Chapter Two

Poetry Defined

2.1 Romantic Definition of Poetry

Defining Poetry became an important activity of the Romantic Age in poetry and criticism to which such great poet-critics as Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats contributed much. They had their own ideas to contribute; each one appears to have contributed in his own way. However, each converges at most of the points. At the surface, the ripples are so many, the divergent current moving in so many different ways. But, if read together, the convergence appears like the undercurrent that has been given the name of the Romantic Movement. Like the other poet-critics, Keats has not propounded a long thesis or written a book of criticism on Poetry – its nature and function. Whatever he has said is in the form of maxims to be elaborated further by his readers for they are just an expression of his own experiences with the writing of his own poems. But on elaboration, his ideas too take a definite shape and seem to be a part of the same undercurrent, and as a separate entity, they become a part of the Romantic definition of Poetry.

During a short span of twenty-five years (1800-1825), a good deal of profound thinking on the nature of poetry and allied problems was done by English Romantic Criticism. In its initial stages, English Criticism was mainly humanistic, being preoccupied with problems of Language and Style. This linguistic and rhetorical bias persisted throughout the Renaissance. It survived also in the neo-classical age which followed it. Not much serious thought was given in these early times to fundamental questions regarding the origin and effect of poetry. There are, no doubt, some flashes of original reflection in Sir Philip Sidney's *Apologie for Poetry*, but for the rest, only certain traditional problems are raised and answered in a stereotyped manner. About
the middle of the Seventeenth Century, under the French influence, the Renaissance Criticism yielded place to the Neo-classic Criticism which was, in the matter of rigid application of accepted rules, more hidebound than its predecessor. Rules, not principles, derived from the ancient and made less flexible by the French masters, acquired paramount authority. Their prerogative was unmitigated and unchallenged.

Freedom is the keynote of Romantic Criticism which exhibits originality in conception and approach. For centuries, it had become customary to define poetry as imitation or as invention after the fashion of Aristotle or Horace. The neo-classicists had considerably narrowed down the meaning of these ancient terms and consequently their view of literature had become stereotyped. Those who sponsored the Romantic Criticism attempted new definitions of poetry conceived in the spirit of freedom which now permeated all spheres of human existence. Emotion and imagination were enfranchised and acquired new authority in the domain of art. Thus it is that Wordsworth in *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* defined poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" and Shelley in his essay *A Defence of Poetry* defined it as "the expression of the imagination". Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria* describes poetry as "the blossom and the fragrancy of all human knowledge, human thoughts, human passions, emotions, language" (312), and lays down immediate communication of pleasure as its main end. Just as there is novelty in the literature of the Romantic revival, likewise there is striking freshness in the opinions of the critics of the Romantic School. The old rules are now ignored if not completely discarded; the old classification of literary forms does not hold good, since there is considerable freedom in the use of literary genres and patterns. Whatever has the importance of creative imagination and gives adequate expression to sincere feelings is now deemed
good literature and, on the contrary, writings cast in conventional moulds and using
the rigid diction of the earlier century are ruled out of court.

After the disintegration of the neo-classical standards, for some years, there was
uncertainty. But the Romantic critics ultimately succeeded in formulating new
principles and discovering new criteria of judgement. Generally speaking, the seminal
principle of imagination is at the core of this new literary reflection. Imagination is
now regarded as the essence and animating soul of all poetry and the whole duty of
the critic lies in the perception of its working.

Imagination provides the necessary basis for judgement on individual works and
authors. For instance, Shakespeare is praised by Coleridge, Hazlitt and Lamb with
warm approval, as imagination is seen successfully at work in his plays and poems.
But the poets of the Eighteenth Century are discountenanced, being deficient in this
respect. Similarly, genuine emotion is regarded as indispensable for poetry; without it,
the characteristic appeal cannot be produced and imagination itself is handicapped in
its operation. The age-long controversy regarding pleasure or instruction as the aim of
literature is resolved by Coleridge who expresses the opinion that poetry instructs
through pleasure. In the entire romantic theorizing of this epoch, there are
reminiscences of Longinian thought, but at the same time the approach remains highly
original.

This originality of enquiry is nowhere to be seen as clearly as in the discussions on
poetic diction and versification. Poetic diction had become pale and bloodless in the
Eighteenth Century as it had become rigid and conventional. While discarding it,
Wordsworth offered valuable cogitations on the subject. He tried to bridge the gulf
between popular speech and poetic language. In so doing, he pushed his conclusions
to the opposite extreme and the excesses in his thought on diction as well as
versification were later to be corrected by Coleridge. The views of Wordsworth and Coleridge, taken together, lead to significant conclusions which are amazingly different from the established faith of the neo-classical age. The problems of style and metre are re-examined with much courage. There was a break with the past rhetorical tradition which had come down from Aristotle and steadily grown more and more rigorous. A new line of thought was initiated by Wordsworth and Coleridge which has provided the ground for subsequent investigation and discussion on the subject.

The philosophy, linguistics, literary theory and literary practice of the Eighteenth Century were significantly shaped by the philosophical system of John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Locke's account of the arbitrary nature of linguistic signs led him to distrust language in general and literary language in particular. He denounced rhetorical and figurative language as a 'perfect cheat' and recommended that all discourses should employ a language of clarity and sense. Locke's denunciation of the pleasurable but deceptive nature of literary language clearly left poets with a problem. If language is arbitrary, and acceptable only when used in straightforward, rational ways, what justification could be there for poetry? Alexander Pope's response to this problem was to propose a model of poetry in which truth, clarity and sense predominated, and figurative language and all other embellishments of poetry were kept duly subservient. This allowed Pope to distinguish 'good' poetry from 'bad' on the basis that it was only the latter which exhibited all the faults which Locke had identified with poetry in general. Pope's model of good poetry is presented in a poem, *An Essay on Criticism*, which sets out to exemplify the precepts he lays down. In an often-quoted couplet, Pope prescribes the proper relation between language and thought in poetry -

Expression is the Dress of Thought, and still
Appears more decent as more suitable. (II, 318-19)

Shortly afterwards, he articulates what has become one of the best-known claims about the relation between sound and meaning in English poetry. He says that in poetry 'The Sound must seem an Echo to the sense' (II, 365)

Romantic poets and theorists at the end of the Eighteenth and in the early Nineteenth Century rejected the Popeian version of the relationship between sound and sense, along with Locke's philosophy and linguistics, as a mechanistic account of poetic language. Instead of seeing thoughts, ideas or meaning as a 'body' which is then 'dressed' by language, Romantic theorists shifted the metaphor by arguing that authentic language 'embodies' the 'spirit' of the meaning. In his Essay Upon Epitaphs, Wordsworth suggests that the writing of poetical epitaphs in the Eighteenth Century was

"...thoroughly tainted by the artifices which have overrun our writing in metre since the days of Dryden and Pope .....(In such writings) those expressions are not what the garb is to the body but what the body is to the soul, themselves a constituent part and power or function in the thought ....are abandoned for their opposites" (The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, 229).

Wordsworth goes on to argue: "If words be not....an incarnation of the thought but only a clothing for it, then surely will they prove an ill gift" (229).

The pre-eminent merit of the Romantic criticism is to be seen in its attempt to deal with fundamental questions. With the sole exception of Sir Philip Sidney, no English critic before Wordsworth and Coleridge had really tried to go to the heart of the matter and answer such questions as "What is Poetry?" or "What is the true appeal of Poetry?" These are just the problems which engaged the attention of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Hazlitt and Keats. The great strength of the Romantic criticism consists in
this profound theorizing about the essential nature of poetry encouraged by interest in philosophical reflection in both German and English. The aspect of *Lyrical Ballads* that presented the most obvious challenge to the general poetry-reading habits of the age was the choice of modest and familiar themes, subjects drawn from "humble and rustic life" expressed in "the real language of men*. *Lyrical Ballads* is an exploration of the widening possibilities of poetry. Its wider intention is to relate poetry as closely as possible to common life, to remove it in the first place from the realm of fantasy, and in the second from that polite or over-sophisticated amusement. Wordsworth speaks therefore of "the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers", of neglect of the older literature in favour of "frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse*"(*The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, 238). To Wordsworth, Poetry abjures all these subjects and inane phraseology. Poetry should be "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings", not the mere satisfaction of a taste for imagery and ornament. Wordsworth's aim in all this is to show the poet as a man appealing to the normal interests of mankind, not as a peculiar being appealing to a specialized taste and he points out that

He is a man speaking to men: a man; it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighted to contemplate similar violations and passions as manifested in the goings – on of the Universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them (*The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, 241).
The poet's pleasure in his art is an acknowledgement of the beauty of the world. So is the work of the scientists, but his is an indirect and laborious pleasure, hard to come by and hard to transmit. The poet comes

...singing a song in which all human beings join with him.... In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs: in spite of things silently gone out of mind, and things violently destroyed; the poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth and over all time (The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, 242-3).

Wordsworth's argument, which is here at its most passionate and deeply felt, is that poetry is the concert, the immediately experienced part of knowledge, in which the sensations and emotions can join. Those who suppose that Wordsworth would confine the commerce of the poet to hills and sheep, and that the advent of an urban and scientific age means some sort of anti- Wordsworthian revolution should note the passage that follows –

If the labours of the Men of science should ever create any material revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition, and in the impressions which we habitually receive, the Poet will sleep then no more than at present; he will be ready to follow the steps of the Man of science, not only in those general indirect effects, but he will be at his side, carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the science itself. The remotest discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist, or Mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the Poet's art as any upon which it can be employed, if the time shall ever come when these things shall be familiar to us, and the relations under which they are contemplated by the followers of these respective sciences shall be manifestly and palpably
material to us as enjoying and suffering beings. If the time should ever come when what is now called science, thus familiarised to men, shall be ready to put on, as it were, a form of flesh and blood, the Poet will lend his divine spirit to aid the transfiguration, and will welcome the Being thus produced, as a dear and genuine inmate of the household of man (The Prose Works of William Wordsworth, 243).

These lines provide so adequate a faith for succeeding ages. They realize so clearly the difficulty of incorporating science into our imaginative life, yet still believe that it can be accomplished. Wordsworth here shows himself possessed of a conception of his own time and temperament.

