

## Negative Capability: Theory and Practice in the Poetry of John Keats

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### المقدرة السلبية في شعر جون كيتس

#### الخلاصة

هنالك العديد من النظريات الفلسفية المهمة التي اثرت بالفنون والعلوم الانسانية الاوربية الحديثة. ومن اهم هذه النظريات واكثرها جدلية هي "المقدرة السلبية" للشاعر البريطاني جون كيتس (1795-1821). حيث اهتم هذا الشاعر الشاب في الشعر من حيث الشكل والاسلوب والتكوين. ووجد ان من اهم صفات الشاعر هي تحليله بالمقدرة السلبية التي اتسم بها الكاتب ولیم شكسبير واكسبت اعماله ذلك السمو والخلود. حيث ان المقدرة السلبية هي قدرة الشاعر على تكريس ما لديه من فراغ ذهني لخدمة خيالاته الشعرية، فيكون بذلك نتاجه الادبي تجسيداً لأحاسيسه، غير متأثراً بمشاغل ومتاعب الحياة اليومية التي تشغل الجزء الآخر للعقل "المقدرة الايجابية". تناول هذا البحث المقدرة السلبية من حيث المعنى الحرفي والادبي. كذلك هنالك توضيح للأصول التي اعتمدها كيتس في بنائها وكيف طبقها في قصائده.

As indicated by the title, this research deals with the Negative capability, the most argumentative theory of the young romantic poet, John Keats (1795-1821) whose status in the modern age seems to be much higher than that of his own time.<sup>1</sup> This study sheds light on the literal and the literary meaning of the term, its relation to drama, and implication in poetry with reference to some of Keats's famous odes.

Like most of the romantic poets, Keats is highly concerned with the idea of form and style besides the sublime role of imagination in forming poetry. His experience in life and his poetic gift are the most important factors that shaped his views and tendencies and poetry. His experience came from his wide readings of art and literature plus his literary associations with men of letters like Hazlitt, Brown, Dilke Leigh Hunt, Benjamin Robert Haydon, Benjamin Bailey and others. The combination of his taste in arts and his knowledge of history opened new world in front of the young romantic poet.<sup>2</sup>

Keats first coined the term "Negative Capability" in his discussion of the qualities of "Man of Achievement" in one of his letters to his brothers George and Thomas Keats dated in 22nd December 1817. In that very letter Keats speaks of

...several things dove-tailed in my mind, and at once it struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously - I mean Negative Capability.<sup>3</sup>

First of all, the literal meaning of the term will be explored because the term negative capability seems to be an odd paradox for many people. It is like saying active passiveness or motion without movement. This vagueness may well be resolved when explaining the intended literal meaning of the compound words Negative and capability.

In the western civilization, the word "negative" has many connotations; it may refer to rejection, refusal, nothingness, or disagreement. However, Keats used the word to signify nothingness or free of something; mainly troubles and worries. On the other hand, the word "capability" has a Greek origin "capacious" which means able to hold much; roomy, or spacious.<sup>4</sup> Thus, capability is related to "capacity" as well as "ability" used together to refer to the largest space that can be held and developed by a container for a particular purpose. Brought together, Negative Capability refers to the space in one's mind which is free from life's troubles, and can be used and developed for certain purposes.

As a literary concept, Negative Capability, Keats explained, is the state when man is "capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after facts and reason."<sup>5</sup> This state, according to Keats, must be the main trait of poets to make good poetry. Hence, the negative space of the poet's mind, which is free from the troubles, conflicts and uncertainties of real life, acts as a container to the emotions and imagination which are symbolized by an object.

However, the negative capability letter is described as "the most puzzling of Keats letters,"<sup>6</sup> at the beginning of which he referred to "several things dove-tailed."<sup>7</sup> One may ask what the things which dovetailed in the poets mind are? And, what is the relation between them and the negative capability? Answering these question may help to explain the literary meaning of the theory. It seems that there are certain issues that had paved the way to Keats's doctrine; they rather led him to come out with his doctrine. They come to Keats's mind at once and struck him, as he had stated in the beginning of that very letter. Three things may be part of that dove-tail. First, his interest in drama, especially Shakespearean plays acted by Edmund Kean; second, the lack of knowledge or half knowledge and finally, the poet's identity.

