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"Negative capability" as a "gift for invention"
On the positive contradictions of John Keats's poetic theory

Caroline Bertonèche
Université de Grenoble III

Where is the Poet? Show him! show him!
Muses nine, that I may know him! (l.1-2).[1]

I. Negative identity: the "unpoetical poet" (Keats and Shakespeare)

In his lengthy and chatty letters, most unlikely place, it would seem, for Keats's theoretical musings – Keats being the only Romantic, with Jane Austen maybe, to use the epistolary mode as a means for philosophical digressions, in a very eighteenth-century-like manner –, the 'camelion poet' defines his poetic self as he would the art of poetry in general, not by what it is but by what it is not:

> As to the poetical Character itself (…) 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—It has as much delight in conceiving a Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher, delights the camelion Poet. It does no harm from its 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 any thing in existence; because he has no Identity—he is continually in for—and filling some other Body—The Sun, the Moon, the Sea, and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute—the poet has none; no identity—he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's Creatures.[2]

Wishing to be everywhere and nowhere at the same time while fully aware of his own limitations, the 'unpoetical poet' – and there lies our first positive contradiction

– depicts his non-identity or rather his meta-identity as the combination of mixed personalities and mixed genders, as well as mixed forms and genres, of course, where theory meets letter-writing and poetry feeds on medicine. Constantly "filling some other Body" – an Iago and an Imogen, the Sun or the Moon, a man or a woman –, the Keatsian poet, proudly flaunting his androgynous ubiquity, dresses the part of his moral equivocations and intellectual transgressions. In desperate need of outliving the short life of his transient being, he is both the main protagonist of an art "writ in water", to quote Keats's meta-theatrical epitaph, and "a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more (V, 5, 24-25)"[3]. For Keats indeed, poetry can only be born within the walls of an (amphi)theatre where scientific exactitude or anatomical visions are not incompatible with his very own midsummer day-dream, a world of fact and fusion re-enacting the staged reverie of genuinely poetical creatures: "Cowden Clarke once inquired how far Keats liked his studies at the hospital.(…) 'The other day, for instance, during the lecture [of anatomy], there came a sunbeam into the room, and with it a whole troop of creatures floating in the ray, and I [Keats] was off with them to Oberon and fairyland'"[4]. After being dramatically born on medical "fairyland", in the hands of a coy surgeon[5] or an eccentric apothecary (and we can easily imagine Keats playing that part to perfection rather than that of the effeminate, emasculated Romeo, like the critics would more often have it!), poetry also dies with consumptive Keats's "little fairy lamplighter" and, as previously quoted, with his epitaphic return to the origins of theatrical mutability. The framed discourse of Romantic theory is thus reinvented by drawing on the archetypes of Shakespearian drama with its masks, disguises, silhouettes, shams and potions of all sorts; in other words, when the character-actor poet, heir to Macbeth and Prospero, masters in the art of poetic deception or dereliction, gets actively caught up in his own creative game, in line with what James P. Driscoll calls the "Shakespearian metastance": "The spirit of the archetypal poet, like that of the archetypal magician and seer, gains its freedom once he reaches a metastance to his own identity—if you will a meta-identity. As Keats puts it, the ideal poet is a creator of identities who himself has no identity. His metastance makes him an open window to both soul and cosmos"[6]. If then poetry is not be

trusted and the mortal poet has "no self", then what are we left with? The universal authority of the poetic subject, says Keats, which lives on when the art's unselfish nobility, its "unobtrusive" greatness, is to easily dissolve and be erased by the genius of its substance: "Poetry should be great & unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle or amaze it with itself but with its subject"[7]. Not only is there a theoretical imperative for the non-existent writer, present *in absentia*, to merge with the massive cluster of exterior influences which emanate from the "most poetical of all God's creatures", but a moral imperative at that to be voluntarily "in the Mist", first, in the "Mystery" thereafter: "We see not the balance of good and evil. We are in the Mist. We are now in that state—We feel the 'burden of the Mystery'. To this Point has Wordsworth come, as far as I can conceive when he wrote 'Tintern Abbey' and it seems to me that his Genius is explorative of those dark Passages"[8]. With a burdened, dark and misty Wordsworth, less focused on the size of his "egotistical sublime", Keats is thus finally on board. In that state only, is the English poet, although partially freed from canonical tradition, now meant to feel the full weight of that "strange influence"[9] which he has himself pieced back together. And in that state only, can he let himself be transported to this great Nietszchean Beyond where good intention comes with its share of bad influence, where there is Truth in contradiction and where negative identity gives way to "negative capability":

