meets on his way, she enjoys for a time the cruel pleasure of baiting and teasing him. Like Hermes she dominates him, "a stoop'd falcon ere he takes his prey" (I, 67). But she must surrender her pretence at being of a choicer "essence" (I, 289); otherwise she could not sing,

Happy in beauty, life and love, and every thing. (I, 298)

Immortality seems to be linked with the total abandonment to love. Lycius experiences it as soon as he is struck by Lamia's beauty.

*And soon his eyes had drunk her beauty up,
Leaving no drop in the bewildering cup,
And still the cup was full.* (I, 251-3)

Such is the reality of the blissful trance of passion. And the poet insists on the necessary insertion of love in this world:

*Let the mad poets say whate'er they please
Of the sweets of Fairies, Peris, Goddesses,
There is not such a treat among them all,
Haunters of cavern, lake, and waterfall,
As a real woman, lineal indeed
From Pyrrha's pebbles or old Adam's seed.* (I, 328-333)

This time, therefore, full happiness is realized on the level of actuality, and not in a feverish dream, not among essences, but amid human beings, though they were but "Platonic shades".

It is bliss that creates a separation from everyday life; the lovers

enjoy the feeling of living "in a dream" (I, 350), in isolation from the bustle of Corinth, realistically pictured.

*Men, women, rich and poor, in the cool hours,
Shuffled their sandals o'er the pavement white,
Companion'd or alone. (I, 355-357)*

Values have changed; and the lovers fear the interference of friends and particularly of old Apollonius and his reasoning wisdom. For the young people entranced in love, he appears as "the ghost of folly", with all senses blinded to the warmth of life. The power of love then is strong enough to create a world within the world, a privileged nook where an immortal feeling confronts mortality. There is the flaw, inevitably. The "phosphor glow" that lights the way and welcomes people at the porch of Lamia's palace must not be overlooked. Shut in their marble and crystal residence "unknown / Some time to any" (I, 388-9), their life expands out of time, till the parasite worm within the chrysalis bores through and slits the cocoon to destruction.

*'Twould humour many a heart to leave them thus'
Shut from the busy world of more incredulous. (I, 396-7)*

Such comments are very new in Keats's poems; one guesses he does not want to let emotion invade him, as the subject verges on his own personal problems. He recoils from the romantic temptation of letting loose the egotistic troubles of his heart explicitly. The second part of the poem also starts with considerations which are meant to dismiss the immediate preoccupations of his love affair:

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

Again Keats wants to avoid getting deeply involved in the tale, though it is clear that he is talking to himself. He does not believe the first alternative could satisfy his love, and cannot afford the other. Some lines of the brief introduction to Part II are too near the expression of thwarted passion of his letters to Fanny Brawne not to betray a disguised avowal of his own case:

*... too short was their bliss
To breed distrust and hate, that make the soft voice hiss.
Besides, there, nightly, with terrific glare,
Love, jealous grown of so complete a pair,
Hover'd and buzz'd his wings... (II, 9-13)*

As a comparison, here is just one example of the tone in the letters. "If you should ever feel for Man at the first sight what I did for you, I am lost. Yet I should not quarrel with you, but hate myself if such a thing were to happen — only I should burst if the thing were not as fine as a Man as you are as a Woman" (25 July 1819, To Fanny Brawne; no. 178, II, 132). Keats's self-torturing mind, "jealous grown", repeatedly hints at some possible rival, and abandons itself to foreseeing and picturing the worst that could happen. The poem, too, repeatedly hints at the fatal end: "For all this came a ruin" (II, 16). Again the cold statement occurs right in the middle of the highest bliss, and prepares the cool impassive atmosphere through an interplay of opposed contrary impressions and comments. The lovers are depicted united in sleep in a way comparable to that of the "Ode to Psyche". The curtaining allows the eye to gaze into "the summer heaven, blue and clear" (II, 21). It is the apex of bliss which both enjoy in retirement, till the outward world intrudes in the form of "a thrill / Of trumpets" (II, 27-28). Lycius returns to consciousness:

*His spirit pass'd beyond its golden bourn
Into the noisy world almost forsworn.* (II, 32-33)

The delicate balance of wise passiveness is upset; the tale can only step on towards its already proclaimed fatal conclusion. The struggle is now that of tender indolence against the thinking process: "Why do you think?" (II, 41) is Lamia's first reproachful question. Her "sciential brain" (I, 191) knows too well

