

JOHN KEATS'S THEORY OF IMAGINATION

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Abstract

Romantic poets, including John Keats, were known for their emphasis on nature as an imaginative cognizance of external objects. They believed the imagination was signified as the coincidence and fusion of the expressed and inexpressible. Keats's contemporaries thought of the imagination as deeply intertwined with these poet's fervent emphasis on nature and therefore, their creative emphasis on imagination. Keats however, had a unique perspective of the imagination compared to his fellow Romantics. The vital force behind his poetry was his power to apply imagination to every aspect of life. His poetry exposes the delusive fantasies that create our reality, a reality which lingers in uncertainty beyond its aesthetic potential. The imagination embraces what Keats coined as negativity capability and obstinately refuses to establish social and political constructs. Through works such as "Endymion," "Lamia," "Isabella," "The Eve of St. Agnes," "Hyperion," and the Odes of 1819, Keats expresses his desire to immerse himself into an imaginative dream world, while simultaneously playing a responsible part of procuring painful reality. John Keats's theory of imagination is defined by his expression of the connection between the conscious and unconscious creative mind through his representation of conflict between thought and feeling and reason and consciousness.

In his November 22, 1817 letter to his good friend Benjamin Bailey, John Keats famously wrote, “The imagination may be compared to Adam’s dream — he awoke and found it truth.”¹ The Romantics, including Keats, were known for their emphasis on nature as an imaginative cognizance of external objects. They believed the imagination signified the coincidence and fusion of the expressed and inexpressible. Wordsworth and Coleridge thought of the imagination as deeply intertwined within their fervent emphasis on nature and, therefore, believed their creative interpretation of the imagination echoed how the imagination penetrates nature. Keats however, had a unique perspective of the imagination compared to his fellow Romantics. He did not respond to the natural sublime or observed nature, but instead, the vital force behind his poetry was his power to apply imagination to life’s creative aspects. His poetry exposes the delusive fantasies that create individual realities, realities which linger in uncertainty beyond their aesthetic potential. The imagination embraces what Keats coined as “negativity capability” and obstinately refuses to establish social and political constructs.² Through works such as “Endymion,” “Lamia,” “Isabella,” “The Eve of St. Agnes,” “Hyperion,” the Odes of 1819, and Keats’s letter correspondence with friends and family, Keats expresses his desire to immerse himself into an imaginative dream world, while simultaneously sometimes procuring painful reality. He delighted at the existence of abstract entities, such as time, human emotion, and immortality, that were outside of his own comprehension. His short career led to the conclusion that poetry is a vessel to “[impart] the conviction that Imagination and its empyreal reflection is

1. Walter Jackson Bate, *John Keats*. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963), 250.

2. Bate, 233.

the same as human Life and its spiritual repetition.”³ John Keats believed life’s truths flourish in the mind’s sexual, immortal, and tragic fantasies. His poetry’s evolution demonstrates how Keats’s crafted his theory of imagination, so it ultimately expresses the connection between the conscious and unconscious creative mind.

After the death of both of his parents, fourteen-year-old Keats moved in with new guardians. It was during this time and his last two years at secondary school that Keats was introduced to literature and became very interested in reading, books, and language. Although he is described as “not really bookish,” his young interest in books explains “another illustration of the qualities of character that we have already noticed: a union of energy, courage, and absorption in something outside of himself.”⁴ It is important to realize that his interest in literature came suddenly, was largely self-found, and could potentially have been an escape from the tragic realities of losing both of his parents. This inspirational time was the most critical period in the young poet’s life because Keats discovered that human beings are not limited to the environment they are physically in, but rather, the world can significantly be enlarged through literature. He was moved by the expansive reach of his readings and began to realize the world of literature was infinite within one’s imagination. Keats’s sudden interest in literature displays why his capacity of imaginative identification and “high mindedness” came to be so significant to in his famous poems.⁵ Despite his interest in literature and writing, Keats left school to apprentice

3. Bate, 372.

4. Bate, 27.

5. Bate, 27.

with apothecary and surgeon, Thomas Hammond.⁶ Keats registered as a medical student at Guy's Hospital in October 1815, obtained a successful job as dresser at the hospital assisting surgeons during operations, while all the while still keeping writing as a side hobby.⁷ After a few years however, even the dynamic nature of the medical field could not keep Keats's interest, and he quit his hospital job to devote the entirety of his time to writing.

John Keats was generally considered by his contemporaries and peers to be the least intellectually sophisticated Romantic poet, but he was a substantially more serious thinker than he was given credit for. Deeply intertwined with symbols, typical Romantic writings exposed "imaginative emphasis on nature, with their imaginative emphasis on the imagination, and with their imaginative emphasis on the infinite."⁸ Wordsworth, De Man, and Coleridge for example, signify the symbol of the imagination as the fusion of the expressed and the inexpressible. Further, in the Romantic eye, nature is the imaginative infestation of the "cognizance of external objects."⁹ Romantic symbols indicate that in cognitive experience, imagination accompanies every lucidly defined object in consciousness.¹⁰ For example, Coleridge tended to use the demonic as a function of power, Wordsworth sought language of power through human sacrifice. In such aspect, Keats's tone of power differed by expressing power's reversion through hopeless love. Keats undoubtedly borrowed ideas from Romantic poetry, but he slowly rejects them

6. Bate, 44.

7. Bate, 58.

8. Bate, 57.

9. Robert J. Barth and John L. Mahoney, *Coleridge, Keats, and the Imagination: Romanticism and Adam's Dream: Essays in Honor of Walter Jackson Bate*. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989), 32.

10. Barth, 55.

throughout his career. Keats's poetry seems to take the basic undertones of Romantic literature, but he spins its morals to fit his own individual thoughts on time, nature, and the imagination. Keats's brilliance in his later works comes from his responses to fine arts and intellectual humility rather than the natural world, giving his poetry a different tone than most Romantics.

Keats begins to illuminate the complexities of the imagination that his contemporaries failed to consider starting as early as "Endymion", his first "test" of the imagination. "Endymion," while considered a failure by Keats, represents the mind a young poet who is consumed by the visionary imagination. Keats shows himself as a young man filled with thoughts of physical beauty and sexual passion, while also showing his tendency to think of imagination as engaged in a heroic struggle. He primarily portrays his perception of imagination as erotic by creating the moon goddess Cynthia. Author Karla Alwes suggests Cynthia is a type of woman called *femmes fatales*, a woman who is both the physical and feminine embodiment of an imagination that attempts to desert the Earth.¹¹ She is "a convenient symbol for the male imagination precisely because she...can thus be so easily dehumanized into a spiritual object."¹² Cynthia, like female figures in Keats's later poetry as well, derives her power from her celibacy because a female's character's celibacy causes her to penetrate her male counterpart's imagination. Keats's association of loss of self with an intensity of pleasure testifies to his idea of sexuality as omnipotent in the imaginative process. Cynthia's celestial essence shows that young Keats saw the imagination as a manner by which an escape from reality can sexually transpire. The poem is therefore as much a statement about the mind's dual use of imagination as

11. Barth, 4.

12. Karla Alwes, *Imagination Transformed: The Evolution of the Female Character in Keats's Poetry*. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993), 4.

it is about the power of imagination. Additionally, Endymion's return to reality after the Indian maiden disappears is, like all of Keats's descents of the imagination, of deathly disenchantment:

His first touch of the earth went nigh to kill
“Alas!” said he, were I but always borne
Through dangerous winds, had but my footsteps worn
A path in hell, for ever would I bless
Horrors which nourish an uneasiness
For my own sullen conquering: to him
Who lives beyond earth's boundary, grief is dim,
Sorrow is but a shadow: now I see
The grass; I feel the solid ground,”¹³

The quest for permanence in this scene involves longing for a merger with a symbol of beauty. The character's power of metamorphosis lies within imagination itself and represents the conflict between reality and the imagination. Endymion's indecision, brought about by his lack of identity, causes him to lose all connection with the earth and the bower of imagination. The poem's sexuality, especially the sexual acts themselves represented as a fusion of two individuals, are presented as the blending of Earth and Heaven or a poet and his imagination. Endymion's love for the goddess and erotic desire for the maiden are ultimately the same,

13. John Blades, *John Keats: The Poems*. (New York; Houndmills [England]; Palgrave, 2002), L. 618-626.

Hereafter, poems will be cited solely with line numbers.

showing that while their love is earthly, erotic love has “supreme value” in the imagination.¹⁴ Ultimately, “Endymion” represents the imaginative sexuality of a young Keats and signifies a young mind’s idea that “A thing of beauty is a joy forever” (1). “Endymion” mirrors Keats’s own identity search in that it is young Keats’s search of imagination for the beauty and truth, a beauty and truth that represents the search for love, immortality, and poetic achievement.

