

LITERATURE

JOHN KEATS'S NOTION OF THE POETIC IMAGINATION

A. E. ERUVBETINE

University of Lagos

The Romantic sensibility derives its distinctness from a high sensitivity to the strength and weaknesses of the human imagination. Keats, like most other Romantics, placed high premium on, and evolved a theory of, the imagination which serves as the foundation upon which he built his poetic career. Essentially, he conceives of the poetic imagination as the faculty that enables the successful poet to suspend his rigid instinctive and egotistical identity, take on the existence of his subject, explore it thoroughly, and capture its distinguishable characteristics in art or poetry. Regarding all great poems as aesthetic records of poets' intimate experiences in this complex world, he views the poetic imagination (insofar as it aids poets in objective explorations and depictions of human experiences, and insofar as it broadens and enriches man's knowledge of the world) as the "Genius of poetry" (Forman 1931 (henceforth *Letters*): I, 243).

Keats regards the aesthetic or poetic imagination as a special manifestation of the human imagination in his scheme for the education of poets which is latent in his consideration of the world as "a vale of Soul-making" and speculations on "the Chambers of human mind" (*Letters*, II, 362-5 and I, 155-8). For him, the imagination is an integral part of the principle of consciousness. In its ideal manifestation, the Keatsian aesthetic imagination, is a power which, in the words of Coleridge, enables the poet to bring "the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other according to their relative worth and dignity" (Shawcross 1907:II, 12 — Coleridge). It accounts for the poet's mature and realistic apprehension and portrayal of man's life in the world. On the other hand, Keats maintains that the human imagination sometimes functions "unpoetically." He contends that while the poetic manifestation of the imagination realistically apprehends and effectively depicts man and his world, the 'unpoetic' manifestation of the imagination unrealistically apprehends and ineffectively portrays man and his world.

Since the poetic genius is the ideal manifestation of the human imagination, Keats sees it as only potentially present in all human beings. He maintains that, given the diverse and often contradictory functions of the human imagination, all those who aspire to be real poets must learn to distinguish between the poetic and the unpoetic activities of the human imagination. The course of education in the discrimination between the poetic and unpoetic forms of the imagination is latently integrated with Keats's programme of Spirit-creation in which he views the attainment of Soul-state as essentially coterminous with the actualization of the aesthetic potential of the human imagination. In the Keatsian system of spirit-creation, the poetic imagination is born in the "chamber of Mature-Thought" while the unpoetic capabilities of the imagination are manifest in the "chamber of Maiden-Thought".¹ Each birth of poetic consciousness in the chamber of Mature-Thought signals the birth of a great poet. Since all poems in Keats's view are expressions of the imagination, they naturally reflect the measure of success which their creators have attained in the process of actualizing the poetic potential of their imaginations.

The world's harmony is perceived and depicted by the poetic imagination in two distinct but related ways — the creation of poetic dreams or what he calls "empyrean reflections," and the vitalization of the veridical world or what he regards as the "spiritual repetitions of human life" (Letters, I, 73). In capturing the complexity of human life, the poet's dream world and his vitalized reality are related to, but not confused with the actual. Both worlds are brought into a kind of unity in which the distinctive features of the vitalized, real, and dream worlds are intensified by the poetic imagination.

I

The visionary mode of the poetic imagination is revealed by Keats in his use of Adam's dream as an analogue of the poetic activity: "The imagination may be compared to Adam's dream (*Paradise Lost*, VIII, 470-I) he awoke and found it truth" (Letters, I, 73). While all dreams are like poetic activities because they are subjective, not all dreams are necessarily poetic manifestations of the imagination to Keats. In "To J. H. Reynolds Esq.," he identifies three kinds of dreams; the first and second are unpoetic because they respectively establish the bright and dark conditions of life as sole realities while the third is an aesthetic vision because it presents the dark and bright sides of life in relation to each other. In Keats's view, dreams of perpetual brightness (13 — 2), dreams of eternal heavens created by fanatics ("The Fall of Hy-

perion", I, 1 — 2), and dreams of "external fierce destruction" ("To J. H. Reynolds", 67 — 88) — as long as they are presented as the only truths of human existence — make their creators "mere dreaming things" ("The Fall of Hyperion", I, 168) and not poets. Only dreams informed by the broader perspectives of human existence make their creators poets because such dreams show "a regular stepping of the imagination towards a truth" (Letters, I, 98).

