CHAPTER III

JOHN KEATS:

AESTHETIC TRAJECTORY
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“If I should die, I have left no immortal work behind me-nothing to make my friends proud of my memory; but I have loved the principle of beauty in all things, and if I had time, I would have made myself remembered.” John Keats

Among all the Romantics, Keats unfortunately had a very short span of life. Larger span of life, however, is no sure proof of lasting literature. Keats achieved in 26 years what others could not do in their entire life. Keats, who was greatly inspired by Greek art, culture and mythology and by Elizabethan poets, especially Spenser, is said to be the most romantic of all the romanticists. John Keats lived a very short life marred by tragedy. His father died in 1804 and his mother died six years later in the year when Keats left school. His brother Tom died of tuberculosis and his other brother, George, departed to seek his fortune in America. Early in his life, before the death of Tom, he himself suffers the symptoms of the same fatal disease i.e. tuberculosis. In addition to that, his financial condition was bad and he failed in the field of love.

Besieged by family loss would have made Keats more susceptible to gaining an acute sensitive mindset against the outside world. This sensitivity may explain his hyper ability to detect beauty everywhere around him in spite of his tragic short life. Beauty, for him, is a religion and an aim he was seeking throughout his miserable tragic life.

John Keats’s firm faith in the fact that “beauty is truth”, leads him, unconsciously, to adopt this fact throughout his verse. And it is this faith that characterizes his sweetest poetic production in English literature. If
Coleridge delivers his Romanticism via supernaturalism; Keats gifts his Romanticism to us by means of beauty i.e. via aesthetic trajectory.

For Keats, beauty is the moving spirit of both life and arts; but his awareness of the concept of beauty can be interpreted differently. Mr. Ford interprets Keats’ conception of beauty from the sensuous point of view. For him, Keats’ chief poems celebrate sensuous beauty and sexual love whereas Wasserman, Murry and Bradley find ideal beauty in Keats’ poems.

In fact, Keats seems to glorify both sensuous and ideal beauty because even normal things that have no effect on normal people can easily thrill Keats and fill his heart with aesthetic pleasure. Keats’ friend, Hydon, comments on Keats’s attraction to everything beautiful and states: “The humming of a bee, the sight of a flower, the glitter of the Sun, seemed to make his nature tremble; then his eyes flashed, his cheeks glowed, and his mouth quivered.”¹ Not only do normal things affect Keats; but even things that are considered disagreeable by others can affect Keats too. For example, the season of autumn, whose beauty has been ignored by majority of people, arouses a deep aesthetic pleasure overwhelms every single sense of Keats who considers it a golden season of golden mists and fruitfulness:

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Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;
To bend with apples the moss’d cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
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In spite of the critics’ claim that Keats celebrates physical beauty in his earliest poetic phase whereas spiritual beauty has been celebrated by him in his mature poetic phase; it seems that Keats worships beauty in both phases. In other words, he glorifies ideal beauty in his early poetic phase
too, for example in *The Hyperion: A Vision* he admires beauty which is a form of might:

For it’s the eternal law
That first in Beauty should be first in might.

Keats focuses on how experiencing beauty gives meaning and value to life. In *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, Ed Friedlander thinks that Keats seems to be telling his readers about something that may have happened, or may happen someday, to them. They discover something that they think they really like. They do not really understand it, but they are sure it is the best thing that is ever happened to them. They are thrilled and focus on it to give in to the beauty and richness and pleasure, and let it overwhelm them.

Then the pleasure is gone. Far more than a normal let down, the experience has left them crippled emotionally. At least for a while, they do not talk about regretting the experience. And it remains an important part of who they feel that they are\(^2\).

Keats considers both beauty and true imagination that leads to beauty, the ultimate truth. Consequently, true imagination can be a form of beauty. Keats wrote in one of his letters: “What imagination sizes as beauty must be truth, whether it existed before or not.”\(^3\) Not only can beauty be truth, it is also power as Keats declares in *The Hyperion: The Vision*. In fact, he worships and glorifies beauty in all its forms and aspects whether sensuous and physical or ideal and spiritual. It is the ultimate truth and the full power; it is Keats’ religion and faith, the spirit of his life and the style that dominates his poetic works. Thus, Keats’ conception of beauty can be identified as follows: It is the religion, the faith and the style that stands as a spectrum involves the different shades of all these aspects i.e. truth, power, imagination, sensuous charm and spiritual values.

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**Beauty via Despair**

What distinguished Keats’s poems and characterized his aesthetic tools is that they embody the deep sorrow and frustration tune of a helpless person counting his days. Keats has been identified by the unique ability to find beauty everywhere; even despair can produce beauty on the hands of Keats who is capable to find joy even in the moments of pain and frustration. He is also distinguishable by the power he mastered to bring life, soul and feeling to the description of these moments of pain in a way brought an immortal existence to his odes as long as the existence of human joy and pain. Stopford A. Brooke comments on this ability as a mark of Keats’ genius:

> The life in the moment, and in the momentary joy and movement in all things in nature, was the source of his directness in description. This joy in the present, this absorption in the beauty of the hour, this making of it a divine possession, and losing in its loveliness the pain of life is one of the chief marks of his genius.

Keats’s despair resulted mainly in his hard life, in which both poverty and ill-health conditions combined together to lead him to the failure in love meanwhile it, i.e. despair, strengthens his power to vivify the pain-joy images in his poems in general and his odes in particular. The tragic tones, in these poems, together with the little joyful ones are clear indicators for the sad-resistant emotional state of a frustrated lover whose lost love sharpens his ability to detect beauty and even to create it in the moments of pain and suffering. The more frustrated Keats is, the more beautiful his images are.

Keats’ moments of despair are affiliated mainly to his lost love, Fanny Brawn. Consequently, exploring Keats’ love poems, that are either addressed to Fanny or written for her, is the best way to explain how Keats manages to create beauty via his despair. Keats’ life was too short to enable him to love more than once. Fanny Brawn was the beginning
and the end of his love relations. Their relation started in 1818 and ended by his death in 1821. During that three-year-love period, Keats’ poetic creativity reached its highest. The increasing heat of his love being frustrated by both week health conditions and poor financial situation got his poetic creativity to ripen and mature early in his life.

In spite of the fact that Keats wrote sonnets, ballads, narrative poems, and odes, it is in the odes that his best and most distinguished poetic qualities are found and all these odes written after meeting his only love, Fanny. Together with some other factors, the signs of flirtations on the part of Fanny Brawne, to whom he secretly betrothed, and the symptoms of a fatal disease that may stand on the way of their matching are major factors that refined his talent to produce these odes. Anyhow, explaining some of his love-frustration poems will make the idea clear.

*Ode to Fanny* is addressed to Fanny Brawne. He wrote this poem to express his miserable jealousy of Fanny whose passion is poisoned by uncertainty. He heard that Fanny had been flirting and dancing with some other young men. This added more to his anguish in a time he was suffering the symptoms of a fatal disease. He launches his poem requesting nature to give him a theme by writing on it he may relieve his pent-up heart:

Physician Nature! Let my spirit blood!
O ease my heart of verse and let me rest;
Throw me upon thy Tripod, till the flood
Of stifling numbers ebbs from my full breast.
A theme! a theme! great nature! give a theme;
Let me begin my dream.
I come -- I see thee, as thou standest there,
Beckon me not into the wintry air.

Then he moves to the main theme of the poem i.e. Fanny, his dearest love, who is the fountain of fears, panting miseries, hope and joys. She is the source of fears because she may leave him because of his fatal disease which makes his life miserable, yet she is still the source of joys. In his
imagination he sees her lovely figure. She looks cheerful, smiling and all aglow in her heavenly beauty and bubbling, blooming youth. This got him to gaze at her with ravished vassal eyes:

Ah! dearest love, sweet home of all my fears,
And hopes, and joys, and panting miseries, --
To-night, if I may guess, thy beauty wears
A smile of such delight,
As brilliant and as bright,
As when with ravished, aching, vassal eyes,
Lost in soft amaze,
I gaze, I gaze!

In a fit of jealousy Keats imagines someone making love with his love Fanny and she is flirting and making advances in a love affair with somebody else. He feels that there is someone eating his feast i.e. Fanny whom he calls silver moon. He is jealous of all glances cast at his beloved. He requests her to let other glances go away having no signs of advancements. She should be indifferent to them. He prays her not to transfer her love from him to them and to keep her sincere and warm love to him at least out of generosity:

Who now, with greedy looks, eats up my feast?
What stare outfaces now my silver moon!
Ah! keep that hand unravished at the least;
Let, let, the amorous burn --
But pr'ythee, do not turn
The current of your heart from me so soon.
O! save, in charity,
The quickest pulse for me.

