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**Death and desire in the texts of John Keats: The “weight of
utterless thought”**

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Lehigh University, 1987

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DEATH AND DESIRE IN THE TEXTS OF JOHN KEATS:
THE "WEIGHT OF UTTERLESS THOUGHT"

by
David Earl Williams

A Dissertation
Presented to the Graduate Committee
of Lehigh University
in Candidacy for the Degree of
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"Death, for him, had a profoundly erotic significance -- it became a symbol for consummation; and love, just as significantly, meant death." Conrad Aiken, "John Keats"

Death and Desire in the Texts of John Keats:

The "Weight of Utterless Thought"

In only three years (1717-19) John Keats wrote himself into the English canon as one of the greatest Romantic poets. This burst of creativity bears the influences of his parents' and brother's deaths. As a result, death became a dominant theme in his poems, overtly, as in "When I Have Fears," and more subtly, for example in what Gittings calls "the most serene poem in the English language," the ode "To Autumn." Coupled with the current of death is the complementary theme of desire, specifically erotic love. Together these forces move ambivalently ("everywhere in his poetry the ideas of love and death are ambivalent" Aiken, "John Keats") through the poems and simultaneously within the coterminous letters.

In Keats's first major effort, the epic "Endymion," he strives to "fill 4000 lines of bare circumstance" with "verses fit to live." The poem declares Keats's debt to the search, to questing. It is the contention of this paper that the direction and energy (if not the

cause itself) for the search are a result of the author's unconscious desire to heal the wounds left by the deaths of his family members, his mother in particular.

Examining what Freud called "Eros" and "Thanatos," the drives of sex and death respectively, as they appear as hints and glares in the texts yields a network of interrelated motifs. Not only are sex and death characterized in multiple configurations, for example in unison (as in "Ode to a Nightingale") or antithetically (as in "To Autumn"), but they emerge in numerous guises as ambivalence, enclosure, desire for immortality, and as a seeking for a purer means of communication. In whatever mode, the core forces in Keats's writing attest to an unbroken bond among the poet, his desires, and his work.

"A poetic 'text,' as I interpret it, is not a gathering of signs on a page, but is a psychic battlefield upon which authentic forces struggle for the only victory worth winning, the divinating triumph over oblivion...."
Bloom, Poetry and Repression

Keats: "The Weight of Utterless Thought"

Death entered young John Keats's life perhaps more than average, certainly leaving more overt repercussions. Mr. Keats died when John was nine, an event affecting his psycho-sexual development. When Keats was thirteen, he nursed his mother as she lay ill from tuberculosis. There is an anecdote, told by Bate (and Trilling and Ward) in his seminal biography,¹ about the young guardian fiercely blocking the doorway to his mother's boudoir with his toy sword. Both death and desire appear in this image, attesting to Keats's willing but undeveloped erotic desires. The forces are present in this dynamic scene which will eventually mark the grand poetry of the Keats still to come. They are also present in a parallel fashion, both superficially and potentially, in the poetry. For the young guard, his phallic emblem represents both an adolescent's

unconscious Oedipal wish to be master in his mother's bedroom and to castrate any rival paternal figure. Yet like this aggressively protective action that both doubles and screens ulterior wishes, the poetry also attacks the subject of death, ambiguously closing and opening the forces of desire which play against the notion of death.

The little warrior posturing against intruders and against the unassailable power of death mirrors the unconscious desire to replace his father as the "sword bearer" in his mother's bedroom. The poetry bears the imprint of these overt and screened meanings. Death and desire are the focus of study on the literal level as they use this surface stage to join and separate, covering and displaying the darker undercurrents at the same time. Keats's poetry is a veil, at once burying the unwanted, like Lorenzos's head,² but, like Isabella's remarkable, supernatural ability to see her lover's corpse through the earth, the poetry also opens its own doors to the repressed worlds within.

What underlies the nightingale's seductive song and Endymion's quest for the ideal and even what moves like a spectre around Keats himself (as he struggles with his feelings for Fanny Brawne) is the shapeless, invisible but constant duality of eros and thanatos, the structuring elements of his poetry and life. The center

of Keats's poems lies off-center, guarded but accessible. It shows itself by a tortuous path, as if through intermediaries, like a message "...told/ By a cavern wind unto a forest old;/ And then the forest told it in a dream/ To a sleeping lake...."³ The off-center focus, like Keats's own more sophisticated and provocative oxymorons, both disfigures and enlightens; it plays hide and seek with the perceiver while it moves through the background, through the source itself, through the Other,⁴ and through Keats's unconscious, to play its will upon the layers above.

The ripples of this will, their waves against the shore, is the focus of this paper. By examining the patterns in the beach sand and inferring backward, by using skills similar to those of the archaeologist,⁵ the past appears, capable of a reading, if only in the way a message can be read beneath the surface layer of a palimpsest. The subtext of John Keats's poems, letters, and even of his life's actions reveals or hints of the knotted surface texts and the unconscious cause, the unconscious motivations and influences lying enmeshed in the author's psyche.

Throughout Keats's life and poems overt patterns become visible against these submerged patterns. Both reflect the shadow of the the author's center. The hidden core leaves traces behind, like the solitary

electron, which, as Heisenberg points out, may have its position located according to probability. At the center of Keats's psyche is elusive desire, the emptying (w)hole that sparks chain-like repercussions reaching and affecting the surface.⁶

In the literal surface level of the poems and in the dailey experiences of Keats's life, the core eludes conscious-ness (necessarily, as it eludes itself), yet it makes itself felt as an undercurrent, as the attraction of the "known Unknown," (Stillinger 155, "Endymion," II 739). Keats's great quest, mirrored in the searches in the poems,⁷ is for himself; yet like his own deep center, he cannot find himself. The search, a form of desire, creates itself. His quest, like Endymions's, takes him from the deepest recesses to the sublime limits of language.

The fundamental desire that begets all others is a blocked or fixated erotic desire -- the Oedipal desire to unite with the mother and take over the father's role. Keats's basic desire is at once its own subject and object; it seeks itself, writes itself, with itself. The desire forms the content, the subject, the motivation, and the style of his writing.

A tangential consequence of this base desire is Keats's attempt to defeat death; this struggle between eros and thanatos lies in all of Keats's works and is

causally connected to unresolved Oedipal fantasies and desires. Because Keats unconsciously feels guilt for the deaths of his brother and mother (this paper will argue), he seeks combat with death on his terms in an effort (desire) to overturn, reverse, or transcend the power of death as it fights against the powers of sex, rejuvenation, and creative energies. These forces also at the core of Keats's psyche.

Keats's quest is to find an ideal, a Dian (Cynthia-Phoebe), and then live happily for ever amidst the transcendent realm of found and sated desire. But desire satisfied is negated desire and necessarily a contradiction. It is this contradiction that propels Keats. He wants not only to find himself but to describe and communicate his attempt. The examples of mind expansion (see "The Fall"⁸) and of purer language ("Endymion's" "lispings empyrean") reflect this specific desire.

The word is gateway to the ineffable, the unconscious.⁹ It is through the word that the source and structure of Keats's repressed desires evidence themselves. The word hides, guards, and reveals the unconscious. There may not be a universal key to unlock the unconscious, but word choice limits and directs the appropriate type of key. For Keats this key is the Oedipus dynamic with its knotted forces of

death and desire.

This "complex," in the Jungian sense of the term, is the source and goal of Keats's poetry. It contains the drives toward unity and transcendence, toward reunification with the void -- the grand maternal gap -- that actuate and direct Keats.

His unconscious reveals itself in language as it surfaces between the cracks of the repressed.¹⁰ The unconscious knows itself as it reflects within the language, although like a child before a mirror, it can reach out to grasp this specular image, only to grab the air behind the mirror -- the reflection is symptom, not cause. Therefore, the unconscious knows itself only as sign, as signifier, the signified slipping away out of reach like Eurydice back into the mist of the cave.

As reflection, Keats's language is open-ended, allowing multiple accesses to its roots. The signs, like the initials "AR" for Arnie Sachnusen in Verne's Journey to the Center of the Earth, provide a guide in the maze-like journey. One of the signs is pattern, either within one poem or patterns through a series of poems. These arranged signs, like the links between signifiers along the path to the unconscious in Lacan's chain of language, lead to the source of the pattern's theme from the surface, through the jetsam of repression, to the core of desire. For example, the

reflection of Keats's uncertainty about his feelings toward women¹¹ manifests itself in the recurrent situations, scenes, and language paradoxes that read as ambivalence or ambiguity in his poems. The uncertainty of dual desire characterized by ambivalence reflects an inner uncertainty and ambivalence caused by the simultaneous desire for and fear of women. Ambivalence, then, is one theme, one type of language structure that, like the disembodied voice calling to Endymion to enter the cave (Stillinger 131, "Endymion," I 964), beckons us to follow it into the depths of the unconscious.

Although the major themes in Keats's poems are enclosure, ambivalence, transcendence, revivification, and communication, each with its corresponding source and distinct (yet also related, even coterminus) path to the source, the primary and quintessential motifs in both poems and letters are those which Freud termed Eros and Thanatos, the libidinal and death drives. All the above themes may be subsumed by these two, and ultimately derive from them. One of the main premises of this schema is that eros and thanatos provide the motivations (ambivalently, as the forces and themes play back and forth across each other on and among the various planes) for not only the major themes of the poetry, but also for the very affections, actions, and decisions in Keats's life. The latter are documented in

his own words, in his letters, and in those of his biographers.

The analytic journey can begin by following either the themes as they emerge in the poems or with the poems as they enclose and disclose the themes. These labyrinthine paths lead to the unconscious and may bring to light ("alethia")¹² the depths and forces within poet and poems.

Because the poems have been ordered chronologically (Stillinger 2) it may be best to begin by studying the poems as they hold ("like rich garners") the "full ripening" potential of the poet's evolving psyche. Keats's letters and personal life will fill and cement any fissures - and perhaps lead to their own treasures. It is the intent of this study to mine the ore (Keats, quoting Spenser, in his letter to Shelley suggests he "load every rift with ore")¹³ that glimmers, entices, seduces on the surface with its bright reflections by digging through the strata to find the (m)other lode and thereby enrich the stores of our understanding about John Keats the man and his writing.

By tracing the themes, motifs, signs, and representations of eros and thanatos, and their derivative images and ideas in language to their origin in the accessible portions of the unconscious, (through the "rents in the fog")¹⁴ it may be possible to tie and

untie the knots, among Keats's writing, his life, and his unconscious. Like Lacan's image of the Borromean knot, this tripartite structure hangs on the intertwining of the separate yet independent forces. By linking one, all three are linked; by severing one, all three are separated. This paper seeks to establish the nature of this interrelation, to solidify their connections, and to discern the independent forces as they have their basis in language.

Poems are the dense and condensed formulation of thought arranged in a manner most provocative of thought and of stimulating emotion.¹⁵ And like dreams or like a palimpsest they contain the references, traces, and clues to the underlying meanings, the meanings beneath the surface, screened by the surface, at once hidden and visible, promising and forbidding. Ambivalent layers of associations interplay with the network of forces creating the surface or manifest content. With Keats there are a host of texts which function to veil the inner Keats, his poems being the most direct, as they, like dreams, incorporate flights of fancy and imagination. His letters, however, are also texts for the archaeological critic. Exploring the intertextual paths as they lead into the themes and forces of Keats's life will expose the connections and interactions among them, bringing to light the power and dominant forces of

eros and thanatos.

Ultimately, these "digs" at the site of the texts will intensify the power and strength of Keats's poetry. Specifically, this paper endeavors to uncover the force of Keats's bond to his mother,¹⁶ the power of a wounded (dissolved) Oedipus complex on the author, his life, and works.

Helen Vendler (The Odes of Keats) examines Keats's odes and the "Hyperions" as though they form a progressive unit. Her premise that the odes evolve aesthetically and mature philosophically until they reach their apex in the "Autumn Ode" opens critical study to a diachronic approach, one seemingly out of the contemporary autotelic approach. Yet her premise, in the above loose sense, holds attraction as it enables the critic to examine texts separately as an analyst would examine an analysand's dream, by building on and comparing each to other dreams or texts. Although individual texts and New Critical explication provide a focus and specificity necessary to enriching the power of art, Vendler's direction and technique, taken further to the point of examining a series of texts as though they were overlaid or as though they were interlocking steps or an interconnected framework of a larger exterior, may be more in keeping with Derrida's position that all texts are part of a large, macrocosmic

network.¹⁷ Within the moderate area between isolating texts and involving them in the universal framework lies Vendler's approach, where an author's work may bear new fruit if examined within the context of his/her other work. It is this direction that provides a revivification and revitalizing vigor to the corpus of Keats critical studies. By focusing on Keats's major works in his short writing career, we can gain a fresh understanding of the underlying forces that affected and influenced Keats's work and life.

The themes in Keats's work display their origins by pointing to the roots they share. They expose these roots by playing out in the texts the associations common to them in content as well as in subject and situation. For example, the numerous uses, types, and examples of reawakenings, viewed in relation to the motifs and types of desire, point to an origin in Keats's unconscious of a basic desire to be immortalized. This association, later elaborated, is caught "slumbering on its own right arm" (Stillinger 74, "Sleep and Poetry," 237), and points toward the theme's origin. Buried beneath manifest content, the associations disclose themselves, in a sense reawakening the onirically related source of these themes.

Language is, of course, one element that unites both poetry and psychoanalysis, and it is through the

medium of language that Keats expresses, represses, and reveals his thoughts. From his childhood Keats was interested in and facile with words. Bate tells an anecdote about the young Keats rhyming his responses to adults' questions (Bate 8). Despite this early proclivity for "la parole" it is not until his middle teen years that Keats's real interest begins to focus, "Not until I heard Chapman ring out loud and bold...." (Stillinger 64, "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer"). His close friend and headmaster's son Charles Cowdin Clarke mentored the student when he became a voracious reader. He was a boy struggling between the continual brawls spawned by a disdain for injustice (he once fought and won a fight against a butcher's son who had "tormented" a kitten)¹⁸ and the seductive, new world of poetry, particularly Spenser's.¹⁹ Soon he was writing down his own thoughts, albeit somewhat reservedly. From the start of his writing particular areas caught his attention. In one of his earliest extant poems "Dedication to Hunt," he notes that "Glory and loveliness have pass'd away" (Stillinger 92). Here is the first reference to evanescence, to the transience of life and beauty. Consciousness of death and of life's limits pervade his poems through "The Fall of Hyperion" and beyond.

In writing to Leigh Hunt, Keats fortifies a

relationship to older men that lasts throughout his brief life.²⁰ The youngest of his group, Keats affiliates himself with older colleagues from the time of this poem on. Like Hamlet, Keats was fatherless at a critical time in his psycho-sexual development, for him during a return of the repressed.²¹ And like Hamlet, Keats comes to move ambivalently in relation to his ersatz father-figures, from Hunt to Haydon to the paternal pantheon of poets spanning Milton, Shakespeare, Spenser, and Wordsworth. The desire upon which this ambivalence is predicated parallels Lacan's notion of desire, at least on one level. "Desire, then, is not bodily instinct but an expression of loss, for desire itself, organized around the 'desire of the Other,' is structured as the very alienation which it forever seeks to overcome."²² Keats seeks to find and then replace the paternal figures, which include death, in his life and in (and by) his poetry.

His desire, while an expression of loss, also writes itself in and as the poem's imagery. Glaucus, Apollonius, Saturn, to name a few, are proxy father figures whose functions are paternalistic and pedagogic for their respective protagonists. Keats's gap, the void left by his father's death shows up as gap in his life and poems, a reflection of itself, a reflection of alienation "which seeks to overcome." Glaucus is

submerged, lost, until saved by Endymion; Apollonius creates the loss of love object, ambiguously losing Lycius in order to save him; Saturn loses his kingdom and fruitlessly struggles to regain paradise. All three and others exhibit the reflection of Keats's loss, his ambivalence toward it, and the desire to overcome the paternal imago.²³ Endymion as son frees Glaucus from his spell; Lycius follows his desire despite the stern, fatherly warnings of Apollonius; and Hyperion "flares" onward into the void at the open end of "The Fall" in contrast to the gloom of Saturn, father of the gods.

Desire, then, roots itself in the poetic images. The universal Oedipal desire, the fundamental, primary prong of desire, plays itself in two directions at once, betraying itself as it does in Hamlet's delay -- as ambivalence.²⁴) Keats assumed the role of surrogate partner as his mother's nurse and guardian. (The sword anecdote shows the child's conscious desire to defend and protect his mother/love-object while it expresses the unconscious desire to retain selfish possession of the love-object by threatening castration, the metaphoric purpose of the waved sword, to any rival.) When Keats is unable to stave off death, the consequences are twofold. First death assumes the imago of evil and father, as it is the successful nemesis against which the young boy cannot compete. Second,

Keats falls into doubt and diffidence that smoulder until they burn years later as a "horrid morbidity of temperament" (Trilling 73, letter to Benjamin Robert Haydon, May 10-11, 1817), and an extreme ambivalence toward women, the latter epitomized in his highly ambivalent relationship to his fiancée Fanny Brawne.²⁵

At this point in Keats's life his unique web of desires (a "beautiful circuiting," Trilling 11, letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, February 19, 1818) begins to take shape. Its various forms weave themselves in the surface of Keats's texts as the literal sensual desire that pervades the poems and as the internal force of desire that is the cause of their surface action. Interacting with the spreading circuits of desire is the counter force of death.

These conflicting yet mutually supporting forces cluster around the gap created by loss, emphasized and made conscious by Mrs. Keats's death, (linked also to the initial loss of the primary object of desire, the breast.²⁶ When the breast vanishes, substituting loss for presence, the chain of desire begins, symbolized in and by language where metonymically the signifier replaces the signified and the object of desire is infinitely deferred)²⁷ Death replays this loss, which in Keats's case recapitulates during the return of the repressed when he loses his mother. The frustration,

disappointment, and consequent fear of loss caused by this re-opened wound becomes repressed, and later sublimates into the material of Keats's texts.

Death and desire constitute the warp and woof, the flesh and blood, the material of the psychic energy, the psychic cathexes, of Keats's life.

II

In his early works, trying to find comfortable subject matter, Keats often focuses on nature, as in "I Stood Tip-Toe." The poem opens in the first person, not uncommonly, which locates the author as persona, centers him, making him rather than observed nature the focal point, the actual subject of attention. Esse est percipi,²⁸ and Keats's nature comes anthropomorphically to life when perceived by the author who endows nature with his own energies; he writes of nature when he writes of himself. The author notes the limits of his observation, the horizon, with the "dwindled edges of its brim," (Stillinger 79, 18) denoting awareness of the finite or of symbolic mortality. Yet here as throughout his works, Keats provides a bridge, a means of transcending the limits, a way to unite with the ideal. After peering around the

horizon while atop a hill on his tip-toes, the persona spies a path that leads beyond the horizon, "never ending" (20), an almost oxymoronic image of a shrinking, self-enclosed circumference parted by a winding, infinite path. In this early scene lie the seeds of images that before long will compound and develop into themes.

Already Keats's characteristic "mise en scène," the world of ancient Greek gods and goddesses, becomes the stage for the flights of fancy in this poem. The author's choice of figures is telling, as it also sets the direction for the future, or other, characters in the poems. Desire is the common bond between the mythological figures here. Pan and Syrinx and Narcissus are the figures present in the text. Pan desires Syrinx, and Narcissus, of course, desires himself.

Narcissus represents the quintessential figure of desire. Desire dominates all energies and actions until it attenuates even the life force, the elemental core of eros, and Narcissus pines away. His desire, like the postponed desire expressed by language for the lost object, signifier to signified, deceives itself by decentering itself. Narcissus gazes longingly (the figure epitomizing the scopic drive par excellence)²⁹ at his own reflection, and he thereby represents the self deluding itself about its object of desire. Narcissus

does not know that he loves/desires himself; he does not know that his desired object is reflection, image, the self de-centered. His gaze is the gaze of "meconnaissance," of misrecognition. Instead of seeing himself in the mirror and assuming a unity, a reflection of an integrated being (a false, misleading perception, according to Lacan,) ³⁰ Narcissus sees himself without seeing himself. The ambiguity compounds as the element of desire also plays its role in the interaction. Because what Narcissus sees and desires is a reflection of himself, he becomes fixated, hypostatized, and perpetually put off -- by himself. Desire, in its characteristic sense, feeds itself here, ensuring perpetuation of itself, even at its own expense.

The satisfaction of this desire is forever postponed, reenacting the perpetual putting off of satisfaction in language as the signified forever eludes the signifier, as the lost object ("objet petit a") is forever just out of reach. By staring into his own reflection, Narcissus lives out the role of desire to its ultimate extreme - perpetual ambiguity, perpetual inevitable return. Desire keeps its death, its satisfaction forever out of reach by desiring itself, and it deludes (it misreads, misperceives, represses) itself by desiring an object that acts as if it were a separate entity. (In the same way, Lacan sees the ego

as a self delusionary entity seeing itself but never from or as itself.)³¹ Both ego and Narcissus gaze at themselves, but Narcissus does not pretend to see himself as a whole and as center; rather for him he sees the hole in himself, as he looks at a reflection and fails to see himself, thus more appropriately enacting Lacan's version of the ego.

The play of desire within this misprison alludes to the hidden presence of death in this scene, the underground presence in all of Keats's poetry whenever desire shows itself. Narcissus desires until he dies, his desire causing its own death while at the same time perpetuating itself. This ambiguity replays throughout the poems. Death is also present closer to the surface, while desire, eros, defines itself against the void of death. Death is gap, and desire seeks to fill the gap (phallically); therefore, desire seeks its own death. Yet desire also seeks to overcome death ("All desire springs from a lack, which it strives continually to fill" Eagleton 167), by forever leaving death postponed. Narcissus's desire cannot be fulfilled because it is reflexive and therefore it lives on until the subject itself, the desirer, enters the gap. Death, the gap, lurks as the everpresent alternative to desire. Desire itself is suicidal as it "entertains the void"³² (Vendler) in its search for fulfillment. Yet

satisfaction remains elusive and desire continues to live. It may be this desire to maintain desire, with its distinctly Narcissistic flavor, that prompts Keats to avoid consummation, or at least to defer it, in his decisions to remain away from Fanny Brawne (see chapter IV). His choices are another way of capturing momentary control over the void of death.

One of the recurrent topoi in Keats's poetry is the propensity of characters to enter into alternate states of consciousness. In "Calidore," another early work, the main character, like the prior character in "Tip-Toe," wishes to be disturbed. Amidst nature and friends, a hand on the persona's shoulder sends him into a mystic-like state; his soul swoons into a trance: "Into how sweet a trance his soul was gone" (83). A voice comes (as they do throughout the poems) from above, "like something from beyond/ His present being" (100-1). The situation calls literally to a higher realm - both of consciousness in the swoon and of experience in the disembodied voice, "a spirit new come from the skies" (120). This dual reference to alternate realities is symptom of dissatisfaction, hence evidence of desire.

Poems, like dreams, fancies, or daydreams, express the fantasies of the author, at least on the level drawn by early psychoanalysts like Freud, Stekel, or Kuttner³³

who recognized the element of sublimation in the arts. They were aware that a degree of artistic creation is a product and consequently a reflection of the artist's repressed desires. Certainly art is more than sublimation, as critics such as Trilling, Clive Bell, and Ricoeur point out,³⁴ yet the similarities between those perimeter areas of the conscious where the unconscious finds it easiest to slip across the border and the act of creation, particularly in the verbal arena of poetry, argue in favor of poetry as a rich storehouse for unconscious desires. "Calidore" with its twin allusions to transcendent realms reflects a desire of the artist/persona to escape beyond the confines of mortal existence. Its hints at higher planes of reality on personal and universal levels spell desire for power, even desire to overcome human limitations.

Keats's images continually reflect this desire to overcome limits, like those in "Elgin Marbles" with its "sick Eagle looking at the sky" (Stillinger 93, 5), like the ride skyward upon black Pegasus in "Endymion,"³⁵ and like those in "The Fall of Hyperion" where the first touch of the ascending steps give life.³⁶ These and the similar recurrent images tell of the author's deep need and desire to gain power and control over the ineluctable mortality in his universe.

Like the two sides of a paper, where obverse

implies necessarily reverse (except in Borges' "Library of Babel"), desire brings with it death. In "Calidore," death enters, as it does so often with Keats, as the limits which desire seeks to disenfranchise, to overthrow. (Desire, like Oedipus, seeks elusive fate, not father, but both destroy the father in their desire to overcome fate).

Keats's desire to overcome death's power, his desire to leap beyond the grasp of death, builds on itself in "Calidore" and relates to the days of caring for his sick mother. Keats could not prevent his mother's death despite his nursing and guarding efforts. The consequent (unconscious)³⁷ guilt combines with the love for his mother (both on the surface as well as the unconscious Oedipal level) to create a lifelong desire for revenge in the form of battle and victory over the opponent death. Death is the "mortal bar" ("Endymion" and "Tip-Toe"),³⁸ the threshold at "the bourne of heaven" (Stillinger 111, "Endymion," I 295)³⁹ that surrounds mortality. It is this bar or perhaps its ambiguous implications of blocking and opening that divide life from the unknown. If Keats can acquire immortality and ascend into the realms of "heaven's bourne" beyond our "mortal bars," then he will be able to reunite with his mother and satisfy desire. (This desire is the foundation of "Endymion's" plot.)

The relations of desire and death as they unravel back to Keats's experience with his mother play themselves out further in "Calidore." The main figure of the poem seeks stories about ideal deeds (144) of protecting women, a recurring of the desire to idealize, replay, and recreate a victory in the repetition of his own earlier situation with his mother. Women are often idealized (or scorned -- further Keats ambivalence -- see letters),⁴⁰ and the example of woman-protecting harks directly to the desire to protect his own mother as well as the desire to replay the event in a repetition compulsion that will last throughout his works. This replaying of failure (a failure that fixates the desire and causes the need to repeat it, to replay and alter it) also carries with it the baggage of death, as Freud (and later Lacan) points out in Beyond the Pleasure Principle where the "fort/da game" is analogous in structure and purpose to Keats's own game of poetic allusion, metaphor, and repetition of themes about protecting women.

With this desire, however, comes the otherside of ambivalence, the death side, where the reality is that he could not, did not, save his mother. The resulting guilt manifests itself in the repulsion of women, the inability to consummate sexually with a mother-imago (hence no "libidinous feeling" for the Hasting's Lady),

and extreme ambivalences toward Fanny Brawne.⁴¹

Throughout all of these interacting pulls and counterpulls, death stalks because desire requires its antithesis, its opposite -- and death provides the darkness against which desire defines its contrast; it comes forth from the underside as the barrier against which Keats opposes himself in his striving (desire) to undo his past, to free his guilt, and to reconcile the hybrid of his festering, repressed Oedipal desires.

Ambivalence enters his work because death also serves as a unifier, an equalizer, reuniting Keats with his mother on another plane of reality, arising in the themes of transcendence and transformation. Changing from one form to another (Lamia, Apollo) and striving for higher realms, ideal worlds, (Endymion, Porphyro, the protagonist of "The Fall") play out the desire to dominate the force of death by enduring beyond it or evolving past it. These themes and vestiges of the unconscious find themselves at work in Keats's life and poems both as release of energy and as reflection of their source, as structural replication of their primal/primary, unconscious existence.

NOTES

¹ Walter Jackson Bate, John Keats (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1963). p.1.

² "Isabella", in Jack Stillinger, The Poems of John Keats (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978). pp. 245-64.

³ "Endymion," II 830-833, Stillinger, pp. 157-8.

⁴ Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory An Introduction (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 174. "Language, the unconscious, the parents, the symbolic order: these terms in Lacan are not exactly synonymous, but they are intimately allied. They are sometimes spoken of by him as the 'Other.'"

⁵ Paul Ricoeur, Freud and Philosophy An Essay on Interpretation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970). p. 164. Ricoeur, for example, sees Freud's endeavors in psychoanalytic interpretations of art as "archeological reconstructions."

⁶ Shoshana Felman, "Beyond Oedipus: The Specimen Story of Psychoanalysis," Modern Language Notes, p.

1028. "...he assumes, in other words, his radical de-centerment from his own ego, form his own self-image...."

⁷ Poems of questing include "Endymion," at least the opening of "Lamia," "The Eve of St. Agnes," and the "Hyperions."

⁸ see the expansion of consciousness in "The Fall of Hyperion," Stillinger 485. "Then Moneta's voice/ a me brief upon my ear, -- 'So Saturn sat/ When he had lost his realms.' -- Whereon there grew/ A power within me of enormous ken,/ To see as a God sees, and take the depth/ Of things as nimbly as the outward eye/ Can size and shapes pervade." (300-306)

⁹ Language, specifically metonymy and metaphor have been related to the unconscious. Displacement, the transferring of affect and/or energy from one image onto another in Freud's work, became associated with metonymy in language by Lacan. Similarly the act of condensation, or association of several similar, related ideas combining in one image, almost magnetically, (similar to over-determination) becomes a metaphor for Lacan in his relating of language to the unconscious. These two primary, fundamental activities provide the foundation for the structure, the framework of the bridge between the unconscious (and its unnamable contents) and language, its slippery, evanescent

surface. Metonymy and metaphor are the forms of language that provide the links to and the gaps in the unconscious. By following an image or pattern through the links in the metaphor chain it is possible to follow a path from the literal level of language through the layers of connotation and beyond into the dark, uncertain undercurrents.

Jean Laplanche and Serge Leclaire, originally in L'Inconscient (VI e Colloque de Bonneval) < Desclee de Brouwer, 1966. p. 396. "Thus, metaphor and metonymy connect unconscious representations to consciousness." also, "Repressed material consists, instead, of representations whose affective aspects are inseparable from language, narcissism, Desire, and attitudes toward the Law." p. 384.

¹⁰ Felman, pp. 1024-5. "What Freud discovered in, or through, the Oedipus - the unconscious nature of desire - implies, in Lacan's view, a structural relation between language and desire: a desire that articulates itself, substitutively, in a symbolic metonymic language which, thereby, is no longer recognizable by the subject."

¹¹ An uncertainty fed by guilt over his mother's death.

¹² Martin Heidegger, Basic Writings (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 13 of "General Introduction"

by David Farrel Krell. quotes Heidegger from On Being and Time p. 79. defines "alethia" as "the unconcealedness of what is present, its being revealed, its showing itself."

¹³ Lionel Trilling, ed., The Selected Letters of John Keats (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, Inc., 1951) p. 272.

¹⁴ Joseph Conrad, Lord Jim (New York: Airmont Publishing Company, Inc., 1965), p. 56.

¹⁵ Ricouer, p. 169.

"...overdetermination...indicates that analysis does not close explanation off, but rather opens it to a whole new density of meaning." also: "A poem means everything it can mean."

A. C. Bradley, "Poetry for Poetry's Sake," in A World of Ideas, ed. Lee A. Jaccobus (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), p. 595. Says about poetry "there floats an atmosphere of infinite suggestion."

Derrida says "The meaning of meaning is infinite implication."

¹⁶ "The mother's face is the purpose of the poem, as Keats told us implicitly." Harold Bloom, The Breaking of the Vessels (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 46.

¹⁷ Derrida in Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, Geoffrey Hartman, and J. Hillis Miller, eds.,

Deconstruction and Criticism (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 84. A text is "no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces."

¹⁸ Charles Cowdin Clarke, Recollections of Writers, in Bate 116f.

¹⁹ Charles Cowdin Clarke, Recollections of Writers. Clarke says Keats first read Spenser's Faerie Queene "'as a young horse would through a spring meadow -- ramping!'" Bate 33.

²⁰ Aileen Ward. The Making of a Poet (London: Secker and Warburg, 1963), p. 11. "He was to search for an idealized father in one older man after another throughout his life."

²¹ Elizabeth Wright, Psychoanalytic Criticism Theory in Practice (New York: Methuen, 1894), p. 12. Defines "return of the repressed" as "a mechanism that marks both the emergence of the forbidden wish and the resistance to it." Also: "something in the mind is at once made inaccessible and preserved." p. 30. Relevant also is Brill's comment in Freud's Totem and Taboo Resemblances Between the Psychic Lives of Savages and Neurotics A. A. Brill, Ph.B., M.D. (New York: Vintage Books, 1918), p. xiv., where he says that the force of

childhood wishes remains forever in the unconscious and "forever tries to express itself."

²² Shullenberger, "Lacan and the Play of Desire in Poetry," Massachusetts Studies in English, VII 1, p. 34.

²³ Wright, p. 40. Defines "imagos" as "internalized images which are the result of past experience."

²⁴ see Ernest Jones's "The Problem of Hamlet and the Oedipus Complex."

²⁵ Robert Pack, ed., Selected Letters of John Keats (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1974), p. 11. Pack suggests the situation that is symptomatic of ambivalence: "But a great deal of Keats's pain in this year, as he reveals in his letters, seems to have stemmed from his unfulfilled and unfulfilling relationship with Fanny Brawne."

