A STUDY ON KEATS' VIEW ON IMMORTALITY

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INTRODUCTION

'I think I shall be among the English Poets after my death,' wrote Keats to his brother shortly after the 'Cockney School' attack in the Blackwood's Magazine and another harsh criticism in the Quarterly Review. These words convey a firm belief in himself that cannot be laughed at as mere bluff. That was probably the moment when he felt secretly as his own the happiness already expressed in 'Sleep and Poetry': Happy he who trusts to clear futurity his darling fame!

Keats' life could be said to have been continual efforts to immortalize his 'darling' name. Five years or so of his poetic career was the rapid development of the efforts, in which we see his steadfast self-consciousness as a poet. It was, in a sense, a struggle against his death, dealing with the mortal life of one who had once asserted, 'Death is life's high meed.'

In his letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, May 3, 1818, Keats compared life to a mansion with three main chambers. The original idea of the course of life, however, had already been set force in 'Sleep and Poetry'. In the letter Keats condensed the original by giving it the compact simile. Wordsworth had something to do with the idea; note the words, 'burthen of mystery', in 'Tintern Abbey'.

The three chambers Keats mentioned were

- the infant or thoughtless chamber,
- the chamber of maiden-thought,
- and the nameless dark wide chamber.

To the second room belonged the immediate wonder at beauty, both natural and artistic, and a visionary world constructed by the beauty-inspired imagination. To be intoxicated and die in a beautiful atmosphere was one of his happiest yearnings, and so he found it difficult to bid farewell to the second chamber. The third one can be taken as the world where men crowded and where the poet dealt with them.

Transition to the third had much to do with the problem whether to go on to art for life's sake or remain a prototype of art for art's sake. The mysterious third room that he thought could not be neglected as long as a man went on breathing, gave him an intense theme: it was that of approaching to and seeing through human nature. The winter from 1817 to 1818 was the actual turning point for him as a poet and an individual. Some self-conscious strain began to show itself on the threshold of the third chamber. The strain was the opposite of brilliance, softness and fresh wonder in the second one. A gradual change came upon the long-cherished significance of beauty and death.

Throughout his career the golden lettered 'immortality' hung pendant
before him. He had been surrounded by the 'immortal' nature, nightingale, bards and antiquity. Certainly he had a 'fine palate' (cf. Ode on Melancholy) to taste the eternal bliss, but, at the same time, he came to discover himself at a great distance from those immortal-charactered objects.

To trace the development of his view on immortality makes us also understand the shift of his notions on happiness, solitude, death and so on. The above-mentioned 'Sleep and Poetry' written early in his career during the winter from 1816 to 1817 will serve us as a base to start from and occasionally return to in our survey of the development of one of his chief interests.

1. **THE FIRST CHAMBER**

1.a. Extract of the letter to Reynolds, May 3, 1818

To cite only the 'life-mansion' passages:

'An extensive knowledge is needful to thinking people — it takes away the heat and fever, and helps, by widening speculation, to ease the Burden of the Mystery — a thing I begin to understand a little, and which weighed upon you in the most gloomy and true sentence in your letter. . . .

I compare human life to a large mansion of many apartments, two of which I can only describe, the doors of the rest being as yet shut upon me. The first we step into we call the infant or thoughtless chamber, in which we remain as long as we do not think. We remain there a long while and, notwithstanding the doors of the second chamber remain wide open, showing a bright appearance, we care not to hasten to it, but are at length imperceptibly impelled by the awakening of this thinking principle within us.

We no sooner get into the second chamber, which I shall call the chamber of maiden-thought, than we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere, we see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there for ever in delight. However, among the effects this breathing is father of is that tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of man — of convincing one's nerves that the world is full of misery and heartbreak, pain, sickness and oppression, whereby this chamber of maiden-thought becomes gradually darkened and at the same time on all sides of it many doors are set open — but all dark — all leading to dark passages. We see not the balance of good and evil. We are in a mist. We are now in that state — we feel the 'Burden of the Mystery'; to this point was Wordsworth come, as far as I can conceive, when he wrote 'Tintern Abbey' and it seems to me that his genius is explorative of those dark passages. Now if we live, and go on thinking, we too shall explore them. . . .'

Keats wrote Wordsworth's genius was explorative of those dark passages of the 'burden of mystery'. Keats himself was then in the third chamber, feeling also the 'burden of mystery', and losing the balance of good and evil. Something characteristic of him at that stage was a certain agnosticism shown by the word 'mist'.

How was his route before then, and after? The question makes us turn to the former one again: to trace his notions on death, beauty, immortality etc.
1.b. Childhood and death of parents

The so-called 'infant or thoughtless chamber' was characterized by self-centered experiences, carelessness and absence of systematic thought. It was a world of

A pigeon tumbling in clear summer air;
A laughing school-boy, without grief or care,
Riding the springy branches of an elm.

(Sleep and poetry. 11. 93–95.)

In such careless days, his father was killed in an accident in 1804 when he was eight. Immediately after that, his mother married another man, leaving her four children in charge of her mother, Mrs. Jennings. After a short period of her unhappy, second marriage she returned to her children. Keats' grandfather died in 1805, a year after his father's death. He left a fortune but it was to go into the hand of the orphans' guardian after the death of Mrs. Jennings. Keats did not versify the memories of those dead blood relations. From 1803 to 1811 were his school days at Mr. Clark's School, Enfield. In March 1818, when he was fourteen, his mother died of tuberculosis. He did not versify his mother's death, either. Now he began to read books madly, keeping himself indoors alone. The early loss of his parents bred within him deep love for his brothers and sister. He told nobody about his grief but endured it alone. A strong sense of responsibility grew within him now that he was the oldest except for his grandmother.

Nonetheless, those were such innocent and happy days as is seen in a doggerel written July 3, 1818, which was named 'A song of myself.'

There was a naughty boy / And a naughty boy was he, / He kept little fishes / In washing tubs three / In spite / Of the might / Of the Maid / Nor afraid / Of his Granny-good — / He often would / Hurly burly / Get up early / And go / By hook or crook / To the brook / And bring home / Miller's thumb / Tittlebat / Not over fat / Minnows small / As the stall / Of a glove / Not above / The size / Of a nice / Little Baby's / Little fingers — / O he made / 'Twas his trade / Of Fish a pretty Kettle / A Kettle / Of Fish a pretty Kettle / A Kettle / Of Fish a pretty Kettle / A Kettle !

2. THE SECOND CHAMBER

2.a. A happy death in the earliest sonnet

After leaving Mr. Clark's School, he began to study surgery and obtained a license for practice. Along with the medical study, he started composing poems. In those days, December 1814, his grandmother died. Now he composed a sonnet on the death of his dear one for the first time. It was a Petrarchan sonnet.