He goes on requesting her to keep loyal for him and starts advising her how to do so: Though music is tempting and arouses passions and though dancing with others is dangerous, she can be loyal by being indifferent to others as an April day, smiling, cold and gay. She should be like a lily, though beautiful yet pure. By doing so, he thinks, the joys of spring will come back and he will be able to make love with his sweetheart, Fanny. Then he will be cured of his disease and will have full vitality to enjoy her youth:

Save it for me, sweet love! though music breathe
Voluptuous visions into the warm air;  
Though swimming through the dance's dangerous wreath,  
Be like an April day,  
Smiling and cold and gay,  
A temperate lilly, temperate as fair;  
Then, Heaven! there will be  
A warmer June for me.

If she does not believe his opinion about the disloyalty of women she can test the truth of his statement by putting her hand on her heart and to examine it on her pulse to see how much faithful she has been to him. Women, for him, are faithless. A woman is lured into temptation like a feather on the sea swayed to and fro to every tide and wind. A woman in love should not be uncertain as a blow-ball from the meadow which goes on hanging like a pendulum; it is neither constant nor firm:

Why, this, you'll say, my Fanny! is not true:  
Put your soft hand upon your snowy side,  
Where the heart beats: confess -- 'tis nothing new --  
Must not a woman be  
A feather on the sea,  
Sway'd to and fro by every wind and tide?  
Of as uncertain speed  
As blow-ball from the mead?

He loves her sincerely and wholeheartedly and chases her like a butterfly moving in his heart. His conditions become miserable when away from her but jealousy, which he called the green-eyed monster\(^5\), tortures him that is why he requests her to protect him from that monster. She can do so only if she keeps constant to him:

I know it -- and to know it is despair  
To one who loves you as I love, sweet Fanny!  
Whose heart goes fluttering for you every where,  
Nor, when away you roam,  
Dare keep its wretched home,  
Love, love alone, his pains severe and many:  
Then, loveliest! keep me free,  
From torturing jealousy.
If she really values his true love more than the temporary, pity and fading pleasure of an hour of dance, she should let nobody pollute the “Holly See of love” in her and not to allow any stranger to profane the place that should be kept holy for him alone. If she could not remain loyal to him, it is better that their betrothal should be broken because allowing others to touch just new-budded flower of her beauty and letting her fragrant youth to be enjoyed by others is just license for Keats to die:

Ah! if you prize my subdued soul above
The poor, the fading, brief, pride of an hour;
Let none profane my Holy See of love,
Or with a rude hand break
The sacramental cake:
Let none else touch the just new-budded flower;
If not -- may my eyes close,
Love! on their lost repose.

*Bright Star* was written by Keats perhaps on a voyage to Italy in an attempt to try a common treatment for tuberculosis. When he wrote this poem he was aware of the fact that he was dying. *Bright Star* has been theorized to be addressed to his fiancée, Fanny Brawne, connecting it to Keats’ May 3, 1818 letter to her. In this poem he envies the bright star i.e. the Pole Star, not for its loneliness but for its constant and steadfastness:

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 ablution round earth’s human shores,

If he possesses the constancy the Pole Star has, he would be able to enjoy a sort of immortality i.e. the immortality he can gain when he rests his head on the well-developed breast of his love feeling, forever, its gentle rise and fall but even then he will be always awakening to a sweet but restless feeling. This feeling is aroused by hearing the sound of her breathing which would remind him of the shortness of his life. This case of joy-pain condition seems to add more to his suffering and tantalization,
which force him to wish either to be immortalized or to die soon. Both choices seem to be better than being tortured by a temporary joy that is always spoiled by pain and sorrow:

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 tender taken breath,
And so live ever-or else swoon to death.

Another example for Keats’ beauty via despair can be found in his famous ballad *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. Though some readers claim the story in this ballad symbolic of the plight of the artist, who is always in love with beauty, can never fully accept the mundane; it seems much logical to maintain that the poem is really about Keats's confused feelings for, his fiancée, Fanny Brawne; to whom he could not commit fully. The La Belle Dame or the beautiful woman who has no mercy upon her lovers is Fanny Brawne with whom Keats felt in love but still uncertain of matching her because his friends disapproved the possibility of such match.

This poem was first penned by Keats on April 21, 1819, and then altered for its publication on May 20, 1819. At that time his relation with Fanny was not firm yet which added more to his suffering. Her beauty enslaved him just as the beauty of the mysterious woman, La Belle Dame, enslaved the knight in the story of the poem, as well as kings, princes, and warriors. For him, the beauty of Fanny is as mysterious and merciless as the beauty of that woman in the story of the poem:

I met a lady in the meads,
Full beautiful - a faery's child,
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild.

I made a garland for her head,
And bracelets too, and fragrant zone;
She looked at me as she did love,
And made sweet moan. ----
She found me roots of relish sweet,
    And honey wild, and manna-dew,
And sure in language strange she said -
    'I love thee true'.

Though the knight, as well as Keats, did not know the beautiful woman well, they are both deadly enslaved by her beauty and charm to an extent got them to lose their consciousness. But that deadly-like condition enabled them to discover the sorrowful and reality of being enslaved to her:

And there she lulled me asleep
And there I dreamed - Ah! woe betide! -
The latest dream I ever dreamt
    On the cold hill side.

I saw pale kings and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
They cried - 'La Belle Dame sans Merci
    Hath thee in thrall!'

When the knight, together with Keats, wakened up they discovered that what happened was a nightmare then they both realized their miserable condition:

I saw their starved lips in the gloam,
    With horrid warning gaped wide,
And I awoke and found me here,
    On the cold hill's side.
And this is why I sojourn here
    Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is withered from the lake,
    And no birds sing.

Like *La Belle Dame Sans Merci, Lamia* is another folkloric allegory in which Keats finds identification between his love story and the story in it. *Lamia* is one of Keats’ famous poems in which Keats finds a rich folklore field to draw his aesthetic images. It is a long narrative poem its main theme is the love-episodes of Lycius and Lamia. Lamia is a serpent-immortal goddess who falls in love with a mortal young handsome Corinthian man, Lycius, who is a man with a philosophic bent of mind.
She has the ability to change her form. In order to win Lycius’s love, she changes herself into a beautiful girl and waits by the roadside for him to pass by. When he comes, she accosts him who falls headlong in love with her at first sight. Lamia gives up her immortality for his sake.

They both love each other and live together in deep love. Lycius then decides to marry Lamia in a social manner and fixes a day of wedding and a big feast to be given to the people of Corinthian. During the feast, Apollonius, a sage philosopher, a friend and a teacher of Lycius, arrives there. He warns Lycius that he has been deceived because the woman he loves is not a mortal woman but a serpent one. For Lycius, it is too difficult to believe. In order to protect Lamia he enters an argument in defence of her, but, being revealed, Lamia begins to dissolve into a serpent and vanishes altogether. Being unable to bear the pain remaining alive without Lamia, Lycius dies of the shock.

This poem is an allegory to sing out Keats’ love for Fanny and her response to his love. It is a contradiction between dream and reality. So long as Lamia and Lycius as well as Fanny and Keats remain in pure love, lost in the ecstasy of passion, forgetful of the social world, the dream stays. But the moment Lycius as well as Keats tries to give this dream a social shape of marriage it vanishes.

There is a suitable suggestion that Lamia represents Fanny, Lycius represents Keats and Apollonius represents the bitter reality into which the sweet dream dissolves:

Then Lamia breath'd death breath; the sophist's eye,
Like a sharp spear, went through her utterly,
Keen, cruel, perceant, stinging: she, as well
As her weak hand could any meaning tell,
Motion'd him to be silent; vainly so,
He look'd and look'd again a level - No!
"A Serpent!" echoed he; no sooner said,
Than with a frightful scream she vanished:
And Lycius' arms were empty of delight,
As were his limbs of life, from that same night.
On the high couch he lay! - his friends came round
Supported him - no pulse, or breath they found,
And, in its marriage robe, the heavy body wound.

Through this poem Keats foresees the end of his love relation with Fanny: he will die before he could achieve his dream i.e. before being able to marry Fanny. The advice of his friends which disapprove his marriage to her will come true just like Apollonius’ expectations about Lamia were real.

What qualifies the poems discussed here is that these poems are all overwhelmed with the feeling of despair and frustration and these feelings stimulates Keats to compose these poems and to decorate them in this aesthetic way. Keats’ despair strengthens his poetic creativity to produce many of his aesthetic imagery.

