

T.C.
FIRAT ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
BATI DİLLERİ VE EDEBİYATLARI
ANABİLİM DALI
İNGİLİZ DİLİ VE EDEBİYATI BİLİM DALI

**John Keats' in Ölüm Karşısındaki Tutumları ve
Ölümlülük Fikriyle Başa Çıkma Yolları**

YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ

DANIŞMAN
Doç. Dr. Abdulhalim AYDIN

HAZIRLAYAN
Abdulkadir HAMARAT

ELAZIĞ – 2011

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JOHN KEATS’S ATTITUDES TOWARDS DEATH
AND HOW HE COPE WITH THE IDEA OF
MORTALITY

MASTER’S DEGREE THESIS

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Jürimiz, tarihinde yapılan tez savunma sınavı sonunda bu yüksek lisans tezini oy birliği / oy çokluğu ile başarılı saymıştır.

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- 1.
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Sosyal Bilimler Enstitü Müdürü

ÖZET**YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ****John Keats' in Ölüm Karşısındaki Tutumları ve
Ölümlülük Fikriyle Başa Çıkma Yolları****Abdulkadir HAMARAT****Fırat Üniversitesi****Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü****Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatları Anabilim Dalı****İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bilim Dalı****Elazığ - 2011, Sayfa: V + 65**

Bu tezde, İngiliz edebiyatının Romantik döneminin en büyük şairlerinden olan John Keats'in(1795-1821) eserlerinde ölüme karşı takındığı tavrı ve ölüm gerçeğiyle başa çıkabilmek için benimsediği stratejiler ele alınacaktır. Keats ölümle çok erken yaşlarda tanışmıştır. Babasını bir kaza sonucu, annesi ve kardeşi Tom'u ise veremden kaybetmiştir. Öte yandan, kendisi de verem hastasıdır ve aynı akibetin kendisini de beklediğini bilmektedir. Elbette bütün bunlar çok hassas bir kalbe sahip bir şairi derinden etkilemiş ve bu etki eserlerine de yansımıştır.

Çalışmamız başlıca üç bölüme ayrılacaktır. Birinci bölümde kısa bir biyografisi, ölümle olan trajik ilişkisine vurgu yapılarak verilecektir. İkinci bölümde, ölüm karşısındaki tutumu ve son bölümde de ölüm fikriyle başa çıkma yolları üzerinde durulacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: John Keats, Ölüm, Ölümsüzlük, Ölüme Karşı Tutumlar, Ölümle Başa Çıkma Yolları

ABSTRACT

MASTER'S THESIS

**John Keats's Attitudes Towards Death and How He Copes With the Idea of
Mortality**

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In this thesis, John Keats'(1795-1821), one of the greatest literary figures of English literature in the Romantic period attitudes towards death and the ways he copes with it will be dealt with. Keats got to know death at a very early age. His father died as a result of an accident and his mother died of tuberculosis. His brother, Tom, died of the same illness in a later period of his life. Keats himself is suffering from tuberculosis, too. He knows his end will be the same. All these, of course, affected deeply someone with a sensitive heart like Keats and this effect was reflected in his works.

The thesis is divided into three parts. In the first part, a brief account of his life will be given, putting the emphasis on his tragic affair with death. His attitudes towards death will be given in the second part and his ways of coping with it in the third part.

Key Words: John Keats, Death, Immortality, Attitudes Towards Death, Ways of Coping With Death

ÖNSÖZ

Bu çalışmanın gerçekleşmesinde büyük rolü olan tez danışmanım Doç. Dr. Abdulhalim Aydın Bey'e, ayrıca yetişmemizde katkıları görmezden gelinmeyecek kadar büyük olan Prof.Dr. Mehmet Aygün Bey'e ve Yrd. Doç. Dr. F. Gül Koçsoy Hanım'a teşekkürü borç bilirim.

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Bu çalışmayı, varlıklarıyla kalbimi cennet esintileriyle dolduran çocuklarım Meryem ve Sacit'e ithaf ediyorum.

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INTRODUCTION

Death is the one major question humanbeings have to find a satisfying answer before they could go on with their lives. They have done so from the very beginning and have come up with a myriad of answers and attitudes. Throughout history, mankind have generally been satisfied with the answers religions provide, that is; death is not the end, there is an afterlife, those who lead a virtuous life will be rewarded in Heaven and those who commit crimes and injustices will be condemned to damnation in Hell. But, what about the attitudes? One may find comfort in the idea that life does not end with death but goes on to exist in another realm or in another dimension. But still, death continues to affect them in one way or another. They develop certain attitudes to cope with this traumatic phenomenon. They sometimes long for death because they find life unbearable with all its troubles and hardships. They sometimes fear death because they have a lot to lose if they die. But, perhaps the most painful side of death is the death of the beloved ones.

It can be safely claimed that human soul longs for eternity and shudders at the thought of coming to naught, leaving no trace at all. Human individual, even if he/she is not a believer in the answer a certain religion provides, wants to exist in some form even if it is not a bodily existence and only in the memory of later generations. The humans' wish to attain immortality can be traced back to the dawn of humanity. The people of earlier civilizations took with them what they thought would aid them in the afterlife after they died. They were buried with food, fine clothes, items of pottery to drink and eat from, etc. Some even took their horses with them, with of course the horse in question to be buried alive with its owner. Ancient philosophers thought the soul was immortal. For example; Plato thought, "The soul, being eternal, is at home in the contemplation of eternal things, that is, essences, but is lost and confused when, as in sense perception, it contemplates the world of changing things"(Russell:1989, 154).

The following lines from the Epic of Gilgamesh still echoes across ages;

*"I think compassion is our God's pure act
Which burns forever,
And be it in Heaven or in Hell
Doesn't matter for me; because*

*Hell is the everlasting gift
Of his presence
To the lonely heart who is longing
Amidst perishing phantoms and doesn't care
To find any immortality*" (Mason:1972,74)

It is an instinct deeply trenched in human consciousness. John Keats is not an exception in that respect. He witnessed death at a very early age and death continued to stalk him all his life, casting its gruesome shadow on him all the while. Bloom makes a similar remark on Keats's fear of death;

"Throughout his life, John Keats lived with a foreboding sense of his own early death. This fear no doubt contributed to the rapid pace at which he produced his best work. The roots of Keats's fears about death are to be found in his early childhood. His father, Thomas Keats, originally the head stableman at a London livery stable, had risen from a humble background to become a prosperous businessman. When he was thrown from a horse on the evening of April 15, 1804, he sustained a fatal skull fracture and died the following morning. Keats was only eight years old at the time" (Bloom: 2001, 11). He led a very difficult life full of hardships of every kind. Because he was an immensely sensitive man and he had a very developed emotional capability, he suffered proportionally.

In this thesis, we are going to look at his varying attitudes towards death and the ways he tries to cope with death, the most traumatic experience of a human being. Since he belongs to the Romantic school, he expresses his feelings quite emotionally, using striking metaphors and images. In telling about his fears, hopes and frustrations, he lets his emotions unchecked. His romantic personality plays a major role in his experiencing death intensely, having paradoxical feelings about death. He sometimes fears death, sometimes tries to adopt a serene and rational approach by making philosophical remarks on it. At other times, he expresses deep sorrow at the fleet of time. He observes that time is ticking fast, good and beautiful things are like flowers that fade, wither away and die eventually with the passing of time, which, of course, is a source of pain for an extremely sensitive soul as Keats. He is a helpless creature, trapped in the confines of time and unable to surpass the boundaries of it. He would very much like to

freeze time just as it is on a work of art so that beauty and youth shall not perish even if it requires the beauty and youth portrayed on the work of art to be still and lifeless.

Since he does not believe in Christianity and its notion of afterlife and immortality of the soul, he tries to find solace elsewhere: the religions of antiquity. His works are full of references to the gods and goddesses of Ancient Greece. At times, he finds comfort in the thought that he will gain a place among the canon of English literature and will be remembered by later generations. He even clings to such flimsy ideas that immortality can be reached if one has an immortal love.

To conclude, Keats found a place among the canon, which he desired fervently although he himself did not know he would at the time of his death. Today, he is regarded as one of the greatest figures of English literature.

PART I

1. DEATH AS A TRAGEDY IN JOHN KEATS'S LIFE

We thought it would contribute immensely to our arguments if we talked briefly about Keats' life, which sheds light on the understanding of his works. Therefore, the whole of Part I is assigned to this end.

Maybe, the best way to start writing a brief account of Keats's equally brief life is to give Motion's still brief and beautiful description of the man himself.

"Keats: his name releases a flood of familiar images. He is the apostle of 'beauty' and 'truth'. He is the dedicated sensualist, sometimes swooning and softly pillowed, sometimes feasting greedily on luscious fruit and jellies. He is the poor orphan whose 'march of passion and endeavour' is fraught with hardships. He is the lover who loses his life almost as soon as he finds it. He is always pitifully young but full of extraordinary adult wisdom. Suffering and striving combine at every stage of his career. So do selflessness and self-fulfilment. At once pathetic and sublime, his story distills familiar human fears, and realises the most noble ideals. Its fascination is endless; its power to move and inspire is inexhaustible" (Motion:1999,XII).

John Keats was born on 31 October 1795 as the first child of Frances Jennings and Thomas Keats. When Thomas and Francis got married, Francis's father employed Thomas as the manager of his stables. They were to have four more children, one of whom died in infancy. George was born on 28 February 1797 and Thomas on 18 November 1799. After their births, the young couple moved to a separate house on Craven Street, about a half-mile from the stables. Their son Edward was born on 28 April 1801 but died shortly after his birth. And on 3 June 1803, the last of their children and only daughter, Frances Mary, was born.

Keats's father died on Sunday, 15 April 1804 as a result of falling off his horse. This accident was the first of a series of misfortunes that were to affect the whole family for the rest of their lives. Frances felt forced to remarry because she was unable to run the stables on her own. The man she married, it turned out, was after her wealth. They sent the children to live with their grandmother as soon as they got married. But, the marriage was not a successful one and Frances left her husband, leaving the stables with him, to go and live with her children and her mother. After this, Frances's health failed

immensely. Meanwhile, John Jennings, Keats's grandfather died On 8 March 1805, which was the beginning of financial problems that would plague the Keats children all their lives. Their grandmother was nearly seventy and assigned in her will a shady character, Richard Abbey, as the trustee and guardian of the children. The boys were sent to school at Enfield, where they were quite popular. John was distinguished with his generosity, sensitivity and his bravery, which got him in fights frequently. "As a boy the poet was known, little as he was, as a great fighter in defending what was right or chivalrous. Remembered his schoolmate Holmes, "He would fight anyone-morning, noon and night, his brother among the rest. It was meat and drink for him." (Hendrickson, 1997, 160). His friends and teachers thought he was going to become a great figure in future in the military profession. No one could have known he was going to take his place among the greatest English poets. With the death of their mother in 1810 and their grandmother in 1814, John and George were taken from school by Abbey and John was apprenticed to an apothecary/surgeon named Dr. Hammond and Abbey took Fanny into his own home. He would not let Keats brothers see Fanny as often as they would like to see their sister.