As for the subject of poetry, Wordsworth makes his opinion clear in his poems through the subjects dealt with in them and also in his criticism. His emphasis is on the psychological and moral interests of subjects. He is not trying to write familiar anecdotes or nursery tales. He is seeking the fundamentals of human life by contemplating its simplest forms. One is not asked to be interested in Michael because he is a picturesque character, peculiar by his station or calling, but because he is a man, revealing in the least elaborated form passions common to all men. He talks of tracing in his familiar incidents "the primary laws of our nature".

The same reason is there behind the question of poetic diction. What he says is that Humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language;….because the manners of rural life….are more durable; and, lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the
beautiful and permanent forms of Nature (The Prose Works of William
Wordsworth, 237-8).

If Wordsworth's statement is understood correctly, his fascination is not for the
language of the "humble and rustic life" in itself. He is attracted to such a language
for therein "the passions of men are incorporated". The humble life works merely as
the window to these passions. But it does not mean for him that passion is acquired by
stylistic devices. It rather arises from the nature of the poet's perception of his subject,
of the subject itself. From his presentation of his theory one might imagine that for the
true poet, expression takes care of itself. If only the poet has the right kind of
perception, what he has to say will be poetry. This is very different from Pope's "What
oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed" ("Essay on Criticism" 298).

Wordsworth was clear enough in expressing his view of what the poet did and why
what he did was valuable, but he was not clear on the question of how the poet's aim
affected his way of writing and of how a poem, as an individual work of literary art,
differs from other forms of expression. He tended to regard the material element in
poetry as an optional ornament. As for the question of poetic diction, his famous
pronouncement boils down simply to asserting that since poetry concerns itself with
grand elemental facts about man and nature, the poet should avoid, as he said in his
Preface to Lyrical Ballads, "transitory and accidental ornaments"(The Prose Works of
William Wordsworth, 243) and use simple and elemental language. The old problem
of the relation of form and content was thus still unresolved. He did not maintain, as
Pope and Dr. Johnson would have, that a poem is the handling of a paraphraseable
content in skillful and pleasing versification. He insisted on the uniqueness of the
poet's kind of perception but he did not make clear how that unique perception
inevitably sought its uniquely appropriate form. He seemed to be content to regard the
form as in greater or less degree suitable rather than uniquely appropriate. For Sidney, poetry was the creation of an ideal world. However, that ideal world had to be presented in a persuasive manner so that the reader would be moved to imitate it. Thus Sidney made a clear difference between form and content but he assigned a definite role to each. Similarly, Dryden in *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* insisted that the poet present "a just and lively image of human nature" (17). Here, the justness was a matter of content or plot and the liveliness could only be guaranteed by the proper kind of style or form. For Wordsworth, the vitality of the poet's perception seemed to guarantee both its own justness and liveliness. Naturally, the whole form-content problem is left unresolved.

In attempting to remedy this defect in Wordsworth's argument, Coleridge put the philosophical inquiry into the nature and value of poetry on an entirely new footing. Many of Coleridge's elaborately philosophical definitions turn out to be of direct literary value. Such is the Definition of a poem in Chapter XIV of *Biographia Literaria*. Coleridge begins by noting the obvious distinction of metre and rhyme, pointing out that both may be used for merely mnemonic purposes. However, even in these lowly forms, the regular recurrence of sounds and quantities (stresses) gives a certain pleasure of its own. But a further distinction between a poem and other kinds of writing is the difference of object. The immediate object may be the communication of truths, as in the case of words in science or history. But in a poem, this is not the immediate object; the immediate object is the communication of pleasure. As Coleridge says:

So much for the superficial form. A difference of object and contents supplies an additional ground of distinction. The immediate purpose may be the communication of truths; either of truth absolute and demonstrable, as in
works of science; or of facts experienced and recorded, as in history. Pleasure, and that of the highest and most permanent kind, may result from the attainment of the end; but it is not itself the immediate end. In other works[,] the communication of pleasure may be the immediate purpose; and though truth, either moral or intellectual, ought to be the ultimate end, yet this will distinguish the character of the author, not the class to which the work belongs. Blest indeed is that state of society, in which the immediate purpose would be baffled by the perversion of the proper ultimate end.…

But the communication of pleasure may be the immediate object of a work not metrically composed; and that object may have been in a high degree attained, as in novels and romances. Would then the mere superaddition of metre, with or without rhyme, entitle these to the name of poems? The answer is, that nothing can permanently please, which does not contain in itself the reason why it is so, and not otherwise. If metre be superadded, all other parts must be made consonant with it (Biographia Literaria, 309).

And then the definition of poetry follows -

The final definition then, so deduced, may be thus worded. A poem is that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth; and from all other species-- (having this object in common with it)-- it is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the whole, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part (Biographia Literaria, 309).

The communication of pleasure may be the immediate object of a work not metrically composed, such as novels and prose romances, which no one has ever attempted to call poems. If somebody casts these into metrical form, they cannot become poems.
Here, the metre would be a mere meaningless addition, and "nothing can permanently please, which does not contain in itself the reason why it is so and not otherwise" (*Biographia Literaria*, 309).

Graham Hough, in his book *The Romantic Poets*, makes the following significant comment –

This definition of a poem, often passed over, is in fact one of the most pregnant of critical utterances. It contains the germ of the modern distinction between "scientific" and "emotive" language; and the germ therefore of much later discussion of poetry and science, poetry and belief. And in the final sentence – that poetry demands attention, not only to the whole, but to each individual part, we surely have the ultimate distinction between prose and poetry, a criticism which over rides that of mere metre, which explains our obstinate tendency to class the more consciously rhythmical kinds of prose with poetry; which, properly understood, leads on, not to hair-splitting and abstraction, but to that close attention to texture and imagery that the proper reading of poetry demands (79).

What Coleridge is enquiring into here are the differentiating qualities of poetry. How does a poem differ from other ways of handling language? What is the point of its so differing? How are these points of difference justified by the function and nature ("object and contents") of a poem? "A poem contains the same elements as a prose composition" (*Biographia Literaria*, Chapter XIV, 309). Both use words. The difference between a poem and a prose composition cannot, then, lie in the medium, for each employs the same medium, words. It must therefore "consist in a different combination of them, in consequence of a different object being proposed" (*Biographia Literaria*, Chapter XIV, 309). A poem combines words differently,
because it is seeking to do something different. All it may be seeking to do may be to facilitate memory. One may take a piece of prose and cast it into rhymed and metrical form in order to remember it better. And rhyming tags of that kind, with their recurring "sounds and quantities" yield a particular pleasure too, though not of a very high order. If one wants to give the name of a poem to a composition of this kind, there is no reason why one should not. But one should note that, though such rhyming tags have the charm of metre and rhyme, meter and rhyme have been "superadded"; they do not arise from the nature of the content but have been imposed on it in order to make it more easily memorized.

The "superficial form", the externalities, provide no profound logical reason for distinguishing between different ways of handling language. "A difference of object and content supplies an additional ground of distinction." (Biographia Literaria, Chapter XIV, 309). The philosopher will seek to differentiate between two ways of handling language by asking what each seeks to achieve and how that aim determines its nature. The immediate purpose may be their communication of truth, or the communication of pleasure. The communication of truth might in turn yield a deep pleasure; one may get a profound pleasure from reading a work of science or history. But Coleridge insists, one must distinguish between the ultimate and the immediate end. Similarly, if the immediate aim be the communication of pleasure, truth may nevertheless be the ultimate end. While in an ideal society, nothing that was not truth could yield pleasure, in society as it has always existed, a literary work might communicate pleasure without having any concern with "truth, either moral or intellectual". The proper kinds of writing can thus be most logically discussed in terms of the difference in the immediate aim, or function, of each. The immediate aim of poetry is to give pleasure.
By far the most celebrated of Coleridge's essays in this direction is his distinction between Fancy and Imagination. The purpose behind discussing these two faculties of the poet is to understand Coleridge's explanation of poetry. The primary imagination is then the act of self-consciousness referred to as the foundation of all knowledge and all perception. It is literally the act by which each one of us creates his world, and is a human repetition of the act by which God created the world as a whole. The secondary imagination is the poetic imagination. Just as the primary imagination unites the knower and the known in a single act, so the secondary or poetic imagination unites the poet's mind with the objects of its contemplation, and these various objects with each other. It is that which makes a poem, not merely a reproduction of things previously existing in the objective world, but a new unity, with an existence of its own. How it does so is best described in the words Coleridge uses for Wordsworth's poetry; it is by

…the union of deep feeling with profound thought; the fine balance of truth in observing, with the imaginative faculty in modifying, the objects observed; and above all the original gift of spreading the tone, the atmosphere, and with it the depth and height of the ideal world around forms, incidents, and situations, of which, for the common view, custom had bedimmed all the lustre, had dried up the sparkle and the dew drops (Biographia Literaria, Chapter IV, 263).

Shelley's Defense of Poetry is the main document on which the poet's reputation as a critic rests. It turns out to be a general theoretical treatise on the origin, scope and function of poetry. As to the other Romantic critics, and so also to Shelley, the imagination is the indispensable agency of poetic creation. Outside Coleridge,
nowhere else in the writings of English critics does one find a clearer and more emphatic statement of the workings of the imagination –

"...there is a principle within the human being, and perhaps within all sentient beings, which acts otherwise than in the lyre, and produces not melody alone, but harmony, by an internal adjustment of the sounds or motions thus excited to the impressions which excite them" (Selected Prose Works of Shelley, 76).

Again, the imagination is distinguished from reason both in nature and function. According to one mode of regarding those two classes of mental action which are called Reason and Imagination, the former may be considered as mind contemplating the relations borne by one thought to another, however produced; and the latter as mind, acting upon those thoughts so as to colour them with its own light, and composing from them as from elements, other thoughts, each containing within itself the principle of its own integrity (Selected Prose Works of Shelley, 75).

Shelley's remarks on poetry in the widest sense which is connate with life and universe in general, suggest Coleridge's delineation of the scope and function of the primary imagination. When he restricts the field and talks about poetry in a narrower sense, his concern is with the secondary imagination which performs its work through human will and choice. Throughout the essay, one finds a sprinkling of terms and phrases derived from Coleridge.