Keats’s entire career after “Endymion” becomes a moving struggle with an internal dilemma of his own ideas about the imagination. In a letter written to his published James Hessey on October 8, 1818, Keats wrote, “Praise of blame has but a momentary effect on the man whose love of beauty in the abstract make him a severe critic of his own Works. My own domestic criticism has given me pain without comparison beyond what Blackwood or the Quarterly could possibly inflict.”¹⁵ “Endymion” is significant to Keats’s development largely because of his own reading and critique of its flaws. He saw the overused Romantic idea of eternal love and beauty, and thus began to change his worldview. Even while revising “Endymion,” Keats wrote his sonnet, “On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again” where he rids romance of the happy, blissful, “golden tongued” stories and instead, introduces dark, edgy romance that becomes a paramount piece of his later works.¹⁶ Keats subsequently developed versions of romance internally critiquing the genre itself, a style which he begins to use exponentially more throughout the rest of his career. Two and a quarter years later,

14. Irina I. Strout, "Nature's Calling: The Evolution of Sexuality and Poetic Imagination in John Keats's 1817-1820 Poetry." (*South Central Review: The Journal of the South Central Modern Language Association* 33, no. 3, 2016), 127.

15. Bate, 170.

16. Susan J. Wolfson, 1948. *Reading John Keats*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 48.

introduces an exponentially more solidified answer to his identity search, salutary for later writers, by turning the dilemma itself into a subject for all of his poetry.

In December of 1817, William Wordsworth, the most renowned poet at the time, visited London where Keats and a few companions were able to meet their idol. Keats's friend Benjamin Robert Haydon wrote in his Diary of Keats's and Wordsworth's first encounter:

“Wordsworth received him kindly, & after a few minutes, Wordsworth asked him what he had been lately doing, I said he has just finished an exquisite ode to Pan- and as he had not a copy I begged Keats to repeat it- which he did in his usual half chant, (most touching) walking up & down the room- when he was done I felt really, as if I had heard a young Apollo- Wordsworth drily said “a Very pretty piece of Paganism” - This was unfeeling, & unworthy of his high Genius to a young Worshipper like Keats- & Keats felt it deeply.”¹⁷

Keats may have found Wordsworth's remark to be a surprising revelation of Wordsworth's character, rather than a wounding remark. Keats's admiration for Wordsworth's poetry was never altered and the similarities and even highlighted in Keats's implementation of the imagination in his own poetry. Wordsworth's poetry features the imagination as intrinsically opposed to Nature, while Keats uses art and literature as symbols to represent the synthesis between the imagination's and nature's influence on an individual's worldview.¹⁸ Keats knew his

17. Bate, 265.

18. Katey Castellano, "Why Linger at the Yawning Tomb so Long?": The Ethics of Negative Capability in Keats's *Isabella* and *Hyperion*." *Partial Answers* 8, no. 1 (2010): 23-38, 31.

descriptions of nature were not inferior to Wordsworth's, and according to Keats's acquaintance William Hazlitt, Keats wholeheartedly believed Wordsworth's depiction of nature was too idealistic.¹⁹ In a letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, however, Keats dwells on the "burden of Misery" and how, "To this point was Wordsworth come, as far as I can conceive when he wrote 'Tintern Abbey' and it seems to me that his Genius is explorative of those dark Passages. Now we live, and go on thinking, we too shall explore them."²⁰ He is influenced by Wordsworth's application of nature's discordant elements influence on the mind's infinite imagination. While his early poetry, like "Endymion," does not reflect this influence, his 1819 work undoubtedly shows he takes the mind's dark wanderings in to serious consideration.

Even more than Wordsworth, Keats's relationship with Samuel Coleridge's influenced much of Keats's 1819 work. Keats's and Coleridge's only encounter was on April 11, 1819, which Keats describes in a letter to his brother and sister-in-law four days after:

"I took a walk towards highgate and in the lane that winds by the side of Lord Mansfield's park I met M'Green our Demonstrator at Guy's in conversation with Coleridge... I walked with him at[t] his alderman-after dinner pace for near two miles I suppose In those two Miles he broached a thousand things...Nightingales, Poetry – on Poetical sensation – Metaphysics- Different genera and species of Dreams – Nightmare – a dream accompanied by a sense of touch..."²¹

19. Barth, 19.

20. Marcello Giovanelli, *Text World Theory and Keats' Poetry: The Cognitive Poetics of Desire, Dreams and Nightmares*. 1st ed. (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013; 2015), 104.

21. Barth, 8.

This encounter motivated Keats to ponder his life's unique experiences. According to John Beer, Keats started he "[contemplated], for example, the contrast between the warm sensuous moments in which it is hard for human beings to believe in death and the bleak contemplation of frozen forms which reminds them inexorably of death's inevitable intervention."²² Coleridge's influence on Keats's work is so apparent that four months after *Biographia Literaria* was written, Keats sent his famous "the authenticity of the Imagination" letter, which demonstrates the poets' similar concern for the imagination.²³ In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge suggests that the secondary imagination's activity is a process of dissolving, diffusing, and dissipating in order to recreate. This involuntary imaginative process plays a substantial part in Keats's theory because it suggests the unconscious mind plays a crucial role in an individual's imaginative method. Keats eventually treats Coleridge's perceptions as a means to further his own theory of the imagination, rather than mirroring Coleridge's beliefs like he did in his early poetry.

Coleridge not only influenced Keats's thoughts of the imagination, but also how he expressed these thoughts in his poetry. "Christabel" particularly seems to have a large influence on Keats's Gothicism in "The Eve of St. Agnes," "Lamia," and "Isabella." With too many similarities to be coincidence, "The Eve of St. Agnes," like "Christabel" to Coleridge's poetry, is one of the best poems to represent the recurrent theme of dreams as Keats's sense of the visionary capacity for the imagination. Small similarities such as settings are outside a medieval castle or manor house, plots occur in the middle of the night in cold weather, Christabel and Madeline being innocent, young maidens (with blue eyes!), and the poem's seducers, although different genders, depicted in terms of witchcraft and magical enhancement are

22. Barth, 10.

23. Barth, 21.

borrowed from Coleridge.²⁴ Keats however, wrote “The Eve of St Agnes” shortly after his brother Thomas’s death, and therefore the poem seems to be a reflection of his dark thoughts about death as an eternal sleep state. In combination with the pieces borrowed from Coleridge, the contrasting realities of Porphyro’s lusting imaginative world and Madeline’s dream world draw attention to Keats’s ideas about the imagination in terms of the conscious and unconscious mind. Keats wrote Madeline in submissive language like, “Gods help! My lady fair the conhuror plays/ This very night: good angels her deceive!” implying her dreams are not drawn out by her own independent power, but are the consequences of some greater power acting upon her (124-125). Similarly, Keats’s line “Hoodwink’d in faery fancy; all amort,/ Save to St. Agnes and her lambs unshorn” suggests that Madeline’s slumber renders her incapable of sensing anything real except the dreaming visions she anticipates nightly (70-71). It expresses that Madeline is being tricked, like Christabel, by a fraudulent, perhaps supernatural, entity. While Madeline is a dreamer, Porphyro uses his imagination to trick Madeline and make her dream ironic. The result of character’s different states of mind while using their imagination is because Porphyro utilizes his conscious, sexual imagination, while Madeline is submerged in her unconscious dreams about her lover. Keats uses a lot of eye and sight imagery when describing Porphyro’s imagination, yet he represents a misleading imagination that can be seizing and adaptive. Porphyro represents the imagination’s visionary effect on the conscious brain, which Madeline represent the mind altering effect the imagination has on the unconscious mind. Madeline awakens from her dream to find it a truth in that she thinks that she has been deceiving herself and feels as though she has truly awakened. Keats explains how prominent the unconscious

24. Barth, 15.

imagination's effect on the dreaming brain can be in "The Eve of St. Agnes," which continues his quest to interpret the human imagination.

