

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

STRANGE IMAGES OF DEATH:
THE FUNCTION OF MACABRE IMAGERY IN
KEATS'S POETRY OF HEALING

by

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the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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At the close of the Middle Ages the whole vision of death may be summed up in the word macabre, in its modern meaning. Of course, this meaning is the outcome of a long process. But the sentiment it embodies, of something gruesome and dismal, is precisely the conception of death which arose during the last centuries of the Middle Ages. This bizarre word appeared in French in the fourteenth century, under the form macabré, and, whatever may be its etymology, as a proper name. A line of the poet Jean Le Fèvre, 'Je fis de Macabré la dance,' which may be dated 1376, remains the birth-certificate of the word for us.

Towards 1400 the conception of death in art and literature took a spectral and fantastic shape. A new and vivid shudder was added to the great primitive horror of death. The macabre vision arose from deep psychological strata of fear; religious thought at once reduced it to a means of moral exhortation.

- Johan Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages

I was at home
And should have been most happy, - but I saw
Too far into the sea, where every maw
The greater on the less feeds evermore.-
But I saw too distinct into the core
Of an eternal fierce destruction,
And so from happiness I far was gone.

- John Keats, "To J. H. Reynolds, Esq."

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout his poetry, Keats uses macabre imagery to represent the disease for which the transcendental imagination provides the cure. Macabre imagery, portraying man's life as a grim, senseless journey towards death, thus prepares for an affirmation of the existence in man of a transcendental imagination, a faculty which eases the pain caused by this knowledge of mortality. From the beginning of his career, Keats sees his poetry as having a healing function: in "Sleep and Poetry" (1816) he calls on poetry "To soothe the cares, and lift the thoughts of man," (l. 247)¹ and in The Fall of Hyperion (1819) he describes the poet as "a physician to all men" (Canto 1, l. 190). From the beginning as well, Keats sees knowledge of mortality as the root of man's cares; hence, for him, the cure must consist of a liberation from the strictures of finitude, a transcendence of the pain and despair caused by the knowledge of mortality. This cure, Keats avers, derives from man's transcendental imagination.

This faculty puts man in touch with an eternal, spiritual world. If the exact nature of this extra-mortal world remains elusive in Keats's works, the fact of its presence is nevertheless boldly limned in Keats's poetry. In Earl Wasserman's words, "There are, Keats is saying, forces outside the range of mutability which are nevertheless perceptible in the texture of sensory things."² To point to this world, to find analogies for this experience, Keats makes use of classical myth and the supernatural.

This analysis of macabre imagery throughout Keats's works has implications in relation to the general criticism of Keats. Specifically, the consistent function of macabre imagery points to a consistency and unity in Keats's thought. While it is generally agreed that the claims of this and a transcendental world form a basic theme throughout his poetry, critics have remained divided on Keats's resolution of these claims. M. H. Abrams, for example, in Natural Supernaturalism speaks of a "growth to tragic understanding."³ Jacob Wigod similarly finds Keats opting for the claims of this world in speaking of "tragic consciousness."⁴ Jack Stillinger, perhaps the strongest advocate of Keats's earthly orientation, summarizes his argument in this way:

[Keats's] significant poems center on a single basic problem, the mutability inherent in nature and human life, and openly or in disguise they debate the pros and cons of a single hypothetical solution, the transcendence of earthly limitations by means of the visionary imagination. . . . Keats came to learn that this kind of imagination was a false lure, inadequate to the needs of the problem, and in the end he traded it for the naturalized imagination, embracing experience and process as his own and man's chief good.⁵

This study, on the other hand, will provide support in detail to the more general studies which do propose Keats's consistent faith in the transcendental imagination, such as the recent study by James Land Jones.⁶

The present study progresses chronologically through Keats's corpus, focussing on the major works and including examples from Keats's various genres. The first chapter examines I Stood Tip-Toe,

in which the seemingly innocent description of flowers and a stream
that

may haply mourn
That such fair clusters should be rudely torn
From their fresh beds, and scattered thoughtlessly
By infant hands, left on the path to die,
(11.43-6)

in fact serves as a metaphor for a more sinister theme, man's seemingly senseless mortality. This reference to the macabre, though muted and submerged in the imagery, nonetheless forms part of an imagistic train that gives meaning to the apocalyptic healing occasioned at the end of the poem.

The second chapter analyzes Endymion, in which macabre imagery occurs overtly and regularly to mark Endymion's confused and pained ignorance in the absences of the periodically revealed Cynthia. The fable traces man's quest for the supernal, which heals the pain of earthly life separated from this remote object of desire.

The third chapter ^{presents} Isabella, which celebrates the transcendental experience as an intensely private one within a hostile and uncomprehending society, a theme evident in Keats's other narratives, such as in Lamia or in The Eve of St. Agnes. Macabre imagery is used here to depict the kind of perception which fails to transcend the mutable, material world. How Keats manages to affirm a transcendental experience through the peculiar concentration of macabre imagery in this poem affords an opportunity to compare similar treatments of imagery in other poems that may seem also to deny the transcendental

vision, such as "La Belle Dame" or "Ode to a Nightingale," where fancy is called a "deceiving elf."

The fourth chapter studies "To Autumn" in which submerged or muted references to the macabre form the necessary underpinning of the softer, soothing visions. The last chapter examines the two Hyperion poems which relate the timeless encounter of the individual with his own mortality and, subsequently, with his own power to transcend that state.

In all of these works, the specific images used to render a sense of the macabre, range through a great variety of forms which include the hapless flowers of I Stood Tip-Toe and the colossal figures of the Hyperion poems. Whatever their specific nature, each image serves to render a sense of man's life as a tragically finite experience. So, while on the surface these images may differ widely, close analysis reveals their similarity: for example, on the one hand, the "fair clusters" of I Stood Tip-Toe are revealed as but another shape of man, while, on the other hand, the colossi of the Hyperion poems are but other flowers "scattered thoughtlessly . . . [and] left on the path to die" by other "infant hands." But whenever, also, the chilling blight of mortality appears in these poems, the regenerative spring of the imagination is never far behind.

"Ah, surely he had burst our mortal bars."

Chapter One

Imagination's Soft Colours and Apocalyptic Vision: the Macabre Transformed and Dispelled in I Stood Tip-Toe

The sense of the macabre in I Stood Tip-Toe may at first appear as muted and uncharacteristic allusions to man's mortality in such passages as the description of the bluebells torn by infant hands (ll. 41-6) and the reference to sickness and death at the end of the poem (ll. 221-36). A closer examination of the poem reveals that man's knowledge of his mortality is indeed central to the poem: it is the *raison d'être* of the faculty which is portrayed in the poem, that is, the transcendental imagination. The reason for the seeming inconspicuousness of the macabre lies in the approach Keats took to the portrayal of the imagination. He undertook to present the imagination in the poem's images and structure in such a way as to emphasize its healing and transcendental function rather than to expose in equal light the root cares which this faculty obviates. This approach produces a poem with a sustained sweetness of outlook which deceptively emanates from an imagery which can sustain this outlook while revealing to the careful reader the proper depth and force of the theme.

Depth and strength are not qualities widely attributed to this poem or to Poems 1817 in general. Allusions to the underlying knowledge of mortality in the poem are either ignored by the critics or

are seen as uncharacteristic excrescences in an otherwise sweet verse. Illustrative of criticism in this vein is Sidney Colvin's evaluation in 1887 that "the spirit which animates [Keats] is essentially the spirit of delight: delight in the beauty of nature and the vividness of sensation, delight in the charm of fable and romance, in the thought of friendship and affection."¹ Other critics have maintained this view of the early poetry as unadulterated sweetness; thus Claude Lee Finney sees that "the images evoke a mood of delight but they do not suggest the mysteries of human fate or the principles of human action."² In equal disregard of the symbolic depths of the poem, Hugh I'Anson Fausset asserts that "the moon . . . appears as a decorative illustration."³ Where subsequent critics noticed a macabre tinge in the poem, they dismissed it as being out of place; so, in commenting on the breezes which cure the "languid sick," Aileen Ward states that "this passage . . . has no logical connection with the rest of the poem"⁴ and E. C. Pettet terms it "that curious passage."⁵ Certain recent critics have repeated similar judgments about the early poetry. John Jones speaks of "insufferable monotony" and calls it "extraordinarily tiresome." In particular, he finds I Stood Tip-Toe to be "extremely poor."⁶ Morris Dickstein feels that "complexity of awareness . . . is absent from these poems,"⁷ while Robert Ryan, in noticing the strongly macabre images in "The Epistle to J. H. Reynolds," totally ignores a similar vein in I Stood Tip-Toe:

This awful vision of what another poet would
call "Nature red in tooth and claw with

ravine" seems to have struck Keats suddenly, unexpectedly, and almost with the force of a revelation. Nothing like it appears before in his writings. In the earlier poetry, the natural world is all peace and harmony and "places of nestling green for Poets made." Nature, for the younger Keats, was a "fair paradise" where

the hurrying freshnesses aye preach
A natural sermon o'er their pebbly beds.
"I Stood Tip-Toe" (ll. 126)⁸

When the underlying sense of the macabre is noticed it is generally placed in a view of the poetry that condemns it as immature and noteworthy only insofar as it foreshadows the later work. For example, Morris Dickstein sees that Keats "seeks escape not merely from the phenomenal world but from our mortal condition itself, so his vision will involve not random imaginings but a genuinely original myth-making."⁹ But he sees this myth-making as a future endeavour only: the early poems, "in a naive and spontaneous way . . . undertake many of the strategies that we have seen to be characteristic of Keats at a later, more sophisticated period."¹⁰ Again, Barry Gradman comments on the healed lovers at the end of I Stood Tip-Toe:

This curiously forceful conclusion to "I stood tip-toe" is noteworthy because it adumbrates, in a condensed, inchoate way, similar metamorphic episodes that recur throughout Keats's poetry. Paradigmatically, the experience of the sick lovers consists of three distinct stages: illness, slumber, health. This is the earliest manifestation of what I should like to call a three-part "metamorphosis pattern," discernible in a number of Keats's subsequent poems in which it serves to express a wide spectrum of the poet's moral and aesthetic attitudes."¹¹

A more common interpretation of the centrality of these poems in Keats's corpus is that they express for the first time Keats's view of the close relationship between poetry and nature.¹² First advanced by Douglas Bush in 1937, this view has been more recently repeated by Jack Stillinger and James Land Jones.¹³ Finally, the persistent cause of the putative mediocrity of I Stood Tip-Toe is reported to be that it was artificially pieced together: according to Walter Evert, "the successive stages of the work's composition are very hard to ascertain. What can be said, however, is that the poem shows signs of uncertain intention. . . . And so he abandoned the artificially spliced-together romance."¹⁴ In this critical view, the poetry becomes a contradiction. Jacob Wigod feels that

it seems strange, even contradictory, that Keats should aspire to write of the agonies, the strife of human hearts and at the same time to tell simply the most heart-easing things. . . . The truth probably is that, though Keats knew theoretically what path to follow to attain poetic greatness, he had not yet proved upon his pulses the higher stages of his theory.¹⁵

Similarly, Stuart Sperry sees that "rather than any genuine resolution, 'I Stood Tip-toe' expresses a pressure of conflicting attitudes toward the nature and validity of visionary experience."¹⁶ The most recent criticism still reveals the old bias of the poem's being without clear structure. According to Wolf Hirst, "the work has no overall imagistic pattern and symbolic structure."¹⁷

My examination of this poem will reveal its structure as consistent with its theme of the function of the imagination. As for

its being a shallow description of pleasant scenery, I follow Clarence Thorpe in the view that

it is true that in I Stood Tip-toe . . . nature seems to play an important part. But after all it is a subordinate part, the role of chief exciter of the imagination, and the poetry evoked by nature has all a human quality . . . it is evident that with Keats the sensuous and the world of nature are chiefly significant in poetry as leading to an understanding of the deeper spirit of man and the "Mystery."¹⁸

In arguing a clear design in the poem, I place it in the mainstream of Keats's sensibility, if yet recognizing its relative weakness compared to the later works. This view has recently been well expressed by Ronald Sharp:

In claiming a high degree of substantive consistency for Keats's work, I do not wish to imply that his early work is as fully realized or as brilliant as his later work. But I think it is a serious mistake to read the early work condescendingly. No one can doubt that Keats's early poetry betrays occasional uncertainties, or that in general it suffers remarkably by comparison with his later work. But it is another matter altogether to regard the early poetry as the product of a poet whose deepest convictions about life and poetry have yet to mature.¹⁹

The deep conviction revealed in I Stood Tip-Toe is that the imagination cures the perception of life as a horrible journey towards death.

I Stood Tip-Toe offers a dramatic unfolding, through symbolic action and scenery, of the role of the imagination as a cure of the

images that will let him discover that which will lead to that vision of immortality: the transcendental imagination. The subject, a perusal of the outward world, is a metaphor for an examination of the inner world and its faculties, specifically, the imagination. What is viewed in nature points to aspects of this inner landscape. The tendency for inclusion which has been noted in the first verse paragraph, has, by the end of the poem, effected a number of related metamorphoses whose unfolding is set within the natural progression from dawn to darkness. The solitude of the initial "I" has been replaced by a number of lovers whose company somehow transcends the moment: they create "ties, that never may be broken" (l. 238). These ties are formed by the "poesy" (l. 235) they utter, a development of the incipient sound at the beginning of the poem: "A little noiseless noise . . . / Born of the very sigh that silence heaves" (ll. 11-12). This sound is further related to the image of the wind which develops from, "The air was cooling, and so very still" (l. 2), to "The breezes were ethereal, and pure" (l. 221). Finally, these images of wind are related to images of sight:

The breezes were ethereal and pure,
 And crept through half-closed lattices to cure
 The languid sick; it cool'd their fever'd sleep,
 And soothed them into slumbers full and deep.
 Soon they awoke clear eyed (ll. 221-5)

The intimate relation between these early and late images can be seen, for example, in the fact that the air "crept" in both instances:

and then there crept
 A little noiseless noise among the leaves,
 Born of the very sigh that silence heaves.
 (11. 10-12)

This "noiseless noise" that was "born"²¹ at the beginning has grown into a full expression of an ineffable vision:

They met the wond'ring sight
 Of their dear friends, nigh foolish with delight;
 (11. 227-8)

 Young men, and maidens at each other gaz'd
 With hands held back, and motionless, amaz'd
 To see the brightness in each other's eyes

What wind causes what vision is a question that has been studied by M. H. Abrams who called it the "correspondent breeze" of poetic inspiration:

the wind is not only a property of the landscape, but also a vehicle for radical changes in the poet's mind. The rising wind, usually linked with the outer transition from winter to spring, is correlated with a complex subjective process: the return to a sense of community after isolation, the renewal of life and emotional vigor after apathy and a deathlike torpor, and an outburst of creative power following a period of imaginative sterility.²²

The "return to a sense of community after isolation" has already been noted in this poem and the transition from winter to spring is implicit in the "scantly leav'd" (l. 5) "May flowers" (l. 29) as well as reflected in the transition from night to day. The sense of "deathlike torpor" points to a central concern of the poem which is usually ignored in criticism: the effect, and even the purpose, of the strange vision that is inspired. The effect as well as the pur-

pose is to "cure" (l. 223) this torpor:

The breezes were ethereal, and pure,
 And crept through half-closed lattices to cure
 The languid sick; it cool'd their fever'd sleep,
 And soothed them into slumbers full and deep.
 Soon they awoke clear eyed: nor burnt with thirsting,
 Nor with hot fingers, nor with temples bursting
 (11. 221-26)

The word "therefore" makes it clear that the vision is a life-giving one,

And as they stood, fill'd with a sweet surprise,
 Until their tongues were loos'd in poesy.
 Therefore no lover did of anguish die . . . ,
 (11. 234-6)

and that this life is timeless:

But the soft numbers, in that moment spoken,
 Made silken ties, that never may be broken.
 (11. 237-8)

In short, the imagination transcends mortality.

The informed reader can then notice this theme from the beginning lines where "the early sobbing of the morn" (l. 7) is not merely an example of eighteenth-century preciosity in referring to the dew on the flowers but is also an image linked to the development of the theme of the transcendental imagination unfolded in the related imagery of vision, wind, and pain. The solitary sobbing of the morn becomes "the brightness in each other's eyes," a mystical community forged in a common vision, to whose ranks the reader is invited through the "moment" (l. 237) of the poem. This community is

encapsulated in the myth of the mortal Endymion receiving immortality in his union with the goddess Cynthia. In view of the other correspondences between the initial and last parts of this poem, would it not be reasonable to infer that this "sobbing of the morn" may point to another such correspondence by alluding to the sorrow of Eos, the dawn, in losing the mortal Tithonus because the boon of immortality was forgotten and not granted?²³ If such an allusion is recognized, then the two parts of the poem are indeed very nicely balanced in the contrast between the failure to achieve immortality and the fulfillment of that desire. In any case, it is obvious that this "sobbing" is echoed in the final curing of the sick. The reason for such a tangential reference to sorrow may be found in the initial posture of the narrator; he is already under the benign influence of imaginative vision, already rising from the earth and in the presence of the "cooling," and, as has been shown, inspirational, air.

The initial reference to sorrow in "sobbing" is curiously and very importantly linked to the idea of beauty in that the bedewed flowers are objects of beauty:

. . . the sweet buds which with a modest pride
 Pull droopingly, in slanting curve aside,
 Their scanty leav'd, and finely tapering stems,
 Had not yet lost those starry diadems
 Caught from the early sobbing of the morn.
 (ll. 3-7)

Indeed, throughout Keats's poetry, the sense of sorrow, and more specifically, the pain caused by the knowledge of mortality, is closely linked to the sense of beauty. Repeatedly, beauty is por-

trayed as arising out of pain and sorrow, just as the healing imagination is a faculty engendered in mortal man. And this is precisely the theme of this poem, the birth, development and propagation through poetry of the imaginative vision. This theme is developed through several related imagistic trains which form various interrelated movements in the poem, such as movements from the immediate environment to a timeless realm, or from the finite to the infinite; from immaturity to maturity; from gestation to birth; from pain and sickness to health; from solitude to company; from concrete description to symbolism; from nature to the human and finally to the spiritual or extra-mortal realm.

In the first verse paragraph, then, the "early sobbing of the morn" is succeeded by "a little noiseless noise . . . / Born of the very sigh that silence heaves"; finally, at the end of this paragraph, these images are superseded by "the fanning wings of Mercury" (l. 24) which seem to lift the narrator and which adumbrate the poet's role of messenger of the gods, bringing man a celestial vision. This fanning also obviously signals the correspondent breeze noted earlier.

As the narrator proceeds, under the nascent inspiration of the imagination, to relate the "many pleasures to my vision started" (l. 26), a rather unusual "pleasure" seems to interpose itself amidst the "luxuries bright, milky, soft and rosy" (l. 28):

a spring-head of clear waters
 Babbling so wildly of its lovely daughters
 The spreading blue-bells: it may haply mourn

That such fair clusters should be rudely torn
 From their fresh beds, and scattered thoughtlessly
 By infant hands, left on the path to die.

(ll. 41-46)²⁴

The notion of generation is repeated in this section in such words as "youngling tree," (l. 38) "brethren shoots" (l. 39) and "aged roots," (l. 40) as well as "daughters" (l. 42). These words obviously point through the thin veil of natural description to the human world where generations succeed one another in life as well as into death. Further, these natural cycles which bring death to the individual are linked to the notion of immaturity in that the hands causing death are "infant" ones. This link to immaturity is strengthened in that this decimation is done "thoughtlessly." In the context of the development of the transcendental imagination, this imagery suggests that the sense of the macabre is indeed one promulgated by immature and thoughtless or visionless individuals. This imagery, in fact, provides an antithetical metaphor of the curing of the languid sick at the end of the poem, and provides another of the echoes and contrasts on which this poem is structured.