That but a moment's thought is passion's passing bell.
(II, 39)

Lycius' good intentions are destructive, though he sincerely believes in his capacity to heighten their happiness of luxurious enjoyment. Lamia's witchcraft had "tangled [him] in her mesh" (I, 295); but the young man's will

*"... to entangle, trammel up and snare
Your soul in mine, and labyrinth you there
Like the hid scent in an unbudded rose"* (II, 52-54)

is an illusion. Heart and mind stand as antagonistic powers. The desire to show off his beautiful bride to everybody's eyes, the perverse delight in "her sorrows" (II, 74) — which recalls the mistress's "rich anger" of the "Ode on Melancholy" (18) — the luxury of passion turning to cruelty, taking on "a hue / Fierce and sanguineous"

(II, 75-6) and displaying some fine energy, are the flaws in the man's character. He seems unable to resist the intrusion of consciousness into the wise passivity of bliss. Identically the woman character cannot rid itself of the serpent of origins. All through the poem we are reminded of its lingering presence. It recurs for instance when the poet conjures up the image of Apollo

... in act to strike

*The serpent — Ha, the serpent! certes, she
Was none. She burnt, she loved the tyranny.* (II, 79-81)

Thus the flaws in man and woman create the conditions for their incapacity to realize that enduring and godlike bliss of love. The only moment of full delight for them both takes place when in the half slumber of satisfied love they wait in an indolent mood for renewed kisses. Otherwise the working mind drives them asunder. Lamia is more self-centred than Lycius. She has no friends, no parents, therefore she dedicates herself entirely to love. Lycius is more socially-minded, and wants to pride himself upon Lamia's beauty, and share his joy with others. Thwarted intentions and opposed aims succeed each other, and prevent any definite movement of elation or depression from establishing itself. Both lovers are full of good will; but disintegration takes place, mixed with images that re-instate the delights of bliss. Such is the character of the passage when Lamia, left alone, prepares the "glowing banquet-room" (II, 121). The anti-climax is always present in the midst of the fairy-land description. What Lamia does is but

... to dress

The misery in fit magnificence. (II, 115-116)

The light, the colours, the "haunting music" (II, 122), the "untasted feast / Teeming with odours" (II, 132-3) rouse all the senses to the habitual trance. But the lady herself paces the hall "in pale contented sort of discontent" (II, 135). The thwarted rhapsody of love comes to an end and Apollonius' ominous entrance into the luxurious palace chills the heaving wave of sensuous perceptions.

For a time Lamia's well-prepared spell seems to win the day. The magic of "brilliance and perfume" (II, 174), the "blaze of wealth" (II, 198), the intoxication of "music" (II, 199) and wine (II, 202) are evoked in a concentration of images that reaches again to a climax of sensations: "Soon was God Bacchus at meridian height" (II, 213). It is, however the last effulgence of embers that burns themselves out. We are warned not to be taken in; it is no longer possible in the clear-sighted age of scientific description:

*Do not all charms fly
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?
There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:
We know her woof, her texture; she is given
In the dull catalogue of common things.* (II, 229-233)

There is, of course, a deep regret expressed in these lines, but at the same time an acknowledgement of a new world confronting the romantic idealization of life. Another dark passage has been opening in the "Mansion of many Apartments". Things must be looked at in two different ways. The world of sensations is not to be abandoned, but its feverish apprehension is not the only guess at truth; cold reason must have a chance even though the risk of its destructive powers exists. With Apollonius stepping in and piercing through the sham appearance of the woman character, the poet tackles a new problem, that of dealing in poetry with the unpoetical realistic side of life, and thus "upset[s] the drawling of the blue stocking literary world" (14 Aug. 1819, To Bailey; no. 181, II, 139).