"Lamia" and "Christabel" also have a few similarities that are significant, the most obvious connection in the poems being the snake images and motifs.²⁵ Christabel and Lycius are put into trances, Geraldine and Apollonius are described as having evil eyes, and Lycius "ever thinking [Lamia]/ Not mortal, but of heavenly progeny" echoes Coleridge's "Yet he, who saw this Geraldine,/ Had deemed her sure a thing divine."²⁶ Lamia is one of many female characters in Keats's poetry that has a conflicted identity. She is an important part of the poetic imagination because she both in the human and immortal worlds, however, she is destroyed by reality. The poem concerns the tension between appearance, reality, and how the imagination plays a role in each. In Part I, Lamia's real nature is revealed, as well is her status as deceptive shape-shifter and her associations with demons and madness. There is a clear suggestion that she puts Lycius under a magic spell when he first meets her and swoons and when he is awakened by her kiss. The imagery of Lycius "tangled in her mesh" suggests she is in complete control (1, 295). In Part 2, however, Lamia loses this control as she in turn becomes the victim of Lycius's human vanity and arrogance. In his overwhelming and pathetic desire to oppress, he becomes cruel, taking delight in her sorrows, becoming "fierce and sanguineous" and he is berated as a madman (2, 75-76). Lamia even shape-shifts into a weak woman whom encompasses a mortal woman's predictable qualities: "The serpent - Ha, the serpent! certes, she / Was none" (2, 80-81). Lamia and Lycias struggle in their relationship because one of the other has control of their imagination, not both. The characters' back and forth dominance over the other illustrates the all

25. Barth, 17.

26. Barth, 17.

encompassing power of the imagination. Moreover, the illusion created by Lamia collapses under logical scrutiny. Keats demonstrates the power of the imagination by creating visions in verse which have endured, but don't last forever. It is from Lamia's imagination that the lavish decoration of the banqueting hall is created, which has such an impact on both guest and reader. Her visual form to of a nymph desired by Hermes is what refreshes and satisfies his quest and by projecting her desired image of herself to Lycias, she attains love. Keats demonstrates that illusion and the imagination are not to be disparaged as false. He demonstrates that beauty that is created by creativity, or in Lamia's case magic, may not be permanent, but it allows for the mind to enjoy the extraordinary. In the end nonetheless, Lamia withers and dies under the cold stare of the rational philosopher Apollonius, who sees through her illusion. Lycius dies as his dream is shattered.

"Isabella" is the antithesis of the Romantic happiness that failed in Keats's earlier works, and instead, focuses on the dark, twisted elements of romance and the imagination. In "Isabella", Keats mirrors Coleridge's interest in nightmares and shows how nightmares rely on clusters of negative lexical items, like "marred," "miry," and "cold doom," as integral world-building and enriching writing components (276, 280). This diction creates a dark setting and tone for which the poem takes place. Coleridge uses the demonic as a function of power in the dreaming imagination, and Keats takes this a step further by representing the dreaming imagination as an escape from dark and demonic reality. Keats told his friend John Hamilton Reynolds while he was writing Isabella,

"Imagination brought
beyond its proper bound, yet still confined...
Cannot refer to any standard law

Of either earth or heaven.”²⁷

Just as he expresses in this letter, Keats wrote Isabella to express the confines of the imaginative world. Keats emphasizes the functional experience of the nightmare world and how Isabella’s experience with Lorenzo can be explained through the consequences of creating such a world.²⁸ Imagination does not have any “laws,” but it can only be used by an individual in particular ways before it become inhibitory. For instance, Lorenzo and Isabella do not have an actual relationship until he is dead causing communication between them to almost exclusively exist within their imagination:

“They could not in the self-same mansion dwell
Without some stir of heart, some alady,
They could not sit at meals but feels how well
It soothed each to be the other by;
They could not, sure, beneath the same roof sleep
But to each other dream, and nightly weep” (3-8).

The couple loves each other based on experiences in their minds. They are imaginatively and physiologically compelled by the intensity of mental constructs. Their imaginative courtship advances their relationship prior to Lorenzo’s death, but hinders Isabella’s ability to move on. Her mind is adhered to the mental construct she made for Lorenzo when her was alive. Later, the appearance of Lorenzo’s ghost mingles beauty with horror, bringing up the question of whether or not he is physically there or if he is just a figment of Isabella’s grieving imagination. Keats uses a highly exclamatory sentence to highlight that Lorenzo is “a shadow now, alas! alas!”

27. Alwes, 65.

28. Giovanelli, 7.6.

(305). Lorenzo's ghost represents the lost world of idealistic love and the naïve belief in the power of the imagination because once his plant is taken by Isabella's brothers, Isabella is driven insane. Her nightmare causes her distress not because she is frightened, but because it ends. She must face the reality of her lover's death when there is no longer some piece of him to cling to.

The "Negative Capability" letter was written when Keats was speculated to be producing some of the highest function of his poetry,

"Several things dovetailed in my mind, & at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason. Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge. This pursued through Volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration."²⁹

Passages of *Biographia Literaria* may have been where "negative" in Keats's negative capability idea came from: "negative faith, which simply permits the images presented to work by their own force, without either denial or affirmation of their real existence by the judgment."³⁰ Keats argues that a person's potential can be defined by what he or she does not possess. Passivity, a willingness to let what is unknown and doubtful about mankind can remain as such. In a letter to

29. Bate, 230.

30. Barth, 26.

his publisher, Keats writes, "I think Poetry should surprise by a fine excess and not by Singularity- it should strike the Reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a Remembrance..."³¹ Essential to literary achievement, Keats suggests, he, as well as other poets, should break away from relentless searches for knowledge, to instead contemplate the beautiful and true. Experiences and intuitive appreciation of beauty is central to Keats's poetic talent as Keats seems to have this realization just at the right moment in his career, He begins to write at his highest level. Keats's negative capability incorporates a multitude of ideas that he believes are essential to the human experience and is his means by which he proposes those ideas in his poetry. The first idea negative capability incorporates is the ideal towards which Keats is groping contrasted with an egotistic assertion of one's identity. Negative capability, according to Marjorie Levinson, "describes an intellectual, imaginative, and moral largesse, a condition prerequisite to achievement in any dimension of human enterprise," but this generous abundance of ideas occurs first through a traumatic emptying out of identity. Keats is developing a newly occurring measure of the "sympathetic potentialities of the imagination" with proceeding to suggest the unconscious mind takes part in a substantial portion of the imagination's creative wanderings.³² This is objective realism,

"what the human mind itself contributes to what it assumes are direct perceptions of the material world- supplementing, channeling, and even helping to create them- is not...something invented or read into nature that is not really there. Instead, this cooperating creativity of the mind...are to this extend a valid and necessary

31. Bate, 234.

32. Bate, 243.

supplement in attaining the reconciliation or union of man and nature at constitutes knowledge.”³³

Contrasting objective realism with consecutive reasoning, “the piecemeal, step-by-step procedures of the analytic and selective intelligence” leads to Keats’s note of what he called the “philosophical” implications of poetry.³⁴ Through his conscious engagement with desire and death, Keats develops an ethical dimension of negative capability suggesting that an encounter with the tragic existences ushers the individual into a state of “posthumous existence” that forcibly empties the mind of personal, social, and historical certainty.³⁵ This uncertain mind is then capable of restructuring or even reinventing socially and politically ossified meanings and values. Encountering the negativity of death and yet remaining alive generates the intense psychological uncertainty that historians call his seminar on ethics the domain and the level of the experience of absolute disarray. Lacan’s term “absolute disarray,” like the “negative” in negative capability, implies a being-towards-death, a psychical state that willingly engages a liminal space between the economy of the symbolic and the similarity of the Real. Neither happiness nor pleasure should be the goal of psychoanalysis. Much of Keats’s poetry exposes the dark, delusive fantasies that create our reality. In both “*Isabella*” and “*Hyperion*,” traumatic loss is destabilization, the negative that engenders the capability. It lingers in uncertainty, beyond its aesthetic potential, embracing negativity and obstinately refusing to establish social and political constructs. In both characters of *Isabella* and *Saturn*, being-towards-death becomes a deeply-seated fidelity to the negative that, in its opposition to the values of rational calculation and