The verse paragraph immediately following begins to detail the poet's role in the nurturing of the transcendental imagination which cures the individual of his diseased perception of his own putatively mortal being. His hortation to the marigolds bridges the "sweet buds" with the dew ("from the early sobbing of the morn") at the beginning and the healed lovers at the end of the poem:

Open afresh your round of starry folds,
 Ye ardent marigolds!
 Dry up the moisture from your golden lids,

For great Apollo bids
That in these days your praises should be sung
On many harps, which he has lately strung
(11. 47-52)

These "starry folds" recall "those starry diadems," and "the moisture from your golden lids" echoes the sorrow "caught from the early sobbing of the morn." These images are more than a mere echo, however; at the beginning, the idea of sorrow is only indirectly linked to the flowers, the dew is the dawn's tears, and the narrator merely observes these. The marigolds, on the other hand, are presented as producing their own tears, "Dry up the moisture from your golden lids." Furthermore, the narrator is now actively engaged with the flowers in bidding them to leave their sorrow. The narrator has progressed from an observer of nature to a participant whose task, it is becoming apparent, is to assuage sorrow. Thus, at the beginning the narrator becomes incidentally aware of sorrow, and in the brook and flowers images he becomes aware that the root of this sorrow resides in mortality, but now with the marigolds he begins to take action against that sorrow: he is becoming a healer. This healing power is still nonetheless only nascent as evidenced in the fact that he himself needs the assistance of the marigolds to complete his task as a poet-physician; that is, he asks them to intercede for him to Apollo, the god of poetry.

Why he should need the marigolds' assistance as intercessors becomes clear when the symbolism of the natural imagery is recognized. The narrator whose essential sorrow derives from his knowledge of his own mortality has to recognize this as a starting point

A tuft of evening primroses,
 O'er which the mind may hover till it dozes;
 O'er which it well might take a pleasant sleep,
 But that 'tis ever startled by the leap
 Of buds into ripe flowers (ll. 107-11)

This culmination of imaginative development, the perception of the realm above our mutable sphere, is encapsulated in the figure of the moon:

That smile[s] us on to tell delightful stories.
 For what has made the sage or poet write
 But the fair paradise of Nature's light?
 (ll. 124-26)

This "Nature," however, is indeed a paradisaic one, one that is a refinement of our sublunary nature, for it

Charms us at once away from all our troubles:
 So that we feel uplifted from the world
 (ll. 138-29)²⁶

Just before the climactic myth of the union of Endymion and Cynthia, other myths recapitulate and enlarge upon the theme of the poet's function. For example, the reference to Psyche and Love echoes the earlier presentations of the poet's path from recognition of mortality through to its transcendence:

how they kist each other's tremulous eyes:
 The silver lamp,--the ravishment,--the wonder--
 The darkness,--loneliness,--the fearful thunder;
 Their woes gone by, and both to heaven upflown,
 To bow for gratitude before Jove's throne.
 (ll. 146-50)

The transcendence of the knowledge of mortality is here summarized in a classical myth presented with strong resemblances to the

Christian pattern of fall and salvation which here is an analogue for Keats's vision of imaginative transcendence of mortality.

The other myths presented also contain another key characteristic of the poet-physician. Besides achieving his own imaginative development, the poet is one who confers this vision on others. Man's basic disease is his mortality. The poet, having undergone his cure, is anxious to provide for others that which they may be powerless to effect; thus, in a kind of divine rage, the poet creates the sounds that heal:

He was a Poet, sure a lover too,
 Who stood on Latmus' top, what time there blew
 Soft breezes from the myrtle vale below;
 And brought in faintness solemn, sweet, and slow
 A hymn from Dian's temple; while upswelling,
 The incense went to her own starry dwelling.
 But though her face was clear as infant's eyes,
 Though she stood smiling o'er the sacrifice,
 The Poet wept at her so piteous fate,
 Wept that such beauty should be desolate:
 So in fine wrath some golden sounds he won,
 And gave meek Cynthia her Endymion.

(ll. 193-204)

These "golden sounds," or poetry, have an immediate effect that, as noted earlier, has met with critical puzzlement. In terms of its representation of man transcending the sublunary world of mutability, however, it makes complete sense. The golden sounds that proclaim this victory ("he won") over the disease of death should indeed have a universal effect. Those who already understand are bolstered in their knowledge: "men of health were of unusual cheer" (l. 216); and those who do not are cured of their ignorance:

it cool'd their fever'd sleep,
 And soothed them into slumbers full and deep.
 Soon they awoke clear eyed. (ll. 223-25)

The effect of the golden sounds is universal because man has the same innate disease, but the universality of the poetry has another dimension, through time, since the present poet is repeating now the Latmos poet's tale, which, in the form of this poem, has a recurring effect. Thus, it is "ever new" (l. 182) and it creates "silken ties, that never may be broken" (ll. 237-38) because it points to a timeless realm. The lovers are presented as such because this reflects the Endymion myth; a lover, like the Latmos poet--"He was a Poet, sure a lover too" (l. 193)--is one who has achieved the immortal visions of the imagination. Thus, the reader, too, participates in the "ever new" ties being created. As his vision is cleared, the reader too is one of the lovers, and a poet too; and that is why Keats used the line "Was there a poet born?" He is asking the reader if he has understood his poem and he is not merely being coyly hopeful about his own talents as is frequently averred in criticism of this poem. Similarly, the closing lines--

but now no more,
 My wand'ring spirit must no further soar.--

do not represent an inability to close the poem forcefully but rather they summarize man's paradoxical ability to transcend his finite condition by presenting the imaginative flight in proximity with an allusion to corporal death.

The "wand'ring spirit" of the poem is above all a happy one, and one that progressively heightens that happiness. The macabre path which is overflowed by the spirit is largely visible only by careful inspection, but it is by careful inspection that the crucial link between the macabre and the healing vision reveals itself.

"Some shape of beauty moves away the pall
From our dark spirits."

Chapter Two

Endymion: The Macabre as the Tenebrous Context of Man's Long Quest for Light

Macabre imagery in Endymion reveals the mutable world as it is in the absence of the transforming vision of the imagination. The shepherds have a notion of the universe beyond the mutable world, whose eternal mystery is represented in the figure of Pan, but Endymion, the initiate to the imaginative vision, has perceived this mystery as an intimate, personal figure, Cynthia. The poem then relates, through Endymion's rambling adventures, how such an inchoate perception is fully realized within oneself. The key to his success, as becomes clear through the long series of tests he undergoes, is simply faithfulness to his vision. Keats, in Endymion, illustrates his basic tenet that he is "certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination."¹

Macabre imagery first extrudes itself in full force after Endymion's initial perception of Cynthia. Here, macabre imagery marks Endymion's fall into mortal self-consciousness, the ironic first effect of the individual's incipient vision beyond the mutable world. Opposites define each other, and the perception of an extra-mortal realm at first serves to delineate more clearly the macabre outlines of the mutable world. Besides at first sending

Endymion into deeper sorrow than he had known, it also provides him with a strong impulse to know this remote object of desire. The way to this heavenly light in the tortuous darkness of the sublunary world is through the fidelity in one's heart. Macabre imagery, then, in its subsequent extrusions in the poem, marks wrong choices made by Endymion (or by someone presented to Endymion as a lesson, such as Glaucus) in his quest for enlightenment. Wrong choices invariably mean choosing less than Cynthia, that is, lacking faith in one's vision. Such choices inevitably lead to a perception which is opposite that represented by Cynthia, the beautiful and immutable: it is a perception of a horrible journey to death. Macabre imagery in Endymion, then, portrays the different stages of man's perception of mortality: first, the initial fall into mortal self-consciousness precipitated by the appearance of its opposite, transcendental vision; secondly, the re-affirmation within oneself of this macabre reality by losing faith in the vision.

Critics do not always acknowledge the importance of this macabre imagery in Endymion. S. R. Swaminathan states that "the accent falls not so much on the suffering of the hero as on the happiness of his fulfillment"; indeed he feels that the poem "is a romance with a facile optimism at its center."² Jacob Wigod agrees:

It is noteworthy that death never enters the scene in the Poems of 1817 and Endymion. There may be sleep or prolonged sleep, the semblance of death, but never death itself. Keats is too full of his own keenly felt existence, happiness, and ardor--for calamity has not yet struck. Passionate love, not death, is the most vital human truth at this time of his life.³

These opinions contradict the present argument that the sense of the macabre is at the foundation of the poem, but critical disparities regarding this poem are quite typical. Claude Lee Finney, for example, developed an allegorical interpretation along neo-platonic lines in The Evolution of Keats' Poetry (1936) while others, such as E. C. Pettet, see the story as "a straightforward love poem."⁴ Besides the basic contention between those who see the poem as an allegory of spiritual progress and those who see it as a more mundane love story, there exist differences between the interpreters of the allegory.

In reviewing the numerous allegorical interpretations, Jack Stillinger concluded that the poem contains at least five themes and that "thematic unrelatednesses" are responsible for the critical differences.⁵ A persistent explanation for the poem's seeming lack of unity is that Keats changed his mind regarding his theme as he wrote the poem. The first proponent of this view, Glen O. Allen, stated that

Examining Keats's poetic statements concerning dreams and visions from the beginning to the end of his writing, one notices a decided development. Keats, it appears, expressed in the earlier poems a conviction that these visions were actual visitations to a higher reality; in the later poems he expressed doubt, and finally he denied that they were genuine, affirming the alleged visions to be merely illusory. This change, to be sure, was gradual, but, as nearly as it can be identified with a period in his life, it occurred during the winter of 1817 and 1818, that is, during the period when he was completing and revising Endymion. And because Keats's theory of poetic creation was the very

concern of Endymion itself, the change inevitably affected his handling of the poem and no doubt has been at least partly responsible for the confusion over its interpretation.⁶

This view finds current affirmation in Barry Gradman's estimation:

what strikes me as the best recent criticism of the poem is more or less agreed on two points: that Endymion is very much an apprentice work, and that Keats's faith in the validity of Endymion's visionary quest wavered during the eight months he spent writing the poem the indistinctness [in the poem] resulted from a conflict in Keats's attitude toward the visionary which intensified as he continued to work on the poem.⁷

James Caldwell feels that allegory is too rigid a term for this story and instead explores in the poem "animate symbols of Keats' mental life."⁸ Morris Dickstein states that

in a sense the older Neoplatonic critics are closer to the truth, though we need not follow them in their assumption of a pre-ordained system, in their rigid allegorization, or in their moral embarrassments. Endymion is more than a love story. It is about a voyage of the self. . . .⁹

Finally, S. R. Swaminathan, in analyzing the "still image," a symbol of the mystical interpenetration of the worlds of change and permanence, warns that

In interpreting the poem there are two extreme positions which we will do well to avoid. One of them is to read it as if it is a consistent allegory, and the other is to dismiss completely the presence of any allegorical or symbolic meaning whatever, and

deal with it as a simple but unsatisfactory narrative overlaid with excessive descriptive poetry. If we steer clear of these extreme views, we may find in the poem a cluster of related ideas that become closely associated in Keats's mind with the still image as it grows into the myth of Endymion.¹⁰

If basic questions of theme have found varied answers, interpretations of specific episodes abound to the extent that James Caldwell remarked:

One approaches Endymion, indeed, with misgivings. It is a perilous jungle, a tangled overgrowth of luxuriant fancy, serenely beautiful in certain regions, lush and stifling elsewhere, counter-crossed by broken trails of event, haunted by vague symbols and half-shaped meanings. It breathes an atmosphere conducive to luminous half thoughts and starry speculations, delightful to the fresh-minded reader and generally alarming to scholars¹¹

The seemingly unstructured peregrinations of the hero actually reflect the means of attaining vision in the world,

Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth
Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,
Of all the unhealthy and o'er-darkened ways
Made for our searching

(I, 8-11)

The way to the "bower" of "health" (I, 4-5) mentioned in the opening lines may finally constitute "gradations of Happiness"¹² but the actual progression of the path is not so clear in the "searching" (I, 10). Thus Jacqueline Zeff sees in the poem not so much a "vertical progression" as a perpetual journey,¹³ and Judy Little,

in reference to the "strayed lambs" (I, 68-79) of the Latmians who end up in Pan's happy herds, declares that

In the process of describing the setting of his poem, Keats foreshadows its main action: the culminating happiness to be found even in wandering through "o'er-darkened ways" . . . wanderings, strayings, solitary dodgings are exactly the means of arriving at the "unimaginable lodge" of the beauty immanent in an elaborate, temporal world.¹⁴

The succeeding lines of the poem hint at the spiritual death which lack of light--or the sight of Cynthia, the "queen of light," (IV, 828)--means, not an ordinary "despondence" (I, 18):

Yes, in spite of all,
Some shape of beauty moves away the pall
From our dark spirits.

(I, 11-13)

One such "shape of beauty" "is the grandeur of the dooms / We have imagined for the mighty dead" (I, 20-21). This image reveals the imagination as a force which reaches beyond death and shapes conceptions of an after-life. As well, the "grandeur" and "mighty" refer back to "noble nature" (I, 9), a reminder that the imaginative redemption from mortality is contingent upon the realization of one's proper nature. One has to become worthy of one's proper nature. One has to become worthy of it through one's choices which must be guided by faithfulness to the vision.

The last lines of the first verse paragraph leave no doubt as to the nature of these "shapes of beauty" immanent in the world: they are "[a]n endless fountain of immortal drink, / Pouring unto us from

the heaven's brink" (I, 23-24).¹⁵ This section ends in a little noticed but very forceful and clear pronouncement of the alternative we have to those "shapes of beauty": "They alway must be with us, or we die." (I, 33) It is spiritual death, then, the darkness of the visionless soul, which is the real death envisioned in the macabre imagery of this poem. The horror of physical death is obviously obviated by the visions of the transcendental imagination.

The macabre imagery in the rest of the poem follows in the context of the themes raised in the poem. Macabre imagery, that is, consistently refers to the lowest gradations of life, the mineral, vegetable, and animal realms, rather than to the human or spiritual worlds. In this way, Endymion's wrong choices of the world of mortality over that of the eternal spirit are underscored.

Book I sets the basic problem for Endymion; he has had un-earthly visions but he does not understand his proper relationship to them: "Unto what awful power shall I call? / To what high fane?" (I, 623-24). He must learn for himself that relationship about which the old shepherds and the priest speculate:

There they discours'd upon the fragile bar
That keeps us from our homes ethereal;
And what our duties there
(I, 360-62)

The imagery pointing to this unredeemed mortality in Book I runs through the hierarchy of the chain of being. First, Endymion is associated to the mineral realm:

in the self-same fixed trance he kept,
 Like one who on the earth had never slept.
 Aye, even as dead still as a marble man
 (I, 403-05)

Like the "dull and clodded earth," Endymion needs now to re-affirm within himself "a touch ethereal." (I, 297-98), an awakened soul. This symbolism is not gratuitous but carefully prepared, beginning in the description of Pan's altar, which is a "marble altar" (I, 90). The significance of Pan's altar is that it represents the conjunction of heaven and earth;¹⁶ it is the visible presence of the "touch ethereal." In the second paragraph of the proem, the soul is associated to the image of a temple:

even as the trees
 That whisper round a temple become soon
 Dear as the temple's self, so does the moon,
 The passion poesy, glories infinite
 Haunt us till they become a cheering light
 Unto our souls
 (I, 26-31)

That is, Endymion must recognize himself in Pan's altar and become its reflection. The altar is the public symbol of the ideal toward which Endymion must strive, and his vision, or Cynthia, is the personal "touch ethereal" which will complete him.

This image of marble infused with an eternal life is repeated in terms of art's permanence; the narrator momentarily draws back from the dancing shepherds to place them in a broad historical context:

those fair living forms swam heavenly
 To times forgotten--out of memory:

Fair creatures! whose young children's children bred
 Thermopylae its heroes--not yet dead,
 But in old marbles ever beautiful.

(I, 315-19)

Against the background of these two references, the image of Endymion as "dead still as a marble man" (I, 405) certainly underlines his spiritual vacuity. He is as lifeless as an altar to the void or, in reference to art as physical objects endued with a spiritual permanence, as vacant as an unread poem.

Endymion's quest is to find his proper complement and the possible failure, that is, spiritual death, is implied in vegetable imagery. In Book II, Endymion remarks upon his separation from life-giving forces:

Where soil is men grow,
 Whether to weeds or flowers; but for me,
 There is no depth to strike in
 (II, 159-61)

In this context, the narrator's invocation for inspiration introduces this idea of man's growth, as well as the more obvious one of poetic achievement:

I send
 My herald thought into a wilderness:
 There let its trumpet blow, and quickly dress
 My uncertain path with green, that I may speed
 Easily onward, through flowers and weed.
 (I, 58-62)

Endymion's path is initially very "uncertain" and that he himself is in danger of suffering the fate of a weed is reflected in his view of the world when he loses sight of the ethereal vision; the world's

"green" becomes the monstrous exteriorization of his fall into mortal self-consciousness:

all the pleasant hues
Of heaven and earth had faded: deepest shades
Were deepest dungeons; heaths and sunny glades
Were full of pestilent light; our taintless rills
Seem'd sooty, and o'er-spread with upturn'd gills
Of dying fish; the vermeil rose had blown
In frightful scarlet, and its thorns out-grown
Like spiked aloe.

(I, 691-98)

Indeed, the world as perceived in the absence of the transfiguring force of the transcendental imagination becomes a preying animal. Endymion's malaise, the "dis-ease" caused by his mortality, is a "cankering venom" (I, 396) that reveals the world for what it is in itself--a journey to death:

If an innocent bird
Before my heedless footsteps stirr'd, and stirr'd
In little journeys, I beheld in it
A disguis'd demon, missioned to knit
My soul with under darkness; to entice
My stumblings down some monstrous precipice
(I, 678-703)

Endymion's environment reflects the same idea; in the absence of Pan, the images suggest, the world would provide a horrible end for Pan's "sheep," or shepherds. In praising Pan, the shepherds note that "No howling sad / Sickens our fearful ewes" (I, 217-18), and that Pan's servants provide protection

whether to surprise
The squatted hare while in half sleeping fit;
Or upward ragged precipices flit
To save poor lambkins from the eagle's maw;

Or by mysterious enticement draw
 Bewildered shepherds to their path again
 (I, 264-67)

Indeed, the preying animal is the symbol of death which is overcome
 by the imagination:

Among the shepherds, 'twas believed ever,
 That not one fleecy lamb which thus did sever
 From the white flock, but pass'd unworried
 By angry wolf, or pard with prying head,
 Until it came to some unfooted plains
 Where fed the herds of Pan
 (I, 73-78)

The strongest expression of this image in Book I occurs when
 Endymion relates how he felt when losing his vision of the heavenly
 goddess:

Aye, such a breathless honey-feel of bliss
 Alone preserved me from the drear abyss
 Of death, for the fair form had gone again.
 Pleasure is oft a visitant; but pain
 Clings cruelly to us, like the gnawing sloth
 On the deer's tender haunches
 (I, 903-08)

Life as a horrible journey to death is centrally portrayed
 through these images of the lower chain of being in connection with
 the notion of a Lotus land where one loses oneself to a forgetful
 nothingness associated with air and wind. Perhaps the climax of
 this type of imagery occurs in Book III in Glaucus's story which
 provides a clear warning to Endymion of the consequences of giving
 oneself to the wrong elements, for he knowingly gave himself, in
 rejection of the quest for his true love, his complement, to a
 lesser, more easily attainable love:

I lov'd her to the very white of truth,
 And she would not conceive it. Timid thing!
 She fled me swift as sea-bird on the wing,

My passion grew
 The more, the more I saw her dainty hue
 Glean delicately through the azure clear:
 Until 'twas too fierce agony to bear;
 And in that agony, across my grief
 It flash'd that Circe might find some relief--
 Cruel enchantress! So above the water
 I rear'd my head, and look'd for Phoebus' daughter.
 Aeaea's isle was wondering at the moon:--
 It seem'd to whirl around me, and a swoon
 Left me dead-drifting to that fatal power.