Reconciliation of the two aspects is difficult, perhaps impossible, and, therefore, the splitting of the male element into two characters was necessary: but Lycius, "blinded" (I, 347) by love turns to be made "senseless Lycius! Madman!" (II, 147) through the working of his will; while "the ghost of folly" (I, 377), Apollonius, through his rational power becomes a "foul dream" (II, 271), the destructive agent of old beliefs. He only laughs scornfully at Lycius' threat of punishment:

*"Shut, shut those juggling eyes, thou ruthless man!
Turn them aside, wretch! or the righteous ban
Of all the Gods, whose dreadful images
Here represent their shadowy presences,
May pierce them on the sudden with the thorn
Of painful blindness."* (II, 277-282)

The contempt shown by Apollonius echoes the introduction to the poem where the generations of gods lightly replace each other in playful succession. And it is worth noting that Apollonius, if he brings the illusory world of romance to an end, takes on the customary attributes of the inspired, or inspiring character in romantic poetry:

*"Look upon that gray-beard wretch!
Mark how, possess'd, his lashless eyelids stretch
Around his demon eyes."* (II, 287-289)

He is not so different from the Ancient Mariner or Leech-gatherer, and therefore stands for some new creative force in poetry. Like

the serpent's his power partakes of the demoniacal magic sources of poetry. If he assumes the role of piercing through the illusion of love, this is due to the personal problems of the poet at the time; in the process the notion of truth apprehended in some high sensuous trance is also shattered, and it causes the poem to evolve irregularly, elation and depression being set in close opposition throughout the different passages of the tale. However the main theme of love still retains the 1819 general structure of rising from a birth out of death into life, through the metamorphosis of Lamia and the passion of the lovers, to destruction and death. In spite of the action of disillusioned reason, it is not poetry that is submitted to the most devastating attack, but the woman character whose supernatural connection with a serpent is never denied to the end.

This hard and harsh narrative is the only complete example of the new mood in Keats's poetry. It is therefore impossible to know whether he would have stuck to the new vein of poetical ore, and explored and developed to perfection the possibilities offered by clear-sighted irony. The "Cap and Bells" seems to give an affirmative answer to the question; but no conclusion can be drawn from such an incomplete portion of a long narrative, which introduces political satire into the game. The new attitude certainly did much to temper the mood and tone in "To Autumn". It shows that Keats did not abandon the principles elaborated in the early months of 1819, but that they were applied with less strict observance owing to the "moulting" of Keats's attitude towards romance.

In conclusion it can be said that the dilemma set up by the confrontation of the wise passiveness of surrendering to sensuous impressions and the active exploration of rational thinking made the symmetry and structural imagery lesser elements in the composition of "Lamia". However, the general pattern is still felt so far as the main character is concerned. Lycius is driven into the same climactic experience. For once it is not the passing of time that is the destructive agent of the blissful harmony of love, but the cold analysis of the true character of love, and of the opposing forces lying within the man's and the woman's unconscious minds. Time exists, of course, since this is a narrative, and is given visual form in the age of Apollonius who is described: "bald-headed" (II, 245), and with a "gray beard" (II, 287). The reasoning faculty seems to be linked with old age; but it is not time that is made responsible for the frustration and annihilation of love, it is the hard, unfeeling insight into the spell of magic.

27. Conclusion

At the close of this exploration of Keats's poems, in which we have tried to trace one particular mark of the evolution of the poet's art, we hope to have given a tangible hold of what is often sensed more than demonstrated. The poet's life-time was so short that it is difficult to select one clear element capable of giving a simple but conclusive outline of the changes occurring in the craftsmanship leading from juvenilia to masterpieces. Recurrent themes and images contradict the very notion of evolution; the analysis of the detailed technical elements of prosody is likely to miss much of the longer poems, or give too great importance to their weak passages. That is the reason why we have tried to define one feature of general composition and examine its evolution. It is revealed through the imagery proper to each single poem, and emphasizes the determination of the poet to use symmetries intermingling with the dynamic unfolding of the themes.

If we have confined our analysis largely to the published works, it was because it seemed advisable to base our conclusions on the part of Keats's works that was approved and cared for by the poet till the ultimate processes of fair copies and proof correcting were completed. It is true that there is some difficulty in stating positively that Keats was able to direct and control the publication of the *Lamia* volume, as he did in the case *Poems 1817* and *Endymion*. Some doubts can arise from the way he crossed out the editor's "Advertisement" in one of the gift copies, where he added the resentful comments: "This is none of my doing — I was ill at the time"; and the violent expostulation about the sentence apologizing for the unfinished state of "Hyperion", on account of the discouragement caused by the critical reception of *Endymion*: "This is a lie".