33. Bate, 238.

34. Bate, 240.

35. Castellano, 24.

accumulation, clears the ground for radical ethical transformation. In previous letters, Keats quotes “The Genius of Poetry must work out its own salvation in man: it cannot be matured by law or precept, but by sensation and watchfulness.”³⁶ Keats seems unsure of the authenticity of the imagination in his letter and it can be argued that his skepticism toward the visionary in almost all of his major narratives and lyrics is tantamount to an acceptance of the naturalized imagination central in his poetry.³⁷ This ultimately establishes negative capability as the core underlying support for Keats’s theory of imagination. Two months after Keats finished and copied out *Isabella* in September 1818, he began writing “*Hyperion*.” Interestingly, in at least in the affective state of the poems’ protagonists, *Hyperion* begins where *Isabella* ends. Like Antigone, *Isabella* crosses the threshold between life and death after the tragic loss of Lorenzo. “*Hyperion*,” moreover, depicts the deposed but immortal Saturn, neither alive nor dead; the god lies prostrate like a mortal on the sodden Earth. Through these characters, Keats explores both the aesthetic and ethical capabilities of such a “posthumous existence.”³⁸ Keats continues in “*Hyperion*” with descriptions like that of *Isabella*’s and Lorenzo’s erotic joy overshadowing the rather hackneyed situation that they face. In other words, in both *Isabella* and *Hyperion*, traumatic loss is the destabilizing, negativity that engenders the capability. Structurally, the incomplete *Hyperion* and the unpopular *Isabella* falls short of the aesthetic wholeness of Greek mythical history or the satisfaction of fulfilled courtly love, yet the longing for such traditions is

36. Barth, 232.

37. Barth, 27.

38. Leon Waldoff, *Keats and the Silent Work of Imagination*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 24.

evoked, exposing the very desire that kindled fantasies of wholeness in the first place. In the characters of Isabella and Saturn, being towards death becomes a deep-seated fidelity to the negative that, in its opposition to the values of rational calculation and accumulation, clears the ground for radical ethical transformation. Keats's "*Hyperion*" and "*Isabella*" reveal the inverse of Keats's famous statement that "[t]he imagination may be compared to Adam's dream — he awoke and found it truth," showing how significantly his theory of imagination changed over the course of his career. His poetry now exposes the delusive fantasies that create reality. Lingering in uncertainty, beyond its aesthetic potential, the imagination embraces negativity and obstinately refuses established social and political constructs.

Both unfinished drafts of "*Hyperion*" and "*The Fall of Hyperion*" seek and question identity. Keats was getting at a deeper issue of imagination's veracity through the theory of constant nourishment of one generation to the next by using the Titans as symbols of imagination and beauty. Their fall "Deep in the shady sadness of a vale... sat grey-hair'd Saturn, quiet as a stone," questions the authenticity of the imagination. The imagination, like such divine beings, might be authentic but there is no guarantee of its transcendence through time. Oceanus's speech and Apollo's ascension both point to Hyperion's concern with truth and its relationship with beauty, knowledge, and suffering. Truth is closely associated with knowledge and both are acquired through pain, which results from the understanding and acceptance of change and impermanence. However painful, truth is pure and beautiful, and what is beautiful is eternal. It is this honorable truth that the human spirit strives to attain. That is why Keats calls Hyperion, "the agonies, the strife of human hearts." Similarly, the idea of progress runs throughout the poem. The old gods with old, worn out ideas are replaced by the new gods who possess superior modern knowledge. Eventually, even the vanquished old gods come to accept the new gods as

the rightful leaders and accept their ways as right and just. These ideas are a reflection of Keats's progression as a poet. Possibly worried about his earlier 1817 poem's failures, Keats is explaining that his poetry is like the new god's ideas, novel but right and just. The poem suggests that suffering is indiscriminate when Apollo declares, "Knowledge enormous makes a God of me," (3.113). Apollo triumphs because of his understanding of human suffering. His knowledge and full understanding of the human experience allows him to gain the power of truth, which in turn allows him to be "a God" without physical force. However, because Apollo is not a human himself, he must use his imagination to conjure his interpretation of human suffering. This is what Brotemarkle calls the High Imagination. It is a pre-figurative and creative use of dreams as a communicative model. This conscious imagination really means a relation between the imagination as the one and a finite. Keats brings a sense of identity that includes an intense awareness of the mutable nature of man, yet at the same time a predisposition to the wishful notions that change is growth and that a poet's quest is heroic. Keats's myth-making take two forms: historicized beauty and turning old myths into new symbolic signifiers. Keats thinks of mythology as ancient poetry, so he expects the myths to act as emblems of human passion.³⁹ He shapes the classical mythology around the contraries of joy and melancholy making mythology itself is a symbol or mediator as an art object embodying imagination.

Keats continued to grapple with the ideas of imagination versus reality in the context of the problem of human suffering and with human dilemma. Great Odes, written in conversational styles, were probably inspired by the prologue of Coleridge's "Rime of the

39. Diane Brotemarkle, *Imagination and Myths in John Keats's Poetry*. (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1993), 83.

Ancient Mariner” prologue, and confronted ethics including act and activity, nihilism and immanent value, happiness and the growth of identify, and aesthetic and moral disinterest.⁴⁰ In the Odes, Keats assumes a sympathetic understanding between himself and each symbolic object by either extending his own sympathy towards it or attributing a sympathetic understanding of it.⁴¹ The central symbols to each of the poems are seem as feminine, immortal, and have an established relationship with the poet, so are therefore sympathetic. The odes are considered to be a group that together attempt to be a remarkable adaptation to the mutability inherent in nature and the human experience. The quest for permanence through union with a symbolic presence leads the odes inescapably to a deepened awareness of the transient nature of existence.⁴² Like Apollo in “Hyperion,” Keats has finally reached greatness in poetry. He suggests a simple formula in his odes: Humans should endure what they cannot cure, and realities should be accepted calmly, not with a defeatist mentality, but a divine frame of mind.

“Ode to Psyche” is thought of as an introduction to the other odes exploring a melancholy mood, reverence of the imagination, creativity, and a celebration of timeless, permanent beauty and love. Keats seems to be concerned with the mutability of the immortal as he reflects on his belief that gods and goddesses mirror human desires, virtues, and insights. The poem begins with a sense of melancholy: “O Goddess! Hear these tuneless numbers, wrung/ By sweet enforcement and remembrance dear” (1-2). The lines beginning with “o” derive intensity and meaning from a pained consciousness of something felt or thought to be absent.⁴³ Automatically, the poem is

40. Barth, 174.

41. Waldoff, 101.

42. Waldoff, 149.

43. Waldoff, 106.

associated with a fading presence or death suggesting that Keats is commenting on the connection between fleeting time and the imagination. The erotic scene in the first stanza gives way to a rescue fantasy in the remaining three stanzas. Although Psyche was the

“Lovliest vision for
Of all Olympu’s faded hierarchy!
Fairer than Phoebe’s sapphire-region’d star,
Or Vesper, amorous glow-worm of the sky”

she was never properly worshipped (24-27). Her goddess-like beauty, while missing deification by the post-Augustan peoples, will remain in the minds and imaginations of Keats and his readers because of the poem itself. Psyche may have been fated to disappear into mythology had it not been for Keats’s fascination with her story. The poet and goddess become the central couple in the poem because Cupid is only mentioned once as “The winged boy” (21). His act of physically writing his praise for her allowed her name and beauty to be known. Keats uses Psyche as a means of expressing his belief that the creative process involves human beings’ exploration of the untrodden regions of the human mind. Being human to Keats meant that he needed to cultivate consciousness using the imagination to make all life’s experiences a sanctuary in the mind. “Ode to Psyche” displays a young Keats’s capacity for experiencing beauty in this way. Keats’s experience of Psyche’s story is stored in his imagination, so his poem is his vessel for his imagination of beautiful, immortal Psyche. “I see, and sing, by my own eyes inspired” also suggests a new attitude of self-rescue for Keats. Through the rescue of Psyche, he is simultaneously recuing his own psyche whose concern with transience and mutability urges him to try to prevent any further fading of the goddess.⁴⁴ Keats undergoes an imaginative

44. Waldoff, 114.

restoration as a means of replacing what is felt to be lost. In this way, the imagination works as an exploration of the wilderness and Keats's own communing with his own psyche.⁴⁵ The poem can likewise be seen as a hymn to the imagination. Keats, while is very cynical of the imagination in his other odes, shows that he can build an inner paradise in which he would be insulated from the world of pains and troubles.⁴⁶ The sense of internalization at the end of the poem seems to prefigure Keats's increasing commitment to psychological concerns. Sperry suggests that "Ode to Psyche" displays intellectual growth that seems altogether to preclude an unqualified faith in the imagination. The only tentative tie "Ode to Psyche" has to the other Odes is its investigation of the imagination's ability to cope with time and change. "Ode to Psyche" is a celebration of the imagination's glories, while Keats's later written Odes act more like warnings and premonitions. "Ode on a Grecian Urn" begins to idealize a mythical world, much like "Ode to Psyche," but a world that is frozen in time, depicted on the side on a Grecian urn. Throughout the poem, it is clear that Keats yearns for the Grecian urns aesthetic beauty and imperviousness to human strife. The urn itself resides in the real world, which is subject to time and change, yet it pictures unchanging life making the figures mutable, though the urn may be changes of affected slowly over time. This makes for an intriguing paradox. In the last lines of the first stanza, Keats wonders what the scene in the urn is really depicting: "What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?/ What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?" (9-10). Keats is caught up in the excited, rapid activities depicted on the urn and moves from observer to participant in the life on the urn, in the sense that he is emotionally involved. Keats's need for human passion

45. Brokemark, 122.

46. Waldoff, 114.

in his poetry is reiterated in “Ode on a Grecian Urn” precisely because the symbol on the urn can offer a lifeless ritual. One ritual Keats perseverates on is the young couple in pursuit of a sexual encounter which will never happen:

“Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal yet, do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair! (17-20).