Not only do his love poems prove Keats’ unique ability to find beauty everywhere, however, this ability turned into Keatsian fact can be found in all his poems especially when dealing with the theme of mortality or death.

Keats focused on the theme of death and its inevitability in his work, even before the diagnosis of terminal tuberculosis. For him, small, slow acts of death occurred every day, and he chronicled these small mortal occurrences. Many of the images concerning death for instance the end of a lover’s embrace, the images on an ancient urn, the reaping of grain in autumn all of these are not only symbols of death, but examples of it. The instances of great beauty and art also caused Keats to ponder mortality. As a writer, Keats hoped he would live long enough to achieve his poetic dream of becoming as great as Shakespeare or John Milton: in *Sleep and Poetry* (1817), Keats outlined a plan of poetic achievement that required him to read poetry for a decade in order to understand and surpass the work of his predecessors. Hovering near this dream, however, was a
morbid sense that death might intervene and terminate his projects; he expresses these concerns in the mournful 1818 sonnet “When I have fears that I may cease to be.”

In his poetry, Keats proposed the contemplation of beauty as a way of delaying the inevitability of death. The message Keats wants to deliver to his readers is that although they must die eventually, they can choose to spend their time alive in aesthetic revelry, looking at beautiful objects and landscapes. Keats’s speakers contemplate urns *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, books (*On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer*, 1816 and, *On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again*, 1818), birds (*Ode to a Nightingale*), seasons (*Ode to Autumn*), and stars (“Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art”, 1819). Unlike mortal beings, beautiful things will never die; but will keep demonstrating their beauty for all time. Keats explores this idea in the first book of *Endymion* (1818). The speaker in *Ode on a Grecian Urn* envies the immortality of the lute players and trees inscribed on the ancient vessel because they shall never cease playing their songs, nor will they ever shed their leaves. He reassures young lovers by telling them that even though they shall never catch their mistresses, these women shall always stay beautiful. The people on the urn, unlike the speaker, shall never stop having experiences. They shall remain permanently depicted while the speaker changes, grows old, and eventually dies.

Death seems to mystify Keats who tries to give it a common form so as to change its ugly horrible reality. In his poem *On Death*, he inquires whether it is possible to regard death as a sleep since life seems to be a dream and beautiful events looks like phantom and pleasures as visions; but unfortunately we still think that death is the greatest pain:

*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.

Then, he goes on contemplating the nature and the strangeness of human  
life being doomed to lead a life of woe:

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.

In *Ode to Autumn*, Keats who is aware of his soon mortality, celebrates  
autumn the season precedes winter which is the season of coldness and  
symbol of death. Autumn “Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness!” and  
“Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun”. It is a lady:

Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,  
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;  
Or on a half-reaped furrow sound asleep,  
Drowsed with the fume of poppies, while thy hook  
Sparès the next swath and all its twined flowers.

After glorifying the special beauty of autumn, Keats comes back to the  
constant mortality of this world “Where are the songs of Spring? Ay,  
where are they?” The songs and beauty of youth have gone; but autumn  
being, personified into a lady, should not be bothered by the mortality of  
the world. It would be better, due to the speaker in the poem, to enjoy the  
present beauty and not to spoil it by being involved in the past sorrow or  
thinking of the eventual death of the mortal world:

Think not of them, thou hast thy music too, -  
While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day  
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;  
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn  
Among the river sallows, borne aloft  
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies.

*Ode to a Nightingale* is a good example to discuss here. Keats’ loss of  
sensation, that is normally caused by severe pain and aching, leads him to  
awareness where happiness can be immortal. This spiritual journey  
caused by the sweet singing of a nightingale:
My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thine happiness, -
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green and shadows numberless,
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

Keats finds in the feelings of pain, suffering and numbness a hidden ecstasy, a spiritual joy and an eternal pleasure. He is happy for the happiness of the nightingale and his happiness brings the numbness he feels.

The desire for death is clear enough in his ode. Death which is the source of pain, suffering and sadness; for Keats, it is easeful and source of relief.

He is half in love with death which is always hated by all creatures:

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 mused 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.

Dying seems to be the way to the ideal state of things. Though when he dies he would suffer no pain anymore; he would not be able to hear the eternal song of the bird which is supposed to be immortal. Half of Keats’ spirit seeks escape from pain and change via death; the other half yearns for immortality via the eternal song of the nightingale. Keats skillfully mastered handling the contradictions by exploring the complexities of sorrow and joy, numbness and heightened sensitivity, life and death and by trying to hold these oppositions in balance. In his poetry, Keats proposed the contemplation of beauty as a way of delaying the
inevitability of death. Although we must die eventually, we can choose to spend our time alive in aesthetic revelry, looking at beautiful objects and landscapes.

Out of the mortal death Keats finds immortal life and out of the suffering of pain; he can find ecstasy and happiness. His permanent medium through which he can convey any theme is beauty which for him the absolute truth. Thus, it is accepted to claim that Keats is capable of creating beauty not only out of despair but even out of ugliness.

**Romantic Medicine and Beauty**

In his brief life (1795–1821), John Keats managed both to study medicine and to write some of the most memorable poetry in the English language. It has always been surprising that the part that medicine played in the creation of Keats' poetry should be so under-estimated (or ignored) by literary scholars. After all, Keats spent six years of his life in the study of medicine (five years of apprenticeship and a year at Guy's and St. Thomas' Hospitals in London) a period roughly equivalent to the time he spent writing poetry\(^8\). Thus, Keats’ medical knowledge should be firmly estimated and put into consideration during any critical study aims at studying his poetic works appropriately.

One of the creative ways to read Keats’ poems is to consider his medical background during this reading. Doing so will lead to the romantic medicine Keats offers. This branch of medicine has been neglected and ignored as a reaction to the triumph of French mechanism. Almeida comments on this fact and states:

> The period of Romantic medicine has existed as a hiatus in the history of science. Unified in its intellectual concerns yet conceptually distinct, and spanning the three decades of a recognized era, Romantic medicine has been ignored at once by historians of medicine whose studies end around 1794 with the triumph of French mechanism and semiotics in the newly established clinics of the late eighteenth century and by
the chroniclers of modern medicine who begin their studies with the invention of the high-resolution doublet lens microscope in 1829 that permitted Robert Brown's discovery of cell nuclei, Theodor Schwann's cell theory, and Rudolf Virchow's description of cellular pathology.

One of the reasons that lead to neglecting medical hints in Keats’ poems in the modern age is the fact that, in the 20th century, Romantic medicine has been separated from science by the modern theorists who study Romantic art:

Also, theorists of Romantic art, secured perhaps by the common but otherwise insupportable twentieth-century assumption of the alienation of Romanticism from science, have chosen largely to exclude the issues of early-nineteenth-century medicine from their consideration. As a fertile period of transition between the birth of the clinic and the discovery of the cell, as an era of speculative insight between the imaginative reading of life signs and the visual knowledge of bacterial life, Romantic medicine engendered biology, zoology, immunology, clinical diagnoses, and evolution theory.

Whatever the reasons of neglecting romantic medicine and whatever the amount of ignorance of the medical influence in Keats’ poetry can be, they cannot decrease the importance of this effect on his poetic production.

From the medical point of view, Keats, the physician-poet, gives a typical medical treatment through his poems. Suffering on both sides, physically and spiritually, the physician-poet, Keats is seeking remedy via poetry. This romantic remedy can be generalized to suit, not only Keats, but rather suit all humanity who can have the chance of reading him. His poems, mostly, seem like psychotherapy sessions. The three stages of medical treatment i.e. description of symptoms, diagnosis of the disease and finally the prescription of medicine, can be traced in these poems.
In his *Ode to a Nightingale*, Keats launches the poem by a description of his physical condition when he heard the sweet song of the nightingale: his heart was aching; his pain turned into a drowsy numbness and his sensation is lost as if he had drunk a hemlock or an opiate. Now he forgets all about the pain as if he had sunk in the river of oblivion “and Lethe-Wards had sunk.” Then, he turns to the diagnosis of the disease that can show these symptoms. It is the effect of the sweet song of the nightingale on him; it is not a disease resulted by envying the happy bird; but rather happiness overwhelms the physician-poet when he heard the attractive twittering of the Dryad of the trees i.e. the nightingale. He is happy for the happiness of the bird:

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thine happiness,-
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green and shadows numberless,
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

This poem presents a psychological therapy and the medicine it gives is not the use of pain killers like hemlock or opiate; the prescription it gives contains three types of medicines: the song of “summer in full-throated ease” of the nightingale, the Flora wine, and poetry. Each medicine has a specific effect on the pain: the song stops the feeling of pain; the Flora wine will make the patient, Keats, so powerful and will inspire him with unusual ability to compose poetry:

O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green.