As a poetic theory, negative capability had its seeds in theater. It is worthwhile that Keats relation with men of letters had affected his poetic ideals. His interest in theater owed much to Charles Brown, first met Keats in 1814. He had lent his silver ticket to Keats to freely enter the Drury Lane for famous performances.<sup>8</sup> Noteworthy, Shakespeare played an immediate impact on Keats's poetic tendencies. Besides possessing negative capability, Keats considered Shakespeare as the "miserable and mighty Poet of human Heart."<sup>9</sup> Hence, Keats had attended most of the performances of Shakespearian dramas played by the representative of the English stage of romanticism, Edmund Kean (1787-1833). This very actor has played an immediate inspiration to Keats's doctrine of negative capability.

Kean's acting of famous characters like Shylock, Hamlet, Macbeth, and Richard III not only appealed to Keats but also shed light on certain basic ideas related to arts. William C. Hazlitt (1778-1830), the famous critic and essayist was the first to recognize Kean's gift. In one of his reviews, Hazlitt commented on the defects and virtues of Kean's acting. However, Keats found no defects in Kean's acting. Thus, he wrote a review on Kean as a Shakespearian actor in 1817.

What is Particularly interesting, in that very review, is Keats's reference to Kean's interest in small details or "immortal scraps," and the "indescribable gusto" in his voice.<sup>10</sup> Keats has borrowed the word "gusto" from Hazlitt, his literary guide, whose writings have "stimulated new ideas" in Keats and "developed the existing" ones.<sup>11</sup>

Hazlitt's has used the word in his essay on art and painting under the title "On Gusto." Originally, Hazlitt used the word to refer to the "power or passion defining any object" in art.<sup>12</sup> In other words, gusto, to Hazlitt, refers to the feeling that an object is able to arise in the recipient's mind. Accordingly, Titian's paintings have a great deal of gusto for "Not only do his heads seem to think -- his bodies seem to feel..... It seems sensitive and alive all over."<sup>13</sup>

Keats, however, used the word in rather different sense. He used the word to mean intensity which "supersedes older term like 'nature,' and 'universality' as a first order criterion for poetic development."<sup>14</sup> Keats used it to refer to ability of making things seem real and alive. A quality that seems to be basic in all arts including drama as he has stated in the beginning of the negative capability letter: "The excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all 'disagreeable' evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth."<sup>15</sup> Drama, then, was one of the most important stimulus to Keats theory.

The other quality is related to style which Keats discovered in Kean's performances; namely, his ability to "deliver himself up to the instant feelings, without a shadow of thought about anything else."<sup>16</sup> This is directly linked to negative capability; it represents one of the tools of the theory. By the deliverance to "instant feelings" Keats meant the artist's ability to give up his identity, personal worries and uncertainties to melt in his artistic work in which all "disagreeable" will vanish. This ability of neglecting the actor's personal life or emptying himself of individuality for the sake of the artistic work appealed to Keats and represents one of the important keys of the state of negative capability.

To Keats, men of genius do not have any determined individuality; a condition that embodies his theory of chameleon poet. In a letter to Richard Woodhouse in 1818, Keats writes

As to the poetical Character itself (I mean that sort of which, if I am any thing, I am a Member; that sort distinguished from the Wordsworthian or egotistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone) it is not itself -it has no self - it is every thing and nothing-it has no character-it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated...What shocks the virtuous philosopher, delights the camelion poet. It does no harm from relish of the dark side of things any more than from its taste for the bright one because they both end in speculation. A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence; because he has no identity. He is continually infor(ming) and filling other Body.<sup>17</sup>[sic]

This power enables the poet to imaginatively identify himself with the object he is dealing with. Beauty and truth is the result of this identification. Keats himself enjoyed this power. Severn and Haydon were the first to notice Keats's ability to enter into the identity of things. The latter stated that "the humming of the bee, the sight of a flower, the glitter of the sun, seemed to make his nature trembling."<sup>18</sup> Hence, the poet's imagination must be open and free to all suggestions beyond his knowledge to enable him to get outside his perception and discover the truth and enjoy

the beauty of existence. This is exactly what Keats called for, in his theory, and did apply in his "Ode to the Nightingale" and "Ode on the Grecian Urn."