Keats’s enthusiasm in these lines show he is tempted by the figures escape from temporality and attracted to the eternal unchanging beauty of the female figure. The figure’s lives are superior to all transient human passion, which, in its sexual expression, inevitable leads to an abatement of intensity. The passion is satisfied, all that remains is wearied physicality. Keats believes the couple looks content in the particular moment depicted on the urn, but “leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy’d” (29). Interestingly however, the imagination that saves Keats’s lovers in the end is more supernatural than creative. He realizes while the picturesque town on one side of the urn is visually beautiful, the people can never return. He will never know the “real story” as he can only see a snapshot of their lives. The urn’s illustration’s stories can be furthered, however, in Keats’s mind. He can answer the question he has been asking the urn’s figures by making the figures pasts and futures in his mind. The final two lines, “Beauty is truth, truth beauty, -- that is all/ Ye know on Earth, and all ye need to know” explain that the imagination creates perception. Keats sees the urn and its stories as beautiful, but the urn is only beautiful because in Keats’s mind, the figures are real. His perception of the stories may be different from another observer’s. Truth is beauty because perception is the imagination’s truth.

“Ode to a Nightingale,” considered Keats’s “Greater Ode,” is an intense meditation of the contrast between the painful mortality that defines human existence and the immortal beauty found in the nightingale’s carefree song. Keats considers poetry’s ability to create a kind of rapt suspended state between the two. At first, “Ode to a Nightingale” deals with death with the metaphor for a state of mind in which all anxieties and tensions are dissolved in a moment of luxurious sensation. The loveliness of the bird’s song leads the narrator to describe the bird as a transcendent maker of beauty and question if he is awake or asleep: “That thou, light-wingèd Dryad of the trees/ In some melodious plot” (7-8). The nightingale is compared with a spirit of the woods, a "dryad," because nature’s beauty casts a magical spell on the imagination, an idea that develops further throughout the poem. Stanza two presents the ways Keats seeks release from the mortal pains of the world as the poem’s progress from wine to poetry to death mirrors the mind’s absorption of the sensuous, the imaginative, and the spiritual self. The bird’s song has an intoxication impact on the narrator and seems to lift him from the physical world as if the surrounding nature has magical qualities:

“O, for a draught of vintage! That hath been
Cool’d a long age in the deep-devled earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
Dance, and Provencal song, and sunburnt mirth!” (11-14).

The description of drinking and the imagined world with wine is idealized. Wine, like his imagination, promises a temporary release from dreadful realities. The beautiful images previously in his mind were creative sparks of his imagination that he consciously drew upon in order to escape facts of his existence. Within this rich nook of the imagination, protected from

dull reality, darkness has a powerful allure, and imagines a kind of consummation with the nightingale in which Keats expires while listening to the bird's ecstatic song:

“Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!” (55-58).

Happy being within his own mind, Keats questions whether in death he could stay in this happy, fabricated place. Overarching, “Ode to a Nightingale” deals with death as a metaphor for a state of mind in which all anxieties and tensions are dissolved in a moment of luxurious sensation. Keats knows that while the immortal bird would continue singing, he would be no more than an inert, insensible mass: ‘Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain – / To thy high requiem become a sod.’ (59-60). As the nightingale’s song fades, Keats accuses his imagination of deceitfulness, for it can cheat him into believing fictitious realities but not to the extent that he is unaware he is being cheated. He is confused by both the nightingale’s music and the despairs of human life, therefore ending the poem with a question: “Was it’s a vision, or a waking dream?/ Fled is that music:- Do I wake or sleep?” (79-80). These lines question the imagination and suggest that the internalized image of the symbolic bird and Keats’s experience have not disappeared, but are strong enough in his state of mind to make him doubt his powers of perception.⁴⁷ The uncertainty with which the poem ends is due to the profound impression the internalized image of the symbolic bird persists in making on the poet in contrast to the real world of which he is now again so well aware.⁴⁸ “Ode to a Nightingale” is drastically more

47. Waldoff, 131.

48. Waldoff, 132.

complicated and ambitious than his contemporary's odes as "The Greater Ode" is not so much an attack on imagination, but an attempt to use the power of the soul's entirety.

Ode on Melancholy can be seen as an open acceptance of the mutability inherent in nature and human experience.⁴⁹ The idea of writing an ode on melancholy suggests that Keats made an effort to examine the psychological process that renders all thoughts and experiences in the shadowy cast of a mournful sense of loss, and it seems as if he attempts to confront his own melancholy. Due to the death of his brother George in 1818, examining the mourning process had been a large part of his imagination and thought process.⁵⁰ The poem begins with three negative words, "No, no, go not to Lethe," setting up the poem to match its negative title (1). However, the rest of the stanza proves to be more helpful. The remedy for melancholy for common people would be something that makes them unconscious of sadness and pain, but to experience true melancholy, all senses must be stimulated. Keats explains that beauty and melancholy are intertwined in the world and both offer a complete view of life when occurring in tandem. These images of paradox represent a figurative equivalent of Keats's sense of a deeper interfusion of things.⁵¹ Instead of telling readers to break free of their melancholy, Keats suggests enduring it because then beauty is looks like it is "from heaven like a weeping cloud" (12). The poem's imagery represents this seizing, internalization of Keats's imagination. "Or on the rainbow of salt-sand and wave,/ Or on the wealth of globed peonies" (16 and 17). A person in a state of melancholy can imagine the beauty of their surroundings despite their internal gloom because he or she can remember what the world appears in happiness. Melancholy comes to the

49. Waldoff, 148.

50. Bate, 300.

51. Waldoff, 154.

person who knows that the raptures and ecstasies of the beautiful and pleasurable are tragically short lived. A dull and blunt soul incapable of experiencing the intensity of pleasure cannot also experience acute pain. Therefore, the sharpness of consciousness resolves pain and pleasure in the act of contemplation of either of them. The poem's imagery celebrates the sensuousness and joyousness of life and experiences. Melancholy is never described as totally paralyzing and is associated with a quest, perhaps because Keats felt intrinsically that a quest for renewal of imagination's struggles was the best defense against despair.⁵² Life seems to have perplexed Keats with its abundance of melancholy, but he finds a solution in his own binaries. "Ode to Melancholy" proposes his idea of simultaneous understanding, experience, and acceptance as a way of making opposites complete reality.

Written with the same sense of conflict and ambiguity as the earlier odes, "To Autumn" is unconventional in the sense that it is one Keats's only odes in which the poet is completely removed and because the poem celebrates autumn, a season generally regarded by other poets as a time of sadness. The poem is a metaphor in which Autumn is an androgynous figure.⁵³ In the first stanza, autumn is a

"Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun:
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatched eaves run;"

like a friendly conspirator working to bring the earth to a state of perfection (1-4). The ripeness of the season represents the ripeness of Keats's poetry and imagination. "To Autumn" is the

52. Waldoff, 150.

53. Awles, 1.

result of Keats's internalization of the sorrows of the Earth experienced in the fall and it exemplifies the creative process produced by this sorrow. The language referring to the elusive imagination that Keats struggled to contain is not present in this poem. His identity seems to ooze into the language of the poem through the metaphor and as he finally comes to his complete understanding of the imagination. In the second stanza, autumn begins to change suggesting the quick coming of winter:

“Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
Among the river shallows, borne aloft
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
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” (27-33).

The poem's full and lethargic stanzas such as this create an atmosphere of observant calmness. All of the images procured take a hypnotic tone, pulling the reader into the season. The form of "To Autumn" suggests that autumn has previously experienced the things Keats is describing. Sorrow for the coming winter is softened because of the final stanza, in which autumn is seen as a musician, and the music which autumn produces is as pleasant as the music of spring. This is because with the passing of autumn comes winter and with the passing of winter come spring. The poem focuses on regeneration, indicating Keats's discovery of the transforming ephemerality and the fact that the seasons are an ethereal cycle. Keats celebrates life because it is never ending. Autumn is the perfect symbol of permanence that Keats sought throughout most of his career. The season is within the feverous realm of the imagination and provides Keats's

imagination with a final outlet for his perceptions. "To Autumn" is strikingly simple, yet ties together complex objectives from his earlier poetry. The poem denotes experience, wisdom, knowledge and the ability to accept the inevitable leaving room for the imagination to take its course.