Abbey wanted solid and respectable careers for the Keats children. Poetry, in his opinion and in the opinion of many other critics of the age for that matter, was too lofty a career for a middle-class boy like John. Only those from upper classes and rich people could afford to indulge in such idle work. John Keats would viciously be attacked in his later years on the grounds that he came from a middle-class background or because of his association with Leigh Hunt, who was not popular among the critics of the age due to his political beliefs.

At first, John showed great talent for the job but then his enthusiasm diminished as his interest in poetry flourished. He continued his studies in medicine for the following three years. Whether out of ill will or indifference, Abbey withheld money from the children on the pretext that they would waste the money. He never let the children know about the actual amount of their inheritance. So, the children were all alone in the wide world struggling with money problems. The death of grandparents and the mother brought the Keats children closer to each other until George's emigration to America and Tom's death from tuberculosis. Keats, being the eldest of them, would go to great lengths to help them and this would usually mean the sacrifice of his writing and peace of mind.

On 1 October 1815, Keats entered Guy's Hospital to further his training in medicine.

In March 1816, Keats published his first poem in *The Examiner*. It received little critical acclaim, but his circle of friends was widening with men who shared his literary tastes, among them Leigh Hunt, Benjamin Haydon and John Reynolds. Hunt was Keats's most ardent supporter. Hunt was a critic who did not conform with the established literary values of his times and he did everything within his capacity to bolster up the young poet's courage and determination.

By this time, Keats had completely given up on his medical training. He knew the difficulties he would face on the road to having a career in poetry nevertheless he was unshakable in his decision to go after his dream. He was reading voraciously and became an enthusiastic admirer of Spenser and Shakespeare. His first volume of poetry, *Poems*, appeared in 1817. It was not a success and sold very few copies. Keats and his brothers decided to move to and settle in Hapstead, a healthier area North of London. They made many friends there, most notably Charles Wentworth Dilke and his wife Maria.

Keats set off on a four month tour through Carisbrooke, Canterbury, Hastings, etc in April 1817. This tour proved to be a very fruitful period, in which Keats was, for the first time in his brief lifetime, able to focus on poetry. He was able to complete the first books of *Endymion* and he had ample time and solitude to be aware of his ambition and ability during this four-month period. John Keats also met Joseph Severn, who was the person to accompany Keats on his journey to Rome and look after him until his death. Keats also made friends with Benjamin Bailey and Charles Brown. Keats stayed at his house at Oxford in the September of 1817. Bailey was the wealthiest of Keats's friends and his house was comfortable and full of books. This was especially an endearment for a voracious reader like Keats. Bailey's daily schedule began after breakfast and Keats would follow his example and put pen to paper. He wrote the third book of *Endymion* in September and the fourth book in November. Keats would read his work to Bailey on the long walks they took in the afternoons. Bailey had a very high opinion of Keats. He openly expressed his appreciation of Keats's poetry and this encouraged the normally shy poet to talk more about himself, his inner world.

The time Bailey and Keats spent in Oxford offered Bailey to get to know Keats's character more closely: "The errors of Keats's character, - and they were as transparent

as a weed in a pure and lucent stream of water, - resulted from his education; rather from his *want* of education. But like the Thames waters, when taken out to sea, he had the rare quality of purifying himself;...." He was also aware of Keats's innately generous nature; the poet "allowed for people's faults more than any man I ever knew."

Their readings together made Bailey come to the understanding that, although he himself was a more educated person, Keats's power of insight was immeasurably greater than his own. Bailey was studying theology and planned to have a career in the Church. They also had conversations on religious matters. He learned from these conversations that Keats was a skeptical believer. Keats also found time to think seriously about establishing his philosophy of poetry. All in all, the impact of one month spent at Bailey's in Oxford was very favourable. But, when he returned to London in October, Keats was not able to find enough privacy to work and this he regretted much although he enjoyed his brothers' companionship. Meanwhile, he fell ill with a disease, the particulars of which are, to this day, unknown. Rumour has it that Keats had contracted a venereal disease while in Oxford and the nature of his illness was a sexual one. He had to spend October resting and this provided him with the opportunity to think and develop his philosophy of poetry. He now felt confident enough to critique monumental literary figures of his time; Wordsworth and Coleridge. He also studied the works of Shelley and Byron. He was in the meantime struggling with *Endymion*. The work was weak in technical terms but it contained very beautiful and powerful passages. Given the fact that Keats was only 21 at the time he was writing *Endymion*, it can be safely argued that he was trying to find his distinctive voice.

Towards the end of 1817, his brother Tom became ill, which was reminiscent of their mother's death and which worried John very much. Tom's illness would weigh down on his consciousness for most of the next year. He published *Endymion* in the spring of 1817. But his brother's health worsened and he had to spend the next two months looking after him. While he was there, he started writing *Isabella, or the Pot of Basil*. Bailey read *Endymion* and was impressed very much by it and invited him to stay at his house. But Tom's illness prevented Keats from accepting Bailey's invitation. George married Georgiana Wylie and they left for America on 28 May 1818. This was the first time they had been separate. Tom was in his deathbed and Fanny was kept away from her brothers. John's sorrow was literally limitless. In a letter to Bailey, he wrote:

*"I have two Brothers, one is driven by the 'burden of Society' to America, the other, with an exquisite love of Life, is in a lingering state. I have a Sister too and may not follow them, either to America or to the Grave."*¹

June 10, 1818 (pp: 305-306)

Tom returned to London and was left in the care of their landlady, Mrs. Bentley. This gave Keats to go on a tour of Lake District and Scotland with Charles Brown, whom he made friends with in the summer of 1817. The breathtakingly beautiful landscape was an inspiration for his writing and it also enabled him to forget his personal sorrows. He described his feelings in a letter to Tom:

"...[T]hey make one forget the divisions of life; age, youth, poverty and riches; and refine one's sensual vision into a sort of north star which can never cease to be open lidded and steadfast over the wonders of the great Power.I never forget my stature so completely. I live in the eye; and my imagination, surpassed, is at rest.I shall learn poetry here and shall henceforth write more than ever."

25-27 June 1818 (p. 307)

This trip and a month in Oxford after the trip had an ever-lasting influence on Keats's poetic career and was, in a sense, the beginning of a new phase in his life. Brown would play a major role in Keats's life as a friend and supporter. He caught a cold while he was in Scotland and the doctor he saw advised him to rest. But the news from London was bad. Tom's doctor asked the Dilkes to send for Keats because Tom's condition was getting worse. Now, his main occupation was looking after Tom but he himself was struggling with health problems. The doses of mercury he took was increasing under the advice of Tom's doctor, but mercury was taking its toll on his health. It had such side effects as nervousness, sore gums and a bad toothache so, he stopped taking mercury and spent several weeks in seclusion, thinking about his brother's short life. Tom died on 1 December 1818, which was like a blow to his already frayed nerves because of the cruel reviews of *Poems* and *Endymion* which appeared in the press.

¹ - All the quotations of Keats's letters and poems in this thesis, unless noted otherwise, are taken from *The Complete Poetical Works and Letters of John Keats*

The influential *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* had published a very harsh criticism of the 'Cockney School of Poetry', into which they put both Hunt and Keats. 'Cockney' is a derogatory term and refers to the part of London where working class people live. Keats did not like to be associated with Hunt. Because, his aesthetic values were far from those of Hunt's. While other reviewers only criticized his poetry, *Blackwood's* was criticizing the fact that someone with a middle-class background should write poetry.

Keats was, in fact, going through an artistic metamorphosis during this period. He had already left behind the first products of his youth, his first attempts at poetry and was at the threshold of writing the most beautiful poems and odes in English literature.

Another major event that would have an enormous influence on John Keats happened: He met Fanny Brawne. Fanny was 18 years old and she was a lively and flirtatious girl who liked flirting with young men. In a letter to George, Keats describes Fanny as

"Mrs Brawne who took Brown's house for the summer still resides in Hampstead. She is a very nice woman and her daughter senior is I think beautiful, elegant, graceful, silly, fashionable and strange. We have a little tiff now and then - and she behaves a little better, or I must have sheered off."

18 December, 1818 (p.340)

And yet in another letter he gives a more detailed description of her,

"Shall I give you Miss Brawne? She is about my height with a fine style of countenance of the lengthened sort - she wants sentiment in every feature - she manages to make her hair look well - her nostrils are fine though a little painful - her mouth is bad and good - her Profile is better than her full-face which indeed is not full but pale and thin without showing any bone - her shape is very graceful and so are her movements - Her arms are good her hands badish - her feet tolerable.... She is not seventeen - but she is ignorant - monstrous in her behavior flying out in all directions, calling people such names that I was forced lately to make use of the term Minx - this I think not from any innate vice but from a penchant she has for acting stylishly. I am however tired of such style and shall decline any more of it."

25 December, 1818 (p.342)

In the beginning, Keats tried to avoid her for a while. His main occupation was poetry. But, it would not take long before they fell in love with each other and now Fanny had an equal place with poetry in Keats's life. Fanny, in the beginning, was not someone who liked poetry but, she grew to like and appreciate it and had a respect for Keats's poetry.

Keats completed *The Eve of St Agnes* in January, 1819 and *The Eve of St Mark* a month later. In April, he wrote *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, one of his most known and loved poems. Then something quite extraordinary happened; he wrote three of the most beautiful poems ever written in the duration of only a few weeks: *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, *Ode to a Nightingale* and *Ode on Melancholy*. These three odes are the works which define Keats's art and unusually sensitive world best. It can safely be claimed that these three odes alone would suffice to make Keats one of the greatest poets of English literature even if he had not written anything else. They deal with the most fundamental questions of human condition in a very sensitive way. But, the irony is that they did not get the fair acclaim they deserved immediately. He wrote *Ode on Indolence* and *Ode to Psyche* in June. He went to the Isle of Wight to spend the summer and he found enough time and privacy to work there. Keats left the Isle of Wight for Winchester. He wrote the second part of *Lamia* and the beautiful ode *To Autumn*, which is one of his most famous works. Although he started writing *The Fall of Hyperion*, he became disillusioned with the project and consequently, abandoned it. He became officially engaged to Fanny in October. But, they were far from getting married due to Keats's usual financial troubles. The final year of his brief life began with serious health problems. He had his first lung hemorrhage on 3 February. He had gone to London to visit some friends a few days earlier and he had come back riding outside the stagecoach, simply because it was cheaper. To make matters worse, he did not have a coat on and the night was cold and windy. He went to Brown's house in a fever and his friend put him in bed immediately. Keats coughed and there was blood coming from his mouth. He told Brown to bring him a candle and said when he saw the blood, 'I know the color of that blood; it is arterial blood. I cannot be deceived in that color. That drop of blood is my death warrant. I must die.' Owing to his years of medical training and time spent looking after Tom, Keats knew the true nature of that blood. He had a second hemorrhage that same night. He coughed uncontrollably and bled more. He thought he was going to die right then and there. He did not have any hope so, he wrote to tell

Fanny that she was free to break her engagement to him. Fanny did not and Keats was relieved to hear that. But, Keats knew the inevitable end was near. In a letter to his friend James Rice, he wrote:

"How astonishingly does the chance of leaving the world impress a sense of its natural beauties on us.....I muse with the greatest affection on every flower I have known from my infancy - their shapes and colours are as new to me as if I had just created them with a superhuman fancy -.... It is because they are connected with the most thoughtless and happiest moments of our Lives."