²⁶ Harold Bloom, The Breaking of the Vessels (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 49 & 69. Bloom paraphrases Freud's third essay on "Infantile Sexuality" and declares that "The finding of an object is always a refinding of it."

²⁷ For Freud the absence of the mother and her return, metonymically the absence and return of the breast, ripple outward and into the future finding when an object is a refinding of it. Bloom recognizes that

this repetition manque means that "every act is tropological, whereas we need and desire it to be literal." (Bloom 69). Lacan, too, develops the theory of the presence and absence of the breast as this primal experience deflects the child's primary object of desire, the breast, onto/into a search for the lost object -- a search that seeks satisfaction discovering the traces in the signifiers or at least of an unattainable object, "an object always out of reach" (Wright, on Lacan, p. 117) which is satisfied by discovering the traces of absence represented by/as signifiers.

²⁸ "To be is to be perceived."

²⁹ Narcissus epitomizes the scopic drive "par excellence" because his gaze is desirous and reflexive.

³⁰ Sherry Turkle, "Lacan and America: The Problem of Discourse" in Sander Gilman, ed., Introducing Psychoanalytic Theory (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1982), p. 244. "In his essay on 'The Mirror Stage,' Lacan gives his own description of the ego, built out of the misidentifications, confusions, and alienations of a presymbolic stage of development." from Ecrits: A Selection, pp. 230-31, Lacan's "The Mirror Stage as a Formative Function of the I"

³¹ Terry Eagleton, p. 170. "Lacan boldly rewrites Descartes' 'I think, therefore I am' as 'I am not where

I think, and I think where I am not.'"

³² Helen Vendler, The Odes of John Keats (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 260. Used in a section on Keats's "Lamia."

³³ claudia C. Morrison, Freud and the Critics The Early Use of Depth Psychology in Literary Criticism (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), pp. 48-50. Kuttner and Stekel both wrote of art as sublimation.

³⁴ Ricouer, p. 73. "The work of art is both symptom and cure." also: Art functions as "proscriptive symbols of one's personal synthesis..." p. 521. also: Lionel Trilling in "Freud and Literature" from The Liberal Imagination criticizes Freud for focusing exclusively on the content of art to the exclusion of form.

³⁵ Stillinger, p. 202., "Endymion," IV 343-4. "So from the turf outsprang two steeds jet-black,/ Each with large dark blue wings upon his back."

³⁶ Stillinger, p. 481., "The Fall of Hyperion," Canto I 132-4. "One minute before death, my iced foot touch'd/ The lowest stair; and as it touch'd, life seem'd/ To pour in at the toes."

³⁷ Freud, The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis trans. and ed. by James Strachey (New

York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1953), p. 573-4. "unconscious sense of guilt."

³⁸ Stillinger, p. 112., "Endymion," I, 360 "fragile bar," p. 136 II, 124 "scanty bar," also: "I stood tip-toe" p. 86. 190 "mortal bars."

³⁹ Earl Wasserman, The Finer Tone Keats's Major Poems (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1953), p. 195. "Death, then, is not an event which divides two existences, but the meeting point at which the ladder of intensities enters into heaven's bourne."

⁴⁰ Trilling, p. 143., Keats in a letter to Benjamin Bailey, July 22, 1818: "When I am among Women I have evil thoughts, malice spleen....You must be charitable and put all this perversity to my being disappointed since Boyhood."

⁴¹ Conrad Aiken, "John Keats," The Dial, XXVII (June, 1925), p. 480., "the tragic conflict of his feelings for Fanny Brawne."

"...one cannot make the dream as a whole the object of one's attention, but only the individual components of its content."

Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams

CHAPTER I

Endymion: "The Cave of Quietude" Revisited

One way that Keats's desire to defeat death enters his writing is through his focus on ambition. In the epistle-poem to his brother George (Stillinger, 58) he presents overtly the desire for fame, for "posterity's award" (68). Keats speculates on the thoughts of a dying poet, a type of conscious projection of identity and time wherein he poses what the poet would say while looking "through the film of death" (70). The association of author to character, via projection, by identification, signals desire in the form of vicarious wish fulfillment. In this light the author's ploy of gaining access to communication with later lives (a form of "lispings empyrean") via his poetry's extended life, signifies a desire to outlive himself.

Following the explanation of the dying poet's wish, the poem catalogues instances where the poet's verses will affect those alive after his death. Strengthening the link between desire for power over death and the

poem's content, Keats gives the written poet power both to watch from heaven the effects of his poetry and to prod, stimulate. ("And then I'll stoop from heaven to inspire him" (80). Keats's life-long desire to defeat death materializes here, in one of its main forms, as ambition, a desire voiced later in a letter to George and Georgiana (October 14-31, 1818) to outlive himself, to "be among the English Poets" after he dies, as well as in the "Ode on Indolence." Keats goes on in his vicarious role-playing fantasy to describe the poet's passing away (in Keats's own imagination of his own future, death). The poet speaks to the world as he goes; he writes himself into and beyond death, as Hamlet speaks himself into the future when he says to Horatio, "Tell my story."¹ The passing is similar to flying, a major motif in the Keats repertoire, and here the motion (transition/transformation) is akin to falling upward. Accompanying this movement is pleasure. The poet says: "Full joy I feel" (107), which is pleasure in knowing that his verses will bring happiness to others alive. The association with pleasure must also carry over into the act of free movement, ascension, as well as into the notion of consciousness that endures beyond physical death. Through the medium of poetry Keats manages to play out his fantasies, to envision himself (consciously or not) as a successful poet and as one who also

possesses the ability to conquer death even in death. Not only do the dying bard's poems (metonymically himself) endure and produce effects on the lives of later beings, but the deceased poet also is able to bridge the gap of/to death, to cross the bars of mortality to direct actions, a delusion of grandeur in the imagination.

Keats imagines a serene death, one through which the works and consciousness of the poet endure on two levels of reality at once. This poem provides the form and the physical analogy to its enclosed content, content which expresses Keats's desire to master both fame and, through it, death. In the poem, as wish, both the works and their creator's consciousness last beyond the end of the poet's life, thereby creating a simultaneous existence for both the author (as writer and as imagined poet in the text - like the dreamer who dreams another self into existence in Borges' "The Circular Ruins", and the captain who hallucinates his other in Conrad's "The Secret Sharer") and for the poet, who exists both in the realm of the world through his poems and in the realm of death where his consciousness is the medium able to bridge the gap between the two realms. Keats's desires flood the text in this letter/poem, and these desires will come to be the foundation of all others.

This poem suggests that at least part of the reason Keats opts for the life of a poet is because of "mad ambition"(110) that has its roots in the desire to be remembered after his death. A poet has, this epistle to George shows, an edge over the limits imposed on mortals. It is the consciousness of this advantage that helps Keats choose the profession of poet over surgeon (dresser) despite the objections of his guardian, Mr. Abbey.

"The poetry of earth is never dead"² Keats was soon to write (on December 30, 1816), and the poetry of earth is about death. Keats's poetry is ultimately about "ceasing never." In the "Grasshopper and the Cricket" life deflects death. This poem exemplifies an attitude counter to a "horrid morbidity"; its complacency precurses the "most serene poem in the English language,"³ (Gittings) "To Autumn," a year and a half away. Written at Leigh Hunt's party under the limitations of time and subject as well as the formal rules of sonnets, "Grasshopper" defeats death because it focuses on life. The tone is complacent, marking one of Keats's happier moments. Of course the act of poetry plays the major role in the battle against death, but the subject becomes the transcendence of art over death. Keats achieves the tone, the sense of satisfaction that marks his best work -- the ability to "exist in

uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact or reason."⁴ In the Grasshopper poem there is no irritable reaching, only calm satisfaction. The poem transcends the quotidian troubles of the author's family, future, and personal fears. It exists as "pour soi," a tangible premonition of the still developing genius of its young (twenty-one) author. It also holds the kernels of the dominant themes in Keats's life and poetry, his desire to use art to overcome death.

Part of the Grasshopper poem's message is that art, in this case poetry, has the power to defer death, to hold it off, postpone it, to make it momentarily invisible. Consciousness of beauty, of the eternal nature of beauty, or in Keats's words, awareness that "what exists as Beauty must be truth",⁵ refines the perceiver, lifts him/her onto a purer plane, into an almost Platonic realm of the ideal where death is an abstraction and life means entertaining the eternal truths as they exist in beauty, in art. The same message of "ars longa vita brevis" grounds the "Ode on a Grecian Urn," but it is here in the "Grasshopper" poem that for the first time Keats captures an almost Eastern state of serenity, a state of equanimity objectified like an insect caught in amber and saved for posterity.

Even before that treasure trove of Keats's unconscious, his epic "Endymion" (which constitutes a fourth of his published work) there are hints of his motivations and focus in these earlier poems. "Sleep and Poetry" also points to Keats's preoccupation with the desire to outlive himself. The poem begins with a schema of relative merit in life, sleep, and poetry, in that order. This hierarchy proceeds the poet's conscious reason for his love of poetry, love predicated in the prior example of poetry where it is awe inspiring in its variability and singular in its power. But the motivation to love poetry comes from the knowledge of the results achieved by loving and writing poetry, namely, "To see the laurel wreath, on high suspended, / That is to crown our name when life is ended" (Stillinger 70, 35-6). Not only is poetry valuable in itself or for itself, but also because of its ability to extend the power of the poet over the finality of life's end.

In the name of poetry Keats, or at least the persona in this poem, is willing to endure renunciation and death in order to live out his perception of what constitutes poetry. Thanatos is here unrepressed, out in the open, as counterpoint to eros. Yet the underlying force is still the desire to dominate death (even as he is willing to denigrate himself to his icon

-- poetry) by retaining control through self sacrifice and even self willed death -- and the power beyond -- by following the sunbeams to Apollo. By making a sacrifice of himself he manages to appease both his thanatonic and his erotic urges, both his desires to die and to live beyond death, as these forces translate for Keats. The persona that will desire to be a priest to poetry in the "Ode to Psyche" here desires to be its sacrificial victim.

All of Keats's themes and motifs arise in "Sleep and Poetry," most notably those of death and desire; however it is in the concentrated yet rambling poem "Endymion," Keats's first attempt at sustained poetry, that the themes and forces of and in the unconscious find freedom to move and develop.

As with "Ode on a Grecian Urn" "Endymion's" opening theme is the superiority of art to life, the aesthetic world providing a touch of the eternal: "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever" (Stillinger 103, 1). Its effects are not isolated as "it will keep a bower quiet for us" and provide sweet dreams. The object is capable of providing sensuous as well as aesthetic pleasure, and consequently it serves to introduce the theme of ideal beauty and ideal pleasure that will find their unity in the figure of feminine beauty.

Beyond the call for a union of the real with the

ideal, the opening lines imply Keats's fear of death, of passing into nothingness. Because a thing of beauty has causative properties, "it still will keep..." and endurance, "a joy for ever," the opening also implies a path out of man's weakness relative to art, for example death, by association. If, (even in a strict Platonic sense) an "object d'art" will never pass into nothingness, then by association a perceiver has, via consciousness as aesthetic appreciation, a momentary touch with the empyrean, and aesthetic appreciation provides a means of transcending the trip into nothingness. The author focuses on the negative, even though the artistic objects are presented in the positive, as enduring for ever.

Countering the negative, as in "for ever" and "never passing into nothingness," signals a preoccupation with the end of things -- all things. The persona expresses a need to contradict the end, the finity of things. A recourse for mortals enters in the form of aesthetic awareness; cognizance of (eternal) beauty permits a means, if ephemeral, of conquering death. It provides an extension of the self, as perception unifies the perceiver (the real) with the object (the ideal - beauty via the power of the scopic drive).

Through aesthetic appreciation the self extends

beyond itself in a fashion similar to the union of consciousnesses in "The Fall Hyperion" (Stillinger 485, I 300-10) and creates life for the object, as beauty is exclusively a perceived quality. This passive creative act of the perceiver provides the extension of the self, a carrying out and beyond the self because the object will endure. More concretely, the act of creation, writing a poem for example, directly links the perceiver to the future as the extension outlasts its creator. The opening suggests that even though it is the object itself that endures for ever, it is beauty endowed by the perceiver (what Locke calls a "secondary quality") that prompts or permits the transcendence into the noumenal realm. It is the act of perceiving that enables the concept of beauty to increase the value of the object, thereby making it a joy for ever by transferring it from an ordinary object to a life in the timeless realm of consciousness.⁶

The submerged desire is the perceiver's wish to outlive death, a desire projected onto an object as a man-given attribute (as it is a thing that is beautiful and will endure because of its beauty, not merely a thing that will endure). Its beauty is the special quality existing only in the consciousness of the perceiver, and one that enables longevity. Because man as perceiver endows or creates through his/her peception

and consciousness the quality of beauty, man has a share in the eternal.

The infatuation with an afterlife in "Sleep and Poetry" neutralizes in "Endymion" where death is nothingness, a lack of consciousness. The opening focus on being and nothingness, or desire signed in joy for ever and in absence of desire in nothingness, sets up both the poem's theme and cause.

The desire extends beyond aesthetic experience, beyond desire to live past mortal limits, to the basic desire to fill the void. To fill the gap of absence, of nothingness, Keats will "trace the story of Endymion" (35). Fear of death and its converse desire to overcome death spark the act of writing, the masculine need to fill the void, and this results in the Barthesian "joissance" of writing, a writing erotics that will become Keats's true mistress, the only real substitute for his mother. Poesy, writing, is the real woman in Keats's life, and it is his affair with this paramour that inhibits, impedes consummating with Miss Brawne.

Keats is always conscious of his role as writer as his letters attest. From his first timid sharing of the sonnet given to Charles Cowdin Clarke⁷ "On Leigh Hunt's Release," through his final letters, Keats is aware of his writing, aware that he writes himself. Although he loses himself in some of his best poems, for example the

"Autumn" ode where he diffuses into the background, most of his poems foreground the author as he intrudes into the text. "Endymion" is the latter case, beginning with the first person "Preface" and continuing into the text where periodically the author calls out to the muse for guidance: "O kindly muse! let not my weak tongue falter" (I 128). The persona speaks in first person as narrator, and this choice also associates Keats with the speaker in the text.

These ties make the poem read more easily as fantasy, as the indirect product of the author's unconscious. In the same way that a dreamer's unconscious desires (wishes) formulate the dream text, ["the dream is the (disguised) fulfilment of a (suppressed, repressed) wish"]⁸ the bond between poet and poem and the nature of fiction and its similarities to dreams invite the analogy of poetry analysis to dream analysis as an expression of latent content within the surface or manifest level. Like dreams, the latent content of poems reveals itself in the language used to describe the ideas. The poet, like the dreamer, expresses his visions through language. Unlike the dreamer, however, the poet uses language consciously, but densely. This density consequently contains more material (as does the dream's manifest level) within it than the apparent surface at first suggests. The

critic, like an analyst or archeologist, can extricate and study the shards of the unconscious and then determine what patterns, what forces, exist beneath the surface. The conscious manipulation and structuring of language distracts the censor, enabling freer reign for the unconscious, freer paths for the unconscious to work its influence up on the surface.

"Endymion" is a conscious effort by the author to "make 4000 Lines of one bare circumstance and fill them with Poetry" (Trilling 85-6, letter to Benjamin Bailey, October 8, 1817). He considered the effort an exercise in discipline. His motivations for this exercise stem from the desire to be a poet, to prove himself as a poet, yet the desire to be a poet may be rooted in his need to release the libidinal energies that were shut off from their normal route of release upon the development of guilt resulting from his inability to protect his mother and prevent her death. The need to express his sorrow and guilt becomes his tendency toward self mortification as asceticism.

The poems' emphases on sensual pleasure, clear in "Sleep and Poetry" and "Endymion" (critics view "Endymion" as a paean to unrestricted sensual pleasure, for example Ward 141-3) suggest a mild conversion reaction, a fictive release of repressed, denied pleasures. Furthermore, the bedrock of all Keats's

poetry, the core desire to overcome death, represents his fundamental need/desire to conquer the force that defeated him in his battle to protect his mother.

The need to overcome death, the soil from which all his poetry grows, is also the vestige of his need to undo and replay the battle with death, this time substituting his creation, substituting his surrogate mother/lover, his poems, in the battle. The need to write also serves the need to release libidinal energies -- energies refocused Oedipally during his nursing experience and energies that manage to find release in the act of writing as the play, the foreplay of sexual release. Keats manipulates the phallic extension, his pen, and releases the unconscious pressures for Oedipal union which emerge as the desire to overcome death, while the act of writing simultaneously provides an onanistic/autoerotic release of libidinal energies by its nature as self wish-fulfillment. It also serves to release the guilt dammed up by his loss of the mother, thereby fitting all of his needs at once.

The author's choice of subject is psychically revealing. Why did he choose the Endymion myth? Through the first person intrusions, Keats ties himself to the protagonist, a figure whose situation parallels that within Keats. Cynthia (also Phoebe and Dian, tripartite) watches over, watches desiriously (the

scopic drive in full force) Endymion nightly as he sleeps.⁹ The relationship at this level replays that of Keats's infancy when he was watched over by his mother. Endymion's reciprocal desire¹⁰ arises for the feminine object, yet throughout most of the poem Cynthia remains the mysterious yet desired "known Unknown" (II 739) or the replication of unconscious Oedipal desires.¹¹

There is an interior preface (34-62), that follows the famous opening section about the power of beauty in our lives. This inner preface fits in the interstice between the general introduction (1-33) and the beginning of the actual tale (63). It reinforces the presence of the writer in the text by calling attention to him. He ties himself to his subject overtly, "The very music of the name has gone/ Into my being." (36-7) The author raises himself from the invisible background, from the role as self-effacing author, ("paring his fingernails")¹² up into the surface of the text, thus focusing attention on himself, egocentrically. Keat's desire to be a writer, to be known and recognized as a writer may be responsible for this intrusion. The writer voices his desire to see his creation completed by a predetermined time-table: "O may no wintry season, bare and hoary,/ See it half finish'd." (54-5) The author states his desire directly. He presents his desire in the text's surface almost as a reminder, a

personal form of pressure designed to motivate him to accomplish his task.

Birth imagery accompanies the transition into the actual story, significant not only as an objective correlative to the subject's beginning, but also as a reflection of the poet's start on his new life, his autonomous life now that he is living alone in Margate, determined to write. For example, there is an image in the very beginning (64) where the earth (mother earth) nurses, "for the moist earth fed..." an image introducing the ideas of birth, of beginning.

Endymion finally enters the scene as prince exemplar: "His youth was fully blown" (169). There may be elements of wish fulfillment tinged with irony in the masculine image Keats paints of the boy prince, who arrives resplendent "and between/ His nervy kness there lay a boar spear keen" (173-4). The phallic nature both of object and position reinforces the masculine desire, but its detumescent state, its passive condition, belies its purpose. The ambiguity of potential ("keen") versus actuality (it lies there) contains the ambiguity within the author in his relation to women. His desire is keen; it ignites in his letters, (see chapter IV) yet his boar spear lies flacid when he avoids direct contact with Fanny. Not only does this ambivalence play itself into the texts, but it carries out into Keats's life as

evidenced in his passionate avowals of love to Fanny and his denials of contact with her (see chapter IV). The opening image of Endymion holds the enclosed ambivalent powers that battle within the author, who at once has potential desire but responds impotently to his desires.

Death settles onto the text as night falls around the shepherds. They sit around their campfire and discourse "upon the fragile bar..." that keeps them from their "...homes ethereal" (359-60). The tenuous nature of life and the thin film, the slender border between life and death is the center of conversation. As the topic of discourse, death assumes the role of priority, of foreground, particularly as the subject and conversation about it continues into the text. Death assumes the role of interiority, of unconscious impulse pushing itself outward into the text as the chosen topic. The interior dictates the topic choice; the exterior determines the topic's direction, focus, and intensity. The author's inside and outside conform in this choice, death being the preeminent, puissant force behind the poem and its writing. Death dominates the selection of subject and the selection of medium through which to reveal itself.

While the elders talk of their "anticipated bliss" (373) in "that eternal spring" (378) wherein they would be reunited with their loved ones, Endymion is on a

sidestage both physically and consciously. As the men "out-told/ Their fond imaginings" (392-3), Endymion sits in two worlds at once, ambiguously present and not present in the world of men. Pre-playing his later transition from mortal to god-realm, this simultaneous existence in two worlds anticipates his fate and also serves to establish a link between the subject's death and the character's ability to overcome the subject. Endymion is symbolically dead, absent from the others, self-made, invisible from isolation (like Gyges after he turns his ring -- also at a shepherd's campfire), out of consciousness. Further, after the main subject of the text for the past thirty lines has been death, Endymion becomes death-like, sitting "dead-still" (405), alive and dead, present but absent, "Like one who on earth had never slept" (404). He comes to prefigure himself as he will be by the story's end, that is as the personification of the author's wishes, as one able to exist beyond death.

The death imagery and the enacting of the author's desire to gain power over death continue in the new scene. Endymion's sister Peona enters and breaks her brother's "zombie" state (as the living dead) with her language. The importance of language as an intermediary, as a penetrator (and phallic filler) of consciousness emerges later in this poem between Cynthia

and Endymion as well as elsewhere -- notably in the Moneta-narrator mind meld in "The Fall." Here Peona's words, "her eloquence" (412) evaporates the curse on Endymion. She then leads him across the water to an island, as though ferrying him Charon-like to Bocklin's isle of the dead. Once on the island, the multiple enclosure, entombing images perpetuate the death theme, as Endymion is physically and mentally removed, separated from the world where Peona is "gently glad to see him laid/ Under her favorite bower's quiet shade" (436-7) as though he were being laid to rest. The numerous trances and the transitions from separation to reunification carry on the author's wish to control death, to live beyond death, return from death, and bring desire into the action of the text as a structural parallel to itself.

The canon rather evenly divides into two camps in "Endymion" criticism. The standard, formal side sees the poem as a semi-Platonic expression of man's desire to grasp the ideal, to come to knowledge of the noumenal world.¹³ The more modern perspective, elaborated most articulately by Ward, considers the poem a paean to sensuality, a plea of Romantic desires for sensual freedom, as Endymion's quest is to achieve carnal union with his object of desire. Judging from a psychoanalytic perspective, however, the poem reads more

as a confession of unconscious needs and desires for the resolution of the Oedipal constraints that impede the author's sensual development. The poem is epic, overt wish fulfillment of adolescent fantasies in Classic garb. Although the entire poem reads as if the author were an analysand revealing his thoughts, wishes, fantasies, to the reader-analyst (and the act of writing-confessing is therapeutic and erotic in itself), this exact situation finds itself played "forte" in the surface of the text.

In the opening section of the poem where the groundwork is forming for the themes still to evolve, Endymion, like an analysand in therapy, reveals the (until now suppressed) conscious source of his melancholy spirit. He is dominated by desire, by erotic desire, a desire of unparalleled magnitude: "with so deadly gasp,/ No man e'er panted for a mortal love" (525-6). The ambiguity of the adjective "mortal" notwithstanding (whether no man has ever desired a mortal more than he or whether no man has ever desired so intensely as he for a mere mortal, his desire is for one immortal and therefore commensurately greater), the passion released in a sudden surge attests to the force of the influence till now reigned in, kept inside as his "secret grief" (539). Cloistered with only his sister-confessor present, Endymion speaks his grief's

cause. He discloses a dream to his listener inspired by sleep upon a "magic bed" (554) in a field of poppies. In characteristic Keatsian fashion, Endymion vividly dreams of himself flying. When he is not able to fly any higher, he looks down and sees the moon through the clouds. He feels: "...my dazzled soul/ Commingling with her argent spheres..." (594-5). On one level, the dream evinces the standard adolescent erotic wish fulfillment, with flying corresponding to the rising erection, and the ecstatic state seemingly, inevitably equivalent to orgasm. While this reading describes the overt desires of both protagonist and author, the content suggests more specifically the unconscious cause of this dream - unsatisfied Oedipal longings. Endymion, already in an altered state of consciousness from the poppy fumes ("Moreover, through the dancing poppies stole/ A breeze, most softly lulling to my soul;/ And shaping visions all about my sight/ Of colors, wings, and bursts of spangly light" 566-69), and perhaps thereby closer to his unconscious than normal, as well, envisions (in-visions) himself flying upwards. Able to fly no further, he turns his gaze downward where he spies the moon.

In a fashion that reverses the mideval perception of spiritual ecstasy as sensual pleasure, expressed in Bernini's "The Ecstasy of St. Theresa," Endymion receives and experiences almost spiritual pleasure from

a sensual encounter. He feels his soul frolic with the moon (594-6). Endymion's desire focuses when a blinding light from which he shields his eyes interrupts his escapade. Upon looking again, he sees a female vision, a "completed form of all completeness" (606). Endymion confronts his desire personified -- deified. This vision becomes his object of desire, his "raison d'etre." Because the contact came within a dream, the content also reads metaphorically, as release of Endymion's (or the author's) unconscious.

The moon, transformed in a burst of light into a female figure, literally enacts displacement. By its position in the sky as a watcher over Endymion the moon acts maternally. By turning into an ideal female figure the moon transforms from a symbol, a mother imago, to an imago of desire, encompassing the qualities of one maternal and of one sensual. Viewing her, Endymion says she has hair "bright enough to make me mad" (613).

Aside from introducing Endymion to the object of his desire in the text, his dream introduces the goal of his unconscious desire, union with the ideal. Several desires condense in this image, overdetermining it. Libido finds expression in the goal of the dream, in the flight toward it, and in the release from commingling in a sexual-fantasy intercourse. The moon image, round, white, watching over Endymion¹⁴ has maternal

characteristics linking Endymion's desire to the Oedipal base. When the moon transforms into a goddess, the desire for union, the object of Endymion's quest, becomes the desire to have a carnal relationship with an immortal, to wed, and thereby acquire immortality.

Through a dream Endymion is able to find potential solution to the problems broiling in Keats's unconscious, and coincidentally it is vicarious confession, precisely the standard mode of psychoanalytic investigation, that frees Keats's desires from his unconscious and opens them to the analysis of the reader.

The wish for existence beyond death also enacts itself in the dream scene as the supernatural, but typically Keastian, ability to retain consciousness during altered states of consciousness. Within this dream Endymion faints (635-40), yet he remains aware. The ambiguity of being aware, awake while fainted in a dream replays the predicament of remaining a perceiving entity while removed from life by death. The dream within a dream is a surrogate death, a staging of death state, and the retention of consciousness, the transcending of the enclosing states by the consciousness, corresponds to the desire to love into and beyond death. As characters remain conscious through an altered state of being, they replay the

unconscious desire to overcome death. Thus the repetition compulsion of thanatos surfaces here in the repetition of scenes where consciousness endures beyond the limitations of mortality. In effect thanatos plays against itself, and its own means of release, sublimation, expresses its antithesis.

By using an element of the opposition against itself, by having a repetition compulsion manifest itself in a wish-fulfillment of eros (as life force) over thanatos, the ambiguity builds into irony. The author's compulsion to repeat acts itself out as a wish for eros dominance in the content -- as represented by the retention of consciousness during states of altered consciousness. The irony is that eros and thanatos work in tandem for the release of their respective antithetical desires, goals, on their respective levels, in their separate paths of expression.

This is not the first or only example of ambivalence unified, of opposite forces reconciling to achieve a larger psychical goal; death and desire work in unison in the concluding portion of this dream scene.

Endymion re-experiences the sensation of flying while swooning off within his dream. Still conscious, he is aware of being not alone (645). When he sees the vision (a replay of the prior dream encounter) he experiences a feeling that incorporates both eros and thanatos forces

as he responds: "madly did I kiss/ The wooing arms which held me, and did give/ My eyes at once to death"

(653-5). Death and desire overlap here, where death supplants sexual climax. By uniting both forces in one image, Keats is able to satisfy the inner need to master the ambivalent forces stemming from the unresolved Oedipal conflict, if only vicariously and transiently.

The desire (Endymion's or Keats's) to unify with the ideal parallels through displacement the desire for mother reunion. The willingness to die, the expectation of death as a consequence of the sensual needs and actions corresponds to the guilt spawned by acting out an incest fantasy (even within that fantasy) which further expresses itself as ambivalence -- Endymion simultaneously provides himself the means to achieve his desire and the method of punishment for it as an appeasement of the concomitant guilt. Endymion replays the Diana (goddess of the moon) myth with himself as the figure whose scopie drive results in his death, whose erotic desires bring about his own end. In Endymion's case, however, the death is desired because the situation affords the opportunity to oppose and transcend death -- his expectation of death being false.

As in the Diana myth where the male intruder is to receive punishment for his intrusion into the privacy of the goddess, (a situation similar to Porphyro's in "The

Eve of St. Agnes"), Endymion's predicament involves the appropriate punishment for spying, for voyeurism -- blinding. Endymion gives his eyes to death and expects to be blinded for his indulgence. The punishment is the correlation to castration for carnal violation ("for every punishment is ultimately castration...").¹⁵ This expectation brings to the surface the fear and the guilt of viewing, of exercising the scopic powers on an object of erotic desire. Yet Cynthia enacts precisely the same circumstance when she desirously views the sleeping Endymion.¹⁶ Further, the result is not death but reciprocal expression of desire. The scene portrays the success not only of eros over thanatos but of desire over guilt. Endymion's success, albeit momentary at this point in the text, indicates a fulfillment of an unconscious (the scene really transpires on a level contiguous with the unconscious) desire for relief from guilt of living out scopic, voyeuristic fantasies and a fulfillment of the unconscious desire to gain power over death, as the potential for death transforms into the reality of erotic satisfaction. Endymion's swoon/dream/fantasy releases the pressure of guilt as well as repeating the primary scene, the primal scene, of battle against and victory over the nemesis death.

So powerful is the desire to live beyond death that the author rephrases the desire, transferring it from

the metaphoric level of example to the surface level of metaphysics in the oft-quoted section about a "fellowship with essence" (777-842). In this passage the narrator (or Endymion?) describes his version of "the clear religion of heaven" (781) wherein the spirit ascends by the strength of its emotion until it "shines full alchemiz'd and free of space" (780). Abstractly this description, much desired as a goal in life, describes death. The desire for death is, expectedly, a desire to live beyond it, as the soul, spirit, ego, or essence frees itself from the evaporated mortal machine, a quasi-Cartesian mind-body split, a view of being equivalent to Plato's "sema soma." Existence is not evaporated, the body is; consciousness is meted out into the noumenal realm, another version of the mortal-immortal commingling that conceptually replays the theme of Endymion/mortal wedding Cynthia/immortal.

The theme of desire seeking power over non-desire continues in the passage. Return from the higher world marks a return to the earthly, as the spirit re-enters the phenomenal world, eased by "music's kiss" (784). Even though the distilled spirit lives into death, into oblivion, free of space, (and this enduring repeats the thematic strains), the return by it to earth plays the motif "forte" by extending the power over death to the mortal realm. Not only can a spirit (through the power

of love) exist free of space, but it can resume its prior existence on the earth in its mortal mantle. It can be re-born, out of death, and this revivification foreshadows the return to life of the drowned lovers in Book III.

Endymion's emotions follow a path similar to his own soars and swoops during his dreams. He is alternately ecstatic when glimpsing Cynthia (890) or suicidally depressed when she vanishes (905). It is only the vestige of his emotional high that saves him from the plunge into desire's antithesis: "'Aye, such a breathless honey-feel of bliss/ Alone preserved me from the drear abyss/ Of death'"(903-5). Endymion's suicidal thoughts reflect his obsession with death, and by choosing suicide as the path to death, he once again shows his desire to control death, even as he contemplates the abyss.

As Book II opens, he enters the cave in his path at the behest of a feminine voice. The second book has as its "mise en scene" the deep, enclosing bowels of the earth, and Endymion's path parallels the journey inward, following his own voice of desire to his desire.

Books I, II, and III open with a narrative voice distinct from the story. As a result, the entity of the text is not hermetically immured as are other uniformly, univocally voiced poems. The edges of the text blur

into a quasi-boundary where the identity of the speaker lacks the clear separation of features that defines autonomous voices. Instead, the author carries himself over into the text and the story pulls him further into it through the intermediary, the narrator. Consequently the story appears semi-biographical, at least on a psychic level, and Endymion becomes the putative author, the personification of the author's fantasies. Endymion's adventures, then, are the vicarious fulfillments of the author's wishes, wishes conforming to the conscious desires but stemming from the unconscious. It may be that any text reflects the veiled desire of its author's unconscious, but Endymion lends itself openly to this claim as it melts the border between text and author through the narratorial voice and with authorial intrusions, making the distinction vague and the bond tighter. The poem becomes, at least on a lower level of the poetic palimpsest, a large symptom or dream or Rorschach blot in which to examine the relationships among author, text, and unconscious.