Some critics consider these two odes, both written in 1819, as the most important of Keats's whole work. Robert Gittings says that the "130 lines" of the odes give a "good idea of Keats's characteristic poetic style."<sup>19</sup> In "Ode to a Nightingale," Keats attempts to enter into the uncertainties of the nightingale's world and held a comparison between the transience nature of human life and the immortality of the nightingale. This experience is supported by a metaphorical description of losing of the self to be imaginatively united with the bird. When the poet-speaker first heard the singing of the bird at night, he admits that:

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:  
(St.1, ll.1-4)<sup>20</sup>

The ach that the poet feels is not a physical one it is rather the soul desire to experience the beauty of nature which the bird is part of; hence, "It's not through envy of thy happy lot,/But being too happy in thine happiness"(ll.5-6) . This desire, as it were, makes the speaker indulged in the nightingale's singing. Albert Guerard, Jr. argues that the poem contains a longing for "a free reverie of any kind."<sup>21</sup> Hence, he feels as if he has had a hemlock that gets him passive, his senses numbed and he leaves "the world unseen./ And with thee fade away into the forest dim"(ll.20-21). At this point, the speaker, metaphorically, leaves the real world under the spell of the bird's singing in "some melodious plot / Of beechen green,"(ll. 8-9) a setting that represents a familiar fresh ground for meditation of most of the romantic poets, for the sake of a profound thinking.

The narrator explains that the impact of the bird's singing is like that of wine; both of them are associated with songs, dance and happiness. Then, the speaker's desire to experience the nightingale's "happy lot" is linked to his desire for a "draught of vintage!"(L.11) that has been "Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth."(L.12) in this sense, the bird is like the wine in resisting the pressure of time or long age and belonging for organic nature. Furthermore, the poet adds one more quality of wine that may represent the meaning of that bird's singing to him by comparing wine to the waters of Hippocrene, the fountain of poetic inspiration:

O, for a beaker full of the warm South,  
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,  
Tasting of Flora and the country green,  
Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!  
.....,  
.....;  
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,  
And with thee fade away into the forest dim:  
(St. 2, ll.15-22)

However, the poet, at the end, makes his mind to choose the "viewless wings of Poesy"(l.33) instead of wine; for it helps him to:

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;  
(St.2, ll.21-26)

The ode has been framed by association of words; the words "weariness" and "fret" are connected with the idea of man's insight: "Where but to think is to be full of sorrow." Thinking of the troubles of life represents an obstacle to enjoy the beauty and the truth of the world. This is a logical explanation for the "happy lot" that the nightingale enjoys; the source of the bird's mirth is that she "hast never known" people's worries of time and death.

It is through negative capability power that the poet gets the ability to dissolve with the bird's world rather than escaping to it. He is united with the bird, flying with her in that night; and in a bird's-eye perspective, the narrator says that he

...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;  
(St.4, ll.41-6)

Exploring and enjoying the bird's world, the speaker has discovered an important fact. He discovered that what people are worried of, i.e., old age, fading beauty, thinking of death, (ll.25-6) must not be looked at as a problem; it is rather a sign of a new beginning:

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.  
(ll.41-50)

Death, the speaker suggested, is an important part of the cycle of life. In other words, without death there would be no new beginning. Believing in that truth may release man from his worries concerning aging and death. This gets the poet to declare that he is "half in love with easeful Death;" and, further, he

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!  
 (St.5, ll. 53-58)