But Shelley gives an unmistakable Platonic colouring to his account of the imagination. It helps the poet in bringing about an approximation or correspondence between the world of sense perception and the platonic world of ideal reality. The poet is thus not simply presenting a shadow of shadows and creating delusion, but his task is noble in so far as he lifts what is imperfect to perfection. "A poet participates
in the eternal, the infinite, and the one; as far as relates to his conceptions, time and
place and number are not" (Selected Prose Works of Shelley, 80).

The imagination may perform its function in diverse ways and utilize different
media to deliver its fruits, but, according to Shelley, the medium of language is most
suitable for its purpose. Language is a repository of past impressions, and with the
assistance of rhythm and metre, is capable of doing full justice to the operations of the
imagination. It assists the imagination which in turn bestows upon it its blessings.
Language is –

"a more direct representation of the actions and passions of our internal being,
and is susceptible of more various and delicate combinations, than colour,
form, or motion, and is more plastic and obedient to the control of that faculty
of which it is the creation" (Selected Prose Works of Shelley, 80).

Shelley assigns a very important place to inspiration in the process of poetic
creation –

Poetry is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the
determination of the will. A man cannot say, "I will compose poetry." The
greatest poet even cannot say it; for the mind in creation is as a fading coal,
which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory
brightness; this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which
fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our nature
are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure (Selected Prose Works of
Shelley, 111).

By means of a brief historical survey, Shelley shows how the great literary epochs
have been periods when moral virtues were valued and practiced. On the other hand,
in an age of corruption and obscenity, literature tends to lose its noble quality and
begins to show symptoms of decay. He makes it clear that it is not the office of poetry like that of ethics to teach moral lessons in a direct manner. But in a subtle and imperceptible manner, poetry refines feelings and creates in the human mind love of virtue. Beauty, love and virtue seem to be allied in Shelley's mind and they are all fostered by poetry. Shelley expresses the superiority of poetry over reason, philosophy and, in fact, every other branch of knowledge –

What were virtue, love, patriotism, friendship – what were the scenery of this beautiful universe which we inhabit; what were our consolations on this side of the grave – and what were our aspirations beyond it, if Poetry did not ascend to bring light and fire from those eternal regions where the owl-winged faculty of calculation dare not ever soar? (Selected Prose Works of Shelley, 111)

One may say that just as Wordsworth sought to explain the phenomenon of poetic creation with reference to passion and imagination, with almost equal stress on both, just as Coleridge attached the highest value to the imagination with feeling coming only as its helpmate, likewise Shelley made his special contribution to the Romantic theory by emphasizing the necessary union of inspiration with imagination as the essential pre-requisite of all poetic creation.

Keats was not a regular critic like Coleridge. He has left behind only scanty material with any critical interest. A review, a poem "Sleep and Poetry", some marginal notes and stray critical remarks in his letters, that is all one has from him. Of these, the letters alone really throw light on questions of fundamental importance. The poem is more descriptive than theoretical and remarks elsewhere, outside the letters, are highly perfunctory. Keats has hardly anything to say on the structure and meaning of poetry, his main concern being with the poet and the nature and function of poetry.
His criticism is mainly based on his own personal experience as a poet. There is no pronounced doctrinal bias, but simply a desire to reveal his own experience regarding poetic creation. He has his specific convictions which are of general interest at the same time.

There was no such alliance between Keats and Shelley as there was between Wordsworth and Coleridge. Their qualities were antithetical. Shelley was, as Keats thought, "much disposed to dissect and anatomicize any trip or slip" (SLK, 79-80). In "Endymion" Keats was inclined to deplore Shelley's dissipation of his powers on other objects than pure poetry. Keats writes to Shelley:

I received a copy of the Cenci.... There is only one part of it I am judge of——the Poetry and dramatic effect—which by many spirits nowadays is considered the mammon. A modern work it is said must have a purpose, which may be the God. An artist must serve Mammon; he must have “self-concentration,” selfishness perhaps. You, I am sure, will forgive me for sincerely remarking that you might curb your magnanimity and be more of an artist, and “load every rift” of your subject with ore. The thought of such discipline must fall like cold chains upon you, who perhaps never sat with your wings furl'd for six Months together (SLK, 464[emphasis in original]).

Keats hardly shared at all in Shelley's political and social passions. He did not see the poet as the trumpet that signs to battle, or the unacknowledged legislator of the world. "An artist must serve Mammon" — that is, his own art rather than humanity. Keats thus becomes the first of those in the Nineteenth Century who wished to carve out a separate kingdom for the arts. It is a doctrine that was later to develop into "Art for art's sake". But, as the later development shows, Keats was never really happy in this belief. However, it shows that, for himself and for other artists as well, he was
ready to show as the conscious artist, anxious to load poetry as fully as possible with its own special kind of excellence. As a result, he always gives a devoted critical care to his own poetical development, makes a constant effort to correct faults in technique and emotional tone, abandons harmful models and chooses better ones and above all thinks out the essentials of his own kind of poetry to the exclusion of everything else. However, he also wanted to resolve the conflict between art and human life. The relation of art, his own kind of art, to human life as a whole was a question that perplexed him from the beginning. What he says to Shelley above can be countered by passages in which he implies the opposite – that the "magnanimity" of sharing the distresses of humanity is essential to the poet's growth. He lived in an age in which the youth were expected to be liberal and enthusiastic about humanity. Keats had begun his career in a circle of liberal enthusiasts. Yet he was different in not caring about so many things that worried them. He was not quite a friend to humanity in the contemporary sense. The whole tendency of Keats' work, as he states in his letter to J. H. Reynolds on 3 May 1818, is to show that "a mighty providence subdues the mightiest Minds to the service of the time being" (SLK, 125). However, providence does not always do so in the most obvious way. The artist does not necessarily proceed to the heart of humanity by the plainest and most-trodden route. The artist can "proceed to the heart of humanity" not by his sheer knowledge; he can do so only by feeling it fully. Artistic intuition is far in advance of the artist's experience. First, he has to sharpen his own senses and then, through them proceed to humanity. The most important poem in the 1817 volume is "Sleep and Poetry". It is an early attempt to formulate his poetic ideals. The central part of the poem describes prophetically what he foresees to be his course in poetry –

First the realm I’ll pass
Of Flora, and old Pan: sleep in the grass,

Feed upon apples red, and strawberries,

And choose each pleasure that my fancy sees; (101-104)

He wonders whether he can ever bear to give up these sensuous ecstasies, but realizes in the same breath that they are only a stage in his progress –

And can I ever bid these joys farewell?

Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life,

Where I may find the agonies, the strife

Of human hearts: (122-125)

These were the two poles of his unreconciled vision. On the one hand, there was the delight, mystery and fear of immense sensuousness and passion and on the other hand, there was the pain of how to reconcile them? The task of the poet and his poetry was first to achieve this reconciliation. Throughout his short life, Keats was making an attempt to reconcile the loveliness of the world with its transience, its pleasures with its pain, the longing to enjoy the beautiful with the suspicion that it cannot be long enjoyed unless much of that which is beautiful is facade. He was never to find a solution to these conflicts, and was never resigned as a modern poet might be, to write poetry of blank conflict: he was entering on a new phase of exploration when he died. The theme recurs in his letter to his friend J. H. Reynolds on the 3rd May 1818 –

Well, I compare human life to a large Mansion of Many Apartments, two of which I can only describe, the doors of the rest being as yet shut upon me. The first we step into we call the infant or thoughtless Chamber, in which we remain as long as we do not think. We remain there a long while, and notwithstanding the doors of the second Chamber remain wide open showing a bright appearance, we care not to hasten to it, but are at length imperceptibly
impelled by the awakening of the thinking principle within us. We no sooner get into the second Chamber, which I shall call the Chamber of Maiden-Thought, than we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere, we see nothing but pleasant wonders and think of delaying there forever 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 darken’d and at the same time on all sides of it many doors are set open, but all dark, all leading to dark passages…. Now if we live, and go on thinking, we too shall explore them (SLK, 124).

Yet another side of this fundamental attitude of Keats becomes clear when one returns to "Sleep and Poetry". He shows his view of the Eighteenth Century poetry. There he shows his own dislike for such poetry. In former days, the altar of poetry "shone e'en in this isle" – presumably in Elizabethan days. At that time "Muses were nigh cloyd with honours": but in the succeeding age all this was forgotten, and

\[
\text{Nurtured by foppery and barbarism,} \\
\text{Made great Apollo blush for this his land.} \\
\text{Men were thought wise who could not understand} \\
\text{His glories: with a puling infant’s force} \\
\text{They sway’d about upon a rocking horse,} \\
\text{And thought it Pegasus. (186-192)}
\]

Keats' attack is conducted with contempt. Antipathy to the "rocking-horse rhythm" of the Eighteenth Century couplet was an article of faith.
The essential clue to Keats' poetic faith is found in his cult of beauty. The poet should be able to perceive the all-pervading principle of beauty in nature and art. Such a perception is possible only with the assistance of imagination, and it leads always to a joyful experience. "What the imagination seizes as beauty must be Truth", writes Keats in one of his early letters on 22 November 1817 to Benjamin Bailey (SLK, 54). And the same truth is reiterated by him in the last two famous lines of "Ode on a Grecian Urn" “Beauty is truth, truth beauty,”—that is all /Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know (49-50). In the opening line of "Endymion", "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever", the poet voices his conviction that beauty invariably engenders joy, since there is a never-failing bond of union between the two. Beauty, according to Keats, is to be grasped by the senses. In theory and practice, he valued sensations above all other things that serve as pre-requisites of poetry. There is the exclamation in his letter to Benjamin Bailey: "O for a life of sensations rather than of thoughts" (SLK, 54). In another letter, he writes to Fanny Keats on 26 October 1818, "The Genius of Poetry must work out its own salvation in man, it cannot be matured by law and precept, but by sensation and watchfulness in itself" (SLK, 193). In his romantic conception of poetry, there was no scope for reticence or restraint. In a letter to John Taylor, he writes—

In Poetry I have a few Axioms, and you will see how far I am from their Centre. First, I think Poetry should surprise by a fine excess and not by Singularity; it should strike the Reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a Remembrance. Second, its touches of Beauty should never be half way, thereby making the reader breathless instead of content. The rise, the progress, the setting of imagery should like the Sun come natural to him, shine over him and set soberly, although in
magnificence, leaving him in the Luxury of twilight. But it is easier to think what Poetry should be than to write it, and this leads me on to another axiom. That if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all. However it may be with me I cannot help looking into new countries with “O for a Muse of fire to ascend!” (SLK, 96-97).