As from the darkening gloom a silver dove
Upsoars, and darts into the Eastern light,
On pinions that naught moves but pure delight,
So fled thy soul into the realms above,
Regions of peace and everlasting love;
Where happy spirits, crown'd with circlets bright
Of starry beam, and gloriously bedight,
Taste the high joy none but the blest can prove.
There thou or joinest the immortal quire
In melodies that even Heaven fair
Fill with superior bliss, or, at desire
Of the omnipotent Father, cleavest the air
On holy message sent — What pleasures higher?  
Wherefore does any grief our joy impair?

His grandmother's soul fled to Heaven of peace and everlasting love, as if on wings of a silver dove leaving gloom into the Eastern light. It was the place where the happy and glorious spirits enjoyed the high pleasure only the blessed could have. He imagined his grandmother joining the immortal quire or cleaving the air on the holy message of the omnipotent Father and went on further with his applause, 'What pleasures higher? Wherefore does any grief our joy impair?'

This sonnet is only too abundant in delight, bliss and grandeur. He thoroughly glorified human soul's relief at death. We find this piece so brilliant that there is no room for grief there. It seems as if the long-endured silent sorrow after the loss of his parents turned suddenly into the purely blissful words at the death of his grandmother.

Moreover, the word 'pinions' reminds us of those of imagination. It is natural that then we should detect Keats' own figure behind the grandmother's, about to take wings up into the firmament of poetry. When Keats' own figure is our utmost concern, 'pinions' are imagination or fancy, 'happy spirits' are poets, 'crown'd' can be taken for laurel-crowned, 'Father' is Apollo, 'melodies' are poems, and 'immortal quire' means the immortal poets. Then it might well be understood that the soul was Keats' own, who was just entering the chamber of maiden-thought, or the world of Spenserian beauty. He blessed his grandmother because she had fled into the realm he imagined to be happy. When the wings left the 'darkening gloom', namely this world, the poet could not help feeling 'pure delight', and so the eternal departure was a high pleasure to him. It is noteworthy that the poet's inclination to immortality was already explicit on his first step.

2.b. Quietude, aestheticism, death of luxury, and solitary pride

'We become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere, we see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there for ever in delight.'

Thus he described the charm of the second chamber in the letter just cited. As was explained in ‘Sleep and Poetry’ (11. 101–121.), he wanted to enter the realm of Flora and old Pan, sleep in the grass, taste red apples and strawberries, play with white-handed nymphs, read with them a lovely tale of human life, and, in the bosom of a leafy world, he and one of the nymphs would 'rest in silence, like two gems upcurl'd/In the recess of a pearly shell.' Such fantastic quietude was one of the remarkable peculiarities of the chamber of maiden-thought.

'Sleep and Poetry' gives us also some other delights in the chamber. Keats referred to 'sweet music' lost to some ears in the eighteenth century:

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...sweet music has been heard / In many places; — some has been upstirr'd / From out its crystal dwelling in a lake, / By a swan's ebon bill; from a thick brake, / Nested and quiet in a valley mild, / Bubbles a pipe; fine sounds are floating wild / About the earth: ...
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(11. 223–229.)
In the above lines were shown the ears to hear ‘unheard’ melodies. (cf. Ode on a Grecian Urn.) As for such inborn tendency of his own, Bate goes on further with his study and says that even so-called negative capability Keats later found in Shakespeare can be traced back to his childhood.9

Delights in visual images were shown in the following lines:

...the stirs / Of a swan’s neck unseen among the rushes: / A linnet starting all about the bushes: / A butterfly, with golden wings broad parted, / Nestling a rose, convuls’d as though it smarted / With over pleasure — many, many more, / Might I indulge at large in all my store / Of luxuries: . . .

To ‘indulge at large in all my store of luxuries’ — this is the proclamation of aestheticism — was to be painfully convulsed with excessive pleasure like a golden-winged butterfly on a rose. His early tendency towards such sensuous beauty can be explained best by a Spenser’s phrase that Keats selected for the motto of the first poetical works published in 1817, which contained ‘Sleep and Poetry’: What more felicity can fall to creature, / Than to enjoy delight with liberty?9

The golden butterfly convulsed with excessive pleasure might be a figure of a poet yearning for a brilliant death; for the beauty of nature sometimes assumed irresistible power on him:

...If I can bear / The o’erwhelming sweets, ’twill bring to me the fair / Visions of all places. (Sleep and Poetry. I. 61–63.)

And, the brilliant death was, in Keats’ terms, the death of luxury:

O Poesy! . . . . . / . . . to my ardent prayer, / Yield from the sanctuary some clear air, / Smooth’d for intoxication by the breath / Of flowering bays, that I may die a death / Of luxury, . . .

The death of luxury was often connected with the sanctuary of Apollo as can be seen in the lines following the above:

(that I may die a death / Of luxury,) and my young spirit follow / The morning sunbeams to the great Apollo / Like a fresh sacrifice. (ibid. I. 53–59.)

Now, the theme of the before cited sonnet beginning with ‘As from the darkening gloom’ may well be considered to be one type of death of luxury: the grandmother’s death was of delight and content. The sonnet below also shows us a serene and soft death of a poet; only, the death is not of a ‘fresh sacrifice’ here.9

After dark vapours have oppress’d our plains
   For a long dreary season, comes a day
   Born of the gentle south, and clears away
   From the sick heavens all unseemly stains.
   The anxious month, relieved of its pains,
       Takes as a long-lost right the feel of May;
   The eyelids with the passing coolness play
   Like rose leaves with the drip of Summer rains.
   The calmest thoughts come round to us; as of leaves
       Budding — fruit ripening in stillness — Autumn suns
   Smiling at eve upon the quiet sheaves —
   Sweet Sappho’s cheek — a smiling infants’ breath —
The gradual sand that through an hour-glass runs—
A woodland rivulet—a Poet's death.

(composed on 23 February, 1817. Petrarchan.)

Some might feel it inconsistent that he followed the calmest thoughts to a poet's death, when he was impregnated with the fresh vitality of May.\textsuperscript{11}) But, it was the matter of course for Keats. Why? Because, although May had been visiting England every year, of course, there were those who were unaware of the feeling of the youthful month. (cf. \ldots beauty was awake! / Why were ye not awake? But ye were dead / To things ye knew not of \ldots ‘Sleep and Poetry' 11. 192–194.) Keats thought they were dead, though breathing, to the ‘feel' of May. He was sure that he was genuinely awake to the surroundings, doubly alive, so he could die content in fresh delight. This might be the reason why he closed the sonnet with a poet's death. Anyway, to indulge freely in beauty and die a 'death of luxury' was a great ideal in the second chamber.