However Garrod has shown in his introduction to his critical edition of Keats's poems¹ that Keats was still arguing with Taylor about the end of "Lamia", and objecting to suggestions of modification on the part of his editors a fortnight before the book was due to appear; also that Woodhouse's uninspired proposal to replace the

¹ Garrod, op. cit. xxxv-xxxvi.

closing lines of the poem was rejected. On the whole Keats had his own way so far as the poetry was concerned; only the editor's advertisement to the readers seems to have escaped the poet's control. In spite of the repeated periods of illness that impaired his creative capacity in 1820, he is seen concentrating his energy, when he was well enough, on the publication of the *Lamia* volume, and a few individual poems in different literary papers (the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" in January 1820, "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" in May, "As Hermes once..." in June). It is known too that about the middle of March he was dedicating his attention to the revision of "Lamia" (18 [?] March 1819, Ch. Brown to Taylor; no. 245, II, 276), and that the manuscript was sent to the editors at the end of April.² A letter to Taylor testifies to the fact that Keats was doing strenuous proof-reading in the first weeks of June 1820. It shows that the poet's fastidious control of aesthetic details was still alive at the time. For instance: "In the first Stanza my copy reads — 2nd line

bitter *chill* it was

to avoid the echo cold in the next line" (no. 263, II, 295). This was a few days before the haemorrhage on June 22. The poet's keen awareness of such poetical problems entitles the critic to feel more secure than has been sometimes thought, about the respect of the author's intentions — despite editors' doubts and objections — in his last published works. The prefatory "advertisement" (dated 26 June) is the editor's sole responsibility; Keats was ill at the time. The theory concerning the lack of reliability of Keats's printed texts is due to the deterioration of his health since the winter 1819-1820, and to the opinion that in consequence he did not care any more for such details. We, on the contrary, feel that what was left of his energies was devoted to working up to perfection the completed poems, during the periods when he felt better. As for the works in progress it is, of course, no use arguing much, as we do not know what would have been their fate.

Thus our study of the works that we know were considered acceptable by Keats has led us to sketch out the vast architectural prospects that supported the composition of his poems. One based on the archetypal plunge into the mysteries of the underworld, which corresponds to a time of apprenticeship and discovery, to a deepening apprehension of the totality of the world of nature and of the mortal status of man. The sonnet form, in its brevity, and natural tendency to rush towards a climax contradicted the taste of the young poet for the initiatic down- and upward journey of the epic tradition. The pattern engendered an enthusiasm for an

² Blunden fixes the date 27 April, in *London Mercury*, IV (1921), 141.

opposite internal structure of composition — the pyramidal symmetry —, reinforced by the aesthetic discovery of the world of painting, sculpture and architecture. It proposed an escape, limited as it was, away from the hardships of every day life, a direct contact with truth through the visionary power born of the beauty of life and art; it also forced upon the poet the melancholy recognition of the restricted scope of such experiences, due to the passing of time and man's mortality. The "Ode to a Nightingale" seems to offer the most perfectly achieved synthesis of both elements in the subtle interplay of the depressing imagery born of the reality of life, opposing the high elation of sensuous perceptions drawn from the natural world. The sovereign atmosphere of "To Autumn" crowns that evolutionary process by draining it of the dramatic and passionate tension felt throughout the Nightingale ode. Resignation or lucid acceptance of a transient world of beauty fills Keats's last ode with an objectivity and serenity that surpass all his previous less temperate verse.

Was this masterpiece the highest and last achievement to be built on the up- and downward dynamic of imagery? The growing silence of 1820 makes it impossible, of course, to decide; but the general tone of irony, in "Lamia", the repeated breaks of anticlimax and the consequent lack of sustained elation in the unfolding of the amorous experience, hint at some new profound change occurring in Keats's aesthetic views. The pyramidal and symmetrical structure is not entirely discarded, but its dynamic evolution is shattered by the cold objective comments on the action, and the irony that grins at the dramatic and romantic plot. Was it the start of a sustained effort towards the exploration of some new "dark passage" revealed by experience? If it partly shakes off the well-established, 1819 pattern of composition, is it a decisive step towards some new underlying structure? "The Cap and Bells", in its unfinished form, seems to answer in the affirmative. The tone of disillusionment reigns and turns to a facetious mood; poetry expresses the sentimental farce of its own illusions. If the poet regretted the intrusion of scientific truth into mythological interpretations of the world, as in the case of the rainbow ("Lamia", II, 231-238), he now decidedly chooses the bare realistic side of things to upset his readers and shock voluntarily the literary world of the time. Stanza XXIV of "The Cap and Bells" will be a sufficient example to show that Keats is now developing the spirit of the rainbow passage in "Lamia".