February 16, 1820, (p.426)

And in a note dated in February 1820 from the same period, he mused:

"If I should die", said I to myself, "I have left no immortal work behind me - nothing to make my friends proud of my memory - but I have lov'd the principle of beauty in all things, and if I had had time I would have made myself remember'd."
(p.428)

And there were times he totally gave up on life. In a letter to Fanny, he wrote:

'...I am sickened at the brute world which you are smiling with.'

July 1820 (p. 442)

But, good things were happening, too, though not at the frequency Keats would like them to. His new volume of poems received positive reviews. It was a far greater success than his earlier work.

His friends suggested that he take a trip to Italy. They thought a warm climate would help restore his health. John Severn accepted to accompany him to Rome and look after him. They sailed on 17 September. Keats spent time mostly avoiding human contact on the journey, including the company of Joseph Severn, who was gregarious and cheerful by nature. After a brief stop at Naples, they arrived in Rome on 15 November and directly went to Dr. James Clark's Office. Clark arranged rooms at a boarding house for Keats and Severn to stay. He examined Keats and saw he had

indigestion and he prescribed him a diet of healthy food and fresh air. But Clark was terribly wrong. Keats's illness had progressed beyond all hopes of recovery. Though the trip to Rome could not help restore Keats to his health, it was not a totally meaningless trip for it provided a break with the anguishes and worries of England. Keats was now calm and this is reflected in his last letter dated 30 November and addressed to Charles Brown:

*"My dear Brown, 'Tis the most difficult thing in the world to me to write a letter. My stomach continues so bad, that I feel it worse on opening any book - yet I am much better than I was in Quarantine. Then I am afraid to encounter the proing and conning of any thing interesting to me in England. I have an habitual feeling of my real life having past, and that I am leading a posthumous existence. God knows how it would have been - but it appears to me - however, I will not speak of that subject. I must have been at Bedhampton nearly at the time you were writing to me from Chichester - how unfortunate - and to pass on the river too! There was my star predominant! I cannot answer any thing in your letter, which followed me from Naples to Rome, because I am afraid to look it over again. I am so weak (in mind) that I cannot bear the sight of any hand writing of a friend I love so much as I do you. Yet I ride the little horse, - and, at my worst, even in Quarantine, summoned up more puns, in a sort of desperation, in one week than in any year of my life. There is one thought enough to kill me - I have been well, healthy, alert &c, walking with her - and now - the knowledge of contrast, feeling for light and shade, all that information (primitive sense) necessary for a poem are great enemies to the recovery of the stomach. There, you rogue, I put you to the torture, - but you must bring your philosophy to bear - as I do mine, really - or how should I be able to live? Dr Clarke is very attentive to me; he says, there is very little matter with my lungs, but my stomach, he says, is very bad. I am well disappointed in hearing good news from George, - for it runs in my head we shall all die young. I have not written to **** yet, which he must think very neglectful; being anxious to send him a good account of my health, I have delayed it from week to week. If I recover, I will do all in my power to correct the mistakes made during sickness; and if I should not, all my faults will be forgiven. I shall write to **** tomorrow, or next day. I will write to **** in the middle of next week. Severn is very well, though he leads so dull a life with me. Remember me to all friends, and tell **** I should not have left London without taking*

leave of him, but from being so low in body and mind. Write to George as soon as you receive this, and tell him how I am, as far as you can guess; - and also a note to my sister - who walks about my imagination like a ghost - she is so like Tom. I can scarcely bid you good bye even in a letter. I always made an awkward bow. God bless you! "

30 November 1820 (pp. 448-449)

He wanted to read but he could not as he states in this letter. He wanted to write poetry but he was forced to abstain from doing so because he was afraid that it would ruin his peace of mind. Soon, he grew altogether tired of books because they reminded him of his mortality. Keats requested Severn to read to him from *Holy Living and Holy Dying* by Jeremy Taylor. He was looking for something to lean on at the threshold of the impending death.

When Keats woke up in the morning of December 10th, he coughed blood and vomitted blood. Severn sent for Clark and Clark bled him but, loss of blood caused dizziness in him. Keats told Severn, 'This day shall be my last.' Fearing suicide, Severn hid all the sharp objects in the house. He had another hemorrhage that day and five more over the next nine days. He was constantly talking about Tom's illness and death. Severn was himself a devout believer in Christianity and tried to comfort him by Christian values but to no avail. In a letter to close friends in England, who were eagerly waiting to hear from Keats, Severn wrote about Keats's bitterness,

'For he says in words that tear my very heartstrings - "miserable wretch I am - this last cheap comfort which every rogue and fool have - is deny'd me in my last moments - why is this - O! I have serv'd every one with my utmost good - yet why is this - I cannot understand this" - and then his chattering teeth.' And later, 'I think a malignant being must have power over us - over whom the Almighty has little or no influence - yet you know Severn I cannot believe in your book - the Bible. ...Here am I, with desperation in death that would disgrace the commonest fellow.' When Severn finished a letter to Keats's publisher Taylor, the poet told him to add a postscript: 'I shall soon be in a second edition - in sheets - and cold press.'

By now, Clark had lost all hopes of Keats's recovery and did not hide this from him. Keats grew suicidal again and pleaded with Severn to give him the laudanum Clark prescribed. Keats wanted to commit suicide because he knew beforehand what it was

like from his brother Tom's experience; the loss of bodily control, the constant blood and vomit and diarrhea. He apparently did not want to go through all this.

Severn relates Keats's last moments in a letter to Charles Brown "about four, the approaches of death came on. [Keats said] 'Severn—I—lift me up—I am dying—I shall die easy; don't be frightened—be firm, and thank God it has come.' I lifted him up in my arms. The phlegm seem'd boiling in his throat, and increased until eleven, when he gradually sank into death, so quiet, that I still thought he slept."(Hancock: 2004, 215-216)

He died on Friday the 23rd and was buried in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome on Monday 26 February 1821².

² Biographical information about John Keats, **unless noted otherwise**, was taken and abridged from <http://englishhistory.net/keats/life.html>

PART II

2. JOHN KEATS'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS DEATH

Although Keats' attitudes towards death do not differ markedly from those of an ordinary individual, it is obvious that he experiences those feelings more intensely. He is more vulnerable and fragile in front of death. His responses towards death are given in a logical order. He fears death, which is a common and universal reaction shared by every human being because death is unknown, invincible and inevitable. Then, he tries to approach it in terms of rational mind in order to overcome his fear as any human individual would do when they are confronted with something unusual, unknown and threatening.

He thinks of time as the accomplice of death for time is something that brings us closer to death. And this he regrets very much. He feels intense sorrow when he thinks of the destruction time causes. And finally, he desires death to be relieved of pain. He feels drained and exhausted and thinks he cannot go on living a life of woes and utter despair. He rejoices in the fact that death exists and he thinks of grave as a resting place.

2.1 Fear of Death

Fear of death is a very natural response common to every human being. In the following poems, Keats' reasons for fearing it will be discussed. He fears death because it may come before he achieves immortality by creating a work of art(*When I have fears that I may cease to be/Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain*). He fears death because he doubts the existence of an afterlife(*That I am oft in doubt whether at all/I shall again see Phoebus in the morning*). He fears death because it may take him away "*from fireside joys, and Lydian airs*" He fears death because he thinks grave is a damp and chill place(*A chill as from a tomb*) and he wants to be rescued from the *cold grasp of Death*.

Sonnet

*When I have fears that I may cease to be
 Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,
 Before high-piled books, in charactery,
 Hold like rich garners the full ripen'd grain;
 When I behold, upon the night's starr'd face,
 Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
 And think that I may never live to trace
 Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance;
 And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,
 That I shall never look upon thee more,
 Never have relish in the faery power
 Of unreflecting love;--then on the shore
 Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
 Till love and fame to nothingness do sink. (p.39)*

The poet is reflecting his death. He fears death because it may come and take him before he can produce an artistic work and rob him of his chance to be immortal. He then looks at the stars in the night sky and thinks he may not live long enough to trace their shadows. He sees himself as a “fair creature of an hour”. The word “fair” brings to minds the idea of loveliness, beauty and hence vulnerability, fragility. The poet wants to be immortal but he can not transcend the boundaries of time. He is a prey to the destroying effect of time. He suffers because he will not be able to look on his beloved’s face when he is dead. He is sad. He feels desperate and all alone. He thinks till love and fame mean nothing to him. Because, death’s looming presence blackens everything and furls everything worth living for into nothingness. He is terrified of death.

Epistle to George Felton Matthew

.....

Just when the sun his farewell beam has darted:

But 'tis impossible, far different cares

Beckon me sternly from soft 'Lydian airs,'

And hold my faculties so long in thrall,

That I am oft in doubt whether at all

I shall again see Phoebus in the morning: (p.10)

The poet is describing a setting in which he is enjoying soft 'Lydian airs,' The online webster's dictionary defines the word "Lydian" as "*Of or pertaining to Lydia, a country of Asia Minor, or to its inhabitants; hence, soft; effeminate; -- said especially of one of the ancient Greek modes or keys, the music in which was of a soft, pathetic, or voluptuous character*" and this definition suggests that he is listening to music, looking at the beauties the landscape has to offer, enjoying worldly pleasures. But, the critical moment is when he realizes it is the time of sunset and the darkness which reminds him of death is going to throw its shadow over these beauties and blacken them. It captures the poet's emotional and intellectual faculties as a slave and they are not functional anymore. What replaces them is doubt and fear of death. Because he is not sure whether he can see Phoebus again in the morning. According to Greek mythology, Phoebus is the Greek god of light; god of prophesy and poetry and music and healing.

Written in Disgust of Vulgar Superstition

The church bells toll a melancholy round,

Calling the people to some other prayers,

Some other gloominess, more dreadful cares,

More hearkening to the sermon's horrid sound.

Surely the mind of man is closely bound

In some black spell; seeing that each one tears

Himself from fireside joys, and Lydian airs,

And converse high of those with glory crown'd.

Still, still they toll, and I should feel a damp,--

A chill as from a tomb, did I not know

*That they are dying like an outburnt lamp;
 That 'tis their sighing, wailing ere they go
 Into oblivion;-that fresh flowers will grow
 And many glories of immortal stamp. (p.35)*

The bells of the church are tolling to announce the time of prayer, bringing sad and melancholic thoughts to one's mind. But, what surprises him most is the human beings' rather irrational way of behaviour. They act as if their minds are spellbound. They are not individuals with free and enlightened minds. They still answer the 'melancholy' chimes of a church and what is more, abandoning worldly pleasures such as 'fireside joys' and 'Lydian airs', they go inside churches to listen to 'horrid' sounds of a priest. The voice of a priest preaching the masses of people is like a spell. Church has a bewitching impact on the people. They do not act out of their own free wills

He compares human life to outburnt lamps. He thinks they go into nothing but oblivion after going through many trials and tribulations. Their existence here on earth is meaningless. They are mistaken in their beliefs in the kind of afterlife Christianity portrays. They think they are going to Heaven after they have died because Jesus Christ died on the cross to atone for humanity's sins. But, this just is not true. Their lives are spent in vain. The persona of the poem cannot awaken them out of their foolish beliefs, either and this fills him with feelings of dread, sending a damp chill down his spine.