Since Keats regards the poet's dream as a creation of the poetic imagination, it is appropriate to differentiate the poetic dream from all other dreams by calling it a 'vision'. Keats himself would have accepted this differentiation in terminology because, not only does Woodhouse recall the poet's preference for making "A Vision" instead of "A Dream" the subtitle of "The Fall of Hyperion", Keats also makes a clear distinction between the poet and the mere dreamer in "The Fall of Hyperion":

"The poet and the dreamer are distinct,
 "Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes.
 "The one pours out a balm upon the world,
 "The other vexes it."

(I, 199—202)

Poetic visions reflect the world's harmony either by presenting the relations between various aspects of the world or by concentrating on a single aspect of reality, exploring it thoroughly, and revealing its place in the larger scheme of things. There is nothing in the Keatsian system that prohibits the poetic imagination from basing its visions on only the seamy or unseamy side of things. In fact, the poetic imagination's ability to concentrate on a segment of truth, explore it intimately and stretch it to its limits without substituting or confusing it with the sole truth or other segments of reality is what Keats call "Negative Capability" (Letters, I, 77).

In Keats's works, pleasant and unpleasant visions are placed within broader contexts of human existence. In "I Stood Tip-toe", for example, the visions of the consummation of the love between Cupid and Psyche (143 — 150), and the languished love of Pan for Syrinx symbolize the bright and dark conditions of life respectively. In the intense feelings accompanying both visions, the opposition between the two aspects of love seems to disappear. The joys of love symbolized by the fulfilment of the love of Cupid for Psyche are qualified by the attendant tremor and ravishment (147) while the anguish of Pan and Syrinx is made 'sublime' by being described as "balmy pain" (153). The interpenetration of pain and pleasure is present in both visions.

Keats graphically illustrates how a poetic vision is generated when he compares the activity of the poetic imagination to that of a spider spinning a beautiful web from its inside: "almost any Man like the spider spin from his own inwards his own airy Citadel — the points of leaves and twigs on which the spider begins her work are few, and she fills the air with a beautiful circuiting"

¹ The "Chamber of Mature—Thought" here serves as a complement to John Keats's own phrase "the Chamber of Maiden-Thought".

(*Letters*, I, III). This statement seems to suggest that the poet creates out of his inner self, apparently oblivious of the external world, but a careful examination shows that the poet's works have direct contact with the world of objective reality. Just as the existence of the spider's web greatly depends on the leaves and twigs, so also does the truth of the poet's works and visions spring from their relation to the objective world. Therefore, poetic visions are not substitutes, but creations that enhance the significance of the veridical world by their peculiar relation to it.

II

While visions constitute "the empyreal reflections" of life by the poetic imagination, the enhancing of qualities of actual objects through a process of intensification is what Keats calls the "spiritual repetition of the actual". The enriching of objects and experiences can, in part, be done by the poetic genius through the vitalization of past events or through a personal recreation of historical happenings; hence, for Keats, individuals who have successfully actualized the aesthetic potential of their imagination can intimately participate in the activities of generations other than their own. He avers, "as my imagination strengthens, I do not live in this world alone but in a thousand different worlds" (*Letters*, I, 261). His ability to live in a thousand different worlds is part of the reward for a proper use of his imagination while the thousand different worlds that he is capable of living in can either be visionary or historically true worlds. Thus, the two distinct manifestation of the poetic imagination — visionary creation, and animation of the real — are shown to be related and not mutually exclusive.

Keats demonstrates the poetic imagination's ability to vitalize historically true worlds by describing his intimate participation in the customs and traditions of previous Ages:

We with our bodily eyes see but the fashions and Manners of one country for one age — and then die. Now to me manners and customs since passed, whether among the Babylonians or the Bactrians are as real, or even more real than those among which I live.

(*Letters*, I, 281)

The poet partakes of the essence of past traditions and customs by recreating and living 'personally' in the past generations. In recalling and recreating the previous customs, the poetic imagination highlights and intensifies some element of the customs, making them richer than, and even different from, their historical originals.