The immortality of the nightingale is one of the discoveries of the narrator who addresses the bird, saying that "Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!" (l.61). However, this immortality is not a physical one; because nightingale physical existence is part of nature so it is subject to the cycle of life and death. The immortality the poet hints at comes from the bird's inability to think; hence, she is free from the worries of man mentioned in stanza three (ll.23-30); and from the immortality of the song which

.....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  
 (St.7; ll.63-70)

It obvious then that Keats relies heavily on the process of association on the progression of the ode; a fact which has been figured out by Guerard who states that "The form of the poem is that of progression by association, so that the movement of feeling is at the mercy of words evoked by chance, such words as *fade* and *forlorn*, the very words that, like a bell, toll the dreamer back to his sole self."<sup>22</sup> Hence, the word "forlorn" in "faery lands forlorn." (l.70), meaning deserted, reminds the speaker of another connotation of the word; forlorn may also mean sadness, hopelessness a forsaken.

In its last connotation, the word "forlorn" is compared to a "bell" that "toll" in the speaker's mind:" Forlorn! the very word is like a bell/To toll me back from thee to my sole self!" (ll.71-72) This marks the point of transition from the nightingale world to the poet's real world of worries and troubles. Besides, it is the turning point in the process of negative capability, where the poet gets back his active senses after the imaginative out of body experience he enjoyed when he heard the voice of the nightingale. Then, the ode turns from the happy tone to a plaintive one at the moment of the awaking of the poet's mind when the bird flies off and thus the identification ends. The poet now is wondering "Was it a vision, or a waking dream?/ Fled is that music:--Do I wake or sleep?" (ll.79-80). "Ode to a Nightingale" represents Keats's spontaneous union with the nightingale that has a living identity whereas the basic symbol of Keats's emotion in "Ode on Grecian Urn" is a physical one.<sup>23</sup>

However, the latter ode shows Keats's attempt to get into the static life represented in the pictures engraved on the urn, which has passed many centuries to reach the time of the observer. The ode, as a matter of fact, is framed by the doctrine of negative capability in many senses. First, in the negative capability letter, there is a reference to the visual arts, to which the urn belongs. Secondly, the urn is a work of art that posses a great gusto; it has a power that may affect the

viewer and arise certain feelings in him. Thirdly, there are many "uncertainties, mysteries, doubts" around the figures on the urn that urged the poet to find balance of all the "disagreeables" raised in his mind. Finally, the use of the phrase "beauty and truth," which is mentioned in the letter, in the final stanza of the ode.

It is worthwhile that Keats is highly interested in visual arts. Ian Jack states that "Keats's interest in painting and sculpture sharpened his own powers of observation and helped him to maintain that balance between the introvert and extrovert which is triumphantly evident in his mature poetry."<sup>24</sup> Painting from literary sources was a common fashion at that time. Keats, in this sense, was with the main current, for he knows

...how to paint a picture of his own. By allowing his imagination to work in the way in which a painter works, he could produce a passage of which we cannot say whether it is based on a particular work of art or not"<sup>25</sup>

Art, to Keats, is the link between real world and imagination; or rather it is the only possible gate to get outside the boundaries of the self into infinite world of imagination. Hence, the idea of attaining eternity through art is displayed in "Ode on a Grecian Urn" by the use of a Grecian urn as a pivot symbol. Earl Wasserman argues that the main subject of the ode is "the human and the mutable on one hand, and the immortal and essential on the other hand; and what it states has something to do with an opposition and a fusion of these two states."<sup>26</sup> Imaginations, fantasy, beside the poet's ability to enter into the essence of other entities are the main tools to link the abstract Grecian world depicted on the urn to the tangible "real" world. It is the uncertainties in the poet's mind that stimulates his imagination to explore that very vase, which is physically related to his transient life yet it is immortal.