In Keats' eyes, the death of Leander, lover of Hero, drowned in the stormy sea, and those of the tragic lovers, Lorenzo and Isabella, were also not necessarily unhappy. In the former death, he combined it with love young for ever:

\ldots a victim of your (=maiden's) beauty bright
Sinking bewildered 'mid the dreary sea:
’Tis young Leander toiling to his death;
Nigh swooning, he doth purse his weary lips
For Hero's cheek, and smiles against her smile.

(On a Picture of Leander. March, 1817. Petrarchan.)

In the latter, Keats intended to render the lovers' miserable death happy, writing:

Were they unhappy then? — It cannot be — (Isabella. XII.)

Moreover, it must be noted that the poet yearning for a ‘death of luxury' was a proud, lonely youth:

Or did ye stay to give a welcoming / To some lone spirits who could proudly sing / Their youth away, and die?

(Sleep and Poetry. 11. 217–219.)

The lone spirits meant here were Thomas Chatterton (1752–1770), Kirk White (1785–1806) and possibly Keats himself.\textsuperscript{12}) He took pride in loneliness, delightful solitude peculiar to youth.\textsuperscript{13}) It was bred by his willingness to dedicate himself to Apollo:

If I do hide myself, it sure shall be / In the fane, the light of Poesy. (ibid. 11. 275–276.)

Within less than a year his search for the hidden agony behind the fane was to begin, but at that time it was out of the question. All that mattered was to ‘follow the morning sun-beams to the great Apollo like a fresh sacrifice.' As it was, his proud death tended to turn its back on the world and creep into quietude: after the lines just cited above comes,

If I do fall, at least I will be laid / Beneath the silence of a poplar shade; / And over me the grass shall be smooth shaven, / And there shall be a kind memorial graven.

(ibid. 11. 277–283.)
Here as elsewhere in his works, death caused the poet's spirit to sink for a while. But then, his poetical attachment and ambition saved his mind from drooping. It is in this very reaction that we find his noble sense of solitude and youthful pride. So his spirit began to soar after the passage of his grave:

But off Despondence! miserable bane! / They should not know thee, / Who athirst to gain / A noble end, are thirsty every hour.

(ibid. 11. 281-283.)

Such from-fall-to-rise processes of his mind can be seen in some other sonnets also. Let's take an instance:

O Solitude! if I must with thee dwell,
Let it not be among the jumbled heap
Of murky buildings; climb with me the steep,—
Nature's observatory—— whence the dell,
Its flowery slopes, its river's crystal swell,
May seem a span; let me thy vigils keep
'Mongst boughs pavillion'd, where the deer's swift leap
Startles the wild bee from the fox-glove bell.
But though I'll gladly trace these scenes with thee,
Yet the sweet converse of an innocent mind,
Whose words are images of thoughts refin'd,
Is my soul's pleasure; and it sure must be
Almost the highest bliss of human-kind,
When to thy haunts two kindred spirits flee.

(Composed November, 1816. Petrarchan.)

2.c. Happiness and death of luxury

Keats proposed three kinds of happinesses in a song 'Wherein lies happiness' inserted in 'Endymion' (written from spring to November, 1817). It is notable that happiness was said there to be higher than fame by Endymion. According to the song, happiness lies

1) 'in that which becks / Our ready minds to fellowship divine, / A fellowship with essence; till we shine, / Full alchemiz'd, and free of space;' (Endymion. Book 1. 11. 777-780.)

——shortly, in enjoyment of natural beauty,

2) in recalling to one's mind past ages of 'old songs from enclosed tombs, old ditties, ghosts of melodious prophecying, blonze clarions, a lullaby for infant Orpheus etc.';

Feel we these things? — that moment have we steep'd / Into a sort of oneness, and our state / Is like a floating spirit's (ibid. 11. 795-797.);

3) in love and friendship.

Keats afterwards explained to John Taylor, the publisher, that these gradations of happiness were the 'regular stepping of the Imagination towards a Truth.' (cf. letter 42. H. Buxton Forman's number; the same hereafter.)

Now, to hope for a death of luxury, or giving beauty to the death of an
ancient Greek youth, Leander, can be considered as the effort to combine death and happinesses of the first and the second kinds. It could also be said that he wanted to immortalize happiness by means of a death of luxury. Certainly, the theme of the Leander sonnet was of coincidence of love and death, but the atmosphere in which the death was described belongs exactly to the death of luxury in the maiden-thought chamber.

If we take into consideration the early tendency of Keats to oppose awakening (to beauty) to death, the following lines in eighteenth-century elegiac stanza will be more easily appreciated. We find in them the same kind of atmosphere as that of the first cited sonnet on his grandmother’s death. These lines were written in 1814, quite early in his poetic career.

On Death

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

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

2.d. Beyond the luxury

Now we have some doubts: could he find himself always in ‘oneness’ with eternal time and nature, and, in his own way, feel himself happy? It might have been possible to make himself involved in everlasting current of time, or dissolved into nature, by dying an ideal and imaginary death of luxury, quite content and pleasant.

Now, when he faced immortality and found it indifferent to him, he came to be acutely impressed with his own mortality. He saw a real human nature in it.

The moment a lock of Milton’s hair was shown him, his blood was certainly temperate, but after a little while it was stirred; he had to acknowledge his minority, and human mortality.

For many years my offering must be hush’d;
When I do speak, I’ll think upon this hour,
Because I feel my forehead hot and flush’d,
Even at the simplest vassal of thy power, —
A lock of thy bright hairs, —
(Lines on seeing a Lock of Milton’s Hair, Jan. 23, 1818.)

Therefore, when he used the epithet ‘happy’ for a tree, a brook, or scenes carved in relief on a Grecian urn, he was at once praising immortality beyond human nature and well conscious of his mortality. Note that the happiness then referred to was not of the third type of his classifying, and that the first and the second happinesses became his own only when he melted into the enviable
objects. Let’s look at some examples.

Stanzas (writ. Oct. or Dec., 1817.)

I

In a drear-nighted December,
Too happy, happy tree,
Thy branches ne’er remember
Their green felicity:
The north cannot undo them,
With a sleety whistle through them,
Nor frozen thawings glue them
From budding at the prime.

II

In a drear-nighted December,
Too happy, happy brook,
Thy bubblings ne’er remember
Apollo’s summer look;
But with a sweet forgetting,
They stay their crystal fretting,
Never, never petting
About the frozen time.

The tree and brook were blessed with a ‘sweet forgetting’ and senseless toughness of ‘never petting about the frozen time’. Here we sense the keynote of nature’s eternal circulation, shown in ‘Nor frozen thawings glue them from budding at the prime.’