Keats illustrates the modifying ability of the aesthetic imagination, when he discusses the possible modification in an individual's recall of a singer's face:

Have you never by being Surprised with an old Melody — a delicious place — by a delicious voice, felt over again the very speculations and Surmises at the time it first operated on your Soul — do you not remember forming to yourself the singer's face more beautiful than it was possible and yet with the elevation of the Moment you did not think so — even then you were mounted on the Wings of the Imagination so high.

(*Letters*, I, 73)

"Forming to [oneself] the singer's face more beautiful than it was possible" suggests the imagination's power of intensifying the aspect of reality being reproduced. Coleridge calls this imaginative ability the "modifying or coadunating power" while Wordsworth refers to it as the "endowing or modifying power"².

The imagination, for Keats, also modifies concrete objects or even creates entirely 'new' ones from them. Writing to Haydon, he avows, "I look upon the Sun, the Moon, Stars, the Earth and its contents as materials to form greater things" (*Letters*, I, 131). For him, the poetic imagination draws upon objective reality or natural phenomena in creating things that are subjective but real. It either highlights aspects of its subjects as is the case in the recall of the singer's face, or uses objective things as starting points in creativity as is the case in the spider's web analogue. Natural objects can be bases for the vitalization of the actual and for the creation of visions.

The imagination's visionary and naturalized activities are also evident in Keats's classification of poetic subjects or "Ethereal things under three heads — Things real — things semireal and nothings. Things real such as existences of the sun, Moon & Stars and passages of Shakespeare. Things semireal such as love, the clouds & c... and Nothings" (*Letters*, I 120 — 1). His examples of real things are interesting in the sense that natural phenomena like the sun and the moon are regarded as having the same measure of reality as passages of Shakespeare. Passages of Shakespeare represent all great works of art that eternally reflect some valuable part of man's knowledge of his life and world. Though subjective, the works continue to exert as much influence on man as objective things like the moon and stars. "Things semireal" do not exist independent of the human consciousness. They derive existence from the interaction of man with the world. Things that are 'nothings' (like dreams and visions) exist in the consciousness of man, virtually independent of the external world.

All Keats's poems can be rewardingly viewed as products of the poetic imagination's operation on materials classed "under these three heads". For instance, in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn", the urn, as a great work of art that is

² See Shawcross (1907: II, 56 — Coleridge) and William Wordsworth's preface to the 1815 volume of poems (Hutchinson 1971).

comparable to passages of Shakespeare, can be said to be a real thing; the lovers depicted in the second stanza may be viewed as semireal because their existence is guaranteed partly by the external world and partly by the subjective world of the individual; and the imaginary melodies from the "soft pipes, that/Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone" (II, 2 — 3) are "nothings" because they are fanciful, deriving their reality solely from the subjective world of the poet. Similarly, in *Endymion*, the protagonist's love for the Moon goddess is a thing that is semireal; his fascination with the Moon and the other natural creatures is a fascination with real things; and his dream in which he beholds Cynthia (like his imaginative voyages into the sea, earth and sky) is a 'nothing'.

Since the poetic creation of visions from the subjective and objective worlds, and the vitalization of materials in both worlds are essentially subjective, Keats establishes bases for demonstrating their truth. The truth of an aesthetic vision and a vitalized object respectively depend on the effective reflection of the reality of man's existence in this world and the original or normal object. Moreover, Keats offers the intensity of sensations to complement the effective reflection of reality by visions and modified experiences of the world. He speculates, "probably every pursuit takes its reality from the ardour of the pursuer — being in itself a nothing — Ethereal things may at least thus be real". Within the Keatsian cosmos, all aesthetic creations — be they visions or intensified actualities — "require a greeting of the spirit to make them wholly exist" (*Letters*, I, 120 — 1) because "What the imagination siezes as Beauty must be truth ... for all our passions as of love ... are all in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty" (*Letters* I, 72 — 3). Sublime passions are mainly intense feelings, while "essential Beauty" is the aesthetic ideal. Intense passions elevate the soul of man to heights where he can personally partake of the harmony of existence which justifies the poet's assertion that a state of excitement is the only state for the best of Poetry (*Letters*, II, 407).