(III, 402-17)

"That fatal power" creates a bower of forgetfulness, a "specious heaven" (III, 477):

How then, was Scylla quite forgot?
 'Who could resist? who in this universe?
 She did so breathe ambrosia; so immerse
 My fine existence in a golden clime.
 She took me like a child of suckling time,
 And cradled me in roses. Thus condemn'd,
 And to this arbitrary queen of sense
 I bow'd a tranced vassal: nor would thence
 Have mov'd, even though Amphion's harp had woo'd
 Me back to Scylla o'er the billows rude.

(III, 452-462)

As the meretricious nature of this bower is revealed to Glaucus, the imagery combines animals and airy nothingness; Circe's vassals pay homage to her (III, 498-533). This cluster of images is repeated in a scene which emphasizes that while man's destiny is noble, there is an "inhuman dearth of noble natures" (I, 8) (III, 537-553). And "this arbitrary queen of sense" (III, 459) makes it doubly clear to Glaucus what constitutes the reward of choosing the flesh, the finite:

Mark me! Thou hast thews
 Immortal, for thou art of heavenly race:
 But such a love is mine, that here I chace
 Eternally away from thee all bloom
 Of youth, and destine thee towards a tomb.
 (III, 588-92)

The earth, devoid of "the touch ethereal" has its false charms,
 and Endymion is prone to these from the first. Earthly beauty is
 pictured as a Lotus land leading to airy nothingness:

Apollo's upward fire
 Made every eastern cloud a silvery pyre
 Of brightness so unsullied, that therein
 A melancholy spirit well might win
 Oblivion, and melt out his essence fine
 Into the winds
 (I, 95-100)

"His essence fine" foreshadows Glaucus's "She did so breathe ambrosia;
 so immerse / My fine existence in a golden clime" (III, 454-55), and
 the Circean reward is hinted at in the word "pyre."

Endymion's sister, Peona, is uncomprehending of his visions and
 to the extent that she dissuades Endymion from them and persuades him
 to attach himself to the earth as such, she, too, is Circean.¹⁷
 This danger, if not recognized by Endymion, is evident to the in-
 formed reader in the image of the wind:

Endymion!
 Be rather in the trumpet's mouth,--anon
 Among the winds at large--that all may hearken!
 (I, 736-38)

In this context, Endymion's resolve at the end of Book I strikes the
 right note:

I'll smile no more, Peona; nor will wed
 Sorrow the way to death; but patiently
 Bear up against it: so farewell, sad sigh;
 And come instead demurest meditation,
 To occupy me wholly, and to fashion
 My pilgrimage for the world's dusky brink.
 No more will I count over, link by link,
 My chain of grief: no longer strive to find
 A half-forgetfulness in mountain wind
 Blustering about my ears

(I, 972-81)

While the Glaucus episode in Book III provides the most striking examples of macabre imagery, the sense of the macabre is implicit in the other, seemingly innocent, episodes. In Book II, the bower of Adonis, while presenting a less obviously inadequate choice for Endymion as love's pilgrim than does the bower in the Glaucus episode, contains within itself a warning to Endymion (and to the reader) as to what to avoid in the quest for transcendent beauty. As in the other episodes, it is mortality itself that is to be overcome, and the most obvious limitation of this bower in this regard is that it fails to transcend nature. Adonis's immortality is a qualified one, linked to the cycles of the seasons, and, in effect, he is dead for much of the year. That all is not well in the bower of Adonis is expressed in the following way by Stuart Sperry:

the Bower, in its dream-like isolation from the world of process and change, seems strangely etherized and shrouded in the quiet of a deathwatch. Although grown to a man, the sleeping Adonis resembles as much as anything, the infant in the womb or cradle whose every need is gratified. The episodes may portray an ideal of imaginative realization; but it is at the same time enveloped in an air of sickliness and self-indulgence.¹⁸

The bower, it must be noticed, while isolated "from the world of process and change," is only so on the diurnal scale, for its very life is conditioned by the broad cycles of the seasons. While Sperry notices the macabre and morbid overtones, he still accepts that Keats's intention in the depiction of the bower was to portray an "ideal of imaginative realization."¹⁹ Rather, this episode should be seen as a variant of Circe's bower, given to Endymion as another of many opportunities to learn the way to his true complement. What Adonis's punctuated eternity underscores is the cycle of nature, which, on its own, means death for the individual. It is only through the intervention of heaven that nature is redeemed:

Lo! this is he,
That same Adonis, safe in the privacy
Of this still region all his winter-sleep.
Aye, sleep; for when our love-sick queen did weep
Over his waned corse, the tremulous shower
Heal'd up the wound, and, with a balmy power,
Medicined death to a lengthened drowsiness
(II, 478-84)

Venus's yearly arrival contrasts nature and heaven:

when lo! the wreathed green
Disparted, and far upward could be seen
Blue heaven
(II, 516-18)

The departure of her heavenly presence signals a return of grief on earth:

High afar
The Latmian saw them minish into naught;
And, when all were clear vanish'd, still he caught
A vivid lightning from that dreadful bow.

When all was darkened, with Aetnean throe
 The earth clos'd--gave a solitary moan--
 And left him once again in twilight lone.
 (II, 581-87)

A central episode in Book IV, the Cave of Quietude, performs the same function as the bower of Adonis and the many other bowers in the story. As with the bower of Adonis, critics have frequently presented it as an ideal one. S. R. Swaminathan says "it is an experience akin to the ecstasy of the via purgativa, or nirvana";²⁰ Bernard Blackstone eulogizes it:

Nothing in Endymion, indeed nothing in the whole of Keats's writing, impresses me as this passage does with the sense of his extraordinary insight. He has come, at twenty-three, to an understanding which few men reach at twice those years. He has tasted the quality of the peace that passes all understanding, the peace which lies in full acceptance of what is: he has understood the secret of the joy that is beyond happiness. From such an understanding there is nothing that cannot be anticipated.²¹

The "deathlike oblivion" recalls the other episodes, such as the adventures of Glaucus, whose wind and animal imagery symbolized a progression to death. Indeed, the whole quest may be stated as one to identify the "bower quiet for us" (I, 4) mentioned in the proem. The Glaucus episode made it clear that a "specious heaven" is "a real hell" and Endymion's "regeneration" in the Cave of Quietude identifies it as a very specious heaven. As Endymion feels that he has now understood his duty to forsake his visions, we are presented with a parody of his coming redemption at the end when he

recognizes his true heavenly, not earthly, goddess:

There never liv'd a mortal man, who bent
 His appetite beyond his natural sphere,
 But starv'd and died. My sweetest Indian, here,
 Here will I kneel, for thou redeemed hast
 My life from too thin breathing

(IV, 646-50)

The term "natural sphere" ironically underscores the point he has missed. By "natural sphere" he means both his proper sphere and the mutable sublunary world of nature. The whole point of his long course is to lead him to his proper sphere which is beyond the mutable. That his is definitely the wrong choice here is made obvious. His choice is a consequence of the Cave of Quietude which is termed a "Dark Paradise! where pale becomes the bloom / Of health by due" (IV, 538-39).²² It is "by due" since it is the legitimate consequence of choosing mortality. By contrast, when Endymion chooses Diana, the heavenly goddess ("this very night shall see / My future days to her fane consecrate." [IV, 888-89]), the consequence echoes the universal healing and celebration effected at the end of I Stood Tip-Toe by the union of Endymion and Cynthia:

O Hermes! on this very night will be
 A hymning up to Cynthia, queen of light;
 For the soothsayers old saw yesternight
 Good visions in the air,--whence will befall,
 As say these sages, health perpetual
 To shepherds and their flocks

(IV, 827-32)

The right choice of devotion dispells the Dark Paradise conveyed in the macabre imagery found throughout the long quest for

light. The basic principle of fidelity in this quest receives an astonishingly extreme example in the identity of the two ladies. Fidelity resides in the "Heart's affections" and Endymion's affections lead him to the Indian Maid, even though his senses tell him he is wrong. In seemingly betraying his true object of desire, he is merely remaining faithful to her. His final attainment of her represents his spiritual completion, a wholeness that cures his previous fall into mortal darkness.

"He with light steps went up a western hill,
And bade the sun farewell" (X)

Chapter Three

Isabella: The Permanence Behind Corruption

Isabella is a tale of innocence victimized by corruption and led into a nightmarish world of insanity. It is, at the same time, a myth of man's innocence shattered into the opposite elements of mortal self-consciousness and transcendental vision. The structure of the tale, progressing from a sweet love-idyll to a nightmarish world of corruption--moral and physical--suggests that the first consequence of the loss of innocence is the pain of the knowledge of mortality. The less evident, but equally present, affirmation of a transcendental vision following the loss of innocence in the tale, suggests the final state of wholeness in this dialectic of perception. Man progresses from an original innocence which is in reality an earth-bound state to a state where the implications of mutability, pain and imminent death, become known, and, from thence, to a perception of the opposite of this mutability, a transcendental realm which, by definition, nullifies the former state.

The pot of basil is a curiously apt emblem of the transcendental imagination growing in mortal man. The beauty of the plant--and its special beauty is stressed ("beautiful it grew, / So that it smelt more balmy than its peers" [LIV])--represents transcendental vision, as the beautiful women did in "I stood tip-toe" and Endymion,

and the buried head obviously constitutes a fitting representation of mortal man's mind, from which the vision grows:

it drew
Nurture . . .
From the fast mouldering head there shut from view:
So that the jewel, safely casketed,
Came forth, and in perfumed leafits spread.
(LIV)

The plant's representation of life beyond death is sustained in the fact that its "kernel" indeed was found in the "grave" (XLVIII).

Isabella has been one of Keats's most neglected poems, and where critics have noticed it, they have been far from being wholly admiring. While it was admired in Keats's circle and generally in the nineteenth century, modern critics seem at times to take such approbation as a sign of the poem's unsuitability in terms of modern sensibility. Walter J. Bate, for example, in remarking on "the poem's continued defiance of general criticism" states that

It relies too heavily on the reader's predisposition; one either brings a readiness to enter into the direct pathos of a poem like this (in which case specific criticism is irrelevant; for it is then a moving, a "sincere" poem, which, as Lamb said, "should disarm criticism"); or else, if one cannot come prepared with that predisposition, the poem seems absurd and embarrassing. The nineteenth century delighted in it Sir Sidney Colvin (1917) still felt that in Isabella Keats "reaches his high-water mark in human feeling, and in felicity both imaginatiave and executive."¹

Indeed, modern criticism is united in perceiving the poem as overly sentimental, merely transitional in Keats's career, and, generally

unimportant or a failure.² If it is not seen as mawkish, it is regarded suspiciously with an eye on perversion.³ Attempts to find something more solid in the poem still find it wanting. Jack Stillinger, who has analyzed the poem as an "anti-romance . . . a tough-minded 'modern' recasting of what Keats came to realize was a kind of naive romance more appropriate to an age gone by," feels that Isabella is a more complex poem than critics generally allow, and yet terms it "Keats's last large poetic failure."⁴ Louise Smith who also feels the poem has been neglected--she calls it "the wall-flower among Keats's narratives"⁵--sees that the poem is a sustained effort to present a balanced view of life, and that it "makes the theoretical point that horror in some form must enter any good poem to balance with beauty so as to give an accurate account of the real world."⁶ She, too, however, ends up preferring "its sisters, The Eve of St. Agnes and Lamia . . ."⁷

Whereas the quest for vision was direct in the previous poems, the attainment of vision is not obvious in Isabella; the surface reveals a raving madwoman and a severed head mouldering in a plant pot. What the symbolic dimensions of the poem reveal, on the other hand, is a person who has attained transcendental vision. What is seen on the surface, the madwoman surrounded by corruption, represents what the person of vision seems like to those who know not such vision. The same images, then, acquire double meanings to represent the two kinds of vision presented: the mortal earth-bound one and the imaginative transcendental one. This doubleness in the poem gives it a complexity not present in I Stood Tip-Toe and

Ednymion where the imagery depicting the two mental states is more distinct. Macabre imagery in Isabella is complex, but, as shall be seen, unambiguous.

This doubleness in the imagery is connected to the contrast in the poem between the beginning description of what is usually referred to as the love idyll between Isabella and Lorenzo, and the narration subsequent to the peripeteia in the idyll, the murder of Lorenzo. This change is only one of different kinds of sudden reversals in the poem. The brothers' happiness, for example, changes at the end, and these reversals and contrasts may be seen as a reflection of the perceptual change which the reader must effect in himself towards the surface narration in order to perceive the symbolic dimensions of vision. This kind of doubleness and sudden reversal is characteristic of all Keats's major dramatic narratives: La Belle Dame Sans Merci, Lamia, and The Eve of St. Agnes. The purpose of these techniques is the same in all of these poems; they point to the fact that ordinary perception ultimately is grounded in horror and corruption and that this perception can be transcended by the imagination which provides a realm of beauty and permanence resulting in happiness.

All doubleness and contrast in the poem ultimately projects the contrast between heaven and earth, and the visions pertaining to each. The major contrast between Isabella and Lorenzo on the one hand, and Isabella's brothers on the other, makes this clear. Her brothers, "these men of cruel clay" (XXII), are earth-bound and materialistic. Dust can only become dust, and the brothers produce

death on a global scale (XIV-XV) in their greed; of course, their effect on Lorenzo is to turn him into "clay" as well:

When the full morning came, she had devised
 How she might secret to the forest hie;
 How she might find the clay, so dearly prized
 (XLIII)

By contrast, Isabella and Lorenzo are characterized by images of vegetation, things that grow out of the ground; the pot of basil provides a central example, but also, their love "Grew, like a lusty flower in June's caress" (IX), or, they themselves are

Twin roses by the zephyr blown apart
 Only to meet again more close, and share
 The inward fragrance of each other's heart.
 (X)

The poem is much more complex than a simple antithesis between young innocent love and worldly greed. The poem explores the very meaning of life and becomes a definition of what constitutes reality. Love and imaginative vision provide life and lack of these produces death. The actions of the narrative provide this view of reality by focussing on the ideas of birth, death, and nature. The long love idyll which introduces the story is typical of the doubleness of the poem. The general tone is that of courtly love; in the context of the poem's concentration on what is natural and unnatural, the fact of the artificiality in the presentation of this love, this "unnatural" picture, should point to the underlying ironies in this opening idyll. The very first lines hint subtly at something more than a love idyll:

Fair Isabel, poor simple Isabel!
Lorenzo, a young palmer in Love's eye!

The first line indicates that Isabel is beautiful, innocent and to be pitied; the cause of why she is to be pitied is hinted at in the second line. Poor Isabel may be reminiscent of the hoodwinked Madeline, especially in view of the fact that "palmer" means not only a "pilgrim" but also a "trickster." In what way Lorenzo does cheat Isabella may be made clear by referring to the ancient romances whose spirit one might detect in the use of the archaic word "palmer."⁸ Chaucer, whom Keats admired and whose narrative digressions he imitates in this poem,⁹ may have provided more than stylistic example in that his Troilus and Criseyde provides an interesting parallel to Isabella in the attitudes portrayed towards earthly love, and that is, that earthly lovers always cheat their mates by deserting them through death. In Chaucer's Christian viewpoint there is only One Bridegroom who never deserts the soul that marries Him; in Keats's Isabella, the imaginative vision provides the key to such endless love. In Troilus and Criseyde, after Troilus's death, this assessment of the earth becomes clear to him:

And down from thennes faste he gan avyse
This litel spot of erthe, that with the se
Embraced is, and fully gan despise
This wrecched world, and held al vanite
To respect of the pleyn felicite
That is hevене above; and at the laste,
Ther he was slayn, his lokyng down he caste.

And in hymself he laugh right at the two
Of hem that wepten for his death so faste;
And dampned aloure werk that foloweth so

The blynde lust, the which that may nat laste,
 And sholden al oure herte on heven caste.

.....
 For he nyl falsen no wight, dar I seye,
 That wol his herte al holly on hym leye,
 And syn he best to love is, and most meke,
 What nedeth feynede loves for to seke?¹⁰

Similarly, as an earthly lover Lorenzo does desert or cheat Isabella;
 it is only in a supra-mundane existence that their love begins to
 realize itself fully;

thou art distant in Humanity.

(XXXIX)

I know what was, I feel full well what is,
 And I should rage, if spirits could go mad;
 Though I forget the taste of earthly bliss,
 That paleness warms my grave, as though I had
 A seraph chosen from the bright abyss
 To be my spouse: thy paleness makes me glad;
 Thy beauty grows upon me, and I feel
 A greater love through all my essence steal.

(XL)

The opening love idyll is similarly undercut throughout by
 ironies which point to the inadequacies of earthly love. While the
 transcendental imagination can arise in earthly, finite man, so that
 the material can breed the spiritual, the material on its own breeds
 only itself. As mortal lovers, Isabella and Lorenzo are dying from
 the beginning, and not only in a polite courtly metaphorical sense:
 they feel "some malady" and "nightly weep"; on the other hand, their
 nascent love makes them "well" and "soothed" (I). The continuing
 ambiguities regarding the effects of their love might again be seen
 as reflecting the two possible orientations of this love, earth or
 heaven, the one bringing life, the other death. So in stanza II,

the fact that their love tends to obliterate nature can refer either to the fact that it transcends the material or that it is not proper to their spiritual nature, ultimately leading to death. In stanza III the first two lines hint at the transcendental power of love in that it provides knowledge or vision beyond the senses: "He knew whose gentle hand was at the latch / Before the door had given her to his eyes." The succeeding two lines, on the other hand, echo the possibility that Lorenzo may be a cheat, an animal of prey in fact: "And from her chamber-window he would catch / Her beauty farther than the falcon spies." It should be noted that even this carnivorous image hints at the transcendental vision alluded to earlier in that it transcends the keenest earthly eye. However, the earth is in itself merely a place of the hunter and the hunted, a place for death, something echoed in the fact that Lorenzo goes to his death as a huntsman himself (XXIV). The rest of the stanza picks up the echoes of impending death in "sick" and in the pun on mourning ("morning-step"), but it also iterates the ambiguous possibilities of their love: "And constant as her vespers would he watch / Because her face was turn'd to the same skies." "The same skies" may indicate a proper orientation for their love, but it can also indicate that Isabella, as well as Lorenzo, is in fact pre-occupied with other than the devotion of vespers.¹¹

Stanza IV clarifies the references to nature in showing that their love runs counter to nature in being unfulfilled: "A whole long month of May in this sad plight / Made their cheeks paler by the break of June" (IV). After they do come together, they are a

reflection of the natural: "great happiness / Grew, like a lusty flower in June's caress" (IX). Furthermore, they become "twin roses." If the consummation of their love is natural, it is only so in the moral sense developed in the poem: that it be conducive to transcendental experience, not only earthly delight, something emphasized in the closing stanza of their idyll. The words "close,"¹² or suffocating, and "musk," reminiscent of the previous animal imagery, suggest that their bower may be, or may become, as false as Circe's:

All close they met again, before the dusk
 Had taken from the stars its pleasant veil,
 All close they met, all eves, before the dusk
 Had taken from the stars its pleasant veil,
 Close in a bower of hyacinth and musk
 (XI)

These ambiguities and ironies in the opening section, then, point to a reality greater and deeper than the surface one. Young people can grow to attain transcendental heights as in fact these two do, or they can, like Isabella's brothers, remain creatures of clay. Transcendental reality, however, reveals that the earthly one is ephemeral, and indeed, Lorenzo and Isabella find limited enjoyment. The material claims him, but his spirit lives on. As a supernal vision revealed to Isabella, his transformation becomes symbolic of the passage from innocence to experience: " 'Ha! ha!' said she, 'I knew not this hard life, / . . . 'Sweet Spirit, thou hast school'd my infancy' " (XLII). Again, at the end, the brothers' observation of her woe is telling: "They could not surely give belief, that such / A very nothing would have power to wean / Her from

her own fair youth, and pleasures gay, . . . " (LVII). Being true children of clay, they are never weaned of the earth, never gain transcendental vision, and so when they do uncover this "very nothing" all they can see is corruption, matter in its natural course.