Then, in the third stanza, he turned to human nature;

Ah! would ’twere so with many/A gentle girl and boy!

Thus, the first two lines of the stanza reveal to us definitely the poet who could not have forever the nature’s happiness to himself.

But were there ever any/With’d not at pass’d joy?

Here can be found the remaining charm of his wonderful maiden-thought chamber; Keats was now approaching the third chamber. In his letter to Reynolds, May 3, 1818, he described the approach to the last room as follows: ‘However, among the effects this breathing is father of is that tremendous one of sharpening one’s vision into the heart and nature of man — of convincing one’s nerves that the world is full of misery and heartbreak, pain, sickness and oppression . . .’

Nevertheless, there still remained a faint regret for having to leave the second chamber, so the stanza ended like this:

To know the change and feel it,/When there is none to heal it,/Nor numbed sense
to steel it,/Was never said in rhyme.

He was now struck by the tremendous distance between nature’s happiness and humanity. We foresee the day for the newly-awakened poet to call the world the ‘vale of soul-making’, not of tears, struggling to find the negative capability in Shakespeare, — in himself.

‘To Autumn’ was an ode later composed (Oct. 1819.), which he filled with the clearest serenity by effacing his mortal self into circulation of the great nature.
What might be called semi- or mock eternity of the mellow season is found in the last two lines of the stanzas I and II, respectively:

Until they think warm days will never cease, / For summer has o'erbrimm'd their clammy cells:

Or by a cyder-press, with patient look, / Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

This mock eternity, and circulation of the seasons hinted at in 'gathering swallows twitter in the skies', — the closing line of the ode — were the chief agents to unfold the mild happiness of the season.

In 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' he took part in the second happiness: i.e. happiness of dreaming passed times. Images in relief on that urn were those of gods and goddesses, or lads and lasses, merrily playing together in a thick forest.

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter.

The unheard melody from a pipe took off the barrier of time for the poet. He got into 'oneness' with those ancient figures and praised happiness — immortality — not present out of the urn:

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;
And, happy melodist, unwearied,
For ever piping songs for ever new;
More happy love! more happy, happy love!
For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,
For ever panting, and for ever young;
All breathing human passion far above,
That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue. (stanza III.)

It seems that he thought human youth and love were less happy than those on the urn. Once, in the sonnet on the grandmother's death, grief had been driven away by immense delight:

Wherefore does any grief our joy impair?

Now in this ode a kind of sorrow due to human nature — mortality — began to show itself and grow as big. Sorrow on one side went into pleasure on the other. In 'The Fall of Hyperion', Moneta says:

Every sole man hath days of joy and pain,
Whether his labours be sublime or low —
The pain alone; the joy alone; distinct:
Only the dreamer venoms all his days,
Bearing more woe than all his sins deserve.
(Canto I. 11. 172-176.)

Whether one could separate joy from pain was later to decide whether he was a mere dreamer or a poet. In the present ode, growing grief was not strong enough to wash away delight; and, after a reflection in his mind, culminated in a purely crystallized phrase.

Thou silent form, dost tease us out of thought / As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!

Facing eternity, he fell into a sort of paralysis of thought, felt faint at a long
distance between the eternal urn and himself,23) and then gradually came to his senses. After describing eternity and coldness of the marble urn that dejected his thought, he became doubtless of its eternal presence, and convinced himself that it would remain for ever as a friend to man. The process of his reflection was sublimated into the famous lines: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty;"—that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

Now, quite important for considering his third chamber are these phrases, 'in midst of other woe than ours', and 'a friend to man', in the forerunning lines: 'When old age shall this generation waste, / Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe / Than ours, a friend to man, . . .' From one point of view, it seems that beauty and truth were equated here as he regarded soothing beauty as true beauty.24) We find in these lines his strong sense of 'Sollen' that beauty must be a friend to man.

In 'Ode to a Nightingale' (writ. May, 1819.), he got intoxicated with a nightingale's warble and 'faded' away into a dim forest. There, he imagined various flowers and blossoms by their smells, and with the bird's song visited antiquity or even the fairy land. The bird's song took away the barrier of time, and here also the supertemporal nightingale was crowned with epithets 'happy' and 'immortal'.

'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot, / But being too happy in thine happiness. (11. 5–6.)

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird! / No hungry generations tread thee down. (11. 61–62.)

The poet fled from this world and visited ancient days of the 'emperor and clown, Ruth sick for home amid the alien corn', and even

magic casements, opening on the foam / Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn. (11. 69–70.)

'Forlorn' was the keyword that made the poet return to himself in the actual world.25)

There are two points to be remarked in this ode.

First, now he could fully ripen and condense the idea of death of luxury, i.e. the highest ideal in the second chamber.

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call'd him soft names in many a muse'd rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain——
To thy high requiem become a sod. (stanza VI.)

We see that he had been 'half in love' with death of luxury; that it was now the best opportunity for him to realize his dream; and that the ideal death was painless, because the nightingale was in 'such an ecstasy' and he, too, with it. In the above lines, full-ripened death was presented; that is, death and immortality
closely united. It is interesting that the early ideal ripened at this stage of his career, just inside the third room, after the letter 64 to Reynolds, May 3, 1818, and, of course, after re-reading of Shakespeare in the last few months of 1817.

Second, though he, for a while, got through the wall of time and space in the same way as in ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’, he came back again to his ‘forlorn’ self; this time to make it clear that the power of imagination, written as ‘fancy’ here, was limited:

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is fam’d to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now ‘tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music; — Do I wake or sleep? (stanza VIII.)

Jack Stillinger discriminates Keats' ‘visionary' imagination from ‘naturalized' one; Keats confessed here the limit of the ‘visionary' imagination. With realization of his mortality he was introduced into the third room, in which he had to feel his way in mist.

3. INTO THE THIRD CHAMBER

3.a. Perspective

How did he come to be dissatisfied with the former Spenserian world of fantastic beauty? One of the reasons will be his keen sense of ‘Sollen’—selflessness Bate finds even in his childhood—already expressed in ‘Sleep and Poetry’. After the confession of his unwillingness as follows:

And can I ever bid these joys farewell? (1.122)

he began the next line without any hesitation:

Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life, / Where I may find the agonies, the strife /
Of human hearts. (11. 123-125.)

Another reason will be the reflection of his way of versifying, i.e. shortage of his own experiences in life, after the poor sale of his poetical works, or critical attacks however shallow and out of point they might have been. With such reflection began an intense fight between poetry and death, and his sense of beauty gradually underwent a change. By the way, Keats had expressed his poetical hope in ‘Sleep and Poetry', writing

To see the laurel wreath, on high suspended, / That is to crown our name when life is ended; (11. 35-36.)

and then wished for ten years to establish himself:

O for ten years, that I may overwhelm / Myself in poesy; so I may do the deed / That my own soul has to itself decreed. (11. 96-98.)