The third medicine is poetry that will lead him to fade away to the world of the bird where he can taste all types of joys:
Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!
O for a beaker full of the warm South,
    Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
    With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
    And purple-stained mouth;
    That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
    And with thee fade away into the forest dim.

Being faded to the world of the bird; the patient will put an end to his suffering because he reaches the last stage of treatment. The patient-physician-poet, Keats, will leave the physical world with all its pain and suffering. The romantic physician presents his medicine, not in a bottle of medicine, but rather in a container of beauty. By means of poetry, the poet will dissolve into the natural world of the bird where he can forget all the diseases of fever, fret and weariness. There will be no pain “groan”, no ageing, no death, no sorrowful thoughts, and no despair. In that world the joys of beauty and those of love can be fulfilled without delay:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
    What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
    Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
    Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
    Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
    And leaden-eyed despairs,
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
    Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

Not only does the poem prescribe romantic remedy, it also gives some medical romantic advice e.g. beauty of nature can replace medical drugs and death should be looked at differently because it is not as dreadful as people think. Death should not to be afraid from because it can put an end to people’s suffering:

    I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call’d him soft names in many a mused 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.
The poet who leaves medicine for poetry finds a remedy in poetry rather than in medicine because the relief caused by drugs is temporal whereas poetry leads to a permanent relief in an eternal world which is the world of nature. Keats finds identification between his poetry, which will enable him to dissolve into nature and become a part from it by means of wine, and the delicate song of the nightingale because they are both eternal sources of joy. The poet himself seems to be semi-conscious as if undergoing a spiritual journey or attending a psychotherapy session. By the end of the session, at the end of the poem, he returns to his consciousness to inquire:

Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music: - Do I wake or sleep?

*Ode on Melancholy* is another proof for the medical influence in Keats’ poetry. The name of the poem has pathological connotations. The dictionary meaning of the word ‘melancholy’ is deeper than mere sadness; it refers to a psychological state of a sort of a deep despair or depression that may lead to madness. The physician-poet, Keats presents, by means of the poem, a medical report consists of three main parts; each part represented by a stanza in the poem. The first part of the report is about the drugs that can be used to decrease the pain resulted by melancholy and his recommendation regarding the side effects of these drugs (first stanza). The second part prescribes the most appropriate remedy that has no side effects (second stanza). The third part describes the nature and reality of this psychological state i.e. melancholy.

The medical report that is offered by the physician-poet is robed in wonderful aesthetic images. Those who suffer melancholy should not go to oblivion “Lethe”, not to use pain killers like the poisonous bane that is enough to kill a wolf “Wolf-bane”, or the deadly “ruby grape of Proserpine” and not to use cult of death as “yew-berries”, death-moth, or
“the downy owl”; because all these ways of treatment has deadly side effects which is damaging consciousness. “The main idea that Keats expresses through this wealth of imagery is that we must not seek escape from the pain of melancholy in poisons and drugs that destroy consciousness”\textsuperscript{11}:

\begin{quote}
No, no, go not to Lethe, neither twist
Wolf's-bane, tight-rooted, for its poisonous wine;
Nor suffer thy pale forehead to be kiss'd
By nightshade, ruby grape of Proserpine;
Make not your rosary of yew-berries,
Nor let the beetle, nor the death-moth be
Your mournful Psyche, nor the downy owl
A partner in your sorrow's mysteries;
For shade to shade will come too drowsily,
And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul.
\end{quote}

Keats objects the use of these poisons all well as all the symbols of death cult not because “they are terrifying or unpleasant in themselves, but rather that they stand for the inhalation of consciousness, which is too high a price to pay for the relief of melancholy.”\textsuperscript{12}

The physician-poet moves to the prescription of the safe cure that suits this case: when the fit of melancholy falls as a weeping cloud, that waters every beautiful thing with despair and sorrow and consequently overcomes the patient fully with sadness, then the ideal treatment for it is returning to the beauty of nature and gaining the joy of it. The remedy is the pleasure gained from the beauty of the “morning rose”, “the rainbow of the salt stand-wave”, and “the wealth of globed peonies”:

\begin{quote}
But when the melancholy fit shall fall
Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud,
That fosters the droop-headed flowers all,
And hides the green hill in an April shroud;
Then glut thy sorrow on a morning rose,
Or on the rainbow of the salt sand-wave,
Or on the wealth of globed peonies;
\end{quote}

But if this fit which Keats addresses as “thy mistress” is so severe it will be then much more beautiful as an angry lady. The romantic poet
finds beauty even in the fits of melancholy! What he wants to say is that the much severe the fit of melancholy is; the more effective and joyful this remedy will be. The severe melancholy is similar to the woman whose beauty enriched by her anger:

Or if thy mistress some rich anger shows,  
Emprison her soft hand, and let her rave,  
And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes.

The last part of this medical romantic report spots light on the nature of melancholy and its causes: melancholy dwells on beauty and joy! Which can be surprisingly unexpected; but the smart poet, Keats, who is armed with rich competence and full mastering of his aesthetic images, is capable of convincing his patients together with his readers with his conclusion which is beauty and joy are the remedy and causes of melancholy. This is because melancholy can be relieved by means of beauty and joy meanwhile it can be caused by both of them since it exists in the shortness of the time of beauty, pleasure and joy:

She 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:  
Ay, in the very temple of Delight  
Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine,

Melancholy exists with the beauty that must die, and in the limited joy that takes no time longer than the time a bee-mouth needs to sip nectar from a flower. Thus, the sensuous temporal beauty and the human limited capacity to experience joy are the causes of melancholy.

By the end of the poem, we come to the medical recommendation where the physician–poet advises his patients not to lose their awareness in order to escape the pain of melancholy; but rather to experience it since its pain is the price of awareness. The choice is not between pain and pleasure but between oblivion and awareness:

Though seen of none save him 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.

The least well-known of the six great odes of 1819, *Ode on Indolence*, is not far away from Keats’ romantic medical knowledge. The poem is a psychological therapy: indolence or lethargy is a means of treatment for the troubled poet who suffers triple agony i.e. poetry, ambition, and love. He was struggling to get full power over poetry by means of which he can gain his ambition to be a great poet and consequently he can win his love, Fanny, because then he will be able to give this love a public form i.e. marriage. Being indolent or in lethargic mood, the activity of both body and mind are suspended and the poet becomes indifferent for both pain and pleasure. Indolence will relieve the poet’s pain and keeps him away from the burdens of life.