> I had not a dispute but a disquisition with Dilke, on various subjects; several things dovetailed in my mind, & at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason.[10]

The positive outcome of this "Penetralium of mystery" – discarded by a weaker Coleridge, who, unlike Shakespeare, Keats adds, proved himself "incapable of remaining content with half knowledge"[11] – is that the young poet, just arrogant and humble enough, can now pride himself in not knowing much more than his predecessors; author of an art with no name, father of the unknown and mother of all its future inventions. By turning inexperience into irony, he finds himself distanced from his own cosmic puns, where imitation is a token of invention and there is some

kind of coherence in that irrational playfulness, rivalling Shakespeare and Sydney, joking with Spenser and paraphrasing Milton. In the theoretical making, this original, pre-constructed type of meta-poetry, the "Keatsian", Helen Vendler calls it, is invented by a poet, whom we now know to be a bit of provocative hybrid. Yet, at the end of his "interminable wanderings"[12], his purpose is met when past theory is intentionally dematerialised and then skilfully reshaped; one single founding principle forever re-manipulated – the *Odes* are living proof of it all! – and the "solution"[13] to the Romantic poet's inferiority complex and identity crisis.

II. The *Keatsian*: a "Test of Invention" (Keats and Sydney)

A gifted imitator, with a particular talent for manipulating his sources, Keats made the conscious choice of bringing to his precursors' works as well as to a somewhat expected propensity for poetic *mimesis*, the sweetness and ardour of his extravagant verse ("extravagant" being here used in the etymological sense of the word, "to wander off, to go beyond one's own personal limits"). And because Keats was a poet who, more often than not, would take the road less travelled by, there were expectations, notes the *Edinburgh Review*, in a talent that was not yet effective but promising:

> We had never happened to see either of these volumes till very lately—and have been exceedingly struck with the genius they display, and the spirit of poetry which breathes through all their extravagance. That imitation of our older writers, and especially of our older dramatists, to which we cannot help flattering ourselves that we have somewhat contributed, has brought on, as it were, a second spring in our poetry;—and few of its blossoms are either more profuse of sweetness or richer in promise, than this which is now before us.[14]

In 1817, the criticism of Keats's early poems in *The Champion*[15] supports the idea that it is his empathy with the liberating virtues of nature which has provided the poet with sufficient inspiration to distance himself from the first stage of imitation. We, one the other hand, prefer another explanation, based on the pre-eminence of his "gift for invention"[16]. This spark of a coveted inventiveness, Keats experiences it as the leading thread, his ideal landmark in space and point of reference in time or what he refers to, in his letters, as the "Polar Star of Poetry"[17]. Following the stellar

footsteps of Sir Philip Sydney whose defence of poetry consists in a brilliant sketch of influence as an emerging concept amongst the Renaissance poets[18], Keats pays tribute, a few centuries later, to Sydney's definition of a "poetics of intentionality" or deliberate act of a double invention: "Only the poet, disdaining to be tied to any such subjection [to nature], lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature (…) so as he goeth hand in hand with nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit"[19]. The intentional vein is, first and foremost, that of the author, "within the zodiac of his own wit", writes Sydney, before being that of the poetical work but they do have both in common that same "vigour of invention" which they have at heart to put forward. To the Greek art (*poiein*) of making or shaping poetry, Sydney's objective is to make it better by unmaking and remaking the elements of nature following a new dynamic, which Keats almost directly inherits, extending metaphysical curiosity to its load of supernatural projections. From all this, a series of visionary artistic movements emerge which are not only just inventive, but which also bear the hope of reacting intelligently to the sources they were born out of. It therefore allows the intention of the poet to create the poem, of course, but also to consolidate itself along the way and to shine through as it unravels. We are thus not surprised that someone like Reynolds, close friend and collaborator of Keats when the whole *Isabella; or the Pot of Basil* project started but who had to suddenly withdraw after having first read Keats's more modern and bloodier version of Boccacio's tale, would describe his admission of powerlessness in the writing process as a ritual of passage from one intention to another: "I give over all intention and you ought to be alone. I can never write anything now—my mind is taken the other way"[20]. And, for an atypical Keats who has shown not so serious efforts in wanting to, theoretically and practically, part with some of the more classical Romantic themes of the time, it is yet this same distinctive mark of intention which goes hand in hand with an overall selective vision of bardic excellence; some sort of subjective mode of creaming off – the culinary metaphor is certainly not random here – the best from the less worthy of the ancient poets: "How many bards