He had thought he would have gained a ‘nobler life' by thirty. Because he
had had such a perspective, he had been quite full of ardent spirit:

Then the events of this wide world I'd seize / Like a strong giant, and my spirit tease / Till at its shoulders it should proudly see / Wings to find out an immortality. (11. 81–84.)

3.b. Charioteer's descent and mist on Ben Nevis

In 'Sleep and Poetry' the movement into the third chamber had been depicted by the steeds, chariot and charioteer descending in a whirl through the air onto the earth and many a figure proceeding on into the mighty oak forest. The charioteer had been bent forward, listening to and writing down something unknown to Keats. When all the visions had gone, a sense of reality came to him doubly strong. However, it was not in the sense that he had 'seized the world', but that he had realized his own blindness anew—a sort of agnosticism:

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. (11. 155–162.)

This kind of agnosticism can also be found in the before cited letter 64 to Reynolds, and the sonnet 'Written upon the Top of Ben Nevis.' Those later expressions were more realistic, bearing his experiences.

— but all dark — all leading to dark passages. We see not the balance of good and evil. We are in a mist. We are now in that state — we feel the 'burden of the mystery'. (letter 64.)

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

(writ. August 2, 1818. Shakespearian.)

3.c. Shakespeare and Milton

Near the end of 1817 Keats re-read Shakespeare and went often to theaters to see Shakespear's plays acted by Edmund Kean. Now from his works sensuous beauty began to disappear, while the sonnet style gradually changed from Petrarchan to Shakespearian.

In the letter 32, Dec. 21, 1817, 'negative capability' was mentioned, which Keats found to have gone to form great literary minds, and which Shakespeare had possessed in abundance. Although Wordsworth was not referred to there, that might have been also his 'wise passiveness'. It marked Keats' step directed towards insight into human nature, i.e. 'intellect', 'knowledge', and 'thought', in his own words. These had to be tested and proved by experiences, and somewhat different from 'consecutive reasoning', thought he. It was his step from innocence to experience.
It is true that out of experience there is no dignity, no greatness, that in the most abstracted pleasure there is no lasting happiness;

thus wrote he to his brother, Tom, July 6, 1818, from his Scotland tour in which he walked more than 600 miles observing the real life there. By the way, what did he wish to get from Shakespeare by perceiving the remarkable capability within him? The following sonnet will give us a clue.

On sitting down to read King Lear once again

O golden tongued Romance, with serene lute!
Fair plumed Syren, Queen of far-away!
Leave melodizing on this wintry day,
Shut up thine olden pages, and be mute:
Adieu! for, once again, the fierce dispute
Betwixt damnation and impassion'd clay
Must I burn through; once more humbly assay
The bitter-sweet of this Shakespearian fruit:
Chief poet! and ye clouds of Albion,
Begetters of our deep eternal theme!
When through the old oak Forest I am gone,
Let me not wander in a barren dream,
But, when I am consumed in the fire,
Give me new Phoenix wings to fly at my desire.
(writ. Jan. 23, 1818. Petrarchan.)

This sonnet tells us about his design and some strain. He now turned to Shakespeare, bidding adieu to Spenser. In ‘Sleep and Poetry’, visionary figures had gone into the oak woods (= the third chamber), but in this sonnet it was Keats himself that was going through the same place. He had to burn through the ‘fierce dispute betwixt damnation and impassion’d clay’, humbly ‘assay the ‘bitter-sweet’ of King Lear once more, and he prayed, ‘Let me not wander in a barren dream’. In the last line he wished to get new Phoenix wings to fly with at his desire. They could be understood as ‘wings to find out an immortality’ in ‘Sleep and Poetry’. (184.) They were not the wings to carry him to the realm of Flora and old Pan, but to fly over and grasp the human world. Moreover, they might even reveal futurity to him:

When every childish fashion / Has vanish'd from my rhyme, / Will I, grey-gone in passion, / Leave to an after-time / Hymning and harmony / Of thee, and of thy works, and of thy life, / But vain is now the burning and the strife, / Pangs are in vain, until I grow high-rife / With old Philosophy, / And mad with glimpses of futurity!
(Lines on seeing a Lock of Milton’s Hair. 11. 23–32.)

He hoped to grow ‘high-rife with old Philosophy’ and ‘mad with glimpses of futurity’. He said burning strife and pangs without it was vain. According to Houghton, Keats meant by ‘old Philosophy’ love in Milton’s ‘Lycidus’ and ‘Comus’.33

The ‘King Lear sonnet’ and the ‘Milton’s Lock lines’ were written on the same day in two letters. The former was written in the letter 41 to George and Tom Keats, and the latter in the letter 40 to Benjamin Bailey. Thus, with Shakespeare and Milton as his guide posts, Keats’ steps were directed towards a new search from then on.
3.d. Threatening death

Ambition, uneasiness, confidence and impatience ('fever', in his word) began to take hold of Keats one after another. He began to suffer from throat aches after the 40 days' Scotland tour in the summer of 1818; the year when the youngest brother, Tom, died an untimely death of the same disease as his mother's.

When he wrote,

Happy he who trusts / To clear Futurity his darling fame!

(Sleep and Poetry. 11. 358–359.)

he was a quite hopeful fame hunter. But the very eagerness often made him lose confidence in himself. The Elgin Marbles, mother of his later 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', impressed on him his minority as well as mortality when he first saw them:34)

My spirit is too weak — mortality / Weighs heavily on me like unwilling sleep, / And each imagin'd pinnacle and steep / Of godlike hardship, tells me I must die / Like a sick Eagle looking at the sky.

(On first seeing the Elgin Marbles. Mar. 1817. Petrarchan.)

The next sonnet shows us Keats in desolate solitude, being threatened by approaching death:

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


Single-minded ardency is missing here, which once he had when he wrote: ‘O for ten years, that I may overwhelm / Myself in poesy; so I may do the deed / That my own soul has to itself decreed.’ Only eight days after his reference to Shakespeare’s ‘King Lear’ and Milton’s ‘old Philosophy’, Keats was now cornered by vaguely threatening death. He was doubtful as to whether his pen would ever produce anything out of his garnered thoughts, or give new life to romance36) he had just parted with or whether he could ever ‘have relish in unreflecting love’, however transient the beauty might be. He was afraid that an untimely death would frustrate all his designs.