III

All great poets are, in Keats's view, "simple imaginative minds" whose lives are based on "Sensations rather than thought" (*Letters*, I, 73). The simple imaginative mind (as the essential poetic mind) is, for him, different from "the complex mind — one that is imaginative and at the same time careful of its fruits, to whom it is necessary that years should bring the philosophic mind", (*Letters*, I, 74 — 5). This unshakable faith in the profundity and truth of the poetic activities of a simple imaginative mind is a corollary of his belief that a life of sensation subsumes philosophical understanding and makes poetry the "true voice of feeling" (*Letters*, I, 154 and II, 419). As Trilling correctly

observes, for Keats, "sensations generate ideas and remain continuous with them" (Trilling 1951:12).

Keats's reliance on the intensity of sensations as a means of determining the truth of imaginative experiences and of discovering the essential beauty in all things is partly reminiscent of William Duff's consideration of the imagination as "the faculty whereby the mind not only reflects upon its own operations but which assembles the various ideas conveyed to the understanding by the canal of the senses" (Duff 1767). The understanding is different from the mere intellection which Kant calls the activity of the mind unregulated by the imagination, because Keats insists that "Memory should not be called knowledge" (Watson 1880). Only an idea that has been tested on the pulses constitutes the true Keatsian knowledge. In the words of Coleridge, the poet is a man who "carries the simplicity of childhood into the powers of manhood" (Shawcross 1907:II, 148 — Coleridge).

Though Keats maintains that poetic flights should be propelled by the passions, he also insists upon the necessity of extensive knowledge: "An extensive knowledge is needful to thinking people — it takes away the heat and the fever; and helps by widening speculation to ease the Burden of Mystery" (*Letters*, II, 407). Since mystery largely arises from ignorance, any visionary flight undertaken in a state of ignorance is (no matter how intensely passionate the visionary may be) bound to be unpoetic. Keats asks, "Or is it that imagination brought/Beyond its proper bound .../Lost in a sort of Purgatory blind/Cannot refer to any standard law of earth or heaven?" ("To J. H. Reynolds", 78 — 82). Lycius's fate is an obvious answer to this question. He is unable to refer to any standard law of earth or heaven and therefore has so limited a knowledge of life that he cannot speculate on it. His intense passions hustle him faster to death and oblivion than would otherwise be the case.

Keats graphically illustrates the great dangers (short of death) involved in an intensely passionate imaginative activity that is unguided by knowledge:

The difference of high sensation with and without knowledge appears to me this: in the latter case we are falling continually ten thousand feet deep and being blown up again without wings and with all the horrors of a bare shouldered creature — in the former case, out shoulder is fledged, and we go thro' the same air and space without fear.

(*Letters*, I, 151)

Knowledge creates a link between the visionary and normal worlds. Without this knowledge, any visionary flight may become purposeless and turn into "An awful mission" because "when the soul is fled/To high above our head/Affrighted do we gaze/After its airy maze" ("God of the Meridian", 5; 9 — 12).

An imaginative flight accompanied by intense sensations but unregulated by extensive knowledge is what Keats sometimes calls *fancy*. He maintains that, in writing *Endymion* — a long poem, "Fancy is the Sails and Imagina-

tion is the Rudder" (*Letters*, I, 55). The aesthetic genius or the ideal manifestation of the human imagination is regulated by a true knowledge of life which serves as the control in any artistic flight. Therefore, when Keats agrees with those critics who say that "we must temper the imagination with judgment" (*Letters*, II, 357), he implies that the unpoetic manifestation of the human imagination which may be regarded as fancy must be tempered by judgment. And yet, in the poem titled "Fancy", he seems to equate fancy with the poetic imagination because the power of fancy celebrated in the poem (the spreading of a film of familiarity over strange things and spreading a film of strangeness over familiar things) is analogous to the modifying power of the imagination which is evident in the poetic creation of visions and in the vitalization of actualities.