Song

*I had a dove, and the sweet dove died;
 And I have thought it died of grieving:
 O, what could it grieve for? its feet were tied
 With a single thread of my own hand's weaving;
 Sweet little red feet, why should you die--
 Why should you leave me, sweet bird, why?
 You lived alone in the forest tree,
 Why, pretty thing! would you not live with me?
 I kiss'd you oft and gave you white peas;
 Why not live sweetly, as in the green trees? (pp. 125-6)*

We can almost picture the persona: eyes wide open out of sheer terror, a horror-struck expression on his face. The persona has difficulty accepting the death of his dove. It is evident from the questions employed in the poem that he is going through a shock now. The unusual frequency of questions posed by the persona suggests that he is in a state of rebellion. Why should a pretty dove with little red feet die? Why should death exist and destroy beauty and youth? Why should everything sweet come to an end? The questions he poses can be regarded as his effort to accommodate himself to the idea of death and his own death in particular. He is both rebellious and seeks reconciliation with death.

To George Keats-Written in Sickness

*Brother belov'd if health shall smile again,
Upon this wasted form and fever'd cheek:
If e'er returning vigour bid these weak
And languid limbs their gladsome strength regain,
Well may thy brow the placid glow retain
Of sweet content and thy pleas'd eye may speak
The conscious self applause, but should I seek
To utter what this heart can feel, Ah! vain
Were the attempt! Yet kindest friends while o'er
My couch ye bend, and watch with tenderness
The being whom your cares could e'en restore,
From the cold grasp of Death, say can you guess
The feelings which these lips can ne'er express;
Feelings, deep fix'd in grateful memory's store. (pp.251-252)*

Keats is very ill; he is feverish and exhausted. He is in his death bed. His friends take care of him. He appreciates that but he would rather have his brother by his bedside. He claims his brother's love and affection could free him from death and restore him to life and good health. Here again, Keats' dislike and fear of death are at the foreground. His choice of words clearly indicates that he still wants to cling to life although his health is in a very bad condition. He hopes to regain his strength and flee from the "cold grasp of Death"

2.2 Philosophizing on Death

Instead of living a life fearing death constantly, he attempts to define it using his rational mind. He compares death to sleep, which is a sign of his wish to see death, a threatening phenomenon, as something pleasant and comforting (*Can death be sleep, when life is but a dream,*). He describes death as a reward after a life full of sorrows (*death is life's high meed*). He sometimes adopts a matter-of-fact approach and makes realistic remarks on death (*The blossoms hang by a melting spell/And fall they must*).

On Death

*Can death be sleep, when life is but a dream,
And scenes of bliss pass as a phantom by?
The transient pleasures as a vision seem,
And yet we think the greatest pain's to die.*

*How strange it is that man on earth should roam,
And lead a life of woe, but not forsake
His rugged path; nor dare he view alone
His future doom which is but to awake. (pp.1-2)*

Keats begins this poem by asking a question on the nature of death and life. This is an indication of his attempt at overcoming his fear of death and trying to understand it from a philosophical point of view. Maybe, we should not fear death because it may turn out to be as peace-giving as sleep. Maybe, the worldly pleasures we seek on earth are only illusions and not reality. People are mistaken in their belief that death is something that gives immense pain. Because, quite paradoxically, it is 'the transient pleasures' that do so. Because, the moment we stop experiencing those pleasures, it is as if they have never existed. They leave only a shadow, a weak trace on our palates, which are the cruel reminders of the fact that they have left us and do not exist now. Kauvar makes a similar remark:

"Death is more pleasurable than life for it will evaporate annoyances which, however educative, are annoyances. Our path here is rugged and strewn with woes, but

the whole suggestion of the lyric is that in death things will be otherwise. Further, death will not call out heroism in the man who properly understands its non-dream kingdom, even though it exists only for those who do not need the strength of others to support them. I think we can see clearly that one of Keats's attitudes toward death, his longing for it, which opposes his ultimate rejection of it in the nightingale ode, persisted throughout his life while the reasons for the longing took on the tinge of his current philosophizing" (Kauvar:1969,116).

Humanbeings are irrational creatures. They lead lives full of hardships and sorrow, clinging passionately to the ephemeral joys and desires but very few of them get the things they run after. Despite the stormy course of their journey, they constantly shun the truth which stares them in their eyes all the while. Keats seems to claim that the real doom is not the death but awakening from the sleep of life and find out that all one's life was spent in vain.

Sonnet

*Why did I laugh tonight? No voice will tell
 No God, no demon of severe response
 Deigns to reply from heaven or from hell
 Then to my human heart I turn at once:
 Heart, thou and I are here, sad and alone,
 Say, why did I laugh? O mortal pain!
 O darkness! Darkness! Forever must I moan
 To question heaven and hell and heart in vain?
 Why did I laugh? I know this being's lease
 My fancy to it's utmost blisses spreads
 Yet would I on this very midnight cease
 And all the world's gaudy ensigns see in shreds
 Verse, fame and beauty are intense indeed
 But death intenser, death is life's high meed. (p.137)*

Keats is trying to find answers to why he laughed. The act of "laughing" is the symbol of making merriments and enjoying oneself and this, in turn implies being oblivious to the deeper and more meaningful aims of being. While one part of the poet

wants to make the most of what life has to offer and pursue gratification of bodily pleasures, yet another part of him is courageous enough to ask questions about his own existence. His subconscious mind is not comfortable with questions unanswered. It urges him to suddenly stop and seek answers. He can not get answers from God or other spiritual beings. They are completely indifferent to him. They do not condescend to provide him with answers. He feels enormous pain. He is in total darkness concerning the reasons for his existence. He thinks his quest for meaning is futile. At this point he reaches a state of serene wisdom. Ward, drawing the attention to Keats's futile efforts to escape death, puts forward that he finally gives up escaping from death and tries to face it from a philosophical perspective.

“From the beginning, his poetry had been shaped by his attempt somehow to escape from the realization of death; now he was finally relinquishing the attempt as meaningless. If the prospect of death was faced squarely, he saw, it could not be the negation of all the struggles of life but the supreme experience, ‘intenser’ than all the others in calling out all man’s heroism to meet it. More than this, it might become ‘life’s high meed,’ the resolution of all those doubts which can never be settled in life itself” (Ward:1963,259-260)

He is not moaning anymore. He adopts a philosophical and hence more sensible way of looking at things. Then, he wishes to die that night and leave behind all the valuable things of the world “in shreds”. “Verse, fame and beauty” are things that make one experience intense feelings but death is something which makes one have more intense feelings and it is a gift, a much more potent finishing touch of a life with intense feelings.

Faery song II

*Ah! Woe is me! Poor silver-wing!
That I must chant thy lady's dirge,
And death to this fair haunt of spring,
Of melody, and streams of flowery verge,--
Poor silver-wing! Ah! Woe is me!
That I must see
These blossoms snow upon thy lady's pall!
Go, pretty page! And in her ear*

Whisper that the hour is near!
Softly tell her not to fear
Such calm favonian burial!
Go, pretty page! And moothly tell,--
The blossoms hang by a melting spell,
And fall they must, ere a star wink thrice
Upon her closed eyes,
That now in vain are weeping their last tears,
At sweet life leaving, and these arbours green,--
Rich dowry from the Spirit of the Spheres,
Alas! Poor Queen! (p.141)

Keats is addressing a bird with gray wings, which is why he names it silver-wing. The lady of the bird is dying and the persona very much regrets the fact that mourning the lady by singing a dirge falls on his shoulders. He urges her servant to go and tell her to prepare for death. He should whisper it to her ears. Death is such a horrible thing that its name cannot be uttered aloud and it strikes feelings of terror in people. However, he tries to make it as less painful for her as possible. He employs such words and phrases to impart an almost appealing quality to death; “*softly*”, “*favonian*”, “*blossoms*” etc. Yet, blossoms must fall and sweet life depart

2.3 Sorrow Because of the Passage of Time

Keats’ feelings of time generally focus on the fact that time passes and hence brings destruction. He complains about the “*Wasting of old Time*”. Time annihilates everything (*Where's the cheek that doth not fade*). He likens the passing of time to a drop of tear from a crying angel. He feels intense sorrow because beauty and youth, which are as fragile as bubbles and destroyed when rain falls on them, have to perish (*Like to bubbles when rain pelteth*). He wishes that a week could be prolonged as long as an age (*O that a week could be an age*).

To Hope

.....
*Whene'er the fate of those I hold most dear
 Tells to my fearful breast a tale of sorrow,
 O bright-eyed Hope, my morbid fancy cheer;
 Let me awhile thy sweetest comforts borrow:
 Thy heaven-born radiance around me shed,
 And wave thy silver pinions o'er my head!*
 (p.6)

The scene is again one of loneliness, sadness and vulnerability. The people he holds dear are no more. He is fearful that he is going to have the same fate one day. He is completely unprotected. Time is a merciless executioner in that it passes no matter what and spares no one, which is an endless source of sorrow for him. Keats deifies what he calls '*bright-eyed Hope*' and invokes this false god to relieve him of his rather unhealthy state of mind. In fact, his conscious and rational mind is very much aware of the fact that he cannot do anything to stop the passage of time. Since time cannot be stopped, one can at least enjoy whatever Hope can offer.

What the persona demands from Hope is that it should lend his comforts to him, shed its heavenly radiance on him and be treated as a king with servants around him fanning him on his throne in the courtroom and he and his courtiers making merriment

Sonnet

*To one who has been long in city pent,
 'Tis very sweet to look into the fair
 And open face of heaven,--to breathe a prayer
 Full in the smile of the blue firmament.
 Who is more happy, when, with heart's content,
 Fatigued he sinks into some pleasant lair
 Of wavy grass, and reads a debonair
 And gentle tale of love and languishment?
 Returning home at evening, with an ear
 Catching the notes of Philomel,--an eye*

*Watching the sailing cloudlet's bright career,
 He mourns that day so soon has glided by:
 E'en like the passage of an angel's tear
 That falls through the clear ether silently. (p.13)*

An individual spending most of his time in a city naturally is filled with joy of living when he goes to the countryside. He looks up at the smiling face of the sky and lies on the grass reading a tale of “love and languishment” listening to the songs of a nightingale. But, then this scene of total bliss comes to an end when it is time for him to return home. His world of heavenly euphoria is shattered when he becomes aware of the fact that time has glided by. *He mourns that day so soon has glided by:/E'en like the passage of an angel's tear/That falls through the clear ether silently.*

The imagery used to describe the passage of time is quite noteworthy. **An angel crying high up in the heavens and a tear drops silently through the air.** This master portrayal of an idea using shocking metaphors is what makes John Keats one of the greatest poets of English literature. There is an apt congruence between the words and the ideas they communicate. What better words could he use other than “an angel’s tear” to describe how a sensitive young man powerless against the destructive effects of time would feel?

Fancy

.....
*Every thing is spoilt by use:
 Where's the cheek that doth not fade,
 Too much gaz'd at? Where's the maid
 Whose lip mature is ever new?
 Where's the eye, however blue,
 Doth not weary? Where's the face
 One would meet in every place?
 Where's the voice, however soft,
 One would hear so very oft?
 At a touch sweet Pleasure melteth
 Like to bubbles when rain pelteth.*

.....