Now that he was alone feeling a vague fear, he was no longer a proud lone spirit he had once been. Love and fame were nothing, when he faced death. He had to reduce fever and irritation to nothing in order to resume his advance. Considering the beautiful descent of a chariot, and the dancing girls proceeding
into a thick forest in ‘Sleep and Poetry’, Keats ever after 1818 was not a
dreaming poet; he was aware of the Might of experience. But at that stage
ominous throat ache seized him; death, verse, fame, love, and beauty struggled
against one another within him.

Why did I laugh to-night! No voice will tell:
No God, no Demon of severe response,
Deigns to reply from Heaven or from Hell,
Then to my human heart I turn at once.
Heart! thou and I are here sad and alone;
I say why did I laugh! O mortal pain!
O Darkness! Darkness! ever must I moan,
To question Heaven and Hell and Heart in vain.
Why did I laugh? I know this Being’s lease,
My fancy to its utmost blisses spreads;
Yet would I on this very midnight cease,
And the world’s gaudy ensigns see in shreds;
Verse, Fame, and Beauty are intense indeed,
But Death intenser — Death is life’s high meed.
(writ. March 18, 1819. Shakespearian.)

We see here his high-ranking hopes painfully inverted. He could say plainly,
‘Verse, Fame and Beauty are intense indeed,’ because there had been written
immediately before it that he ‘would cease and see the world’s gaudy ensigns in
shreds.’ It seems that the ‘world’ mentioned here involved the poet, or, to put
it more specifically, that Keats himself was meant emphatically by it. In that
Keats had been pursuing ‘gaudy ensigns’, he was exactly relevant to the passage.
After once negating himself who had been obsessed by verse, fame and beauty,
he now admitted new ensigns of verse, fame and beauty. And then, by placing
death above them, he built a hierarchy of values. In such a framework he could
recover a balance audaciously, which made him laugh alone on that midnight.
Thus, death made its overwhelming appearance in this sonnet.

Now, the passage, ‘Death is life’s high meed,’ on one hand, reveals the critical
phases that he thought

1) death would relieve him from rigor of life;

2) death would relieve him from the ‘demon Poesy’ (cf. Ode on Indolence.
   III.) that spurred him onto verse, fame, and beauty;

but, on the other hand, as the sonnet has not any reference to friendship nor to
love, we could suspect that he then decided subconsciously to make his death the
last proof of his humanism.

By the way, we have already seen his mind revived by his passion for poetry
from depression caused by his dreaming of a calm death. In the above sonnet
also, his uneasiness was suppressed even when death threatened him. We cannot
help admiring his steady, dauntless mentality; we know Keats had almost nothing
to do with ennui.
3.e. Changing beauty

When he realised grave mortality, his eye for beauty underwent a great change. After indulging in overflowing splendor in the maiden-thought chamber he gradually became satiated, and the human nature loomed large on him:

However among the effects this breathing is father of is that tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of man — of convincing one's nerves that the world is full of misery and heartbreak, pain, sickness and oppression, . . . .

A new film covered the eye that had adored enjoyment of beauty.

She (= melancholy) dwells with Beauty — Beauty that must die;

And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips

Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh,

Turning to Poison while the bee-mouth sips:

(Ode on Melancholy. 11. 21–24.)

Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,

Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

(Ode to a Nightingale. 11. 29–30.)

Where's the cheek that doth not fade, / Too much gaz'd at? Where's the maid / Whose lips mature is ever new? / Where's the eye, however blue, / Doth not weary? (Fancy. 11. 69–73.)

Lines expressing the passing beauty — passing pleasure — are not few.

To know the change and feel it, / When there is none to heal it, / Nor numbed sense to steel it, / Was never said in rhyme.

(In a drear-nighed December. 11. 21–24.)

Passing beauty came to be connected with human mortality: behind nature's beauty he saw human nature. Jack Stillinger has illustrated the course by which the romantic poet fled from a world, entered another, and then came back somewhere in the former world. In his chart, the level line separates mortality below from immortality above; we can also suppose there such contrasts as those of earth-heaven, known-unknown, materiality-spirituality, realism-romance, and time-eternity. Keats started from A, reached B, and then came down to a somewhat distant point from A; it is shown as A'. Now we would like to add something to the chart for the sake of convenience: when Keats reached B, he detected B', a reflection of B below the level line. The shadow A–B'–A' accompanied the 'ascent-and-descent' (circumflex) course A–B–A'. While Keats' early aestheticism had been satisfied with the upward movement A–B, he came down to A' at last, as the gloomy B' began to haunt him.

To the poet who had arrived at A', death of luxury was no longer a suitable theme. Though Keats' 'Sein' is said to be on B, the fact is that he was come to
A.

Shakespeare's insight, and Milton's love — the third happiness — now served him as the new Phoenix wings. These wings could be strengthened by man himself, while the former wings to fly to the first and the second happinesses were incapable of that.

The prototype of the new wings are found in 'In a drear-nighted December'. It was a 'sweet forgetting' that trees and brooks were blessed with; or, the tenacious sense against pains, which went with eternity. Nature became a model after which the poet developed an eye to 'humbly assay the bitter-sweet'. The 'intellectual power' began to ripen quickly — power gained through observation of reality and proved on his pulse.

I was at home / And should have been most happy, — but I saw / Too far into the sea; where every maw / The greater on the less feeds evermore: — / But I saw too distinct into the core / Of an eternal fierce destruction, / And so from Happiness I far was gone. (letter 58, to Reynolds. Mar. 25, 1818.)

We can judge no further but by larger experience, for axioms in philosophy are not axioms until they are proved upon our pulse. (letter 64, to Reynolds. May 3, 1818.)

The difference of high Sensations with and without Knowledge appears to me this — in the latter case we are falling continually ten thousand fathoms deep and being blown up again without wings and with all the horror of a bare shouldered creature — in the former case, our shoulders are fledged, and we go through the same air and space without fear. (ibid.)

An extensive knowledge is needful to thinking people — it takes away the heat and fever; and helps by widening speculation, to ease the Burden of the Mystery. (ibid.)

In the world of the 'eternal destruction' he began trying to obtain 'life's high meed'. As we have seen, he turned to nature, this time for its help to himself. It might be said that he discovered this power of nature in Shakespeare as 'negative capability'.

4. 'HYPERION', AND 'THE FALL OF HYPERION'

4.a. Something lacking in 'Hyperion' Book III

In order to describe that a man who possessed the power — new Phoenix wings — could at last 'die into life' (Hyperion. Book III. 1. 130.) or 'die and live again' (The Fall of Hyperion. Canto I. 1. 142.), Keats composed two works on Hyperion.