Keats's concept of fancy is thus closer to that of Wordsworth and opposed to Coleridge's definition of fancy as "the aggregative or associative power" as distinguished from the imagination which is the "shaping and modifying power" (Raysor 1907:I, 193 — 4). He implicitly endorses Wordsworth's assertion that the imagination is not only a "shaping and modifying power" but also an associative and aggregative power. However, he disagrees with Wordsworth and Coleridge in their belief that fancy operates on "fixities and definites" while the imagination operates on "the plastic, the pliant and the indefinite" (Hutchinson 1971 and Raysor 1907:I, 202). In fact, he feels that the poetic imagination is capable of converting "definites and fixities" into "plastic, pliant and indefinite materials".

IV

Keats has a consistent hypothesis about how the aesthetic imagination transforms or modifies its subjects in the process of perceiving and creating visions or vitalized actualities. Generally, it is in consonance with John Locke's empiricism which postulates that man can build the most complex ideas from sensations and the mind's reflections on the sensations³. John Locke sees the interaction between sensations and the intellect as inevitable but he does not clearly postulate an intermediary faculty like the imagination — as Keats, many Romantic poets, and transcendentially oriented philosophers like Kant do — in order to actuate the interaction between the heart and the mind. Moreover, David Hartley's (1966 [1749]) physiologically determined associationist theory (developed out of Locke's hints on the subject) will be acceptable to Keats if the implied sensations are made explicit because Keats (though not

³ This is the central idea in John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* 1690.

directly concerned with abstract ideas) believes that the human passions or feelings form the basis for most associations.

This associative power of the imagination in poetic creativity which Wordsworth explains in terms of the psychology of poetic creation or composition in his 1815 preface, is what Keats sometimes refers to as the faculty of invention. He states, "*Endymion*, will be a test, trial of my powers of imagination. *Endymion*, will test chiefly my invention ... by which I must make 4000 lines out of one bare circumstance" (*Letters*, I, 55). He believes that, and demonstrates how, the imagination is capable of taking a single incident exploring it intimately by testing it on the pulses of the poet, inventing other possible incidents from those suggested or associated with the initial one, and sincerely capturing all these in art. Therefore, in embarking upon the task of writing *Endymion*, Keats views the "one bare circumstance" (the Moon goddess' visit to Endymion) as an event with limitless possibilities. When he declares that "Byron describes what he sees — I describe what I imagine" (*Letters*, II, 452), he is really talking about how his imagination is able to create new experiences from single incidents like visit of the Moon goddess to Endymion. William Duff (1767) terms this imaginative power "the plastic power of inventing new association of ideas, and compounding them with infinite variety", and argues that the effective use of this power is the hallmark of originality.

In the fourth stanza of the "Ode on a Grecian Urn", Keats is able to draw upon the plastic power of the imagination in associating various images carved on the urn, and creating from these associations images of his own which he presents in "scenes and objects which never existed in nature":

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

The poet is an active participant in the sacrificial scene. He first creates a kind of sacrificial procession headed by the priest. Secondly, he relates the procession suggested by "this fold" to an indefinite "little town". Thirdly, the procession out of the Town immediately suggests the image of a deserted place which the poet aptly captures. Fourthly, however, with the suggestion of the desolation of the town comes an implicit realization of the fossilized nature of the people of the emptied town. And fifthly, in the final tercet of the stanza, the poet expresses his deep feeling of regret at the apparent absence of a chro-

nicler, possibly one amongst the former inhabitants of the town, who can tell why the town is deserted. Paradoxically, the desolation of the city is depicted by a poet who, though "in reality" has not been part of the procession of sacrifice, has imaginatively become part of the actions that are now recreated, intensified, and relived in poetry.

In spite of his belief in a fairly systematic pattern of association in the operations of the poetic imaginations, Keats recognizes an unconscious or involuntary element involved in all poetic activities.

To Haydon, he writes:

Believe me Haydon, your picture is part of myself — I have ever been too sensible of the labyrinthian path to eminence in Art (judging from Poetry) ever to think I understand the emphasis of painting. The innumerable compositions and decompositions which take place between the intellect and its thousand materials before it arrives at that trembling, delicate and snail-horn perception of beauty.