gild the lapses of time/A few of them have ever been the food/Of my delighted fancy (…) (l.1-3)"[21]. If Keats acknowledges the whole host of star poets who have reached fame, written and prospered before him, he nevertheless only has a few of them, carefully hand-picked, play an important part; thereby reaffirming his refusal to have others dictate his choices, or even worse, produce an art subjected to a unique set of authorial figures or any so-called higher forms of poetic requirements. When, in his *Don Juan*, for example, Byron both biblically commands and humorously calls upon his fellow poets for their implicit faith in the sacred trinity of Augustinian verse – "Thou shalt believe in Milton, Dryden, Pope" (I, 205)[22] – Keats refuses to obey. Hostile to such a foolish inclination for a "mask of Poesy" (the more complex case of Milton excluded) which has obviously been contaminated by what he can only perceive as the French bad taste of the time, Keats does not lack in audacity when he responds with a libellous *Sleep and Poetry*:

> Easy was the task:
> A thousand handicraftsmen wore the mask
> Of Poesy. Ill-fated, impious race!
> That blasphemed the bright Lyrist to his face,
> And did not know it,— no, they went about,
> Holding a poor, decrepit standard out
> Mark'd with most flimsy mottos, and in large
> The name of one Boileau ! (l.199-206).[23]

And for the young Romantic who has just awakened to this other world where art is now caught in between poetic indolence and non-poetic lucidity – and there lies our second positive contradiction –, the act of inventive selection, when it comes to precursors and past sources, stems from this very Keatsian conviction that by actively choosing our references, we are ourselves chosen in return; hence the exceptional status the poet gives to his "little clan" of respected authors which welcomes him as he has welcomed them with deference and recognition in a closed circle of crowned heads and resounding voices:

> Or may I woo thee
> In earlier Sicilian? Or thy smiles
> Seek, as they once were sought, in Grecian isles,
> By bards who died content in pleasant sward,
> Leaving great verse unto a little clan?
> O give me their old vigour, and unheard,

Save of the quiet primrose, and the span
Of heaven, and few ears
Rounded by thee, my song should die away,
Content as theirs,
Rich in the simple worship of a day (l.4-14).[24]

Keats is indeed conscious of the fact that while passively enduring undesired influences, he runs the risk of not being able to predict the forms that his own influence will itself take on. A poet who prematurely developed a flair for anticipation, actor and author of his own posthumous myth, convinced, very early on, and with quasi-certainty, that he "sh[ould] be among the English Poets after [his] death"[25], Keats would not have known what to do with an art left entirely to chance and to fate's good will. And, from his first, more or less successful, attempts at poetic imitation, we can see how the projections of this same inventive eye are brought to light. If, for example, Keats lets himself be seduced by some kind of past enchantment in *Imitation of Spenser*, he nevertheless adds to his verse the more modern features of luxury and profusion – which have grown to be Keats's major idiosyncrasies in the rest of his verse – and builds the whole momentum of his poem around a romanticised vision: "For sure so fair a place was never seen,/Of all that ever charm'd romantic eye:/ It seem'd an emerald in the silver sheen/Of the bright waters (…) (l.24-26)"[26]. For Keats's Romantic eye cannot be anything but wide open when the poet ventures to go beyond the visible, past the vale/veil of intelligent reality and its tiny "atoms of perception" and into the "Mist again" of Miltonic abstraction where old poetry spells out its inheritance, puts words into the young poet's mouth and gives birth to its soulful new theories.