During 1820, Keats displayed increasingly serious symptoms of tuberculosis, suffering two lung hemorrhages in the first few days of February. The first months of 1821 marked a slow and steady decline into the final stage of tuberculosis.⁵⁴ John Keats died in Rome on February 23, 1821 and was buried in the Protestant Cemetery, Rome. His last request was to be placed under a tombstone with no name or date, but only the words, "Here lies One whose name was writ in water."⁵⁵ Keats's view of the imagination changed throughout his career as he matured and grew from his own experiences. In Keats's biography, Walter Jackson Bate said, "When the imagination looks to any past, of course, including one's own individual past, it blends memories and images into a denser, more massive unit than ever existed in actuality. This frailty -- as well as consolation -- of the human imagination, occasional in all poetry, gradually became endemic in the later eighteenth century as was to continue to embarrass the literary conscience of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries," which perfectly describes Keats's theory of imagination.⁵⁶

Keats saw the imagination as supreme and used his poetry to develop an intimate relationship with the world around him. To Keats, the imagination is ultimately so powerful that it breaks the laws people living solely in the real world are accustomed to. Mixing the imaginative world and real world was important to Keats because with one another life would be

54. Bate, 738.

55. Bate, 738.

56. Bate, 144.

ugly. "Endymion" represents Keats's sexual, young imagination and the last of his Odes, "To Autumn" represents his somewhat cynical, but clear interpretation of the imagination's functions in entirety. By the end of his life, Keats's theory amounted to an accumulation of ideas he obtained through his life: creating art of beauty and permanence, allowed the individual to transcend the fleeting experiences of this world. However, the human imagination can only exist within time and within the human brain, which is itself subject to death and decay.

Annotated Bibliography

Alwes, Karla. *Imagination Transformed: The Evolution of the Female Character in Keats's Poetry*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993.

Alwes introduction points out the duality of Keats's female characters. Keats's somewhat misogynist perspective mirrors that of Apollo, which creates the "femmes fatales" character: a woman who is both the physical and feminine embodiment of an imagination that attempts to desert the Earth. Looking at Keats's beginning poetry, like his poems in 1817, it is easy to see why he later abandons the "bloomy" female figure; She does not keep the imagination of a man. Like Cynthia in *Endymion*, these females derive their power from celibacy. Keats's association of loss of self with an intensity of pleasure testifies to his idea of sexuality as omnipotent in the creation of poetry. Loss of self through "dying" is auto-erotic. Alwes focuses on *Endymion* next, comparing it to Romeo and Juliet like Keats did in his letter to J.H. Reynolds. As stated above, Cynthia is not a typical symbol, but rather the embodiment of eternity, immortality, and perfect beauty. Keats made her a symbol of his early imagination, which will evolve into a replacement with more powerful goddesses. When comparing the awakening of Endymion and Porphyro in *The Eve of St. Agnes*, the dreamers have very different responses. These differences lie in the situations that evoke the dreams and Keats's changing perception of the dream state. Keats is able to use the maiden's suffering as a means of stimulating the imagination, which he will eventually do in most of his poetry regardless of justification. As an agent of the imagination, the female as persona is characterized as mortal. During Keats's dying days the juxtaposition between women and cancer coincides with why women are seem as "morally responsible or guilty in his poetry. Unusually, Porphyro is a male catalyst to the imagination in *The Eve of St. Agnes*, and Madaeline is the only mortal female character who is neither abandoned by a male or the imagination. In later unions of mortal and immortal, it is important that the male be the mortal and vulnerable of the pair because he will be the one who seeks change through the female. Likewise, in *St. Agnes*, religion is a theme that is inferior to the imagination. Religion is important however, as a major force of in the dichotomy of the female, as the two dominant characters in the church, Eve and Mary, show. Keats's need for human passion in his poetry is reiterated in *Ode on a Grecian Urn* because like religion, the symbol on the urn can offer a lifeless ritual. Interestingly however, the imagination that saves Keats's lovers in the end is more supernatural than creative. Alwes next directs her attention to *Hyperion* by drawing the comparison between the Titans and their seemingly human counterparts in *The Eve of St. Agnes*. Saturn's defeat is not only the defeat of mortality but also of time; Time is a defining and limiting characteristic of mortality itself. The battle is a contract between the "stone" nature of the Titans and the emotional, feminine expressiveness of Apollo. Like Edgar in King Lear, he survived by forsaking his masculine identity, his true self, and instead feigned madness. When shutting the lady's eyes, the knight-at-arms seeks her loss of vision and direction but loses his instead. His action enforces a passivity upon the lady. Elusiveness is a trait thus obtained by both genders in this poem. *Lamia* is discussed next. A parallel is drawn between Lamina and the serpent goddess Nina: these women are the incarceration of the flash of female sexuality in its most irredeemable terrifying form. Lamia is also aligned with mythical Ariadne as Alwes claims they are both vulnerable. The female's ability to elude and delude the male makes her dangerous, and this is shown in her ability to change shape and character. If it is a sexually procreative,

somewhat phallic image that is produced from the fusion of a female and serpent, then the confusion of the lamia's identity lies with the male. Finally, Alwes discusses that the final figure in "To Autumn" is not female or any gender but rather is the process of poetic maturity.

Bate, Walter Jackson. *John Keats*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963.

Walter Jackson Bate's biography begins with a description of Keats's early life, especially focusing on the lack of stabilization and security in the Keats children's lives. When he was eight his father died after falling off of a horse and his mother died when he was fourteen from tuberculosis. He and his siblings were sent to live with Richard Abbey, and around this time Keats left school to apprentice with an apothecary and surgeon, Thomas Hammond. Having finished his apprenticeship with Hammond, Keats registered as a medical student at Guy's Hospital and began studying there in October 1815. Within a month of starting, he was accepted as a dresser at the hospital, assisting surgeons during operations, a position that marked a distinct aptitude for medicine. However, Keats's training took up increasing amounts of his writing time, and he was increasingly ambivalent about his medical career. He had written his first poem, "An Imitation of Spenser," in 1814, when he was nineteen. He suffered periods of depression. In 1816, Keats received his apothecary's license, but before the end of the year he announced to his guardian that he was resolved to be a poet, not a surgeon. Although he continued his work and training at Guy's, Keats devoted more and more time to the study of literature, experimenting with verse forms, particularly the sonnet. In May 1816, Leigh Hunt agreed to publish the sonnet "O Solitude" in his magazine, *The Examiner*, a leading liberal magazine of the day. It was the first appearance in print of Keats's poetry. In the summer of that year, Keats went with a friend to the seaside town of Margate to write. There he began the era of his great letter writing. Five months later came the publication of *Poems*, the first volume of Keats's verse, which included "I stood tiptoe" and "Sleep and Poetry," both strongly influenced by Hunt. The book was a critical failure, arousing little interest, although Reynolds reviewed it favorably in *The Champion*. The April before starting to write *Endymion*, Keats termed "negative capability" in his most talked about, yet confusing, letter to his brothers. Keats's new and progressive publishers Taylor and Hessey issued *Endymion*, which Keats dedicated to Thomas Chatterton, a work that he termed "a trial of my Powers of Imagination". A particularly harsh review by John Wilson Croker appeared in the April 1818 edition of *The Quarterly Review*. He composed five of his six great odes at Wentworth Place, although it is debated in which order they were written, "Ode to Psyche" opened the published series. "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and "Ode on Melancholy" were inspired by sonnet forms and probably written after "Ode to a Nightingale". In 1819, Keats wrote "The Eve of St. Agnes", "La Belle Dame sans Merci", "Hyperion", "Lamia" and a play, *Otho the Great*. The poems "Fancy" and "Bards of passion and of mirth" were inspired by the garden of Wentworth Place. Here, Bate stops to explain how Keats arranged the words in his poetry with charts. In September, Keats, very short of money and in despair, considered taking up journalism or a post as a ship's surgeon. Instead, he approached his publishers with a new book of poems. The final volume Keats lived to see, *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems*, was eventually published in July 1820. Fanny Brawne and her widowed mother moved into the other half of Dilke's Wentworth Place, and Keats and Brawne were able to see each other every day. Keats began to lend Brawne books, and they would read together. He gave her the love sonnet "Bright Star" as a declaration. It was a work in progress which he continued at until

the last months of his life, and the poem came to be associated with their relationship. Keats endured great conflict knowing his expectations as a struggling poet in increasingly hard straits would preclude marriage to Brawne. During 1820, Keats displayed increasingly serious symptoms of tuberculosis, suffering two lung hemorrhages in the first few days of February. The first months of 1821 marked a slow and steady decline into the final stage of tuberculosis. John Keats died in Rome on 23 February 1821 and was buried in the Protestant Cemetery, Rome. His last request was to be placed under a tombstone with no name or date, but only the words, "Here lies One whose name was writ in water."