Keats seems as a physician diagnosing the symptoms of being indolent: his eyes benumbed, the circulation of blood seems to be slow and the beats of his pulse is feeble:

```
The blissful cloud of summer-indolence
Benumb'd my eyes; my pulse grew less and less;
Pain had no sting, and pleasure's wreath no flower.
O, why did ye not melt, and leave my sense
Unhaunted quite of all but - nothingness?
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In a letter to George and Georgiana, Keats described his indolence: “This is the only happiness; and is a rare instance of advantage in the body overpowering the Mind.” Keats used the lethargy of the body to control the suffering of his mind.

Even *Ode to Autumn* can be read from a romantic medical point of view. This poem celebrates the fruitfulness of autumn on the surface and at the same time, in the depth, it presents a psychological therapy for those who are approaching old age i.e. those who think that approaching old age is free from joy, fruitfulness and production:
Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;
To bend with apples the mossed cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;

The poet consciously or unconsciously offers a psychological therapy via his aesthetic contemplations. By addressing autumn, the poet addresses those who are approaching the old age or maturity telling them that their age has its own music and joy too:

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,---
While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;
Then in a wailful choir, the small gnats mourn.

Autumn, which stands for approaching maturity, should not envy spring and its joys (songs) because they are temporal that is why they have vanished. For Keats, spring is not better that autumn; both have their own beauty and joy which are temporal in both seasons; but he honours autumn more because of its maturity and fruitful beauty which spring season lacks. The poem is richly sensual, and contrasts the joys of autumn to the more-poetized joys of spring. Keats was dying at the time, and as in *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, he is probably describing, on one level, his own final illness as a time of completion, consummation, and peace.

The question that presents itself here is “why does the young Keats celebrate autumn and not the spring?” one of the possible answers is that maybe because Keats feels that his ill health conditions won’t let him reach the age of maturity and for this reason he longs for approaching maturity and tries to celebrate its fruitfulness by honouring the maturity of autumn via this ode. Consequently, the poem can be read as Keats’ self-remedy through which he relieves his pain by convincing himself that all joys and beauties of life are subjected to mortality and death just
like him and his youth. Thus, even if he lives more and reaches maturity he will die at the end. So, there is no need to feel sorry since his bad health won’t allow him to reach this stage of life.

One of the principles upon which psychologists mainly depend is giving their patients similar models or conditions to ease their pains. This technique can be traced obviously in the two Keatsian poems *Lamia* and *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. The two poems offer a psychological therapy for Keats together with all frustrated lovers. Fanny was characterized by Lamia in the first poem and by the beautiful lady in the second and all of them are models for selfish women who use their charm and beauty to condemn their lovers. Lycius in *Lamia* together with the knight, princes, kings and warriors in *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* are models similar to Keats. They are all condemned and sent to death by the women they loved.

In *Lamia*, Lycius, who was cheated by the snake-woman (Lamia), was unable to bear the ugly truth of her and at the same moment he had his last breath at his wedding ceremony:

> “A Serpent!” echoed he; no sooner said,  
> Than with a frightful scream she vanished:  
> And Lycius’ arms were empty of delight,  
> As were his limbs of life, from that same night.  
> On the high couch he lay! - his friends came round  
> Supported him - no pulse, or breath they found,  
> And, in its marriage robe, the heavy body wound.

In *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, the knight told Keats about the victims of the beautiful woman whose souls were sucked by her:

> I saw pale kings, and princes too,  
> Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;  
> Who cry’d--"La belle Dame sans merci  
> Hath thee in thrall!"

Keats, the psychological therapist, tries to ease his pain and the pain of all the lovers, who are suffering, by convincing them that they are not
suffering alone. He wants them to consider the fact that there are many others in this world whose suffering can be equal or much more severe than theirs. After undergoing such a therapy, those frustrated people will reach a kind of relief and relaxation similar to the ease that can be gained after attending a psychological session at the clinic of a psychological therapist.

Keats the romantic poet, who practiced medicine for a period of time equal to the period of composing poetry, cannot avoid the conscious or unconscious effect of medicine on his poetry. This medical effect has a romantic tune. The Keatsian treatment is much more wider and particular than any normal medical treatment i.e. Keats’ patients are all human beings; the prescriptions he offers have the form of songs or poems; and his potential medicine that has no side effects is beauty in all its forms and the sweet consequences of beauty such as joy, pleasure and delight.

**Vampires and the Aesthete**

The word “vampire” used originally to refer to either one of two or more species of South American blood-sucking bats or vampire bats that are used to living on the blood of horses, cattle and other animals as well as man chiefly during sleep. “These bats are destitute of molar teeth, but have strong, sharp cutting incisors with which they make punctured wounds from which they suck blood”\(^\text{14}\). The word ‘Vampire’ is also used to refer to “one of several species of harmless tropical American bats of the genus Vampyrus, especially Vampyrus spectrum. These bats feed upon insects and fruit, but were formerly erroneously supposed to suck the blood of man and animals”\(^\text{15}\). It is “called also false vampire”\(^\text{16}\). In literature the word Vampire is used differently. It refers to:

A blood-sucking ghost; a soul of a dead person superstitiously believed to come from the grave and wander about by night sucking the blood of persons asleep, thus causing their death. This superstition was once prevalent in parts of Eastern Europe, and was
especially current in Hungary about the year 1730. The vampire was often said to have the ability to transform itself into the form of a bat, as presented in the novel depicting the legend of Dracula published by Bram Stoker in 1897, which has inspired several movies…

The persons who turn vampires are generally wizards, witches, suicides, and persons who have come to a violent end, or have been cursed by their parents or by the church.¹⁷

Dictionary.com gives semi-definitions for the same word: a vampire can be one of the following:

A preternatural being, commonly believed to be a reanimated corpse that is said to suck the blood of sleeping persons at night. (in Eastern European folklore)

a corpse, animated by an undeparted soul or demon, that periodically leaves the grave and disturbs the living, until it is exhumed and impaled or burned; a person who preys ruthlessly upon others; extortionist or a woman who unscrupulously exploits, ruins, or degrades the men she seduces.¹⁸

The last definition, a woman who unscrupulously exploits, ruins, or degrades the men she seduces, is the most appropriate one for the purpose of the study; because it is the one found in Keats’s poetry particularly in his two famous poems La Belle Dame Sans Merci and Lamia.

The enchantress of La Belle Dame Sans Merci is one of a long tradition of supernatural beings who have charmed mortals into spiritual slavery. The knight whom Keats met told Keats about the story of the beautiful woman who has no mercy on her lovers whom she originally seduces. The knight discovered this fact so late that he could not save himself from her. She charmed him so much that it was easy for her to suck his soul and threw him helpless on one of the hills in the nearby:

Ah, what can ail thee, wretched wight,
Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge is wither’d from the lake,
And no birds sing.

Ah, what can ail thee, wretched wight,
So haggard and so woe-begone?

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The squirrel's granary is full,
And the harvest's done.

I see a lily on thy brow,
With anguish moist and fever dew;
And on thy cheek a fading rose
Fast withereth too.

The La Belle Dame Sans Merci is a vampire used to live on sucking the souls of men who were easily seduced by her up normal charm and felt in love with her. She carefully selected her victims who were kings, princes, warriors and knights:

And there we slumber'd on the moss,
And there I dream'd - Ah! woe betide!
The latest dream I ever dream'd
On the cold hill side.

I saw pale kings, and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
They cried - 'La Belle Dame sans Merci
Hath thee in thrall!'

Saw their starved lips in the gloam,
With horrid warning gaping wide,
And I awoke, and found me here
On the cold hill side.

What is really amazing here is the wonderful aesthetic treatment presented by the romantic poet to handle this ugly theme. Keats narrates the story of the vampiric woman in a very beautiful poetic way where the natural and supernatural beauty sweetens the bitterness of the tragic love story. The initial lines of the poem take us to the fairy world delicately without any sense of fear. Keats manages to make us wholly attracted by the charming of the lady regardless her fairy beauty and her wild eyes:

I met a lady in the meads,
Full beautiful - a faery's child;
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild.

He leads us to enjoy even her fairy song instead of being scared of it:
I set her on my pacing steed,
And nothing else saw all day long,
For sideways would she lean, and sing
A faery's song.

And to be interested in her “sweet moan” and to imagine her look at him
as if “she did love” him:

I made a garland for her head,
And bracelets too, and fragrant zone;
She look'd at me as she did love,
And made sweet moan.

He gets us to be happy when we hear her strange language confessing her
true love for Keats:

She found me roots of relish sweet,
And honey wild, and manna dew;
And sure in language strange she said -
'I love thee true.'

Even the most crucial and the scariest moment of the vampiric action,
when his soul together with his blood have been sucked violently, is
beautifully addressed and gently delivered by Keats to make it much