*It was the time when wholesale houses close
 Their shutters with a moody sense of wealth,
 But retail dealers, diligent, let loose
 The gas (objected to on score of health),
 Convey'd in little solder'd pipes by stealth,*

*And make it flare in many a brilliant form,
 That all the powers of darkness it repell' th,
 Which to the oil-trade doth great scaith and harm,
 And supersedeth quite the use of the glow-worm.*
 ("The Cap and Bells", XXIV)

Can anything be more destructive of a whole tradition of symbolic interpretation of such mysterious phenomenon as the glow-worm's phosphorescence? Indeed the way seems suddenly very distant from the ecstasy of "Tender is the night"! A sense of humour pervades the work and dismisses any tendency to revert towards romantic moods:

*"See, past the skirts of yon white cloud they go,
 Tinging it with soft crimsons! Now below
 The sable-pointed heads of firs and pines
 They dip, move on, and with them moves a glow
 Along the forest side! Now amber lines
 Reach the hill top, and now throughout the valley shines."*
 (LXII, 4-9)

*"Why, Hum, you're getting quite poetical!
 Those nows you managed in a special style."* (LXIII, 1-2)

It sounds like self-destruction; it is brilliant, lucid, cruel. At the same time it strikes the reader as astonishingly modern in its sardonic determination to dispossess heroes, plot and descriptions of the spell and aura that used to make them bearers of high truths. From the point of view of structure nothing can help us to guess at the whole composition. There is a flight; but it is a mockery and cannot possibly be situated within the unfinished poem. However the huge effort of the poet during the last months when he could still use his creative faculties, seems to prove that the attempt was serious, and that his idea of blowing up the poetic notions of "the blue-stocking literary world" was here being put into effect. Illness proved a still more overpowering challenge. What may have been the impact of Lord Byron's *Don Juan* on Keats's change of perspective remains to be examined at length. But this is no concern of ours in the limits set to this study. And there is no knowing whether there could have been any sequel to the balance and rich ore of "To Autumn".

It is evident that the present prospect does not sound all the many-sided aspects of the evolution of Keats's art. One particular viewpoint has been chosen leading to a perception of the changing attitude of the poet in the field of composition. The concentration of imagery enhances the perception of symmetries, of dynamic and

structural patterns that recur in certain periods of the poet's life, and are changed and reversed in others. *Poems 1817* and *Endymion* belong to the stage of journeying to the wide and bottomless pit of nature's secrets, to an extension of knowledge and a building up of imaginary worlds. The "living year" of 1819 produces the masterpieces, prodding tentatively at the high ideals of truth, beauty and immortality; the structure of composition becomes pyramidal. The trip to Scotland with Ch. Brown, and the writing of "Isabella" mark the in-between period of changing outlook in time and artistic performance. *Lamia* can be said to inaugurate a further evolution, though it is not clear where this might have led.

Whatever the mode of composition, however, it can be seen, too, that the symmetrical patterns used by Keats in his most important works made for a particular concentration of tension in the middle of the poems; there stands the possible point of revelation in the poet's quest, whether it is the rejection of the "Ill-fated, impious race! / That blasphemed the bright Lyrist to his face" ("Sleep and Poetry", 201-2), or the blissful trance of stanza 3 in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn". The central experience is the pivot in each particular instance, especially in longer works. It models the mood of the conclusions. The path to knowledge in the first phase of Keats's development, culminating in *Endymion's* prolonged exploration, is replaced by the contemplative retirement of the odes. The stasis allows the world of sensations to press in upon the poet's inactivity and offers him an intimation of happiness, or truth, or immortality. Instead of the discovery of the vast worlds created by imagination, the intimate bower born of the passivity of indolence and melancholy offers a concentration of sensuous perceptions that opens on glimpses of ethereal bliss. The voices of revelation seem to whisper to the poet's entranced ears. But the basic element remains the concrete presence of the surrounding natural world apprehended through the senses, whose faculties are heightened by inactivity itself. As soon as life starts on its course again, the complex oppositions of contraries reappear, "teasing us out of thought". "Aching pleasure" is the recognized and accepted reality of "forked" existence. The poet must cope with the paradoxical presence of "veiled Melancholy" "in the very temple of Delight". And the means Keats found most illuminating to solve the dilemmas was to weave a protective cocoon out of the intense delights profusely offered to the expectant appreciation of the chosen few. For them "tender is the night", since the absence of light creates the necessary conditions for the concentrated, intense alertness of the senses. The central experiences of separation and elation gives meaningful value to life as a whole; the aching tension temporarily solves the problems set by the mortality of man's nature and the passing of time. "Vision" or "waking dream" there is comfort in feeling identified with one