In light of the correlation between text and author's unconscious, it seems appropriate that Book II open following the narratorial insertion, the link between author and story, with the protagonist beginning his quest for the ideal, for the goal, the object of his desire, by journeying like Verne's protagonist to the

center of the earth. Already tied associatively to the mother imago the earth strengthens the association as its characteristics here become womb-like, with Endymion's entry made through a vaginal-like opening.¹⁷ Endymion begins his quest for the female ideal with a symbolic re-finding, re-entry, and return to the universal mother earth. ("The finding of an object is always a re-finding of it.") The quest naturally begins by Endymion returning to the symbolic primal scene, the location of his own origin, the maternal womb, symbolically assuaging Keats's unconscious desire to reunite with his mother. Keats re-enacts the Oedipal conflict within his unconscious by playing it out in the text situation. Endymion's quest, then, stands to stabilize the ambivalent forces that create the uncertainty and confusion in their relations to women, characterized by the ambivalence of his actions toward Cynthia in Book IV, and Keats's ambivalence toward Fanny Brawne later in his life.

Because Endymion exists without background, as fictive element only, the motivation for his desires is speculative, despite the service of retrospective induction. Yet as vicarious wish fulfiller of Keats's psyche, Endymion represents the path to the author's past and the means to a fuller understanding of the causes behind the author's poetic and life choices.

Endymion serves as Keats's proxy in the attempt to reconcile the psychic imbroglio caused by the revived Oedipal situation in his life. In his father's position with its incumbent guilt, while in his mother's bedroom, Keats's Oedipal feelings resurge. He nurses his mother only to lose her to death. The rekindled Oedipal desires then combine with guilt of loss. (In the same way that a child of a divorce may assume the guilt from his own presumption about his role as the cause of the divorce, Keats may unconsciously assume guilt at the assumption that he is responsible for the death as he could not prevent it.) The need to overcome this diffidence develops into the need to replay the scene in the bedroom, the need to re-enact the relationship between himself and his mother in order to work through his unconscious erotic desires for her. Until he can replay the earlier scene, he remains impotent, despite desire. Until Keats can find a way to re-unite with his mother and thereby defeat the paternal force of death, he remains fixed in the Oedipally unresolved configuration.

Poetry and fictive adventures provide the means by which to release the forces churning within the young author, as they ease not only the pressure of desire, but become the mirror of the internal tensions themselves. Poetry serves a multitude of functions.

Language provides the opportunity to live vicariously the desires and is the means by which these desires can both reveal and conceal themselves from the censor of the consciousness (furthermore the censor runs on the force of guilt caused by Keats's failure to save his mother, the sexual nature of his desires, and the unearned usurpation of his father's role in the Oedipal triangle).

Endymion's journey inward proceeds "Through buried paths, where sleepy twilight dreams/ The summer time away" (II 73-4). The description seems suited to the perspective that the journey is a self revealing, introspective journey, a revelation for the author. Keats, by writing his unconscious story, himself wanders through his own "buried paths" to his past which the "sleepy twilight" of the unconscious, by its atemporal nature, dreams time away. Through metonymy and synecdoche, Keats's unconscious writes itself into the text metonymically as structure, content, metaphor, any means available to language.

Endymion finds the cave opening by following a butterfly. He follows, almost flying himself. Desire takes on its attributes of seeking, and flying also carries the soft tones of sensual pleasure. This undertone becomes clearer when the object of his pursuit touches a fountain emanating from deep within the cave

mouth and transforms into a Nereid. Endymion chases desire to its source where it blossoms into the actual form of erotic desire, a water nymph. Endymion lives out an adolescent fantasy. Like Adam's dream, this poem is Keats's waking correlative to his dream's desires. The erotic nature of the encounter intensifies when she kisses "her dripping hand" (101) to Endymion. She literally is the object of Endymion's desire, at least the desire to catch a butterfly, because she is the butterfly transformed. ("I've been thy guide" (123) she tells Endymion.)

Where transformation or displacement occurs in the manifest level of the poem, it reflects the much greater potential for the dynamics of the unconscious that lies in the latent content or the subtext of the poem. Keats's recourse to the translation of one entity into another opens the way to the world of the unconscious associations of signifieds that slip through the unconscious and under other signifiers. Keats's example replays the path that a signified takes in its trip from the unconscious to consciousness to the Other, along the signifying chain. As desire objectified, the butterfly leads Endymion along to the fountain welling from within the cave. Metonymically the water is the unconscious, which would provide the medium and the links necessary for the transition of signifieds. Desire, like Endymion,

chases its object, the elusive signified, (replaying the disappearing breast) which can, thanks to contact with the source of the chain of signifiers, the unconscious, change into yet another signified.

Representing, signifying the object of desire, the nymph in both her forms guides Endymion, yet she remains out of reach as she plays the role of signifier, postponing desire. She offers no direct gratification, and as *divertissement* she postpones, waylays Endymion in his quest for Cynthia. Desire obstructs itself, eludes itself. Frustrated and still desiring, Endymion clasps his head "to keep off the burr/ Of smothering fancies" (II 138-9). As the signified slips beneath the signifier, so does the butterfly slip from Endymion's grasp. The signified slips further, as it disappears momentarily and reappears as a nymph, displacing, replacing one object of desire by another.

The nature of language to postpone desire, to be never at one with itself, ("That which is written is never identical to itself." Derrida) to have the signifieds forever slipping away from their signifier, played out in this brief episode of the poem, is one of Keats's major concerns throughout his poetry.

Keats dramatizes weaknesses of language by portraying the distinction between mortal language and god language, or as he refers to the latter, as "lute

breathings and lisplings empyrean."¹⁸ God communication apparently cements the signified to the signifier, killing implication, as Bloom notes,¹⁹ but also effectively solving the problem of the Other. The mind provides union between mortals and gods, particularly in "Endymion" and "The Fall", characterizing the author's concern for the "dearth of human words" (II 817-18). Even though a capturing of the signified by signifiers would weld a one to one correspondance between words and meaning, effectively castrating the reproductive, fertile series "of infinite implication" (Derrida), it would also permit a wider range of communication and reduce misconception and misinterpretation.

Keats's version of the perfect language evades the criticism of having killed language by imprisoning it. He does so by widening language to include the direct communication of precise emotional and visual experiences, a prototype of Orwell's "feelies," all within language, rather than within a theater. The natural desire of a "teeming brain" ("When I Have Fears") or of a mind burring with "smothering fancies," may be to expand the use and efficiency of the poet's medium, but short of the mind enlargement Keats creates in "The Fall," communication by language will have to cross the gap between individuals, an abyss deepened and complicated by the role of the unconscious on either

side of the communication. The gap in language remains so long as the signifieds, like Endymion's butterfly, can, through contact with the unconscious, transform into other signifieds like the transmogrified nymph. Keats's dream remains the desire of a poet to touch the being of another and to transfer directly the intensity and precise nature of his thoughts and feelings, but as long as language remains the medium of this contact, the abyss (Lacan's "L'Autre") waits to disappoint and perpetuate the desire.

In the very next scene Endymion plays out the desire adumbrated in the former episode with the nymph. Frustrated by the elusive Nereid who seductively kisses her hand to him, Endymion needs release. Consequently he seeks his satisfaction in the same way the author seeks his, by imagining it. Endymion calls out to Cynthia and fantasizes about flying to her, with her, until the imagination becomes too real and he fears falling into "the wide gaping air" (II 194). Again the desire for sensual satisfaction (emerging as flying and the object Cynthia) becomes flaccid as a result of diffidence.

Endymion proceeds deeper and deeper into the earth, in a path that parallels the course of introspection, which is itself the subject in Book IV's "Deep den of all" (Stillinger 548, IV 208) episode. The journey marks

Endymion's desire to find the source, the object (unconsciously and consciously, respectively) of his desire. It tells of the author's desire to find the root of his need and the goal of his confused sexuality by vicariously releasing the forms of tension within him as the forms of experience by his protagonist.

Endymion's endurance, his determination to overcome the impediments blocking the path to his object, is congruent with Keats's discipline in writing the poem.

After wandering through the mazy paths in the earth's bounds the shepherd prince comes upon a "chamber, myrtle wall'd, embowered high" (II 389) wherein lies Adonis sleeping. Although "Wild analysis" might call to the undertones of the author's possible bisexuality because of the sensual description of the scene and its central figure (393-410), the pertinent aspect of this eruption-interruption along Endymion's journey is the circumstance surrounding Adonis. Like Proserpine, this mythical character spends half of the year in the underworld -- the world of death -- and half above on the earth's surface. The associations overtly tie the underworld trip to death, reinforcing the contention earlier that Endymion is seeking power over death through union with his immortal object of desire by journeying into the symbolic link (via condensation)²⁰ to the cause of his and Keats's desires,

mother and death, both characterized by the depths and enclosures in the deep caves.

The other feature represented, in the overdetermination of the scene, is the power of Adonis over death. He, like Proserpine, is able to return from sleep, symbolic death, to life. Adonis epitomizes the author's wish to overcome the final death sentence. It is not surprising that Endymion's journey, located in a single symbol of the dual forces, thanatos and Oedipal eros, encounters a figure personifying the author's desires to divest himself of the former unconscious forces. Adonis is an example of an intermediate stage between mortal and immortal, the missing step in the ladder transcending mortal barriers.

Through representation Keats reveals his desire to battle death. By defeating death, Keats would eradicate the cause of his sexual diffidence, as it was death that took his mother while he was in the process of redeveloping an Oedipal relationship with her, apparently before he was able to reconcile his unconscious desires to reality (before his ego was able to conform to the reality principle). Death, then, is the proxy Pater and victor in the battle for his mother. It consequently takes on the power of rival, yet, like Claudius in Hamlet, it becomes the object of ambivalent feelings on the young rival's part, ambivalence

manifested in both cases by uncertainty, hesitancy, doubt. Hamlet delays, and Endymion goes on a long quest; Keats at once plays with suicidal thoughts and seeks ways to live without giving in to death (see "Nightingale") as well as delaying sexual consummation with mother imagos both in poetry and in life. (This latter tendency is a reflection of the fear of maternal disapproval and/or fear of replacing the mother with another when the original is still the primary desire.)

The sensual element in the Oedipal triangle finds its expression in the erotic nature of Endymion's relationships with Cynthia, who is at once mother imago and ideal sex partner. Endymion's desires for the Ideal are largely, some argue (Ward 141-3) exclusively sensual. In this next scene Endymion, again after flying, contacts Cynthia who remains the "known Unknown" (II 739). He circles her naked waist with his arms after which it was a "Long time ere soft caressing sobs began to mellow into words" (II 736-7).

Because Endymion's object of desire remains obscure, veiled by distance or altered perceptions, Cynthia resembles the union of Keats's unconscious desires. By living out the forbidden and denied sexual relationship with his mother within the fictive world of his poetry, Keats attempts to ease the ambivalence within himself toward women. His own libido presses him

toward sensual satisfaction, always a major goal, yet his guilt over the incestuous desires rekindled while nursing his mother, combined with the guilt over her death in the midst of these desires, forms a barrier that increases desire but renders him impotent. In other words, Keats's libidinal force increases with each frustration, and each desire is frustrated by the guilt associated with sexual release, perpetuating the cycle. If Keats can defeat death, the paternal imago and sexual rival, then he can break the cycle because the accomplishment would establish him as an autonomous figure, able to overthrow the paternal power and thereby justifiably qualify as a partner. It would also allow him to put the guilt of his mother's death behind because of his victory over her abductors.

Endymion's victory over death in this poem repeats Keats's battle against his guilt from not being able to prevent his mother's death and therefore represents a vicarious victory. The associations between Cynthia and mother imago (as they are watchers over, unattainable, and sexually forbidden) show the author's desire to complete the Oedipal circuit fictively and unconsciously. Death in the poems and the associations between it and the various contacts Endymion makes with symbols of the the unconscious, such as caves and darkness, mark the desire to overcome unconscious

restrictions brought on by guilt. On a psychic level, "Endymion" is an attempt to reach a healthy resolution to the ambivalence (desire for, guilt from) caused by the truncated Oedipal dynamic. Keats's protagonist experiences the same desires and difficulties as the author, except that he manages to overcome the obstacles ultimately to achieve a victory over death through union with his object of desire. Yet neither of these successes transpires for the author during his life.

Keats's own uncertainty about the identity of his motivations, that is, his incestuous desires that peaked before they could sublimate, is reflected in Endymion's uncertainty as to the identity of his "known Unknown." In Book III, Endymion calls to the moon, to Phoebe (III 142). He recognizes her power to revivify by "Kissing dead things to life" (III 57). This call is the voice of desire, two-fold desire. First, the contact with Phoebe is the replay of Oedipal desire, of the element in Endymion/Keats left unfinished, needing resolution by symbolic consummation. Second, the inability to bring life to dead things signals the desire to rework and replay the death of his mother. Through projection, desire to defeat death arises as the object surrogate of the desire. Both desires, to reunite with his mother and to accomplish this reunification by countermanding

death (and thereby removing the source of guilt) combine or condense in the Phoebe image, as she represents both mother imago and the means, viz. projection, through which to achieve the object of desire.

From the depths of the earth Endymion mysteriously materializes in the ocean, signalling the end of Book II and the start, after yet another narrative incursion, of Book III. With the dramatic potential of a single character limited, Book III sees a deuteragonist introduced into the story. Glaucus is the 1,000 year old wizard, altruist, mentor who will continue Endymion's education and further Endymion along his path toward the goal of the love object Cynthia. Through contact with the undersea sorcerer, Endymion will exhibit his powers "to consummate all" (III 710). After accomplishing this task, Endymion moves on to vivify all of the drowned lovers stored together by Glaucus over the past 1,000 years. Endymion's miraculous ability to restore life marks him as now mid way to the ideal, exemplifying god-like powers, now an intermediary between mortal and god (as if his ability to live underwater were not already enough). It also continues the strain of desire to defeat death, as it arises in the literal level of the story.

Endymion's power is another example of the author's wish fulfillment, of his unconscious desire to

calm the turbulence caused by guilt. The ability to bring life to the dead makes Endymion the holder of Keats's desires. To communicate the beauty of truth, the truth of the imagination, and the intensity of the heart's affections is the desire of a poet.²¹ To bring the past, the dead to life again (to reunite lovers) and therefore provide the closure to a gap, the completion to a void, is the poet's unconscious desire. Endowing Endymion with powers desired by himself, Keats dreams his fantasies, supplying momentary release of the energies trapped within the unconscious, dammed by the guilt of incestuous desires and imagined impotence. Like a dreamer, Keats fulfills his unconscious desires by fantasizing about them, only as a poet, he records his fantasies. Projecting his desires into the protagonist, Keats manipulates Endymion along a path to fulfillment. All aspects of the relationships protrude into the poem, from Oedipal influence to the guilt generated from this influence, to the author's fears of his own ceasing to be, to his hopes of consummating his libidinous wants while simultaneously relieving guilt. Were he to achieve this latter goal, Keats would finally put his mother to rest in his unconscious once and for all and open the door to the next room in the "Mansion of Many apartments" (Pack 90, letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, May 3, 1818) where the love object lies

desiring him.

Glaucus collected all of the drowned lovers and stored them in an underwater citadel. "'And where I have enshrined piously/ All lovers, whom storms have doom'd to die..." (III 721-2). Textual emphasis lies on the prior state of desire in the couples "All ruddy,--for here death no blossom nips" (III 740) rather than on their present state, truncating desire in its midst. Glaucus's job is to maintain the lovers in a hypostatized position relative to their desire, to hold them until a savior arrives to revive them and reunite the objects of desire, sealing the gap. The thrust of this third book replays the thrust prior to it in Endymion's quest for his lover. When Cynthia's "naked waist" (II 713) melts in Endymion's arms his desire is castrated. These and other postponements evince repressive forces in the author which emerge as postponement in the text. Although Endymion does not know that Cynthia is Phoebe is Dian, Keats does, and when Endymion comes close to consummating his passion, the mother affinity of the figure interferes with this satisfaction, repressing pleasure and postponing unification as a product of guilt from incestuous longings.

Ambivalence in all guises is vestigial product of this fundamental repression. Repeating the repression

is the undersea scene of interrupted desire. Its tie to the author's Oedipal conflict is in the situation which replays Keats's relationship to his mother where desire, brought to the surface in the face of father absence and situation as boudoir protector, is forced below, drowned, effectively killed when Keats's mother dies before desire finds satisfaction. Therefore desire, like the lovers, lies interrupted within the author's unconscious waiting for impossible completion. As a result, it seeks symbolic satisfaction. The symbolic quest for reunification, seen "mise en abyme" in the drowned lovers' episode, unfolds in the story as Endymion's search for Cynthia.

As easily as Arthur pulled the sword from the stone, Endymion accomplishes the tasks that Glaucus sets up to prove Endymion is the long-sought redeemer. (Glaucus says upon seeing Endymion for the first time: "'Thou art the man!'" III 234.) He easily, skillfully unravels a delicate thread, and he reads a blank sea shell (III 755-90). Completing the proofs breaks the age old spell put on Glaucus by the jealous witch Circe. Endowed with new powers as a consequence of his abilities ("Showering those powerful fragments on the dead...Death felt it to his inwards: 'twas too much:/ Death fell a weeping in his charnel-house./ The Latmian persever'd along, and thus/ All were reanimated." III

784-90), Endymion rejuvenates Glaucus and the lovers by sprinkling leaves over them. Now Endymion has the power to fill the gap, to unite desire to goal, to revivify the dead lovers. He has the power to do for others what he (and Keats) wants for himself -- to unite the desired object with the desire.

It seems no psychic accident that the means to this end involves a return from death, which is the expression of the host desire, Keats's root desire, to vanquish death's power, opens the path to reunification with parental imagos and leads the way to normal resolution of Oedipal influences (relieving also what Joyce in Ulysses called the "Aginbite of Inwit"). In Endymion's case the act of revivification foreshadows his own desired ends, as if this act were a ritual of fate, of manipulating the future. The drowned lovers' scene constitutes symbolic wish fulfillment. If he is able to bring the dead to life and reunite desires in others, he is on the path to those goals himself, and at the same time that much closer to the author's.

Before Book III ends, Endymion undergoes the next in the series of altered conscious states. Now amid the realm of gods and goddesses, he feels overwhelmed, overstimulated and calls out to the goddess of sensual love for aid: "'O I shall die! sweet Venus by my stay!'" (III 1010). Within grasp of his desire, Endymion feels

the pull of the abyss. His awareness focuses on the proximity of death to the goal of desire, recognizing that the opposing forces work closely, sometimes barely separated. His call is a voicing of the choices his intensified level of being has before it; he can fall easily to either side of the edge, and he seeks help from the eros side. Endymion calls to Venus (mother of Eros) to hold thanatos back and permit him to achieve the object of his quest. But momentarily the intensity is overbearing and he collapses, saying: "'I die'" (III 1012). Like the drowned lovers before him and his own loss of Cynthia before that, his desire is postponed, interrupted by the presence and force of death as its absence intrudes into the gap between desire and goal. Not even the Nereids could revive Endymion, "A sudden ring/ Of Nereids were about him, in kind strife/ To usher back his spirit into life:/ But still he slept." (III 1014-16). Yet the power of desire cuts through the pull to the void, as despite being ostensibly unconscious, even dead, Endymion is aware of his lover's presence. As the hero read the blank shell (III 761-64), he perceives the sound of words spoken, but ambiguously "Written in star-light on the dark above" (III 1021). Cynthia's voice penetrates to the consciousness enclosed within her lover. She tells him to awake, and he does alone amid a forest on earth's

surface, setting the scene for Book IV.

Once again desire has been within reach of fulfillment but is again postponed. The battle goes on between eros and thanatos in the poem, within the protagonist, and by association within the author, whose struggle finds itself portrayed in the text. What takes place in Keats when sensual union with the ideal comes within reach through a fictive consummation is that the opposite force of death (qua guilt) rises to meet the challenge to its power. Whenever the potential of realizing fulfillment arises, the counter force rises to interrupt consummation, thereby maintaining desire even while preventing it.

Death works to counter desire but ambivalently also to perpetuate it. Death prevents fulfillment because, as representative of repressive forces, it symbolizes the guilt caused by the carnal reunion with the mother element in the tripartite goddess. Sensual fulfillment may be Endymion's goal (and Keats's -- as he is able to satisfy his desires in fiction more readily than in real life), but it is not without its costs in increased guilt, guilt which surfaces to block the engagement of desire with object (and guilt which emerges in Keats's life where it postpones precisely as it does in art, here the text).

A new book brings a new character. The Indian Maid,

an escapee from Bacchus's party of revelers, meets Endymion and steals his love with her earthly charms. "And so he groan'd, as one by beauty slain" (IV 98). The new distraction splits Endymion's attention. Despite his hard fought journey to win his ideal, Cynthia remains invisible, inaccessible, and the Indian Maid is present, tangible, and willing. Endymion feels divided, possessor of a "triple soul" (IV 95). The choice also indicates (as critics point out) the division between the ideal and the real. Endymion has a chance to commit himself to the real world, to take a princess and return to rule his shepherd kingdom. The offer tempts him because the Indian Maid represents the alternative to union with the ideal, that is consummation with a real woman.

Professing love of the Indian Maid, Endymion feels recrimination, guilt because of his neglect for Cynthia, although he claims love for both. ("Adieu, my daintiest Dream! although so vast/ My love is still for thee" IV 657-8 for Phoebe; implied in lines IV 660-70 for Indian Maid) Before these admissions, he chooses the Indian Maid, but as he nears the consummation of their relationship, the watching Cynthia disappears ("...the shadow wept, melting away" IV 456) and soon thereafter the Indian Maid vanishes (she "melted from his grasp" IV 509). Endymion then renounces women, vows a hermit's

life of celibacy, and prepares to leave when Peona returns with the Indian Maid who will turn into Cynthia. Endymion and Cynthia/Phoebe/Dian/Indian Maid then disappear into the forest, living happily, like a joy from a thing of beauty, for ever.

The Indian Maid signifies sensual satisfaction by a figure autonomous from the mother archetype, yet when chosen, in effect merges into, transcends her earthly level into the ideal woman, unifying the separate but related aspects of "mater imago," ideal sensual partner, and virgin (Cynthia/Phoebe, Indian Maid, and Dian, respectively), with the realm of the real. Such a union is in itself contradictory, oxymoronic, a Platonic paradox like the Idea of the One and the Many, yet its very ambiguity characterizes the multiple, overdetermined forces broiling within the author's unconscious. The unification testifies to the desire to reconcile the disparate factions within Keats's mind, the projection of a next to impossible satisfactory result for the bickering forces within.

In the final episode the Indian Maid gains Endymion's approval and becomes the object of desire because she balances the Oedipal desires and their accompanying guilt with her fresh non-involvement. The irony is that the autonomy is a delusion; the Indian Maid is merely a projected extension of sensual

characteristics.

The unlikely solution to Endymion's dilemma -- which woman to select -- completes the analogy between Keats's poem and a wish-fulfilling dream. Four women on two levels turn into one. Endymion's ultimate amalgamated superwoman circumvents the author's need to come to terms with his mother's absence in his life by providing a fantasy solution. The hero gets all of the options, successfully unifying with the mother (Cynthia/Phoebe), conquering death²² and eradicating guilt by choosing an earth woman in a healthy show of reality and independence. Endymion lives out the deepest desires of his author in this awkward, enigmatic "mortal ex-machina" conclusion to this epic poem-dream, Keats's first major effort, and his longest sustained work.

NOTES

¹ Shakespeare, Hamlet: "If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,/ Absent thee from felecity a while,/ And in this harsh world draw they breath in pain/ To tell my story," spoken by Hamlet, Act V, sc. ii: 357-59.

² Stillinger, p. 88. Dated in Bate, p. 120.

³ Robert Gittings, John Keats: The Living Year 21 September 1818 to 21 September 1819 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 162.

⁴ Trilling, p. 92. Letter to George and Tom Keats, December 21, 1817.

⁵ Trilling, p. 88. Letter to Benjamin Bailey, November 22, 1817.

⁶ Ricoeur. pp. 105, 115.

⁷ Bate. p. 41, "Even now the poem Keats showed Clarke -- and Keats handed it to him with 'hesitation' and only when they parted...."

⁸ Freud, Interpretation of Dreams, ed., trans., Dr. A. A. Brill (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), p. 68.

⁹ Stillinger, p. 156, Endymion, II 774-786, implicitly; also, III 105-10: "...half-entranced laid/ His head upon a tuft of straggling weeds,/ To taste the

gentle moon..." p. 166, III 108-10; also: "'What is there in thee, Moon! that thou shouldst move/ My heart so potently?...Hand in hand we went/ From eve to morn across the firmament.'" p. 167, III 142-6.

¹⁰ Wright, p. 108, Lacan's "Desire of the Mother", a double genitive, means the child's desire and the mother's desire. The child sees itself as the full desire of the mother.

¹¹ The absence of a tribal king, of a figure who presents a rival authority for Endymion, as he is the shepherd prince and leader of his people, means an absence of what Lacan calls "nom du pere" or the "Law," a rival for his object of his desire. This situation replays Keats's own position, as his father was absent from the Oedipal triangle prior to its re-stimulation, its reawakening, its return from the repressed. Relatedly, this act of reawakening finds expression in the poems as the theme of revivification, a theme that serves two purposes at once, i.e. it is overdetermined. It serves the literal story's function and it serves the fictive wish-fulfillment of overcoming death (and of bringing his mother back to life).

¹² James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.

(New York: The Viking Press, 1964), p. 215.

¹³ Critics who see "Endymion" as an allegory

include Sperry, Owen, Bloom, Evert. Among those who oppose the allegorical perspective and see the poem in Platonic or neo-Platonic light are Little, Bate, Stillinger, Gittings.

¹⁴ Stillinger, p. 113, "Endymion," I 369; pp. 164-5, III 52-71. See also #9 above.

¹⁵ Freud, "Dostoevsky and Parricide," (1928) Chapter XXIV, in Character and Culture, intro., Philip Rieff, (New York: Collier Books, 1963) p. 283, "For every punishment is ultimately castration...."

¹⁶ Stillinger, p. 156, "Endymion," II 773-827, specifically: "'What! dost move? dost kiss? O bliss! O pain!/ I love thee, youth, more than I can conceive.'" II 773-4.

¹⁷ Stillinger, p. 138 "Endymion," II 203-4
"'...descend where alleys bend/ Into the sparry hollows of the world!'"

¹⁸ This interest is almost as if Keats anticipated the contemporary Structuralist and Post-Structuralist movements and their realization of man's fundamental deficiencies in communication through language.

¹⁹ Wright quotes Bloom (1975, p. 94), p. 152:
"'tropes are necessary errors about language, defending ultimately against the deathly dangers of literal meaning,'" and she goes on: "Literal meaning is death because the movement of desire has been stopped."

²⁰ J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, The Language of Psycho-Analysis, trans., Donald Nicholson-Smith, intro., Daniel Lagache, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1973), p. 82. "One of the essential modes of the functioning of the unconscious processes: a sole idea represents several associative chains at whose point of intersection it is located."

²¹ The source for this phrasing comes from Keats in his letter to Benjamin Bailey dated November 22, 1817, (Pack, p. 52): "I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of the Imagination -- What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth...."

²² The figure is immortal and, as was the case with Hercules, has won permission to make Endymion immortal
--

'Drear, drear
Has our delaying been; but foolish fear
Withheld me first; and then decrees of fate;
An then 'twas fit that from this mortal state
Thou shouldst, my love, be some unlook'd for change
Be spiritualized,'

Cynthia says to Endymion, IV 988-93; see also IV 376-9.

Otto Rank "has produced evidence of the surprising fact that the choice of subject-matter, especially for dramatic works, is primarily determined by the ambit of what psychoanalysis has termed the 'Oedipus complex.'" Freud, 1919

"The problem of the status and significance of poetry must be resolved at last in the area where our understanding of the following will meet: dreaming, and the telling of dreams in poetry, and the analogy: sex, and the telling of sex in love."
Bloom, Poetry and Repression

CHAPTER II

The Dramatic Poems

Desire returns to first desire, to Oedipal desire. In Keats's case this desire never fully matures into autonomous object desire because he finds himself in a situation closely resembling unconscious wishes when, after his father dies, he becomes his mother's bedroom companion and guardian. His Oedipal desires reawake (re-cathect); they return from the repressed under the strain of such overt similarity between desire ideal and reality (as in "Endymion"). His sensual desires fixating as a result of his mother's death strand Keats in the middle of confused desire. Unable to extricate himself from this fixation (death is irrevocable) and moved by growing guilt that he may be responsible for his mother's death (he could not keep the intruder death from his mother's bedroom), he grows obsessed with the

from his mother's bedroom), he grows obsessed with the idea of re-enacting the death scene, re-battling death, with the idea of reuniting with the ideal mother imago in order to fulfill the Oedipal needs thereby completing the reversed relationship with his mother. These memories linger in the major motifs and scenes of his poetry and directly influence his life's decisions (from becoming a poet to leaving Fanny Brawne to considering suicide).

The dominant themes of death and desire do not only appear within "Endymion." They arise again and recurrently in Keats's work where they reestablish and reinforce the strength and role of the unconscious in Keats's poetry. And as was the case with "Endymion," these themes tie the poet to his work while the work unties the themes of his unconscious. Two years after completing "Endymion," in 1819, Keats shows in "Lamia" (published in 1820) that the same earlier guilt and desires still haunt him. "Lamia" begins in the realm of classic mythology as mytho-poetic fantasy, echoing the prior poem.

Desire opens "Lamia" with Hermes chasing a nymph: "Hermes empty left/ His golden throne, bent warm on amorous theft" (Stillinger 452, 7-8). As anticipated, it should not be long until its counterpart theme arises, and shortly thereafter a disembodied voice calls

out: "When from this wreathed tomb shall I awake!" (38). Punctuated as exclamation, the question foregrounds the other dominant theme in Keats's poems, thanatos. This is the author's question, and "Lamia" is the answer. Each poem is an extension of the self into the network of texts that exists beyond death, effectively prolonging the author's existence. Keats comes to life with every reading of his work. Lamia's question voices the author's desire to arise from death, to win the battle with death, a battle lost when fighting for his mother and later for his brother.

In the opening situation of "Lamia," the nymph has been rendered invisible (99-109) in order to elude the desire of others (eros as lust). It is desire, ironically, that returns her to visibility when Lamia desires a favor from Hermes in return for the power to see the nymph. Lamia's selfish desire ultimately results in her own death, but at this stage, it results directly in the major transformation scene in this poem, her convulsions into woman (a scene presaging Apollo's dying into life in "Hyperion"). For the nymph transformation signals death to her complacency, to her security. For Hermes, it signals the consummation of desire: the nymph "gave up her honey to the lees./ Into the green-recessed woods they flew" (143-4, p. 456.) For Lamia, who sacrifices the bond of trust to achieve

satisfaction of her own erotic needs, transformation means the rebirth of desire, much after the fashion of Glaucus being rejuvenated by Endymion's abilities to accomplish the impossible (reading the blank shell, etc.). Lamia's rebirth is an escape from the restrictions of the animal world, (the opposite change from that of the men transformed by Circe into animals in "Endymion") escape into the reality of sensual satisfaction, the surface theme of the poem. By betraying the privacy of the nymph (110-1 & 121-2) (and as a result, perhaps, signing her own demise?), Lamia acquires the power to evolve into the human realm, retain supernatural powers, and achieve the object of her erotic desire, the human Lycius.

As with Cynthia, it is a woman, Lamia, who is the aggressor, the sexual provocateur. As in an adolescent boy's dream, the woman instigates the sexual contact, relieving the boy of some guilt because he projects the erotic desires onto the woman. Immediately upon contact there is love at first sight between Lamia and Lycius of such degree that loss, absence arouses fear of death for Lycius. He is afraid that Lamia will vanish ("while he, afraid/ Lest she should vanish..." 253-4), and that if she does, he will die, foreshadowing the story's outcome: "'Even as there vanishest so shall I die'" (260) Lycius complains, linking death causally to

desire.

Like La Belle, Lamia is a fantasy realized, the object fixation of erotic desires, yet again like La Belle, Lamia is a tease, arousing Lycius but then threatening to leave him (280, p. 459.) "The cruel lady" (290) shows no sympathy or regret when he swoons, "murmuring of love" (289) from the loss. The tension between lovers slowly solidifies into the power relationship that accompanies sexual expression when characterized by dominance and submission. Here Lamia semi-sadistically controls her paramour. Soon the roles will reverse and she will love the "tyranny" (II 81). Lamia examines the dark side of desire, the possibilities of sensual indulgences in "That purple-lined palace of sweet sin" (II 31). These desires, like adolescent fantasy, appear to be the projected, sado-masochistic tendencies of the author, and these tendencies are the vague traces of his dissatisfaction with his intense desires for the opposite sex -- desires blocked by the stunted Oedipal desires left unresolved by his mother's death.