more bearable:

She took me to her elfin grot,
And there she gazed, and sighed deep,
And there I shut her wild wild eyes
So kiss'd to sleep.

The La Belle Dame Sans Merci symbolizes Fanny who sucks Keats’
souls. Being in a bad health conditions Keats suffers a lot for loving a
very active girl. Both La Belle Dame Sans Merci and Fanny Brawn are
merciless and vampires.

Keats’ Lamia suggests Coleridge’s Geraldine due to the fact that both
represent snake-vampire women who are capable of deceiving their
lovers. They can do so because of their ability to disguise themselves
easily. However, the way of presenting these two characters are different.
Coleridge, the poet of supernaturalism overwhelsms his character with mystery and panic whereas Keats, the poet of beauty, presents his character, Lamia, nicely. Coleridge’s Geraldine has a hissing sound and ugly breasts whereas Keats’ Lamia shows a polite lovely and courteous manners which may get one to wonder whether Keats did change his mind halfway during the poem or not. It is a normal reaction if one puts into his consideration the fact that Keats is skillful in showing beauty even when dealing with ugliness.

The origin of the lamia myth lies in one of the love affairs of Zeus. The Olympian falls in love with Lamia, queen of Libya, which was for the Greeks, the whole continent of Africa. When Hera finds out about their love, she destroys each of Lamia's children at birth. In her misery, Lamia withdraws to the rocks and caves of the sea-coast, where she preys on other women's children, eating them and sucking their blood. To recompense his mistress, Zeus gives her the power of shape-shifting. Perhaps as a reflection of this versatility, the monstrous race of lamia of Africa are composite beings, with the heads and breasts of women, but the bodies of serpents. In this earliest incarnation, Lamia is a cannibal and a blood sucker. 

Lamia’s position in the myth is clearly that of the outcast. She is an abandoned mistress, a non-Greek, and a violator of the almost universal taboo against eating human flesh. That she takes on this role out of anguish over the loss of her own children does not, however, arouse sympathy.

The way Keats presents his lamia gives an impression that as if he wants to contrast her with the myth of the vampire-woman. When he presents Lamia at the beginning of the poem he was careful to present her nicely without affecting her vampiric nature. She has a sad voice bewailing its fate mourning her extraordinary nature i.e. she was a
creature who was snake-like in appearance but with beautiful eyes and mouth of a woman and a feminine voice, who suffers from her extraordinary appearance. Consequently, she makes a bargain with the god Hermes to restore his nymph if he in return would enable her to change back into her shape as a woman which Hermes promise to do:

There as he stood, he heard a mournful voice,
Such as once heard, in gentle heart, destroys
All pain but pity: thus the lone voice spake:
"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! Ah, miserable me!"
The God, dove-footed, glided silently
Round bush and tree, soft-brushing, in his speed,
The taller grasses and full-flowering weed,
Until he found a palpitating snake,
Bright, and cirque-couchant in a dusky brake.

The richness of imagery in the poem together with the attraction resulted by the strangeness of the theme strongly hold the reader’s attention who may feel sympathy with the “mournful voice” that “in gentle heart, destroys” and speaks in a painful but pity tone wishing to have “a sweet body fit for life”. This way, Keats prepares his readers to react with this strange creature in a good way and to accept her ugly appearance with sympathy rather than fear and panic:

She was a gordian shape of dazzling hue,
Vermilion-spotted, golden, green, and blue;
Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard,
Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson barr'd;
And full of silver moons, that, as she breathed,
Dissolv'd, or brighter shone, or interwreathed
Their lustres with the gloomier tapestries -
So rainbow-sided, touch'd with miseries,
She seem'd, at once, some penanced lady elf,
Some demon's mistress, or the demon's self.
Upon her crest she wore a wannish fire
Sprinkled with stars, like Ariadne's tiar:
Her head was serpent, but ah, bitter-sweet!
She had a woman's mouth with all its pearls complete.
This strange creature that has “a gordian shape of dazzling hue/
Vermilion-spotted, golden, green, and blue;/ Striped like a zebra, freckled
like a pard,/ Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson barr’d;” is full of silver moon. Keats beautifies the ugliness of this creature by scattering her horrible appearance into smaller acceptable images; she is eyed like a peacock, stripped like a zebra…etc. These small acceptable images get us not to concentrate on the whole horrible image of this creature which not only does decrease the amount of ugliness of this creature; but rather get us to sympathize with it especially when informed that this creature has emotions like us and its eyes weep out of pain and suffering:

And for her eyes: what could such eyes do there
But weep, and weep, that they were born so fair?
As Proserpine still weeps for her Sicilian air.

Thus, readers are well prepared to face the worst of this creature that has a serpent throat. Even this ugly- frightened feature is also sweetened by giving the serpent’s throat the ability to say honey words for the sake of love:

Her throat was serpent, but the words she spake
Came, as through bubbling honey, for Love’s sake,
And thus; while Hermes on his pinions lay,
Like a stoop’d falcon ere he takes his prey.

The softness of her words affects even the god Hermes especially when she politely describes his emotional state she pretends to see in one of her dreams:

"Fair Hermes, crown’d with feathers, fluttering light,
I had a splendid dream of thee last night:
I saw thee sitting, on a throne of gold,
Among the Gods, upon Olympus old,
The only sad one; for thou didst not hear
The soft, lute-finger’d Muses chaunting clear,
Nor even Apollo when he sang alone,
Deaf to his throbbing throat's long, long melodious moan."
God Hermes is too sad to enjoy life or even taste the sweetness of Apollo’s singing. Out of his sadness he loses the ability to feel pleasure. Not only does this strange creature, know his emotional state; she knows even the reason of this sadness i.e. it is because of losing his maid:

I dreamt I saw thee, robed in purple flakes,
Break amorous through the clouds, as morning breaks,
And, swiftly as a bright Phoebean dart,
Strike for the Cretan isle; and here thou art!
Too gentle Hermes, hast thou found the maid?"
Whereat the star of Lethe not delay'd
His rosy eloquence, and thus inquired:

Being influenced by her ability to know everything about him, the god, diplomatically, requests her help to find his love which she benefits from offering him her bargain, in a very gentle manner as if she were a real lady, to which he agreed:

"Thou smooth-lipp'd serpent, surely high inspired!
Thou beauteous wreath, with melancholy eyes,
Possess whatever bliss thou canst devise,
Telling me only where my nymph is fled, -
Where she doth breathe!" "Bright planet, thou hast said,"
Return'd the snake, "but seal with oaths, fair God!"
"I swear," said Hermes, "by my serpent rod,
And by thine eyes, and by thy starry crown!"
Light flew his earnest words, among the blossoms blown.
Then thus again the brilliance feminine:
"Too frail of heart! for this lost nymph of thine,

The nymph was made to appear and the snake woman manages, after violent and agonizing convulsions, to shed its brilliant skin and out of which a beautiful woman appeared:

Left to herself, the serpent now began
To change; her elfin blood in madness ran,
Her mouth foam'd, and the grass, therewith bespren't,
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,
Spoil't 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.

The way Keats reveals the vampiric nature of the beautiful woman, who will tempt Lycius to fell in love with her, is too courteous and proficient to get us to take a stand against this creature; but at the same time he puts into our consideration the fact that this creature is originally an extraordinary snake-woman, whose main aim is to win Lycius’s heart:

Still shone her crown; that vanish'd, also she
Melted and disappear'd as suddenly;
And in the air, her new voice luting soft,
Cried, "Lycius! gentle Lycius!" - Borne aloft
With the bright mists about the mountains hoar
These words dissolv'd: Crete's forests heard no more.

Even after changing her appearance in order to deceive Lycius to win his heart and her ability to have a full power over him pretending to have a divine nature; the vampiric woman does not arouse the expected extent of fair inside us because Keats so smartly handles the theme that he was able to get us to ignore the vampiric nature of this creature and to wait eagerly to see a happy end for this love story rather than wishing to reveal the ugly reality of this creature to the poor cheated lover:

Why this fair creature chose so fairly
By the wayside to linger, we shall see;…
Her dream, with feast and rioting to blend;
And once, while among mortals dreaming thus,
She saw the young Corinthian Lycius
Charioting foremost in the envious race,
Like a young Jove with calm uneager face,
And fell into a swooning love of him.
Keats starts to prepare his readers to accept the bitter end of Lycius when Lamia reacts strangely to Lycius’s request to make their love relation in a public form via marriage that should be celebrated in his lovely home Corinth. She obviously distressed by this idea, lamented and begged him to change his mind because she does not want him to remind the outside world; but her tears made him more resolute which consequently gets her to submit. Such reaction leads the readers to feel the mystery and the ambiguity of her:

……………… Lamia, regal drest,
Silently paced about, and as she went,
In pale contented sort of discontent,
Mission’d her viewless servants to enrich
The fretted splendour of each nook and niche.
Between the tree-stems, marbled plain at first,
Came jasper pannels; then, anon, there burst
Forth creeping imagery of slighter trees,
And with the larger wove in small intricacies.
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.

By means of Apollonius, the reality of Lamia, the vampire-woman, has been discovered; but the sincere lover, Lycius, is unable to accept the ugliness of his love cursing his old teacher, Apollonius, and accusing him of demonic powers. But the old teacher told contumulously, that on the contrary, it was he who saved Lycius from the demonic power of a serpent. Being revealed, Lamia screamed and vanished which the poor Lycius could not bear and paid his life and soul out of his shock:

Then Lamia breath'd death breath; the sophist's eye,
Like a sharp spear, went through her utterly,
Keen, cruel, perceant, stinging: she, as well
As her weak hand could any meaning tell,