Though his main emphasis is on sensations, there is no doubt that Keats recognized the imagination as the creative faculty which organizes sensations and adds to human perception its own colouring. There are numerous references to this essential Romantic belief. Here are some lines from "Sleep and Poetry" in which the scope and function of imagination are clearly set forth:

Is there so small a range

In the present strength of manhood, that the high

Imagination cannot freely fly

As she was wont of old? prepare her steeds,

Paw up against the light, and do strange deeds

Upon the clouds? Has she not shewn us all?

From the clear space of ether, to the small

Breath of new buds unfolding? From the meaning

Of Jove’s large eye-brow, to the tender greening

Of April meadows? (167-176)

2.2 Keats' own Ideas about Poetry

Here one is concerned with Keats' own ideas about poetry. In the period in which Keats wrote, it was expected that every poet had his own theory about poetry. The other Romantic poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley had worked as
philosophers of poetry; each one has something very cogent to say about poetry. But Keats wrote no formal treatise on poetry as did poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley. Yet, judging from the evidence of his poems and letters, he was as theory-conscious as these poets. Throughout his brief life, Keats strove to gain a clear perception of the nature and function of poetry. In a few of his poems, he directly explores the theoretical aspect of poetry. In a few other poems, his view of poetry is implied. His random remarks on poetry scattered in his poems and letters have a profundity which belies his age. Some of these remarks are worth whole treatises. They reveal Keats' own ideas on the nature and function of poetry. They can form a full treatise on the nature and function of poetry. In *The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism*, T.S. Eliot remarks about Keats' contribution to poetry and his ideas about poetry:

"There is hardly one statement of Keats about poetry, which, when considered carefully and with due allowance for the difficulties of communication, will not be found to be true; and what is more, true for greater and more mature poetry than anything Keats ever wrote" (93).

Keats' ideas about poetry were not static, but in a process of change. The gradual change in his view of poetry bears testimony to his deepening critical perception. He has very little to say about style or manner of poetry as different from its matter or substance. He had a passion for fine words and phrases. He looked upon fine phrases "like a lover". He disliked artificial diction and language and was a strong advocate of naturalness in expression. He found Miltonic verse too artful and gave up his "Hyperion" partly because there were too many Miltonic inversions in it. He wrote to J.H. Reynolds on 21 September 1819 –
"Miltonic verse cannot be written but in an artful or rather artist’s humour. I wish to give myself up to other sensations. English ought to be kept up. It may be interesting to you to pick out some lines from Hyperion and put a mark X to the false beauty proceeding from art, and one || to the true voice of feeling" (SLK, 345).

One of Keats' axioms in poetry, as stated in his 27 February 1818 letter to John Taylor, was that its "touches of Beauty should never be half way, thereby making the reader breathless instead of content" (SLK, 97).

Keats' early theory of poetry is based on two main postulates. First of all, he regards poetry as a form of escape. Secondly, he believes that poetry has its origin in moments when the poet's senses receive maximum stimuli. Poetry which originates thus will, in Keats' view, provide a feast to the reader's senses. The poet, fleeing from the tragic realities of life, takes refuge in the delightful world of sensuous pleasures. His imagination, stimulated by ecstatic sensuous experiences, conjures up a dream-world of perfect beauty and bliss. He is transported to this sensuous paradise on the wings of imagination. In the early years of his poetic career, Keats thus attributes to poetic imagination mainly the power to conjure up an airy, insubstantial work of sensuous beauty and the power to transport the poet thither. At this stage, Keats believes that this world of enchanting beauty and unalloyed bliss conjured up by the poet's imagination, and not the real world of pain and sorrow must form the basis of poetry. Many of Keats' early poems either express or suggest this view. This "escapist" view of poetry is indeed a far cry from the mature poetic creed associated with the last few years of his short life. In his years of maturity, Keats regards poetry not as something which is completely out of touch with the real world, but as something which draws sustenance from the rich soil of human life. The early Keats
is an "escapist" who lives in a delightful world of his own, which has very little similarity to the real world of pain and sorrow. The imaginative power is, for Keats, the power to take happy flights. In the early period, it is the "pleasures" rather than the ardours of song which engage his mind most of all. For him poetry is "song" or "anthem". The words are suggestive not only of spontaneity, but also of careless rapture. He believes at this stage that poetry is more akin to music than to painting. He uses some significant words in this context. Poetry is "Sweet", it is like soft-lydian airs; its notes are "pleasant". In short, poetry is something soft, gentle, and soothing.

With the theory of poetry, Keats has also formulated his ideas about the poet. He thinks that a man is a poet by virtue of his ability to draw inspiration from sensuous beauty and break into song. When he fails to draw such an inspiration, he feels disheartened and feels that he is not destined to be a poet.

Keats has also ideas of the content of poetry when he dwells on a poet's influence on posterity. Keats' description of a poet's influence on posterity gives us the impression that he has in mind a kind of poetry which skims the surface of life, without plumbing its tragic depths. The writing of such poetry as he has in mind requires little knowledge of the world. He feels that by surrounding himself with breath-taking natural beauty, a poet will be able to draw the necessary inspiration to write poetry which will have a delightful dream-like quality. He did not believe that poetry should undertake any serious criticism of life; he seems to believe that the main function of poetry is to give some sensuous pleasure. This preoccupation with the senses is a disguised form of escapism. Poetry should offer a feast to the senses. Keats implies that the sensuous beauty of Nature is the richest source of poetic inspiration. Naturally, he has steeped himself in natural beauty. At this stage, Keats
holds the view that sensuous experiences are more conducive to poetic creation than a knowledge of real life in all its tragic complexity.

"Sleep and Poetry", written in the autumn of 1816 has an important place in the study of the evolution of Keats' theory of poetry. Here one has this theory jostling with the later notions about poetry. An entirely different kind of poetry derives its strength from a sympathetic understanding of "the agonies, the strife/ of human hearts" and concerns itself with the "dark mysteries of human souls". Poetry, in his view, is of so ethereal a nature that the very thought of it "is awful, sweet, and holy/ chasing away all worldliness and folly". It is a kind of intoxication which stimulates the imagination.

In the same poem, Keats envisages the different stages of his poetic career. His description of the stages of his poetic development is highly reminiscent of Wordsworth. In the first stage, Keats hopes to pass through the realm of Flora and old pan. Wordsworth has spoken about these two stages. The first stage is characterised by the "coarser pleasures" of his "boyish" days and "their glad animal movements". The next stage of "aching joys" and "dizzy raptures" was when Nature was "all in all" to him. For Keats, all the senses are as important as "the eye". The poetry that he is to write in the first stage of his career must therefore give pleasure not only to the eye, but also to the other senses. Besides appealing to the senses, the poetry written at this stage will now show decidedly "escapist" tendencies. The tragic and somber aspects of life and the philosophical problems raised by these will not be his concern as a poet at this time. However, Keats makes it clear that this will only be a temporary phase.

Keats is aware that in this phase, he will have to think of a deeper and mature poetry which will require of him an intimate and sympathetic understanding of "the agonies, the strife/ Of human hearts". There is no doubt that Keats envisages this kind
of gradual poetic development not only for himself, but for every genuine poet. This
is corroborated by his letter of 3 May 1818, written to J.H. Reynolds. In this letter
Keats introduces "a simile of human life" (SLK, 124) to measure himself against
Wordsworth's poetic stature.

Keats condemns the Neo-classic poets for reducing poetry to a mere craft by being
"closely wed / To musty laws lined out with wretched rule/ And compass vile". But he
speaks nostalgically of the earlier poetry which, in his view, had given free rein to the
imagination. He rejects this poetry because it is devoid of imaginative splendour and
glow because of the poets' obsession with technical perfecting and their insensitivity to
natural beauty. His belief is that poetry must have its roots on the soil of human life. It
also suggests his mature conception of poetic imagination as an organ of insight and
his later belief that poetry must offer "visionary gleam". As a result to his admiration
of Hunt, most of Keats' early poems, written up to the end of 1817 show Huntian
influence to some degree. It does not, therefore, seem unreasonable to assume that
Keats' thinking on the question of what poetry ought to be was influenced in the early
years by what Leigh Hunt's poetry actually was.

Keats slowly moves towards a more mature view of poetry. The movement
between the two stages of his conception of poetry does not have a break. It is a
continuous movement. The second stage naturally proceeds from the first. Even some
of his early poems contain the germ of a more mature view of poetry. "Sleep and
Poetry" draws out these two stages of Keats. The poem is concerned with the early
stage. But it has momentary flashes about the later stage also. There one has
momentary flashes of insight into the nature of great poetry. Keats realizes that
ultimately he must out grow this kind of "escapist" poetry, and begin to write on his
tables
all that was permitted,

All that was for our human senses fitted (Sleep and Poetry 11:79-80)

He must finally come to grips with the Labyrinthine Complexities of human life. This will usher in the most important stage in his poetic career when he will seize the events of this wide world like a strong giant. He believes that only the writing of poems dealing with the serious aspects of life can guarantee poetic immortality. A true poet has to meditate deeply on the significance of human life. Both the pleasant and the painful aspects of life must engage his attention. He must be acutely conscious of the brevity and sadness of life. At the same time, he must not ignore the joy of being alive. All this is suggested in his poem "Sleep and Poetry". There comes a stage in his career when he must respond to "The still, sad music of humanity" ("Tintern Abbey" 93). Keats makes it clear that poetry written in response to "the giant agony of the world" is immeasurably superior to poetry of mere sensuous exuberance. It is a far nobler kind of poetry. He believes that no one can be a great poet who has not mastered the secrets of the human heart and been educated in the school of life.