Lycius also undergoes transformation, and his change exactly carries out the author's desire to overcome death. After he "from one trance was wakening/ Into another (296-7), "Lycius from death awoke into amaze" (322). In these poems desire in the male figures

intensifies until it causes a loss of consciousness, a state here associated with death. Awakening from this state, like awakening from death, implies a rebirth, a conquest over the void's power, and constitutes a small triumph for eros over thanatos. Keats conquers death momentarily by suspending its powers over his characters. When Endymion or Lycius returns from unconsciousness as if returning from death, Keats overcomes the pull into absence, into loss, into the realm empty of his mother and the realm overwhelmed by his guilt in the prior loss to death. Death calls forth the memory of his mother, metonymically as loss, and it also summons the guilt associated with the loss. By creating fictional power over death, Keats fictively parallels the totemic rituals of "primitive" cultures where idols, icons of the dead, house the dead's spirits and perpetuate the past into the present. Keats's poems and their characters are his totems; they provide his defence against the overwhelming powers of loss and the continuous pressure of guilt accompanying the loss. Poetry provides a release of these pressures as the fantasized power to master the ineluctable (a form of "semi-omnipotent thought").

Yet another transformation in the poem is the subtle change in desire. Rather than as a goal in itself in "Lamia," desire becomes sated, its goal

achieved. In "Endymion" desire propels the entire poem, as if the rising action were the entire purpose of the story, its climax saved for another time -- perhaps here in "Lamia", where the climax and the ensuing resolution are still preliminary to the denouement. As the passion in the purple palace detumesces and the sated lovers lie "Where use had made it sweet" (II 23), (presaging a similar tableau in "Psyche") desire rests, lulled to sleep by satisfaction, allowing the heretofore dominated forces a freer reign. This shift, this incipient transformation from unfulfilled desire to desire satisfied brings with it the change in Lycius's character and a power reversal in his relationship. Lamia awakes confusedly from post coital sleep (II 34-9). She wants to remain isolated with Lycius in their palace, but desire for power replaces erotic desire in Lycius. He wants to show her off as a possession in a public wedding. He wants to dominate his object, "with stronger fancy to reclaim/ Her wild and timid nature to his aim" (II 70-1), with "His passion, cruel grown" (II 75), and conversely, "she lov'd the tyranny" (II 81). Their relationship changes from desire as pursuit to desire as a surfeit of decadent, sensual overindulgence which finally turns into perversion.

By the end of the poem, Lycius dies from the loss

of Lamia, who herself dies from the cold stare of Apollonius, the undesired guest at the wedding. The steel stare of the rational Apollonius de-masks Lamia (here the scopic drive aligns with thanatos), cuts the gap, the wound of absence into Lycius's life. The gap pulls Lycius within, like a cosmic black hole pulling even light back into itself. Desire presupposes absence, as need presupposes a lack, but Apollinian reason kills desire by unveiling the wound, the gap which desire pulls into itself and suffocates. By this action the gap fills and empties itself, killing desire rather than satisfying it. By de-masking Lamia, Apollonius exposes the gap of desire to the cold "lashless eyelids" (288) of rationality's non-desiring, in effect neutralizing desire. The smothering stare of reason, the steady gaze of the superego, douses the smouldering look of desire. When the object of Lycius's desire evaporates before him, his desire, both as source and goal, dries up as well, killing both him and his desire in a chain reaction. Death, by its presence as void, as absence, sucks up and nullifies desire when the thanatos-motivated scopic drive focuses its stare via Apollonius into the mask of Lamia's desire, melting it, exposing the desire to the void beyond, killing Lamia and opening the gap to swallow Lycius and his desire.

The superego quells the self-perpetuating desire

(desire with goal in sight but beyond gap), and death opens the void beyond desire, dissolving the scopic link to the goal. Death swallows the goal, removing it from the cycle, eradicating the fuel that propels desire into the gap. Death-gap swallows desire, suffocating it, leaving only gap behind, unfilled (into which Lycius fell) rather than leaving behind desire as would happen in its normal self-perpetuating cycle. When desire enters the gap in search of its object, it leaves its trace behind in the form of premature closure, of scar, the sealed wound healed by desire tracking its object, but death-gap leaves the wound open, as it swallows both object and desire, leaving nothing but void behind, killing the cycle.

Being its own subject and object, desire chases itself. It self perpetuates by emptying whatever it fills. As long as the object remains apart, ahead of the chasing desire (the subject), desire continues (the gap remains between subject and object). But when desire catches its object, as Hermes does the nymph, as Lamia does Lycius, then the gap closes, momentarily, in climax, but as this climax fills the gap (as the penis fills the vagina), it empties itself (as the seminal fluid leaves the penis), as if digging a hole behind while it fills the hole ahead - thus even in completion, desire prepares for further desire. In "Lamia" the gap

closes in the purple palace, as Lycius fills his desire in Lamia's gap; yet even in the climax, satisfaction wanes as desire, sated empties, leaving another gap.

A healthy relationship is a closed cycle, the desire filling itself ahead and emptying itself behind, opening and closing the gap, perpetuating desire as love. But in Lamia and Lycius's case, the cycle becomes unbalanced by jealousy on Lamia's part and by greed on Lycius's. Instead of a self-enclosed cycle, instead of the perfect isolation within the palace, the cycle malfunctions. The gap opens but remains unfilled. Rather than working in tandem, the desires lose rhythm and create discord. Between Lamia and Lycius, the desires misdirect, opening independent gaps, leaving other gaps unfilled. When a third element, Apollonius's gaze of death, enters the system, the gap opens without filling, in effect evaporating desire. Then, weakened by the stress of unsynchronized cycles, the desire dissolves into the void opened by the third element, and swallows the entire cycles.

Death opens the void, the unfillable gap that swallows desire in its cycle. The superego blocks satisfaction by ending the cycle. Without his object of desire, Lycius dies; without the source of desire (Lamia's empty need to have Lycius, blocked by Apollonius, dried up by his stare), Lamia dies. Lamia

is an elaborate dramatization of desire's path from need to fulfillment to interruption to death.

In "Endymion," the impediments on Endymion's path to his goal plague desire but desire still prevails. In "Lamia," desire catches and consumes itself. "Isabella" falls between the two, a poem about thwarted love. Again the theme is romance, but romance unconsummated, truncated, cut off in the midst of desire, in this case leaving the wound to become infected.

Unlike the prior poems' characters, "Isabella's" are diffident, uncertain, tentative in their romantic ways. Lorenzo watches Isabella, his scopic drive siphoning off some libidinal energy, but his desire grows anyway. (Stillinger 245-6, 3). Finally the two would-be lovers reciprocate their passions, revealing their feelings to each other (8-9). Committed to their desires, Lorenzo and Isabella look forward to a life together, but just as the path to consummation is interrupted in "Endymion" by external forces, here again an intercession prevents desire from satisfaction. Isabella's brothers intrude, their jealousy and condescension goading them to interfere in a relationship they consider unsuitable for Isabella. The brothers' crime, aside from reflecting their specious bourgeois morality as they rationalize murder for selfish and economic reasons, represents the castration

of desire. Isabella's brothers murder Lorenzo, stabbing him to death, reflecting the symbolic removal of libidinal forces.

Their motivation may mirror the same source as did Apollonius's -- the author's superego. This poem again punishes the desirer, castrating his desire by cutting off life. The poem reflects the author's tension, Keats's ambivalence about erotic desire and its fulfillment. All of the characters mirror a force within the author's "teeming brain." Isabella's brothers characterize the fear and disapproval caused by guilt (within ego at the influence, cause of superego). Masochistically, Keats desires punishment for the pleasures associated with erotic desire (a desire carrying over, outward into his life, a point to be discussed later). Endymion must surmount the impediments (both natural and supernatural) on his path to union with Cynthia. (As Glaucus paid for his desire with "1,000 years of..."). Lycius, although he manages to glut his desires, pays with his life for his transient pleasure, evaporating when his desired object dies. For Isabella and Lorenzo's passion, death comes to both, and then only after a lingering suffering and madness for Isabella.

Close to realizing their goal, Isabella's desires expect consummation (10). Familial intrusion

unexpectedly closes the gap between desire and its object by opening it into the void of death. Closed because the object vanished, the gap then opens into the depths of absence, of lack beyond desire's ability to fill. Death accompanies the brothers' intrusion, effectively postponing Isabella's desire infinitely.

Love, desire denied, forms the basis for these longer Keats poems. Desire teased into tumescence, tickled into excitement creates the primary subject beneath the plot, only to have its anticipation defeated by the intrusion of guilt. These erotic games run through the poem as they find their source deep within the author's unconscious.

Keats's feelings of frustration from his own losses find their way into the text as Isabella's neurotic response, her obsessive reaction to her loss of a love object. Echoing Lamia, and in a faint trace through two protagonists to the author, Isabella begins to fade away, like Lycius, immediately upon the loss of her desired object. When Lorenzo fails to return from his trip, Isabella begins to deteriorate: "So sweet Isabel/ By gradual decay from beauty fell" (32). As in Hamlet suspicions gain confirmation in a dream. Like Hamlet, Isabella receives a ghostly visit at midnight revealing the true nature of the crime against her lover. (35-41). Isabella's contact with the supernatural, like Hamlet's

and Endymion's (his nightly dreams wherein Cynthia contacted him, as well as his "Adam's dreams") reinforce the connection between poetry and dreams and between fiction and the author's unconscious. By incorporating dreamed information in the text, information from a supernatural, unknown source, the writer replicates the relationship between his own source, his unconscious, and his text.

In Isabella's dream Lorenzo, ghost-like, presides by her bed, "at her couch's foot" (35). Like King Hamlet's ghost, Lorenzo's ghost returns to avenge his death. The communication between ghosts and humans, like that between humans and immortals, replays the veiled links between consciousness and unconsciousness and suggests the desire to overcome the finality of death . Like Orpheus, Isabella desires to reunite with her lover, like Keats who desires reunion to complete his interrupted relationship with his mother who has gone below, Eurydice to Hades, Lorenzo to the earth grave and Mrs. Keats to death and absence. In these cases the desire, the force of eros, overcomes thanatos; the dead return, at least temporarily. Eurydice reaches the portal to the surface; Lorenzo returns in a vision (and in the flower pot), and Keats's desire creates the texts which continue fictively the life of his desires. The dead manage a return, their power arising from the

desire of the living consciousness, a desire sufficient to overcome the gate of death. These examples constitute a mythico-poetic reflection of the author's wish (and of the collective unconscious's) to have desire overcome the frailty of death.

Keats's particular yearning to overcome death, the seminal force in his writing, comes again to the surface in the narrator's focus (and the narrator, as previously, seems to correspond to the author's conscious voice), evident overtly when he apostrophizes to the audience about being in a graveyard and imagining the past lives of those buried. "Pitying each form that hungry Death hath marr'd,/ And filling it once more with human soul?" (45). Death personified establishes itself as nemesis. Keats's theme again becomes that of conquering death, of gaining dominance over the paternal Law that defeated him in his childhood and then turns up periodically to taunt him. (Keats's decision to be a surgeon may be motivated by his desire to face death and to push it back, to have the power to stave off death, but language facility exerts more control than manual dexterity, and he attempts to control death on the textual level rather than confront it/him in the operating room.)

Like Keats, Isabella develops an obsession with death, but whereas Keats sublimates this fixation,

relieving its tension through the act of writing, Isabella dams her energy. Ultimately her monomania dries all other areas of desire and results in her death. In her dream Isabella sees Lorenzo's dead body through his grave's earth: "She gaz'd into the fresh-thrown mould, as though/ One glance did fully all its secrets tell;/ Clearly she saw...Pale limbs at bottom of a crystal well" (46). She and her hand maid find the grave, dig it up, and remove the dead lover's head. Her obsession with Lorenzo's rotting head, bordering on necrophilia, intensifies as she devotes exclusive attention to the object. She plants his head in a flower pot beneath a Basil plant (hence the sub-title), and the plant then becomes the sole object of her ministrations. The plant flourishes from her affections and solicitude while inversely she withers until her brothers, again the perpetrators of absence, steal the pot, removing the object of Isabella's perverse monomania. Without the object, Isabella dies, the absence opening her wound too widely.

Death, then, permeates Keats's poetry, creeping in as the paternal nemesis to Keats's desires. Foiled by death in the still formative years when Keats's parents died, he spills his unconscious quarrel into his poetry where it is the underpinning, the skeleton, lying within, beneath the context. Desire, as motivation for

subject and as content, battles death, its adversary, in multiple layers.

In the two poems prior to "Isabella," desire sated results in diverted erotic energies which ultimately lead to the deaths of Lamia and Lycius; desire denied provokes a festering wound that also ends in death in "Isabella." There seems to be a fear that desire's rewards may be too powerful, too potent for actual fulfillment. None the less, Endymion resolves his guilt by enduring harsh trials and postponement, and the results of his consummation Keats leaves unfulfilled, unwritten, ending his poem at the moment of re-union, as if at the behest of his own repressive forces. When he dares to dream, to wish past the point of consummation, guilt infringes on the freedom of pleasure and imposes its power in association with death by giving death to those who actually achieve their desire.

"The Eve of St. Agnes" marks a return to the "Endymion" scene, where the entire duration of the poem, up to the final lines, is the story of desire and its search to the point of fulfillment. Here again the story ends before fulfillment begins. The heart of the poem is desire and within the heart of the castle lies Porphyro's object of desire. Desire draws Porphyro to the center of the castle where he ensconces himself in Madeline's closet. Situated, desire stops. As in Lear,

"ripeness is all," and there is a delay of action. In Hamlet, the protagonist delays, according to Freud, Ernst, Trilling, et al. because of the internal conflict caused by his Oedipus complex.¹ Porphyro delays for similar reasons. Sitting alone, closetted next to his paramour, Porphyro exercises his scopic drive.² He becomes a voyeur. Like Cynthia to Endymion, Endymion to Adonis (Lycius to Lamia: "...they might see each other while they almost slept" Stillinger 464, II 25), Porphyro watches over his sleeping object of desire. Porphyro begins the act of observing prior to sleep, however, drawing closer to its actual source in erotic desire, as he becomes audience, willing participant in Madeline's unaware striptease. "Anon his heart revives: her vespers done,/ Of all its wreathed pearls her hair she frees;/ Unclasps her warmed jewels one by one;/ Loosens her fragrant boddice; by degrees/ Her rich attire creeps rustling to her knees..." (26). Rather than rushing in to her boudoir and culminating his desire immediately, (or at least making the attempt, however un-Courtly), Porphyro delays, preferring instead passive scopic pleasure. Rationale for the delay comes in the Romantic notion of the Eve of St. Agnes legend, that is, the need for Madeline to dream her lover into existence, in a fashion similar to Borge's story "The Circular Ruins," before she may marry. Delay satisfies

a deeper need and that is the need to postpone gratification because of the concomitant guilt, achieving instead clandestine pleasure through the passive sense of sight.

The act of delay is actually a prolongation of pleasure, visually parallel to the physical foreplay preceeding sex; it builds the intensity through anticipation and excitement -- scopic stimulation. Porphyro, more exactly the narrator, focuses on the sensuous and sensual aspects of Madeline's disrobing. It seems both protagonist and narrator (they are difficult to distinguish) derive pleasure from the duration and object of focus. This focus and detail point to the erotic nature of the experience.³

For both Porphyro and narrator (and author?) the striptease provides the cause for the delay in action. A source of this delay lies within Porphyro-as-Keats. Erotic desire, repressed, needs release through alternate means, and for Keats this means writing. His own tendencies emerge in his writing. Voyuerism surfaces as noted above suggesting at least an unconscious affinity for this proclivity. By fulfilling Keats's specific needs, it releases sexual energies while maintaining distance and obviating guilt. As long as the object of desire remains asleep, she remains latent, her erotic potential in neutral. In Madeline's

case, the active striptease bonds the viewing to the erotic desires, putting the potential for fulfillment into gear; yet Porphyro still delays because of the passive indulgence Madeline's act provides -- delay enables fantasy freeplay. For Porphyro delay is a solitary, autonomous, passive, autoerotic satisfaction that permits erotic pleasure without the complications of physical involvement. For Porphyro, passive pleasure is preliminary to action, but for Keats, action remains in the realm of his poetry, best left to the stronger characters who can act out their creator's desires without involving him. Writing in this sense is itself a means of voyeurism, the writer staring at his creations and watching his desires fructify.

Delay constitutes the ambivalence of erotic desire in Keats. Voyeurism solidifies the desire but its distance, its delay signifies its diffidence, its fear of impotence. Keats's characters watch because viewing is safer than acting, and Keats's characters only act when they can be punished for their actions (Lycius, Isabella) or when their pleasure can be infinitely postponed into the exterior text or beyond (Endymion, Porphyro).

The author's guilt evinces itself not only in the secretive nature of voyeurism, an autoerotic pleasure devoid of involvement, but in the converse of voyeurism,

the desire to remain hidden, that accompanies Porphyro on his quest. He avoids being seen, sneaking into Madeline's chamber. He was lead "in close secrecy,/ Even to Madeline's chamber" (19). Following his contact with her, finally, they sneak out of the castle, veiling themselves under darkness and conscious effort to avoid disapproving eyes. They avoid being caught and act, as the old beldame earlier feared, "From dim fright of espial" (21), a reverse voyeurism, in order to release their erotic desires of social and superego constraints. Secreting erotic pleasure and exercising erotic desire in private while screening it from others seem the acts of insecure, guilt-ridden persons, standard stock in the Keats unconscious "dramatis personae."

Passive pleasure is the choice of the impotent, those desiring but incapable. The imagery recurring in Keats's poetry includes scenes of impotence and of desire frustrated, a notable example arising in "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles" of "a sick Eagle looking at the sky" (Stillinger 93, 5). In "The Eve of St. Agnes" a similar image occurs in Madeline's unspoken thoughts, which the narrator describes spoken "As though a tongueless nightingale should swell/ Her throat in vain, and die, heart-stifled, in her dell" (23). Both images reflect insecurity coupled with desire, the inability combined with passion that marks a voyeur. Keats's

descriptions derive from understanding the plight of one fraught with desire but overcome by lack. Like one impotent, one erotically wounded, one effectually castrated, the eagle is sick but longs for its medium, and the nightingale dies from a lack of the creative element. These sentiments echo Keats's and permit a glimpse into his inner fears and insecurities, weaknesses that influence his decisions with Fanny and the other women in his life.

Most of the main characters developed by Keats in these major poems share a commonality in having their desire postponed and gratification delayed. Even when objects of desire become unified with the subjects, they must first wait. "Endymion" is the story of delay as Endymion and Cynthia's desires wait for satisfaction. Isabella and Lorenzo are too shy to reveal their love, but when they finally do, Lorenzo's death puts desire into infinity. Porphyro must endure the passage into the castle while subliminal fears and guilt postpone contact, at least while subsidiary desires fill themselves. Lamia waits an indefinite period before she is rendered human, that is until she is restored to her fully human form and able to seek her desire in Lycius.

Desire postponed may not always be desire denied, but as a pattern it supports the contention that guilt exercises strong control over desire. Guilt influences

the characters' behavior, or more specifically, the behavior of their creator, as it seems that guilt accompanying the rewards of consummation motivates the delays rather than any character's drives. Coupled with the impotent-imagery examples and the voyuer scenes, the acts of delay portray the psyche of one who has strong libidinal drives countered by equally strong fears of rejection, guilt feelings, and reservations about performance.

Another oft-repeated scene is what Keats refers to in a letter as "Adam's dream" (Trilling 88, letter to Ben Bailey, November 22, 1817) in an allusion to Milton's Paradise Lost. When Endymion awakes to "...find his arms enclosed around his vision bright..." he is enacting Adam's dream. Madeline had such a dream, and when she awoke, "she still beheld/ Now wide awake, the vision of her sleep" (34), "videlicet," Porphyro. Madeline dreams her desire into reality, yet her desire remains aloof, ideal. Whereas Porphyro's desire exists in the earthly realm, the realm of knights and dogs howling execrations, (10). Madeline's desire is removed; she melts Porphyro out of reality and into her dream, dozing back to sleep and re-dreaming her lover, the distinction between real-ideal blurred as it became in "Endymion." The two worlds overlap. Desire reaches beyond the gap, bridging them. Madeline's dream

prepares for the earthly union with the divine, the real with the ideal.

Merging the realm of desire -- dreams -- with reality voices the desire within the writer, a desire to dominate the immutably real with the everlasting ideal. Here is yet another way that Keats expresses his desire to overcome death, this time by dreaming his wishes, his fantasies, his desire to reunite with the (maternal) ideal, into reality: "We have learned to understand the longing for death as the longing for reunion with the mother."⁴ Adam's dream represents the power to overcome the limitations of this world and replace them with the boundless possibilities of fantasy. It also suggests the desire to transcend the impediments to consummation in this world, a desire to dream away the cold world outside the castle, to wish away the guard dogs and the clansmen, and live fulfilled in a dream realm where connubial satisfaction does not hold fears of impotence and guilt.

NOTES

¹ See Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, trans., Dr. A. A. Brill (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), p. 163. See also "The Problem of Hamlet and the Oedipus Complex," Ernest Jones (or his Hamlet and Oedipus, Doubleday Anchor Books, 1949, p. 18): Hamlet cannot virulently renounce Claudius to his mother because "the more vigorously he denounces his uncle the more powerfully does he stimulate to activity his own unconscious and repressed complexes."

² Keats, later, will wait to catch a glimpse of Fanny: he will be "watching to see you [F.B.] show yourself for a minute in the garden," Pack, p. 219, letter to Fanny Brawne, February, 1820?

³ Stillinger, p. 310. Variations for stanza 26 clarify the sensual nature further: "[a] Loosens the boddice from her [b] Loosens her bursting [c] Loosens her Boddice lace string [d] Loosens her Boddice; and her bosom bar [e] Loosens her."

⁴ Karen Horney, "The Distrust Between the Sexes," in A World of Ideas Essential Reading for College Writers 2nd ed., Lee A. Jacobus, ed., (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), p. 339.

"The Ego is not master in its own house." Freud

Chapter III Revolutions in Poetry: 1819

"HYPERION: A Fragment"

Framing the famous odes of 1819 are the "Hyperions." Begun in May, "Hyperion" begins the final year of writing and extends toward the end of Keats's poetic output. Differing from the odes' conceptual and personal content, "Hyperion" is written in a fictional mode. The poem tells a story, naturally one from the ancient Greek collection of myths, that focuses attention on origins, on pre-history when the Titans populated the earth and cosmos. The "mise en scene" proffers information about the direction the poet's mind is taking; namely, he is embarking on yet another search for fulfillment.

The thematic elements, Titans, their power loss and frustration, continue in the Keatsian vein, particularly as Oedipal forces exercise prominent influence. The very situation of overthrow, of young males replacing their older counterparts, coincides with the Oedipal longings of male youth. Characteristically, Keats's poem is overdetermined and reflects several sources. Aside from the Oedipal

situation constituted by the "donnee," other Keatsian characteristics populate and move in the poem which opens with the main character Saturn sitting "quiet as a stone" while "his bow'd head seem'd list'ning to the Earth,/ His ancient mother, for some comfort yet" (Stillinger 329, 20-1).

Overthrown, Saturn is powerless, diffident, reduced to self pity, "His old right hand lay nerveless, listless, dead,/ Unscpetred," and this quote, often used by Bate, sums up in a static, sculptured image of impotence the loss of power and pride Saturn once held. This picture of ebbd masculine power shows the undercurrent of uncertainty and disillusionment that flows within other Keats poems. Beginning with an impotent male figure who, emasculated, seeks solace for his weakness in his mother's embrace (21), revives Keat's fundamental themes and acknowledges them from the start. Where Oedipal influences surface, so do the concomitant themes of death and desire.

Saturn, too, is charged with connotations as he represents the object of overthrow, "'rebellion/ Of son against his sire'" (Coelus's observation to Hyperion, I 321-2), and the potential for youth to replace the old. He is the object of opposition, the castration threat, and all that is the Law, all that has been overturned, cast aside. He thereby opens a vacancy, a gap for the young to fill. Further, in appearing to return to atavistic maternal security, he signals the cyclic nature of the Oedipus complex

as the father goes to his mother when he faces loss. Mother Earth's role in this scene is a comforter, a maternal security blanket.

In an "Endymion" mode, Keats plays revivifier by using his earlier themes. As before, Keats describes the discrepancy between mortal language and ideal. The narrator laments "our feeble tongue" (49) because it is comparatively "frail/ To that large utterance of the early Gods!" (50-1) Later this same theme enlarges in the mind expansion scene in "The Fall" (with its progenitor in Paradise Lost)¹ which overcomes the barrier between mortal and god-like language.

Concern for communication between two realms is yet another layer of the author's deep debt to the loss of his mother. All of the desires for "lispings empyrean," for mortal-god communication, are fruits of the fundamental desire to unite life with afterlife, to reach out from life to death. And because gods are projections of desire to defeat death, immortal as well as inhabitants of a higher plane, the desire to communicate fully with them signals the base desire to join with the dead, in life, to defeat death by living as an immortal in defiance of it.

The transition from Titans to new gods continues the series of transitions that weave through the poems. In this case the change literally completes the natural cycle of youth replacing age; it is also the surface of a deeper wish to supplant the paternal powers, as Jove takes over for

Saturn (249-50) and Apollo prepares to for Hyperion. The Oedipal desire to take over, to supercede the rival for mother's affections, surfaces as the theme of transitions, finally reaching close to the source in "Hyperion" where the plot itself is the replacing of father figures by son exemplars. While paralleling Bloom's theory that "strong poets" like Keats need to overthrow their paternal heritage, (Keats tropes, as Bloom would say, Paradise Lost, "Book II: The Argument" here in the underground scene in Book II), the situation also expresses the Oedipal dynamics between fathers and sons.

The theme of parental overthrow binds the poem to its Oedipal source. The poem's focus on Saturn combines with the sympathetic perspective given to those overthrown to suggest castration fear as the main theme. Condensed in Saturn's situation is both the fear of castration and the correlative, fear of impotence, manifest as power loss.

Saturn, with support from Thea, regains his confidence by recognizing powers that enable him to rise beyond depression -- these powers reflect the poet's own response to depression. Saturn asks: "'But cannot I create?'" (141), projecting the question for the author. Creativity moves Saturn beyond his depression (and writing will enable the author to overcome his fear of death).

Book II of "Hyperion" has as its focal point the Miltonic, epic style of grand dialogue, reminiscent of the

Greek military leaders' language when they are deciding strategy in Book II of The Illiad. It also directly parallels the discussion scene, mentioned above, in Book II of Paradise Lost where Moloch, Mammon, Belial et. al. plot their next move against the angels. Each figure in Keats's "dramatis personae" expresses a thought or approach similar to those espoused by their also overthrown forerunners, the cast-out in Paradise Lost. Oceanus preaches acceptance of fate, like Mammon. Enceladus advocates revenge like Moloch, etc. (280). Saturn, like Lucifer, seeks to rally the despondent gods, and he refuses to continue self-pity, responding instead with action: "'But cannot I create?'" (141). Here he shares perspective and motive with Keats, who writes to Miss Jeffrey (Pack 167, May 31, 1819), "I must choose between despair & Energy -- I choose the latter."

The youthful Apollo becomes the central figure of Book III, changing the theme from loss to gain. The scene shifts from the gods' world to the earthly isle of Delos. Having left his mother and his twin sister, Apollo wanders the countryside, not yet a full fledged god. In yet another version of Adam's dream, a goddess comes looking for Apollo, whom he recognizes from his dreams (III 82). The use of Adam's dream variations, in "Endymion," "Eve of St. Agnes," here and in the letters, objectifies desire. These scenes where dreamed visions turn into reality are objective correlatives to the underlying desires of the character, and

by extension, fantasies of the author.

When the goddess Mnemosyne actually appears to Apollo after their communication in his dreams (III 61), he recognizes her and reacts intimately, revealing confidences to her, as though she were mother, lover, or analyst. He discusses his feelings, wondering why he is melancholy and why he is like "'one who once had wings'" (III 91), (involving again the theme of male impotence). Apollo sounds the poem and poet's theme, wondering "'Where is power?'" (III 103) before he realizes that it is "'Knowledge enormous'" (III 113) that makes him a god.

Book III chronicles the Lamia-like transformation of Apollo from youthful potential into immortal, adult godhead. The violent transition ("Soon wild commotions shook him, and made flush/ All the immortal fairness of his limbs;/ Most like the struggle at the gate of death" III 124-6), symbolizes the intensity of the struggle to turn from death aversion to death tolerance. Apollo's struggle is "Most like the struggle at the gate of death" (III 126), and his convulsions are measured against the (soon to be impossible) extreme of death, described oxymoronically as the shuddering ability to "Die into life" (III 130). Language choice brings out the subject that underlies the poem, that of death and power to resist or even transcend it ("Where is power?"). Apollo's change provides also the clue to the author's means of transcending, evading, or circumventing the inevitable

conclusion of mortality. Knowledge gave Apollo his godhood and provided him with a feeling of power, of immortality, as if he had drunk an "'elixir peerless...And so become/ Immortal'" (III 119-20). It is knowledge then, and more specifically knowledge of beginnings and endings, of "creations and destroyings" (III 116) -- of eros and thanatos -- that makes a god of him. Apollo's immortal knowledge is emblem for the (author's) desires to move beyond the bounds of death by mastering the forces of creativity and power (destruction). Apollo's transmutation is the physical analogue to the author's turning from Oedipal incompleteness to the resolved and resigned state of mature acceptance and equanimity based in the "Knowledge enormous" of "creations and destroyings all at once." Keats, like his characters, grows beyond the battle for immortality to the plane of equanimity and serenity, the realm extolled and exemplified in "To Autumn." It is the same realm glimpsed and desired here in the final section of the first "Hyperion."

"You will judge of my 1819 temper when I tell you that the thing I have most enjoyed this year has been writing an ode to Indolence." Keats in a letter to Miss Jeffrey. June 9, 1819.

Gleaning the Brain; Tracing the Shadows

Misrecognition or "meconnaissance" grounds "Ode on Indolence" in a repetition compulsion that keeps the narrator's projected desires veiled from himself. Three figures appear before the persona early in the morning and follow each other, heads bowed, identities masked. The narrator may be awake but the setting is ambiguous enough to keep his conscious state uncertain: "One morn before me were three figures seen" (Stillinger 375, 1). Called "shadows" (11) the sexless figures revolve or pass before the narrator's gaze. He fails to recognize them, and it may be that he sleeps, seeing shadows before him. Regardless, he wonders why he fails to recognize them and why their identities are hidden: "How is it shadows, that I know ye not?" (11).

Rather than simply not recognizing the figures, the narrator notes that "they were strange to me" (9). He exhibits denial, wondering twice why he could not recognize them. (He will call them "ghosts" later; here they are "shadows.") He cannot identify them because,

as projections of his strongest desires, desires denied (overtly by the end of the poem, unconsciously here), they cannot enter his consciousness unmasked. Delay provides him time to permit the distortion caused by denial to enact the transition to his consciousness of the figures' identities. Only after the narrator sees them a third time does he finally understand who they are, and then only after he speculates on their origin and questions their intent: "Was it a silent deep-disguised plot/ To steal away...?" (13-14). The narrator, rather than supply information about the figures, reveals his own paranoid fears in this question. He fears conspiracy and loss -- but by his own desires that finally undergo dreamwork to materialize into the allegorical images of his strong desires, the personified figures of Love, Ambition, and Poesy.

The three figures' identities are slow to materialize because they are still forming. As projections of the perceiver's consciousness, they gradually, cautiously, became whole out of their repressed and distorted state. The narrator, still semi-conscious, releases his desires as visions before himself. Appearing unmasked before a receptive consciousness brings them back for their fourth² turn in front of the persona: "And once more came they by." It

is only after the light of day enters and brings with it the harsh realities of daily responsibility that he turns his back on his desires and banishes them from his sight. "The morn was clouded...O shadows! 'twas time to bid farewell!" (45,49). In order to function without losing to indolence or without suffering melancholy from his desires' loss, he needs not only to repress his desires but to deny them their strength and power over him.

What the poem expresses, then, is "der Wiederholungszwang" or the repetition compulsion. It is, as Vendler would say, the "constitutive trope"³ of the ode. More specifically, the poem marks the uncanny ("unheimlich")⁴ presence of the return of the repressed.

The passive voice gives away the diffidence with which the author approaches this new yet familiar scene. The figures' uncanny presence puzzles the viewer: "How is it, shadows, that I knew ye not?" (11). They stir a ripple in his consciousness, and he wonders at his memory loss (repression). Ambition, Love, and Poesy remain unrecognized at first, yet they are familiar because, albeit repressed, they are working their way into the persona's consciousness. When they finally emerge clear and full-faced, (21-2), compared to the metaphorically appropriate "side-faced" (2) view in the beginning, the dawn has broken. The narrator has at

last recognized the characters who have been haunting him during the first two stanzas.

The figures' various references as "shadows" (11), "figures" (1), "Love, Ambition, Poesy" (stanzas III, IX), "ghosts" (51), and "phantoms" (59), attest to their lack of substance. They gain features through simile, by an analogy to figures on a Greek vase (5), a conceit that both provides the amorphous concepts a physical nature and introduces cyclicity to the ode.

In profile, the figures, humble, sad, or hiding, walk hand in hand with "bowed necks, and joined hands, side-faced" (2). All three characteristics give the perspective unity of purpose and ambiguity of intent. They are incomplete, hidden or hiding, lending the scene an enigmatic aura. The passing figures "were strange" (9) to the viewer, meaning they were as much unusual and disconcerting as unknown. The figures are new or unrecognized, "strange," but not unexpected or unfamiliar. They are uncanny because they are not readily identified, not because the figures are unidentifiable.