III. The "Vale of Theory-Making": the Metaphysics of Poetry (Keats and Milton)

In his now famous letter to George and Georgiana Keats, dated April, 21st 1819, Keats presents the concept of "Soul-making" as follows:

> Call the World if you Please, 'The Vale of Soul-making'. Then you will find out the use of the world (I am speaking now in the highest terms for human nature admitting it to be immortal which I will here take for granted for the purpose of showing a thought which has struck me concerning it). I say "*Soul-making*" Soul as distinguished from an Intelligence—There may be intelligences or sparks of the divinity in

> millions—but they are not Souls till they acquire identities, till each one is personally itself. I[n]telligences are atoms of perception—they know and they see and they are pure, in short, they are God—how then are Souls to be made? How then are these sparks which are God to have an identity given them—so as ever to possess a bliss peculiar to each ones individual existence? How, but by the medium of a world like this? (…) This is effected by three grand materials acting the one upon the other for a series of years—These three Materials are the *Intelligence*—the *human heart* (as distinguished from intelligence or Mind) and the *World* or *Elemental space* suited for the proper action of *Mind and Heart* on each other for the purpose of forming the *Soul* or *Intelligence destined to possess the sense of Identity*.[27]

Keats might as well have written "Call the *word* if you please… then you will find out the use of the *word*" (my emphasis) in his version of poetic genesis, of a Keatsian Logos and "system of Spirit-creation"[28]. For when he writes somewhat religiously about the Book and the School of the Soul, Keats mostly just pretends to theorise the basics of poetry learning, reading and understanding textual heritage: "I will call the *world* a School instituted for the purpose of teaching little children to read—I will call the *human heart* the *horn Book* used in that School—and I will call the *Child able to read, the Soul* made from that *school* and its *hornbook*"[29]; which would explain why Keats's metaphysics of poetic education as well as his conception of a pluralized and personalised world of spiritual "identities" both start with the "cool pleasure in the very sound of vale". Indeed, commenting on the first book of Milton's *Paradise Lost* and most specifically on these four verses, " […] or have ye chosen this place/After the toil of battle to repose/Your wearied virtue, for the ease you find/*To slumber here, as in the vales of Heaven*? (I, 318-21)", Keats writes in his *Marginalia* the following notes: "There is cool pleasure in the very sound of vale. The English word is of the happiest chance. Milton has put vales in heaven and hell with the very utter affection and yearning of a great poet. It is a sort of Delphic Abstraction – a beautiful thing made more beautiful by being reflected and put in a Mist. The next mention of Vale is one of the most pathetic in the whole range of Poetry"[30]. Through the mirror of abstraction, though blurry it might me, Keats finds truth in the Beauty of a happy sound, a "joy forever" in the Englishness of a well-chosen word, that is to say in the linguistic virtues of a "miltonism"; one of those same "miltonisms" which, ironically so, have haunted Wordsworth in *The Prelude*, are omnipresent in Shelley's *Adonais* or

have prevented Keats from finishing *The Fall of Hyperion*. For if Milton – and T.S. Eliot will have seen it better than anyone else – is a "bad influence"[31] in poetry writing, his merging powers of heaven and hell, his Satanic pathos, his mastery of the language or even his delphic authority on intimidated poets are "of the happiest chance" regarding poetic theory. Keats clearly felt it in this undefined vale where artistic identities and rational thought might have a chance to meet in the name of immortal Beauty, while fighting away the curse of a binary opposition and turning it into our third and last positive contradiction. Himself a divided soul yearning to be reunited on the grounds of a lost identity, Keats finds in this "grander system of [personal/poetic] salvation"[32] mixing vague Christian beliefs with literary meta-commentary (Keats annotating Milton) the means of having poetry generate and absorb its theoretical offspring to form, in English at least, an almost perfect anagram (*[p]oetry/t[h]eory*). Cued by a father-poet's inspiring image, Keats tells us, in his own way and in his own words, that we do not need to theorize the origins of poetry. First, because they are steeped in mystery and, for a British Romantic, somewhere hidden in the English mist, which makes them even harder to locate, also because, whether it be at the opening of *Endymion* and its original "thing of beauty" down to the sleepy god's attempt at an apotheosis or when portraying the wrath an awakening giant, Saturn unleashed, or the violent fall of a weak hero, *Hyperion Unbound*, the source of a poem is usually just another poem, one's own or someone else's, a word within the word, and its theoretical mode of justification, to pretend as if there were some greater force at stake behind it all, an overall fuzzy system of creativity lost and inspiration regained.