Looking into the pictures painted on the urn, Keats's worries seem to be vanished. The speaker (the poet himself) starts to address the urn by applying apostrophe:

unravish'd bride of quietness,  
 r-child of silence and slow time,  
 orian, who canst thus express  
 tale more sweetly than our rhyme

Here, the poet refers to an (St.1, ll.1-4) important issue, i.e., art and time in contrast to real mortal life. The urn, a work of art, is described as the "unravished bride of quietness,"(L.1) and "the child of silence,"(L.2) for being not affected by the passing time. Besides, it is described as a historian who tells a story from the past ages. This idea corresponds with the view of the Greek poet Simonides of Ceos (556 BC-468 BC) that a picture is silent poetry, and poetry is a painting with the gift of speech.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the relation between Poetry and Visual Arts is one of the issues discussed in "Ode on Grecian Urn."

The poet goes further to wonder about the dynamic life depicted on the frozen urn:

fring'd legend haunts about thy shape  
 or mortals, or of both,

or the dales of Arcady?  
 or gods are these? What maidens loth?  
 pursuit? What struggle to escape?  
 s and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?  
 (ll.5-10)

In these lines, the poet oxymoron, bringing mortal with the uses together the immortal in an attempt to move from the observer position to a real participant. The transition from an observer to a participant is the key of penetrating into the uncertainties and ambiguities of the picture on the urn. Besides, by using oxymoron the poet brings the mortal and the immortal together; so, we have the pairs: "deities" with "mortals"; "Tempe," an earthly region, with "Arcady, a heavenly earth;" and finally, "men" with "gods." Subsequently, the focus is moved from the urn, as a work of art existing in the temporal world, to the life depicted on it and fringed with leaves. At this point, the poet seems to start losing his identity to join the Grecian world on the urn. The word "ecstasy" is the key of this transition. It is the opposite of fret, fever and worries of real world referred to in the "Ode to a Nightingale": "...pouring forth thy soul abroad/ In such an ecstasy!" (ll.57-8); hence, it is a sign of the poet's joint with the Grecian life.

In his imaginative journey, the poet presents three main images from the Grecian life which are taken to be immortal. They are: music "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard/ Are sweeter;" (ll.11-12); it is immortal because it plays to "the spirit ditties of no tone" instead of the "sensual ear" (ll.31,14). The second immortalized image is nature which is represented by the trees which never "be bare;" and finally, the image of love represented by the "Bold Lover" who will be always happy, as the speaker tells him "Forever wilt thou love, and she be fair!" (l.20) Art, then, immortalizes that suspended moment of the Grecian world.

Music, nature, and love are further expatiated in the third stanza. Here, the poet-speaker seems to be much more penetrated into the life carved on the urn. The static pictures of the first stanza turned to a dynamic life with the observer to a participant. Grecian life seems to be delightful, everything seem to be happy. The poet addresses the images in the perspective saying:

happy boughs! that cannot shed  
 s, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;  
 y melodist, unwearied,  
 ping songs for ever new;  
 y love! more happy, happy love!  
 arm and still to be enjoy'd,  
 (ll.21-6)

The sense of happiness the speaker feels is justified by the idea of the preservation from time and mutability. The trees seem to be happy as the leaves will never fall. The singer and the lover will keep their way in youth and enjoyment. The word "happy" is significant here. From one side it stands in contrast with troubles of real life. It is an imaginative world like that of the nightingale, which is, free from troubles and worries and eternal. In the other side, the word "happy" is attributed to an inanimate things; hence, pathetic fallacy is applied to show the way nature, love, and music seem to the poet. It is clear, then, that the poet is a real participant as he shares happiness with the immortalized Grecian world. This kind of eternity is contrasted to the real life



where suffering and old age are inevitable. Man, in the real world, is a subject to "The burning forehead, and a parching tongue." (l.30)

The intensity of the poet's description of the urn is the natural outcome of the employment of negative capability. The poet loses his own identity and unites with the people depicted on urn. He is caught with the Grecian world; and consequently he is able to explore its uncertainties and ambiguities, imagination is at its heights. He goes beyond the paintings to explore the community that the individuals belong to. Another scene is introduced in stanza four. The scene is that of a mysterious sacrifice of a heifer. The poet wonders:

een altar, O mysterious priest,  
 u that heifer lowing at the skies,  
 · silken flanks with garlands drest?  
 town by river or sea shore,  
 ain-built with peaceful citadel,

The first question is about  
 the priest; but the second  
 questions are different.

l of this folk, this pious morn?  
 (St.5;ll.51-7)

the identity of  
 and third  
 They are about

the direction that the folk are coming from and where they are going to.<sup>28</sup> the poet, as a matter of fact, conjures up an empty deserted streets of little town that the "folk" come from. Thus, the places are unknown as they are not included in the pictures, which are depicted on the urn.