(p. 125)

Everything is subject to fading, losing colour, beauty and strength. Beautiful faces, rosy cheeks, sensual lips, bright eyes and melodious voices will eventually fade into ugliness. They will lose their charm and what follows is a traumatic pain. Human ego finds it unacceptable to lose the interest of others and be removed from the centre of attention. It is the passage of time that causes the erosion of beauty.

This poem is full of such references to youth and beauty as fresh cheeks, blue eyes, soft voices. The main theme of the poem is the transient nature of things. Keats emphasizes the ephemeral nature of things treasured by human beings and associated with the existence of humans on earth by pointing out that all these things are ruined and lose their appeal in time. The imagery he uses to highlight the vulnerability of earthly things is quite spectacular: "*At a touch sweet Pleasure melteth / Like to bubbles when rain pelteth*". One can almost picture the rain drops falling on soap bubbles and destroying them.

Robin Hood

*NO! Those days are gone away,
And their hours are old and gray,
And their minutes buried all
Under the down-trodden pall
Of the leaves of many years:*

.....

*No, the bugle sounds no more,
And the twanging bow no more;
Silent is the ivory shrill
Past the heath and up the hill;
There is no mid-forest laugh,
Where lone Echo gives the half
To some wight, amaz'd to hear
Jesting, deep in forest drear.*

.....

*Gone, the merry morris din;
 Gone, the song of Gamelyn;
 Gone, the tough-belted outlaw
 Idling in the "grene shawe";
 All are gone away and past!
 And if Robin should be cast
 Sudden from his turfed grave,
 And if Marian should have
 Once again her forest days,
 She would weep, and he would craze:
 He would swear, for all his oaks,
 Fall'n beneath the dockyard strokes,
 Have rotted on the briny seas;
 She would weep that her wild bees
 Sang not to her---strange!*

..... (p.41)

Robin Hood and his Merry Men belong to a very distant past. As the name suggests, they led a life of merriment, freedom and glory. What they did for the poor people secured them a very solid place both in history and folklore. Keats considers it as a tragedy that time passed and their happy days came to an end. The fact that they died many centuries ago and their memories are buried under a shroud of the leaves is a source of sorrow for Keats. It would also be so for Maid Marian if she rose from the dead and saw that their world was no more.

We again see in this poem the idea that time grinds everything to pieces and glory or fame can not save you from death and annihilation.

On Seeing the Elgin Marbles

*My spirit is too weak; mortality
 Weighs heavily on me like unwilling sleep,
 And each imagined pinnacle and steep
 Of godlike hardship tells me I must die
 Like a sick eagle looking at the sky.*

*Yet 'tis a gentle luxury to weep,
 That I have not the cloudy winds to keep
 Fresh for the opening of the morning's eye.
 Such dim-conceived glories of the brain
 Bring round the heart an indescribable feud;
 So do these wonders a most dizzy pain,
 That mingles Grecian grandeur with the rude
 Wasting of old Time -with a billowy main,
 A sun, a shadow of a magnitude. (p.36)*

Elgin Marbles are a collection of ancient sculptures brought from Greece to England by the Earl of Elgin, in 1812, while he was British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire from 1799 to 1803³. They were looted from Parthenon and Acropolis in Athens and taken to Britain. They are now on exhibition in the British Museum. Keats' fascination with everything Greek, especially Greek art, is well known. His entire poetry is brimming with images and ideas related to Ancient Greek. Upon seeing the Elgin Marbles, Keats remembers his mortality. Everything he sees around reminds him of his inescapable fate. This idea awakens "an indescribable feud" in his heart. Elgin Marbles, "these wonders", lasted many centuries and so, they are immortal in the sense that they are very durable and can stand many more centuries into the future. Keats looks at his own mortality on one hand and the immortality of the marbles on the other hand and feels "a most dizzy pain". The "old time" is going to rub him away bit by bit just as stormy, turbulent waves eat away the rocks on a shore. Like a sick eagle, deprived of its ability to fly due to its illness and looking wistfully at the sky, which stands for eternity, the poet, too, longs for eternity.

Although it may seem paradoxical, it can be claimed that Keats delights in sorrow. He feels a certain dizziness, which suggests intoxication and which in turn is closely associated with feelings of enjoyment. Rossetti makes a statement to this effect: "As no poet had more capacity for enjoyment than Keats, so none exceeded him in the luxury of sorrow." (Rossetti: 1887, 88)

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elgin_Marbles

Sonnet

The day is gone, and all its sweets are gone!
Sweet voice, sweet lips, soft hand, and softer breast,
Warm breath, light whisper, tender semitone,
Bright eyes, accomplished shape, and lang'rous waist!
Faded the flower and all its budded charms,
Faded the sight of beauty from my eyes,
Faded the shape of beauty from my arms,
Faded the voice, warmth, whiteness, paradise--
Vanished unseasonably at shut of eve,
When the dusk holiday -- or holinight
Of fragrant-curtained love begins to weave
The woof of darkness thick, for hid delight;
But, as I've read love's missal through today,
He'll let me sleep, seeing I fast and pray. (p.214)

Keats is again alone and contemplating about the passing of time. The day is compared to time and the “shut of eve” to death. By the end of day, everything he values has lost their meaning. Darkness, like a piece of cloth or a shroud, has covered them. During daylight, he enjoys the delights of life and has a sensuous existence, but with the advent of evening, things lose their colour, they fade, wither and shrivel. The choice of vocabulary, too, contribute to the meaning of the poem. On one side, there are *Sweet voice, sweet lips, soft hand, and softer breast, Warm breath, light whisper, tender semitone, Bright eyes, accomplished shape, and lang'rous waist, budded charms, the sight of beauty, the voice, warmth, whiteness, paradise,* on the other; *fade, vanish, darkness, unseasonably.* As darkness causes beauty to fade and lose its fragrance and lustre, death, too, causes ultimate destruction. And the time is like a chariot taking everything to their final destination. It is a sad and sorrowful journey.

To John Hamilton Reynolds

*O that a week could be an age, and we
 Felt parting and warm meeting every week,
 Then one poor year a thousand years would be,
 The flush of welcome ever on the cheek:
 So could we live long life in little space,
 So time itself would be annihilate,
 So a day's journey in oblivious haze
 To serve our joys would lengthen and dilate.
 O to arrive each Monday morn from Ind!
 To land each Tuesday from the rich Levant!
 In little time a host of joys to bind,
 And keep our souls in one eternal pant!
 This morn, my friend, and yester-evening taught
 Me how to harbour such a happy thought. (p.44)*

He is wallowing in wishful thinking. He wishes that one week could be prolonged as long as an age and one year as long as one thousand years. He does not want the flush on the cheek to fade away. He takes his wishes to its extreme by wanting the total annihilation of time. Because, time is, in a sense, the accomplice of death. The passage of time brings sorrow and destruction.

2.4 Longing for Death

Death has always been the tragedy of human race. So, when the burden of living weighs down on him and pain and misery reach unbearable proportions, he wants to die: *"I wish for death every day and night to deliver me from these pains"*. He sees death as a resting place as he says: *"I am sure I shall never have any rest till I get there"*. Grave is the place where 'sound and fury' of the world is no more.

To Charles Armitage Brown, September 28, 1820

I wish for death every day and night to deliver me from these pains, and then I wish death away, for death would destroy even those pains which are better than

nothing. Land and Sea, weakness and decline are great separators, but death is the great divorcer for ever. When the pang of this thought has passed through my mind, I may say the bitterness of death is passed.

... ..

Is there another life? Shall I awake and find all this a dream? There must be, we cannot be created for this sort of suffering. (p.446)

He is in such unbearable pains that he desires to die to be relieved of them. But, then he changes his mind and wants death away from him. This letter reflects Keats's conflicting beliefs. The sentence "*I wish death away, for death would destroy even those pains which are better than nothing.*" clearly shows Keats's conviction that there is nothing after death. The expression in the following sentence "*but death is the great divorcer for ever*" reinforces this belief. But then, he asks "*Is there another life?*" and he himself gives the answer "*There must be, we cannot be created for this sort of suffering*". Human soul cannot accept death as total annihilation. The belief in an afterlife is like an inbuilt property in human soul. So, Keats, too, believes in an afterlife although at times he says he does not. Now that the conflict is resolved, we can claim that he really wants to die to escape the sorrows and pains of this world.

To Fanny Brawne, July 1820

I long to believe in immortality. I shall never be able to bid you an entire farewell. If I am destined to be happy with you here-how short is the longest life. I wish to believe in immortality..... (p.441)

...the world is too brutal for me-I am glad there is such a thing as the grave-I am sure I shall never have any rest till I get there. (p.442)

We again see his strong wish to be able to believe in immortality. He sees death as a resting place, a shelter and he wants it. He denounces life on earth even if it is a happy one. Suppose my life on earth with you is a happy life, I still would not have it, he seems to be saying. Because, the longest life a human being can hope for is one hundred and twenty. Let it be one thousand years, or one hundred thousand years of a most pleasurable life. It still would be unbelievably short compared to immortality. He

longs for death as it is the threshold of immortality, a door that opens to an eternal existence.

To Sleep

*O SOFT embalmer of the still midnight!
Shutting, with careful fingers and benign,
Our gloom-pleas'd eyes, embower'd from the light,
Enshaded in forgetfulness divine;
O soothing Sleep! if so it please thee, close,
In midst of this thine hymn, my willing eyes.
Or wait the Amen, ere thy poppy throws
Around my bed its lulling charities;
Then save me, or the passed day will shine
Upon my pillow, breeding many woes;
Save me from curious conscience, that still hoards
Its strength for darkness, burrowing like a mole;
Turn the key deftly in the oiled wards,
And seal the hushed casket of my soul. (p.142)*

As the title suggests, Keats is addressing sleep in this poem. Sleep is very much reminiscent of death. **Some cultures even define it as the twin brother of death.** The analogy is even clearer if we take a close look at the choice of words in the poem. The act of embalming is applied to the dead bodies to keep them from decaying. Another example of comparing sleep to death is “*Shutting, with careful fingers and benign, Our gloom-pleas'd eyes,*” in the same way people would do to their beloveds who have just died. He asks sleep to “*seal the hushed casket of my soul*”. By using the word “casket”, which means both the body and a coffin, he calls sleep to his aid. Because, his conscience is preoccupied with matters that trouble and torment him deeply in the same way a mole would burrow under the ground. He wants sleep to relieve him of the woes of that day. But, on a deeper level he simply wants to die, which can be inferred from his usage of terms we normally would use to talk about death or a dead person.

Ode to the Nightingale

.....

*Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
 What thou among the leaves hast never known,
 The weariness, the fever, and 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;
 Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
 And leaden-eyed despairs;
 Where beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
 Or new love pine at them beyond tomorrow. (p.145)*

He is addressing the nightingale in this poem, urging it to leave the world he himself belongs to. He argues that it is full of sorrow and pain and the nightingale should go to the forest where none of these exists. A forest, too, is a symbol of death in that it is a dark and cool place like a grave. So, it can be argued that the poet is identifying himself with the nightingale. By telling the nightingale to go to the forest, a gravelike place, he, in fact, is expressing his own wish to die.

.....