He believes that poetry can sharpen the sensibility and foster qualities like sympathy, compassion, and tolerance. Surely a poetry of escape or of purely sensuous appeal cannot do this. It is obvious that Keats has in mind poetry with a human content and having a human appeal. Perhaps no one can write such poetry who has not first studied human life and explored the human mind. Though Keats objects to poetry with a palpable design upon the reader, he values the social influence of poetry. He writes –

We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us—and if we do not agree, seems to put its hand in its breeches pocket. Poetry should be great and
unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one’s soul and does not startle it or amaze it with itself but with its subject. How beautiful are the retired flowers! How would they lose their beauty were they to throng into the highway crying out, “admire me I am a violet! Dote upon me I am a primrose!” Modern poets differ from the Elizabethans in this. Each of the moderns like an Elector of Hanover governs his petty state and knows how many straws are swept daily from the Causeways in all his dominions and has a continual itching that all the Housewives should have their coppers well scoured (SLK, 86-7).

Moreover, Keats believes that the insights or the soul-knowledge gained by one mind should be communicated to another mind without the least degree of obtrusiveness. It is only in this way that the poets of the age can "give the World another heart / And other pulses" (SLK, 9).

Keats' ideas about poetry began to undergo a decisive change in the course of the year 1817. As Keats' critical perceptions begin to change, he begins to develop a dislike for his early poetry. The greater influence seems to have been cast by Shakespeare, especially tragedies. No less is the influence of Wordsworth. In Keats' view, Wordsworth's poetry reveals his deep knowledge of the human heart. It must be noted that Wordsworth sees poetry as something firmly rooted in the soil of human life. "Endymion" is the poem that clarifies his view about poetry. It explains the goal of the poem and the poet. The goal of the poet seems to be not only to gain an insight into things, but also to write poetry which will enable the reader to see into the life of things. Such poetry can help the reader to experience the "fellowship divine". Though the poet has momentarily perceived his goal, the way to reach it is as yet not clear to him. Endymion's long journey in search of his immortal love may be viewed as the poet's tireless pursuit of his ideal. The newly awakened sympathy of the poet for
human beings manifests Keats' awareness of the human sympathy. Keats seems to have in mind an experience similar to the one described by Wordsworth in "Tintern Abbey", lines where a total and passionate response to the sensuous beauty of Nature leads the poem, by degrees, to an intense awareness of the still, sad music of humanity. "Endymion" helps not only to release the old man from the spell of Circe, but also to bring back to life the numerous lovers lying drowned on the ocean bed. Those acts of Endymion may be seen as manifestations of the poet's human sympathy, love, and friendship. This can be noticed in his letter to John Taylor on the 24th of April 1818. He writes—

I think I did very wrong to leave you to all the trouble of Endymion, but I could not help it then; another time I shall be more bent to all sort of troubles and disagreeables. Young Men for some time have an idea that such a thing as happiness is to be had and therefore are extremely impatient under any unpleasant restraining. In time, however, of such stuff is the world about them they know better and instead of striving from Uneasiness greet it as an habitual sensation, a pannier which is to weigh upon them through life.

And in proportion to my disgust at the task is my sense of your kindness and anxiety. The book pleased me much; it is very free from faults, and although there are one or two words I should wish replaced, I see in many places an improvement greatly to the purpose.

I think those speeches which are related—those parts where the speaker repeats a speech, such as Glaucus' repetition of Circe's words—should have inverted commas to every line. In this there is a little confusion. If we divide the speeches into *identical* and *related*, and to the former put merely one inverted comma at the beginning and another at the end, and to the latter
inverted commas before every line, the book will be better understood at the first glance. Look at pages 126 and 127: you will find in the 3rd line the beginning of a related speech marked thus: “Ah! art awake,” while at the same time in the next page the continuation of the identical speech is mark’d in the same manner, “Young Man of Latmos.” You will find on the other side all the parts which should have inverted commas to every line (SLK, 116-7).

Endymion’s experiences in Book IV may be taken to denote a more advanced stage in the poet's development. His relationship with the Indian Maid is symbolic. It is much more than a sensual passion. He is drawn to her not merely by her physical beauty, but also by her sorrow and suffering. It makes clear human sympathy for human suffering. The song ends with a total acceptance of human sorrow. The poet's realization of misery, heartbreak, pain, sickness and oppression is heightened. Keats believed that the ultimate goal of the poet is to write poetry which will enable the reader to see into the life of things and ultimately to experience the divine. This is clear in his letter to J. H. Reynolds on the 3rd of May 1818.

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 darken’d and at the same time on all sides of it many doors are set open, but all dark, all leading to dark passages (SLK, 124).

After studying Wordsworth's poem "Gypsies", Keats makes a very deep note. He charges the poem for its superficiality, its lack of depth. It seems, to Keats, that Wordsworth failed to draw on his intimate knowledge of life or his sympathetic understanding of the human heart as he did when he wrote his great poems.
Wordsworth's deep feelings were not involved in it at all. It seems to be a product of the intellect alone. The poem has no evidence of a whole-hearted search after Truth. To be able to write a poem of any value, one has to think long and deeply. As Keats says:

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. He is a Genius and superior to us, in so far as he can, more than we, make discoveries and shed a light in them. Here I must think Wordsworth is deeper than Milton, though I think it has depended more upon the general and gregarious advance of intellect than individual greatness of Mind. From the Paradise Lost and the other Works of Milton, I hope it is not too presuming, even between ourselves, to say his Philosophy, human and divine, may be tolerably understood by one not much advanced in years. In his time Englishmen were just emancipated from a great superstition and Men had got hold of certain points and resting places in reasoning which were too newly born to be doubted, and too much opposed by the Mass of Europe not to be thought ethereal and authentically divine (SLK, 124-5).

All this comment from Keats suggests how much his critical perceptions have deepened. He has out grown his earlier "escapist" approach to poetry.

Keats was tremendously impressed by Hazlitt's essay on Lear in which Shakespeare is lavishly praised for his powerful portrayal of human passions. Here Keats has begun to recognize the poet's need to study the human passions. One now
comes to his poem "On Seeing a Lock of Milton's Hair". He confesses his need to acquire knowledge and to study philosophy. He recognizes that knowledge gained through books and also from experience and thought is an indispensable part of the poet's equipment, without which it is impossible to produce great poetry. The poet, he realizes, is a mere songbird. He is engaged in the serious task of interpreting life. Such a task demands knowledge gained through the intellect and reason. Keats feels that far from hampering the poet's visionary perception, such knowledge only strengthens it. Growing with philosophy does not prevent the poet from becoming mad with glimpses of futurity. This view marks a new stage in the development of Keats' thought.

One now comes to Keats' study of Hamlet. Keats' decision to re-read King Lear is symbolic of his new attitude and approach to poetry. It symbolizes his awaking interest in poetry which plumbs and explores the tragic depth of life and his dissatisfaction with mere "Romance". Shakespeare's King Lear typifies for him poetry of an altogether higher order. On coming into contact with the living poetry of King Lear, at this stage, Keats realizes the serious limitations and the sad deficiencies of the poetry he had written so far. It becomes clear to him that till now he had been wandering through "the old oak forest" of romance in a "barren dream". He realizes that this stage will soon come to an end. But, in fact, Keats does not want to completely drop the stage one and end his poetic career. He wishes to pass on to a higher stage. It is clear from his poem "Sleep and Poetry" that he wants to adhere to it. Keats undoubtedly has the advent of this stage in mind when he prays to Shakespeare in his poem "On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again".

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 to my desire. (11-14)

Keats is here expressing his desire to put away every childish fashion and to attain poetic maturity. That is why he turns to *King Lear* with the belief that it will provide the necessary stimulus for his poetic growth. His ambition is to develop into a poet of the highest order – a poet who is genuinely engaged with the serious questions of life. For him the poet needs to know life to the core. In "Sonnet To Spenser", he writes, "The flower must drink the nature of the soil / Before it can put forth its blossoming." (11-12) Such knowledge and experience cannot, of course, be gained without toil.

Keats, in his letter to J. H. Reynolds on the 3rd of May 1818, admits that he is able to describe only the first two chambers of the mansion of human life, the doors of the rest being as yet shut upon him. But he looks forward to a time when he hopes to explore, like Wordsworth, "those dark passages" leading beyond "the chamber of Maiden-Thought" (*SLK*, 124). A truly great poet must pass beyond the "thoughtless chamber" and the "chamber of Maiden-Thought" to a stage in which he feels the "burthen of the Mystery" (*SLK*, 124). This stage must, he believes, lead to another in which "the burthen of the Mystery" is lightened. Now, he clearly sees that a true poet, instead of fleeing from reality, has to pass from awareness to understanding.

In "Ode to Psyche", Keats proclaims the superiority of the human mind over mere sensuous beauty. Psyche stands for the human mind with all its complexities unlike earlier gods and goddesses who were personifications of simple ideas like beauty or love. Shifting from the old to the new modern poets, Keats marks a difference between the two. Modern man is plagued by uncertainties and doubts. A modern poet who wishes to be true to life and experience has therefore to adopt these very "uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts" (*SLK*, 60) as the theme of his poetry. He must study
and deal with the various ways in which the human mind responds to this unintelligent world. This is what Keats now wishes to do. He desires to become a true votary of Psyche. He knows that this will mean sacrificing epic grandeurs. He may have to martyr himself. But he is convinced that this is the only desirable course open to a modern poet. It appears that perhaps Keats is making a commitment on himself. He will study the human mind as it explores the dark passages leading beyond the second chamber of the mansion of human life. His poetry will henceforth be reflective in nature. The thoughts set forth in poetry will be the result of a combination of pleasure and pain. The poetry will not only be reflective but also original. Thirst for knowledge becomes essential. It is the first step towards actual acquisition of knowledge, which is a knowledge of human sorrow and suffering. The poet's whole being responds to the sum total of human misery. He burns through an agonizing experience, very like death. It is, however, not death, but death into life. He is now the god of poetry. He has the godlike power to see into the life of things. He suggests that a mere intellectual awareness of human sorrow is enough, although this is the starting point. The poet feels in his own person the whole weight of human sorrow.