The place suspended on the urn is between heaven and earth. The folks make their way from real town to "a green altar" in heaven. So, there is a fusion between the mortal and the immortal. However, there is no obvious oxymoron between the two worlds like that of the first stanza. In his comment on this issue, Wasserman assumes that:

The altar and town are ...dimensional points as irrelevant to heaven's bourne as they are absent from the frieze. The procession itself is frozen in space and time on the urn: it can never arrive at altar; it can never return to the town. It poised between heaven and earth, and is the 'element filling the space between.'<sup>29</sup>

The poet imagines the town to be desolate, for he thinks that all people are in the ceremony. The poet postulates that the streets of that town "Will silent be; and no soul to tell" (l. 39). As a matter of fact, silence predominates the poem from the very beginning. It works, Wasserman said, as a "thread" to integrate the parts of the poem.<sup>30</sup> Besides, the words: "quietness," "silence," "ditties of no tone," unheard melodies," "soft pipes," "silence," and "silent form" are the signs of leaving the real world of the speaker to the infinite world of imagination. Analogically, the silence of pictures on the urn is linked to the poet's state of mind as he left the world of troubles behind to enjoy the Grecian world.<sup>31</sup>

In the final stanza, the poet seems to be more retreated. It is the real point of detachment of the poet and the Grecian world. His empathetic progress seems to reach an end and he, finally, returns to his real world. Thus, he addresses the urn from outside. The urn, the poet said, is "an Attic shape" that has an instinct power which can "tease us out of thought/ As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!" (ll.34-5). The phrase "tease us" is significant here. Tease has the sense that the gusto of

the Grecian urn has the power to get the observer out of his identity and urge him to participate in Grecian life and explore its mysteries. Furthermore, the use of the pronoun "us" rather than "me" is interesting also; it emphasizes that the urn has an effect on everyone watching it not only the poet.

The imaginative journey which powered by the negative capability doctrine ended with the poet's realization of what he thinks the most important fact in the world:

age shall this generation waste,  
remain, in midst of other woe  
a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,  
truth, truth beauty,"—that is all  
n earth, and all ye need to know.  
(St.5, ll.46-50)

The urn is immune to time; hence, it is immortalized by the power of art. Furthermore, exploring the urn, the poet learned that beauty and truth are the same in the sense that intense feeling of human inner life of what is outside produces reality covered by beauty. Accordingly, the poet's harmony with the Grecian world on the urn and the nightingale is the result of the unification of beauty and truth. Hence, the essence of beauty is truth and vice versa. In conclusion, Keats reaches to the essence of the urn and the nightingale's life which are beautiful, true and eternal by the employment of negative capability, which he considered to be the 'prime essential'<sup>32</sup> of a poet.

Hence, negative capability is a state of concentration. It is far from being a disperse state, in the sense that disperse is a sort of reaction toward ideas or objects; it lacks the intensity that negative capability state may offer to men of genius. To reach negative capability, the poet must go through three steps, i.e., annihilating his identity, unified with the object; hence, getting the ability to explore the eternal beauty and truth implied in them. However, many writers claimed that they have that sort of ability; like Coleridge, Byron, Browning, T.S. Eliot and the novelist Virginia Woolfe.