(*Letters*, I, 139)

This Keatsian view of inspiration is termed "a variation of the Platonic theory of inspiration" by Finney (1936:I, 213). Keats believes that strong pressures from distinctively defined stimuli can exert inescapable influence on the poet's imagination and lead to some kind of involuntary imaginative activity, accomplished in a poetic mood that is analogous to the Wordsworthian "wise passiveness".

While Keats's view of inspiration is in consonance with the Platonic postulate of artistic inspiration, it is opposed to the Platonic sophistry which equates 'inspiration' with 'possession' in the Socratic declaration that "poets are only interpreters of the gods by whom they are severally possessed"⁴. When he avers, "I see and sing by my own eyes inspired" ("Ode to Psyche", 43), Keats states the central paradox in his notion of inspiration; he is inspired by the goddess and yet he is inspired by himself. He writes to Haydon: "I remember that you had notions of a good genius presiding over you. I have of late the same thought, for things which I do half at Random are afterwards confirmed by my judgement in a dozen features of Propriety. Is it too daring to fancy Shakespeare the Presider?" (*Letters*, I, 30). His choice of Shakespeare as Presider is acknowledgement of the strong impact which the aesthetic world of Shakespeare has on him. What is important is that the Shakespearean world has become so much a part of his life that his imagination can unconsciously draw upon it in ways that defy rational associationist explanations. Put differently, various Shakespearean ideas and images are unconsciously "composed and decomposed" by the imagination in the complex process of creativity.

⁴ Plato's *Ion* (Kaplan 1975 : 17—20). It is important to note that there is a marked difference between 'inspiration' and 'possession' in Plato's works.

V

Keats's distinctive concept of the poetic faculty was present in his mind from the beginning of his poetic and critical career. His poems, therefore, betray his ceaseless efforts to explore in order to confirm and exemplify his general view of the poetic imagination. While he began testing out his insights in the very first poem he wrote, he strongly believed that *Endymion* provided him with a larger scope for testing and demonstrating his understanding of the poetic genius. By making Endymion's search for Cynthia start with a dream or vision of the goddess, Keats establishes a good base for making Endymion's pursuit of Cynthia symbolic of the nascent poet's quest for the poetic capability of the human imagination. Endymion's numerous ordeals also represent tests which the poet must undergo before actualizing the poetic potential of his imagination. And just as Endymion discovers the many possibilities and limitations of his imagination as he undergoes the various ordeals, so also does the poet learn to distinguish the poetic from the unpoetic manifestations of the human imagination. Thus, in *Endymion*, various qualities and functions of the imagination are revealed and examined as a means of establishing and depicting the nature and activities of the poetic imagination.

By initially making Endymion unreceptive to the significance of the Pan festival, Keats sets the stage for the protagonist's great quest for enlightenment. The main issue, in a sense, is that Endymion's ignorance of the importance of the worship of Pan reflects his apparent ignorance of the real meaning of his vision of Cynthia. Like the aspiring poet, Endymion is poised to seek and experience what the vision means to him personally. His "wakeful anguish of the soul" ("Ode on Melancholy", I, 10) sets him apart from the other Latmians. His plight is thus like that of the aspiring poet in "The Fall of Hyperion" whose soul is deeply touched by the conditions in the world (I, 147 — 9). All through the first book of *Endymion*, the protagonist erroneously regards the visionary world as mutually exclusive from the Latmian. In other words, the Poet-in-training considers his dream-world to be better than, and separate from the veridical world.

However, insofar as Endymion is able to counter Peona's argument about the fanciful nature of imaginative or poetic experiences by asserting the authenticating function of intense feelings in all visionary activities he is on the right path to "redemption from a barren dream".

His sincere reliance on the truth of his sensations which differentiates him from the confused "knight-at-arms" in "La Belle Dame sans Merci" provides him with a sense of mission but not necessarily the goal because the ideal which he associates with the dream is yet to be tested on his pulses. His dream prefigures an ideal but his understanding of the ideal is still confused and limited. He even perceptively states the ideal he hardly understands:

Wherein lies happiness? In that which beckons
 Our ready minds to fellowship divine,
 A fellowship with essence; till we shire,
 Full alchemiz'd, and free of space.
 (I, 777—80)

And yet, he does not perceive how the ready minds of the Latmians have been beckoned (albeit in an 'innocent' manner) to have fellowship with the essence in the worship of Pan. His mere statement of the aesthetic ideal is not coterminous with an intimate understanding. His state of mind parallels that of an individual who has stumbled upon a philosophical axiom which he repeats to others even though he is yet to find out its deeper significance.