Saturn ('Cronos' in Greek), who had won sovreignty out of the hand of his father, Uranos, was dethroned in his turn by his son, Jupiter, and fell among deep valleys in Olympus. 'Hyperion' begins with that fallen figure of Saturn. The followers to Saturn, such as Thea, Cybele, Oceanus, Clymene, Enceladus, Iapitus etc., can also be understood to be representative of men on the earth.

Hyperion, one of those Titans, was not yet fallen but he was also doomed to it; his glory was half fading. They conspired to recover the lost glory, but in vain, as it goes in the myth. But, Keats tried to apply a change; Appollo, child
to Jupiter, has undergone deification and become supreme in his work.

In the Book III, young Apollo made his first appearance. He was promised the command over the heaven and the earth, but was embarrassed and sad in inexplicable fear and uncertainty. He carried a golden bow, instead of a silver one as was usual in Greek mythology. That might have been Keats' intentional revision.

But, compared with the satisfactory description for an epic verse in the Book I and II, the Book III was different in its keynote. Apollo faced a goddess, Mnemosyne, whom he had often seen in his dream:

Thus with half-shut suffused eyes he stood,
While from beneath some cumbersome boughs hard by
With solemn step an awful Goddess came,
And there was purport in her looks for him,
Which he with eager guess began to read

... (Hyperion. Book III. 11. 44-48.)

Keats intended to describe the process in which a man ‘died into life’ by presenting Apollo here who tried to read eagerly the goddess’ purport in her looks. But, then, Keats’ intention hurried on so much that we, readers, are left behind. Then came so hasty a divinization. Something was left untouched, and we are forced to make up for it.

‘O tell me, lonely Goddess, by thy harp,
That wailst every morn and eventide,
Tell me why thus I rave, about these groves!

(ibid. 11. 108-110.)

Apollo asked the reason of his misty uneasiness, but in vain.

‘Mute thou remainest — mute! yet I can read
‘A wondrous lesson in thy silent face:
‘Knowledge enormous makes a God of me. (ibid. 11. 111-113.)

To pour into his brain the enormous knowledge would make him a God, said he; the enormous knowledge was the reality symbolized by the fight between Saturn and Jupiter: ‘names, deeds, grey legends, dire events, rebellions, majesties, sovran voices, agonies, creations, destroyings.’ (ibid. 11. 114-116.)

Apollo’s assertion, ‘Mute! yet I can read,’ was too hasty, and so was his deification:

— Thus the God,
While his enkindled eyes, with level glance
Beneath his white soft temples, stedfast kept
Trembling with light upon Mnemosyne.
Soon wild commotions shook him, and made flush
All the immortal fairness of his limbs;
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 : so young Apollo anguish’d:
His very hair, his golden tresses famed
Kept undulation round his eager neck.
During the pain Mnemosyne upheld
Her arms as one who prophesied. — At length
Apollo shriek'd; — and lo! from all his limbs

Celestial * * * * * * * * * *
* * * * * * * * * *

THE END (ibid. 11. 120–136.)

As to whether this work is completed or no, Murry says, 'Yes,' Bate does not say so as clearly as he, and Evert says, 'No.' Keats Poetical Works, Oxford, edited by H.W. Garrod, has 'THE END' printed on page 243. At least, we don't feel so much that he actually ended the story as that he hoped to conclude it with a happy ending of Apollo's divinization.

True, there were once ancient days when poets were holy and of authority; but it is also true that there were those poets who were 'dead' from Keats' point of view. Is it an exaggeration to say that Keats now became half doubtful that poetry alone could rule the world? Didn't he think that to 'seize the world' was one thing, and to rule another? Wasn't it the first time that he placed humbly his earnest meditations on poetry before the real world?

4.b. Classification of men in 'The Fall of Hyperion'

'The Fall of Hyperion' — the revision of 'Hyperion' — was given a subtitle, 'A Dream', and in this work Keats himself could face the goddess. In a dream he stood in a beautiful garden, which symbolized a world of sensuous beauty. Around him were 'trees of every clime', a fountain, roses and a vine-clad arbour. On a mound in front of the arbour were scattered round dainty foods and fruit, as if left by Eve and angels. He picked them up and enjoyed the rare savor; feeling thirsty, he drank of cool juice in a vessel nearby. He became drowsy, fell asleep, and had a dream: a dream in dream.

The beautiful garden was no more; there appeared now an old sanctuary, a huge image (of Saturn), and high-continuing steps to approach it. Coming near the sanctuary, he saw a veiled priestess burning fragrant leaves at the altar. She told him that he had to come up the steps before the smoke was out, or he would die. Though attacked by cold numbness, he desperately strove forward; on putting his foot on the lowest step he felt life 'pour in at the toes.' Those were the immortal steps.

... a palsied chill / Struck from the paved level up my limbs, / And was ascending quick
to put cold grasp / Upon those streams that pulse beside the throat; /
One minute before death, my iced foot touch'd / The lowest stair; and as it touch'd life seem'd / To pour in at the toes:

(The Fall of Hyperion. Canto I. 11. 122–134.)

He was saved from death; he asked the priestess the reason. She explained, classifying men as follows:

1) men who are no visionaries:

'They are no dreamers weak, / They seek no wonder but the human face; / No music but a happy-noted voice — / They come not here, they have no thought to come —

(ibid. 11. 162–165.)
2) men who are less than those classified above:

that is, he (the saved poet): 49)

3) dreamers:

those who 'find a haven in the world, / Where they may
thoughtless sleep away their days.' (ibid. 11. 150–151.)

those who 'venom all his days, / Bearing more woe than all
his sins deserve.' (ibid. 11. 175–176.)

—they are not saved.

The priestess, Moneta (Mnemosyne), said to him, ‘Thou art a dreaming thing,
/ A fever of thyself — think of the Earth (ibid. 11. 168–169.); thou art less than
they (i.e. those who are no visionaries; ibid. 1. 166.).’ However, in this work,
he was shown not as a dreamer in that he could touch the immortal stair. 50)

Above all, it is noticeable that Keats presented those people who were above
him in their contributions to mankind, no matter how far from, or disinterested
in immortality or fame they might be. 81) Let’s remember that happiness had
been thought to be higher than fame in ‘Wherein Lies Happiness’. It was probably
this notion that ‘Hyperion’ lacked in its seemingly hasty happy ending.

Furthermore, the true poet was classified by her as the opposite of the
dreamer:

4) poet: he who ‘pours out a balm upon the world’. (ibid. 1. 201.)

'The poet and the dreamer are distinct, / Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes.' (ibid. 11.
199–200.)