In one of his letters in 1819, Coleridge referred to a kind of "transfusion and transmission of my consciousness to identify myself with the object."<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, in 1822, Byron had claimed that he embodies himself "with the character" while he is drawing it "but not a moment after the pen from off the paper."<sup>33</sup> Apart from Keats's contemporaries, T. S. Eliot, the modern critic and poet, writes "the progress of the artist is a continual self sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality."<sup>34</sup>

To sum up, negative capability is such important theory originated by John Keats who meant it to be a fundamental quality of poets; yet, it has been applied in many fields of knowledge in modern age; like philosophy, psychology, and politics.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>In fact, Keats has anticipated this fact in one of his letters to George and Georgiana Keats in October 1818. In that very letter Keats stated "I think I shall be among the English poets after my

death." See Maurice Buxton Forman ed., *The Letters of John Keats* (London: oxford university press, 1948), 220.

Note: all the subsequent reference to this book will be referred to as *The Letters* followed by the page number(s).

2 Robert Gittings, *John Keats* (London: Heinemann, 1970), 173.

3 *The Letters*, 71.

4 *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, edited by Sally Wehmeier and others (London: Oxford University Press, 2005), see under "negative" and "capability."

5 *The Letters*, 71.

6 W.J. Bate, *John Keats* (Cambridge: Harvard university press, 1962), 236-7.

7 *The Letters*, 70.

8 Gittings, *John Keats*, 171.

9 From a letter to Miss Jeffrey, 9th June 1819. *The Letters*, 346. For more information about Shakespeare impact on Keats, please see Caroline F.E. Spurgeon, *Keats's Shakespeare: A Descriptive Study Based On New Material*. London: Oxford University Press, 1929).

10 Susan J. Wolfson ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Keats* (London: Cambridge university press, 2001), 157. Actually, Keats wrote this review on 19 or 20 December, 1817, and it was published in the *Champion*, on 21 December. Hence, it is written just few days before the negative capability letter.

11 Andrew Motion, *Keats* (USA: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 333.

12 John Cook ed., *William Hazlitt: Selected Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), PP. 266-70. Hazlitt's "On Gusto" was first published in *The Examiner*, May 26th, 1816.

13 *Ibid*, 67.

14 M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York, oxford university press, 1971), 136.

15 *The Letters*, 71.

16 Quate in Gittings, *John Keats*, 174.

17 *The Letters*, 226-7.

18 Gittings, *John Keats*, 143.

19Robert Gittings, John Keats: The Living Year (London: HEINEMANN,1978), 131.

20The text of the two odes under discussion are taken from Maurice Buxton Forman ed., The Poetical Works of John Keats (London: Oxford University Press,1950). "Ode to a Nightingale,"pp.230-233; And Ode on a Grecian Urn,"pp.233-35.

21Albert Guerards, "Prometheus and the Aeolia Lyre," Yale Review, XXXIII (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944),495.

22Ibid.

23David Perkins, "The Ode to a Nightingale" in Walter Jackson Bate, Keats: A Collection of Critical Essays (United States of America: Printice-Hall,Inc.,1964),103-112.

24 Ian Jack, Keats and the mirror of arts (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1967), 140.

25 Ibid, 141.

26Earl Wasserman, "The Ode On A Grecian Urn" in Walter Jackson Bate, Keats: A Collection of Critical Essays (United States of America: Printice-Hall, Inc., 1964), 113-141. Hereafter referred to as Wasserman followed by page number.

27Ian Jack, 214.

28Wesserman, 132.

29Ibid.

30Ibid, 134.

31K. Muir, "The meaning of Hyperion" in K. Muir (ed.), John Keats: A reassessment, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1958),107.

32 John S. Hill, Imagination in Coleridge (London: MacMillan press, 1978),188. This letter was written November 1819to Peter Morris the pseudoname for John Gibson.

33R. G. Howarth ed. The Letters of Lord Byron (London: dent&sons LTD, 1962), 323. Byron had written this in a letter to Thomas Moore in the 4th march.

34T. S. Eliot," Tradition and the Individual Talent" in T. S. Eliot, The sacred wood: Essays on poetry and criticism(London: Methuen &CO LTD, 1960),53 .

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