In terms of these later developments, the opening irony is indeed dramatic. Innocent, or earthly love is vacuous:

To-morrow will I bow to my delight,
 To-morrow will I ask my lady's boon.--
 O may I never see another night,
 Lorenzo, if thy lips breathe not love's tune.--
 So spoke they to their pillows
 (IV)

The last line shows in a humorous way where their innocent thoughts lead -- nowhere. Bowing to one's delight, on the other hand, suggests a spiritually improper orientation, an inability to rule one's passions. Isabella's "O may I never see another night," (echoed by Lorenzo in stanza VIII) may seem, in the general context of mortality, more sinister than she intends it. The dramatic irony becomes positively macabre in Lorenzo's courtly love whimsy: "If looks speak love-laws, I will drink her tears." He does drink them, but in a manner certainly not foreseen by him. In his adolescent inability to express himself he hopes that his desires may be communicated by looks; presumably, a look of love from her speaks commands or laws to him as her courtly vassal in love. In terms of the vision that he literally becomes, vision is indeed the means of communicating truth. Their inability to speak their love is proof that true love is not of this world and not properly communicated in it:

"to his heart he inwardly did pray / For power to speak; but still
the ruddy tide / Stifled his voice" (VI). This stifling by blood
in one sense is a direct prophecy,¹³ as is communicated later,
through the light of eyes, or "vision":

Its eyes, though wild, were still all dewy bright
With love, and kept all phantom fear aloof
From the poor girl by magic of their light,
The while it did unthread the horrid woof
of the late darken'd time . . .
.
In the forest,
Where, without any word, from stabs he fell.
(XXXVII)

Communication of vision in this world is an arduous task:

Strange sound it was, when the pale shadow spake;
For there was striving, in its pitious tongue,
To speak as when on earth it was awake,
And Isabella on its music hung:
Languor there was in it, and tremulous shake,
As in a palsied Druid's harp unstrung;
And though it moan'd a ghostly under-song,
Like hoarse night-gusts sepulchral briars among.
(XXXVI)

If transcendental truth is difficult to communicate, it is not
impossible to perceive in this world. As was seen in the descrip-
tion of their bower, it is, as an earthly phenomenon, specious. It
is pleasant, but separated from heaven, as is emphasized in the
repetition of "before the dusk / Had taken from the stars its plea-
sant veil" (XI). But, in the true heart,¹⁴ perception becomes pos-
sible, although the transition is painful:

And she had died in drowsy ignorance,
But for a thing more deadly dark than all;

It came like a fierce potion
(XXXIV)

It was a vision.
(XXV)

Once such a soul has been transfigured by the regenerative force of vision, it does not lose sight of that truth that has conditioned it. Thus, when Isabella is viewed digging up the putrefying corpse of her lover, it is only eyes that are of earth and in earth that see the corruption and fail to see what Isabella's inner eye is surely seeing. The descriptive touch which is universally hailed by critics as one of Keats's deftest touches of realism in his narrative, thus acquires symbolic dimension beyond mere realistic detail, for Isabella, once blessed with vision, will not allow the "veil" to interfere with her visions:

Soon she turn'd up a soiled glove,
.
Then 'gan she work again, nor stay'd her care,
But to throw back at times her veiling hair.
(XLVII)

To argue that Isabel is a supremely unhappy girl at the end of the poem, and that consequently she cannot surely be enjoying the comfort of supernal vision is to point to the complexity in the characterization of the two lovers. In one sense, Isabel's unhappiness simply reflects the fact that true happiness is not to be fully realized in this world. She has apprehended the vision but cannot possess it entirely in this world. On the other hand, the poem is richly allusive¹⁵ and the characters do acquire dimensions other than that of a pair of earthly lovers.

One such dimension is that their relationship operates in part as an allegory of the relationship between the body and the soul in which Isabella represents the body and Lorenzo the soul. They "in the self-same mansion dwell" (I), "beneath the same roof" (I).¹⁶ While Isabella's essence is spatial, Lorenzo's is depicted in terms of eyes, the windows of the soul, and voice, the instrument for the Word:

. . . her full shape would all his seeing fill;
 And his continual voice was pleasanter
 To her, than noise of trees or hidden rill . . .
 (II)

The body and the soul, being of different natures, find union difficult, even unnatural:

still the ruddy tide
 Stifled his voice, and puls'd resolve--
 Fever'd his high conceit of such a bride,
 Yet brought him to the meekness of a child . . .
 (VI)

Their relationship is soon severed: "Poor Girl! put on thy stifling widow's weed." The pun in "weed" suggests the worth of the body. The depiction of this relationship reaches its climax when Isabella loses her head, so to speak, and in her distraction, literally acquires Lorenzo's corrupted one. The body, as body, seeks only itself and can acquire only itself, the material devoid of spirit. Their relationship is unnatural and, as was seen in stanza VI, the potential bridegroom becomes a child. Indeed, the proper or natural issue of a relationship, a child, becomes a parody:

sweet Isabella's untouch'd cheek
 Fell sick within the rose's just domain,
 Fell thin as a young mother's, who doth seek
 By every lull to cool her infant's pain.

The "untouch'd cheek" causes illness, suggesting the naturalness of union, and the unnaturalness in the inability to effect such union. In fact, "the rose's just domain" (emphasis mine) implies that union is a law of nature (recalling "love-laws" [V]), and this natural law is perverted in the union of unlike natures, matter and spirit. The reference to the infant's ill health, as well as the mother's, reflects the kind of issue to be expected from such union: one that cannot thrive. As in stanza VI, this image also suggests the unnatural relationship between mother and child, since it is Lorenzo's pain that Isabella, at this time, wishes to soothe.

The idea of unnatural issue hinted at in these early stanzas is to be developed in macabre detail as the poem continues. After Lorenzo's murder, Isabella literally (though unknowingly) longs for a corpse:

She weeps alone for pleasures not to be;
 Sorely she wept until the night came on.
 And then instead of love, O misery!
 She brooded o'er the luxury alone:
 His image in the dusk she seem'd to see,
 And to the silence made a gentle moan,
 Spreading her perfect arms upon the air,
 And on her couch low murmuring 'Where? O where?'
 (XXX)

Lorenzo has died without a word, and it is truly "to the silence," to "the air" that she reaches. The issue is monstrous since clay can only produce itself, since body can produce only a body:

When the full morning came, she had devised
 How she might secret to the forest hie;
 How she might find the clay, so dearly prized,
 And sing to it one latest lullaby . . .
 (XLIII)

And indeed, with the help of an "old nurse" (XLVIII) after "three hours" of "dismal labouring" she produces a corpse, which, naturally, cannot be made to thrive:

 it dries
 And freezes utterly unto the bone
 Those dainties made to still an infant's cries.
 (XLVII)

As any natural mother, she protects her monstrous lover-child:

 seldom did she go to chapel-shrift,
 And seldom felt she any hunger-pain;
 And when she left, she hurried back, as swift
 As bird on wing to breast its eggs again;
 And, patient as a hen-bird, sat her there
 Beside her Basil
 (LIX)

So much for what is perceived by the brothers and those of their ilk. When Keats selected Boccaccio's tale he saw in it the potential for a symbolic portrayal of life itself:¹⁷ a horrible journey through and towards corruption but one wherein lies the possibility of the birth of an inner sight which transcends this corruption. Somewhere in the loathsome uncoverings and dissection Keats foresaw that his reader would discover something beyond the surface and "know there is richest juice in poison-flowers" (XIII). At some point the symbols (perhaps like "Isabel's quick eye" which was "wed / To every symbol" [VII]) would reveal a dimension beyond

the transmutation of a simple tale, causing the reader to re-evaluate the surface story, to reverse what was previously apprehended. The possibility for such a peripeteia exists not only when Lorenzo appears in vision, but throughout the tale in its symbolic ambiguities. The macabre parody of birth, for example, exists also as a type of the birth of Christ from the Virgin Mary, religious images which carry Keats's idea of the transcendental imagination.

Isabella, if one remembers her "untouch'd cheek," gives immaculate birth to a being who is Mercy itself ("these men of cruel clay / Cut Mercy with a sharp knife to the bone" [XXII]) and the incarnation of the immortal Lord of Love who underwent death but rose again:

They cut away no formless monster's head,
 But one, whose gentleness did well accord
 With death, as life. The ancient harps have said,
 Love never dies, but lives, immortal Lord:
 If Love impersonate was ever dead,
 Pale Isabella kiss'd it, and low moan'd.
 'Twas love; cold,--dead indeed, but not dethroned.
 (L)

Mary-Isabel, the sorrowing mother, is the intercessor who reveals to those who have eyes to see the strange beauty of her son which transfigures the material:

the prize was all for Isabel:
 She calm'd its wild hair with a golden comb,
 And all around each eye's sepulchral cell
 Pointed each fringed lash; the smeared loam
 With tears, as chilly as a dripping well,
 She drench'd away:--and still she comb'd, and kept
 Sighing all day--and still she kiss'd, and wept.
 (LI)

portrayed in physical reality. Jack Stillinger's famous essay on the hoodwinking of Madeline provides an example of the fact that criticism does not always perceive these spiritual dimensions.

Spiritual experience in a material world is difficult to perceive and that is one of the main thrusts of Keats's technique and theme in these poems. The imaginative vision is presented as a singularly private and personal experience amidst a society which is positively virulent towards the votary. In terms of this thesis, The Eve of St. Agnes is a cross between Stillinger's materialism and Wasserman's idealism. The question of the true locus for devotion, as in Isabella, is quickly introduced in the Beadsman's odd sympathy for the "Knights, ladies" depicted in sculpture in the chapel:

The sculptur'd dead, on each side, seem to freeze,
Emprison'd in black, purgatorial rails:
Knights, ladies, praying in dumb orat'ries,
He passeth by; and his weak spirit fails
To think how they may ache in icy hoods and mails.
(II)

Porphyro, like Lorenzo, among "the whole blood-thirsty race" (XI), seems a deceitful hunter:

Now prepare,
Young Porphyro, for gazing on that bed;
She comes, she comes again, like ring-dove fray'd and fled.
(XXII)

But, like Lorenzo, he climatically transforms into vision:

Beyond a mortal man impassion'd far
At these voluptuous accents, he arose,
Ethereal, flush'd, and like a throbbing star
Seen amid the sapphire heaven's deep repose;
Into her dream he melted
(XXXVI)

The locus of the dream (or vision) is within the spaceless sanctuary of the soul; the outside, divorced from this interior light, is mere corruption, something made quite clear at the end of the poem when the perspective dramatically shifts from the lovers, who engendered within themselves the transcendental experience, to their monstrous sterile surroundings:

And they are gone: aye, ages long ago
 These lovers fled away into the storm.
 That night the Baron dreamt of many a woe,
 And all his warrior-guests, with shade and form
 Of witch, and demon, and large coffin-worm,
 Were long be-nightmar'd. Angela the old
 Died palsy-twitch'd, with meagre face deform;
 The Beadsman, after thousand aves told,
 For aye unsought for slept among his ashes cold.
 (XLII)

In Lamia the introduction pictures the woman-serpent as very ambiguous indeed, and it is only in its dramatic ending, in the hall where "the herd" (1.150) is gathered around the two lovers, that the true serpent is unveiled and that the truth of "a thing of beauty" "alway must be with us, or we die" becomes stunningly clear:

'Corinthians! look upon that grey-beard wretch!
 'Mark how, possess'd, his lashless eyelids stretch
 'Around his demon eyes! Corinthians, see!
 'My sweet bride withers at their potency.'

 no sooner said,
 Than with a frightful scream she vanished:
 And Lycius' arms were empty of delight,
 As were his limbs of life, from that same night.
 On the high couch he lay!--his friends came round-
 Supported him--no pulse, or breath they found,
 And, in its marriage robe, the heavy body wound.
 (11.287-90, 305-11)

Earl Wasserman has noted the double realities in La Belle Dame

Sans Merci:

In his discovery that art prefigures an attainable heaven where beauty will be truth, Keats spoke to man an Everlasting Yea; "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" is his Center of Indifference. From the point of view of mortal life the pale kings, princes, and warriors are right, and the fairy lady is a Circe; in the perspective of postmortal life they are demons, and the lady is the ideal.¹⁸

There is nothing indifferent about the ballad in its portrayal of a man who has attained supernal vision and has thus transcended the seeming strictures of nature as well as uncomprehending humanity, such as the questioner at the beginning. He has found the meaning of life, in other words, and so his final statement, in its deceptive simplicity, is a great understatement of the life beyond nature which enables him to continue in it, though all in nature ultimately passes away:

And this is why I sojourn here
Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge has wither'd from the lake,
And no birds sing.¹⁹

"barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day"

Chapter Four

"To Autumn": The Spiritual Strength Behind Earth's Fading Glories

"To Autumn" stands in obvious stylistic contrast to Keats's other great odes, but its controlled evenness explores the same theme which receives more dramatic turns in the others. The season before winter provides an apt subject through which to explore both the idea of development in man and nature, and the purpose and meaning of these developments. In "To Autumn" the first two stanzas in the main highlight the premise of development as fruitfulness, and the last stanza emphasizes the sense of meaning to be gathered from such a premise: ontology finally leads to eschatology and teleology.

The imagery, in its replete allusiveness, bears at once the two ideas of growth as a physical and as a spiritual phenomenon. The one excludes the other, a relationship that may be compared to the well-known Gestalt perceptual illusion involving the reversible relationship between a figure and its ground, often portrayed as a vase whose outline forms facing facial silhouettes. Such magical transformations of two superimposed realities are clearly analogous to the peripeteia mentioned above in regard to Keats's narratives. On the one hand, the poem uncovers the "real hell" which a "specious heaven" really is, as was evident in Endymion, where the final result of physical maturity is clearly death. On the other hand,

the surface starkness of the imagery, upon closer scrutiny, resonates such that a spectral presence points to a greater life than the one that existed and now remains only as earth-bound stubble. "To Autumn," as well as the other odes, celebrates the imagination's ability to see beyond mortal nature.

Unlike the preceding poetry, "To Autumn" and the other odes stand in critics' opinion at the very centre of Keats's corpus.¹ While "To Autumn" is generally acclaimed as being among Keats's best, the poem has received varied interpretations. By far, the most common interpretation consists in seeing the poem as expressing a calm acceptance of death or loss in the context of a wisdom nurtured through one's maturing in the natural process. It is a view that denies transcendental experience.²

A few critics have used the poem's complexity as a hedge on their part against espousing interpretations favouring either transcendence or natural process. Chatterjee sees that in the poem "the mystery of natural processes is apprehended from different levels of perception and the result is a rich, complex pattern." This pattern includes "a sense of mysterious communication between heaven and earth," but this transcendental relationship is qualified by "the attendant realization that the concepts of reality and illusion, of permanence and mutability, of fulfillment and decay belong to discursive human intellect, that the human mind suffers as it imposes its own order on reality."³ In speaking of the poem's structure, Geoffrey Hartman stated that "the poem has no epiphany or decisive turn or any absence/presence dialectic. It has, instead, a westerly

drift like the sun . . . Westering here is a spiritual movement, one that tempers visionariness into surmise and the lust for epiphany into finer-toned repetitions."⁴ Virgil Nemoianu stresses that complexity in the poem virtually prevents a clear-cut reading of the poem: "It is . . . a complicated polyvalent statement on the relationship between nature's slow, mute, unrelenting, aimless movement and the multitude of meanings that man, a sense-breeding animal, will graft upon it."⁵ Finally, Annabel Patterson advances a pessimistic reading:

the poem undermines the traditional ideology of Autumn. What for Keats began in a pleasurable response to a September color scheme ("better than the chilly green of the Spring") develops into a warning against misreading such experiences. Autumn is an abstraction. Her representation as a natural figure, of the line of Demeter/Ceres, is an act of wishful thinking, of expression of a need to conceive the natural world as instinct with beneficent power. Harvest proves nothing. Nature is amoral and not to be depended upon. The analogy between the natural cycle and the ages of man is a cruel delusion; the turn of the year will not bring back the unreturnable self. . . . Whim and negligence preside over the things of this world.⁶

Upon completing her thesis, however, Patterson concludes by comparing her argument to more optimistic ones and ends by consigning both, it seems, to an epistemological limbo where all perceptions are equal:

The link between the two kinds of conclusion is to be found in a necessary irony: my reading of To Autumn is as dependent on pre-understanding as those readings from which it deliberately departs. Given a negative hypo-

thesis, the syntax of the poem displays negative constructions. What I looked for I found.⁷

The critics who see in "To Autumn" a transcendental experience are few indeed. James Land Jones posits that "through the landscape in 'To Autumn' Keats experiences the Great Moment and feels himself at one with the harmonious operation of Being in nature, which he sees as a paradoxical union of process and stasis." The "Great Moment" is an "epiphany" which reveals "the felt solidarity of all life," "a sense of metamorphosis, that everything may turn into everything else; a sense of reciprocity in the cosmos, found among the seasons, the four elements, and life and death; two particular senses of time, the first a fusion of the past or future with the present . . . , the second an eternal return to the beginning of things, to rebirth/the denial of death."⁸ S. R. Swaminathan has recently advanced the strongest expression of the poem's transcendental character; he speaks of the poem's compositional context:

It is in this vision of a universe without death, an enduring harmony between heaven and earth, and an eternal present, that Keats composes the ode "To Autumn" The season has been associated in his thoughts with ripening fertility, death, the soul and its immortality almost from the beginning of his career.

 the Ode "To Autumn" has its roots in such moods of detached contemplation, and in the habitual associations in Keats's mind of the marriage of heaven and earth, the divine bridegroom and the mortal bride, and of the human soul and its immortality.⁹

The fulness of the first stanza contains, allusively if not directly, both the idea of eternal life and the ideas of a specious heaven; that is, the false felicity of nature is used as the occasion, the subject, for pointing towards true happiness in a transcendental realm available to the imagination. Every word is redolent with the vibrancy of allusion. "Season," etymologically related to the ideas of sowing and seed-time, holds the promise of renewed life, a time beyond the winter whose presence is much felt at the end of the poem. "Season" also conveys the ideas of finite time, of limited duration, an idea which helps to lend a sinister tinge to the bees' thinking that warm days will never cease. Insofar as man's life is evoked in his lurking presence on the periphery of all descriptions--his dwelling in "the thatch-eves," and the "cottage-trees," as well as his definitive faculty in "think"--the idea of finite duration becomes more ominous indeed. Furthermore, "season" evokes the idea of conditioning or curing. In recalling the idea of the length of man's life on earth, the notion of maturation or seasoning then calls up a hint of the question of man's possibilities and purpose. This question, as has been noticed, receives ambiguous treatment in the bees' thought: a conspiracy between heaven and earth has induced in them a sense of immortality but this sense is qualified by the idea of finite duration of this natural process, this season.