What the speaker describes is the path repressed material takes prior to its disclosure and entry into consciousness. What Love, Ambition, and Poesy represent that is repressed is respectively lust (eros), desire (ego inflation), and masochistic desire (she "whom I

love the more, the more of blame/ Is heap'd upon her"
28-9). What these three ideas represent as they return
from the repressed and surface is dually distorted:
1) "How came ye muffled 2) in so hush a masque?" (2). The
uncertainty represents Oedipal desires in their state of
uncertainty, of transition. They are able to break into
consciousness (in stanza three) because of this
distortion. Their familiarity causes the uncanny
response in stanza two, "How is it shadows, that I knew
ye not?" and their distorted identities enable them to
break the guise and become recognized, like Moneta's
face bereft of its veil in the "Fall of Hyperion."

However, the personalities are a misdirection, as
latent material can gain access to the conscious only
through distortion,⁵ and it is the secondary information
that bears the weight (the information that is the
"weight of utterless thought"). In the opening stanza
the figures share characteristics -- the formerly noted
similarities in posture, profile, and attitude. These
qualities establish a unified source yet an indirect
one. The repressed unites in desire but remains
unconfident, uncertain, unformed. Their two
dimensionality and bland appearance "in white robes
graced...like figures on a marble urn" (4, 5), place
them in an early stage of development. Like Conrad's
"secret sharer," who first appears identityless, these

characters, also like Borges's dreamed man ("Circular Ruins") begin to take on their distinctive personalities. But these personalities, even when labeled, remain the mask for their ulterior selves only -- selves dreamed, originating in the unconscious, and like dreamed beings able to exist in the realm of subtext only, or dream within a dream. The three figures, when recognized, remain characters, actors fronting the sub-surface but the motivating force under cover.

As manifestation of desire, the three shadowy figures materialize before the persona while he watches, a spell-bound voyeur who wants to see his dream become a reality. When he finally realizes who/what they are in stanza III, the persona wants to accompany them, to fly after them indulgently. Then as he gains greater consciousness, as the id recedes and ego takes over, the superego intercedes, bringing with it the remembrance of daily troubles and annoyances, anchors weighing him to the present reality. Yet irony remains in that, like Oedipus Rex, the audience knows more than the protagonist. Here the speaker sees only the illusion (the spectres' very names register their incorporeality), the surface of his desires. His language about each one details and reveals their inherent being, a being that remains hidden despite the

recognition in stanza III.

All three figures are female. The persona refers to Love and Poesy as "maid" or "maiden" (25, 29) and also uses the feminine third person (35) (despite neuter third person, (32, 33), and the collectively gendered phrase "Upon your skirts" 50). Desire, then, acquires sexual tones from the erotic relationship described by the narrator between himself and the female figures: "to follow them I burn'd/ And ached for wings" (23-4) and "I wanted wings" (31). Again Keats's erotic language borrows flying imagery to transfer its connotations of longing, recharging the yearning imagery of the sick Eagle in "Chapman's Homer."

Only in the center stanzas does the speaker discuss the figures and his relation to them. He knows (presuming the speaker to be male) who they are. Love is a "fair maid" (25). Ambition is "pale of cheek" (26), and Poesy is both "demon" (30) and "maiden most unmeek" (29). With the identities revealed and characterized, the ode reaches its early climax. Each figure, now identified, corresponds to a desire, which is represented as much by the narrator's "burning" to follow them as by their content. Love, as a fair maid, is erotic desire, but tempered by virginity (see the "Urn" ode) and innocence. She is the Cynthia of the triad, encompassing both erotic and Platonic, spiritual

urges. Ambition, pale and "ever watchful with fatigued eye" (27), is the voyeur figure. She is wan, (like the Knight-at-arms) from ego-centric, reflexive effort. Self concerned, she is fastidiously observant for self advancement, to the point of "fatigued eye." It is Poesy that garners the richest associations, most directly in the use of first person possessive pronoun; she is "my demon Poesy" (30). The speaker is cognizant of the potential Lamia-vampire hold Poesy has over him. The more she is accused, the more of himself he gives to her:

The last, whom I love more, the more of blame
Is heap'd upon her, maiden most unmeek, --
I knew to be my demon Poesy.

These defined characters, deceivers all: "I wanted wings:/ O folly!" (31-2) represent to the speaker aspects of himself, projections incarnate of his desires, personified. Yet they also reflect or glimpse vestiges of their core essence, an inner reality like the latent content of a dream, evident by the secondary qualities associated with each that plays with and against the overt (manifest content) personalities. Love is evanescent, "where is it?" (32), a fair maid, and indefinable, amorphous: "what is Love?" (32). She is the outer trapping of the primal desire, mother imago, as "fort" in the fort/da game of incestual

desire. Love, mother love, even identified, "and Love her name" (25), remains undefinable, "What is Love?" absent while present, is the question "where is it?" Her sex and demeanor as a "fair maid" characterize her as little more than the bland, vague descriptions of her in the opening stanzas.

Although recognized, she (and her companions) remain distanced, generalized images only. The persona's longing to follow the "faded" characters (23) indicates the presence of the death drive, a harbinger (as I stand on thematic grounds with Vendler's ordering of the odes) of the will to death that awakes in the "Nightingale" ode. This "undertow," to borrow from Vendler, of death is imbued with erotic energies. The persona burns to follow the three temptresses.

Self-recognition alters the perspective from external to internal after the midway mark of the poem. In stanza IV the speaker realizes that he is deluded: "O folly! What is Love?" He thinks cynically that Ambition "springs/ From a man's little heart's short fever fit." And Poesy "has not a joy" despite his claim of incremental love seven lines earlier. The speaker has seen enough of these vague characters, these shadowy figures to be disillusioned by them. The erotic-thanatonic impulses give way to a desire for ignorance and isolation in "O, for an age so shelter'd

from annoy/ That I may never know how change the moons"
(38-9). Repression returns to close the feared avenue
of freedoms toward the dangerous temptations of love,
self-fulfillment, and death.

He responds while conscious by the routine route of
denial. He claims a sufficiency of other visions in
place of the three revolving around him. His desires
turn away from the figures and attend instead to other
visions of day and night, thereby both rejecting and
repressing the truth of his inner desires. The persona
even deludes himself by believing them specious, empty,
powerless: "So, ye three ghosts, adieu! Ye cannot
raise/ My head cool-bedded in the flowery grass" (51-2).
Denying the attributes of his three visions sets stanza
IV as the descent from the prior climax of recognition
in stanza III. Denial also establishes the desire that
actuates the ambivalent movements to and from the forms.

In the first half of the poem, the speaker seeks
the identity and the company of his visions; in the
second half, denying the desire, he seeks emotional
isolation and the fantasy of worry free existence: "O
for an age so shelter'd from annoy, that...." He
exchanges one set of fantasies for another, one
unconscious for one conscious. The figures, as
projections of the speaker's unconscious desires
disguised in the garb of conscious temptations, fade

away to be replaced by another set of conscious desires that also mask unconscious wants. Instead of ambition, love, and poesy (the surface masquerade of narcissism, eros, and creativity), he seeks isolation and blissful ignorance: "That I may never know how change the moons,/ Or hear the voice of busy common-sense!" (39-40). (The former line is an echo of Keats's famous toast to the dissolution of mathematics with fellow poet Charles Lamb. It also echoes his idea that science destroys the beauty of a rainbow by explaining it.)⁶ This counter-desire arises from a fear of succumbing to the enticements offered by the three females walking past his head "cool-bedded in the flowery grass" (52). In stanza IV the speaker rejects the lure of his desires for the idealized memories of "drowsy noons,/ And evenings steep'd in honied indolence" (36-7). He denies his desires, both outer casements and latent content, and redirects his interests toward the psychically safer (because erotically and thanatonically neutral) wishes. This swerve (Bloom's "clinamen")⁷ away from the inner desires permits a temporal gap. This space consequently facilitates a fresh stance and fresh approach to the central figures which return immediately in stanza V: "A third time came they by." The figures return (regardless of number; see note #2) before the viewer who now has a more secure tone, a confidence instilled

in part by the denial, as he spuriously acquires self control by denying the power of his temptations and by denying their actual source -- his unconscious.

Now he ponders the figures' purpose: "A third time came they by; -- alas! wherefore?" (41). He focuses on the annoyance of having his sleep disturbed: "My sleep had been embroider'd with dim dreams" (42). These figures are the sole perception of the speaker, and his admission of dreaming locates the females within the bounds of unconscious contact. Again repression gains the upper hand, reversing the desires' course and returning them to their home in the unconscious. It is only temporarily that the censor slacks long enough for the desires to personify, to symbolize and tempt the narrator with their charms. As soon as the morning arrives, cognizance returns and he remembers his responsibilities. It is "a time to bid farewell" (49) to his desires and banish them to their deep rooted source. The time to awake approaches. He chases the "ghosts" away, freezing them in their state as "masque-like figures on the dreamy urn" (56). As the stanza continues, he chronicles elements in association with his "dim dreams": "My soul had been a lawn besprinkled o'er/ With flowers, and stirring shades, and baffled beams" (V, 3-4). The imagery is of natural bower, growth, and uncertainty -- a feeling of ambiguity

intensified in the next line where "The morn was clouded, but no shower fell" (45). These images, like those of denial preceeding them, further distance the speaker from the central theme of addressing his own inner needs, but he is "teased out of thought" and "toll'd back" to himself by the dawning day as it evaporates the shadows and melts his dreams by calling attention to "The open casement" that "Let in the budding warmth and the throstle's lay" (47-8).

Potential for self awareness vanishes with the night, "So, ye three ghosts, adieu! (51). No longer need the persona fear the consequences of reflective awareness, of self-analysis. His desires return to the repressed, ironically closed within as the window opens to the daylight. Banished into the void without regret or sorrow, "Upon your skirts had fallen no tears of mine" (50), the figures, gone and therefore "ghosts," no longer remain to tempt the narrator into a dialogue with himself. The women remain mute, infertile throughout the encounter, discarnate images of his own need to confront his desires, silent testimony to the strength and desire of his repressed ideas to break into consciousness. The effort is futile; they "cannot raise" his "cool-bedded" head from the grass (apparently the memory cannot stir him to activity, as this taunt is delivered in present tense contrasting to the prior past

tense.)

Now that the attempt to gain conscious life has failed and the desires are re-relegated to the night realm of the unconscious, the tentative denial of perception/perspective changes form speculative, "it springs/ From a man's little heart's short fever fit," to full-fledged denial in the overt rationalizing final stanza, "For I would not be dieted with praise" (53). He banishes the "phantoms" (59) for ever, bidding them "never more return!" (60). His rationale for denying the call of the phantoms is a vitiated refusal to be a pawn in a histrionic affair, unwittingly deluded into an ego-bloated state wherein he would be incapable of perceiving himself clearly. True to the means of denial, the irony here is that his fear actually is the (unselfcognizant) reality. By banning his visions and denying their force (Poesy, for example, "has no joy" for him), he prevents himself from perceiving the truth about his desires. Like "the morn" of stanza V, he "was clouded, but no showers fell." The potential for self-exploration and realization presents itself, but it scares the guilt-laden consciousness into a mild conversion reaction, which asserts in the negative the actual desire, "I would not be...."

What the "Ode on Indolence" suggests about death and desire is linked to the primary, manifest content of

the poem. Death and desire, as latent content, are the background before which the act of denial occurs, seemingly blind to its own context. The three figures, projections of the persona/poet's (unconscious) mind, attempt to force themselves into the daylight, into the conscious part of the narrator. Their attempt to free themselves, thereby freeing the speaker, is foiled by the supervening power of guilt, by the fear that once released, the forces of desire would grant the speaker "Knowledge enormous" (Stillinger 354, "Hyperion" III, 113) "Ode on Indolence" is about laxity -- and fear. The speaker is too lazy and afraid to confront himself as three female figures (figures "condensed" with implications) represent his feeling.

Preferring ignorance and sheltered existence to the treacherous flight after his visions, preferring to rationalize his reaction by denying it, the speaker backgrounds (thereby foregrounding) the issue of his desires. He remains content to be ignorant, satisfied to remain repressed and blind to his own potential for fulfillment, opting instead for the conservative, limiting, restrictive path of delusional denial. Rather than fly after his incarnated desires (desires already suspect to a self-deprecating ego), he rationalizes and believes that he is better off without them, "For I would not be dieted with praise," when ironically this

is precisely one of his desires. Further, the denial of the overt desires covers submerged desires, the ulterior goal. Denying Ambition, Love, and Poesy (while giving them life and presence in the form of visions and text) serves equally to deny the erotic-thanatonic energy which charges them. The sexual nature of the figures, their seductive powers, and their evanescence ("ghosts," "phantoms," "shadows") locate them as displaced energies from the sex and death forces of the persona/poet's unconscious.

The repression evidenced by denial, distancing, and distortion in the "Ode on Indolence" is symptom of a broader discomfort than low self esteem or guilt from excess lassitude. It evinces the deeper seated difficulty of self perception. The speaker fends off the visions and his instinctual desire to accompany them, and such discipline, when conjoined with denial as it is here, attests to an inability to accept the truth of one's experience, a very un-Keatsian attitude (particularly as the figures are projected imaginings, and Keats said earlier, "I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of the Imagination.")⁸ This uncharacteristic attitude highlights the presence and power of the underlying forces on the speaker. His attempts, direct and indirect, cognizant and unaware, to countermand the

influence and magnetism of the three figures are the reaction-formation against his strongest wants, and the series of odes contradicts his feigned comfort in banishing them "Into the clouds" (60). Desire for sensual love, fame, and the pleasure of poetry (see also the two poems entitled "Fame") and their underlying ambivalent relation to death, blindly propel through the power of guilt the speaker/poet toward his "known Unknown."

Keats's "Ode on Indolence" plays out the surfacing of desires in the poet at a time between waking and sleep when they are most free to arise without distortion. The poet's inner desires parade before him as he lies indolent, but as soon as he becomes conscious of his response to them, as he becomes aware of his passion for them, he denies their seductive power and closes off his desires.

"Repression produces the rhetorical strategies for overcoming anxiety and is thus the necessary condition for producing poetry."

Bloom

Wright on

The Psyche and "Ode to Psyche"

Ben Bailey noted that Keats wrote "Endymion" "with as much regularity, & apparently with as much ease as he wrote his letters."⁹ In "Ode to Psyche" he concentrates his fullest energies, saying his poem "is the first and the only one with which I have taken even moderate pains" (Pack 165, letter to George and Georgiana Keats, April 30, 1819). Beginning in an apostrophe, "O Goddess! hear these tuneless numbers," the persona speaks aloud, ostensibly to one perceiver, the goddess. He prepares to reveal her own secrets to her, "And pardon that thy secrets should be sung/ Even into thine own soft-conched ear" (Stillinger 364, 3-4). His formal address and declaration of intent, "hear these tuneless numbers" (1), place his audience at a distance, as he speaks to a non-present object in a hopeful tone. He locates himself both at a distance, as established by his formal and general salutation, and in proximity to his object, as he is close enough to sing into her "soft-conched ear"(4). The latter position precurses the subjects of the poem, the lover and Psyche, as they

lie asleep while "Their lips touch'd not, but had not bade adieu" (17). The former address harks back to "Endymion" when the narrator calls out to the muse of his native land (Stillinger 192, "Endymion," IV 1). Both directions re-instill the ambiguity and ambivalence motif in Keats's poetry. Here the poem begins with frames of uncertainty, as the subject of the poem is put off until the second stanza, despite brief appearances in the opening and line six.

"Ode to Psyche" begins by refreshing the themes established in the prior poems. The initial salutation to a goddess directly involves, again, the female transcendent imago. The placating first lines: "O Goddess! hear these tuneless numbers, wrung/ By sweet enforcement and remembrance dear" shift into the sensual "And pardon that thy secrets should be sung/ Even into thine own soft-conched ear," confusing the focus and clarity of the absent object. This obfuscation characterizes the speaker's uncertainty about his own desire, precisely in parallel fashion to the difficulty of identifying the figures in the "Ode on Indolence."

Uncertainty also links this and the "Nightingale" ode -- in both cases there is uncertainty over the persona's state of consciousness. "Surely I dreamt today, or did I see...with awakened eyes?" (5). The perception's external reality is equivocal, and the

uncertainty between conscious states elides into ambiguity, loosening the restraints between conscious and unconscious sources. The narrator is unsure of the event's reality, but its reality is secondary, just as it is with the Grecian urn in that like psychosomatic pains, the experience is actual, despite its questionable cause. Being unsure of the conscious state suggests that, regardless of whether the experience were real or imagined, whether a screen memory or a memory of an actual event, it has ties with the unconscious.¹⁰

The persona's confusion, "surely I dreamt today, or did I see" (5) begins earlier in the ambiguity of his address. He is unsure of her position (present or absent) and unclear about his relationship to the goddess, as he self-deprecatingly begs her pardon (3) even while speaking in the indicative mode, "hear the tuneless numbers" (1). Such wavering continues throughout the poem, mirroring the persona's unresolved relation to his own latent thoughts and desires.

Like the opening mood of "Ode on Indolence," the beginning atmosphere in this poem is prone to the overlap of conscious states. The speaker cannot rely on his memory, despite the confidence displayed in it when exercised willfully above, when the "tuneless numbers" were "wrung/ By sweet enforcement and remembrance dear." He cannot distinguish between dream and waking reality,

placing him in a similar state of mind to the speaker in "Indolence." Again like the prior ode, the apparitions or actual figures appear abruptly, "on the sudden" (8). Their presence in the midst of a desultory, errant, "thoughtless" (7) walk in the forest (the setting being an objective correlative for unconscious-conducting thought in Keats, for example as in "Endymion"), is fertilized by the less-than-fully aware state. Consequently it should be of no surprise to find the tableau described conforming to the wish-fulfillment pattern developed by the circumstances and characters of the Keats poems. "Fainting with surprise" (8), the speaker sees "two fair creatures, couched side by side" (9).

Keats's unconscious predilection for viewing rather than participating, for vicarious rather than physical erotic experience, appears in the "Psyche" ode where the narrator plays the role of intruder, even of voyeur. He peeps, his senses stimulated, into the privacy of the young couple caught sleeping apparently in post-coital bliss; "Their lips touch'd not, but had not bade adieu." Statuesque, asleep, the two bodies lie still with "Their arms embraced, and their pinions too" (16). (The phrasing and imagery of this line and the subsequent "Their lips touch'd not, but had not bade adieu" echo in Christina Rossetti's line "I half turned to go yet

turning stayed.") Although past the implied earlier sexual experience, the sleepers are "ready still past kisses to outnumber" (19). The voyeur persona (playing the same scopic scene as the identity sequence in "Ode on Indolence") peers closely enough at the "tableau vivant" to recognize the lovers.

By focusing on the after-event, the poet represses the sex act, yet this misdirection is merely a screen to the central theme of sexual love (and again flying or flight potential is associated with eros, actually Cupid, as the boy is "winged" in 21). The attention to the sleeping figures more than echoes, it repeats the rhythms of the sexual act as the persona's attention dwells on the sensual and erotic aspects of the lovers, their posture (entwined), their state ("calm-breathing" -- presupposing the quick pants of sexual activity), and their relation to resolution (they had not "bade adieu").

"Ode to Psyche" opens swelling with desire, the narrator excited, "fainting with surprise" (8), by the sight of the lovers. His glimpse of "The winged Psyche" (6) calls attention to desire's objective correlative, wings. Desire fills the second stanza, spilling over from the first. Here Keats's eye for the frieze, the tableau, shows as it did in "Sleep and Poetry" in the image of "Might sleeping on its own right arm"

(Stillinger 237, 74), as it will in "Hyperion" in Saturn¹¹ here embodied in the static, sculpture-like scene of the sleeping lovers. The frozen moment captures desire, suspends it, catches and holds it in its active state, even as it lies within the passive figures.

Although the implication is of post-coital satisfaction (calm breathing, close lips), the scene described, the moment chosen for description, catches the couple in their relationship at a point of sustained and apparently unconscious desire as they sleep. Their bodies betray veiled, latent urges; the surface reveals the substance, replaying Endymion's reading of the blank shell and Isabella's x-ray vision as she sees through the earth's surface to her buried Lorenzo. Jame's Bunn's observation¹² that Keats's odes "represented the simplicity and profundity of desire by gauging the paradox of almost indistinguishable anticipation and satiation" seems pertinent here. The lover and his psyche true lie "As if disjoined by soft-handed slumber" but in proximity, implying that their close lips "had not bade adieu," in an attitude of yearning. Their bodies touch, relax, as "Their arms embraced, and their pinions too" (16).

Focusing on these details after the fact calls attention to the missed (repressed) act and also creates

an ambivalence for the persona. He is drawn to the scene, yet he is unsure of its reality. If, as in the case of "Indolence," the situation and figures are an imaginary figment, then their milieu and posture place them as imagined fulfillment of the persona/poet's desires. Here again the force of eros in the unconscious exerts itself by forming the peripheral elements as well as the primary scene of the poem. Repression moves the subject off-center where it is perceived indirectly as dreamed or secondary subject, and it also keeps off-stage the act that causes the stationary scene. These sexual ambivalences register the degree of repression at work in the poem, persona, and poet.

Frozen desire in this scene portrays underlying themes in Keats's poems in the same way that Hamlet restages his father's murder in "The Mouse Trap." The scene of the lovers objectifies the unconscious in a seemingly reflective, self aware state. The unconscious finds expression in the theme of imminent but postponed desire, the theme of perpetual desire (for example desire rooted in the unconscious posed eternally, ready but still unachieved: "thou still unravished bride of quietness" Stillinger 372, 1). Yet despite stopping time at the moment desire hovers in this scene, desire has already been sated and anticipates satisfaction again,

the lovers sleeping but "ready still past kisses to outnumber" (19) upon reawakening. The narrator catches desire at rest, the point Keats (as projector of desire) uses both to draw in and to maintain distance from his ambivalence about desire, a characteristically Keatsian position.

Psyche represents the object and the goal of desire, again a goddess. She represents both an ideal and the distance from it. Keats is moving away from repression and his stance of diffidence (a shift paralleled in his attitude to death). Yet the distance between potential and realization remains, as Psyche and the intermediary, the narrator, attest. Further, by faltering in his recognition of Psyche, "But who wast thou, O happy, happy dove?" (22) the narrator maintains distance between the object representing consummation and the desire for it, desire fantasized as achievable in the projected character (attraction), but postponed and signed by the voyeur's moment of intrusion after coition (repudiation, ambivalence).

The scene characterizes, as the chase of the "Bold lover" for his desire in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn," as Endymion's long search for Cynthia did, the attempt for sensual fulfillment. Eros escapes the unconscious to enter into the conscious world by influencing the focus, attention, and detail of the poetic subject. In this

poem eros expresses itself as the central subject, but the decision to describe a moment stolen from the youths expresses desire and its role in the poet's unconscious as desire caught in ambivalence, between advance and retreat, between increase and decline.

Vendler discerns the "reduplicative shape" (Vendler 47) of this ode. It seems to be formulated by a repetition compulsion as well. The semi-mirror, partially symmetrical rephrasing of the center stanzas are the clearest examples of repeated imagery. Concomitantly, as Vendler also notes, the re-working of the third stanza's absences (she calls "Psyche" the "archetypal poem of an absent center," 61). "No voice, no lute, no pipe, no incense sweet" (32), fills to become subjective wish and presence in the fourth: "So let me be they choir...Thy voice, thy lute, thy pipe, thy incense sweet" (44, 46).

Beyond this overt completion repetition is the subtler cloning of the subject figure. The persona calls out to his goddess, Psyche. In his vision she duplicates the experience in the forest. Although the first recognition of identity, the final line of stanza two, has the ring of metaphor, "But who wast thou, O happy, happy dove?" (with its overt but superficial repetition), "His Psyche true!" (22,3), the allusion to the Psyche myth (Cupid, signified by his wings, is

recognized by the persona) and the ensuing paean to Psyche tie the sleeping female closely in identity if not number to the goddess. As the poem begins with an explicit reference to Psyche and the persona thereafter goes on to wander "thoughtlessly," thereby allowing the unconscious freer reign, it is no wonder that the vision, the projected wish-fulfillment image would come in the guise of Psyche. This connection would also identify the winged boy as the self projection of the persona.

These projections and doublings are a further indication of the motivating and propelling forces behind the poems. So strong are the urges toward freedom for the repressed libidinal energies (as creative sublimations and overt forces) that they form the content, structure, and subject of the poems.

Attention changes in the second stanza, after its peregrinations from external (goddess) through self centered ("I wandered") to external-internal (the real or imagined couple and their surroundings). The focus here (24-35) is on absence. The persona voices his preoccupation with the object of adoration and desire (in this sense a maternal figure). He argues against the absences, in contrast to them, praising the goddess above "all Olympus' faded hierarchy" (25). His vision or real figure becomes both the cause and object of his

thoughts. The sleeping Psyche initiates the narrator's soliloquy on Psyche. Desire is partially displaced, postponed in favor of adulation, yet it remains backgrounded, a predicate to adoration.

These center stanzas with their series of repetitions and complementarities, despite their lack of overt eroticism, continue to re-iterate the latent desire of the erotic need to evade repression. The act of filling, its phallic implication carried by the scopophilic desires of the third stanza, "I see, and sing, by my own eyes inspired" (43), dominates the middle part of the poem. First the narrator recognizes the hole in his object, the absence of timeliness "O latest born" (24), of created place of worship "temple thou hast none" (28), of evidence of worship "Nor alter heap'd with flowers" (29), of human worshippers "Nor virgin choir" (30), and the litany of absences ranging from voice, lute, pipe, incense, to shrine, grave, oracle, and "heat/ Of pale-mouth'd prophet dreaming" (35). (This list of gaps moves incrementally, from time to objects to space to human.) The subsequent stanza rhythmically simulates fulfillment, achieves it metaphorically, by completing the fragments he created. This self-restorative, self-generating act replays the act of reproduction -- while duplicating it.

Self-inspired (43), the narrator may hold the

literal key to the question of consciousness. The narrator's words, when spoken figuratively, like paraphrases, reveal literally what they mean. The "lucent fans" (41), synecdoche for Psyche, inspire the narrator, yet taken literally, "by my own eyes inspired" (43), mean that Cupid and Psyche are visions, visual inspirations, self-created. Here is a case of the unconscious manipulating the conscious, tricking it, by layering the semantic levels in parallel, like hiding trees in a forest. The narrator ironically does not know how true his words are. Just as he sings (43), self-inspired to fill the void of the absent virgin choir (which is also fanciful, projected), he sees self-inspired, that is, by the creations of his mind's eye.

In consonance with the theme of projected desire are the undertones of masochism last seen "sotto voce" in "Lamia." The narrator in this ode self-deprecatingly asks his goddess (her position inherently superior) to forgive his acts ("pardon" 3). The verb "wrung" with its quasi-violent connotations contrasts with the subsequent adverbial phrase: "By sweet enforcement...." Together they imply a "pleasant pain" (53), an oxymoronic notion common to Keats's poems. The main theme of this poem develops into the narrator's explicit wish to place himself at the will and desire of his

goddess. He offers to relinquish his identity, to transform himself into any means to serve her. The narrator imagines ways to be subservient to his self-created female ideal. He desires to fill her emptiness and to "make a moan" (44) while worshipping and submitting to her.

The final stanza builds "a fane" (50), a mental landscape inside the narrator's "bone box."¹³ While the speaker considers ways to denigrate himself or at least to be a votary of his idealized vision, his exposition paints a wish-fulfillment scene. He vows to serve her, "Yes, I will be thy priest" (50), and describes the imaginary place of worship "In some untrodden region" (51) of his mind. As earlier, the poem tells two tales. While the speaker revels in his fantasy of adoration, he also builds the framework for a prison to isolate and worship the absent object of desire. What the persona describes is a place like Hugo's Hunchback's bell tower or Pluto's Hades or the Phantom of the Opera's underground lair, wherein he can imprison "His Psyche true." The speaker, ironically, assumes that his mental bower will be desirable to his object of worship, yet what he describes, with its naturalistic, religious, and cerebral imagery, is an isolated "rosy sanctuary" (59). In his own mind, the speaker feels comfortable enough to entertain his love, but his obsessive need to serve is

coupled with a need for control. He is willing, eager to sacrifice and give himself to her, yet the environment which he painstakingly creates, despite its outdoor expansiveness, is the "wide quietness" (58) of his "working brain" (60), and limited primarily to her and him. He wants to ensconce her, introject her, keep her for himself (as do the Hunchback, Pluto, and the Phantom) isolated and forced to content herself with his presumption of her pleasure. Albeit romantic, the scene reminiscent of the "purple-lined palace," with his offering of "all soft delight/ That shadowy thought can win" (64-5), is an implacable option, his version of what he wants to offer her. Although the "casement" will be "ope at night" (66), it is to "let the warm Love in" (67), not her out. The speaker's beautiful words, self-created, offered enticingly to his desire, reveal his own desires of dominance ironically screened by a reaction-formation of subservience.

The speaker promises the goddess his devotion, a monument in his mind exclusively for her sake. Yet the lush, open landscape belies the purpose of the creation. Even though his "gardener Fancy" (62) will continually decorate the realm with unique surroundings, like a gardener "Who breeding flowers, will never breed the same" (63), the Eden is a botanical trap. Focus on open space contradicts the actual location of his world, his

imagination. His desire, cunningly, alluringly, painted "tromp l'oeil" lies in the source of the creation, not in its trappings. Not content to remain voyeur and passively watch his Psyche, like Porphyro he must steal her away, into himself where her pleasures will be for him only in the one place where he feels uninhibited and unrepressed enough to offer himself, to enslave himself to his desire.

Moving from formal address to physical parody (the Cupid - Psyche scene/vision) to quasi-religious fantasy, to the final interior universe, the poem dwells on an ego centered obsession with the idealized female. Dedicated to her and directed through- out toward her attention, the ode presents the desire of the persona straightforwardly but ironically. Ostensibly focused on the goddess, attention devolves repeatedly onto the speaker. His obsession with and desire for Psyche surfaces in the projection of the lovers scene, a fantasy wish-fulfillment vision, and in the narrator's oblique efforts to fill, possess, dominate, and imprison his love object. His mania for submission, seen in the repetition compulsion of self-sacrifices and slave-like wishes to serve her, rests upon the contrary and destabilizing base of ego-centered power desire. The narrator's overabundant examples of devotion and love oppose a deeper urge to dominate and control,

proclivities associated with thanatos, yet, like yin and yang, complementary if opposite to eros.

The inter-layer ambivalence generates a tension at once representing and constituting eros and thanatos. Professing adoration overtly and erotic ambitions dramatically (the Cupid - Psyche scene, like Hamlet's "The Mouse Trap" that gives away the King, here reveals the sensual nature of/in an otherwise Ideal relationship), the narrator inadvertently offers also the concomitant opposite but also symbiotic force of thanatos-as-power free reign to articulate the narrator's word, image, and content structures. These subjects and forms unify and activate Keats's poems.

"Psychoanalytic criticism...can do more than hunt for phallic symbols; it can tell us something about how literary texts are actually formed, and reveal something of the meaning of that formation."
Terry Eagleton, Literary Criticism

"A Burning Forehead, and a Parching Tongue"

The "Nightingale" and "Urn" Odes

The ambivalence bonding eros and thanatos in "Ode to Psyche" emerges immediately in the first stanza of "Ode to a Nightingale." Pain and despondance introduce and balance surfeited, sympathetic pleasure. "My heart aches and a drowsy numbness pains/ My sense...But being too happy in thine happiness" (Stillinger 369, 1, 6). Desire mingles ambivalently but inexorably with death in a histrionic fascination with suicide, the death state closing in "as though" the narrator had "of hemlock drunk or emptied some dull opiate to the drains one minute past and Lethe-wards had sunk" (2-4). Suicidal resignation swings in a manic reversal to creative complacency: "That thou...Singing of summer in full-throated ease" (7, 10). (The nightingale's unselfconscious satisfaction in life, particularly creative life, precurses the "haunt of flies on summer eves" later in this poem and the "gathering of swallows twitter in the skies" in "To Autumn.")

This ode exists between events, between the cause of the desire and the end of desire; it develops within

the same frame that Hamlet creates at the end of the final act when, mortally wounded, he implores Horatio to tell his story (see chapter I, note # 1). Hamlet dies, his fictional life buried by the text it was enclosed in. The narrator of the ode lives, his fictional life carried over into the text because his imagined death (as "though of hemlock I had drunk") itself was fictive. The narrator extends himself beyond death, creating a fantasized dominance over death, at least for himself and the author who has created him.