Motion'd him to be silent; vainly so,
He look'd and look'd again a level - No!
"A Serpent!" echoed he; no sooner said,
Than with a frightful scream she vanished:
And Lycius' arms were empty of delight,
As were his limbs of life, from that same night.
On the high couch he lay! - his friends came round
Supported him - no pulse, or breath they found,
And, in its marriage robe, the heavy body wound.

“Perhaps the poem is an allegory to sing out Keats’s love for Fanny and
Fanny’s response to his love. There is a subtle suggestion that Lamia
represents fanny”\textsuperscript{21}. This suggestion seems to be originally true because
the dramatic end of Lycius foresees the dramatic end of the poet who was
doomed to die before he puts his secret love into public marriage. Both
Fanny Brawn and Lamia seduced their lovers, Keats and Lycius, by their
charming beauty and eventually ruin them badly.

Keats’s absolute faith in beauty cannot be avoided by him even when
dealing with the ugly monstrous nature of a vampire whose aim is to ruin
the man whom she initially seduced to fall in love with her. The beautiful
images Keats uses smartly enable him to decrease the amount of
disgusting and panic his readers may feel realizing the evilness and
satanic reality of the apparently beautiful women, either Lamia or the La
Belle Dame Sans Mercy, who are capable of enslaving men and sucking
the souls of their lovers who are completely under the effect of their
demonic power.

**Negative Capability**

Keats is said to be the most romantic of all the romanticists because
his poetry has salient features distinguishing him among other romantic
poets. First of all he is a pure romantic poet. He writes poetry for the sake
of poetry. He believes in art for art’s sake. He does not write poetry for
any palpable design or any propaganda. His major concern is to give
pleasure. It means that his chief concern is pleasure. Whereas some other
romantics have been writing poetry for the propagation of their objectives
as Wordsworth and Shelley, who were in the favour of French
Revolution, Keats is least concern with the social issues of life.
Love for nature is the chief characteristic of all the romantics. Keats also loves nature; but he loves nature for the sake of nature. He does not give any theory or ideology about nature. He only admires the beauty of nature. But on the other hand, Wordsworth spiritualizes nature, Coleridge finds some supernatural elements in nature, Shelley intellectualizes nature and Byron is interested in the vigorous aspects of nature.

Keats was also Hellenistic like all romantics. He was inspired by Hellenism. Hellenism was the soul of his poetry. There are many Hellenistic features in his poetry such as his Greek instinct, his love for Greek literature, his love for Greek sculpture and art, his Greek temperament, and his love for beauty and the touch of fatalism and tragedy. Even his attitude of melancholy is also Hellenistic.

Keats is a sensuous poet too. It means that he writes his poetry with his penta senses. We do not only enjoy his poetry but rather we can taste, touch, see and hear all the images presented in his poetry. We enjoy his poetry with our five senses. The whole of our body is involved when reading him. If Keats’ imagery compared to Shelley’s, one will find out that Keats’ imagery is static and concrete whereas Shelley’s imagery is dynamic and abstract. Keats’ imagery shows the calmness of his mind whereas Shelley’s poetry shows his neurotic and confusing attitude.

All the above mentioned features are coated by one major feature. It is the smart feature that enables Keats to be the most romantic of the romanticists i.e. his ability to be a pure poet projecting no theory in his poetry and consequently enriching his aesthetic trajectory. This ability is Keats’ belief in Negative Capability i.e. the capability of being impersonal. Keats does not involve his personal feelings in his poetry. He writes poetry only for pleasure.

Affiliating Negative Capability to Keats is a common sense in literary Criticism; however, this section will spot light on this notion as
the source of Keats’ pure romanticism; it is the overcoat of Keats’ versification and consequently it may be regarded the main cause that stands behind celebrating Keats as the most romantic of all the romantics. Such conception of this capability sounds extremely new meanwhile old because its existence, as a literary strategy, is old; but in terms of recognition and conception this strategy has been coined and realized first by Keats.

Though many of the milestones in the international literature applied this strategy in their production; they unconsciously did without being able to identify this strategy which has been first recognized and identified by Keats.

Keats coined the phrase ‘Negative Capability’ in a letter written to his brothers George and Thomas on the 21 December, 1817. In this letter he defined his new concept of writing: “I mean Negative Capability, which is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.”22 What Keats is advocating is a removal of the intellectual self while writing or reading poetry after all:

Beauty is truth, truth beauty that is all
Ye know on earth and all ye need know
(Ode on a Grecian Urn)

Throughout his poetry and letters Keats proposes the theory that beauty is valuable in itself and that it does not need to declare anything for us to know. Beauty does not have to refer to anything beyond itself:

I am certain of nothing but 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 sublime, creative of essential Beauty.- Keats in a letter to Benjamin Bailey (Saturday 22 November, 1817)23
It is this ability to hold onto a beautiful truth despite the fact that it does not fit into an intellectual system that Keats praises in Shakespeare. He criticizes Coleridge for letting go 'by a thin isolated verisimilitude... from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge' where he should realize that “beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration” (Keats in a letter to his brothers (Sunday 21 December, 1817)\textsuperscript{24}.

The poems written by Keats are full of contradictions in meaning “a drowsy numbness pains” and emotion “both together, sane and mad” and he accepts a double nature as a creative insight. In \textit{Ode to a Nightingale}, it is the apparent (or real) contradictions that allow Keats to create the sensual and hedonistic feeling of numbness that allows the reader to experience the half-swooning emotion Keats is trying to capture. Keats would have us experience the emotion of the language and pass over the half-truths in silence, to live a life “of sensations rather than of Thoughts!” (Letter to Benjamin Bailey (Saturday 22 November 1817)\textsuperscript{25}.

Keats here can be seen to be extending the principle of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) i.e. the principle that much thought is sublingual by making the meaning of words less important than the feeling they arouse in us. Due to the fact that ordinary people think of meaning rather than languages; they cannot usually find the exact words they need. So, Keats often deals in the sensations created by words rather than the meaning. Even if the precise definition of words causes contradiction they can still be used together to create the right ambience. Negative Capability asks readers to allow the atmosphere of Keats’ poems to surround them without picking out individual meanings and inconsistencies.

In spite of the fact that the relations between Truth and Beauty and their respective definitions are highly complicated, Keats concerns only
of the moments of intense feeling that combine “thought” and “emotion” in appreciating beauty. This explains why much of Keats’ poetry is devoted to catching, and holding, moments of beauty. Keats addresses this desire directly in *Ode on a Grecian Urn* where he writes:

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Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal û yet, do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair.
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Throughout this poem, and many others, Keats captures moments, like that of the “fair youth” stooping to kiss his lover, and holds them to prevent change and decay, reveling in that moment of perfection.

In many of Keats’ poems this need to hold a perfect instant leads to an excited tone, an almost excessive use of superlatives and an atmosphere of crushing, voluptuous intensity as Keats demonstrates the depth of his appreciation for the beautiful and in the act of appreciation creates poems as exquisite as that which he is admiring.

Keats’ Negative Capability is the ability to bask in the beautiful without questioning either it or his methods of description in other words, to take beauty simply as it is.²⁶

*Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines term of “Negative Capability” as “the phrase used by the English poet John Keats to describe the quality of selfless receptivity necessary to a true poet”²⁷. In a letter to his brothers (December 1817), he writes: “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 man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason”²⁸.

This description can be compared to a definition of conflict: “An emotional state characterized by indecision, restlessness, uncertainty and
tension resulting from incompatible inner needs or drives of comparable intensity.”

These two definitions are very similar; the meaning of conflict sounds very negative and hopeless. However, Keats' creative concept seems positive and full of potential by leaving out “restlessness” by avoiding an “irritable reaching after fact and reason”.

The literary site Keats’ Kingdom defines the concept of Negative Capability as “the ability to contemmate the world without the desire to try and reconcile contradictory aspects or fit it into closed and rational system”..... It means “being capable of eliminating one's own personality, in order imaginatively to enter into that of another person, or, in extreme cases, an animal or an object”.

The notion Keats raised by the concept “Negative Capability” seems to be a sublime expression of supreme empathy.

Empathy is the capacity for participating in, experiencing and understanding another's feelings or ideas. It is a creative tool to help us to understand each other, understand different points of views or different cultures so that we might be able to express them.

Being able to see thing from another's point of view, and to apply an open, imaginative creativity, are both critical, poetical methods to resolve conflicts creatively.

Affiliating the concept of “Negative Capability” to Keats does not mean that it is limited only to him. Many writers, poets, and critics seem to identify themselves by having this capability without mentioning the phrase:

Many writers have identified themselves as having 'Negative Capability', even if they have not always used the phrase. Coleridge speaks in a letter of November 1819 of ‘a sort of transfusion and transmission of my consciousness to identify myself with the object'. Byron says, in a letter to Thomas Moore (4th March 1822) that