The celebration of ideal love in the introductory section of the second book of *Endymion* is an attempt to reveal an intimate bond between love and the beauty that was celebrated in the first book. Furthermore, the praise of ideal love highlights the symbolic link between Endymion's quest for the love of Cynthia and the poet's search for the aesthetic ideal or his struggle to actualize the poetic potential of his imagination. The joys and pains of love represent the joys and pains of imaginative adventures and demonstrate the identity of the paths of love and poetry (II, 36). The relation between art and love is established in the poem when Endymion beholds Cynthia in a dream, making Cynthia the ideal of art and love which the Latmians symbolically acknowledge in their worship of Pan. The act of worship by the Latmians spring from *love* and a belief in an imaginative truth. Since he is unable to exercise the emphatic quality of his imagination, he is temporarily barred from the essence of his dream and from the significance of the festival of his subjects.

Endymion's meeting with Venus and Adonis in the underworld is important in his quest. The myth of Adonis and Venus — because it is an imaginative representation of the cause of seasonal changes in the real world — dramatizes the interrelation between the ideal and actual, between the artistic and normal worlds. Evert rightly points out that the Venus-Adonis myth is particularly relevant to Endymion because he is a mortal who seeks an immortal lover: "Since Adonis is a mortal who achieved immortality as the beloved of a goddess, he is an appropriately encouraging sign to Endymion at this stage of his trial" (Evert 1965 : 129). But Endymion neither perceives this relation between him and Adonis nor fully comprehends the message of the myth. However, he is greatly impressed by Adonis's awakening to the splendour of spring. Endymion's soul imaginatively associates the natural beauty that is integral to the awakening of Adonis from slumber with the beauty that engendered his initial dream about Cynthia. He recreates the dream, Cynthia reappears, and a consummation takes place (II, 686—700).

The consummation of love between Endymion and Cynthia in this scene

is, as has been noted by most critics, sensual. While Pettet's characterization of the scene as that of "unabashed eroticism, vulgar and sickly sentimental by turns" (Pettet 1957 : 171), is rather harsh, it nevertheless aptly represents the feeling of most critics about the apparent indecency of the scene. Yet, the scene serves an important purpose which most critics often overlook. It faithfully depicts the protagonist's new but mistaken definition of the ideal which he seeks. In the first book of the poem, Endymion conceives of the ideal as spiritual and unrelated to the material world, but in the second book, he views the ideals as erotic, for he celebrates the sensual as the essence:

Now that I have tasted her sweet soul
 All other depths are shallow: essences,
 Once spiritual, are like muddy less,
 Meant but to fertilize my earthly root,
 And make branches lift a golden fruit
 Into the bloom of Heaven.

(II, 904—9)

Evidently, Endymion confuses the ideal with the erotic. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that his prayer for Alpheus and Arethusa is less humanitarian than is usually supposed by some critics of Keats's works. It may well be that he wishes them a consummation that is basically sensual in nature. How can his wish for their happiness go beyond his present understanding of this ideal life of lovers?

Since Endymion's wish for the fulfilment of the love of Alpheus for Arethusa reflects his limited understanding of love at this stage, it is necessary that he should learn more about love, especially its disinterested sympathy. After all, the love which the Latmians expect from him is that which transcends mere animal fulfilments. The pathetic figure of Glaucus coupled with the penetrating message of the scroll make very strong impact on him. His self-centred life is almost automatically changed as he willingly takes part in the revival of the ship-wrecked lovers. He also participates in the celebration that go beyond those mundane elements which he was once inclined to regard as the essence. Though rather unconscious of this new outlook on the love that he has now willingly embraced, Endymion is prepared for a meeting with the Indian maiden. In his initial meeting with her his unconscious knowledge comes to the fore, making his love for her a disinterested one that is geared towards helping her out of her sorrow.