"The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream" contains Keats' mature poetic creed. It is symbolic of Keats' thought about poetry and the poet. The Priestess tells Keats that if he had refused to face the pain of consciousness, he would have ceased to be a poet. Poetic success is beyond the reach of all those who find a haven in the world. Escapist tendencies and poetic aspirations are incompatible. Now that Keats has faced the pain of consciousness, he is to receive the poet's supreme reward. The shadow of the Priestess tells the poet –

…sure not all

Those melodies sung into the World's ear
The three terms "sage", "humanist" and "physician" enlighten one on Keats' conception of the poet's nature and of his social role and function. He is a "sage" for his power to "see into the life of things". He is a "humanist" because of his interest in humanity and his sympathetic understanding of the human heart. The appellation "physician" emphasizes the practical nature of the poet's vocation. Poetry has a therapeutic effect on the reader. It takes away his fret and fever and gives him philosophic calm and poise. In so far as poetry helps to ease the "burthen of the mystery", it may be regarded as a balm and the poet as a physician. The Priestess makes it further clear that the "dreamer" (escapist) has no right to call himself a poet. The lines "a poet is a sage; / A humanist, physician to all men" suggest what Keats wants to say. These are Keats' mature views on the poet's nature and on the question of his role and function of society. They are an emphatic recantation of his early "escapist" theory of poetry.

Keats shows how a poetic aspirant develops into a great poet after passing through the agonizing experience of taking upon himself and feeling in his own person "the miseries of the world." In the poem, Keats acquires an intuitive insight into the nature of reality. This is the supreme reward of the poet. All this leads to Keats' belief that in order to achieve poetic excellence, the poet has to pass through the agonizing experience of death in life, which is really a death "into life". The supreme poetic experience consists not merely in realizing that "the World is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression" (SLK, 124) but also in feeling the weight of human sorrow. A mere intellectual awareness of the sorrows of the world is not enough. What is needed is self-knowledge. The poet must feel in his own person the
sum total of human misery. It also envisages the inevitability of pain, sorrow and a
knowledge of death, the most painful of all human experiences. Only then Keats, and
also other poets, can become perfect poets.

If Keats regarded the poet as an escapist in the early days of his poetic career, he
later came to regard him as a "sage", a "humanist" and a "physician" to all men. If in
the beginning poetry was for Keats something out of touch with the real world, later it
came to be something firmly rooted in the real world and drawing sustenance from
human life.

This change in Keats was, to a certain extent due to the keen interest he developed
in human life, nature and character in the last few years of his life. His letters of this
period testify to his growing interest in men and women. "Scenery is fine", Keats
writes to Benjamin Bailey (13 March1818) "but human nature is finer…" (SLK, 99).
The gradual change in Keats' attitude to life, which brought about significant changes
in his view of poetry, is tellingly described in his letters – "I have altered, not from
Chrysalis into butterfly,…" (SLK, 314). Keats is now learning to accept and face life.
In this way, Keats came to recognize the vital connection between poetry and human
life. He also came to value the intellect. Intellect, judgement, and thought play a very
important role in poetic creation. He came to realize that knowledge gained through
the intellect is an indispensable part of a poet's equipment. He recognizes a poet's
need to temper his imagination with judgement. This is the idea of Keats about the
poet and poetry. In the second phase, Keats moves so far away from his first stage
that, looking back, Keats appears so different. Keats' recognition that poetry can and
must have an intellectual substratum indicates a major shift from his early view that it
appeals mainly to the senses.
After his approach to poetry as related to the intellect, Keats advances to another very important idea about poetry and the poet. Keats came to believe that poetry should not teach, but reveal. It must reveal to the reader the poet's intuitions regarding the purpose and meaning of the universe and of human life. Such a revelation is the truly poetic method of communicating with the reader, the only method which is compatible with the conception of "Negative Capability". Revelation is the ultimate "end and aim of Poesy". Keats' conception of poetry as revelation is closely linked with his conception of the imagination and his view of the relationship between Beauty and Truth. In his years of maturity, poetic imagination is, for Keats, first of all mainly an intuitive faculty which can perceive "truth" as "beauty". Secondly, it is a creative faculty which can embody this "truth" as "beauty". This means that imagination can create poetry in which "truth" can be perceived as "beauty". Keats regards imagination as distinct from fancy. This conception of imagination as a perceptive and creative power has a bearing on Keats' mature conception of poetry as revelation. In the early period, to him, poetry was motivated and activated by fancy. In the later period, fancy is replaced by imagination. This idea is predominant in the later years.

Here, Keats comes to co-relate imagination with beauty. In the beginning, Keats regarded poetry as something concerned chiefly with sensuous beauty. But in his years of maturity, he came to associate poetry mainly with a "beauty" which is equal to "truth". If in the early years poetic imagination was, for Keats, the power of conjuring up a world of sensuous beauty, in the later years it is an intuitive and creative faculty which can "seize" and embody "truth" as "beauty". Keats suggests that all facets of life grip the poet's attention and arouse his interest. This forms the basis of poetry. The poet is interested in the primordial world of nature which forms
an eternal backdrop to the varied drama of human life. Human passion in all its
diversity offers him immense delight. What Keats gives one through the vision is a
panoramic view of the whole of human life from the vantage ground of detached
imaginative contemplation, not a view of isolated fragments of life, as they affect
particular individuals. When life is viewed thus, its disagreeable aspects cease to be
disagreeable because they are seen not in isolation, but in relation to the whole
spectrum of life. In other words, when life is viewed in the light of imagination, even
its unpleasant aspects are seen to be part of a universal harmony. This constitutes
imaginative insight. Mere intimate knowledge of life is not sufficient for the creation
of great poetry. It is necessary to view life in the light of poetic imagination. Only
imaginative insight can save the poet from the disenchantment caused by a knowledge
of the painful realities of human life. Without the light of imagination, "a sense of real
things", is bound to engender pain and result in poetic paralysis. Through the picture
which he presents, Keats also seems to indicate that in accordance with his
imaginative insight into life, a great poet must paint an imaginative, meaningful,
thereby universal, picture in which all the elements of life, both pleasant and painful,
are seen in true perspective.

Keats gradually came to believe that the chief function of art is the revelation of
"truth" as "beauty". It goes without saying that perception must precede revelation. In
Keats' view, it is imagination that plays the key role in both perception and revelation.
First of all, imagination perceives "truth" as "beauty". Secondly, through artistic
creation it reveals "truth" as "beauty". In his view, the excellence of every Art is its
intensity, capable of making all the disagreeable evaporate, from their being in close
relationship with Beauty and Truth. He cites Shakespeare's *King Lear* as a work of art
in which there is such intensity. Keats links the intensity of a work of art with its
Beauty and Truth and these, in turn, with a "momentous depth of speculation" excited by the work of art. "Truth" is perceived by both the poet and the reader as "beauty". In Keats' view, the poet is free to make use of disagreeable elements – the painful, the evil, and the ugly – provided that these serve to embody his imaginative insights, which cannot but appear to the reader as "beauty". A work of art which embodies such insights has, in Keats' view, an intensity capable of making all disagreeables evaporate. Keats is not referring here to aesthetic or sensuous beauty. He associates poetic "beauty" with the imaginative insights embodied in poetry. It can be assumed that Keats' concept of "beauty" in poetry is wide enough to allow and include representation of what is evil, painful, or ugly. Keats also expresses faith in the intuitive power of imagination. It is clear that the word "truth" here signifies not rational truth but insights gained by the imagination. This does not imply that the imagination is irrational. The fact is that the poetic imagination is concerned with "truths" which lie beyond the realm of reason. Moreover, it affects the reader too. It has the power to stimulate the beholder's imagination to such an extent that he too perceives the truth originally perceived by the artist's imagination and embodied in them. The beauty has nothing to do with its superficial and sensuous appeal. It has insights or universal truths embodied in it. These truths are perceived by the viewer's imagination as "beauty". The word "beauty" suggests the intense pleasure that accompanies the perception of truth. To see things in their beauty is to see things in their truth. Beauty confirms the truth of what is perceived by the imagination. For Keats, what appears to the imagination as "beauty" in a disinterested state of contemplation constitutes the truth of things. To know this is to hold the key to truth. The moment of perception of beauty is, in his view, the moment when one sees into the life of things. It is this insight into things which makes it possible for one to accept
life in its totality. This kind of acceptance is the greatest thing in life. And the poet has
to attach himself to it. The revelation of "truth" as "beauty" is the function of all art,
especially poetry. The picture of life set forth by the poet induces in the reader a
detached and disinterested state of imaginative contemplation in which he arrives at
that trembling delicate perception of beauty. This beauty is truth. In other words, the
reader's imagination perceives as beauty the truth which the poet's imagination had
seized as beauty and embodied in poetry. He writes to Fanny Browne that he "loved
the principle of beauty in all things" (SLK, 422). From himself Keats moves to other
poets, and feels that they are one, that have such an insight to penetrate beauty and
truth.

To give an account of this change in Keats' attitude is to give an account of his
poetic development during the period from 1818 to 1820. This development can be
described as a progress towards the ideal of "Negative Capability". It had to do with
Keats' clear perception of the "end and aim of Poesy" ("Sleep and Poetry" 293).

2.3 Negative Capability

The concept of Negative Capability holds a very important position in Keats'
theory about poetry and literary creation. Negative Capability is, in simple terms, the
poet's capability to lose his own identity, consciousness, and subjectivity and get
mixed up with myriad things that are the creations of his imagination which have no
direct connection with the things external connected by his reason, sense and
perception. These myriad things, since they are the creations of the poet's imagination,
are naturally, full of "uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching
after fact and reason" (SLK, 60). The mind of the poet is not exclusive. It is rather
inclusive so that his imagination becomes a playground for all thoughts. Naturally, the
poet is capable of entering all other bodies and not only human ones. The result is that he can feel the intellect of a waterfall "and pick about the Gravel" with the sparrow (SLK, 55). It is because he withdraws himself from his experience of himself. This is negation of his own identity; really he has no such identity. This is a moment of passivity of the poet's self and identity which consequently releases his imagination to wander freely without any limit. This Keats calls his moment of loneliness – "No sooner am I alone" (SLK, 207). The result is that the "shapes of epic greatness are stationed around me"(SLK, 207). It is a moment of delight and of immense satisfaction for the poet. It makes him content.