he embodies himself 'with the character' while he is
drawing it. Browning claims to be able imaginatively to
enter other beings. Clough's main character in Amours
de Voyage says '...I walk, I behold.../That I can be and
become anything that I meet with or look at'. T. S. Elliot
in Tradition and the Individual Talent writes that 'the
progress of the artist is a continual self sacrifice, a
continual extinction of personality.' Mrs Ramsey, in
Virginia Woolfe's 'To the Lighthouse', looks intently
'until she became the things she looked at'. Certainly it
is a pervasive characteristic of the creative faculty.
Margaret Atwood writes in Second Words (1982) of the
writers desire to be teleported into somebody else's
mind, but retaining one's own perceptions and
memories.32

This fact adds more to Keats’ achievements, who manages to abbreviate
the prolonged philosophy of gaining genius into a short expressive term.

It could be argued that Keats explored this idea in several of his
poems, if not all, like La Belle Dame sans Merci: A Ballad (1819), Ode to
a Nightingale (1819), The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream (1819), Ode on a
Grecian Urn (1819), and Ode to Autumn.

In Ode to Autumn Keats personifies autumn as a beautiful lady who
sits on the granary floor. The stanzas follow the same pattern and stanza
length which imitates the pattern of reoccurring seasons. He also creates a
less positive image of the other seasons, which highlights the beauty of
autumn further. By the end of the poem it becomes apparent that Keats is
also concerning life’s worth. There is a sorrow that autumn will
eventually end (die) but its life is celebrated in the poem, which could be
attributed to Keats being a romantic poet and also having found negative
capability.

Keats chooses autumn as his subject matter because it is the season
directly before winter, traditionally associated with death. Instead of
mourning the loss of summer season, though, he revels in the moment.
He accepts that winter will come, but he does not let that ruin his enjoyment of what life has to offer. To Autumn dwells in a sort of positive negative capability. Keats is confronted with death; winter is coming. However, instead of brooding, he enjoys his life in the moment. It almost seems like this is an emotion that transcends negative capability. Instead of being surrounded by life’s impossible questions, the speaker accepts that they are unanswerable, and that allows him to find pleasure in the world around him. To Autumn is a fitting end to a writing career; it shows a clear switch from struggle to acceptance of things that cannot change. The feelings of the speaker is a noble mode to enter death with.33

In La Belle Dame Sans Merci, Keats seems to be an objective narrator who narrates the story of the knight or the victim of a beautiful woman. That woman used to enslave kings, princes, knights and warriors; she has no mercy upon the men she seduced to fall in love with her. This is her reality and the truth of her that Keats represents as it is without trying even to justify. Keats simply impersonalizes himself from the events of this story. He is just telling about it objectively paying no effort to interfere himself in. This negativity to the story, which was presented through the medium of beauty, gives the charm, the beauty and effectiveness that famed the poem and immortalized it.

“Ode to a Nightingale is a personal poem that describes Keats's journey into the state of Negative Capability”.34 He is happy for the happiness of the bird separating his personal suffering from the cheerful feelings that should be aroused by the sweet song of the bird:

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
‘Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thine happiness.
He ignores his personal agony for the sake of the truth i.e. the song of the bird is so sweet but it would not change the fact that mortality is the absolute truth of everything. So, he managed to keep balance between enjoying the pleasure of this world and accepting its mortality. “The tone of the poem rejects the optimistic pursuit of pleasure found within Keats's earlier poems, and it explores the themes of nature, transience and mortality, the latter being particularly personal to Keats”\(^ {35} \) who is aware of his own approaching.

He delves into his fears about his own mortality. Throughout the poem he tries to escape his fears, but keeps bouncing back into anxiety. He tries alcohol, pain killers, escaping in nature and finally finds that death is the only escape from the pretty melancholy.

“Throughout the poem, he never really finds a satisfying answer to his depressing situation. This is why *Ode to a Nightingale* is a brilliant exploration of negative capability”\(^ {36} \).

Harold Bloom thinks that Negative Capability appears subtly in *Ode on Melancholy* and describes the negatives in the poem as being the result of carefully crafted ironies that first become truly evident as the poet describes the onset of melancholy through an allegorical image of April rains supplying life to flowers.\(^ {37} \) The use of the “droop-headed flowers” (line 13) to describe the onset of an ill-temper, according to Bloom, represents a "passionate" attempt by the poet to describe the proper reaction to melancholy. In the original first stanza, the “Gothicizing” of the ideal of melancholy strikes Bloom as more ironical and humorous, but with the removal of that text, the image of the “droop-headed flowers” loses the irony it would otherwise contain, and in doing so subverts the negative capability seen in *Ode to a Nightingale*, yet Bloom states that the true negativity becomes clear in the final stanza's discussion of Beauty. The final stanza begins:
She dwells with Beauty-- Beauty that must die.

The height of the joy, the moment when the world can improve no further, is both the end of joy and the beginning of melancholy. Negative capability appears in the objective description of the place where melancholy dwells. It is the absolute truth of melancholy that is defined by combining it strictly with beauty and death. “Beauty that must die” is the inexhaustible source of melancholy.

*Ode on Indolence* was written during a time when Keats felt that he should devote his efforts to earning an income instead of composing poetry. This may affect the value of the poem and explain why most critics consider it the least well-known of the six great odes of 1819 and the least accomplished of the group.

*Ode on Indolence* suggests that Keats is resigned to giving up his career as a poet because poetry cannot give him the immortality he wanted from it. Ironically, the poem provided Keats with such immortality. Besides the biographical component, the poem also describes Keats's belief that his works should capture the beauty of art while acknowledging the harshness of life.38

In this way, Keats' poems as a group capture his philosophy of negative capability, the concept of living with unreconciled contradictory views, by trying to reconcile Keats's desire to write poetry and his inability to do so by abandoning poetry altogether and accepting life as it is.39

In *Ode to Psyche*, Keats seems to be apparently impersonal having the ability to understand the state of mind of the goddess Psyche who must have been invoking the unfair decree by the gods of Olympus of not to be worshipped as a goddess. This explores Keats’ negative capability:

O latest born and loveliest vision far
Of all Olympus' faded hierarchy!
Fairer than Phoebe's sapphire-regioned star,
Or Vesper, amorous glow-worm of the sky;  
Fairer than these, though temple thou hast none,  
Nor altar heaped with flowers;  
Nor virgin-choir to make delicious moan  
Upon the midnight hours.

By negative capability, Keats meant that he enjoyed mystery and uncertainty and had no desire to solve or rationalize what he saw; but this negative capability seems to be violated in this poem because Keats proposes to remedy this by worshipping Psyche himself and building her a temple in his mind. His thoughts and feelings will serve as incense, flowers and other paraphernalia required for worship. This way Keats seems to departure a little bit for negative capability. Keats is not negative but rather positive to Psyche for whom he will be a priest:

Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane  
In some untrodden region of my mind,  
Where branched thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain,  
Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind.

What is important to note here is the relationship between the two statements: Eliot’s modern theory of Impersonality and Keats’ romantic views on the “Poetical Character” or negative capability expressed in his letter to Richard Woodhouse which was, may be out of the rebellion against the Romantic creed, marked late in the modern age when C. K. Stead, in his article *Classical Authority and the Dark Embryo*, perceived for the first time the similarity between these two statements. In spite of the modernist revolt against Romanticism, modernists cannot help sharing some concepts in common with Romantic poets. Keats’ negative capability and Eliot’s Impersonality are a clear evidence to prove this. Madge comments on this event:

The verbal similarity between the two statements is too substantial to be easily missed or ignored. That Eliot and Keats whose poetic practice is traditionally held to be widely different, should think about the mind of the poet almost in identical terms is indeed amazing. A
perception of this similarity puts an entirely different, complection of the inter-relationship of Romanticism and the modernist revolt ledge by Eliot and Pound. It can be seen how in spite of its apparent anti-romantic rhetoric, the modernism rebellion shares some important concepts in common with romantic poetics. It is this technique of negative capability that provides Keats the power to dive deeper into the oceans of the truth, of the essence of being and hold out the pearls of beauty.
NOTES

2- Ed Friedlander, *Enjoying La Belle Dame Sans Merci by John Keats*.
3- H. Ghosh & K. N. Khandelwal, p. 58.
4- Ibid., p.101.
5- When Keats wrote this poem he had in mind perhaps the tragedy of *Othello*.
6- “Keats’s Odes: Themes, Motifs & Symbols”, *SparkNotes*.
7- Ibid.
10- Ibid.
12- Ibid., 82.
13- Matthew, *Ode on Indolence*.
   http://onlinedictionary.datasegment.com/word/vampire+bat
15- Ibid.
16- Ibid.
17- Ibid.
20- Ibid.
21- H. Ghosh & K. N. Khandelwal, p. 318
22- “Keats’ Negative Capability”, *BBC*, http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A813962
   Thur. Apr. 7 2011.
23- Ibid.
24- Ibid.
25- Ibid.
26- Ibid.
28- Ibid.
29- Ibid.
30- Ibid.
“Negative Capability”, *Keats’ Kingdom*, [http://www.keatsian.co.uk/negative-capability.htm](http://www.keatsian.co.uk/negative-capability.htm), Thu. Apr. 7 2011.

Ibid.


Ibid.


39. Ibid., p.9.