*Darkling I listen; and for many a time
 I have been half in love with easeful Death,
 Called him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
 To take into the air my quiet breath;
 Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
 To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
 While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
 In such an ecstasy!
 Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain---
 To thy high requiem become a sod*

..... (p.145)

In a world “*where men sit and hear each other groan*”, Keats wants to die a painless death. He is weary of seeing so much pain and misery in the world and the most painful of all is witnessing the death of youth. We see a dead man already in this poem. A man who cut the umbilical cord tying himself to life, an exhausted man without strength to stand up.

Although he is willing to die, he is still afraid of death since it may become painful. He seeks reconciliation. He gives death soft names in his poems as an attempt to appease it, to convince it not to hurt him.

Another point worth paying attention to is that he wants to die at midnight while the nightingale is singing. Why midnight? One reason why he wants to die at midnight may be that it is a time when all the noise and din of the daily life ceases and people go to sleep and forget all their problems and feel no pain. Another reason is that the midnight is the point when the day comes to an end, symbolizing death and a new day begins.

PART III

3. HOW HE COPES WITH THE IDEA OF MORTALITY

Seeing that death is inevitable, Keats seeks ways to alleviate the pain and trauma and tries to reconcile with it. He expresses his readiness to be able to believe in an afterlife, which is usually of a paganistic nature (*Souls of Poets dead and gone,/What Elysium have ye known,/Happy field or mossy cavern,/Choicer than the Mermaid Tavern?*). He attempts to find comfort in Carpe Diem, trying to enjoy the pleasures of this world to the fullest before *the great voice* summons him (*Many such eves of gently whisp'ring noise/May we together pass, and calmly try/What are this world's true joys, ere the great voice,/From its fair face, shall bid our spirits fly*). He believes in the immortalizing powers of art (*Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!*) and love (*who keeps within his stedfast aim/A love immortal, an immortal too*). Lastly, he believes he will overcome death if he manages to find a place in the canon of English literature (*.....I think I will be among the English poets after my death.....*).

3.1 Belief in a Usually (Pagan) Afterlife

It naturally follows that belief in some sort of continuation after death is the first reaction a human being gives, whether it be a religious concept of afterlife or a secular one. In Keats' case, it is mostly a pagan notion of afterlife (*Seated on Elysian lawns/Brows'd by none but Dian's fawns;*). What must be stressed is that his idea of afterlife in his works which do not reflect pagan elements is a quite vague one. Its nature is not clearly defined, it is mostly associated with sky, it is somewhere among the stars (*Thou didst die/A half-blown flow'ret which cold blasts amate./But this is past: thou art among the stars Of highest heaven: to the rolling spheres/Thou sweetly singest:*)

Lines on Mermaid Tavern

*Souls of Poets dead and gone,
 What Elysium have ye known,
 Happy field or mossy cavern,
 Choicer than the Mermaid Tavern?
 Have ye tippled drink more fine
 Than mine host's Canary wine?
 Or are fruits of Paradise
 Sweeter than those dainty pies
 Of venison?*

.....

*I have heard that on a day
 Mine host's sign-board flew away,
 Nobody knew whither, till
 An astrologer's old quill
 To a sheepskin gave the story,
 Said he saw you in your glory,
 Underneath a new old sign
 Sipping beverage divine,
 And pledging with contented smack
 The Mermaid in the Zodiac.*

*Souls of Poets dead and gone,
 What Elysium have ye known,
 Happy field or mossy cavern,
 Choicer than the Mermaid Tavern? (p.40)*

Elysium, in Greek mythology, is the paradise-like place where good people go to after they have died. As Hamilton suggests below Homer does not give a detailed description of the pagan notion of the afterlife. Much of what we know about is from the later poets and especially Virgil.

“In Homer the underworld is vague, a shadowy place inhabited by shadows. Nothing is real there. The ghosts’ existence, if it can be called that, is like a miserable

dream. The later poets define the world of the dead more and more clearly as the place where the wicked are punished and the good rewarded. In the Roman poet Virgil this idea is presented in great detail as in no Greek poet. All the torments of one class and the joys of the other are described at length. Virgil too is the only poet who gives clearly the geography of the underworld. The path down to it leads to where Acheron, the river of woe, pours into Cocytus, the river of lamentation. An aged boatman Charon ferries the souls of the dead across the water to the farther bank, where stands the adamantine gate to Tartarus (the name Virgil prefers). Charon will receive into his boat only the souls of those upon whose lips the passage money was placed when they died and who were duly buried. On guard before the gate sits CERBERUS, the three-headed, dragon-tailed dog, who permits all spirits to enter, but none to return. On his arrival each one is brought before three judges, Rhadamanthus, Minos, and Aeacus, who pass sentence and send the wicked to everlasting torment and the good to a place of blessedness called the Elysian Fields.” (Hamilton: 1989, 39)

Keats addresses the souls of the poets, and it would not be wrong to assume that they are the noteworthy poets of Ancient Greece and Rome given his admiration for classical poets and the civilization of both Ancient Greece and Rome. The Mermaid Tavern was a place frequented by literary figures and intellectuals and where they exchanged ideas and held debates about matters of politics, religion, philosophy and literature. Keats begins the poem by asking them what it is like in their new life and whether the living conditions, so to speak, are better than those on earth. The problem is resolved when an astrologer, the medium of communication between this world and the next, gives the good news that he saw the souls of the past poets living comfortably and drinking “beverage divine”. Keats’s desire for a happy afterlife is reflected in this poem.

Ode

*Bards of Passion and of Mirth,
 Ye have left your souls on earth!
 Have ye souls in heaven too,
 Double lived in regions new?
 Yes, and those of heaven commune
 With the spheres of sun and moon;
 With the noise of fountains wound'rous,
 And the parle of voices thund'rous;
 With the whisper of heaven's trees
 And one another, in soft ease.*

*Seated on Elysian lawns
 Brows'd by none but Dian's fawns;
 Underneath large blue-bells tented,
 Where the daisies are rose-scented,
 And the rose herself has got
 Perfume which on earth is not;
 Where the nightingale doth sing
 Not a senseless, tranced thing,
 But divine melodious truth;
 Philosophic numbers smooth;
 Tales and golden histories
 Of heaven and its mysteries.*

.....

*Bards of Passion and of Mirth,
 Ye have left your souls on earth!
 Ye have souls in heaven too,
 Double-lived in regions new! (p.125)*

The picture of the afterlife here is very much like the one depicted in “**Lines on Mermaid Tavern**”. Here again, we see pagan elements such as Diana, the hunting goddess, the Elysian Fields. This poem differs from the previous one in that it gives a more detailed picture of the pagan afterlife; the daisies are “rose-scented”, roses smell more beautifully than they do on earth, nightingales sing more meaningful and divine tunes, even philosophy serves to reveal the secrets of the universe.

To Chatterton

*O Chatterton! how very sad thy fate!
 Dear child of sorrow -- son of misery!
 How soon the film of death obscur'd that eye,
 Whence Genius mildly falsh'd, and high debate.
 How soon that voice, majestic and elate,
 Melted in dying numbers! Oh! How nigh
 Was night to thy fair morning. Thou didst die
 A half-blown flow'ret which cold blasts amate.
 But this is past: thou art among the stars
 Of highest heaven: to the rolling spheres
 Thou sweetly singest: nought thy hymning mars,
 Above the ingrate world and human fears.
 On earth the good man base detraction bars
 From thy fair name, and waters it with tears. (p.2)*

Thomas Chatterton (1752-1770) was an aspiring young poet. He composed poems in the Middle English dialect and attributed them to a fifteenth century monk named Thomas Rowley. He sought his fortune in London literary circles. Upon failure and the rumors that there was no such monk as Thomas Rowley and the poems attributed to him were forged by Chatterton himself, he committed suicide. Keats wrote this poem to eulogize Chatterton. After praising him in glowing terms, Keats talks about his conviction that Chatterton is now living among stars and his songs accompany the revolution of the planets. Of course, it would be unwise to take these lines literally. But, the significance of these lines lies in the fact that human soul rebels at the notion of nothingness after death and invents modes of beliefs in an afterlife.

Sleep and Poetry

*O Poesy! for thee I hold my pen
 That am not yet a glorious denizen
 Of thy wide heaven- Should I rather kneel
 Upon some mountain-top until I feel
 A glowing splendour round about me hung,
 And echo back the voice of thine own tongue?
 O Poesy! for thee I grasp my pen
 That am not yet a glorious denizen
 Of thy wide heaven; yet, to my ardent prayer,
 Yield from thy sanctuary some clear air,
 Smooth'd for intoxication by the breath
 Of flowering bays, that I may die a death
 Of luxury, and my young spirit follow
 The morning sun-beams to the great Apollo
 Like a fresh sacrifice; or, if I can bear
 The o'erwhelming sweets, 'twill bring to me the fair
 Visions of all places: a bowery nook
 Will be elysium- an eternal book
 Whence I may copy many a lovely saying
 About the leaves, and flowers- about the playing
 Of nymphs in woods, and fountains; and the shade
 Keeping a silence round a sleeping maid;
 And many a verse from so strange influence
 That we must ever wonder how, and whence
 It came. Also imaginings will hover
 Round my fire-side, and haply there discover
 Vistas of solemn beauty, where I'd wander
 In happy silence, like the clear Meander
 Through its lone vales; and where I found a spot
 Of awfuller shade, or an enchanted grot,
 Or a green hill o'erspread with chequer'd dress
 Of flowers, and fearful from its loveliness,*

*Write on my tablets all that was permitted,
 All that was for our human senses fitted.
 Then the events of this wide world I'd seize
 Like a strong giant, and my spirit tease
 Till at its shoulders it should proudly see
 Wings to find out an immortality.*
 (pp.18-19)

Poesy is apotheosized in this poem. Here, we see all the elements of a false religion. Poesy is the god of this religion and the followers of this religion kneel at the altar. Keats is evoking the deity Poesy at an altar of a high mountain top. He claims that he is a faithful servant and with his pen in his hand he wants to servet his deity. He asks the deity to accept him into its realm, bless him with “a glowing splendour” and make him its prophet so that he can descend from the mountain top and carry its divine messages to the people. He prays to the deity to be granted intoxication, which is followed by an easeful, painless and even joyful death. Here, we see again his wish to die a painless death. Throughout Keats’ works and letters, his preference for a painless death is a recurring theme and it is only natural when we bear in mind the fact that he witnessed his brother’s unspeakable pains during his last years and he himself suffered a lot from the same painful illness.

Yet another pagan element in the poem is his soul’s flight to Apollo “like a fresh sacrifice”. He dedicates his “young soul” to Apollo, a pagan god. Ensuing lines are full of pagan elements, which suggest Keats’ belief in a pagan afterlife.