Confusion over the source of the narrator's emotions leaks beyond the reversal from ego-centric self pity to ex-centric sympathetic joy; it seeps into his language. The persona-poet imbues a signifier of absence with a property of presence and further endows it with causal power. Numbness is both "drowsy" and the source of pain. Both sentient attributes, like the Pathetic Fallacy, arrive from the speaker and are not inherent properties of the state; indeed, they are illogical consequences, as absence here is made to act and cause. The trope speaks of the persona's extensive, extending "sense" (2), as he is able to feel and be cognizant even in the midst of absent feeling, a further example of Keatsian extra-sensory perceptions.

The movement of the opening stanza is entropic, toward cessation and death, sinking gradually into lost

consciousness. The drop halts, suspended when the inward motion redirects itself outward, towards the assumed cause of the depression, the bird's music: "thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,/...Singing of summer in full-throated ease" (10). The reverse, out of Lethe-like unconsciousness, continues into the second stanza where the persona's imagination directly contacts and enlivens the tangible world: "O, for a draught of vintage...Tasting of Flora and the country green,/ Dance, and Provencal song, and sunburnt mirth!" (11, 13-14). His senses unite and work in tandem, each heightening the other's sensitivity. This interaction is both extra-sensory and mental. The persona's physical, emotional, and intellectual senses merge and work conspiratorially toward a richer, fuller experience. (The poet's need for such a richer experience finds expression in the recurrent theme of the search for a language superior to man's in the quest for "lispings empyrean" in "Endymion" and the fantasy of consciousness-expansion with a god in "The Fall of Hyperion.")

Tightening the relationship among the perceptual organs is the work of the unconscious and its means of accessing consciousness. Paralleling the unconscious desires overlapping consciousness, a "higher tone of feeling" overlaps the bound of subjective senses, for

example the persona's ability to feel while numb and to taste memories or images, like "Dance." Extending perceptions beyond their somatic source, particularly in wish-fulfillment imagery like the enlightenment scene in "The Fall," or Endymion's retention of perception while unconscious, reflect the influence of the unconscious as it strives to push into the surface. It is this extrusion of self out into and onto the world, as it stems from the unconscious's need to work into the surface, that offers meaning to the phrase "O for a beaker full of the warm South" (15). The persona's apprehension of his perceptions includes the connotations of these perceptions.

The ability to perceive beyond the normal human sense spectrum at once coincides with the other Keatsian extra-sensory perceptions while also echoes the quest motif, the drive for transcendence beyond mortality. These fraternal-twin avenues express the hyper-consciousness of the "snail-horn"¹⁴ sensitive narrator/poet. This consciousness is a hybrid of "Negative Capability" (the ability to exist "in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason"¹⁵), as it is a means of transcending the self's limits to experience externals sympathetically. The persona's taste acts with his mind to absorb the connotative resonances of "the true, the

blushful Hippocrene" (16) that inhere within a sip of "the warm South." An overpowering, overwhelming of the environment and of negatives (absence, numbness) further exemplifies the desire to unify with the ideal.

For the narrator, a reciprocating consciousness with the external world moves toward dissipation, dissolution, death. The tension in this poem pulls between life and death. Focus swings with uncertainty between desire for richer experience, feeling passed the boundary of senses, to the desire toward death, towards Lethe and a fading "away into the forest dim" (20). A bell-shaped curve limns the first two stanzas, beginning and ending on the death track and arching in the middle to ultra-life experience, peaking in sensuous experience. Eros works as the force of life against the undertow of death.

Life force is again "tolled back" to its framing edges of non-being. Despite the respite in the imagined warm southern atmosphere, the persona wants to "Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget" (21) the realities of life's debt to degeneration, disease, and death. He cannot suppress

The weariness, the fever, the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few sad, last gray hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre thin, and dies
(23-6)

Intoxication, with its association to death in their common elements of non-consciousness, is not distancing enough to block the pain of sympathetic consciousness. Death offers the only path of sufficient intensity, "death is life's high meed" ("Why Did I Laugh Tonight?" Stillinger 323),¹⁶ to suppress, muffle life's pains. Music, the nightingale's art, like inebriation, can provide a means of blocking the suffering in the world. Death draws not only the physical but the mental, as it is not only disease and age that exact misery, but consciousness. The persona knows that "to think is to be full of sorrow" (27), and the combined anguish of physical and mental torment substantiates the power of death in life. But irony undercuts the validity of his sentiment and sincerity, as his expression of thought and feeling is thought that brings sorrow but also provides the means to circumvent it -- the hyper-conscious, super-sensitive perceptions. Despite voicing a desire to "quite forget" his "sole self" (72), he acts like the nightingale by creating his way out of the pull of death, even while glorifying its ease and attraction as rest and void.

Buoyed by the nightingale's immunity to sorrow, the persona wants to go with it/her, to fly away soberly, "Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards" (32) but "on the viewless wings of Poesy" (33). He sees art as the

medium through which to escape the draw of death. Fancy, the combination of artistic creativity and imagination, takes over, displacing the attention to external life with a concentration on the internal again. The persona rhapsodizes, lead by his thoughts and desires after the nightingale, about the Queen-Moon and her "starry Fays" (36-7). But again the internal cannot overcome the death drive, the pull of "no light" (38). Again the curve returns to the realm "of verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways" (39-40). The battle continues line by line between life and death, eros, thanatos. Worldly reality competes against aesthetic imagination. The contiguity with the present vies with the timeless "immortal Bird" (61) and all struggle for dominance over life.

The persona's power to experience intensely flows into and shapes his perceptions. Even though he "cannot see" (41) because "there is no light" (38), the speaker imagines "each sweet/ Wherewith the seasonable month endows" (43-4) several animate objects. He presumes both that seasons endow nature and what they bestow on nature. Earlier the persona sensed without sense, in numbness. He experienced the associated imagery of a single sense -- taste. Now he presumes to imagine what nature grants itself. Not only does the speaker guess what special identity, what little "sweet" nature

periodically supplies its seasonal appurtenances, ie. grass, violets, musk rose, etc., but he assumes to be able to know that nature does endow itself with unique, perceivable qualities. This anthropomorphic conception of nature places the perceiver in the mold of competitor. (Later, in "To Autumn," nature will move from "endowing" to impregnating itself.) Nature, the perceiver concludes, is capable of completing itself. It can "endow" particular parts of itself with perceptible "sweets" or specific identifying properties. Because of this reflexive self-improvement, nature is perpetual, able to overcome itself, able to move continuously from "Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves" (47) through (an absented) winter into "The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves" (50). This self-overcoming draws the (jealous) competitor, the speaker, into being "half in love with easeful Death" (52), because it is through death that he can "become a sod" (60). By returning to earth in honor, "to thy high requiem," of the nightingale's song, he echoes the building of a fane in the prior ode. Both urges signify a desire to participate in the power of eternity, first with a goddess (within the atemporality of his mind) and here by returning himself physically into the unending cycle set emblematically in the fifth stanza.

Uncertainty begins to balance as the persona shifts

from the hesitant opening and tentative being "half in love" (51) to realizing that "Now more than ever seems it rich to die" (51). The narrator's desire slips between the sensuous pleasures of "the warm South" (15) that purple-stains the mouth and the loss of his senses as they evaporate smoothly "upon the midnight with no pain" (56) while he listens to the beautiful song of the nightingale as it pours forth its soul "In such an ecstasy!" (58). The persona's consciousness shifts away from the external pains, away from the hurt and heartache of his sympathetic consciousness, by focusing on the opposing escapes of art and suicide.

Immanent within the speaker's temptation to suicide is the desire to join the realm of natural immortality, the realm described serially in stanza five and symbolized by the "immortal Bird" (61). Ostensibly the persona wants to avoid the drain of human suffering, but his focus on nature, coupled with his compulsion toward the creative element in nature -- the bird's song -- (assuming the Pathetic fallacy, as the persona does) -- point to an underlying desire covered by a conscious aversion. He wants to "Fade far away, dissolve" as much to melt into and become part of each "seasonable month" with its unique elements as he does to "quite forget" the "weariness, the fever, and the fret" of conscious life. Returning to the earth ends the pain sensed and

sympathized as well as unites the sympathizer with the endless cycle of regenerating life. Again the poet dwells on the desire to overcome the limits of "mortal bars" even while imagining and desiring the crossing of those limits.

The seventh stanza is a paean to the continuity of life. "No hungry generations" (62) tread down the "immortal Bird." The persona asserts the temporal unity of nature's beauty as exemplified by "The voice" (63) of the nightingale. He digresses from his own consciousness of sorrow to speculate, "Perhaps" (65), on the circumstances of others, like Ruth "amid the alien corn" (67), who have heard this "self-same" (65) song. The images appear to comfort the speaker, and the cause of this tone lies in the recognition of historical progression. As a perceiver of an identical song (although by nature impossible, by logical extension, the "self-same" song must be identical to that heard by emperor, clown (64) and Ruth (66) as the bird is immortal -- a reinforcing of the eternal nature ideology) to that heard millenia earlier, the persona identifies himself with the progression of history, with the power of life and beauty over death and suffering.

Finally, the narrator regains self-awareness, "tolled" back from the bird's song and his imaginings

(72). He recognizes that these thoughts cannot armor him from reality, as "fancy cannot cheat so well/ As she is fam'd to do" (73-4). Despite the momentary lapse in his conscious defenses when he desires to be one with nature, "To take into the air my (his) quiet breath" (54), he recomposes himself and shrugs off the suicidal temptations and the indulgent imaginings of historical unity to reapproach the immediate world. Yet the experience, either "vision, or a waking dream" (79), is actual in that he apprehends the thoughts and feelings. "Fled is that music" (80), but whether he wakes or sleeps depends on whether he accepts his position in nature as mortal or denies his own unconscious link to the immortal bird, thereby succumbing to resignation or despair.

The narrator, and by extension the poet, seeks to follow the song bird because it has powers he desires. Primary among these are the ability to flee the discomfort (the raw realities of death and quiet suffering), and to veil or even transcend these present realities with the creative effort of the bird's song. For the narrator this latter ability becomes the creative effort of "poesy." These desires, first the author's include the desire to evade the pull of seductive death, as the nightingale, an "immortal" bird, "was't not made for death" (61).¹⁷

The poem's theme that aesthetic pleasure can mollify the reality of a suffering world, "Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;/ Where but to think is to be full of sorrow..." (26-7), becomes also a representation of the poet's theme. Just as the narrator finds respite in the purity of a nightingale's song, the poet finds solace in the diversion of writing. Both poet and narrator (and they often seem synonymous) seek a separate, even transcendent realm of purer existence, and desire ambiguously includes and excludes death. On the surface the poem calls for death, but beneath it rejects death as counter to creative effort and creative purity. The poet was many a time half in love with death -- the key is the tense; he was so only playfully in the past. The poet may end confused, ambivalent about his consciousness, "Fled is that music: --Do I wake or sleep?" (80), but his fleeting vision ties him to the world of aesthetic creation, the world of eros that, through creation, dominates thanatos.

The odes mark a shift in Keats's consciousness. Death seems to attenuate. Through contact with the immortal bird and by confronting death consciously, Keats begins to develop a new sense of life where he need not fear death, but rather accept it as a link in a natural cycle. Following the homage to nature's complacency in stanza five and perhaps resulting from

the serenity acquired from sympathy with creatures that live for the moment unselfconsciously, the poet gains strength, confidence, and returns again to the subject of death and suicide, refortified by a new acceptance of mortality.

Real or imagined, the nightingale's song inspires the persona to contemplate his position "amid the alien corn" of man's harsh realities. He weighs the pull of the void, "many a time...half in love with easeful Death" (51-2), against the power of art-in-life, the nightingale's song, and emerges from this temporary self enclosed battle strengthened (he rejects the deceiver fancy, 73) but unsure. His reflective experience tempers him but leaves him somewhere between the bird's "melodious plot" (8) and "where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes" (29).

Flirting with the idea of contentedness, seen in "The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves," the poet will have to wait until (to) autumn and the equipose of "gathering swallows [that] twitter in the skies" before he overcomes the lure of easeful death and symbolic or real immortality. In the interim, beauty again becomes the focus in "Ode on a Grecian Urn" where the poet strives to find desired immortality in his relation to the art of man.

The sensual love that forms the center of desire

and provides the basis for the long poems refines in the odes into aesthetic love. Art becoems its own end, "ars gratia artis," and aesthetic pleasure replaces animal desire. This change in desire accompanies the change in the perspective on death. Each change reflects and reinforces the other, symbiotically, producing the evolution that will result in "the most serene poem in the English language,"¹⁸ Keats's ode "To Autumn." In "Ode on a Grecian Urn" the desire turns from base to quasi-spiritual, a change that, like the modulation toward death begun in the prior poem, signals a new perspective toward the world while also disclosing a changed condition within the poet.

The subjects of Keat's poems both change and remain the same. Although erotic love gives way to aesthetic appreciation, both retain their connection to desire. Abstractions replace women as goals, but the quest is still for an ideal that transcends the real. Whereas the "Ode to a Nightingale" reveals the poet's thoughts about death, "Ode on a Grecian Urn" deals primarily with his awareness of his desires. The narrator in both poems addresses his own thoughts as they are provoked by external, aesthetic stimuli. Here the attention remains predominantly upon the "objet d'art" and the poet's direct thoughts instead of slipping to earlier tangential, associated ideas or external influences like

memory.

Two arts, sculpture and poetry, merge in this poem, and the bond that joins them is the poet's imagination. Art (painting and sculpture) stimulates art (poetry). Both are man-made; here Keats's attention is concentrated on the human realm, the mortal contribution to the aesthetic world.

The poet's concerns project onto his subject, especially in this poem, and present themselves for reading, as if the poem were the poet's unconscious in a dream. The poet reads, interprets, and creates his own subject, drawing from his own preoccupations, conscious and unconscious. Earlier poems, even the "Nightingale" ode, rely predominantly on imagination evolving from Greek myths, i.e., "Endymion" or other poems, for example Spenser's "The Faerie Queene" or Milton's Paradise Lost, as their source. But regardless of the material reality of the vase, and as Mansell notes, "Whether there ever was an actual urn from which this core of poetic fact derived is, of course, irrelevant,"¹⁹ the poem's source is an art object with specific, readable features. The urn is a distinct subject perceived by the poet either sensuously or in his mind's eye. Like Endymion's "blank shell," the urn provides information for the perceiver, and the ode provides information about the poet to its perceivers.

Each ode dwells on a particular means of interacting with consciousness, with perceptions external and internal. "Ode on Indolence" centers around the incipient knowledge of man's vanity and the desire to extend oneself beyond mortal limitations. "Ode to Psyche" exemplifies the persona's ambition to capture the love of an imagined female ideal through the poetry of voice, lute, pipe, incense, and of course through the medium of poetry which subsumes them. The poet's consciousness becomes a "fane" for his beloved ideal. The "Nightingale" ode concentrates on the aural sense which becomes the key to open the consciousness of the persona. This key opens the "charm'd magic casements" (69) to ambiguity. The persona has not yet learned "to tolerate the ambiguity and ambivalence," as Hartman says,²⁰ or to be "disinterested," as Keats used the word.²¹ He is on the verge of this acceptance, seen distilled in "To Autumn," but first the sense of hearing and the fear of death, respectively, must be repressed in "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and "Ode on Melancholy."

From the beauty of music to the repression of the aural sense, the transition from "Ode to a Nightingale" to the "Urn" ode establishes a movement of devouring and discarding. Realizing that beauty in nature will not provide the unequivocal means of dominating mortality, the poet moves on to man-made beauty, to the

"foster-child of silence and slow time," (Stillinger 372, 2) the painted Greek vase. Sound is repressed out of perceptual range, as "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard/ Are sweeter" (11-12), and vision grounded in tactual verification (the urn is turned), anchors this poem in the waking life of phenomenal reality instead of the base uncertainty of "vision or a waking dream." Yet the poet, once grounded, returns to the imagination to actuate the tangible reality by bringing the scenes on the vase to life in the imagination.

Fantasies adorn the frieze-like urn scenes. Like the three figures revolving around the perceiver in "Ode on Indolence," the scenes rotate before the perceiver (presumably at his manipulation), sparking his reactions to the visual stimuli. It is his reaction that holds the perceiver's attention. Suspension of consummation, postponement of sensual gratification and prolonged stimulation, perpetual foreplay, mark the persona's treatment of the first scene. The bride, symbol "par excellence" of expectant consummation, stands as the narrator's first image. Strengthening the qualities of expectance and eroticism are the preliminary adverb and adjective "still unravish'd." She, as symbol, can convey connotatively, "thus express" (3), more than poetry itself "our rhyme" (4). It is this picture, this "Sylvan historian" (3), that records indirectly the

persona's direct desires and interests.

Permanence and the struggle with transience form the poem's thematic crux. "Unravish'd" beauty remains truth, and this truth is beauty, the perceptions of aesthetic and cerebral senses. Yet this symmetrical conclusion is not without its price. In order for art to retain superiority over "silence and slow time" it must pay tax to both. Beauty and truth are perceptions rather than Platonic Ideas. It remains for the persona to activate the scenes, to bring them to life through interrogation:

What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape
Of dieties or mortals, or of both,
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?
(5-10)

"Esse est percipi," and without the perceiver, the virgin bride of the opening is a moot figure, requiring a perceiver to involve the potential of her consummation. Without the perceiver the "Bold lover" (17) has no goal. The poet has not yet accepted life without a perceiver. He presupposes the presence of perceptions and of the perceiver, of one able to discern his ambition, love, and poetry for their potential to carry him beyond mortality.

"Ode on a Grecian Urn" is about the relationship between transcendent and ephemeral figures. Each

defines the other. The perceiver recognizes the advantages of being a thing of beauty and therefore a joy forever. It takes the figure of art to activate the perceiver's sense of mortality and desire for immortality. The latter desire lies in the poet's emphasis on the "objet d'art's" enduring ability to "remain, in midst of other woe/ Than ours" (47-8), precisely the same theme portrayed in the nightingale's juxtaposition to pale, spectre-thin, dying youth. Conversely, it takes the perceiver to bring the art's potential to fulfillment. As foils, the object and perceiver define each other and at the same time together define the artist's relation to death and his desires.

Concern with the immortal realm, particularly when the demarcation between them blurs in the ambiguity of "What men or gods are these" (8) softly resurrects the theme of desire for immortality (recalling the figure of poesy in "Ode on Indolence"). Separately but contiguous both structurally and thematically, women enter the poetic and visual scene: "What maidens loth?" (8). Together, the attention to gods, man, and women vivify Oedipal configurations, particularly those already present in other Keats poems.

The difference between real and ideal, between desire and gratification, which echoes Oedipal longings

(for mother and paternal power), arise in the beginning when the persona permits the idealized (and in that sense maternal) Sylvan historian greater powers than his as she can "express/ A flowery tale more sweetly" (3-4) than his poetry. Shortly thereafter the god-man repetition contrasts the difference between man and god -- immortality. Immediately thereafter sexual difference and the erotic symbolization of desire solidify in the imagery of rape. "What maidens loth?/ What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?" (8-9). Time-frozen sexual potential melts into forcible conquest. The delight, "What wild ecstasy?" involves the attempt and proximity of conquest. Consummation, however close, remains imagined, like unheard melodies. The bold lover forever remains tumescent, "near the goal" (18). He may not catch the object of his desire, but he is frozen in perpetual desire, never dying, a static image of the situation so long sought by Keats and dramatized throughout his poems.

Stanza two sings the praises of the eternal over the ephemeral, "ars longa vita brevis." Shortly, in "To Autumn," the message will reverse: beauty becomes truth. Keats comes to realize a potential that remains distanced throughout this poem. Later, he will praise the fulfillment of the moment, of the truth in beauty that is the quintessential message of the "Autumn" ode.

The dominance of unsensed over sentient experience, a theme carried over from the infatuation with the ideal in stanza one, dominates stanza two. Unknown and unheard melodies are sweeter than those heard (11-14). Imagined song from the "pipes and timbrels" (10) plays "to the spirit ditties of no tone" (14). The imagination, and therefore desire, overwhelms the present. Adam's dream stays in the oneiric sphere, its potential to materialize into reality unrealized. Life is caught, trapped in a perpetual present, in an artificial state where "Fair youth" (15) is not senescent. Desire peaks, forever piqued. Although the amorous youth "hast not thy bliss" (19), the narrator implores that he "not grieve" (18) because he will remain amid desire, "For ever wilt thou love" (20), and he will not fall into depression, detumescence, or the void following "wild ecstasy."

Hope inflates the "Ode on a Grecian Urn." The poem's need for optimism treads the realities of life in the "Nightingale" ode down into history, repressing temporal reality. Time is static, immobilized in the poem and as the poem; yet the forced joy of "More happy love! more happy, happy love!" (25) undercuts in a mild reaction formation the tone's credibility. The "happy, happy boughs" (21) that remain for ever in spring (22), the "happy melodist" (23) who is "For ever piping

songs for ever new" (24) are hypostatized "in medias res," prevented from participating in the natural progression to autumn. The narrator's sympathy endows the frieze figures with life and meaning, but his obsequious tone and manic optimism screen a fear of death and reality. The poem reads as wish-fulfillment, the "Cold Pastoral" (45) as personal fantasy. The narrator's desire is to freeze desire, to deny both negative perspective and natural conclusion in consummation. Both prospects appear feared and remain beneath the potential of the poem, repressed from sight.

Not only indirectly through the poem's ethos does the narrator reveal his feelings. In stanza III he avers his response to the scenes, which leave "a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,/ A burning forehead, and a parching tongue" (29-30). He reacts with love-sick symptoms to the drama played before him by his imagination. He, like the bold lover, feels the senses of desire, and the extreme degree of this state parallels the poem's quick tempo and excited content.

Turning the urn brings a new scene, a new stanza. Agitated love (and sympathetic agitation) (r)evolve into a catalogue of love, desire, and sacrifice. "Breathing human passion" (28) gives way to desolation and the presence of death. Too strong to remain repressed for long, death surfaces as counterpart to consummation.

Just as the lover's blissful goal hovers out of reach, death stays beyond the perimeter of the frieze. The "mysterious priest" (32) leads a "heifer lowing at the skies" (33), but the sacrifice itself remains off-stage, potential only, infinitely delayed. Death remains repressed out of direct sight, even as it works its way back onto the surface.

Absence, death's "foster child," becomes presence in the fourth stanza. A "little town" ambiguously located "by river or sea shore,/ Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel" (35-6) is "emptied of this fold" (37). Opposite the perpetually stimulated youth is the eternally delayed consummation of human passions, the still postponed end to life and desire.²² Forever "desolate" (40) the town "will silent be" (39) as will the sacrificial heifer; death and absence return in this scene on the urn. They cannot stay ignored, yet they remain offset, relegated to the wings of the stage, out of sight within the frozen time frame before their potential becomes inevitable. The external reality avoided in and by the nightingale's song lies around the edges of the urn's beauty, but the narrator seeks desperately to deny it.

Long before cinematography, Keats uses the literary equivalent of a "wreck focus" to open the view in stanza V. The entire vase comes into focus after the close-ups

on the distinct scenes. No longer the art on the vase but the vase itself occupies center screen. Pulling back visually corresponds to the conscious distance between the poet and the object; he disengages himself both scopically and conceptually, causing his imagination to lose its identity through its projection onto the urn. Now the object as a whole, as a "gestalt," becomes the subject, and consequently the relation of viewer/author to subject moves from microscopic to macroscopic. It is from this wider perspective that the final aphorism "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" (49) comes, (made more enigmatic by the controversial placement of quotation marks²³), deflecting attention from the specific to the general. In the broader view, the urn, its form and its unity (what Joyce's *Dedalus* refers to as "integritas" and "consonantia"²⁴), becomes the subject.

Once more the narrator turns the vase before him, just as the three figures passed several times before the speaker in the "Ode on Indolence." Here, instead of the "branched thoughts" in the "Ode to Psyche" where the persona built a fane in his mind to enclose and honor (and entrap) his object of adoration, are "forest branches and the trodden weed" (43) which lead out of enclosure. The urn itself inhibits excessive introspection, leads away from the world "Where but to

think is to be full of sorrow" as it teases the perceiver "out of thought" (45), "As doth eternity" (46). The urn, like eternity, replaces the sorrowful consciousness that comes "in midst of other woe" (47) with a new consciousness; "a friend to man" (48), it renders the sententious, symmetric aphorism. In place of sorrowful consciousness, instead of mortality consciousness (the narrator is cognizant of a time "When old age shall this generation waste" (46)), the "Attic shape" (41) offers its wisdom: "'Beauty is truth, truth beauty'" (49) and the narrator comments that such knowledge is all man can or needs to know (50).

Like a painter or potter, Keats transforms a utilitarian object, the urn, into a work of art. Its essential capability has not altered: the urn remains a container, but the artist imbues it with a purpose, adding a new dimension. Like Wallace Steven's jar on a hill, placing the vase out of its context forces the reader to consider artistic and utilitarian functions of the object. A close-up emphasizes the artist's talents. Panning back, the poem looks like a projection of the poet's nature. Like the urn's painted surface, the poem's imagery reveals the artist's thoughts and attentions; the outside distracts attention from the vase as a container and remains in a separate but distinct relation to it.

This distinction parallels the numerous genre approaches to a work of art, such as structural, formalistic, psychoanalytic. Both the practical and the aesthetic worlds cohere in this ancient, functional art work. These dual roles, at once distinct and united, continue the themes of Keats's earlier poems where the earthly aspired to union with the divine, for example in the earlier poetic desires to follow the beauty of the nightingale's song on the "viewless wings of poesy." In the "Urn" ode he alights and perceives an object fulfilling in itself those very desires of the former narrator. The Grecian urn, like Eliade's "cosmic pillar,"²⁵ bridges the span between the phenomenal and noumenal realms. Art transcends the earthly; it provides the wings to defeat gravity and soar to the empyrean. The artist, for Keats, is the cosmic pillar, the healthy eagle, the fortunate soul able to touch and ascend the stairs that lead from death to the sublime (see "The Fall"). The Grecian urn is the object "par excellence," the peak of man's creative capacity, his bridge across the void.

The urn tells the persona all he needs to know because it links the world of man with the realm of the ideal. With this knowledge, the persona knows that man is able to touch the sublime, the world of truth, through the beautiful, the medium of art, and that it is

this link, this interstice between the vacuous surface of non-being and the ethereal realm of the ideal that man forges with his art. The Grecian urn represents both realms by its clay origin and its completed form and appearance. The artist transforms the one into the other, creating the bridge between his own clay substance and the image of the ideal.

Although the "Urn" persona's tone proclaims with all the bravura of the converted the conviction that art is the key to earthly satisfaction, the poem's subtext wavers slightly. There are vestiges of doubt, remnants of uncertainty in the latent level of the poem. On the surface the speaker may confidently affirm enlightenment, and this attitude will be confirmed in the still to come odes, but death's pull lingers.

While the narrator is satisfied with the urn's wisdom, traces of doubt remain for the poet. Death still attracts him, not fully convinced, and this faint doubt leaves its trace in the poem's concern with eternity. In "Ode to Autumn," death will be repressed out of sight, transcended by the fulfillment of the living moment. Here, death remains the poem's bedrock. Eternity teases us out of thought by offering perpetual unconsciousness. Following the "old age" that "shall this generation waste" (46), the urn will carry its aesthetic message of Platonic ideals to others who will

live later. The poet's sense of mortality and transience prejudices his evaluation of the aesthetic object. (Although like Kant's realization that space and time are inherent properties of experience, this realization, too, is ineluctable.) Rather than heeding the claim of the "friend to man" (48) and accepting truth in the beautiful and the beauty of this truthful logic, the poet needs to know more. He projects into a future that for him will literally be a "cold pastoral." His desire exceeds his ability to accept completely the urn's lesson and appreciate the pleasure of all he "need to know."

For the poet, the allotropic properties of truth and beauty are not enough, not "all/ Ye need to know on earth, and all ye need to know" (49-50). If it were, he would not need to be teased out of thought, nor would he be concerned, even indirectly (or unconsciously) with eternity and "other woe/ Than ours" (47-8). He is on the verge of believing the suspiciously simplistic dictum, and Keats will explore and accept it in September (however temporarily), but here he is still held, albeit faintly, by the attraction of ambition and his desire to extend beyond mortality. The poem functions as art and extends the poet's substance into the future. The persona's infatuation with the frozen moment and with the perpetual life of the frieze scenes

on the urn attests to this drive.

Keats will learn the urn's lesson and translate his knowledge into the "Autumn Ode," but first he must overcome his continual battle with death. "Ode on Melancholy" takes him to the threshold of this victory.

"If we see at all, it is through the eyes of Keats that we see, not through our own." Helen Vendler, The Odes of Keats.

"The Very Temple of Delight"

"Ode on Melancholy" and "To Autumn"

The human world of desire and suffering, where death is enigmatic and omnipresent rather than simple and secondary, provokes the pessimism that founds the "Ode on Melancholy." The voice opening the ode is not as independent, as definitive as in the earlier poems, but neither is it the distilled voice of "Autumn." Instead, it is reflexive, a voice caught talking to itself, arguing, pleading to deny the desire to commit suicide. In denying death by suicide, the narrator sets death and desire vibrating ambivalently. The speaker is uncertain about his subject. His denial presupposes desire even while repressing it. Death becomes an object, feared and desired, embodying both the negation of desire, as void, and the consummation of it, as re-union with an ideal.

If Waldoff is correct and there is a progression in Keats's consciousness from a quest for permanence, to skepticism, to acceptance of reality,²⁶ then the "Ode on Melancholy" fits into the latter part of the second

phase. The "Melancholy" ode doubts the value of permanence from the start, where the persona implores an absent listener to reject suicide. But it is not death, figuratively Lethe, (which Posey says "for Keats signifies both death and oblivion")²⁷ that the speaker objects to directly but the means of going there. "No, no, go not to Lethe, neither twist Wolf's bane...For shade to shade will come too drowsily,/ And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul" (Stillinger 374, I 1-2, 9-10). Loss of consciousness, dilution (drowning) of the melancholy spirit provokes the speaker to argue against suicide. He is skeptical of the final recourse because the means to the end distances consciousness of the experience. He objects to the gradual "shade to shade" loss of "wakeful anguish" or melancholy. It is this state that provides a base against which life's feelings can be measured (as in the "Cave of Quietude").

In choosing even "wakeful anguish" over death, the persona, in a decision related to Achilles's wish to be a even slave on earth rather than a king in Hades, chooses the full range of life's sentient experiences, even the lowest, over the absence of consciousness. He opts for life over the non-consciousness caused by drinking "some dull opiate to the drains" and sinking "Lethe-wards," even if there is a morbid enticement in the latter idea ("for many a time/ I have been half in

love with easeful Death"). It is better to feel the "weariness, the fever, and the fret" than to "become a sod."

As if soliloquizing, the persona offers the conciliatory option of responding to a melancholy fit of anguish. Following the admonition (Vendler writes that this poem is constituted by the trope of "admonition," 158) to refrain from self (consciousness) destruction in the opening stanza (after figuratively painting death, suicide as courageous in the cancelled first stanza,²⁸ the narrator describes the futility of a bold attempt "To find the Melancholy, whether she/ Dreameth in any isle of Lethe dull"), the speaker reflects and suggests an alternative to either suicide or "the melancholy fit" (11).

In the "Nightingale" ode it is beauty through time -- music; in the "Urn" ode it is static beauty in space, a man-made art object; in this ode it is nature and romance that capture the energies away from depression and mortality to stay the pull of the grave. Opposing depression, the speaker suggests bringing beauty to consciousness: "Then glut thy sorrow on a morning rose...." (15). The source of tension in this and the other poems, the yin and yang ambivalence of eros and thanatos, emerges here in the foreground of the persona's consciousness.

The first stanza's imperative turns to substitution in the second. Command becomes temptation, and the persona softens his voice to tease the potential suicide, himself if the poem is soliloquized and reflexive, away from death with the lure of beauty, both aesthetic and romantic. Nature's art, a rose (15), a rainbow (16), "the wealth of globed peonies" (17), when made the attention of perception, can replace the effects of "poisonous wine" (2). Similarly, patience and perception will counter the depressive tendency for romantic schism:

Or if thy mistress some rich anger shows,
Emprison [sic] her soft hand, and let her rave,
And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes
(18-20)

(Note the power-desire, the sado-masochistic tendencies in wanting to "emprison" and "feed" while enduring a "rich anger.") Like the rejuvenative powers of the sea, "O ye who have your eyeballs vext and tir'd,/ Feast them on the wideness of the sea ("On the Sea" 9-10, p. 95), beauty in nature has the ability to change the course of human emotion.

It is not a reversal of emotions from sadness to happiness sought by the speaker, however. He is not seeking either death or life, either numbness or sensuality. The main concern in stanzas I & II is to allow the perceiver unfiltered depression. Suicide may

be rejected in the opening, but it is the methods employed that the narrator objects to, as they insulate the experience of suicide. Nature can distract, but as foil it can highlight and counterpoint the depth of the perceiver's emotion: "Then glut thy sorrow on a morning rose" (15). When love is turbulent and shows its underside, the narrator suggests capturing and incorporating the moment's full intensity. Life for this narrator, for one "whose strenuous tongue/ Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine" (27-28), is equally vital at either end of the emotional scale.