The idea of endless summer as a cruel deception finds corroborative images in the rest of the stanza. The word "close," reminiscent of its use in "Isabella," resonates with the ideas of the un-

comfortable closeness of the "clammy cells." This uncomfortable, perhaps even suffocating, sense is inherent in the very act of growth: it is the inescapable consequence of living, of participating in the natural process. Fruition loads, bends, and swells, and it is a burden that strikes "to the core": if maturation is a terminal process, it is one that does not spare one iota. The very agents fostering this maturation, it has been suggested more than once, are themselves at the mercy of this ineluctible passing.¹⁰ And, in terms of man's passing on earth, the Ode lends a macabre tinge to the word "cell" whose meaning here would then resemble that in Gray's "Elegy," for example, in which "cell" is definitely macabre: "Where heaves the Turf in many a mould'ring Heap, / Each in his narrow Cell for ever laid," (11.14-5) where all, like "all fruit" in this Ode, "Awaits alike th' inevitable Hour. / The Paths of Glory lead but to the Grave" (11.35-6).¹¹ There is only one creature endowed with the power of thought, and the mistake of contemplating endless summer on earth is one against which that creature has long been warned, for his hour will come like a thief in the night.

While the first stanza thus presents, though admittedly very softly, very gently, in a mellow way, a warning (horrid, if not gaped wide) of the inherent end of man's season on earth, this first stanza equally evokes the cure for such melancholy; hence, the mellow tone. The word "fruitfulness" sets the description of the stanza in its abstract mode: it is not the physical reality that is named, but the idea derived from such physical realities. The oft-noted mood of the verbs extends this colouration to the rest of the stanza: the reader is not looking at scenery but apprehending

emotionally laden ideas. This realm of abstraction rises like an autumn mist over the landscape of concrete significations. At the heart of this emanation is the idea of the close union of heaven and earth, the "close bosom-friend[s]." While this relationship may impose a burden, a "load," on the developing beings of earth, this burden of development is also a blessing. This particular union of ideas cannot but recall Keats's idea of the Vale of Soul-making. The aim of this beneficent process is made obvious in "o'er-brimm'd" cells and in the swelling and plumping of the fruit, and that is, that the end of maturation of the intellect is to outgrow one's bounds, and, like Endymion, to burst one's mortal bars. In terms of such spiritual development, S. R. Swaminathan in fact sees the first stanza as a sacred grove, reminiscent of St. John 15: 1-3.¹² One might add that the "maturing sun," the agent that comes to earth to complete the process of development of the beings here, is reminiscent of another Son who had a similar task in relation to the souls of the world. Such resonances of conventional schemes of spiritual development in man help to point out that there is another son¹³ at work in the poem, one who reveals a fruitage other than nature's through his incomparable art. For, it is indeed the fruition of the imagination that is being celebrated in this poem, against the sombre background of nature's deceptive realities. Man's locus of life is not in the physical context, not in the "cottage" of earth but in his transcendental imagination on whose intoxicating wings one escapes the macabre finalities of earth. That is why the cottage is bedecked with Bacchic regalia which not only evokes the

sense of celebration but also turns the cottage into a cranium, the earthly house of man's imagination, the locus of his true life.

Man's span on earth is a season of mists, a time when vision is obscured and he sees as through a glass, darkly. From out the mists of the first stanza emerges the figure of autumn, an opportunity for man to see face to face a timeless creation of the imagination; however, the imaginative vision is set, as is usual in Keats, within the context of finitude or mortality from which this vision may deliver us. While the first line of this stanza may be taken as a self-assured declaration, it may also be seen as implying the contingency of imaginative vision in man,¹⁴ a notion strengthened in the repeated word "sometimes" which counterbalances the assurance in the word "oft." If man does not attain vision, then fruitfulness becomes a mere prelude to death and any ignorance of this fact is a mere cruel delusion. Thus, Autumn "sitting careless" on the granary floor recalls the bees in their deluded contentment. The breath from the close conspiring in the first stanza now, in this sense, has become a winnowing wind which serves to separate the grain from the chaff. Insofar as Autumn may be seen to represent the grain itself on the granary floor, she includes the chaff as well as the grain; as chaff, her fate is dismal if one remembers Matthew 13:12:

His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he
will clear his threshing floor and gather
his wheat into the granary, but the chaff
he will burn with unquenchable fire.

The second portrait of Autumn presents an even more sinister view of nature as she appears as a thinly-veiled Grim Reaper,¹⁵

complete with hook. The "half-reaped furrow" echoes the notion of deluded indolence seen in the bees and in the first portrait.

"Sound asleep / Drows'd with the fume of poppies" is a variant of the deluding intoxication noted in the first stanza; if this intoxication "spares," this mercy is obviously only incidental and momentary. "All" in "the next swath and all its twined flowers" picks up the connotations in "all fruit" of the first stanzas and thus conveys a macabre message for man as well as for flowers. The word "twined" emphasizes the Grim Reaper's melancholy democracy. In this regard B. C. Southam notes that

The flowers have grown intimately amongst the corn to become an emblem of love of happiness which the reaper will destroy. But at least their interlocking can be a heroic gesture, another hindrance to the reaper's progress. All is in vain, however.¹⁶

Wolf Hirst is more pointed in his observation of the reaper's task:

What the "conspiracy" of autumn and sun is becomes clear in the second stanza where we see that the process described is one from which the hook temporarily "spares" grain and flowers: the bosom-friends autumn and sun . . . conspire to murder.¹⁷

As physical phenomena, the season and the sun produce only what they can produce; that which is made of dust must return to dust. The blessing they give in the first stanza also "load[s]" and "bend[s]"; that is, it points the fruit down in the direction to which it is destined: earthwards. Thus, if one recognizes, as does S. R. Swaminathan, that the "brook" suggests a river of death,¹⁸

then Autumn the gleaner portrays the inevitable doom of all earthly goods as she travels to death with her "laden head," the produce of earth. Finally, the last portrait also recalls the duped bees in that the "hours by hours" contemplation is, after all, of the "last" fruitfulness.

In pursuing a positive response to the initial question of this second stanza, one discovers the dominant tone of the stanza in its mellowness and assurance, for what action there is, is indeed soft ("Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind") and without worry ("sitting careless"). Furthermore, the sleep is "sound," or healthful, and death's sting has indeed been blunted in the idle scythe. The "half-reap'd" furrow suggests that there are two possibilities for man in this life, and should he attain the one, imaginative vision, death's sweep is suspended. In this context, the "laden head" points to the locus of true fruitfulness, the imaginative vision growing in man's mind. "Cyder," etymologically "strong liquor," echoes the celebratory tones noted in the first stanza. Furthermore, in light of the religious connotations noted in the first stanza, may not the "cyder-press" be seen in reference to the Son whose wine gives true life through his suffering, ("patient," etymologically) and whose Father's watchfulness ("Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours") has counted the very hairs on one's head and notes the fall of a sparrow? The conspiracy, then, is a sacrament conferring the everlasting life whose nature allusively vibrates throughout the stanza in its imagery depicting suspended and prolonged time. That the stanza carries a sense of an assur-

ance as great as that of Providence is reflected in Donald Pearce's view of "To Autumn" as "a poem absolutely brimming with the powerful presence of its central theme, the nearest equivalent to which might be Jesus's 'consider the lilies of the field.'"¹⁹

The third stanza contains the most stringent images of death in the sustained mellowness of the poem. If the first two stanzas are heavy with the fruit of earth, the third is bare but redolent of recent fruitfulness. The bareness may be seen reflected in a willful straitening of vision which ignores the idea of regeneration (ll.1-2) and rather perversely concentrates on the desolation of the moribund landscape. This carelessness recalls the negative views of intoxication in the previous two stanzas. The "barred clouds" emphasize the separation of earth from heaven, mists which have confounded vision throughout the poem. The blooming of the dying day and the "rosy hue" on the stubble field are nothing but the mortician's art. It is little wonder that in such a melancholy place, there should be wailing and mourning. Nature herself puts forth "weeping" willows²⁰ and her action, in the form of wind, upon the gnats recalls Annabel Patterson's observation that "Whim and negligence preside over the things of this world."²¹ The "full-grown" lambs bleating for that which they have outgrown and that which can never return, ironically recalls the fruitfulness engendered by the "bosom" friends. This bleating constitutes a thin disguise for man's lament when facing his autumn and naturally turning morosely back to origins as he faces a weaning more sinister than that of the lambs. The songs of spring, it seems, cannot be so easily dismissed. With this

ironic turn backwards, the very language itself, if not turning into the statuary rigidity of a pillar of salt, seems to drop its metaphorical trappings, somewhat like leaves in the fall, to become solid statement, mere description:

And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
Hedge-cricket sing; and now with treble soft
The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

The third stanza appears quite bleak in comparison to the fruitfulness of the first two stanzas. If the underlying sense is macabre, the over-riding one remains, as was the case in the previous two stanzas, that of serenity. The sudden shift in this stanza to the bleakness of late or post-harvest autumn demands the question of where all the fruit has gone. The opening question and its answer, as a self-assured statement, directs the reader to look for this fruitfulness. One implication, of course, is that the grain is in the granary to provide new growth beyond winter. The hint of transcendental life is reflected in the sunset colours which for Donald Pearce form an important part of the religious imagery in the poem:

Stanza three consolidates the religious allusions and associations in the strongly implied image of a temple interior, divine service in progress: there is a "wailful choir" of "small gnats," whose thin cloud floats or sinks like incense along the river-aisles, and the whole interior is suffused with a stained-glass light that falls from "barred" and "blooming" skies.²²

Indeed, the striking colours serve to point out that the source of this beauty is beyond the earthly realm. The earthly half of the conspiracy is nearing the end of her cycle, but the sun's light is beyond the cycles of earth. The heavenly light that brightens the earth echoes Pan's description in Endymion in which Pan gives the earth a touch ethereal. The reader is thus reminded that true beauty and true life exist beyond the physical things of earth: they reside in the aesthetics of the imagination which can colour and transform what one perceives. Beauty and truth reside in the interior life of the imagination and the opening question, which addresses the notion of transience and prepares for the answer in the images pointing beyond earthly limits, performs the same function as the questions in "Ode on a Grecian Urn":

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
 To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
 Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
 And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?
 What little town by river or sea shore,
 Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
 Is emptied of its folk, this pious morn?
 And, little town, thy streets for evermore
 Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
 Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

Man is merely a transient on earth and his proper home is in heaven.

For Keats, this "heaven" is portrayed with the help of conventional religious symbols but it is never clearly identified or defined. It transcends the ordinary and the finite but it is largely ineffable. It is revealed but only in deft artistic touches, brimming with suggestions. In this poem, of course, it comes alive to

the extent that the reader and Keats become the conspirators breathing the same intoxicating inspiration that lends life and growth to the imagination. In pursuing those artistic touches that transfigure the desolate landscape one may note that in the first stanza, the sun was suggestive of the redeeming Son and in this stanza His light becomes evident again; so, while the "wailful choir" may mourn, one is also reminded that "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." "Borne aloft" may be seen as a pun in which "born" suggests a re-birth in a higher life. The confounding of time in such images as "full-grown lambs" obviously also points to timelessness or eternity.

In continuing to pursue the echoes of the religious images from the previous stanzas, one might well question the status of the last lines as mere statement; that is, do not the lambs remind one of the Lamb of God who had a very important relation to another "hilly bourn"; does not "treble" hint at that Lamb's special nature in Trinity, of which one is symbolized as a bird; does "red-breast"²³ allude to the stigmata? In this sense "red-breast" would echo "bosom" in the first stanza and would point to the true source of nourishment for the soul, something noted above in relation to the "cyder-press." If "hilly bourn" evokes Calvary, does not one of the etymological roots of "croft," crypt or vault, well portray the means through which redemption of an edenic state was purchased by the Saviour, in the term "garden-croft"? Immediately consecutive to this "red-breast[s]" whistle occurs the "gathering" of the swallows. Are they responding to his call and, if so, are they not in the appropriate milieu, "the skies"?

The third stanza, by ridding the scene of its opulent growth, puts that very growth in special relief. A close examination reveals that indeed the harvest is a spiritual one, not a physical one and that the "gathering" at the end is not of physical goods, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." This gathering in the skies completes the tendency of growth to surpass boundaries noted from the beginning of the poem; rising above all the boundaries is effortless, over the stubble, the river, the bourn, the hedge and the garden-croft, for the wings of the imagination are not themselves of "this dull and clodded earth" (Endymion 11.297).

The third stanza illustrates that absence forms an excellent matrix for profound questions. The same use of absence to suggest the locus of true presence was noted earlier in stanza four of the "Ode on a Grecian Urn." The same technique is evident in the other odes, such as in the Nightingale ode where what may be termed the ultimate absence becomes a central element in the process that in the poem defines the realm of the transcendental imagination. The poem dramatically represents the dissolution of a transcendental experience in order to emphasize the contrast between ordinary perception and that of the transcendental imagination. This supernatural experience in which the narrator experiences the "happy lot" of a "light winged Dryad of the trees" is thus communicated in terms of the annihilation of the ordinary self, as through fatal poison.

In the third stanza of the Nightingale ode, the transcendental experience is defined in terms of its opposite, the macabre sense of

the mortal world, the separation now being more obvious. In stanza four, the imagery, recalling stanza two, has become prosaic in its awkward separation of the metaphors of the second stanza. That wine and poesy have to be stated as being discrete is further evidence of the "dull brain" that "perplexes and retards:" for in the second stanza wine is a distant vehicle for the tenor of the winged imagination.

In stanza four, the narrator guesses at the nightingale's perception of a "tender . . . night," but in stanza five these musings are now confined, somewhat stifflingly in the "embalmed darkness," to the narrator's immediate earthly surroundings which are cut off from heaven's light (IV, 18). These surroundings, however, are also pleasingly pastoral and rich, offering a view of earth's riches which include such as the nightingale, the intercessor between heaven and earth, happiness and melancholy. This earthly richness prepares for stanza six in which the narrator rediscovers in this darkness the happiness of the nightingale, a happiness which prevents the narrator from succumbing completely to his mortal condition. The narrator's reattachment to the nightingale's happiness, however, is qualified in that this very happiness stimulated by the nightingale has "many a time" actually provided a desire for death—a wish finally denied perhaps not so much through the immediacy of the nightingale's stimulation as through logical reasoning: "Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain-- / To thy high requiem become a sod."

The intellect continues to meddle with the immediacy of feeling. In stanza seven, the measure of the narrator's distance from the

transcendental world is his ability now, ironically, to name its chief attribute "immortal." All that is left in this degenerative process is to deny through doubt in stanza eight the validity of the experience itself.

In this ode, the validity of the imaginative experience is in doubt for the narrator, but for the reader who holds the artifact of the poem in his hands, it is a continually realizable experience, essentially out of time. To live in this world means to experience the supernal world only in discrete moments. To lose sight momentarily of this transcendental reality is not to prove its falseness but to experience the inherent pattern of life in this world. One may feel oneself progressing towards death or one may feel the bursting of one's mortal bars; these are the two alternatives which lend the title of the ode to autumn a special double meaning, for, especially in light of its heavy use of infinitives, "to autumn" is indeed an infinitive verb signifying man's modes of perception in this world. Fortunately, the macabre nature of the one can be dispelled by the healing vision of the other.

"And fills the air with so much pleasant health
That even the dying man forgets his shroud," (Fall, 11.100-1)

Chapter Five

The "Hyperion" Poems: Archetypal Fall and Salvation

Macabre imagery in the "Hyperion" poems centres in the descriptions of the Titans' sufferings and represents the pain caused by a knowledge of mortality. This pain of mortality is palliated by the healing effects of the transcendental imagination represented in Apollo's deification. In Hyperion these two states of man, the painful knowledge of mortality and the beatitude of the transcendental imagination, are starkly contrasted in the Titans and the Olympians but in a manner that suggests an archetypal metamorphosis from the former into the latter, representing the basic potential of man's development on earth: the growth of surpassing bliss in a suffering finite creature. In the "Fall"¹ this basic myth is rehearsed in terms of the individual experiencing this timeless pattern of a fall into mortal consciousness and pain and a subsequent transcendence of this disease in an experience of transcendental joy. While the "Fall" thus stresses the effect of the archetypal pattern upon the individual, the experiences in both poems are the same and the function of the macabre imagery is identical in both poems.

A study of the "Hyperion" poems constitutes an appropriate ending to a survey of Keats's poetry in that they span and bracket his

last, great year of writing: thus, a comparison of Hyperion and its revision offers a unique opportunity to test theories of development in Keats's poetry at a particularly intensive period.² This study of the function of the macabre imagery in Keats's poetry assumes an underlying constancy in Keats's thought that should be evident across the two poems as well as throughout the best of Keat's corpus. Critical analyses of the two poems have generally yielded views different from the one maintained in this study; that is, the poems are generally seen as supporting a rather melancholy view of man's condition. Stuart Ende, for example, in reference to the description of Thea's face, feels that "this sorrowful beauty replaces earlier things of beauty" and calls this beauty Keats's "new ideal."³ Clarence Thorpe, on the other hand, is one of the few critics who sees in the poems an affirmation of the transcendental imagination. He states:

I believe that Keats knew only one way to the deepest truths of life and the highest realities of the realms that lie beyond consciousness of this and the super-world, and that was through the power of the penetrative imagination . . . it is only through the discipline of this world of misery that the imagination can be strengthened for the higher flights.⁴

In Hyperion Keats presents perhaps in its strongest, starkest form, his recurring view of the basic pattern which represents the potential for development in man's life. This pattern consists of a fall into the consciousness of mortality, and the pain attendant upon that realization, and a subsequent transcendence of that pain-

ful state through the transcendental imagination into realms not ordinarily available to the finite mind.⁵ By using the primordial myth of the Titanomachia, Keats signals to the reader that he is moving not only through the mists of time but inward to the bedrock of self and experience where the pattern for all experience that matters, all one needs to know on earth, resides. Seen in this way, the fall of Hyperion and his succession by the young Apollo is none other than a psychomachy in which the two gods represent successive stages in the potential development of an individual soul. His revision of Hyperion strives to make this personal dimension of his fable very clear by placing the fable itself within the experience of the individual, the experiencing poet -- and the induction (11.1-18) to "The Fall" makes it clear that we are all, in a sense, poets.

Since the myth portrays the transcendence of the consciousness of mortality, then one should expect that macabre imagery be found in the description of both the state of the fallen Titans and the young Apollo before his deification, and, indeed, the depiction of this fallen state of mortal consciousness is precisely the function of macabre imagery in this poem. The opening description of the fallen Saturn has mortal sickness as its leitmotif.⁷ The "vale" (1.1) has the shadow of death pervading it, and it is "Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn" (1.2). Saturn has been struck by a sickness that seems to threaten imminent death: "and then spake, / Shook horrid with such aspen-malady" (11.92-4); he is "smother'd up, / And buried" (11.106-7). As in the other poems, the mortal state is

identified with the earth. Saturn is "quiet as a stone" (1.4) and his ancient mother provides no comfort but only strengthens the description of his mortality as "sodden ground" (1.17), a term which can be compared to the reference to supernal vision in "The Fall": "every man whose soul is not a clod / Hath visions" (11.13-4). Saturn's state is identified as a change in self-perception from immortal being to limited one. The limitation is in knowledge, exactly what is to be provided to Apollo.