Faery Songs I

*Shed no tear! oh, shed no tear!
 The flower will bloom another year.
 Weep no more! oh, weep no more!
 Young buds sleep in the root's white core.
 Dry your eyes! oh, dry your eyes!
 For I was taught in Paradise
 To ease my breast of melodies,--
 Shed no tear.*

Overhead! look overhead!
'Mong the blossoms white and red--
Look up, look up! I flutter now
On this fresh pomegranate bough.
See me! 'tis this silvery bill
Ever cures the good man's ill.
Shed no tear! oh, shed no tear!
The flower will bloom another year.
Adieu, adieu -- I fly -- adieu!
I vanish in the heaven's blue,--
Adieu, adieu! (p.141)

Keats is speaking in these lines through a bird and the persona of the poem is most probably a nightingale, which is associated with gardens, boughs and flowers in the collective consciousness more than any other bird. The one the persona is addressing is Keats. So, Keats in this poem is speaking to himself through the persona. This reflects his strong desire to be able to believe in an afterlife. He is trying to convince himself of the existence of such a life. His usage of a bird as a messenger and the bearer of glad tidings has its roots in religious literature. For example; the hoopoe bird acts as a messenger to King Solomon and brings him of the news of a distant land; the land of Queen of Sheeba

“And he sought among the birds and said: How is it that I see not the hoopoe, or is he among the absent? I verily will punish him with hard punishment or I verily will slay him, or he verily will bring me a plain excuse. But he was not long in coming, and he said: I have found out (a thing) that thou apprehendest not, and I come unto thee from Sheba with sure tidings.” (27. The Ant:20-22)

“Also he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters were abated from off the face of the earth. And the dove came to him in the evening; and, lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf pluckt off: so Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth.” (Genesis Chapter 8, Verses 8 and 11)

Although we know that Keats was not a believer in the Christian faith, he still could not free himself from using religious terminology. Whether the idea of an afterlife in the way major heavenly religions portray is inextricably embedded in human soul

may yet be the subject of another study. But, what we see here is that Keats could not free himself from using metaphors and images one would expect to find in religious texts.

Sonnet

*As from the darkening gloom a silver dove
Upsoars, and darts into the eastern light,
On pinions that nought moves but pure delight,
So fled thy soul into the realms above,
Regions of peace and everlasting love;
Where happy spirits, crown'd with circlets bright
Of starry beam, and gloriously bedight,
Taste the high joy none but the blest can prove.
There thou or joinest the immortal quire
In melodies that even heaven fair
Fill with superior bliss, or, at desire,
Of the omnipotent Father, cleav'st the air
On holy message sent -- What pleasure's higher?
Wherefore does any grief our joy impair? (p. 12)*

He is addressing an acquaintance of himself who has recently died. His soul goes to a place where *peace and* everlasting love reigns and this place is full of the spirits who are very well taken care of; wearing a starlit crown and beautiful clothes. They taste joys and delights which only the blessed can enjoy. They join a choir whose melodies and songs fill the heavens.

Sonnet

*After dark vapors have oppress'd our plains
For a long dreary season, comes a day
Born of the gentle South, and clears away
From the sick heavens all unseemly stains.
The anxious month, relieved of its pains,
Takes as a long-lost right the feel of May;*

*The eyelids with the passing coolness play
 Like rose leaves with the drip of Summer rains.
 The calmest thoughts came round us; as of leaves
 Budding -- fruit ripening in stillness -- Autumn suns
 Smiling at eve upon the quiet sheaves --
 Sweet Sappho's cheek -- a smiling infant's breath --
 The gradual sand that through an hour-glass runs --
 A woodland rivulet -- a Poet's death. (p. 36)*

Although it may sound paradoxical at first, it becomes understandable upon deeper reflection that human soul finds comfort and delight in the knowledge that, no matter how dreadful a life one is leading or how seemingly endless pains or miseries one has to go through, life has to come to an end. We not only wish to be relieved of a miserable life, but also desire to go to a better place in the afterlife.

The dreary hours of winter, too, must have an end. This poem begins with describing the end of Winter and the advent of Spring. Dark clouds eventually are cleared of the skies after a long period of rain. With all its beauty, spring has come; leaves bud, fruits ripen

One other interesting point is that the flow of sand from the upper chamber of an hourglass into the lower chamber is very suggestive. In the first place, it may suggest the gradual wearing out of the poet's life. Secondly, the passage of sand through the neck of an hourglass and into the lower chamber symbolizes a rebirth, a regeneration.

The poet dies and goes to another world in the same way as a rivulet flows into the sea.

To George and Georgiana Keats, December 18, 1818

.....The last days of poor Tom were of the most distressing nature; but his last moments were not so painful, and his very last was without a pang. I will not enter into any parsonic comments on death-yet the common observations of the commonest people on death are as true as their proverbs. I have scarce a doubt of immortality of some nature or other-neither had Tom..... (p.338)

Keats's approach to the idea of an afterlife does not draw on the teachings of Christianity. He was very much influenced by the prevalent deistic milieu, which suggested that there was a creative power and this Creator set the universe going and did not interfere in the human affairs. The basic tenets of Christianity, such as eternal bliss for the righteous and the eternal damnation for the condemned souls, were rather far from deserving credit. His dislike and distrust for anything "parsonic" is evident in this letter. He believes in "the observations of the commonest people" rather than ages-old parables of Christianity. He and his brother Tom believes in immortality although they are not sure about its nature.

3.2 Carpe Diem

Since it is no use running from death, Keats suggests staying and enjoying life's delights (*O what can be done, shall we stay or run?/O cut the sweet apple and share it!*). Still, they are unable to enjoy life completely, death's presence is always felt and their joys are spoiled by it *Yet---as all things mourn awhile/At fleeting blisses,/E'en let us too! but be our dirge/A dirge of kisses*)

To My Brothers

*Small, busy flames play through the fresh laid coals,
And their faint cracklings o'er our silence creep
Like whispers of the household gods that keep
A gentle empire o'er fraternal souls.
And while, for rhymes, I search around the poles,
Your eyes are fix'd, as in poetic sleep,
Upon the lore so voluble and deep,
That aye at fall of night our care concedes.
This is your birth-day Tom, and I rejoice
That thus it passes smoothly, quietly.
Many such eves of gently whisp'ring noise
May we together pass, and calmly try
What are this world's true joys, ere the great voice,
From its fair face, shall bid our spirits fly. (p.33)*

Keats is renowned for his ability to evoke vivid images and feelings in the readers. This is one of those poems. The setting of the poem is the living room of a house in winter. There is a fire burning in the mantelpiece and silence reigns in the room. The only thing that disturbs the peace in the room is the crackling sound from the burning wood. The crackling sound is likened to the whispers of household gods, the protectors of family members. Keats and his brother Tom are in the room. Tom is lost in deep thoughts. Most probably and ironically, he is thinking of his impending death on his birthday. He is in a trance-like state. Keats is trying to cheer him up a bit. He argues that they should spend their remaining time together in peace and make the most of this world's "true joys", by which he emphasizes the importance of brotherly love and compassion and memorable times spent in tranquility. Since death is inevitable, we must appreciate what we have now, that is; time before "the great voice" calls us forth.

On.....

THINK not of it, sweet one, so;---

Give it not a tear;

Sigh thou mayst, and bid it go

Any---anywhere.

Do not look so sad, sweet one,---

Sad and fadingly;

Shed one drop then,---it is gone---

O 'twas born to die!

Still so pale? then, dearest, weep;

Weep, I'll count the tears,

And each one shall be a bliss

For thee in after years.

Brighter has it left thine eyes

Than a sunny rill;

And thy whispering melodies

Are tenderer still.

*Yet---as all things mourn awhile
 At fleeting blisses,
 E'en let us too! but be our dirge
 A dirge of kisses. (p.38)*

The poet is trying to console someone he is intimate with, most probably his beloved lady. The Lady is sad for some reason; maybe she has lost a relative or someone from her family. She is shaken by this misfortune and is under the influence of very strong emotions; namely she is crying. "I understand your feelings, I am sorry for your loss and you have every right to be sad. But, you should not torture yourself to death with grief and sorrow. Everybody feels unhappy when they lose someone or something they treasure but, only "awhile". It should not last more than it should. Rather, we should always try to be happy and enjoy life. Even our dirges should reflect our positive attitude towards life", he seems to be saying to his beloved.

Stanzas to Miss Wylie

*O come Georgiana! the rose is full blown,
 The riches of Flora are lavishly strown,
 The air is all softness, and crystal the streams,
 The West is resplendently clothed in beams.*

2.

*O come! let us haste to the freshening shades,
 The quaintly carv'd seats, and the opening glades;
 Where the faeries are chanting their evening hymns,
 And in the last sun-beam the sylph lightly swims.*

3.

*And when thou art weary I'll find thee a bed,
 Of mosses and flowers to pillow thy head:
 And there Georgiana I'll sit at thy feet,
 While my story of love I enraptur'd repeat.*

4.

*So fondly I'll breathe, and so softly I'll sigh,
 Thou wilt think that some amorous Zephyr is nigh:
 Yet no -- as I breathe I will press thy fair knee,
 And then thou wilt know that the sigh comes from me.*

5.

*Ah! why dearest girl should we lose all these blisses?
 That mortal's a fool who such happiness misses:
 So smile acquiescence, and give me thy hand,
 With love-looking eyes, and with voice sweetly bland. (p.240)*

The setting is a very idealized and idyllic one and full of references to Greek and Roman mythologies such as Flora, Zephyr, sylphs and faeries. In that sense, this poem is very typical of Keats. Keats is inviting the lady to enjoy themselves under the shades of trees. The idea of *carpe diem* is reinforced by using elements from Greek and Roman worlds, which are closely associated with sexuality, catering to carnal pleasures and enjoying life in general. Pastoral elements such as *freshening shades, opening glades; a bed of mosses and flowers* also emphasize the idea of living the life to the full in a world where death is inevitable.

Sharing Eve's Apple

1.

*O Blush not so! O blush not so!
 Or I shall think you knowing;
 And if you smile the blushing while,
 Then maidenheads are going.*

2.

*There's a blush for want, and a blush for shan't,
 And a blush for having done it;
 There's a blush for thought, and a blush for nought,
 And a blush for just begun it.*

3.

O sigh not so! O sigh not so!
For it sounds of Eve's sweet pippin;
By these loosen'd lips you have tasted the pips
And fought in an amorous nipping.

4.

Will you play once more at nice-cut-core,
For it only will last our youth out,
And we have the prime of the kissing time,
We have not one sweet tooth out.

5.

There's a sigh for aye, and a sigh for nay,
And a sigh for 'I can't bear it!'
O what can be done, shall we stay or run?
O cut the sweet apple and share it! (p. 248)

The persona is trying to seduce his mistress because she is a shy lady and needs encouragement. The title of the poem is referring to Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden because they ate the forbidden fruit, which traditionally is accepted as an apple. The persona, too, is trying to persuade the lady to engage in worldly pleasures, which is symbolized by the apple. He argues that he and the lady are young and are in *the prime of the kissing time*. So, they should not waste time and *cut the sweet apple and share it*.

3.3 Immortality Through Art

The basic idea is that, since, works of art speak through ages and endure many ages, it makes one immortal.

Ode to a Nightingale

*My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
 My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
 Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
 One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
 'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
 But being too happy in thine happiness,--
 That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees
 In some melodious plot
 Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
 Singest of summer in full-throated ease.*

*O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been
 Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,
 Tasting of Flora and the country green,
 Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!
 O for a beaker full of the warm South,
 Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
 With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
 And purple-stained mouth;
 That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
 And with thee fade away into the forest dim:*

*Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
 What thou among the leaves hast never known,
 The weariness, the fever, and 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;
 Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
 And leaden-eyed despairs,
 Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
 Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.*

*Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
 Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
 But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
 Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:
 Already with thee! tender is the night,
 And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
 Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;
 But here there is no light,
 Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
 Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways. (pp.144-145)*

As an author suggests, the persona is torn between life and death. He is intoxicated, which is a very similar situation to death. He is a lost soul in Limbo. "We witness a mind repeatedly slipping away from life and then snapping back to try to keep awake and alive. The poem vacillates continually between the conditions: release from, and then recall to mortal reality. The fact of his addressing the bird in this abrupt manner seems to be what shakes him out of torpor into a drainless shower of sobriety, to confront mortality once again" (Blades:2002,107).