Moneta, who thus explained to him, was a lonely priestess keeping the Saturn’s
temple that had escaped destruction. While Apollo in ‘Hyperion’ had been
impatient to read the purport in the goddess’ looks, the poet in ‘The Fall of
Hyperion’ was not, and Moneta said to him herself:

'My power, which to me is still a curse,
Shall be to thee a wonder; for the scenes
Still swooning vivid through my globed brain
With an electral changing misery,
Thou shalt with those dull mortal eyes behold,
Free from all pain, if wonder pain thee not.'

(ibid. 11. 243–248.)

Unveiled face of Moneta was like this:

Then saw I a wan face,
Not pin’d by human sorrows, but bright-blanch’d
By an immortal sickness which kills not;
It works a constant change, which happy death
Can put no end to; deathwards progressing
To no death was that visage: .... (ibid. 11. 256–261.)

But for her eyes I should have fled away,
They held me back, with a benignant light,
Soft mitigated by divinest lids.
Half-closed, and visionless entire they seem’d
Of all external things; — they saw me not,
But in blank splendor, beam'd like the mild moon,
Who comforts those she sees not, who knows not
What eyes are upward cast. (ibid. 11. 264–271.)

Her eyes remind us of those of Sappho in 'Sleep and Poetry', of Ghost Lorenzo, or the shape of a quiet and cold Grecian urn. Then, Moneta led him to another scene, which had been already depicted in the Book I of 'Hyperion', to let him see what tragedy was hidden deep in her brain.

4.c. Aim of poetry — conclusion

In this way, Keats presented suffering deities in 'Hyperion' and 'The Fall of Hyperion'; there appeared no Flora and old Pan in them. In a sense, the suffering deities were suffering men. Moneta said, 'None can usurp this height / But those to whom the miseries of the world / Are misery, and will not let them rest.'

(The Fall of Hyperion. Canto I. 11. 147–149.)

In 'Hyperion', fallen Oceanus said, 'To bear all naked truths, / And to envisage circumstance, all calm, / That is the top of sovereignty.'

(Hyperion. Book II. 11. 203–205.)

He also said, 'Tis the eternal law / That first in beauty should be first in might.' (ibid. 11. 228–229.)

Those words of Oceanus were certainly the words of Keats himself, and had something in common with the 'vast idea' explained earlier in 'Sleep and Poetry'. But, to our regret, they had almost nothing to do with why Apollo had to become the supreme god: he had groundless, inexplicable worry and sorrow. In 'Hyperion', Keats' chief observations were poured into Oceanus, not into Apollo, so that we were at a loss to understand the reason for Apollo's becoming the supreme.

Be that as it may, Keats said in 'Sleep and Poetry',

— there ever rolls / A vast idea before me, and I glean / Therefrom my liberty; thence too I've seen / The end and aim of Poesy. (11. 290–293.)

And, the end and aim of Poesy was:

— that it should be a friend / To sooth the cares, and lift the thought of man. (11. 246–247.)

We see that the notion was important when Moneta told about the difference between a poet and a dreamer in 'The Fall of Hyperion'. Keats would have intended to show us an invincible mind — mind that can feel sorrow as sorrow, and joy as joy — reinforced sense of beauty, — love —, that cannot be lost even in eternal agony.

— every creature hath its home;
Every sole man hath days of joy and pain,
Whether his labours be sublime or low —
The pain alone; the joy alone; distinct:
Only the dreamer venoms all his days,
Bearing more woe than all his sins deserve.

(The Fall of Hyperion. Canto I. 11. 171–176.)

Then, suffering Moneta looks like a Christ-like goddess in a sense. None can
deny Keats' deep brotherly love and friendship; it is natural that he should have been inspired with Milton's friendship and love:

The kernel of thine earthly love,
Beauty, in things on earth, and things above.
*(On seeing a Lock of Milton's Hair, 11. 20–21.)*

fair-hair'd Milton's eloquent distress,
And all his love for gentle Lycid drown'd.
*(Keen, fitful gusts . . . 11. 11–12.)*

It will be worth while considering that Keats was going to close his letter to Reynolds, May 3, 1818, writing as follows:

Your third Chamber of Life shall be a lucky and a gentle one — stored with the wine of love — and the Bread of Friendship.

In September 1820, Keats left England never to return for a change of air in Italy; his throat ache had developed into serious tuberculosis then. On his way, he composed the last sonnet — in fact, a revised piece. It draws our attention to some points:

1) immortality (symbolized here by the star) had haunted him throughout his life;
2) the early proud solitude had utterly disappeared;
3) separated from nature, he now turned to human reality;
4) he was eager to unify love and death.

Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art —
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
Like nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,
The moving waters at their priestlike task
Of pure ablation round earth's human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors —
No — yet still stedfast, still unchangeable
Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever — or else swoon to death.
*(revised Sept. 28, 1820. Shakespearian.)*

He died Feb. 23, 1821 in a room facing *Piazza di Spagna*, Rome. He wanted a simple epitaph graven suggested by a line from 'Philaster' by Fletcher, whose partnership with Beaumont had long attracted his attention:

*Here lies one whose flame Was writ in water.*

The tombstone is in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome.

**Notes**

2) *Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a tour*. *July 13, 1798*. 1.38.
3) cf. Letter 87. (H. Buxton Forman’s number: The Poetical Works and Other Writings of John Keats: Phaeton, 1970; the same hereafter.)

4) a ‘noble’ letter — Bate calls it so. cf. Bate, W.J. op. cit., p. 179.


8) Bate, W.J. op. cit., pp. 18, 238.

9) Fate of the Butterfly. 11. 209–210.


14) On the flaccidity of rural reprieve in ‘To one who has been long in city pent’, cf. Bate, W.J. op. cit., p. 68.


16) cf. ibid. 11. 769–777.


19) e.g. sonnet: ‘The Human Seasons’


21) Note ‘melodies’ in the second happiness.

22) Bate calls it the ‘nostalgia of the outsider’. op. cit., p. 513.


29) Matsuura, T. op. cit., pp. VIII–XIV.


31) e.g. Letter 58, Mar. 25, 1818.

32) Blackstone, B. op. cit., p. 50.


35) This sonnet is Shakespearian both in style and theme. He began Shakespearian sonnets from then on. cf. ibid. p. 291.

36) ibid. p. 290.


38) Ogawa, K. op. cit., p. 162.


40) written from September, 1818 to April, 1819.


45) Evert, W. op. cit., p. 229.
47) written from September to December, 1819.
48) Blackstone calls this type 'philanthropists too busy to enter the temple' (of immortality). cf. *op. cit.*, p. 250.
50) *ibid.* p. 249.
51) Bate, W.J. *op. cit.*, p. 181.
52) For the minute analysis, cf. Bate, W.J. *op. cit.*, pp. 400–401.
54) cf. Letter 69, June 10, 1818.
56) 'All your better deeds shall be in water writ.'

REFERENCES