Keats' idea of happiness is also very close to his concept of Negative Capability. Happiness consists in abrogating our hard shell - like existence, in going out of ourselves to be identified with all that is. It lies in recognizing no barriers between us and the world around and transporting ourselves in such a way as to be at one with the essence, the spirit or identity of all that there is. It is the 'in – feeling', the spirit of empathy that permits of no consciousness of others. A plenary feeling of self-awareness instead of confining us to our narrow shells of existence, emancipates us from our paltry exclusiveness, negates all spatial separatenesses, and opens the mystic gate to an inclusive pool of life in which we creatively participate. But this creative relationship is not easy to come by. To reach the highest point of intensity, one has to extinguish the conventional ego-feelings, to move through 'self-destroying' until the feeling of separateness is finally overcome and a life of mutual communion joyfully recognised. This is what makes for the pulse of life. The participative consciousness at its intensest triggers the myriad movements of life and causes life to blossom forth in myriad forms. Each movement entails joy and pain, for each movement is an extinction and a renewal and we are 'tortured with renewed life'. 
The contentment and happiness are created in an intense moment. This intensity is generated in the act of creation. "The excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth" (SLK, 60). In the act of creation, the poet goes out of himself into the myriad forms and also removes the disagreeable among the myriad forms. Only agreeables come together based on the principles of Beauty and Truth. These twin principles work to bring together the agreeable and remove all the disagreeable. What remains is the essential poetry which is distinct from the 'poetry' in the narrower sense of the technical vehicle of presentation. "We are to be", says Ridley, "startled and amazed by the tragic figure of Lear, not by the dramatic and poetic skill with which Shakespeare presents him" (6-7). The real poetry lies in King Lear and not in the skill of technical presentation. It is the character of King Lear that actually bears the intensity of Shakespeare's creation of dramatic poetry. The technicalities remain only so – a mere vehicle and thus, not the primary source of intensity. And the reader's awareness of these technicalities worsen poetry – the worse does the poetry become; so believes Keats. An emphasis on them, on the part of the poet, shows, a palpable design; and it is detestable. Again the theory of Negative Capability holds true. The technicalities create an obtrusiveness – the poet obtruding directly in the creation and trying to influence and inform the reader. This obtrusiveness is the negation of the essential principle of Negative Capability. This becomes clear in Shakespeare’s creation of the character of King Lear. In creating King Lear, Shakespeare allows his self to be negated so that Lear mixes myriad personalities in himself. He is not this or that character but a universal personality. But that has to be presented through dramatization, words, images etc. Here also, Shakespeare succeeds. The technicalities come from the character himself. There is nothing obtrusive about them. And this
becomes an example of organic feeling – the content itself generating the form so that
the two – content and form coalesce in order to create the perfect Lear. Negative
Capability takes on the organic form. Yet another example is Keats himself.
Describing this quality of Keats, Ridley says,

For all that Keats is in some way the most 'personal' of poets, yet in all his
great work nothing is more remarkable than the way in which he stands aside,
and allows, for example, the Nightingale to work her own with us; we forget
to admire the artistry in the beauty. There is the embalmed darkness, there is
the song of the nightingale and there are we; but Keats has withdrawn to watch
his magic working (8).

Ridley also says: "But the true poetry to Keats, as he read it, and with very few
exceptions, as he wrote it, is removed as far as may be from this assertive pedagogy
(9). In this respect, Keats is quite distinct from other poets, especially of the Romantic
era and, among them, from Wordsworth. When reading their poems, it appears as if
they are leading us with their own guidelines and wanting us to read and understand
as they want us to do. But Keats is very much away from this "assertive pedagogy"
(Ridley 9). Keats' belief is quite different. Poetry "should strike the Reader as a
wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a Remembrance"(SLK, 97).
The poet, here also, is nowhere, is not in control. Thereby, the reader feels content and
not excited, nor dissatisfied. It is so because poetry comes to him naturally,
effortlessly, without any effort on his part. That would amount to some artificiality. It
also excludes the element of surprise because that will not be normal. The poem itself
is so intense like the character of Lear. The reader, under its intense impact, receives it
naturally, without any other consideration. So, both the poet and the reader are
unobtrusive, thereby, doing nothing; the poet doing nothing in the act of creation and
the reader doing nothing in the act of reading. The poet has just to release his imagination, receive the myriad forms, and select for combination and creation. The reader too receives the poem which releases his imagination to enjoy the poem. To both, poetry should always come naturally. There is Keats' well-known remark that if poetry does not come as naturally as leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all. He will not force himself in poetry. Even in his letters he cannot force himself. He says in his 21, 25 May 1818 letter to Benjamin Bailey – "I cannot force my letters in a hot bed. I could not feel comfortable in making sentences for you" (SLK, 127). If so, naturally, he will not force himself in poetry.

He had his moments of weakness when he failed with his own conviction, when he became a victim "sometimes of hurried and impatient composition and correction" (Ridley 13). The examples may be found in poems like "The Eve of St. Agnes", "Ode to Psyche", etc. But he overcomes his problem gradually. Then he creates "with all his faculties in action, the creative, sometimes even too fertile imagination, and the selecting and shaping judgment" (Ridley 15). And the Odes are the best examples of creation of this period. One can talk here of one ode, "To Autumn". Ridley argues that this Ode "is the most serenely flawless poem in our language" (289). Regarding this Ode, Walter Jackson Bate remarks that "each generation has found it one of the most nearly perfect poems in English" (581). And regarding the great Odes, Vendler states that they "are a group of works in which the English language find ultimate embodiment" (60).

Keats, the poet, enjoyed a very short span of life in which he produced, with equal mastery two different types of writing – poems and letters. When one studies the two and tries to correlate his letters with his poems, one very remarkable thing is apparent. Bernice Slote, in Keats and the Dramatic Principle writes ".....a discernible
development in his poetry, is away from the purely personal, the poet-hero who speaks in his own voice, and towards the dramatic in poetry, where the self is protean and the umbilical cord of the poem is cut" (4). The poet, in his poems, is constantly moving towards the dramatic, the true realization of Negative Capability "where the self is protean and the umbilical cord of the poem is cut" (4). "That Keats was constantly moving toward the dramatic in poetry, where the self is protean and the umbilical cord of the poem is cut" (4). This conscious moving toward the dramatic and away from the personal has certain implications in the interpretation of his work, particularly the later poems. The dramatic principle of objectivity has been Keats' ultimate acceptance. It worked as "a balance to an expression of intensity of feeling" (5). It was a matter of great significance for Keats. Dramatic objectivity led to a great expression of feeling. Shakespeare's creation of King Lear is the best example. The Odes of Keats are the best examples. Naturally, they all work free from historical or autobiographical considerations. They all work individually with their own creative force which manifests itself with the force of the creative feeling that is the character of Lear and of the Odes. They make a direct transfer of feeling through correct expression. Feeling and expression are not separate entities. Very subtly they work together and inseparably – as one entity. This is organic form coming from the Negative Capability of the poet.

That Keats was being dramatic in his literary life and career was not something which Keats was doing deliberately or as an after-thought. He was essentially dramatic. Bernice Slote says, "The subtlety of the poet-dramatist is greater, and his own being more complexly diffused throughout the work. This quality in Keats, developed in a striking way throughout the few years of his creative life, is part of him and must be recognized in defining his kind of poetry" (5). Drama has always
been an inherent passion with him. He wanted to make a revolution in the drama. That was his essential ambition. To him drama did not always mean the play. But, as he explained it in his comment to Shelley, he was always "a judge of the dramatic effect" along with the poetry of a work. Such a dramatic focus had its obvious effects on his later poems, especially the Odes. It is in this context that Dorothy Hewlett sees him as a born dramatist and speaks of the master dramatist he might have been (39). M. R. Ridley in *Keats’ Craftsmanship* points out the emergence of that strong dramatic instinct, that sense indeed of "theatre" in Keats' later works, and speaks of his "dramatic" sense operating in the narrative poems and the Odes (69). And this drama is all about the human element, the human feeling of which the drama is made. So it is all about the human feeling and its expression. Drama entails the objective and natural expression of the two together. This is what Negative Capability and organic feeling come to. It is in this context that De Selincourt believes that "of all his contemporaries he had the greatest objective power"(lix).