Not only does the "Melancholy" ode close with a sense of hope despite awareness of mortality, a sense of hope in the face of death, but this attitude further reflects a move against the internal, equally inevitable and conflicting forces of eros and thanatos. The poet's conclusion, his posture as "grape burster," one who through creative and sensitive consciousness can touch the divine despite the omnipresence of the void (one who experiences joy while remaining aware that Joy's hand "is ever at his lips/ Bidding adieu" 22-3), also represents an intuitive understanding of his own predicament. He seems to be aware that the forces moving him to create stem from a source that, like death, is omnipresent. Yet, like death, it need not prevent a sensually (here aesthetically) fulfilling

experience. He who can "burst Joy's grape" knows also that "in the very temple of Delight/ Veil'd Melancholy has her own sovran shrine" (25-6), and through this consciousness Keats implies that he has come to terms with his own sources of melancholy, the fears and drives coming from his unconscious, resolving Oedipal relations.

A trend in the latter poems leads to the stellar "Autumn" ode. Temptation to hasten mortality and a tendency toward escapism in the "Nightingale" ode, displayed in the desire to "fade away and dissolve," alters in the "Urn" ode to the wish to stop the inexorable end through indentifying with timeless inanimate art. Combat with death, won with uncertainty -- "Do I wake or sleep?" -- solidifies into envy of beauty that is able to endure the wasting of time. In the "Melancholy" ode the relation to death changes and becomes a willingness of the self to immerse in the full range of human emotions. Limitation opens to tolerance, marking the transition from avoidance to acceptance, from fragmentation to unity, from conflict with death to consonance with life achieved ultimately in the final major 1819 odes.

The pen-ultimate step to this unity lies in the recognition and acceptance registered by the narrator as he completes the "Melancholy" ode. Beauty is no longer

a joy forever or Platonic truth; it is subject to perception and therefore confined to the perceiver's limitations. Now "Beauty...must die" (21) and man's pleasures are equally mortal and transient. Joy, always fleeting, "whose hand is ever at his lips/ Bidding adieu" (22-3) joins "aching Pleasure" (22) in ephemerality. The narrator knows the scope of human feelings (the author once likened himself to a "Pleasure thermometer,")²⁹ and is not willing to concede to dissolution or artificial prolongation in attempts to mollify eternity. Instead, he will focus his consciousness on his perceptions and drink their fullest intensity (a position contrary to the cancelled stanza -- perhaps the cause for the cancellation -- as the persona/author moved at the time of writing from a resigned stance, that is, no matter the effort to find Melancholy, death, or eternity, "certes you will fail," to a posture in balance with the tone and attitude of the still to come "Autumn" ode).

The persona, fully aware of "Beauty that must die" and universal impermanence, refuses to succumb to nihilist gravity and, on "patient sublunary legs"³⁰ escapes despondency even in its very midst: even

...in the very temple of Delight
Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine,
Though seen by none save him whose strenuous tongue
Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine;
His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,

And be among her cloudy trophies hung.
(25-30)

Rather than resignation, the persona suggests that confidence and self-satisfaction are attainable in the face of defeat despite the futile struggle. Pleasure, happiness, life may all be temporary, and sadness, sorrow, melancholy may be equally momentary, but they are nonetheless proof of victory over death. They, too, reinforce the "cogito ergo sum" argument, or here the "I feel, therefore I am" postulate. Man is still capable of attempt. Even though "His soul shall taste the sadness of her (Melancholy's) might" and he will ultimately "be among her cloudy trophies hung," the tone is hopeful, because the struggle becomes the purpose. Despite ultimate loss, Joy's grape is burst.³¹ Only those with "strenuous tongue" and a sensitive palate will reach even the level of consciousness necessary to see the "sovrän shrine."

While admitting that the futile struggle against death is the force energizing the poems to this point, the persona takes the conclusion for granted. He becomes "disinterested" and accepts the actual. The focus and purpose shift. No longer is death the nemesis, and life, in all its variations and degrees, becomes the "sine qua non." The struggle becomes the cause, the purpose in itself. "Ode to Autumn" goes a

step further, rejoicing in the new consciousness, the new discovery, and lifts the vivid moment over the void of eternity.

In the "Ode to Autumn" death is no longer the implicit enemy, the underlying foe sparking fear in the persona. Indeed, Waldoff sees "a symbolic reconciliation with impermanence and death implicit in the process of the seasons"³² in the poem. It becomes background, a given format whereupon the business of life acts, oblivious to all else. Though not fully repressed, as it is evident by its absence (all seasons but winter are represented in the poem), death lies quietly behind the action. In this ode as in none of the others, presence and moment dominate.

The omniscient persona relates the action before him with concern for the elements rather than for his relation to them. "Ode on Indolence," for example, dwelt primarily on the viewer. "One morn before me were three figures seen." "Ode to Psyche" also revolved around the perceiver and his desires, "let me be...." It is the narrator's feelings that sustain the "Nightingale" ode, "My heart aches...", and his interpretations that form the "Urn" ode. The "Melancholy" ode, as noted, begins the transition between the ego-centered poems and the ex-centric "Autumn" ode. It maintains ties to the former by its

imperative, didactic voice, yet it moves away from this perspective as the poem changes from direct address, "No, no, go not to Lethe" and becomes undirected, diffuse. Its message, like the urn's, is universal and emphasizes subject rather than speaker or audience.

The "Autumn" ode effaces the narrator who becomes pure medium, replaying tone and subject without self-conscious interference. The necessity to involve his own presence has evaporated from the poet's needs. Instead, he lets the poem speak for him. Like Chapman's Homer, it calls out loud and bold but in the somber tones of a young man who has weathered anguish, has seen death, and has gone beyond fear and dread of death because of his creative powers.

In a significant shift away from the overt desire which constitutes the other poems, "To Autumn" opens with images of complacency. Desire has become satisfaction. It has matured, been consummated, captured its object and achieved its purpose. Nature is atemporal, out of joint, in a prelapsarian, pristine, uncorrupted state of complacency, a "satori" for natural beings.

Rather than dreamed projection, ideal goddesses, Platonic bird, Grecian urn, or abstract notion, the "Ode to Autumn" centers itself amid nature, not states of mind or in wish-fulfillment fantasies. Being in the

world is the poem's theme; more specifically, the theme is being in the world of nature where the gourd's pregnant swelling eclipses any trace of death. Earth's cycle is caught at its climax, suspended like the bold lover's desire, but presented rather than beheld. At this stage in nature's eternal return, when bees "think warm days will never cease" (Stillinger 477, 10), death lies deep, repressed, temporarily conquered by the festival of fulfillment and fruition.

Personified as a woman, in keeping with the Classical figures of Demeter and Dian, autumn postpones death, her scythe "hook/ Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers" (17-18). She sits "careless on a granary floor" (14), content to bask in the moment, to sit "by a cyder-press, with patient look," and watch "the last oozings hours by hours" (21-2). Autumn relaxes without the urgency of the bold lover (or of that poem's persona's necessity), able to drowse "with the fume of poppies" (17) without concern for "the songs of spring" (23) or the unspoken, absent but waiting winter.

Already repressed, banished beyond the poem's boundaries, death is indirectly suppressed when mortality acquires an unapologetic stance and sits complacently between youth and death. "Where are the songs of spring? Ay, where are they?/ Think not of them,

thou hast thy music too" (23-4). The past and by implication the future defer to the moment. They remain vestigial, strong enough to intrude into the present consciousness, but "barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day" (25), and even though night approaches, and spring is irretrievable, the morning's surfeited stores carry over into the evening's bleat of "full-grown lambs" (30), the "wailful choir" (27) of gnats, the crickets' songs (31), and bird's whistles (33), all occurring while "gathering swallows twitter in the skies" (33). Presence, the moment, life in the present "fill...to the core" (6) "the soft-dying day," creating a plenum with no room for either plaintive spring memories or mournful future dirges. Life fills out the moment with ripeness (16), "o'er brimmed" (11), with its own music, leaving death suspended, deferred, defeated. Because there is life, death loses; because there is joyous life, death loses significance, becomes moot, irrelevant.

The bitterness from consciousness and life's injustices ("Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies," and "Where but to think is to be full of sorrow") here turns, troping itself, into contentment from consciousness (think of "thy music too") and harmony (gnats, lambs, crickets, red-breast, and swallows make music simultaneously). Thin, dying youth now is youth vital, vigorous, as the "full-grown lambs"

that "loud bleat from hilly bourn" (30). Psyche transfigures into Autumn, her fane now opened from "some untrodden region" of the mind to stores abroad, from "a granary floor" (14) or "a half-reap'd furrow" (16) to "a brook" (20) or a "a cyder-press" (21). The nightingale's singular music re-echoes in the symphony of bleats, choirings, songs, whistles, and twitters vibrating on the hillside like a Van Gogh landscape. Melancholy hangs among her own cloudy trophies, banished by Autumn's strenuous tongue, connoisseur of nature's Beauty and Truth, known, and appreciated like "a draught of vintage," "without any irritable reachings after fact or reason," pure and full in itself.

For the first time death becomes irrelevant, suspended beyond the context of the poem. Keats implies that the "o'er brimmed" moment is fulfillment, a living nirvana, the bliss that Richard Taylor argues is in itself the meaning of life.³³

"Getting at it with a sort of determination and strength," Keats in a letter to his brothers, Jan. 23, 1818.

"Forgetfulness of Everything but Bliss"

"The Fall"

Toward the end of Keats's last year of writing, in July, 1819, the poet returned to the story abandoned in its midst the prior spring, the fall of the Titans. The theme of power loss returns but, following the lead from book III of "Hyperion," Keats turns attention to power gain. Focus also switches from the Titans' to the first person protagonist's experiences. Like Endymion, the persona contacts the gods. Keats also brings into the story the external world of poetry, involving the real world with his fictive. And again like "Endymion," the "Fall of Hyperion: A Dream" opens with a pre-story, here a tribute to poetry and the written word. This prelude narrows until it centers on the persona's consciousness of death, mortality, and posterity.

After a text break (Stillinger 478, between 18-19), the story per se begins in nature where the narrator-protagonist, in the woods, sees the vestiges of a banquet as if the remains were evidence of "Proserpine

return'd to her own fields" (37). Sharing the characteristic with Adonis from "Endymion," Proserpine lives for six months on earth but spends the other half of the year below, where she lives in Hades, the world of the dead. Proserpine represents for Keats the ultimate compromise between life and death, the ability to love in both realms equally, an ability exceeded only by the gods, who have transcended the problem of how to overcome death by immortality, a state permitting contact with the departed mortals. Proserpine continually descends to Hades and reemerges defeating death while partaking of the death experience. She feels the intensity of "Life's high meed" (Stillinger 323, "Why Did I Laugh?" 14), but without suffering the eternal consequences.

At the picnic scene, the persona drinks a "full draught" (46) that is "parent" (46) to his theme. This intoxicating liquid renders him unconscious. Before he reawakens, his location mysteriously switches to a new and holy place where he hears a voice that gives him an ultimatum: ascend steps nearby or die: "'If thou canst not ascend/ These steps, die on that marble where thou art'" (107-8). After great struggle ("I strove hard to escape/ The numbness; strove to gain the lowest step./ Slow, heavy, deadly was my pace..." 127-9) he manages to touch the step where life rushes into him at the

toes: "One minute before death, my iced foot touch'd/
The lowest stair; and as it touch'd, life seem'd/ To
pour in at the toes" (132-4) (which reverses Endymion's
descent where his first touch of earth "went nigh to
kill").

Moneta, the female liason between the narrator and
the gods, abets the persona on his quest throughout the
poem. She replaces Mnemesyne from "Hyperion" and
elicits a strong reaction from the narrator. Her
description works "a constant change, which happy death/
Can put no end to" (259-60), creating the simultaneous
desires to flee and to remain: "But for her eyes I
should have fled away./ They held one back" (264-5).
Strong ambivalence characterizes the fictional content,
the scopic union between the narrator and Moneta. It is
her eyes that hold him back and draw him to his object
of desire, giving him power to overcome doubts. The
aporia concludes with an enlargement of the mind. The
two figures communicate equally, Moneta enabling the
narrator "To see as a god sees, and take the depth/ Of
things as nimbly as the outward eye/ Can size and shapes
pervade" (304-6). Moneta and the narrator join
perspective and share an intensified, multiple scopic
power that open new realms of apprehension to the
narrator, who can grasp the substance, the essence
(Glaucus's "Symbol essences," "Endymion") of objects by

visual examination. The narrator's consciousness deepens as Moneta raised his body along the stairs earlier, permitting him to die into the life of the immortals, permitting him the pose of the voyeur by making him privy to the god realm.

The god's perceptual abilities as suggested by Cynthia when she communicates to the unconscious Endymion ("Endymion," IV) and Moneta's powers include being able to span a spectrum of experience that ranges beyond mortal man's, as if they were able to perceive all parts of the light spectrum, ultra violet to infra red, in a corresponding range of experience, and then transfer that perception through language. Naturally such a power would appeal to a sensitive poet. Yet the desire extends beyond the aesthetic and communicative aspects, partially because of its repeated occurrences and partly owing to the means and meaning of the act.

This second version of the story returns to the scene before the original, as if returning to the repressed, re-interpreting the prior text, retelling, repressing the original. The second poem catches up to the first immediately after the narrator-Moneta mental-equalizing, when Saturn again becomes the focal point, again dethroned, his power gone, as "His old right hand lay nerveless, listless, dead,/ Unsceptered" (323-4).

At this juncture the two "Hyperions" overlap, the two texts virtually interchangeable for eleven lines³⁴ meeting in the scene where Saturn is unconscious "one moon." ("Hyperion," I 83, "a whole moon;" "The Fall," I 393). In the "Fall" he is also unconscious as the narrator watches over the sleeping giant. During this static period the narrator desires death to relieve him of the monotony as he was "Gasping with despair/ Of change" (398-9). He desires death as an antidote for the weight of responsibility, from "The load of this eternal quietude" (390) which ironically seems more like a description of death than anything else. This ambiguity portrays the still ambivalent feelings towards death held by the narrator-author, yet they are attitudes that are evolving to a state of equipoise achieved concurrently in the "Autumn" ode, composed September 21, 1819 (Bate, 522). (The evolution itself is represented by Apollo's transition in the earlier poem and by the equalizing of minds in this poem.)

The second poem links the story to the external world, bonding the poet to his work and the work to the phenomenal world. Keats rewrites the story from a change in his perspective (coeval with the "Autumn" ode, September, 1819), that, like the narrator's new perceptual abilities, lets Keats see beyond and into the nature of poetry. He has come to realize that art,

particularly poetry, is the key that opens the gate between life and death. It permits the step beyond death to a state of acceptance where the unresolved Oedipal desires level off and psychically regenerate to completion through creative, fictive exercises. "The Fall," then, presents art as the means to ascend the stairs and touch the ethereal realm beyond mortal bounds where god language and god perception open untold dimensions to the mortal.

Located among the gods as observer in "Canto II" the narrator plays journalist, recording the ministrations of the frustrated gods. Moneta aids him, as translator, calibrating her speech, simplifying it to permit the narrator comprehension, saying to him: "'I humanize my sayings to thine ear'" (II 2). The narrator sits among the gods, open to their thoughts, living a fantasy through his contact with the immortals.

By wish-fulfillment or unconscious desire, Keats's character acts out the position, the role of one able to transcend the barriers of mortality, one able to ascend the stairs out of death and mingle with the ideal. Indeed, as Moneta told him earlier (I 141-3), the narrator "'hast felt/ What 'tis to die and live again before/ Thy fated hour.'" Wish, fantasy, or desire, the situation runs parallel with the path of the Oedipal desires flowing within the author, evident time and

again in the situations, language, circumstances, and imagery of his poems. The desire to defeat death and communicate deeply, intimately with an ideal female who is beyond the bounds of death replays the boy's desire to evade the Law and remain protected from incest guilt. Consequently the desire is impeded, set on a tortuous path, and surfaces ambivalently rather than directly. This convoluted yet clear path emerges as pattern in the relations within the poem among the narrator and characters and connects the inner structure shared by Keats's poems.

Notes

¹ "but to nobler sights/ Michael from Adam's eyes
the Film removed/ Which that false Fruit that promis'd
clearer sight/ Had bred; then purg'd with Euphrasy and
Rue/ The visual Nerve, for he had much to see;/ And from
the Well of Life three drops instill'd./ So deep the
power of these Ingredients pierc'd,/ Ev'n to the inmost
seat of mental sight,/ That Adam now enforc't to close
his eyes,/ Sunk down and all his Spirits became
intranst:/ But him the gentle Angel by the hand/ Soon
rais'd, and his attetion thus recall'd." Book XI
411-22, John Milton Complete Poems and Major Prose,
ed., Merrit Y. Hughes (Indianapolis: The Odyssey Press,
1957), p. 442.

² The actual number of revolutions before the
speaker's eyes depends upon which text is consulted. In
Stillinger's, they come by three times, although this is
stated twice: "A third time pass's they by" p. 376, 21,
and "A third time came they by" line 41. In another

source, The Modern Library's John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley Complete Poetical Works, p. 272, 41 reads "And once more came they by" implying a fourth turn around the speaker.

³ Vendler perceives a particular kind of "trope" characterizing and constituting each ode (p. 12); for example she calls the constitutive trope of the "Ode on Melancholy" that of "admonition" p. 158.

⁴ As defined by Freud in his essay "The Uncanny" printed in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, ed., James Strachey, Vol. XVII, p. 217, the uncanny or the "Unheimlich" is the name for everything that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light."

⁵ Laplanche and Pontalis, p. 124, "The latent thoughts are transformed into a manifest formation in which they are not easily recognisable. They are not only transposed, as it were, into another key, but they are also distorted in such a fashion that only an effort of interpretation can reconstitute them."

⁶ Bate quotes Haydon's account of the "immortal dinner" at Charles Lamb's home on the December 28, 1817.

Haydon writes that Lamb and Keats concluded Newton's discoveries "'had destroyed all poetry of the rainbow, by reducing it to prismatic colours" p. 270, whereupon the poets drank a toast to "'Newton's health and the

confusion to mathematics'" p. 270.

⁷ Harold Bloom, Poetry and Repression Revisionism from Blake to Stevens (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), pp. 16-17. "The 'clinamen' or 'swerve' is the trope-as-misreading, irony as a dialectical alteration of images of presence and absence, or the beginnings of the defensive process."

⁸ Trilling, p. 88. Keats in a letter to Benjamin Bailey dated November 22, 1817.

⁹ Benjamin Bailey, from Reminiscences of Keats, English Romantic Writers, ed., David Perkins, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1967), p. 1243.

¹⁰ The inability to decide upon the reality of the memory may indicate a screen memory, the force of the unconscious influencing consciousness, in which case scene as well as the description and imagery may provide a portal to the links with the latent source material.

¹¹ Stillinger, p. 329, "Hyperion: A Fragment": "Sat gray-hair'd Saturn, quiet as a stone" (4). Also: "Upon the sodden ground/ His old right hand lay nerveless, listless, dead,/ Unsceptred" (17-19). See also Bate, p. 128.

¹² James H. Bunn, "Keats's 'Ode to Psyche' and the Transformation of Mental Landscape," ELH, Vol. 39 (1970), p. 581.

¹³ William Golding, Freefall (New York: Harcourt,

Brace & World, Inc., 1959), p. 10.

¹⁴ Pack, p. 50. In a letter to John Hamilton Reynolds on November 22, 1817, Keats quotes the following passage from Shakespeare's poem "Venus and Adonis": "'Audi - As the snail, whose tender horns being hit,/ Shrinks back into his shelly cave with pain...." Keats picks up this image in his notion of "Negative Capability" and in his image of a sparrow whose existence he can partake in. Pack, p. 53, letter to Benjamin Bailey, the same day as above.

¹⁵ Pack, p. 55. Keats in a letter to George and Thomas Keats dated December 21, 1817.

¹⁶ Kenneth Muir, John Keats: A Reassessment (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1958), p. 64. Muir notes the thematic similarity in the shared idea of death being more intense than life in both "Why Did I Laugh" and the "Ode to a Nightingale."

¹⁷ Also included is the desire to accomplish this transcendence through pure communication. In "Endymion" it was the "lispings empyrean." Here it is the "viewless wings of poesy."

¹⁸ Gittings, p. 186.

¹⁹ Darrel Mansell, "Keats's Urn: 'On' and On," Language and Style, 7 (1974), p. 235.

²⁰ Geoffrey Hartmann, Psychoanalysis and the Question of Text, ed., with Preface by Geoffrey

Hartman, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. viii.

²¹ "Disinterestedness" is primarily a later (1819) concept of Keats's. In a letter to George and Georgiana Keats dated February 14-May 3, 1819 he writes: "Very few men have ever arrived at a complete disinterestedness of Mind: very few have been influenced by a pure desire of the the benefit of others..." Trilling, p. 208.

²² Vendler, p. 143. "Keats displaces his fear of death onto the abandoned town."

²³ Perhaps no other issue in the Keats canon has evoked as much controversy as the positioning of quotation marks in the final two lines of the "Ode on a Grecian Urn." Although Helen Vendler considers the matter definitively settled by Stillinger, who places the marks around the phrase only in the penultimate line, Bate among others considers the marks appropriate around the entire final two lines, which would make the lines the urn's and not the persona's words. (Bate, p. 516.) Stillinger's version makes the aphorism about which the persona appends the final comment the urn's. Vendler, parenthetically, has described in a most creative, cogent, and insightful interpretation the meaning of this symmetric phrase. She compares the perceptual stance of the aphorism to the psychological problem of the figure and ground where one can not focus

on two/both aspects of a picture at the same time, particularly a picture that can be seen as two different images, such as the famous vases or profiles picture. She contends the urn says: "Beauty is Truth" "when we are looking at it with eyes of sensation" and "Truth Beauty" "when we are looking at it with eyes of thought." (Vendler, p. 133.)

²⁴ James Joyce. A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (New York: The Viking Press, 1973, copyright 1964) p. 212.

²⁵ The term "cosmic pillar," or "axis mundi" comes from Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World Inc., 1959), pp. 34-37.

²⁶ Leon Waldoff, "From Abandonement to Scepticism in Keats," Essays in Criticism, 21 (1971), p. 152.

²⁷ Horace G. Posey, Jr, "Keats's 'Ode on Melancholy': Analogue of the Imagination," Concerning Poetry, Vol. 8, No. 2 (1975), p. 62.

²⁸ Stillinger, p. 374. Keats's cancelled first stanza reads:

Though you should build a bark of dead men's bones,
And rear a phantom gibbet for a mast,
Stitch creeds together for a sail, with groans
To fill it out, bloodstained and aghast;
Although your rudder be a Dragon's tail,
Long sever'd, yet still hard with agony,
Your cordage large uprootings from the skull
Of bald Medusa; certes you will fail
To find the Melancholy, whether she
Dreameth in any isle of Lethe dull.

²⁹ Pack, p. 65. Keats in a letter to Richard Taylor, dated January 30, 1818.

³⁰ Pack, p. 174. Keats in a letter to John Hamilton Reynolds dated July 11, 1819.

³¹ John Jones, John Keats's Dream of Truth (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), p. 231. Jones calls the grape-bursting a "meta-sexual orgasm." Also noted by Vendler.

³² Waldoff, p. 157.

³³ Richard Taylor. Good and Evil (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970), pp. 264-68.

³⁴ Stillinger, p. 331, "Hyperion," Book I 72-82:

As when, upon a tranced summer-night,
Those green-rob'd senators of mighty woods,
Tall oaks, branch-charmed by the earnest stars,
Dream, and so dream all night without a stir,
Save from one gradual solitary gust
Which comes upon the silence, and dies off,
As if ebbing air had but one wave;
So came these words and went; the while in tears
She touch'd her fair large forehead to the ground,
Just where her falling hair might be outspread,
A soft and silken mat for Saturn's feet.

and "The Fall of Hyperion" Canto I 372-382:

As when, upon a tranced summer night,
Forests, branch-charmed by the earnest stars,
Dream, and so dream all night, without a noise,
Save from one gradual solitary gust,
Swelling upon the silence; dying off;
As if the ebbing air had but one wave;
So came these words, and went; the while in tears
She press'd her fair large forehead to the earth,
Just where her fallen hair might spread in curls,
A soft and silken mat for Saturn's feet.

"Writing is unthinkable without repression." Derrida

CHAPTER IV: THE LETTERS

The same themes resonating in Keats's poems appear more vibrantly in his letters. Love: "My dear Girl I love you ever and ever and without reserve" (Pack 221, to Miss Brawne, March? 1820), death: "the world is too brutal for me -- I am glad there is such a thing as the grave" (Pack 228, to Miss Brawne, August, 1820), and desire: "I cannot exist without you" (Pack 213, to Miss Brawne, Oct. 13, 1819), all play prominent roles in the letters. Their hybrid derivatives, like well-developed minor cast members in a drama, also bloom. For example, the combination of desire and death arises in Keats's passionate love for Fanny Brawne: "I could die for you" (Pack 214, Oct. 13, 1819), and love of death appears as "I should like to die" (Pack 228, August? 1820).

Despite Keats's extrinsic interests, that is, his focus on Fanny Brawne, there remains his selfish concern for his own fate. Realizing that "Death must come at last" (Pack 222, to Miss Brawne, March? 1820), Keats thinks also of his own legacy, "I will not die without being remembered" (Pack 223, to Miss Brawne, March? 1820). This sentiment voiced late in Keats's life echoes his similar thoughts of a few years earlier, when

as an aspiring poet he was fully conscious of death, mortality, posterity -- and "Posterity's award" (Pack, p. 19, to George, August, 1816). In a "beautiful circuiting" (Pack, p. 71, to J. H. Reynolds, Feb. 19, 1818) Keats's themes extend and merge into, over each other, creating crystal patterns of interdependency, together outlining the inner forces, frustrations, and fears motivating the young poet.

From the beginning of his writing career death and desire play a crucial position in his consciousness, forming the foundation and providing the impetus for much of his poetry. As implied earlier, Keats's choice of poetry as a vocation lies interlocked with the forces that permeate his poetry, the forces of eros and thanatos. These forces, too, are rooted in the poet's past (and seem to stem from an undecided, incomplete relationship with his mother). Desire to outlive himself, a theme dominant throughout the poems, appears even more overtly in his letters. This desire originates from a longing to link the two realms of death and life, a desire to communicate across the gap separating them.

Although the medical profession offered a tempting means to conquer death, and this temptation may have lead Keats to pursue medical studies, it could not provide a way to communicate his unconscious desires,

only a method of acting them out by saving others' lives and thereby postponing death. Through language, a medium linked to the unconscious, ("L'inconscient est structure comme un langage"),¹ poetry supplies the means both to act out and express the reunification desire. Poetry provides the way to express symbolically the plight of his unconscious and the way to soothe this plight.

The act of writing becomes the act of intercourse, a penetrating medium by which to pierce the membrane between the author's conscious and unconscious, to enter into a consummation within himself, as if his writing were a bathoscopic plunge into his inner Cave of Quietude. Writing as act exercises the libido as it is sublimated into the arena of social acceptability. Through his desires, Keats writes himself out of death and into the English canon ("I think I shall be among the English Poets after my death," Pack 117, to George and Georgiana Keats, October 14-31, 1818). His poems are masked wishes and his letters are desires revealed.

When Keats, at Hadydon's suggestion (Pack 22, March 17, 1817), goes into seclusion to write "Endymion" at Shanklin (Pack 25), he alludes to two forces that provide the current beneath his poetry. One is his poetic heritage. His reference to Shakespeare, "Is it too daring to Fancy Shakespeare this Presidor?" (Pack

31, to B. R. Haydon, May 10-11, 1817) simply breaks the surface of a debt Keats owes to his progenitors, from Shakespeare through Spenser and Milton to Mathews and Hunt.

Secondly, Keats reveals his adolescent libido in a letter to Reynolds on April 17, 1817, when he says, "I must in honesty however confess that I did not feel very sorry at the idea of the Women being a little profligate." Potentially promiscuous women entice him because they remain free from the constraints of maternally imposed (assumed) guilt -- because as loose women, they fall outside the definition/bounds of mother imago, of female ideal (the whore-Madonna image) and hence are in a deep sense free from guilt association. Of course societal constraints and their individual counterpart, the superego, will not permit guilt-free experience, but loose women potentially provide an avenue of erotic release.

Throughout the letters the same subject returns continually, the subject that haunts Keats, touches him directly in his family, and prevents him from completing relationships with women -- death. He focuses to the point of obsession on the idea of defeating death. A main theme in his poems, the desire to overcome, to outlive death occupies the literal and conscious levels in the letters. He even calls attention to the theme

where it surfaces in Shakespeare's Love's Labour's Lost:
"Let Fame, which all hunt after in their lives,/ Live
register'd upon our brazen tombs,/ And so grace us in
the disgrace of death...." (Pack 30, to Benjamin Robert
Haydon, May 10-11, 1817). Fame appeals to Keats for its
posthumous benefits, not its ego-caressing powers in the
present. Fame means prolonging life into death, as
reputation extends the self into others and,
transitively, others carry the reputation on beyond the
end of original life. Death loses its finality when
reputation extends the self.

Keats's desire to acquire fame in order to extend
himself beyond death collaborates with his desire to
reunite with his mother. (If he can force life and
death to overlap, then he can re-enact his role as
mother's partner, complete his fractured libidinal
direction, and fulfill his erotic desires.) Desire for
fame is a desire to outlast death. Keats predicates his
other desires on the latter. By defeating death, Keats
would conquer the Claudius to his own father's King
Hamlet; as death replaced Keats's father, so Keats could
usurp the father role in the Oedipal triangle by
conquering death (death took his father, and it took his
mother in the midst of his re-establishment in the
partner role -- the role swallowed, made moot by death).
Not only does death play the "pater" position, which

would be sufficient to inspire Keats's response, but it holds his object of desire captive like Pluto does Proserpine, in a place where "what we called happiness on Earth (is) repeated in a finer tone" (Pack p. 52, to Benjamin Bailey, Nov. 1817). This aspect of death, the anthropomorphic aspect capable, like Pluto, of kidnapping objects of desire, like Persphone or Keats's mother, becomes Keats's nemesis.

Death sits in opposition to Keats, at once like the Law and the Capulet-like family of Madeline, opposing, ruling, and preventing reclamation of the desired object. If Keats can extend himself beyond death through his reputation, then he will be able to accept death knowing that his fight goes on and he remains a part of the world. This ambivalent attitude toward death finds expression most prominently in the "Ode to a Nightingale," where suicide tempts the speaker but loses to his sense of aesthetic beauty, an anchor holding him to this world despite lapses into a "horrid morbidity of temperament" (Pack 32, to Benjamin Robert Haydon, May 10-11, 1817).

The other side of the driving forces, eros, emerges equally powerfully in Keats's letters. Poetry provides Keats with the means of simulating the sex act, of releasing both dammed-up libidinal tensions and of

focusing this energy (energy at once libidinally and creatively cathected) on the distorted subjects of his own repression -- romance and mortality or eros and thanatos. His hope of writing more poetry before his death and the consolation writing will bring speaks of his desire to modify death via creative catharsis, a substitute sexual release. Its content is identified by the subject matter and the above associations. His own obsession with writing, "habit has made me a Leviathan" (Pack 27, to John Hamilton Reynolds, April 18, 1817), and "I read and write about eight hours a day" (Pack 31, to Benjamin Robert Haydon, May 10-11, 1817), which is either in solitude or in male company (Bailey, Brown, Dilke, etc.) suggests that he is distracting himself from the real drive or desire which surfaces nonetheless in the content and subject of the poems.

Another troubled source of Keats's writing is the loss of his parents, which affected Keats on all levels of his consciousness. His own awareness of their loss and its consequences emerge in a letter to his friend Ben Bailey, a divinity student with whom Keats lived temporarily in Magdalene Hall at Oxford while he was writing Book III of "Endymion" in September, 1817 (Bate 205-12). He sees the cause of his incipient disillusionment with women stemming from his loss of his parents, resulting in a greater love for his brothers

and a lesser affection for women: "My Love for my Brothers from the earlier loss of our parents and even for earlier Misfortunes has grown into a[n] affection 'passing the Love of Woman'" (Pack 93; Keats here quotes 2 Samuel 1. 26, in a letter to Benjamin Bailey, June 10, 1818). He goes on to admit that his affection for his brothers has "always stifled the impressions that any woman might otherwise have made" upon him. Keats is aware that his parents' deaths and the resulting increased bond between him and his brothers has impeded normal relations with women.

Beyond his strong fraternal bonds lies a deeper source for the trouble, the disruption by his parents' deaths of the Oedipal triangle. Keats has difficulty with women, with possible explainable exceptions (profligate women, Isabella Jones, (as plausibly argued by Gittings in Keats: The Living Year) Fanny Brawne) because he remains bound to the faith in his mother, bound to the image of perfection he created of his mother. It is this mother imago that results in the repeated theme of mortal (alive) man seeking union with the immortal (beyond death) ideal female: "Keats's concern with immortal, non-abandoning love is really a concern with a love that is both sexual and maternal" (Waldoff 152).