If the two Titans in this opening description display obvious symptoms of mortality, Keats softens the sense of the macabre in these descriptions by deliberately engaging the reader's sympathies towards these Titanic victims. This sympathetic treatment supports the theme of a felix culpa in the poem; specifically, man's redemptive vision occurs in a context of macabre mortality. As in the other poems, vision does not come to the innocents, but to those who are most intimate with sorrow. Thus, as the avenue to redemptive vision, sorrow has its own peculiar attractiveness, something conveyed in the description of Thea's face through a "Miltonic turn" which basically expresses the fact that a fall into mortal consciousness is a happy prelude to supernal vision: "How beautiful, if sorrow had not made / Sorrow more beautiful than Beauty's self" (11.36-7).

On one level the two Titans quickly become two very human and very sick beings who engage our sympathies because they cannot find in each other the comfort they so desperately need. On another level, they represent the state of mortal consciousness through

which one passes to supernal vision, its complement. In that sense, these figures must be portrayed in their awesome might and fearsomeness and yet in a manner that does not make them totally forbidding. Thus, Thea is fearsome and fatal:

By her in stature the tall Amazon
Had stood a pigmy's height: she would have ta'en
Achilles by the hair and bent his neck (11.27-9)

Her mien, however, is quickly linked with a strange beauty, and her awesome power is humanized in an act of pity:

One hand she pressed upon that aching spot
Where beats the human heart, as if just there,
Though an immortal, she felt cruel pain:
The other upon Saturn's bended neck
She laid (11.42-6)

Thea, finally, suggests the approaching redemption figured in Apollo in her role as a type of Mary Magdalene, weeping at the feet of Saturn, and even providing her hair for his feet (11.81-2).⁸

By being so deliberately imitative of his great Christian precursors, Keats emphasizes the more his difference with them. This difference is obviously in removing the notion of culpability from that of the fall. If one recognizes Milton's Satan in Saturn, the Naiad forbids irreverence; if Dante's Satan is reflected in Saturn, "the frozen God" (1.87) who is fallen lowest of all (he has to climb back up to reach the others), he does not remain fixed in his frozen abyss. His only sin is old age (in 'The Fall' we are reminded that he "wrinkled as he fell" [1.225]), whose wages, ironically, are also death:

This passion lifted him upon his feet,
And made his hands to struggle in the air,
His Druid locks to shake and ooze with sweat,
His eyes to fever out, his voice to cease.
(11.135-38)

In Keats's epic our first duty towards the prisoners in the macabre hell of earth is sympathy.

This opening description of the two Titans strikes a key-note of sympathetic understanding, for it is through such sorrowful experience that one progresses towards enlightenment. In the dramatic exigencies of the narrative, the tone in the description of Hyperion changes along with the change in the dramatic purpose in this incident. Sorrowful mortality may engage our sympathies insofar as it is our common lot and the inevitable avenue to enlightenment but it must obviously give way to that final destiny. As such, the mortal state must be revealed in its grim reality and, finally, when overcome, must be revealed, somewhat like Orgoglio, as the vast vacuity it really was. Thus, Hyperion's experience of the mortal state is sharper than Saturn's and Thea's, and, at times, even somewhat comical.

Hyperion's incipient awareness of his new mortal state is designed to show the inevitability of the fall into painful consciousness of mortality. Saturn and Thea set a sympathetic tone towards suffering mortals while Hyperion dramatizes the mechanics of the fall, as it were. His close connection to the diurnal curve of the sun, and indeed his inability to do anything but to follow this natural path (11.290-3), shows that his fall is as inevitable as the

sun's setting.⁹ That he is as yet unfallen is merely a nominal position, and in the initial description of Hyperion, Keats skirts the comical in describing Hyperion's awakening sense of mortality. What he perceives are horrors unimaginable, but what these are compared to are childish superstitions:

For as among us mortals omens drear
Fright and perplex, so also shuddered he--
Not at dog's howl, or gloom-bird's hated screech,
Or the familiar visiting of one
Upon the first toll of his passing-bell,
Or prophesyings of the midnight lamp;
But horrors, portioned to a giant nerve,
Oft made Hyperion ache.

By placing Hyperion in his heavens, Keats underlines the fact that "fall" is a metaphor; like Milton's Satan who carries Hell within himself,¹⁰ Hyperion demonstrates that the fall is an inner state not contingent upon external events. The universe carries on as it always has. Man's ministrations towards him have not changed, but he has, such that his relationship to the universe is now altered dramatically:

Also, when he would taste the spicy wreaths
Of incense, breath'd aloft from sacred hills,
Instead of sweets, his ample palate took
Savour of poisonous brass and metal sick
(11.185-9)

To see Hyperion as yet unfallen, then, as he does see himself, is risible; hence, Keats now openly treats Hyperion's vain resistance of mortal vision in a comical vein:

I cannot see--but darkness, death and darkness. (1.242)

 He spake, and ceas'd, the while a heavier threat
 Held struggle with his throat but came not forth;
 For as in theatres of crowded men
 Hubbub increases more they call out 'Hush!'
 So at Hyperion's words the Phantoms pale
 Bestirr'd themselves, thrice horrible and cold
 (11.251-6)

When his macabre destiny is allowed a more sinister tone, it is yet
 ironic, being a parody of the coming re-birth of Apollo:

And from the mirror'd level where he stood
 A mist arose, as from a scummy marsh.
 At this, through all his bulk an agony
 Crept gradual, from the feet unto the crown,
 Like a lithe serpent vast and muscular
 Making slow way, with head and neck convuls'd
 From over-strained might. (11.257-63)

Now that the fall has been reaffirmed as a spiritual event
 (Saturn's being the first), the external dramatization can only be
 ironic. The instigator of Hyperion's plunge, his father Coelus,
 correctly identifies the cause of the Titans' malady:

Now I behold in you fear, hope, and wrath;
 Actions of rage and passion; even as
 I see them, on the mortal world beneath,
 In men who die. (11.332-35)

Man's mortal part is dust, and true to its nature it seeks its
 own; as Saturn in his mortal state was closely associated with the
 earth, so Hyperion now, in taking the fatal symbolic plunge, has an
 elemental father as mentor,

I am but a voice,
 My life is but the life of winds and tides,
 No more than winds and tides can I avail,
 (11.340-42)

and his advice is sadly appropriate and accurate:

To the earth!
For there thou wilt find Saturn, and his woes.
(11.345-6)

Having thus dispensed with the idea of resistance to the coming of mortal consciousness in man, Keats now evokes a respectful sobriety in the telling of the awful event that precedes our possible redemption:

Hyperion arose, and on the stars
Lifted his curved lids, and kept them wide
. . . and still he kept them wide:
And still they were the same bright, patient stars.
Then with a slow incline of his broad breast,
Like to a diver in the pearly seas,
Forward he stoop'd over the airy shore,
And plung'd all noiseless into the deep night.
(11.350-7)

Book 1 defines the fallen state and illustrates it in three individuals while Book 11 dramatizes this individual experience in terms of the human community, our common lot of mortality.¹¹ Appropriately, the Titans' chief characteristics in their macabre "nest of woe" (1.14) are that they are moribund and that they are cut off from heaven:

Scarce images of life, one here, one there,
Lay vast and edgways; like a dismal cirque
Of Druid stones, upon a forlorn moor,
When the chill rain begins at shut of eve,
In dull November, and their chancel vault,
The Heaven itself, is blinded throughout night.
Each one kept shroud (11.33-9)

This community of macabre desolation is meant to remind us of our common lot of mortality; thus, it is appropriately presented in a manner that elicits sympathy--the pain is now physical (11.22-8) rather than being Hyperion's shades of superstition--and in a manner that reminds us of the theme of growth out of the painful consciousness of mortality, that is, through such phrases as "nest of pain" (1.90) and "nest of woe" (1.14) which underline the temporality of that state of pain. Similarly, the Titans are described throughout as belonging to the infant world.

The individual reactions to their new mortal state in the Titans' underworld conference reveal the same inability to transcend the mortal state rendered again through images of earth and time. Saturn sets the key-note in his admission that "Nature's universal scroll" (1.151) is inadequate to explain their mortal state. Oceanus's sophistry is prefaced by a reminder that, like Hyperion and all the rest, he too is now literally and metaphorically, out of his element: he "Arose, with locks not oozy" (1.170). Even though Saturn has just noted the inadequacy of Nature, Oceanus explains their state as "Nature's law" (1.181); furthermore, though he presents his argument as "eternal truth" (1.187) and "eternal law" (1.228), what he offers is an acceptance of one's time-bound fate, a capitulation to the earth:

Say, doth the dull soil
Quarrel with the proud forests it hath fed? (11.21708)

His concluding remark, "Receive the truth, and let it be your balm," is thus sharply ironic in the context of the twisted and tortured

titanic forms scattered about him. The subsequent two speakers, each in his own way, exemplify the Titanic impotence cleverly manipulated by Oceanus to seem like a kind of victory; Clymene, like Oceanus, has felt the beauty and power of the new order, but from that state she is debarred for it is to her "A living death" (1.28). Enceladus provides a sharp contrast of apparent power against the new order but Hyperion's arrival quickly dispells any false hopes Enceladus's hectoring may have aroused in the Titanic enclave. Hyperion's arrival, the only putatively unfallen one, is an unmistakable avowal of total defeat for the Titans. This terrible seal to their fate is set by Keats with tenderness and mercy such that their macabre fate is transmuted into a tribute to "the still sad music of humanity":

It was Hyperion:--a granite peak
 His bright feet touch'd, and there he stay'd to view
 The misery his brilliance had betray'd
 To the most hateful seeing of itself.
 Golden his hair of short Numidian curl,
 Regal his shape majestic, a vast shade
 In midst of his own brightness, like the bulk
 of Memnon's image at the set of sun
 To one who travels from the dusking East:
 Sighs, too, as mournful as that Memnon's harp
 He utter'd, while his hands contemplative
 He press'd together, and in silence stood.
(11.367-78)

While mortality is our common lot, the spiritual metamorphosis which brings the transcendental vision occurs in the individual, and so, Book 111 focusses on the individual:

O leave them to their woes;
 For thou art weak to sing such tumults dire:

A solitary sorrow best befits
Thy lips, and antheing a lonely grief.

Young Apollo is presented as the complement to Hyperion and his fellows. While they fall into the pain of mortal consciousness, he rises from it. Their parallel condition is introduced in the initial question,

Where was he, when the Giant of the Sun
Stood bright, amid the sorrow of his peers? (11.29-30)

and its answer,

He listen'd, and he wept, and his bright tears
Went trickling down the golden bow he held. (11.42-3)

The lines, "I sit, and moan / Like one who once had wings," (11.42-3) suggest that he, too, is fallen. His "aching ignorance" (1.107) is but a variation of Saturn's questionings; appropriately, then, his deliverance consists of a knowledge that satisfies this painful ignorance, and it is a knowledge that transcends time and ordinary human conceptions. The end of this knowledge is a release from mortal bars:

Knowledge enormous makes a God of me. (1.13)
.....
And so[I] become immortal. (1.120)

This release is portrayed as a kind of inversion of death:

Soon wild commotions shook him, (1.124)
.....
Most like the struggle at the gate of death;
Or liker still to one who should take leave

Of pale immortal death, and with a pang
 As hot as death's is chill, with fierce convulse
 Die into life (11.126-130)

The phrase "pale immortal death" underlines the idea that the poem is dealing with states of being and not individuals, in this case, the state of death. Apollo's release from death, contemplating Hyperion's fall into a finite or mortal condition, completes the pattern for man's life on earth. Perhaps it was fitting, then, for the poem to end on a note which evokes the ineffable realm revealed to the initiate to the imaginative version: "Celestial."¹²

Hyperion thus presents an ideal pattern and its references to individual existence are largely left implied. In revising Hyperion, Keats sought to make the relationship between this ideal pattern and the individual more clear. The induction to The Fall of Hyperion consequently, lays a relatively detailed thematic summary. First, dreams or vision reveal "Heaven":

Fanatics have their dreams, wherewith they weave
 A paradise for a sect; the savage too
 From forth the loftiest fashion of his sleep
 Guesses at Heaven (11.1-4)

The role of poetry, or expression of vision in words, is introduced as a key element in both the clear conception of vision as well as its communication:

Poesy alone can tell her dreams,
 With the fine spell of words alone can save
 Imagination from the sable charm
 And dumb enchantment. (11.8-11)

In terms of each individual's chance at the achievement of vision, the induction repeats what has been implied in Hyperion and the previous poems; although the tone suggests the possibility that anyone can achieve it, the wording allows that not all may indeed achieve it:

Who alive can say,
'Thou art no Poet--may'st not tell thy dreams?'
Since every man whose soul is not a clod
Hath visions (11.11-4)

The word "clod" reminds us of Oceanus, as well as of similar terminology in previous poems which relates finite understanding to the earth, such as in Endymion where "the dull and clodded earth" is given a "touch ethereal" by the imagination. The induction, which defines the function of the imagination, concludes with a reference to the macabre, the disease to be cured by the imagination:

Whether the dream now purpos'd to rehearse
Be poet's or fanatic's will be known
When this warm scribe my hand is in the grave.
(11.16-8)

The validity of the vision to be "rehearsed" is not in itself in question since both the poet and the fanatic have been granted this faculty but, rather, the poet's fame is directly addressed. This image is related to a state of consciousness characterized by ignorance, so the image may be seen as a special emblem of a general state, that is, finite knowledge.

That mortality is the problem to be addressed in the poem is made clear in the persona's initial ritual admittance towards vision:

. . . pledging all the mortals of the world,
 And all the dead whose names are in our lips,
 Drank. That full draught is parent of my theme.
 (11.44-46)

The incense at the altar which is to lead to vision is appropriately characterized in terms of the function of the altar, that is, the healing effect of the transcendental imagination on the mortal consciousness:

When in mid-May the sickening East wind
 Shifts sudden to the south, the small warm rain
 Melts out the frozen incense from all flowers,
 And fills the air with so much pleasant health
 That even the dying man forgets his shroud; --
 Even so that lofty sacrificial fire,
 Sending forth Maian incense, spread around
 Forgetfulness of everything but bliss
 (11.97-104)

The persona, however, must rehearse for himself this emblematic metamorphosis. First, the persona accomplishes a symbolic movement from mortal existence to immortality by ascending the steps through an arduous effort to overcome the "palsied chill" (1.122) of death which recalls Saturn's condition as well as, more specifically, Hyperion's brush with death (Hyperion, 11.255-63). The persona's dialogue with Moneta displays the fears and uncertainties that the individual experiences in relation to vision before that vision is fully disclosed.¹³ While the persona has the correct notion of his role,

sure a poet is a sage;
 A humanist, physician to all men (11.189-90),

he must mature into that role. This metamorphosis involves for the time-bound individual, as was seen in "Ode to a Nightingale" for example, or in Endymion's long series of illuminations and subsequent dark questionings, much pain:

Oftentimes I pray'd
Intense, that Death would take me from the Vale
And all its burthens -- gasping with despair
Of change, hour after hour I curs'd myself
(11.396-99)

This ritual progression to the heart of man's experience finds a transcendental core in Apollo's dying into life, but the access to that core is mortality itself. The mystery of a finite creature finding within itself the supernal realm of immortality is perhaps nowhere in Keats so memorably portrayed as in Moneta's visage which reveals Apollo's rebirth. Mortality itself is the reason for vision; it is the avenue through which vision is granted, and thus Moneta, the keeper of the altar of vision, the guide to vision, is reminiscent of the "pale immortal death" Apollo escaped in Hyperion, a stunning vision of mortality:

that Goddess . . . with sacred hand
Parted the veils. Then saw I a wan face,
Not pin'd by human sorrows, but bright-blanch'd
By an immortal sickness which kills not;
It works a constant change, which happy death
Can put no end to; deathwards progressing
To no death was that visage; it had past
The lilly and the snow
(11.255-62)

Since mortality is the avenue to immortality, it has its own peculiar attractiveness:

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

(11.275-82)

.
 So at the view of sad Moneta's brow,
 I ach'd to see what things the hollow brain
 Behind enwomb'd: what high tragedy
 In the dark secret chambers of her skull
 Was acting, that could give so dread a stress
 To her cold lips, and fill with such a light
 Her planetary eyes; and touch her voice
 With such a sorrow

(11.275-82)

This strange admixture of repulsion and attractiveness captures at once the function of macabre imagery in Keats's poetry: to represent the repulsive experience of mortality which is succeeded by the ineffable vision, "Too huge for mortal tongue, or pen of scribe" (1.9).

This journey to the beginning of times and to a battle of gigantic figures for the mastery of the skies over earth portrays for man a figurative delineation of the basic metamorphosis which determines his perceptual path, whether or no this path is fully realized in any given individual. It is a blueprint of the race. As the reader surveys the landscape outlined by this awesome statuary, he indeed reads a fate that is carved in stone. The Titans are forever fallen, an awesomely pathetic, a sublimely, pathetic lot that represents the first stage of man's spiritual development. That one can envisage such eternal torment pays tri-

bute to one's realization of man's double nature, as Olympian as well as Titan, to one's realization of the second stage of man's spiritual development. That the Titanic ruins are spread not only in a localized space, but throughout time and wherever mankind is, gave Keats his special mission as poet, to be a physician to the Titan in all of us by enkindling in us the spark of vision that enables us to look straight through the face of death to the ineffable beyond.

This study of macabre imagery has uncovered a remarkable consistency in Keats's thought throughout his work, something, after all, that from a biographical point of view should not be too surprising. All his poems are varied views of the same basic pattern that conditions man's existence. In a relatively light-hearted ramble through imagination's airy whims as in much of I Stood Tip-toe, the macabre imagery reveals that this seeming decadence is something that was earned, something that the poet can now afford to expend, out of the sheer strength found in a vision attained through a mortal struggle now well-veiled by vision's potent colours. During Endymion's rambling and uneven experiences, now pitched ecstatically into the heavens and now flung into darkest despair, macabre imagery seeks to illustrate the dramatic workings of the imagination in our original state of benighted mortality: enlightenment is not necessarily the work of day. In Isabella's wildly desperate plight, the macabre veil of the poem, not one easily parted, testifies to the strength of the hold of mortality's chill on our perceptions, but, once parted, reveals an unexpected and unexpectedly much more power-

ful force than that of the pall of mortality which it dispells. Imaginative truth is not to be found in the superficialities of earth but in the elusive mind's eye that penetrates where earthly eyes cannot. As autumn's opulent mellowness hints at the coming of winter's chill, imagination's own blooms, unlike the earth's fading ones, reassure the soul's serenity through faith in a matured faculty whose season, unlike the earthly one, extends to the core of reality. The imagination grows in the world but it is not of it. And when, finally, in Keats's Titanic epic, the god of the sun falls, only to be replaced by a new god, the reader recognizes a thinly-veiled fable of the mind's loss and recovery, of enlightenment through the faculty that lights our way to truth. The magnitude and primal nature of these figures reveal them as constituents of the basic story of all of our lives.

Keats's basic theme of the healing power of the imagination remained constant through his works. No critic will deny that his craftsmanship markedly improved from the early I Stood Tip-Toe to the majestic "Hyperions," but any careful examiner of Keats's imagery will not fail to see the common theme invested in these images. And wherever the imagination's healing function appears, the reason for this faculty's very existence, mortality's chilling grip on our selves, necessarily appears also. This macabre imagery portrays what we are in the absence of the transcendental imagination. We are flowers torn up and left on the wayside, or gods reduced to a living death. The common function of these images which evoke in their own ways a macabre sense of life even reflects itself

in some striking similarities between these images. The Titans, for example, are themselves another kind of flower cast down by other infants' hands. Whatever the image denoting the macabre sense of life, deracinated flowers, deposed Titans, a mouldering severed head, Keats has exploited it such that we are ultimately led to the transcendental riches of the imagination through these strange images of death.