His love of the Indian, however, occasionally leads him to temporary relapses in which he considers the actual to be the sole reality that is unrelated to the ideal. His lament, "I have clung/To nothing, lov'd nothing, nothing seen/Or felt but a great dream" (IV, 136 - 8), while it is another wrong reaction to the situation before him, propels him towards the ultimate realization that the ideal and the ordinary are inseparably fused. The Indian maiden's:

initial rejection of his love is an answer to his unfounded fears about dream ideals, and this rejection helps him to reexamine his vision. He then later realizes that the "spirit form" of the Indian is Cynthia while the "material form" of Cynthia is the Indian maiden. This realization signals the attainment of the real goal of his quest and represents the poet's actualization of the aesthetic potential of his imagination.

Just as the crowing experience of Endymion's quest is his winning of Cynthia's love, so also is the highest prize for the aspiring poet the attainment of the aesthetic ideal. The achievement of the ultimate goal is a factor of Endymion's or the poet's intimate realization of the relevance of the dream or visionary world to the Latmian or normal world. While his intense feelings are the guarantee for an eventual victory, the various ordeals serve as means for testing his visions against reality. By finally understanding the aesthetic use of the human imagination, Endymion or the poet is able to partake intimately of the aesthetic ideal which manifests itself in the interrelation of dreams and reality, of the vitalized actuality, the ideal and the actual. Thus, in Endymion, Keats demonstrates the truth of visionary experiences and the reality of imaginatively modified experiences.

IV

Keats's conception of the poetic imagination is, therefore, a unified one. Thorpe expresses an aspect of this truth when he suggests that Keats believes that the poet flies to his dream world but in his flight he does not escape reality, rather he carries with him, to shape and inform his vision, the stored up experiences of a life spent in a sympathetic contact with his fellow men" (Thorpe 1926: 94). And Stillinger states the other aspect when he maintains that a poetic flight to the dream world furnishes the poet with experiences that he draws upon in his normal life (Stillinger 1971). Considered in conjunction with one another, what Thorpe and Stillinger state, represents the complete Keatsian conception of the poetic imagination, a conception which Wasserman effectively reflects in what he calls the "mystic oxymoron:" "Between the realm of the merely human... and the immortal... there is in the Keatsian cosmology," says Wasserman, "the knife-edge where the two meet and are indistinguishably present (Wasserman 1953: 15). Thus, for Keats, the poetic imagination is a faculty which, capturing the interpenetration of the ideal and the ordinary in the realm of "mystic oxymoron," creates poetic visions and also vitalizes veridical reality within the framework of a passionate and comprehensive knowledge of the world and life.

REFERENCES

- Duff, W. 1767. *An essay on original genius*.
- Evert, W. H. 1965. *Aesthetic and myth in the poetry of Keats*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Finney, C. L. 1936. *The evolution of Keats' poetry*. 2 vols. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Forman, M. B. (ed.) 1931. *The letters of John Keats*. 2 vols. London: Oxford University Press.
- Hartley, D. 1966. *Observations on man*. Gainsville: Scholars Facsimiles and Reprints.
- Hutchinson, T. (ed.) 1971. *Wordsworth: poetical works*. Rev. by E. D. Selincourt. London: Oxford University Press.
- Kaplan, Ch. (ed.) 1975. *Criticism: the major statements*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Locke, J. 1695. *Essay concerning human understanding*. London: Awnsham and John Churchill.
- Pettet, E. C. 1957. *On the poetry of Keats*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Raysor, T. M. (ed.). 1930. *Shakespearean criticism*. 2 vols. London: J. M. Dent.
- Shawcross, J. (ed.). 1907. *Biographia literaria*. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Stillinger, J. 1971. *The Hoodwinking of Madeline and other essays on Keats's poems*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Thorpe, C. D. W. 1926. *The mind of John Keats*. New York: Russel.
- Trilling, L. (ed.). 1951. *The selected letters of John Keats*. New York: Straus and Young.
- Wasserman, E. R. 1953. *The finer tone: Keats' major poems*. Baltimore: J. Hopkins Press.
- Watson, J. (ed.) 1880. *The philosophy of Kant*. Glasgow: James Maclehose.