Barth, Robert J. and John L. Mahoney. *Coleridge, Keats, and the Imagination: Romanticism and Adam's Dream: Essays in Honor of Walter Jackson Bate*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989.

The book starts with a short biography of Walter Jackson Bates including his family's struggle during the depression, his schooling at Harvard, and his works on Keats and Jackson. Next, there is an essay on Keats's and Coleridge's relationship: their accounts of their only meeting and how drastically Coleridge influenced Keats's 1918 works. The author of this essay suggests that there are three major ways in which Coleridge influenced Keats: *Christabel* on Keats's gothicism, conversational style poems on the Odes, and lastly, *Biographia Literaria* on Keats's ideas of imagination. The author, Thomas McFarland, compares *Christabel's* gothic elements to Keats's *The Eve of St. Angles* and *Lamia*. He connects the contrast of invisible and visible things of the universe in Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner's* prologue to the inspiration of basic plots in Keats's Odes. More likely however, the author suggests Coleridge's conversation poems contain verbal echoes and imitation of the actual human process of thinking. Lastly in this section, the author looks at Keats's letters to formulate what Keats believed to be negative capability. The next chapter is about the role of the symbol in Romantic imagination. To begin to explain this, the author defines imagination in the context of nature by suggesting the Romantic emphasis on nature was an imaginative infestation of the "cognizance of external objects" (32). Highlighting Wordsworth, De Man, and Coleridge, the symbol is signified as the coincidence and fusion of the expressed and inexpressible. The Romantics had the symbol deeply intertwined with their imaginative emphasis on nature and therefore their imaginative emphasis on imagination. The next essay is on the dreaming imagination of Coleridge who uses the demonic as a function of power. Keats who portrays a reversion of power through hopeless love, and Wordsworth who seeks a language of power through human sacrifice. The second section of the essay focuses on Keats. It suggests that his use of ironic language when metaphorizing the imagination as a dream, "imparts the conviction that Imagination and its empyreal reflection is the same as human Life and its spiritual repetition," as he states in his letter about Adam's dream. In the rest of the section, the author compares the opposite nature of the dreams in *The Eve of St. Agnes* and *La Belle Dame*. The next few essays are about Coleridge, but the last two focus entirely on Keats. The first is written by author Lockridge and narrows in on Keats's theory of imagination's relationship to ethics. Keats confronted ethical questions directly because of the brevity of his life and career. Such ethics include act and activity, nihilism and immanent value, happiness and the growth of identify, and aesthetic and moral disinterest. These four oppositions are reflected in *Hyperion*, *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, *Ode on Indolence*, *Ode on Melancholy*, and *To Autumn*, all of which Lockridge analyzes in the context of Keats's worldly experiences and therefore state of mind at the time they were written. The last essay is

written by Paul Sheats and is primarily focused on *Ode to a Nightingale*. He begins by explaining that Keats's ode is drastically more complicated and ambitious than his contemporary's odes because it is more stanzatic and changes rhyme, length, and meter. Sheats concludes that "the greater ode" is not so much an attack on imagination but an attempt to use the power of the soul's entirety.

Blades, John. *John Keats: The Poems*. New York; Houndmills [England];: Palgrave, 2002.

Book of John Keats's poems including the Odes of 1819, *Hyperion*, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, *Endymion*, *Lamia*, and many others.

Brotemarkle, Diane. *Imagination and Myths in John Keats's Poetry*. San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1993.

This book begins by differentiating Keats from the other Romantic poets because he did not respond to the natural sublime or observed nature, but from the fine arts and "intellectual humility" (1). In *Hyperion*, Keats was getting at a deeper issue of imagination's veracity through the theory of constant nourishment of one generation to the next by using the Titans as symbols of imagination and beauty. Their fall questions the authenticity of the imagination; it might be authentic but there is no guarantee of its transcendence through time. The Elgin Marbles are an example of art that inspired Keats. To him they signified the embodiment of the imagination in the human world, like the Grecian Urn. In "Ode to Psyche", Keats plays with quasi-states of consciousness which are echoed by the narrator. This questions whether an experience is a dream or reality and of time or eternity. He also corroborates this in "Ode to a Nightingale" where the loveliness of the bird's song leads him to describe the bird as a transcendent maker of beauty and question if he is awake or asleep. Brotemarkle suggests "Ode to Psyche" lists two ways the imagination works: an exploration of the wilderness and Keats's own communing with his own psyche. *Lamia* is reflective of Keats's visual imagination. The poem is a melancholic exploration of opposite states of mind, while also containing many symbols of beauty that can be either transcendental or not. The poem can be read as an allegory of the artistic process. If the finite human imagination must take on a sacrificial role at some stage of artistic development. Brotemarkle says that Keats thinks of mythology as ancient poetry; He expects the myths to act as emblems of human passion. He shapes the classical mythology around the contraries of joy and melancholy. Mythology itself is a symbol or mediator as an art object embodying imagination. Keats's myth-making take two forms: historicized beauty and turning old myths into new symbolic signifiers. What Brotemarkle calls the High Imagination is pre-figurative and creative and uses dreams as a communicative model. This imagination really means a relation between the Imagination as the one and a finite imagination.

Castellano, Katey. "'Why Linger at the Yawning Tomb so Long?': The Ethics of Negative Capability in Keats's *Isabella* and *Hyperion*." *Partial Answers* 8, no. 1 (2010): 23-38.

Castellano suggests that through his conscious engagement with desire and death, Keats develops an ethical dimension of negative capability. Keats's concept of negative capability suggests that an encounter with the tragic existences ushers the individual into a state of

“posthumous existence” that forcibly empties the mind of personal, social, and historical certainty. This uncertain mind is then capable of restructuring or even reinventing socially and politically ossified meanings and values. Encountering the negativity of death and yet remaining alive generates the intense psychological uncertainty that historians call his seminar on ethics calls the domain and the level of the experience of absolute disarray. Lacan’s term “absolute disarray,” like the “negative” in negative capability, implies a being-towards-death, a psychical state that willingly engages a liminal space between the economy of the symbolic and the similarity of the Real. Neither happiness nor pleasure should be the goal of psychoanalysis. Two months after Keats finished and copied out *Isabella* in September 1818, he began writing *Hyperion*: at least in the affective state of the poems’ protagonists, *Hyperion* begins where *Isabella* ends. Like Antigone, Isabella crosses the threshold between life and death after the tragic loss of Lorenzo. *Hyperion*, moreover, depicts the deposed but immortal Saturn, neither alive nor dead; the god lies prostrate like a mortal on the sodden ground. Through these characters, Keats explores both the aesthetic and ethical capabilities of such a “posthumous existence.” Initially, Keats’s descriptions of Isabella’s and Lorenzo’s erotic joy are overshadowed by the rather hackneyed situation that they face. Negative capability, according to Marjorie Levinson, “describes an intellectual, imaginative, and moral largesse, a condition prerequisite to achievement in any dimension of human enterprise”, but this generous abundance of ideas occurs first, as I have been arguing here, through a traumatic emptying out of identity. In other words, in both *Isabella* and *Hyperion*, traumatic loss is destabilization, the negative that engenders the capability. Structurally, the incomplete *Hyperion* and the “smokable” *Isabella* falls short of the aesthetic wholeness of Greek mythical history or the satisfaction of fulfilled courtly love, yet the longing for such traditions is evoked, exposing the very desire that kindled fantasies of wholeness in the first place. In other words, Keats’s *Hyperion* and *Isabella* reveal the inverse of Keats’s famous statement that “[t]he imagination may be compared to Adam’s dream — he awoke and found it truth”. His poetry also exposes the delusive fantasies that create our reality. Lingering in uncertainty, beyond its aesthetic potential, embraces negativity and obstinately refuses established social and political constructs. In the characters of Isabella and Saturn, moreover, this being-towards-death becomes a deep-seated fidelity to the negative that, in its opposition to the values of rational calculation and accumulation, clears the ground for radical ethical transformation.