NOTES

Introduction

¹ All references to Keats's poems are to Jack Stillinger, ed., The Poems of John Keats (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978).

² Earl Wasserman, The Finer Tone (1953; rpt. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), p. 50.

³ M. H. Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1971), p. 129.

⁴ Jacob Wigod, The Darkening Chamber: The Growth of Tragic Consciousness in Keats (Salzburg: Institut Fur Englische Sprache Und Literatur, 1972), p. ii.

⁵ Jack Stillinger, The Hoodwinking of Madeline and Other Essays on Keats's Poems (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1971), p. vii.

⁶ James Land Jones, Adam's Dream (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1975).

Chapter One

¹ Sidney Colvin, Keats (1887; rpt. London: St. Martin's Press, 1968), p. 50.

² Claude Lee Finney, The Evolution of Keats's Poetry (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), Vol. 1, p. 173.

³ Hugh I'Anson Fausset, Keats. A Study in Development (1922; rpt. Archon Books, 1966), p. 59.

⁴ Aileen Ward, John Keats. The Making of a Poet London: Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd., 1963), p. 59.

⁵ E. C. Pettet, On the Poetry of Keats (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), p. 70.

⁶ John Jones, John Keats's Dream of Truth (London: Chatto & Windus Ltd., 1969), pp. 123-6.

⁷ Morris Dickstein, Keats and His Poetry. A Study in Development (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1971), p. 28.

⁸ Robert Ryan, Keats. The Religious Sense (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 162.

⁹ Morris Dickstein, pp. 47-8.

¹⁰ Dickstein, p. 28.

¹¹ Barry Gradman, Metamorphosis in Keats (New York: New York University Press, 1980), pp. xiii-xiv.

¹² A departure from the traditional views occurs in Stephen Reid, "Keats's Depressive Poetry" in Psychoanalytic Review, Vol. 58, 1971 in which the author states that "the pain of depression . . . led to the poems on which so much of his reputation rests. The poems themselves are attempts to define the nature of the pain, to locate its source and to find a remedy. The depression is the result of Keats's intense awareness of 'mutability' (p. 396)." The author goes on to explain Keats's poems in terms of a special psychoanalytic phenomenon called "depressive position."

¹³ 'At first sight the poem may appear only "a posey of luxuries," . . . but the essential thing is Keats's first full affirmation of the identity of nature, myth, and poetry.' Douglas Bush, Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry (1937; rpt. New York: Pageant Book Co., 1957), p. 84.

"It is only in the address to the moon (116-242) that Keats finally arrives at his main subject, the equation of nature with poetic inspiration." Jack Stillinger, The Hoodwinking of Madeline, p. 6.

"If this wandering poem has any subject as such it is an affirmation of the identity of natural process, myth, and poetry which the work of his maturity will clarify." James Land Jones, Adam's Dream, p. 101.

¹⁴ Walter Evert, Aesthetic and Myth in the Poetry of Keats (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 101 and 103.

¹⁵ Jacob Wigod, The Darkening Chamber: The Growth of Tragic Consciousness in Keats, p. 19.

¹⁶ Stuart Sperry, Keats the Poet (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 83.

¹⁷ Wolf Z. Hirst, John Keats (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981), p. 57.

¹⁸ Clarence Thorpe, The Mind of John Keats (New York: Oxford University Press, 1926), p. 49.

¹⁹ Ronald Sharp, Keats, Skepticism, and the Religion of Beauty (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1979), p. 6.

Sharp's interpretation of Keats's deepest convictions differs from mine in ascribing to Keats a deep and abiding scepticism regarding the transcendental imagination.

In speaking of condescension, Ronald Sharp may have had such criticism as Walter J. Bate's in mind: "The rhinocerine sighs of Johnson about the limitations of the genre apply quite as much to these couplets as to far better descriptive poems. Because 'the scenes, which they must exhibit successively, are all subsisting at the same time, the order in which they are shown must by necessity be arbitrary, and more is not to be expected from the last part than the first. The attention, therefore, which cannot be detained by suspense, must be excited by diversity.' The diversity, if thin, leaves the mind unengaged; if profuse enough, it only distracts. Keats himself was already aware of the limitations of the genre, and was to become more so with every half year that passed. He did not really want to write a purely descriptive poem: he was doing so now only because he lacked a subject." Walter J. Bate, John Keats (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 124.

²⁰ Judy Little calls this "the structure of parallel imagery . . . in which a poet's imaginative response to the landscape repeats and varies elements of the scene . . . a structure which is almost a formal metaphor of one of the favorite ideas of the romantic poets, the idea that the senses 'half create' what they perceive . . ." pp. 30 and 35 in Keats as a Narrative Poet. A Test of Invention (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975).

Essentially, Judy Little's argument is that Keats deals only with epistemology or that the content of the poem is its structure. I wish to show that structure and epistemology are devoted to an end.

²¹ The first verse paragraph is replete with connotations of birth, and beginnings: the hill is "little"; the buds are "scantly leav'd"; the flocks "new shorn" and "sweetly they slept"; the posey is "milky, soft and rosy."

²² M. H. Abrams, "The Correspondent Breeze: A Romantic Metaphor" in English Romantic Poets. Modern Essays in Criticism, M. H. Abrams, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 37-8.

A recent critic takes pains to disavow the relevance of Abram's metaphor to this poem: 'the poem's lack of cohesion is due to a failure to unify the embryonic themes suggested by these images even more than to the flimsy narrative or the splicing together of sec-

tions inspired and written on different occasions. An extreme case is the "noiseless noise" born of the motionless silence (11-13), which (unlike, for example, the unheard melodies of the "Grecian Urn") is in no way incorporated into the poem's theme. By combining an original personification and oxymoron with close observation of nature Keats creates a superb effect, but he makes no attempt to link the windless air to the poet awaiting inspiration, the Romantic metaphor" Wolf Hirst, p. 57.

²³ In that context, could "sobbing of the morn" remind us of morning's homonym, mourning?

²⁴ Marjorie Norris feels that "the . . . lines of this scene come as a surprise" in 'Phenomenology and Process: Perception in Keats's "I Stood Tip-Toe" ' in Keats-Shelley Journal, Vol. xxv, 1976, p. 48. Norris accounts for these contrasting lines as being part of Keats's affirmation of the complex dualities of life.

Wolf Hirst in John Keats sees the lines as being anomalous: they hint "at the proximity of birth and death, but this theme is not linked to the poem's concern with the inspirational power of nature and a poet's birth" (p. 28).

²⁵ On a lesser level, and probably at a subliminal one at that, his guilt may also be seen in the fact that, as a "harp" "lately strung" he is a supplanter not only in a generational sense but in an artistic one as well: his are the "infant hands." (Recall also that at the end of the first verse paragraph he plucked a posey.) His prayer in this sense would be that he perform his role as poet in a valid new way, not only as a usurper who merely destroys. Cf. "Lycidas":

I come to pluck your Berries harsh and crude
And with forc'd fingers rude,
Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year

²⁶ The context of these lines is a natural description with the obvious symbolic import of elevated feelings. This elevation indeed implies a transcendence of the sorrow of mortality noted earlier in both the "sobbing of the morn" and in the "spring-head of clear waters / Babbling so wildly of its lovely daughters": the voice of the stream has now undergone a metamorphosis such that it now represents the opposite of what it did earlier. Crying over death has changed to a "Charm" which relieves "our troubles" whose source was earlier seen as stemming from death:

While at our feet, the voice of crystal bubbles
Charms us at once away from all our troubles:
So that we feel uplifted from the world,
Walking upon the white clouds wreath'd and curl'd.
(11.137-140)

Chapter 2

¹ "To Benjamin Bailey, 22 Nov. 1817" in Robert Gittings, ed., Letters of John Keats (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 36-7.

² S. R. Swaminathan, The Still Image in Keats's Poetry (Salzburg: Institut Fur Englische Sprache, 1981), p. 102.

³ Jacob Wigod, The Darkening Chamber: The Growth of Tragic Consciousness in Keats, p. 36.

⁴ E. C. Pettet, On the Poetry of Keats, p. 153.

⁵ Jack Stillinger, "On the Interpretation of 'Endymion': The Comedian as the Letter E" in The Hoodwinking of Madeline, p. 26, and Passim, pp. 15-30.

⁶ Glen O. Allen, "The Fall of Endymion: A Study in Keats's Intellectual Growth" in Keats-Shelley Journal, vol. VI, 1957, p. 39.

⁷ Barry Gradman, Metamorphosis in Keats, pp. 24 and 16.

⁸ James Ralston Caldwell, John Keats' Fancy (1945; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, 1972), p. 92.

⁹ Morris Dickstein, Keats and His Poetry: A Study in Development, pp. 66-7.

¹⁰ S. R. Swaminathan, The Still Image, pp. 95-6. An unusual interpretation that forms a kind of compromise between the mundane and mystical views of the poem is to be found in Charles I. Patterson, The Daemonic in the Poetry of John Keats (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1970). The author contends that Keats's vision of happiness was that of the pre-Christian Greek daemons who inhabited a medial realm between heaven and earth.

¹¹ James Caldwell, John Keats' Fancy, p. 91. Indeed, the most eminent scholarship admits Endymion's unwieldy nature: Earl Wasserman in The Finer Tone states that "it is too sprawling to lend itself to close analysis."

¹² In a letter to John Taylor, dated 30 January, 1818, Keats wrote of this passage: "My having written that Passage [sic] Argument will perhaps be of the greatest Service to me of any thing I ever did--It set before me at once the gradations of Happiness even like a kind of Pleasure Thermometer", in Letters of John Keats, Robert Gittings, ed., (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 59-60.

¹³ Jacqueline Zeff, "Strategies of Time in Keats's Narratives" in Studies in English Literature, vol. XVII, 1977, no. 4, pp. 625-6.

¹⁴ Judy Little, Keats as a Narrative Poet (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), p. 46. One may recognize this idea in Cynthia's rather cryptic explanation for Endymion's long delay in being "enskyed": "And then 'twas fit that from this mortal state / Thou shouldst, my love, by some unlook'd for change / Be spiritualized." (IV, 991-3).

¹⁵ At the end of his quest Endymion tells his sister that he is "More happy than betides mortality" (IV, 859) after he declares that "Of the empyrean I have drunk my fill " (IV, 857).

¹⁶ Many critics have stated this interpretation. For example, Earl Wasserman in The Finer Tone sees Pan as the "mystic oxymoron": "Pan is the concurrence of the mortal and immortal, He invests the physical with the ethereal; he is the perceptible reflection of the imperceptible" (p. 16). Judy Little in Keats as a Narrative Poet states that 'Pan's altar represents that perfect conjunction of the supernatural and the natural. . . . during his later quest, Endymion receives in each of these realms - earth, sea, and air - assurances that the supernatural "leaven" is indeed present' (p. 46). Jacob Wigod sees that "Pan is a complex symbol of the green world, the mysterious and supernatural, the creative imagination, and the sublime" in The Darkening Chamber, p. 24. S. R. Swaminathan examines the altar and its surrounding landscape to conclude that "These symbols of the earth in vital contact with supernatural agents suggest an underlying conception of the marriage of earth and heaven as the background for that of Endymion and the Moon-Goddess" in The Still Image, p. 72.

¹⁷ Several critics have noted Peona's limitations. For example, in contrast to Endymion's transcendental longings, Douglas Bush in John Keats (New York: Collier Books, 1966), calls her the "voice of common sense" (p. 49), and Stuart Ende in Keats and the Sublime (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976) calls her "the voice of doubt" (p. 60). Bernard Blackstone, along with other critics, sees Endymion's quest as one to re-discover his proper relationship to man and nature from which he has "fallen" by renouncing them. Blackstone's evaluation of Peona, however, parallels my own: "It is at this moment that the earth, which he has forgotten, and indeed is beginning to despise, puts forth a flower: the girl Peona. I offer this expression not as a preciousity but as the most accurate account I can give of the event. Peona, Endymion's sister, is the embodiment of earthly, uncomprehending love and loyalty. She incarnates the maternal, the limited, the unspeculative. She is, therefore, in one sense, Endymion's greatest enemy on the journey he is about to undertake. . . . She takes him . . . to 'a bowery island'. . . . The water, the island, the bower comprise the sphere of unconscious felicity which Endymion must relinquish for a life of struggle" in The Consecrated Urn (1959; rpt. London: Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., 1966), p. 124.

¹⁸ Stuart Sperry, Keats the Poet, p. 105.

¹⁹ The limitations of this bower are seldom seen. Walter Evert in Aesthetic and Myth states that "since Adonis is a mortal who achieved immortality as the beloved of a goddess, he is an appropriately encouraging sign to Endymion at this point in his trial; and since his immortality is identified with the life of nature, he is a fitting sign of the necessary link between the natural and the divine" (p. 129). Wolf Hirst in John Keats similarly ignores nature's inadequacies: "Endymion's immortalization through love is foreshadowed by Adonis, whose yearly resurrection by Venus symbolizes the renewal of nature in spring," (p. 68). While E. C. Pettet points out that Book II "is clearly to be understood as a descent into the realms of death" (p. 161), in On the Poetry of Keats, he sees the Adonis episode as being idealistic: "the Venus-Adonis story is a vegetation myth, of the renewed life of leaves and flowers rising in springtime out of the barrenness and death of winter. . . . It powerfully and poetically sustains the idea of Endymion's returning life because it is one of the great archetypal legends of resurrection, and in particular of love that triumphs over death" (p. 168).

²⁰ S. R. Swaminathan, The Still Image, p. 93.

²¹ Bernard Blackstone, The Consecrated Urn, p. 185.

²² Another parallel between the two episodes which supports the idea of parody occurs in the description of the means of access to each. Cynthia, as was noted earlier, tells Endymion that "'twas fit that from this mortal state / Thou shouldst, my love, by some unlook'd for change/ Be spiritualiz'd" (IV, 991-3). The Dark Paradise mockingly foreshadows the real one

within ye hear
No sound so loud as when on curtain'd bier
The death-watch tick is stifled. Enter none
Who strive therefore: on the sudden it is won.
(IV, 529-32)

Chapter Three

¹ Walter J. Bate, John Keats, p. 314.

² "Keats's last large poetic failure, Isabella": Jack Stillinger, The Hoodwinking of Madeline, p. 31.

"The Pot of Basil was highly regarded . . . by many of Keats's friends . . . who were sentimental by nature and by education . . . [it] is a transitional poem." Claude Lee Finney, The Evolution of Keats's Poetry, pp. 374 and 379.

"As an example of narrative 'Isabella' is not outstanding." Herbert G. Wright, Boccaccio in England from Chaucer to Tennyson (London: The Athlone Press, 1957), p. 406.

"a document illustrative of Keats's development, as the stones by which he crossed, not too securely, into the promised land," M. R. Ridley, Keats' Craftsmanship (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1933), p. 18.

"'Isabella' and the other odes I consider lesser poems in that the full statements they have to make lie very near the surface." Earl Wasserman, The Finer Tone, p. 10.

"Much of Keats's immature sentimentality lingers on in the opening picture of the young lovers", Aileen Ward, John Keats. The Making of a Poet, p. 173.

"transitional poem": Clayton Hudnell, "New Lines by Keats" in English Language Notes, vol. VII, 1969, p. 111.

"self-indulgent pathos": Stuart Sperry, Keats the Poet, p. 219.

"It is not a poem of which Keats or the majority of his readers have thought very highly." Walter Evert, Aesthetic and Myth in the Poetry of Keats, p. 225.

"Isabella had been a 'weak-sided' poem; a gesture of frustration and thereby a symptom of weariness, following the great but (to Keats) unsatisfactory effort of Endymion. . . . It is the backwash of Endymion: a distillation of the weakness of that poem. . . . altogether of the sentimental cast. . . . It is not deep. . . . The poem is to be a record of impotence and frustration and sterility." Bernard Blackstone, The Consecrated Urn (1959; rpt. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1961), pp. 241, 267, and 268.

"[Isabella does not] offer much access to the rich turbulence of Keats's interior life and speculative growth." Morris Dickstein, Keats and His Poetry, P. 234.

³ "it is impossible to start reading the poem at any point without quickly having to decide whether the object under contemplation is the work of a sick erotic fancy, or something underneath." John Jones, John Keats's Dream of Truth, p. 15.

Truth, p. 15. "Isabella's keeping and caressing of Lorenzo's head mixes love and horror in an almost too questionable fashion", G. Wilson Knight, The Starlit Dome (1941; rpt. London: Methuen & Co., 1968), p. 281.

"This process of fruition of which death is the consummation will find its supreme expression in 'To Autumn,' but in 'Isabella' it is perverted when fulfillment is twice denied," Wolf Hirst, John Keats, p. 88.

"In this account of the disinterment of Lorenzo, with its juxtaposition of tender passion, violence, and physical horror--this horror the more impressive for its delicacy and restraint--Keats is for once indulging in a characteristically Romantic frisson. He is absorbed in the centre of a poem that belongs, more entirely than any other work of his, to Romanticism--Romanticism on its side of abnormal 'agony'." E. C. Pettet, On the Poetry of Keats, pp. 208-9.

⁴ Jack Stillinger, The Hoodwinking of Madeline, pp. 38, 31.

⁵ Louise Smith, "The Material Sublime: Keats and Isabella" in Studies in Romanticism, vol. 13, 1974, p. 299.

⁶ Louise Smith, p. 307.

⁷ Louise Smith, pp. 299 and 310.

⁸ Judy Little refers to the use of this word, and refers to irony in its use but unfortunately does not explain the irony: "her calling out to 'the Pilgrim' (493) is very good, and ironic; the plain word is used, not the archaic and romantic one, 'palmer,' which was used to describe Lorenzo in the second line" in Keats as a Narrative Poet, p. 82. In commenting on Keats's reference to "old Romance" (XLIX), Louise Smith mentions among others, Chaucer's "Troilus and Criseyde" in "The Material Sublime", p. 307.

⁹ Walter J. Bate sees little significance in Keats's use of Chaucerian digression: "Only too conscious that this is a genre which, in English, goes back to Chaucer, Keats inserts occasional brief digressions and invocations in the Chaucerian vein: These conventions of the medieval romance may leave us a little cold, especially in a nineteenth-century poem. But they are not long enough to obtrude." in John Keats, p. 311. Rather than being obstructions these digressions perform an integral function in the poem which is, basically, to draw special attention to the great and important differences between his tale and Boccaccio's as he found it. (See M. R. Ridley, Keats' Craftsmanship for the text of the English translation acknowledged to be Keats's source.)

¹⁰ F. N. Robinson, ed., The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1957), ll.1814-1848.

¹¹ The theme, indeed, may be stated as the proper orientation for the soul; thus, images of direction and orientation abound, as for example in the following line linking vision and orientation: "How could these money-bags see east and west?" (XVIII).

¹² "Close" can be compared to its derogatory use later on:

Yet were these Florentines as self-retired
 In hungry pride and gainful cowardice,
 As two close Hebrews in that land inspired. . . .
 (XVII)

¹³ Dramatic irony is by definition prophetic, and the vatic dimension of the poem points to a realm beyond the simple linearity of time. The famous prolepsis in "the two brothers and their murder'd man / Rode past fair Florence" (XXVII), for example, not only foreshadows an event but also points to the true locus of

action, the spiritual realm which is related to eternity. Thus, the murder essentially occurs in stanza XXII; the relative unimportance of the physical act is reflected in the fact that it is made off stage, as it were. This is reinforced at the end of the poem in the parody of this act when the pot of basil is taken away from Isabella. This, in turn, is linked to the notion of death as separation which, in the climatic separation of head from body, emphasizes the contrast between the mind and the body, heaven and earth. Dramatic irony shatters the present and forces its re-evaluation in terms of a larger perspective.