This dramatic objectivity, the best illustration of Negative Capability, is to be seen in his poem "Ode on a Grecian Urn". "The Ode on a Grecian Urn" explores the element of indeterminacy with respect to the simultaneous depiction of the idealization of the two opposite worlds of nature and art from each other’s canon and suspending the judgment endlessly without favouring anyone and bringing reconciliation between them (Mishra 53). "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is a perfect example of the formula of "Negative Capability" which speaks of uncertainty which makes Keats not to favour this or that and which does not allow Keats to reach after fact and truth in the midst of conflicts and contradictions. The poem presents a conflict between immortality of art represented by the world of the urn and mutability of nature. The two antithetical worlds – the world of art and the world of nature – are
endowed with their own blessings as well as curses when judged from each other’s canons. The world of art, is not only blessed by eternity, but also cursed by frozenness, lifelessness and stagnancy. Similarly, the world of nature, is not blessed by human warmth and passion, but also cursed by ephemerality. Not only are both the opposite worlds – the world of art and the world of nature – just positioned in the poem but the opposition between the two worlds remains unresolved and suspended till the end of the poem. Keats idealizes the world of art – by repeatedly referring to the eternal nature of the objects of art depicted on the urn: but he simultaneously trivializes the immortality of art by referring to its want of human passions, warmth and life. This simultaneous depiction of the idealization and trivialisation of the two opposite worlds – the world of art and nature – judged by each other’s standards continues till the end of the poem, and the reader remains uncertain whether Keats is favouring the former or the latter. He idealizes the world of the urn and also criticizes it for its limitation. It is this simultaneous presence of opposite attitudes which results in an aphoria. This is the element of undecidability in the text. The reader is unable to decide whether to idealize art or nature. It is not that the idealization of art is rejected for the idealization of nature: what is postulated is the impossibility of idealization or valorization. Warring implications within the text do not unite at a higher level, but only pull it in opposite directions. The urn, as is mentioned in the first stanza of the poem, can narrate the history of the old Greek days more effectively than poetry. But it is found that the urn fails to tell the whole story and instead, as it is evident from the number of interrogatives used by the poet in the first stanza, is rather engaged in speculations. The series of questions asked through the stylistic device of Interrogatives without providing any answer perform the function of creating mystery and open-endedness. Keats asks questions repeatedly and creates a puzzle around the
urn to escape any certain and final solution. Owing to the silence of the urn, all the uncertainties implied in the poem remain mysterious, shrouded in ambiguity and enigma. Are they "deities or mortals", are they "both" or are they rather, as the last stanza suggests, mere "marble" men and maidens-creatures, having no genuine identity? To Keats, Beauty and Truth are one and they are perceived through imagination and not by reason as facts and reason are essentially mundane and confined to the phenomenal world. A mind biased with personal prejudices cannot be a fit receptacle to the ultimate truth. It is imagination that frees a poet from preconceived notions and aids him in participating in all types of experience: pain or pleasure, life or death, youth or old age, health or decay, eternity or evanescence or immortality and modernity or antiquity. Imagination deconstructs the minds of the poet and ensures the unbiased participation of the poet without leaning towards any dogma and philosophy. It is only through imagination or intuitions that a poet can transcend physical beauty and approach aesthetic beauty that is only identical with truth. The Greek life perceived through imagination enables the poet to remain receptive to all types of experience even conflictive ones, without deciding in favour of one of them. That is really beautiful and since it is free from the ego and prejudices of a poet, it becomes truthful. In the poem, interrogatives, negatives, alternates and adversaries are skillfully used by Keats to keep on fluctuating and stand and to remain in a state of "Mystery, doubts" (SLK, 60) and in an atmosphere of uncertainty. He leaves a question mark without providing an answer.

Shakespeare was the inspiration behind Keats' idea of Negative Capability. Keats wrote in a Folio copy of Shakespeare's plays,

The genius of Shakespeare was an innate universality; wherefore he laid the achievements of human intellect prostrate beneath his indolent and kingly
gaze; he could do easily men's utmost. His plan of tasks to come was not of this world. If what he proposed to do hereafter would not in the idea answer the aim, how tremendous must have been his conception of ultimates! (Charles Cowden Clarke, *Recollections of Keats*. Web)

Guided by Hazlitt's esteem, Keats cited him to define the "quality" of a "Man of Achievement especially in Literature". This is Negative Capability, a capability "which Shakespeare possessed so enormously" – to efface the self through sympathetic identification with others and yet remain in "uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (*SLK*, 60). Keats elaborated this capability when, again with Shakespeare in mind, he depicted the ideal "poetical Character" (*SLK*, 194) as a "camelion", taking "as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen" (*SLK*, 195). This flexibility is sharpest in its Keatsian enactments in the multiple ironies, conflicting perspectives, and dramatic reversals of such poems as "The Eve of St. Agnes", "Lamia" and the great Odes of 1819.

Shakespearean Negative Capability was significant again for its associations with the reform politics that Keats endorsed. Nicholas Roe in *Keats and the Culture of Dissent* has shown how the Eighteenth Century theories of imaginative sympathy that inform Keats' Shakespearean ideal frequently advanced, by way of Hazlitt's Criticism, liberal arguments for communal sympathies and egalitarian politics. This political inflection was acute when Keats was writing about Negative Capability, in late December 1817 (*Roe* 236). The week before, Hunt's "Examiner" had featured several articles contrasting the "selfish", "narrow" and "irritable" principles of government ministers and greedy theatre managers with the expansive social sympathies of the reform movement in general, and with Shakespeare's equanimity in particular (*Roe* 236).
239). Keats’ use of such language about Shakespeare's Negative Capability suggests that he saw it at work in the liberal sympathies of reform politics (Roe 236). This political sense of Negative Capability informs "To Autumn", often considered Keats' most purely detached poem (Roe 252).

To go into the background of this Concept of Negative Capability, Keats has used it in his letters of 21, 27 December 1817 to his brothers George and Tom. He had been groping for this formula for months. It suddenly appeared while he was engaged in a disquisition with his friend Charles Wentworth Dilke. Keats regards an excessive preoccupation with the self and with personal identity as a serious flaw in a poet. For all his admiration for Wordsworth, he dislikes his egotistical nature. Keats believes that the ideal poet has no fixed character of individuality. Keats holds that the poet's lack of personal identity enables him to easily identify himself, by an act of sympathy, with other people and objects. In his letter of the 27th of October 1818 to Richard Woodhouse, Keats once again dwells on the idea that the ideal poet has no fixed identity and that he is endowed with the power of identifying himself imaginatively with people and objects. It is in this respect that Keats has praised Shakespeare. To him, Shakespeare was the least of an egotist that it was impossible to be. He was nothing in himself. But he was all that others were. Keats often refers to his own empathic power. He can conceive of "a Billiard Ball" that it may have a sense of delight from its own roundness, smoothness, volubility and the rapidity of its motion (SLK, 27). Keats is naturally drawn to empathic images and description in poetry. His response to these testifies to his own empathic power. It is clear that Keats regards empathy as an important poetic virtue. This power, which is the basis of all altruistic actions, is, according to him an important part of the poet's mental makeup. It helps
Alquraidhy

him to understand the workings of the human mind and to master the secrets of the human heart.

Like empathy, Keats regards disinterestedness as an important poetic virtue. In his view, a disinterested state of mind – a state characterized by a total freedom from personal desires and preoccupations – is ideal for poetic creation. In this state, the poet has no personal interest in any earthly pursuit, either Love or Ambition or Poesy. Such a state of calm detachment can be obtained by a poet who has to do with his selflessness and the universality of his spirit.

Negative Capability involves an openness to experience. Keats is aware of the importance of receptivity. In his view, it is much more desirable to be passive, yet open and receptive than to fret after knowledge or to reach after fact and reason impatiently. In his letters, Keats points out that a genuine poet will show an openness to the diversity of experience, both pleasant and unpleasant. Keats holds that "the only means of strengthening one's intellect is to make up one's mind about nothing, to let the mind be a thoroughfare for all thoughts. Not a select party" (SLK, 380). He found this willingness in Shakespeare and he attributed to it the universality of Shakespeare's genius.

Negative Capability implies a total acceptance of the world as it is. The willingness to remain in "uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts" implies an acceptance of life as it is. Life is a mystery. It defies any attempt on our part to make it fit in with a dogma or philosophical system. A philosopher tries to find a simple answer to the riddle of life. He is constantly engaged in a search for fact and reason. The search, however, is bound to be futile. The poet, on the contrary, accepts life as it is. He does not approach life with certain preconceptions or attempt to view it in the light of a personal philosophy. In Keats' view, the province of the philosopher and that of the
poet are separate. Coleridge, he believes, suffers as a poet because he desires to be a philosopher at the same time. In other words, Coleridge lacks the quality of acceptance which a great poet like Shakespeare pre-eminently possesses. The poet has to accept life in its totality.

In Keats, thus, there is a constant dislike for reason. He puts his faith in intuition and a distrust of reason as a guide to truth. In Keats' view, Coleridge "would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetrarium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge" (SLK, 60). In other words, Coleridge, in Keats' view, lacks faith in intuition and so he does not care to record his flashes of insight. A negatively capable poet, on the other hand, has absolute faith in intuition. He, therefore, faithfully records for all the time the fine isolated verisimilitude caught by him from "the Penetrarium of mystery". Keats is very clear on all these points.

The term "Negative Capability" has reference not only to the nature and character of a poet, but also to the manner in which he interprets life. As a term relating to the way in which the poet interprets life, "Negative Capability" first of all implies a certain degree of objectivity or impersonality. Keats, the critic, is against a poetry of subjective self-expression. He detects in Wordsworth’s poetry a deliberate attempt on the part of the poet to convert the reader to his own point of view. Keats is not in favour of imposing his personal views and beliefs on the reader. He should merely put down his halt-seeing. Keats believes that it is against the very nature of poetry to attempt to convert the reader. He says in his 3Feb. 1818 letter to J. H. Reynolds – "We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us….Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself but with its subject" (SLK, 86-7). In Keats' view, the poet should not only
refrain from making his own self the subject of his poetry, but he must make sure that his own personality does not, in any way hinder the reader's response to the subject of his poetry. Keats finds contemporary poetry obtrusive when compared to Elizabethan poetry. In "The Fall of Hyperion", Keats speaks out against "self-worship" in poetry.

Negative Capability implies the ability to see the world (including human affairs) as it is, uncoloured by personal predictions or prejudices. It means looking at things from a certain distance and height, so as to be able to see them in their true perspective. The Odes are examples of Keats' Negative Capability. Negative Capability appears subtly in "Ode on Melancholy" according to Harold Bloom (1961), who 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 (413). The use of the "droop-headed flowers" (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, of "Ode on Melancholy" begins "She dwells with Beauty--Beauty that must die" (21) which he suggests supplies the ultimate case of a negative relationship because it suggests that the only true beauty is one that will die (Bloom 1961, 413). But Thomas McFarland in The Masks of Keats, while acknowledging the importance of the original first stanza to Keats' endeavor, openly praises the removal of the lines as an act of what he calls "compression". McFarland believes that the
poem’s strength lies in its ability to avoid the "Seemingly endless wordage of "Endymion" and lets the final stanza push the main themes on its own (94). McFarland says that by removing unnecessary information such as the reason the poet suggests the trip to Lethe, Keats allows the reader to avoid the "fancy" aspects that would have appeared in the first line and were not sustained throughout the rest of the text (96).

One of the central points of Keats' poetic creed is that poetry should not teach, but merely reveal. Revelation is, in his view, the proper function of poetry. He believes that this is the truly poetic method of communication with the reader, the only method that is compatible with his conception of "Negative Capability". He feels that the poet should embody his intuitions in poetry in such a way that the reader will be able not merely to share his heightened awareness of life, but also to "see into the life of things". When a poet does this, his "Negative Capability" manifests itself.