*I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
 Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
 But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
 Wherewith the seasonable month endows
 The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
 White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
 Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
 And mid-May's eldest child,
 The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
 The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.*

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain--
To thy high requiem become a sod. (p.145)

Bloom, in interpreting these lines, says, "Two attitudes toward death, the first shading into the second, are involved in this beautiful but disturbed stanza. Previous to the occasion this ode celebrates, the poet says, he has frequently invoked Death, under his "soft names" of ease, calling on Death to take his breathing spirit "into the air," that is, to die by the very act of exhaling. As he has called upon Death in "many a mused rhyme," this exhaling is equivalent to the act of uttering and composing his poem, and we are reminded that spirit means both soul and breath, and that the poet invoking his muse calls upon a breath greater than his own to inspirit him. Death, then, is here a muse, but this was previously only partly the case: I have been *half* in love with easeful Death. But Now more than ever seems it rich to die, To cease upon the midnight with no pain. "Rich" and "cease" are marvelously precise words. Now, in the shared communion of the darkness out of which the nightingale's song emerges, it seems rich to die, and he is *more than half* in love with easeful Death. For he has reached the height of living experience, and any descent out of this state into the poverty of ordinary consciousness seems a death-in-life, a pain to be avoided, in contrast to the life-in-death "with no pain" to be maintained were he "to cease upon the midnight." "To cease," suddenly not to be, and thus to cross over into non-being attended by the "requiem," the high mass of the nightingale's song. For the nightingale itself is pouring forth its soul abroad in an ecstasy that transcends the division between life and death; the bird lives, but its breath-soul is taken into the air as it gives itself freely in the extension of its ecstasy"(Bloom:1962, 407-11).

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft-times hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music:--Do I wake or sleep? (pp.145-146)

The nightingale stands for music and art. Many a potent rulers have listened to its songs from the dawn of history. But, now they are all gone despite all their wealth and power. The lands they conquered and the riches they amassed were of no use when death seized them. What still stands is the nightingale and its music. The nightingale, which represents art, is immortal. "What Keats wishes to do is to reach out to a world in which love and beauty are not subject to change. His prime symbol for the imaginative power that will take him on this journey is the nightingale, or more specifically its song" (Wentersdorf: 1984, 70)

Ode on a Grecian Urn

*Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
 Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
 Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
 A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
 What leaf-fring'd legend haunt about thy shape
 Of deities 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?
 Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
 Are sweeter: therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
 Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
 Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
 Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
 Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
 Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
 Though winning near the goal - yet, do not grieve;
 She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
 For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!
 Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
 Your leaves, nor ever bid the spring adieu;
 And, happy melodist, unwearied,
 For ever piping songs for ever new;
 More happy love! more happy, happy love!
 For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,
 For ever panting, and for ever young;
 All breathing human passion far above,
 That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,
 A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.
 Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
 To what green altar, O mysterious priest,*

*Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
 And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?
 What little town by river or sea shore,
 Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
 Is emptied of 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.
 O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede
 Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
 With forest branches and the trodden weed;
 Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
 As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!
 When old age shall this generation waste,
 Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
 Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,
 "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," - that is all
 Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know. (p.135)*

Keats is addressing an urn belonging to the time of Ancient Greece. He employs a lot of striking metaphors in describing the urn, such as “still unravished bride of quietness”, “foster-child of silence and slow time” and “sylvan historian”. It is likened to an unravished bride because it has been hidden from human contact and its marriage has not been consummated yet. It is still a virgin in that no one has ever touched it for at least two or three millenia, which is a staggering figure by human standards. It is compared to the “foster-child of silence and slow time” because it was only like an embryo when it was first made. It had to spend countless years under layers of earth, which of course reminds us of an embryo’s time in a womb. An embryo needs to spend a certain period of time in the womb so that it can come out as a complete entity. If not, it comes to nought. It is a meaningless endeavor. Likewise, an urn has to spend quite a lot of time under many layers of earth, where silence reigns and time flows slowly, so that it can come to fruition and have meaning.

It is also compared to a historian in that the urn, like historians, has a story to tell about past events. “The urn, itself, though, is as much concerned with time as with art: it has survived the centuries intact or ‘unravished’-and one of its effects is to give insight on ancient life. It therefore exists both within time and yet beyond it”(Blades:2002, 118). The story the urn tells us is the story depicted on itself. It pictures gods and men. They are chasing beautiful maidens to the accompaniment of music and the maidens are busy trying to escape the lustful interests of gods and men. The scene is one of a Bacchanalian revelry and ecstasy in which bodily desires are catered to and lecherous feelings run riot.

*Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal yet, do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!*

*Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;
And, happy melodist, unwearied,
For ever piping songs for ever new;
More happy love! more happy, happy love!
For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,
For ever panting, and for ever young;
All breathing human passion far above,
That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue. (p.135)*

Keats argues that the young people in the picture on the urn, which stands for art, will never age and the trees will never shed their leaves. They will remain in their present condition forever. Music will not cease. This is especially important for Keats. Because, he feels a great pain simply because beauties and happinesses in this world have to come to an end. He wants them to continue forever. “Keats’s tone is a fusion of delight in the teasing beauty of the immortal urn and melancholy at the reality of his own mortality”(Blades:2002, 124).

*Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?
What little town by river or sea shore,
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
Is emptied of 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. (p.135)*

This scene is very reminiscent of a town one would expect to see in Ancient Greece. Townspeople are going to the temple to sacrifice a heifer to their pagan gods. That is why the streets of the town are deserted and silent and will remain so till eternity.

*O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
With forest branches and the trodden weed;
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!
When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,*

*"Beauty is truth, truth beauty,--that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." (p.135)*

Everything will perish and sink into oblivion one day but you will always remain in your present condition and be immortal through art. "As in all of the odes considered within this study, a theme that runs consistently throughout the lines is that of the human wish to transcend the ravages of time and decay and the poetic struggle to create an original and enduring work that surpasses all others. As will be seen, the wish for permanence, both for the artist and the work of art, is a recurring one for Keats (Bloom: 2001, 57). Keats comes up with the urn, the work of art, the artistic depictions on which will defy the ravaging effect of time and last many centuries to come." Here Keats implies that the urn exists outside of the limitations of human mortality and of time itself...."(Blades:2002, 124).

3.4.Immortality Through Love

From Endymion, Book 1

*Now, if this earthly love has power to make
Men's being mortal, immortal; to shake
Ambition from their memories, and brim
Their measure of content; what merest whim,
Seems all this poor endeavour after fame,
To one, who keeps within his stedfast aim
A love immortal, an immortal too. (lines:843-849, p.61)*

Keats is expressing his preference for love over fame. Love has the power to purge one of worldly ambitions and feverish struggle to achieve fame, which are fruitless efforts and "poor endeavours" in the final analysis. He who aims to attain an immortal love is immortal. Love has the power to make you immortal.

3.5 Being Canonized

To Benjamin Bailey, 8 October 1817

...At any rate I have no right to talk until Endymion is finished - it will be a test, a trial of my Powers of Imagination and chiefly of my invention which is a rare thing indeed - by which I must make 4000 Lines of one bare circumstance and fill them with Poetry; and when I consider that this is a great task, and that when done it will take me but a dozen paces towards the Temple of Fame - it makes me say - God forbid that I should be without such a task (p.270)

Keats wanted to write an epic poem to rival Milton's *Paradise Lost*. For this reason, he embarked on *a great task* and started writing *Endymion*, which he thought would bring him closer to fame. His desire to be one of the greatest figures of English literature is clearly expressed in this letter

To Benjamin Bailey, 10 June 1818

...Life must be undergone, and I certainly derive a consolation from the thought of writing one or two more Poems before it ceases.... (p.306)

To George and Georgiana Keats, October 13 or 14, 1818

...I think I will be among the English poets after my death..... (p.330)

To Fanny Brawne, February 1820

.....I must make myself as good a Philosopher as possible. Now I have had opportunities of passing nights anxious and awake I have found other thoughts intrude upon me. "If I should die," said I to myself, "I have left no immortal work behind me - nothing to make my friends proud of my memory - but I have lov'd the principle of beauty in all things, and if I had had time I would have made myself remember'd." (p. 428)

To Fanny Brawne, March, 1820

Death must come at last; Man must die, as Shallow says; but before that is my fate I feign would try what more pleasures than you have given so sweet a creature as

you can give. Let me have another op[p]ortunity of years before me and I will not die without being remember'd. (p.432)

One thing the letters above have in common is Keats's complaint that he does not have much time left to write immortal works that will echo through ages to come. He is a tragic figure; so young, so sensitive but doomed to die at a very young age.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, Keats's attitudes towards death and his ways of coping with it have been discussed. It has been claimed that his attitudes vary from clinging passionately to life to longing desperately for death. He has many conflicting feelings and emotions about life and death. He sometimes enjoys life, trying to suck the marrow out of it. He sometimes feels drained of the strength to go on living. He sees death as a shelter where he can protect himself against the pains of life. He wants to die a painless and easeful death. But, even that he could not have. He died "coughing his lungs out and in unspeakable pain"(Urgan:1989, 318). In order to alleviate the terror of death he felt so intensely, he tries to define life and death from a philosophical point of view and rationalize it. He is, in that sense, like a small child who, while passing by a cemetery, whistles tunes or sing songs in order to forget his fear.

To cope with the idea of an inevitable, and likely to happen any moment in his case, death, he believes or rather wants to believe in an afterlife. It is not a clearly defined belief or the characteristics of the afterlife he believes in are not well articulated. One thing is certain; it is not the one offered by Christianity or any other major religions for that matter. It is full of references to Ancient Greek and Roman mythologies. Or he sometimes takes refuge in the immortalizing power of art even though it is a still, lifeless depiction of beauty. One other way he strives to achieve immortality is finding a place among the canon of English literature; he liked to see himself as equal to such monumental figures as Milton and Shakespeare. And as a last resort, he seeks solace in *Carpe Diem*.

To conclude, Keats is not a philosopher. He does not intend to establish a prescribed, orderly system of philosophy. He is a poet, a man of emotions rather than mind. He has a very volatile nature and as a result, he conflicts with himself quite often. Nor does he care about being congruous all the time.

He is a man of his time. He lived in a period when a more than necessary importance was attached to scientific thinking and all sorts of spiritual tendencies, including religion, were denounced. And his tragedy was that he sought answers to questions only religions can answer. His quest was a meaningful one; far from the daily concerns of multitudes. He had a beautiful soul which could not accept annihilation. He

was a rare bird with colorful feathers; he sang melancholic tunes for a while and then flew away.

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² <http://englishhistory.net/keats/life.html>, 15.05.2011 tarihi için

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elgin_Marbles, 04.04.2011 tarihi için

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He was born in Ağrı on 1 October 1971. He graduated from İstanbul University , Department of English Language and Literature in 1998. Currently, he is working as a lecturer at Tunceli University. He is married with two children. His fields of interest are English literature in Middle Ages and literary theory.