¹⁴ Compare the heading to the English translation of Boccaccio's tale used by Keats: "Wherein is plainly proved, That love cannot be rooted up, by any Humane Power or Providence; especially in such a Soul, where it hath been really apprehended." in Jack Stillinger, The Hoodwinking of Madeline, p. 41.

¹⁵ Cf. Mario Praz: "How many times has the magic of the ineffable been celebrated, from Keats, with his
 Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
 Are sweeter. . . .

to Maeterlinck, with his theory that silence is more musical than any sound! But these are extreme cases, in which the romantic tends to merge in the mystical. The normal is that of suggestive expression, which evokes much more than it states" in The Romantic Agony (1933; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 15.

¹⁶ Bernard Blackstone's comments are suggestive regarding the identity of the lovers: "running through the whole poem, we sense a curiously biological motif (if I may so phrase it): the suggestion of a passion between the lovers that is unindividual, undifferentiated, unsexual almost" in The Consecrated Urn, p. 269.

¹⁷ The re-working of an existing tale may have invited critical disregard for Keats's poem; for example, Walter J. Bate feels that "the matter of judgment in the choice of the tale is in this case a very minor consideration" in John Keats, p. 310.

¹⁸ Earl Wasserman, The Finer Tone, p. 83. See also Gerald Enscoe, Eros and the Romantics (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1967), pp. 132-164 passim for analyses of these narratives which probe beyond the surface characteristics of the central woman characters.

¹⁹ Aileen Ward notices "images of medicine and disease" in Isabella but fails to see that Keats ever remained a poet-physician: "A string of images of medicine and disease runs through the poem like a dark vein through marble-- a description of Isabella as thin and pale as a young mother with a sick child; accounts of stifling and pulsing and hallucinations and fever; pharmaceutical lore of distilling and compounding, of poisonous flowers and strong potions; observations of haemorrhage, psychological shock, and consumption;

a metaphor of amputation; and finally, a detailed picture of a freshly exhumed corpse, . . . This imagery implies a more direct confrontation of reality than Keats had yet made in his poetry; and its sudden appearance at this time is strangely significant. The previous spring Keats had told George, "I have forgotten all surgery. . . . The doctor he had started to become . . . and then repudiated, now returned to question the poet he had chosen to be instead." in John Keats, pp. 173-4.

Chapter Four

¹ There have always been critics to express "To Autumn's" perfection, even if that very perfection seems, at times, to be regarded as a liability; thus, Robert Bridges says that "Had Keats left us only his Odes, his rank among the poets would not be lower than it is. . . . Of the seven odes. . . . if we rank them merely according to perfection of workmanship, the one that, was last written, that is, the 'ode to Autumn,' will claim the highest place. . . . But this ode does not in any part of it reach the marvellous heights attain'd by several of the others" in A Critical Introduction to Keats (1895; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1929), pp. 128-9.

Allen Tate's echo of this opinion is harsher: " 'Ode to Autumn' is a very nearly perfect piece of style but it has little to say" in "A Reading of Keats(1)" in The American Scholar, vol. 15, 1945-6, p. 58.

Later critics repeat Bridge's opinion; Walter Jackson Bate in John Keats states that

each generation has found it one of the most nearly perfect poems in English, the whole is "perfected"--carried through to completion--solely by means of the given parts; and the parts observe decorum . . . by contributing directly to the whole, with nothing left dangling or independent. The "Ode to a Nightingale," for example, is a less "perfect" though a greater poem (p. 581).

Ian Jack in Keats and the Mirror of Art (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 242, feels that " 'To Autumn' is so flawless a poem that critics have sometimes been tempted to read more into it than is really there."

A recent critic notices this critical aberration: "why should 'To Autumn' have received less critical attention than most of Keats's other odes, while praise of it has always been glowing and reservations have hardly ever been heard?", Virgil Nemoianu, "The Dialectics of Movement in Keats's 'To Autumn' " in P.M.L.A., vol. 93, 1978, p. 205.

Most critics have been unreservedly admiring: "perfect poem," John Middleton Murry, Keats and Shakespeare (1925; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 189.

"the most serenely flawless poem in our language," M. R. Ridley, Keats' Craftsmanship, p. 289.

"[Autumn] to my mind is the greatest personification in English poetry," Bernard Blackstone, The Consecrated Urn, p. 356;

" 'To Autumn' is the subtlest and most beautiful of all Keats's odes, and as close to perfection as any shorter poem in the English language," Harold Bloom, The Visionary Company (1961; rpt. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), p. 432;

"his most perfect and untroubled poem," Aileen Ward, John Keats, p. 321;

"This is, I think, the only perfect poem that Keats ever wrote," Walter Evert, Aesthetic and Myth, p. 298;

"I concur with those who find this markedly the greatest of Keats's odes," Christopher Ricks, Keats and Embarrassment (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 208;

Morris Dickstein in Keats and His Poetry, p. 262, echoes earlier left-handed compliments in seeing the poem as summative of Keats's odes: "He goes on . . . to write 'To Autumn,' but that is no more than a flawless and seemingly effortless footnote to the odes of April and May." On the other hand, S. R. Swaminathan in The Still Image, pp. 392 and 402, sees the poem as "a perfect miniature of his entire work--a multum in parvo. . . . On retrospect the earlier poems, not excluding the great odes of April and May, look like tentative drafts through which he gropes his way to this final true voice of feeling."

² The list of critics whose views fit in this category includes:

"The whole poem is a celebration of fruition and fulfillment in the process of time," Walter Evert, Aesthetic and Myth, p. 297;

"the images are presented as meaning simply themselves: Keats's richest utterance is the barest of metaphor. The fullness of life, the joy of completion which the poem celebrates," Aileen Ward, John Keats, p. 321;

"It accepts the inevitability of the cycle. And in the acceptance there is joy," Bernard Blackstone, The Consecrated Urn, p. 357;

"In 'To Autumn' he . . . achieves . . . the will to neither strive nor cry, the power to see and accept life as it is, a perpetual process of ripening, decay, and death," Douglas Bush, John Keats, p. 178;

"Resignation or lucid acceptance of a transient world of beauty," Francois Matthey, The Evolution of Keats's Structural Imagery (Zurich: Swiss Studies in English, 1974), p. 265;

Robert Gittings, John Keats (London: Heinemann, 1968), p. 322, agrees with Ward, above;

"From beginning to end it celebrates the world of process," Jack Stillinger, The Hoodwinking of Madeline, p. 110;

"quiet resignation to death," Edward Bostetter, The Romantic Ventriloquists (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963), p. 322, n. 30;

"quiet acceptance of change and death as inseparable from earthly life," Robert Ryan, Keats. The Religious Sense, p. 209;

"quiet acceptance that comes only from experience and knowledge of human suffering. . . . his whole being, moves in quiet, subtle harmony with the ripe and dying rhythms of the universe," Jacob Wigod, The Darkening Chamber, p. 203;

"the natural world provides the shape of the poem; in its presence the writer can compose himself without the need to seek any pattern other than that of the turning seasons--absolved from any irritable seeking after certainties or after symbols which can assume the form of certainties," Gillian Beer, "Aesthetic Debate in Keats's Odes" in The Modern Language Review, vol. 64, 1969, p. 743;

"I am suggesting that Keats is aware of the fact that autumn heralds the coming of winter, and therefore of all that we associate with death; but that in writing his poem about autumn he chooses to dwell most fully on the season as a time of achievement, of a mature fruition," Patrick Swinden, "John Keats: 'To Autumn' " in Critical Quarterly, vol. 20, no. 4, 1978;

"acceptance of an order innate in our experience--the natural rhythm of the seasons," Stuart Sperry, Keats the Poet, p. 336;

"a consummate expression of the triumph of nature's process over the artist's endeavor to eternalize the fleeting moment," Wolf Hirst, John Keats, p. 153;

"an acceptance which includes even the fact of death," David Perkins, The Quest for Permanence (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 294;

"Keats in this poem is almost content with the pure phenomenon," Kenneth Muir, John Keats. A Reassessment (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1958), p. 73;

"confirms the natural cycle of life, which is above regret, and which, as Keats would have us think, needs only to be recorded to be accepted," B. C. Southan, "The Ode 'To Autumn' " in Keats-Shelley Journal, vol. IX, 1960, p. 97;

"He is affirming something about the divineness of the world, of natural existence. . . . the sources of meaning and value are located not in some remote transcendental Beyond, but in the immediate tissues of familiar things," Donald Pearce, "Thoughts on the Autumn Ode of Keats" in Ariel. A Review of International English Literature, vol. 6, 1975, p. 9;

"the poet clearly understands what the inescapable consequence of transience is," James Lott, "Keats's 'To Autumn': The Poetic Consciousness and Awareness of Process" in Studies in Romanticism, vol. IX, 1970, p. 79;

"Yet the poet uses all his art to ease the pain of leaving behind the beautiful, the qualification of the images of emptiness being his own generous gesture of consolation to us," Thomas Pison, "Phenomenological Approach to Keats's 'To Autumn' " in Bucknell Review, 1976, p. 45;

"an impression of the satisfaction and fulfillment which human beings can find in things earthly," Charles Patterson, The Daemonic in the Poetry of John Keats, p. 225.

- ³ Bhabatosh Chatterjee, John Keats, pp. 410, 416 and 411.
- ⁴ Geoffrey Hartman, Fate of Reading (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 129.
- ⁵ Virgil Nemoianu, "The Dialectics of Movement in Keats's 'To Autumn' ", p. 212.
- ⁶ Annabel Patterson, "How to load and . . . bend": Syntax and Interpretation in Keats's 'To Autumn' " in P.M.L.A., vol. 94, 1979, p. 453.
- ⁷ Annabel Patterson, p. 457.
- ⁸ James Land Jones, Adam's Dream, pp. 146 and 12.
- ⁹ S. R. Swaminathan, The Still Image, pp. 388 and 391.
- ¹⁰ David Perkins notes that
 "the sun is maturing--it is not only ripening things, but it is also growing older. So also, one presumes, is autumn itself, the "close bosom-friend" of the sun. Process is taking place, and the season is drawing to a close, however slowly and unnoticed," in The Quest for Permanence, p. 292. Wolf Hirst sees "a sun which is ambiguously described as if it, too, were 'maturing' toward noon or late summer," in John Keats, p. 151.
- ¹¹ Cf. also lines 7 and 8 "where the Beetle wheels his droning Flight, / And drowsy Tinklings lull the distant Folds," as well as line 25, "Oft did the Harvest to their Sickle yield," or line 18 with its "Swallow twitt'ring."
- ¹² 'The stanza suggests in its religious tenor a sacred grove, and the "vines" "round the thatch-eves" blest with fruit, and the repetition of the word "fruit" remind us of the same symbols in the gospel of St. John (15:1-3),' S. R. Swaminathan, The Still Image, p. 392.
- ¹³ Stuart Ende suggests that
 One might see in the "maturing sun" (1.2) a pun that re-establishes the earlier relationship of votary and power, in the familial form this often assumes in Keats. The poet is the son who is maturing. . . .
 in Keats and the Sublime, p. 143.
- ¹⁴ Annabel Patterson in "How to load and . . . bend", p. 453, has written that

The postponed interrogative "Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?" cannot entirely exclude a disbeliever's response, which might affect either the spirit or the stores. Is the harvest in "To Autumn" ever presented as complete?

¹⁵ Several critics have noted this appearance of Autumn. Miriam Allott in John Keats (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1976), p. 38, notes that "Autumn . . . in the guise of a reaper, 'Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers', so that one senses along with munificence the scythe's ineluctible destructiveness (for if Autumn is a reaper, so is Time)." David Perkins in The Quest for Permanence, p. 292, feels that in stanza two "the dominant image is of autumn as the harvester--and a harvester that is in a sense another reaper, death itself." B. C. Southam in "The Ode 'To Autumn' ", p. 96, states that "Autumn the reaper is close to Time with his scythe, moving across the harvest scene determined and inexorable."

¹⁶ B. C. Southam, p. 96.

¹⁷ Wolf Hirst, John Keats, p. 151.

¹⁸ S. R. Swaminathan in The Still Image, p. 395, sees Autumn as Psyche in this stanza and comments on the positive aspects of the image of the gleaner:

The stanza follows the general pattern of several poems of Keats in which a person passes from waking to sleep signifying death, and from sleep to another waking beyond death. Is it far-fetched to suggest that the "brook" may be a . . . Lethe-like stream which Psyche crosses with a steady vision?

¹⁹ Donald Pearce, "Thoughts on the Autumn Ode of Keats", p. 11.

²⁰ Cf. the "river shallows" to the "o-er-hanging shallows" (1.67) in "I Stood Tip-toe."

²¹ Annabel Patterson, p. 456.

²² Donald Pearce, p. 10.

²³ In terms of such religious imagery, the word "red-breast" has interesting illustrations in the Oxford English Dictionary:
red-breast:

1604 Drayton Owle 87 Covering with Mosse the deads unclosed eye, The little Red-brest teacheth Charitie.

1708 prior Turtle & Sparrow 18 Ye pious Redbreasts, deck his Hearse.

Robin redbreast:

1529 Skelton P. Sparwe 399 Robyn redbrest, He shall
be the preest The requiem masse to synge.
1612 Webster White Devil V.(Routledge)45/2
The robin-redbrest and the wren . . . with leaves
and flowers do cover The friendless bodies of
unburied men.

Chapter Five

¹ The Fall of Hyperion. A Dream. This short designation will be used throughout the chapter.

² Critics who seek to examine the two poems for differences in thought arising in Keats's Great Year should consider the theory that the two poems were actually written alternately in parts rather than as a discrete first poem followed by its revision. Leonidas Jones for example finds, in "The Dating of the Two Hyperions" in Studies in Bibliography, vol. XXX, 1977, p. 121,

that [Keats] first wrote the opening twenty-one lines of Hyperion before the Scottish tour in the summer of 1818, turned away from that start to begin afresh The Fall of Hyperion in September 1818, recast the first twenty-one lines of Hyperion as ll.274-326 of The Fall, laid aside The Fall and returned to writing the rest of Hyperion by April 1819, and in the summer of 1819 returned once again to The Fall to expand it from l.327 to its close.

³ Stuart Ende, Keats and the Sublime, p. 107. The following critics, among others, see a similar acceptance of sorrow in the poems.

James Land Jones in Adam's Dream, p. 179, sees in Apollo's birth "a new . . . mode of consciousness . . . the mode of melancholy or tragic joy."

Barry Gradman in Metamorphosis in Keats, p. 60, sees an "acceptance of the tragic vision."

Jacob Wigod in The Darkening Chamber, p. 194, states that Keats in the poems "was setting forth his mature philosophy of life, which was basically tragic in its acceptance of suffering."

Brian Wilkie in Romantic Poets and Epic Tradition (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), p. 169, states that "Keats is turning from romance . . . to the 'bitter sweet' Shakespearean fruit, the powerful beauty that comes from a tragic embracing of suffering. . . . The tragic spirit . . . is not only grander but more truly beautiful than romantic escapism."

Bhabatosh Chatterjee in John Keats: His Mind and Work, p. 433, feels that in "The Fall" "the poet no longer aspires to heaven--earthly (and mortal) existence is considered the ultimate reality.

Walter Evert in Aesthetic and Myth, p. 231, sees "an unbridgable gulf between the mortal and the divine" and that "man is helpless in the world, absolutely condemned to his mortality, with heaven forever beyond his reach" (p. 242).

Paul Sherwin in "Dying into Life: Keats's Struggle with Milton in Hyperion" in P.M.L.A., 93, 1978, states that "Keats recasts Milton's story of our fall into mortal consciousness in his own idiom, supplying as well whatever consolations such sadly limited consciousness can win" (p. 394).

Brian Wicker in "The Disputed Lines", p. 34, states that "Keats's greatest and most intimate reflections amount to this: That happiness -- the supreme quest for all men -- consists in the 'perplexity of joy and pain.' "

Anne Mellor in "Keats's Face of Moneta: Source and Meaning" in Keats-Shelley Journal, vol. XXV, 1976, p. 80, states that "the inextricable perplexing of pleasure and pain was for Keats the bed-rock of reality."

Paul Sheats in "Stylistic Discipline in The Fall of Hyperion" in Keats-Shelley Journal, vol. XVII, 1968, p. 87, sees that "his moral and artistic vision remains fixed on a reality that is sublunary and a world in which, as a younger and more hopeful Wordsworth had said, 'we find our happiness or not at all.' "

⁴ Clarence Thorpe, The Mind of John Keats, pp. 144-5.

⁵ Critics frequently point to the similarity between the pattern of experience in these poems and the expression in Keats's letters of man's progression through the chambers of thought. That the last chamber is still dark leads these critics to assume that Keats remains in that chamber and that therefore his thought is melancholy. This study shows that Keats meant to surpass that benighted and painful state by proclaiming his constant affirmation of the transcendental imagination.

⁶ To make clear the focus on the individual may indeed have been the reason for the revision, if one may judge from Hyperion's reception by critics to this very day who refuse to see it as much else than a fable about ancient gods.

⁷ Barry Gradman in Metamorphosis in Keats, pp. 48-9, notes that "the diction and imagery of the poem make clear that virtually all the characters are in some sense sick; only Apollo can be cured Saturn's lair is a vast sickroom."

⁸ S. R. Swaminathan in The Still Image, p. 147 n. 42, notes that "The picture is reminiscent of the scene of the lamentation of the Magdalen at the feet of the dead Christ in art."

⁹ Paul Sherwin in "Dying into Life", p. 385, notes that "Displacement of the Miltonic Titans is as natural as the passage from youth to maturity or -- to borrow a favorite metaphor of the pro-

gress myth -- as the westering passage of the sun across the heavens."

¹⁰ "Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell," (Paradise Lost, Bk. IV, 1.75). Hyperion's resemblance to Satan is treated comically in the awkward pun "on he flared," which especially stands out being the last words in "The Fall," and which recalls Satan's baleful progress towards earth:

"Nigh founder'd on he fares" P.L., Bk. II, 1.940)
 "So on he fares, and to the border comes
 Of Eden" (P.L., Bk. IV, 11.131-2)

¹¹ To be compared in "The Fall" to the poet's orientation:
 pledging all the mortals of the world,
 And all the dead whose names are in our lips,
 Drank. That full draught is parent of my theme.
 (11.44-6)

¹² Wolf Hirst in John Keats, p. 98, makes a similar observation: "the first version breaks off before we are told what the vision is. Keats may have ended the poem in the middle of a line with 'from all his limbs / Celestial . . . ' in order to bring out the ineffability of divine nature."

¹³ As will be argued below, she represents mortality itself. In terms of the dialogue between her and the poet, she represents the poet's own mortal limitations struggling to attain clarity of vision -- hence the tortuous arguments in the dialogue. Several critics have commented on Moneta as a reflection of the poet's mind. For example, Douglas Bush in John Keats, p. 166, sees that "The dialogue that follows is a debate between Keats and himself, especially between his present and his earlier poetic self, and symbolism is abandoned for anguished directness." Barry Gradman in Metamorphosis in Keats, p. 126, states that "After the dialogue, Moneta ceases to function as the poet's consciousness and takes on an independent emblematic role."

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