*... whose strenuous tongue
 Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine;
 His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,
 And be among her cloudy trophies hung.*
 ("Ode on Melancholy", 27-30)

As Keats said "the poetical character has no self"; it exists only through the sensuous experience of nature and human affection, love. Abstract feelings lead to false idealized mawkishness. Therefore Porphyro performs "all the acts of a bonâ fide husband", to use Woodhouse's phrase (19 September 1819, To Taylor; no. 192, II, 163). Intensity alone can separate the immanent presence of pleasure and pain and make the former pure and clear. "Lamia" still retains this pattern. She is described as one who knows how

To unperplex bliss from its neighbour pain. (I, 192)

She therefore belongs to the categories of the chosen ones capable of building up an isolated nook for herself and her lover, secluded out of time, away from the busy life of Corinth. The existence of such a place reposes entirely on the magic powers of the poetic song:

*A haunting music, sole perhaps and lone
 Supportress of the faery-roof... (II, 122-3)*

As in the "Ode to a Nightingale" wine concurs to the unreal and irrational seclusion from the fever of the world :

*... for merry wine, sweet wine,
 Will make Elysian shades not too fair, too divine.*
 (II, 211-212)

It is, however, only a second best to the real power of the "sciential brain" (I, 191); it stands in opposition to scientific analysis. "Cold philosophy" (II, 230) destroys the "charms" of poetry and the intoxication of the feast, just as the "Cold pastoral" of the ode throws the chill of misgivings over the "breathing human passion" of "marble men and maiden". The "sciential brain" of the poet seems to be still prevalent in the odes, but "Lamia" paves the way for the predominance of other more scientific forces and the ensuing "Change of Sentiment" confessed to Woodhouse (19 September 1819, no. 192, II, 163). The six-hour conversation partly related to Taylor by Woodhouse (ibid., II, 162-163) swarms with allusions to the revolution of taste Keats would have liked to force on the literary world. The correction of the last lines of the "Eve of St Agnes" "bringing Old Angela in dead stiff and ugly" are avowedly meant "to leave

on the reader a sense of pettish disgust" (ibid., II, 162-3). And Woodhouse observes that the development of such an attitude was parallel to that of Byron who was just publishing his *Don Juan*. "I should have thought, he affected the 'Don Juan' style of mingling up sentiment and sneering; but that he had before asked Hessey if he could procure him a sight of that work, as he had not met with it, and if the 'Eve of St Agnes' had not in all probability been altered before his Lordship had thus flown in the face of the public" (ibid., II, 163). To discover what made both Byron and Keats evolve individually away from the mood of tradition and introduce the "sneering" element amidst the sentiments of romanticism, could be the object of some further study. "The Cap and Bells" could be seen in a better light, and given better tribute. But this, as said before, escapes the purpose of this book.

Our hope is to have thrown some more light onto the mysteries of poetic creation, and furthered the appreciation of a work that has not yet disclosed all its secrets. The foregoing considerations probe some of the technical aspects of the craftsmanship of composition, and some of the archetypal patterns that may underlie the creative activity of a poet. They also show that the field rapidly widens, and that the view-point necessarily opens onto a vast expanse of reflections and digressions which are not immediate problems of imagery or structure, as they do not exist of themselves but are born of a whole life of complex struggles, of happiness and misery. And yet it was the imagery that directed our attention towards the symmetrical structures and dynamic development of Keats's poetic tales and other poems. It is our hope that the many allusions to the imagery have enriched, rather than destroyed the spell cast on the reader by the works themselves, and also shown prospective students of Keats how perspicacious was Woodhouse's view of his contemporary when he wrote to Taylor: "His poetry really must be studied to be properly appreciated" (ibid., II, 164).

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