These difficulties did not, however, preclude Keats

from forming certain (psychically acceptable) relationships. For example, he develops a brief affair with the mysterious Hastings woman: "Since I wrote thus far I have met with that same Lady again, whom I saw at Hastings..." (Pack 123, to George and Georgiana Keats, Oct. 14-31, 1818). Gittings argues persuasively, if at times tenuously, that the Hastings woman's identity is Isabella Jones.² Keats's ambivalence wells into his overt behavior, as his actions belie his claims and denials. Apparently Keats has desires for this woman ["As I had warmed with her before and kissed her" (Pack 123) as he boldly kisses her, twice, the second time on their second meeting because "it would be living backwards not to do so again" (Pack 123). This admission contradicts his unconvincing denial of having any "libidinous thought about her" (Pack 124).] But when the lady gently rebuffs his advances, an act strengthening her maternal associations, he feels good, reassured, claiming her refusal makes him "feel more pleasure than a simple kiss could do" (Pack 124). She reinforces maternal images when she counters his amorous desires, establishing herself as a surrogate mother figure. Keats's forced but readily accepted Platonic feelings toward her could hold the key to resolving his tangled, ruptured Oedipal desires which may heal partially as a result of this relationship (a Platonic

affair lasting at least several weeks according to Gittings), yet Keats's ambivalence toward women does not mitigate following this period in his life except that it might have opened the door for at least an attempt at an autonomous relationship with Fanny Brawne.

On the heels of the former experience, in the same letter to his brother and sister in law that he reveals the Hastings affair, he writes that he hopes never to marry because his "Solitude is sublime" (Pack 124). He proposes to avoid marriage: "I hope I shall never marry" because a wife, he says would hold him back, fetter his imagination. His responses, despite the light tone, seem resentful, especially after the former affair, particularly as he goes on to write that the above restrictions combine "with the opinion that I have of the generallity (sic) of woman - who appear to me as children to whom I would rather give a Sugar Plum than my time," and they "form a barrier against Matrimony which I rejoice in" (Pack 124-5). After the Isabella Jones affair he swings from the prior youthful adoration and overt idealization of women to extreme condescension. Because Keats's attitudes can be charted through his letters and the above feelings follow his relationship with Ms. Jones, there is danger of creating a causal nexus; yet the temptation is great because Keats's attitudes toward women are inconsistent until

examined in the light of his Oedipal experiences.

He hopes never to marry because the ideal has again left him. Isabella Jones fortified Keats's maternal illusion by again stirring the Oedipal longings and, by her rebuff, stifling them, preventing them from developing. Because of this symbolic reenactment of the mother-son incest/erotic desire relationship and the replay of the mother-son separation, Keats re-establishes the ideal image that slides out of mortal reach. (It also maintains the necessary distance that prevents Keats from being lured, seduced into a physical affair that would bring maternal disapprobation and guilt.)

Women now appear as children to Keats because he has firmly developed his own fantasy world in his fictional exercises wherein his desires find solace and release. Because marriage would violate his commitments to his mother and her temporary proxy, Isabella Jones, he forms a barrier against matrimony. To marry would be to act in bad faith, as it would also be an attempt to fill a gap created by his mother (and recreated by Jones) that extends infinitely into ideality, and is therefore unattainable.

Consistent with his perception of the mother figure and with his desire to conquer death is Keats's idea of death itself, a version supplementing the "happiness in

a finer tone" version. Keats writes that in death "There will be no space and consequently the only commerce between spirits will be their intelligence of each other - when they will completely understand each other" (Pack 127, to George and Georgiana Keats, Dec. 6, 1818 - Jan 4, 1819). This conception clearly presages the Moneta-narrator bonding in "The Fall" as well as explains the purpose and meaning of the Endymion-Phoebe communions. It also parallels and reflects the desire to reunite across death with the absent mother. This aphysical communion, this spiritual interlocking, is a Platonic version of intercourse on a non-spatial level and as such a displaced³ erotic wish-fulfillment. Only through writing can he fan his hopes of connecting with the ideal. At the same time writing becomes his obsession, his mistress in an autoerotic means of achieving sexual satisfaction. Writing replaces/displaces the libidinal objects of his desire. It does not replace the desire itself but channels and relieves it, a masturbation wherein he can satisfy his desires without sacrificing his ideals.

Keats's need to write fits neatly into the classical (if sometimes naive?) definition of sublimation. His sexual energies (and for Keats more, his sexual goals) are met by his artistic expression while simultaneously allowing productive functioning in

society, all the while producing consummate poetry. Keats's contribution to the poetic canon may owe the lion's share to the circumstances of childhood -- to Keats's undying love for his mother (a love situation on the same unconscious level that Woolf was cognizant of when she said that although her mother died when she was a child, it took forty years to bury her).

In a long letter to George and his wife Georgiana in America (Pack 146, Feb. 14 - May 3, 1819), Keats describes one of his dreams. He dreamt that he was in the regions of Hell where Paulo meets Franchesca, in Dante's fifth canto. Like Endymion, Keats floats in the air while kissing a woman; he is warm amid cold and dark: "even flowery tree tops sprung up and we rested on them" (Pack 156). Here is a vision that repeats a similar scene in "Endymion," and the two images speak of their importance in Keats's mental life. The scene, not unexpectedly, recapitulates union, while the situation, particularly in light of Keats's own context of the scene in Hell, corresponds to imagined death. Here Keats imagines himself warm despite cold and dark surroundings, and he is united in a kiss with a woman, a "beautiful figure" with whom he floats. Their kiss seems to him as if the two were "joined at [for as] it seem'd for an age" (Pack 156). He wishes that he "could dream it every night." That this memorable dream seems

important enough to repeat in a letter, testifies to its position in Keats's consciousness and to the role writing holds as mediator between conscious levels.

When Keats begins to reveal his love for Fanny Brawne in his letters beginning July 1, 1819, ambivalence enters at its greatest intensity. The Keats-Brawne love affair, recorded in their letters, foregrounds Keats's severe internal contradictions about women. Although the letters passionately express a torrid desire, throughout the affair Keats continually stays apart from the object of his desire through the bitter and poignant final days of his life when, dying in Rome, he cannot bring himself even to open Fanny's letters: "...he would still not have her letters opened. Words struck home to him too powerfully" (Bate 695, also 590).

Keat's characteristic ambivalence appears from the start of his relationship with Miss Brawne. He is conscious of the internal contradictions. He declares his love to Fanny, yet he is held back, diffident, insecure. It seems he is jealous, and he imagines another in her life, "I could recant all my suspicions" (Pack 226, to Miss Brawne, July, 1820), and this thought limits him. At the same time (in the same letter) he imagines his freedom gone (consistent with his fear in an earlier letter, to George and Georgiana Keats, Oct.

14, 1818, Pack 124) taken by her because she preoccupies his thoughts. Despite his declared passion while living again on the Isle of Wight, he does not go to visit her the next day, July 2. Here begins the heated but primarily epistollic love affair. Upon receiving her reply to the July 1st letter he begins in earnest the written relationship, Fanny's absence far from impeding his desire. Although he claims to want to be with her, "...you make me ache the more to be near you" (Pack 173, July 8, 1819), he does not make the trip, and Fanny apparently wants to know what is keeping them apart. Keats quotes her suggestion that it may be "horrid people" (Pack 173), but denies this cause and claims instead that he must protect her from "a chance of harm." The source of this harm is unclear, and it seems the stronger reason for not seeing her is for Keats to protect himself -- in order to retain his relationship to his writing.

Two weeks later he writes her a letter wondering when they will be together again, and he speculates that it may be in a month. Satisfaction appears in his tone as he realizes that if he were closer to London he would want to be with her continually -- or so he claims. Yet he remains with Rice, writing "Lamia," "Otho the Great," and "The Fall of Hyperion" during this very prolific summer.

Keats's apparent asceticism, his self-discipline and self-denial, may really be a cover for the ulterior motives working in conjunction with the events in his life. Although he claims that he "would die for one hour" (Pack 176, July 15, 1819) with Fanny, he in fact remains away from London not one but three months, all the while professing undying love through his letters to Miss Brawne. Her responses fan his desire, as he writes: "for your letters keep me alive" (Pack 176). This wording reveals precisely the relationship. It is not Miss Brawne the corporeal, sensuous woman with whom Keats has fallen desperately in love, but instead the act of writing and the act of reading letters, the aggressive-passive, rhythmic pattern that also echoes intercourse. Keats is in love with the fictional Fanny Brawne and the idea of love, but his conception of the ideal and sacrosanct female and his faithfulness to this maternal conception prohibit him from carrying over his desire into the physical-sexual realm.

Meanwhile, during this exchange of missives, death, Keats' old counterpart to erotic desire, re-emerges in his attempt to find a satisfactory metaphor for the intensity of his amorous desires. He has "a swooning admiration" (Pack 177, July 25, 1819) for Fanny's beauty, and he vows to sacrifice himself (re the "Psyche" ode) by living domestically, even by dying for

her to please her. Death emerges here not only as a trope of intense desire but as a distinct and equal power. Activated by his conscious desire for Fanny and the tension this desire creates, Keats writes to her: "I have two luxuries to brood over in my walks, your Loveliness and the hour of my death. O that I could have possession of them both in the same minute" (Pack 177). This sentiment echoes the call of Phoebe in "Endymion" when she moans to her lover: "We might embrace and die: voluptuous thought" (Stillinger 214, IV 759). Finally the two forces of eros and thanatos break through to his conscious level, overtly signifying the debt he owes them.

Word choice reveals the degree to which Keats is preoccupied by the twin themes that he "broods" over daily. He is disturbed by the power desire has over him, and he strikes back at this power by remaining in Wight longer than he expected, effectively postponing any communion other than epistolary with the object he claims to desire so passionately.

However it is not merely erotic desire that holds his thoughts. It is also the thought of his own death, and the two combine into one experience to become his fantasized goal. If he were granted his wish, he would be able to take possession of all his desires. He would be able, for one brief but intense moment, to reconcile

all of the warring forces and contradictory desires pulling within. Dying into life, Keats would have his moment of union with Fanny Brawne in a condensed version of his earlier desire (a few days ago) to live with Fanny as butterflies for three passionate days of more intensity than "fifty common years" (Pack 171). By taking Fanny ("having possession" of her loveliness, if not direct "double entendre," is at least a screen for erotic desire), and by linking this act that breaches his faith by betraying his mother, Keats effectively has his erotic exigencies fulfilled and simultaneously pays the price the concomitant guilt extracts. Furthermore, death, the tax excised on his pleasure, also satisfies his desire to rejoin his mother in her boudoir-sepulchre in death.

Platonic love facilitated by physical separation enables the repressed author to pour out his feelings in his already onanistic medium without fear of unconscious reprisal - especially if the release of energies is further sublimated into expressions of love and beauty rather than of sex and desire. In a letter to Bailey, (Pack 178, August, 1819) Keats expresses the reality of his desire in a surfacing of the repressed, a truth able to evade the censor because it is a "double entendre." Keats praises writing and says: "I look upon fine phrases like a Lover" (Pack 16, to Benjamin Bailey, Aug.

14, 1819) knotting sex and writing. This voiced connection between psycho-sexuality and the acts of writing and reading suggest that these acts have the power of vicarious or real sexual experience for the author, at least subliminally, and further suggest the claim that Keats is at least as in love with writing with Fanny herself.

When Keats is away from her for three months while living and writing in Rice's cottage and then in Winchester, he has a productive relationship with Fanny. He not only preserves mental equilibrium by venting his desires for Fanny without fear of acting on them -- and the latent fear of impotence is also allayed here -- but he is able to convert the energy produced and released by his no longer repressed desire into aesthetic creation, as Keats wrote "Lamia," "The Fall," "Otho the Great" during this time. The act of writing also replaces the act of sexual intercourse, providing Keats with a full range of psycho-sexual surrogate experience. [Keats writes to Miss Brawne July 15, 1819, that "I took your letter last night to bed with me" (Pack 175), presenting an ironic "quid pro quo."]

In what has become characteristic oxymoronic phrasing, Keats goes on to tell Fanny that the reason for his long self imposed absence (Pack 186) is that he "cannot bear the pain of being so happy." Here again

Keats's words disclose more truth than they superficially appear to (Lacan's concept that all speech is a slip of the tongue⁴ is here illustrated) because his temporary happiness from Fanny's presence, like Lycius's love, like Isabella's, like the wretched Wight's, like Otho's, would be shattered in the course of time. Happiness is painful for Keats because the surface, physical pleasure of the moment lies atop the guilt and discomfort caused by the source of this pleasure. Keats must "admit no thought of it" (Pack 186), of this happiness, because it is empty, built on superficial structure and incapable of permanence. The root of Keats's denial, his repressing "any thought" of happiness lies in, again, his guilt complexes that exist causally with his incompleting Oedipal configuration. Until Keats can unify and mend the disjointed relationship between himself and the imago, the image that he has constructed of his mother, he will remain fixated at a pre-resolved level and consequently remain unable to develop a full, mutually satisfying relationship with another woman, despite a normal adult, conscious desire to do so.

After a month's gap in letters extant to Fanny Brawne, Keats continues his epistolical romance September 13, 1819, writing now from London after having moved from Brown's cottage on the Isle of Wight to Winchester.

Keats felt compelled to leave Winchester "immediately on the night coach for London" (Bate 576) when he received word of his brother's (George's) financial disaster in America. The twelve hour trip to London put him close to Fanny, yet despite "wondering what else to do to kill time until he saw Abbey on Monday evening" (Bate 577, Abbey is Keats's ex-guardian), Keats returned to Winchester without seeing Fanny. Strangely (and what is equally strange is the dearth of critical comment about this strangeness) Keats did not visit Fanny despite their proximity, claiming that a visit "would destroy the half comfortable sullenness" (Pack 186) and turn it into "perplexities." His excuse, sounding like denial, reveals the nature of Keats's thoughts, their tension, and the still ambivalent feelings he has about Fanny. In partial ("half") oxymoron, he admits feeling "half comfortable" (Pack 186) in being sullen. Such an ambivalence reflects the uncertainty caused by the antipathetic desires in conflict. (Keats's overt claims of love still run counter to his deeper desires to maintain celibacy until he can reunite with his mother -- the strength of this latter desire evidenced by the author's avoidance of contact with Fanny over the past several months.) The half-comfort of depression remains preferable to the anticipated discomfort "perplexities" would cause were Keats to visit his girlfriend (where

presumably lust would temporarily override the guilt-inspired repressive force).

Then, in the same letter, Keats offers a familiar excuse for a man's acts or non-acts toward a woman: "I love you too much" he says to Fanny, "to venture to Hampstead, I feel it is not paying a visit, but venturing into fire." Keats's ostensible reason for avoiding his love object again sounds the chord of denial and at the same time reveals the fear that contact would fan the embers of desire into the fire of passion, resulting in a breaching of his compact, his unspoken, unconscious vow to remain faithful to his guiding mother image. Seeing Fanny, Keats fears, would turn the ersatz letter connection into a real physical relationship, whereupon his defenses against carnal experience with mother-rivals would be assaulted, he fears, beyond support. Keats is content (if sullen) with the long-distance relationship where he can siphon off his libidinal energies and channel them through the masturbatory medium of writing. But when the potential for contact arises, a potential he postponed by remaining at Wight and Winchester, he makes excuses to stay distant.

Keats's attitude changes during the time of the "Autumn" ode. He admits on October 11, 1819, that he has had "a thousand kisses" (Pack 213) with Fanny. He feels

"absorbed" by her, as though he were "dissolving." He feels "exquisitely miserable" (Pack 214) because of it. His fears of last summer are being realized, yet he is giving in to temptation. The expected guilt caused by kissing Miss Brawne, despite the disinterested attitude, arises in his next letter, October 19, 1819 (Pack 214). Keats wants to reassert self discipline: "I must impose chains upon myself" he writes, seeing his options in Keatsian hyperbole as "Love or death." Naturally these extremes also objectify the two forces impelling him in his life and writing.

As 1820 approaches and Keats turns twenty four (Oct. 31, 1819), his poetry-writing slows as his health deteriorates. Despite being close (next door) to Fanny (he moves into Wentworth Place in Hampstead approximately the twenty-first of October, 1819, Bate 613), he is to be separated from her as much as possible to avoid overstimulation. (By February of 1820 he writes to Fanny: "According to all appearances I am to be separated from you as much as possible" Pack 217.) This judgement coincides with Keats's inner desire to prevent contact, a desire reinforced by the correspondance by letter between the two, even when they live in different sections of the same house.

Living contiguously to Fanny suits Keats. The situation makes him ambivalent, satisfying the

contradictory impulses within him. Despite the proximity of Fanny, his desired object, she is far away, both present and absent in a paradoxical position. Even though they live next door to each other, the lovers carry on a predominantly written relationship, the form best suited to Keats's psychic needs. "When I send this round I shall be in the front parlour watching to see you show yourself for a minute in the garden. How illness stands as a barrier betwixt me and you!" (Pack 219) But the illness is as much a bridge as a barrier, as it facilitates the communication most suitable to Keats and his various needs. The illness offers him the excuse to avoid physical contact, potential anathema to the element remaining chaste within him: "I am strong enough to walk over -- but I dare not" (Pack 227, July, 1820). It also obviates the possibility of being impotent, making it a moot point, satisfying a deep seated fear (found in the earlier poems, for example, Saturn in "Hyperion"). At the same time as these negative advantages, Keats's incapacitating illness promotes the indulgence of self-sacrifice and Platonic love, both expressed through letter writing. Keats's illness, its savagery aside (were that possible), puts him in a position where he is relieved of the obligations of desire without retarding the desire or its means of expression.

As the months progress in 1820 and Keats's health degenerates, he slowly realizes that he must leave England for the warmer winter climate of Italy. He prepares both himself and Fanny for the inevitable departure by rationalizing to her that she will be better off without him (Pack 227). Rather than "an awkward bow" (Pack 237, to Brown, November 30, 1820), Keats's "beau geste" reveals the sensitive, caring man that emerges victorious over the paranoic, jealous lover of the past months (example Pack 226, to Miss Brawne, July, 1820).

The anger, frustration, fear, and desire of Keats's final days with Fanny reach a climax in his letter of August, 1820. Herein he distills the desires that have infused his work from 1818 on and releases them as they erupt among his overt feelings for Fanny: "I wish I was either in your arms full of faith or that a thunder bolt would strike me" (Pack 228). He has reduced the urges of eros and thanatos to their two primary essences, sensual contentment and death. The urgency and frustration of his illness fomented this cry of pathos and desperation, a cry encapsulating the ambiguously antithetical and reciprocal forces that have stirred and motivated Keats the poet over the past five years. The extreme of sensual gratification (as it alternates synonymously with aesthetic desire) or the ultimate end

of life, either intensity can end the pain and suffering of the intermediate world where "men grow old and die."

What compounds the sadness of the young and dying Keats's predicament is that his genuine pain and sorrow from preparing to leave Fanny -- his "thought of leaving Miss Brawne is beyond everything horrible" (Pack 232, to Charles Brown, September 30, 1820) -- accompanies the conflict generated within by the pleasure or at least the reduction in tension of leaving. Keats sails for Italy and Fanny remains in England. Leaving Fanny re-opens the wound of his mother's loss but also removes the potential for maternal transgression. The ambivalence created by this conflict smolders beneath the conscious pain and separation.

Upon leaving, ambivalence reappears in Keats's consciousness in his contradictory desires about Fanny. In his final note to Fanny, tellingly written to her mother (perhaps a greater focus of his attention, as she, her role, more directly corresponds to his own mother, fills his mother's role, via displacement and transference) where he succinctly but poignantly signs off in a post script to Fanny, closing simply with "Goodbye" (Pack 233). He does not write to her again. His feelings, however, haunt him, "I should have had her when I was in health" he writes to Brown (Pack 234, November 1, 1820). Aside from the possible confirmation

of the premise that he could not allow real sexual contact, his retrospective desires reveal and confirm the sexual nature of the desire as well as the repressive forces working against it. His thoughts then are caught in the swing between the still passionate desire expressed here and the still repressive force evidenced by his decision not to write to Fanny again. Later he will not even open and read her letters to him, saying that they would be too painful. The pain would come as much from opening the paths to the past -- and the unconscious -- as from opening the letters. The chain-letters of signifiers leading to Fanny, igniting desire, would rekindle the desire for the mother and the pain from her and Fanny's loss. Reading and writing, although together sexual surrogate, would perpetuate the wound of desire which Keats is struggling to heal through repression.

Part of the cause for this pain and ambivalence is in the consequences of his situation and consciousness. Keats, like Hamlet, is aware of his death's imminence. He watched his mother and his brother die from tuberculosis, and he knows the results of his symptoms (and even though he denies, hopes, and believes the problem is his stomach, as his first doctor misdiagnosed, he still refers continually to his death; for example in a letter to Charles Brown, September 30,

1820, he writes "...I wish for death every day and night..."). With death approaching, Keats consciously confronts the reality of leaving life and unconsciously the potential of re-uniting with his mother, the latter particularly if death is the state of transcendence over life, a realm of the ideal (in which case Keats would in effect live out the fantasy written in "Endymion"). The result is a hyperambivalence again evidenced in Keats's extreme desire for the absent Fanny and his refusal to have contact with her or to communicate with her, eshewing even ersatz intercourse.

A tangential product of this death consciousness and an explanation for his lack of writing is that death's proximity frees Keats from the pressures of the libido (physically if not emotionally). It is this release that supplements the physical weakness and prevents Keats from writing poetry and eventually even letters. His incentive, his compulsion to write ("I read and write about eight hours a day") evaporates rather than intensifies the closer he gets to death because his libido gives way to death consciousness (and to entropy, another aspect of thanatos). Even in November, 1820, he feels that he is living "a posthumous existence" (Pack 236, November 30, 1820).

What Keats has done through his poetry and expressed in his letters is develop a vision of death

that is compatible with erotic desire. Death becomes an extension of the sexual experience, perpetuating rather than ending it (as does art). Self-encapsulated, self-perpetuated, Keats's desire moves beyond the pleasure principle into death, only to rebound in life, like a Phoenix from its ashes, in his poetry. His poems remain, legacies of desire for union between the aesthetic-erotic texts and their readers in a collection of Moneta-like melds between the "teeming" brain of a "snail horn" sensitive poet and the searching desires of readers. Keats's soul was not "writ in water" but self written. The poems and letters of John Keats remain to found a network of texts that keep alive the desires of one whose wish was to "be among the English Poets" in his death.

Notes

¹ Malcolm Bowie, "Jacques Lacan," in Structuralism and Since: From Levi-Strauss to Derrida, ed., John Sturrock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 125. "The unconscious is structured like a language."

² It is Gittings's premise in his book John Keats: The Living Year already noted (Chapter I, # 3), that the identity of the Hastings lady is a Mrs. Isabella Jones and that she is the inspiration for Keats's "Bright Star," "Hush, Hush," and even "The Eve of St. Agnes." pp. 28-30; 60-69.

³ Laplanche and Pontalis, p. 121. "Displacement" is "The fact that an idea's emphasis, interest or intensity is liable to be detached from it and to pass on to other ideas, which were originally of little intensity but which are related to the first idea by a chain of associations."

⁴ Eagleton, p. 169. "But for Lacan all of our discourse is in a sense a slip of the tongue."

"I find that I cannot exist without poetry -- without eternal poetry." Keats in a letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, April 17-18, 1817.

"Die into Life"¹

CONCLUSION

Aware that his death was approaching, Keats suggested to Severn that his epitaph read "'Here lies one whose name was writ in water'" (Bate 694). His tombstone in Rome displays this phrase, indirectly acknowledging Keats's debt to his writing. Keats bares his soul indelibly to the world in his poems and letters, recording his desires everlastingly for the posterity he so longed for.

Writing, Keats's means and end, is his phallic extension, defender's sword, desirer's mistress; it is the path to posterity, the "royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious,"² and above all, the means of overcoming maternal loss. It is writing and specifically writing poetry that dresses the wounds of loss, assuages the fears of guilt, and soothes the pain of sorrow. It builds the bridge from fragmentation to unity, providing intellectual and sensual fulfillment.

Writing flows from the artist to connect his words of beauty forever with the worlds beyond.

Eros, thanatos, and their relationship to the Oedipus complex, like the steel skeleton binding reinforced concrete, extend internally throughout Keats's textual network. According to Keats biographies, the young Keats lost both his parents prior to adolescence. His father died when he was eight (April 15, 1804, Bate 12) and his mother when he was fourteen (March, 1810, Bate 21). Although the Oedipus complex normally evolves during the years of five to seven, the consequent trauma may endure for years. In Keats's case, the "ex post facto" evidence of his texts and their motifs indicates a long-lasting enmeshing in the knots of the childhood unconscious experience. These themes are the current running throughout the texts, supplying the source for questions about the author's preoccupation with them.

In Keats's case the normal Oedipal cycle is interrupted irrevocably during a return of the repressed. Even though Keats had parents long enough to live through the elemental phase of the dynamic, he is resituated in circumstances identical to those of the first phase. Like Hamlet, Keats finds himself confronted by the very situation the Oedipus complex seeks. Not only has his father-nemesis (the "Law") been

removed, but he finds himself playing the role of protector guardian to his own mother in her bedroom when she is ill with tuberculosis. This situation replays the scene of desire repressed in the unconscious since the earlier phase. The shift of power from father to oldest son already set in motion by his father's death carries over into sexual power when Keats is thrust into the role of bedside companion to his initial object of desire, his mother. This is another version of Freud's claim that "the finding of an object is always a refinding of it" (see Introduction, note # 27). Whereas Hamlet was haunted and compelled by his father's ghost, Keats is haunted and impelled by the revenant of his mother.

When the young protector, like the young Oedipus himself, fails to fend off the inevitable death, he, like Oedipus, blames himself and assumes the onus of guilt. Rather than the symbolic castration of self-blinding that is Oedipus's response, the younger and confused Keats buries his guilt, repressing it until it crops up in symbolic self castration as diffidence, fear, acrimony, ambivalence, and guilt when he attempts to develop relationships with women later in his life.

Keats's poems dramatize the search for a complete relationship that eludes Keats during his life. Repeatedly the poems characterize an attempt to

reconstitute fragmented identity and complete unfulfilled relationships. Their primary thematic paradigms suggest a longing for an ideal and the search for a means to communicate completely with it. Keats's poems are a quest for the lost mother, as both Bloom and Waldoff imply. The search leaves its trace in the poems, for example as a replica of unconscious desires and their path as quest in "Endymion." The clues to the source for Keats's motivations lie not in his past, at least not directly, but instead in his texts as they map his thoughts and desires, both conscious and unconscious, throughout his life. This "route" system throughout the poems betrays the root of the author's themes as it returns the repressed material, varyingly disguised, to the surface.

Another way these desires appear is through the author's undiluted thoughts in his letters. In these accounts his wants and needs vacillate. On the one hand he feels menaced by women, "When I am among Women I have evil thoughts, malice spleen..." (Pack 104, to Benjamin Bailey, July 18-22, 1818). Soon thereafter (Oct. 1818, Pack 124, to George and Georgiana Keats), he writes of feeling limited by the thought of marriage. A wife, in a variation of Blake's "mind-forged manacles," would chain his imagination. But the following July he is writing torrid love letters to Miss Brawne. This

transition underscores the ambivalent responses Keats has to women which range from the lascivious to the disgusted to the ambiguous to the contradictory. The poems idealize these reactions, drawn as fantasized reality and portrayed as fulfilled wishes, from Endymion's love swoons to Porphyro's elopement to the mental alter-"fane" honoring a goddess. These fictional scenes, as well as the continual quests and the battles against death, color a picture of the poet's need to overcome his loss from the death of his mother.

Through poetry Keats manages to enact his fantasies and reach a symbolic consummation with the mother imago. As a result, the poet is able, at least in the symbolic realm, to reach a level in his poetry that enables him to transcend the impediments of maternal desire and guilt. In the realm of creative language the poet can, wittingly or unconsciously, live out or release his conscious and unconscious fantasies. This symbolic reification of repressed desires appears several ways: in the union of mortal to immortal, in the attempts to dominate death, and finally in the ability to tolerate the uncertainties of death by looking beyond eternity to the moment. Implied by this overt devotion to imagination and covert loyalty to a distorted sense of mother desire is the impression that poetry and writing are a surrogate partner already, a link in the chain

from desire to mother ideal (and/or the material of the chain itself).

Writing colors all areas in Keats's life. He even mentions it in a discussion of his brother Tom's death: "I was not able to write..." (Pack 126, to George and Georgia Keats, December 16, 1818 - January 4, 1819). At least since "Endymion," when he wrote "eight hours a day" (Pack 31, to Benjamin Robert Haydon, May 10-11, 1817), writing has obsessed Keats. He writes compulsively, feeling depressed when he misses a few days: "I feel I must again begin with my poetry -- for if I am not in action mind or Body I am in pain" (Pack 130, to George and Georgiana Keats, December 16, 1818 - January 4, 1819). His relation to writing has evolved into a sensual relation, with writing filling the position of sexual partner, vacated originally by his mother. Writing releases libidinal desires, as Keats indirectly, allusively, is aware: "I look upon fine Phrases like a Lover" (Pack 178), and "I live under an everlasting restraint - never relieved except when I am composing - " (Pack 130).

The bonds constraining Keats originate in a desire to complete the Oedipal cycle. Before Keats allows himself to unite with a woman, he must reunite with his mother, across death, in order to reconnect the severed desire for her. Because of his unusual circumstance,

Keats feels the need to reunify with his mother, now idealized, before he can marry or consummate a relationship. To gain unity with his mother becomes the goal of his unconscious, the impetus and "Ursprung" of his creative energies.

Keats's fictional characters and situations play out fears of consummation as well as a strong desire for consummation, the contradiction creating tension and lending strength to the poems. For instance, the theme of parental overthrow in "Hyperion" binds the poem to Oedipal roots. Focus in the poem on Saturn, along with the sympathetic perspective to those overthrown offers the fear of castration (as a complex) as the main theme. Condensed in Saturn's situation is the castration fear and the correlative fear of impotence, manifest as power loss.

Concern for communication between two realms is another layer of the author's deep debt to the loss of his mother. The desires for "lispings empyrean," for mortal-with-god communication, are the tangents of the fundamental desire to join life to afterlife, to reach out from life to death. And because gods represent the wish to defeat death, as they are immortal as well as inhabitants of a higher plane, the attempts to communicate fully with them signal the base desire to join with the dead. This intercommunion, this almost

telepathic thought-transfer, however, involves more than simply ideas-exchange; it includes sensual contact. Consequently, there appear similarities to the matrix theme of the Oedipal situation. Keats's characters and their desires for ideal communication not only conform to the poet's desire, but they also translate the founding incestuous desire to objective, metaphorical correlatives, for example, the intimacy between mortal males and goddesses (Endymion-Cynthia, narrator-Moneta, to name two).

Keats's concentration on god communication expresses his desire to dominate death by contradicting it. This focus also replays the more specific desire to reunite with his mother in order to carry out the final stages of Oedipal desire, a desire symbolically represented in the act of writing (every poem is Keats's mother -- "the poem is the mother's face, as Keats implicitly tells us" (see Introduction, note # 16) -- and every writing is his attempt to write her into presence). In order to be able to develop an autonomous relationship with a woman, one where he can freely consummate the relationship, he first must free himself from the guilt that hovers over him, guilt that is a consequence of an unresolved Oedipus complex. Because Keats's mother dies during a return of the repressed, Keats is left ambivalent, desiring and doubly guilty

(from incest desire and inability to save her). As a result he is forever trying to reunite with his mother imago in an effort to confront his desires and live them or counter them.

Writing itself becomes the "raison d'être" for Keats because it provides the outlet, the avenue for sublimation of the repressed and unsatisfied (unresolved, incestual) desires. Writing becomes Keats's paramour, his sexual object and passion. Furthermore, poetry opens his unsated desires to a means of expressing themselves and their cross-routed energies, which lie latent in the poem's groundwork.

Writing for Keats reconstructs the fractured self; it fills the empty space left by loss. Keats finds fullness in the "mellow fruitfulness" of writing, as it connects the cracks in his ego, rooting itself within and bonding the outer with the inner. At least for a moment beneath the "maturing sun," he finds wholeness; he completes the puzzle (of the "Burden of the Mystery")³ when the battles cease, desires abate, and the moments ooze "hours by hours" during the all too brief September day when he writes "To Autumn." This exercise, however, ties the poet to the future, to his own death, and Keats's poems remain, tribute to the search for unity, a search for self-fulfillment.

Notes

¹ Stillinger, p. 356. "Hyperion," III 130.

² Freud, V, 608. "The interpretation of dreams is the royal road to a knowledge of unconscious activities of the mind."

³ Keats often referred to Wordsworth's death trope in "Tintern Abbey," the "Burden of the Mystery," for example in a letter to John Hamilton Reynolds dated May 3, 1818, (Pack, p. 88).

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