Fermanis, Porscha. *John Keats and the Ideas of the Enlightenment*, Edinburgh University Press, 2009. ProQuest Ebook Central.

Fermanis considers this the first book length consideration of the relationship between Keats and the ideas of the Enlightenment. The introduction chapter contemplates the idea that the Romantic movement is an improvement or correction to facile and reductive Enlightenment understanding. John Keats is generally considered to be the least intellectually sophisticated of all the major Romantic poets, but he was a more serious thinker than either his contemporaries or later scholars have acknowledged. Fermanis approaches Keats’s poetry in this way to confront some of the standard assumptions of conventional scholarship to his work. Fermanis provides a major reassessment of Keats’s intellectual life by considering his engagement with a formidable body of eighteenth-century thought from the work of Voltaire, Robertson, and Gibbon to Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith. By the time Keats wrote *Endymion* the philosophic history of the early, late Enlightenment had been challenged by an emerging sentimentalist interest in history

as internal expressive memoir or biography, which Keats rejected in his first “test”, as Fermanis put it, of the imagination. By demonstrating that the language and ideas of the Enlightenment played a key role in establishing his poetic agenda, Keats's poetry is shown to be less the expression of an intuitive young genius than the product of the cultural and intellectual contexts of his time. Hyperion is influenced by French, like Voltaire, and Scottish Enlightenment philosophy that speculated about the dual tropes of the “primitive encounter” and the history of its stages like the Titans and Olympians (66). Fermanis states that the play has an imperialistic flavor and links the Titans to Native Americans. Like the Native Americans, the Titans are astounded at their loss of power, demonstrating a passive understanding of the forces at play with their overthrow. Critics have made connections between Apollo and Napoleon or an ambivalent, modern Columbus figure.

Giovanelli, Marcello. *Text World Theory and Keats' Poetry: The Cognitive Poetics of Desire, Dreams and Nightmares*. 1st ed. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013; 2015;.

Giovanelli begins his introduction by explaining what his book represents: the first full length study of John Keats using the text world theory aiming to account for the use of dreams, desires, and nightmares. In Chapter 2, he presents an overview of the text world theory. Chapter 3 is mainly about the psychology and sleep medicine behind dreaming, while Chapter 4 provides an overview of modality. Chapter 5 is a detailed analysis of “The Eve of St. Agnes”, Chapter 6 aims to explain and explore the nightmare world, and Chapters 7, 8, and 9 are the final analytical section of Giovanelli’s study. For my purposes, I will focus on Chapters 6 and 7. Chapter 6 builds on Giovanelli’s distinction between desire and a dream world to create an extreme type of world: the nightmare world. The chapter takes the point of view that literature can emulate nightmares because as readers are so engaged in the text, they are imaginatively and physiologically compelled by the intensity of mental images. He explores Coleridge’s interest in nightmares and provides an overview of how nightmares rely on “clusters of negative lexical items as integral world-building and enriching components,” which he anticipates further in Chapter 7 with “Isabella”. He emphasizes the functional experience of the nightmare world and how with a critical reading of the poem, Isabella’s experience with Lorenzo can be explained through the consequences of creating such a world. The chapter points out Keats’ own philosophy on trauma as an essential part of the human experience. The deaths he has experienced, especially his mother’s, influenced his imagination of the darkness of a nightmare world.

Strout, Irina I. "Nature's Calling: The Evolution of Sexuality and Poetic Imagination in John Keats's 1817-1820 Poetry." *South Central Review: The Journal of the South Central Modern Language Association* 33, no. 3 (2016): 127.

Strout begins her article with an overview of the Romantic poet’s view of sexual love and erotic passions and then goes on to contrast John Keats different sense of the fluid self and therefore his different view on “life sensations”. She states that in Keats 1817-1820 poetry, he progresses from an adolescent fascination with sexuality to a more dangerous realization of sexuality’s limitations. She explains that “Endymion” is what some scholars believe to be a search of imagination for the beauty and truth in ones search for love, immortality, and poetic achievement. Strout relays each book’s action. While describing the poem’s sexuality, Strout

identifies sexual acts, themselves a blending of two individuals, as the blending of Earth and Heaven or a poet and his imagination. Despite various interpretations of the end of the poem, Strout suggests it represents the conflict between reality and the imagination. Endymion's love for the goddess and erotic desire for the maiden are ultimately the same, showing that while their love is earthly, erotic love has "supreme value". After summarizing and commenting on "The Eve of St. Agnes" and "La Belle Dame sans Merci: A Ballad", Strout focuses on "Lamia". She says this in "Lamia" the sexual union between a mortal man and supernatural woman changes. Lamina is one of many female characters in Keat's poetry that has a conflicted identity. She is a part of the poetic imagination because she both in the human and immortal worlds, however, is destroyed by reality. The poem is driven by the abundant sexual imagery of Venus, but is halted by Lycius' marriage proposal. Sexual passion ceases when Lycius' passionate imagination fails. Strout suggests that Keat's poetry is transformed during the years these poems were written in terms of sexuality that defines creativity and the imagination. She states that "an erotic fulfillment and the unity with the poet's imagination will allow for a poetic chief intensity to be achieved after all" ().

Waldoff, Leon, 1935. *Keats and the Silent Work of Imagination*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985.

This book examines the concept, theme, and role of imagination in Keats's poetry and development. Waldoff defines imagination in three ways in his preface and points out that there is a distinct difference between the conscious and unconscious creative imagination. The imagination is conceived at the mind's eye and is concerned with what is absent. Keats's sense of unconscious workings is directly linked to thought and feeling in conflict with reason and the consciousness. While he never explicitly addresses the idea of repressed feelings, he has a strong sense of how the imagination is continually disturbed by inner longings. This lies somewhere between Coleridge and Freud's ideas on the unconscious. Endymion represents the mind of Keats as a young poet who is consumed with idealized humanity, including the visionary imagination. He shows himself as a young man filled with thoughts of physical beauty and sexual passion, while also showing his tendency to think of imagination as engaged in a heroic struggle. Waldoff suggests that much of the significance of the quest as it relates to an understanding of Keats's imagination is revealed in Book 2 when the goddess makes her fourth appearance. The quest for permanence in this scene involves longing for a merger with a symbol of beauty. Each book of the poem shows the development of Keats's ideas, as *Endymion* represents the earliest internal quest-romance, which he improves upon in the next two years. *The Eve of St. Agnes* is the best poem to represent the recurrent theme of dreams as Keats's sense of the visionary capacity for the imagination. Madeline awakens from her dream to find it a truth in that she thinks that she is "deceiving thing" and feels as though she has truly awakened. While Madeline is a dreamer, Porphyro uses his imagination to trick Madeline and make her dream ironic. Keats uses a lot of eye and sight imagery when describing Porphyro's imagination, yet he represents a misleading imagination that can be seizing and adaptive. In Keats's great odes, the central symbols to each of the poems are seen as feminine, immortal, and have an established relationship with the poet, so are therefore sympathetic. "Ode to Psyche" is thought of as an introduction to the other odes because the only tentative tie it has to the other odes is its investigation of the imagination's ability to cope with time and change. Separately, it explores a melancholy mood, reverence of the imagination, a creative mood, and a celebration of timeless,

permanent beauty and love. "Ode to a Nightingale" at first deals with death with the metaphor for a state of mind in which all anxieties and tensions are dissolved in a moment of luxurious sensation. The nightingale has been integrated into the cultural imagination of Keats's mind even after the conclusion of the poem. Similarly, "Ode on a Grecian Urn" possesses a world halted in a moment of ecstatic intensity, and differs really only in content and sexual suspense. In contrast, "Ode to Melancholy" is more of an open acceptance of the mutability inherent in nature and human experience. Internalization is the dominant strategy of the speaker in the poem as there is no specific symbol like the others. "To Autumn" seems to be an accumulation of the earlier odes. It represents an effortless advance towards a temporary resolution. Waldoff summarizes the importance of the mythological lamias and then goes on to explain that the scene of Lycius's death is central to the idea that his identity has become fatally intertwined with the illusion of a feminine ideal hides behind the lamia. His death is a metaphor for the consequence of losing his masculine identity to the image of a phallic woman. Finally, Waldoff addresses *The Fall of Hyperion* as the poem that deals the most with identity. Keats brings a sense of identity that includes an intense awareness of the mutable nature of man, yet at the same time a predisposition to the wishful notions that change is growth and that a poet's quest is heroic.