NOTES

[1] John Keats, "Where's the Poet? Show him! Show him!", in Jack Stillinger, ed., *John Keats: The Complete Poems*, Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1978, 222.
[2] John Keats's letter to Richard Woodhouse, 27 October 1818, in Hyder Edward Rollins, ed., *The Keats Circle : Letters and Papers, and more Letters and Poems of the Keats Circle : 1816-1878*, 2 vols, Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1948, I, 386-87.

[3] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, in Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson & David Scott Kastan, eds., *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*, Walton-on-Thames, Surrey: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1998, 795.
[4] William Michael Rossetti, *Life of John Keats*, London: Walter Scott, 1887, 19-20.
[5] "Keats indeed always denied that he abandoned surgery for the express purpose of taking poetry: he alleged that his motive had been the dread of doing some mischief in his surgical operations. His last operation consisted in opening a temporal artery; he was entirely successful in it, but the success appeared to himself like a miracle, the recurrence of which was not to be reckoned on". See Rossetti, *Life of John Keats*, 19-20.
[6] James P. Driscoll, "The Shakespearian Metastance", in Harold Bloom, ed., *Modern Critical Interpretations: William Shakespeare's The Tempest*, New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988, 85-98 (98).
[7] Keat's letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, 3 February 1818, in Rollins, ed., *Letters of John Keats*, I, 224.
[8] Keats's letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, 3 May 1818, in ibid., I, 281.
[9] " O Poesy! for thee I grasp my pen/That am not yet a glorious denizen/Of thy wide heaven (…) 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 (l.53-55&69-71)". See Keats, *Sleep and Poetry*, in Stillinger, ed., *John Keats: The Complete Poems*, 39.
[10] Letter from Keats to his brothers, George et Tom Keats, 22 December 1817, in Rollins, ed., *The Letters of John Keats*, I, 193.
[11] Ibid, I, 193-94.
[12] "*Endymion. A Poetic Romance. By John Keats. 8 vol. pp.207. London, 1818*", *Edinburgh Review*, 34,67 (1820), 203-13 (203).
[13] Helen Vendler, *The Odes of John Keats*, Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1983, 6.
[14] "*Endymion. A Poetic Romance. By John Keats. 8 vol. pp.207. London, 1818*", *Edinburgh Review*, 34,67 (1820), 203-13 (203).
[15] "Young writers are in general in their early productions imitators or their favourite poet; like young birds that in their first songs, mock the notes of those warblers, they the most, and love the best: but this youthful poet appears to have tuned his voice in solitudes,—to have sung from the pure inspiration of nature". See "*Poems; by John Keats, Price 6£. London. Ollier, Welbeck-Street. 1817*", *The Champion*, 9 March 1817.
[16] "Keats possessed eminently the rare gift of invention—as is proved by the narrative poems he has left behind". See "*Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of John Keats. Edited by R. Monckton Milnes. 2 vols. London : 1848*", *Edinburgh Review*, 90, 82 (1849), 424-30 (425). We could also mention here Walter Jackson Bate's analysis of *Endymion* as a "test of Invention". See Walter Jackson Bate, *John Keats*, Cambridge, MA.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1999, 149-92.
[17] "Besides a long Poem is a test of Invention which I take to be the Polar Star of Poetry, as Fancy is the Sails, and Imagination the Rudder. Did our great Poets ever write short Pieces ? I mean in the shape of Tales—This same invention seems i[n]deed of late Years to have been forgotten as a Poetical excellence". See Keats's letter to Benjamin Bailey, 8 October 1817, in Rollins, ed., *Letters of John Keats*, I, 170.
[18] While reminding us that the concept of influence, not just in its early acceptation of a cosmic overflow of uncontrolled feelings but in the stricter terms of artistic kinship, only appeared quite a while after Sydney's, Spenser's and Shakespeare's deaths, Andrew D. Weiner shows us, in his own retrospective analysis, how these patterns of poetic affiliations and (mis)readings were already at work then, but more or less directly and explicitly. He takes as a revealing example the impact Sydney's *Arcadia* or Spenser's *Faierie Queene* had on Shakespeare's historic approach in *King Lear*: "To explore these issues my specific project

here is to address the question of how Shakespeare, in the process of authoring *King Lear* might have responded to certain issues raised in Sydney's *Arcadia*, from which he drew the basic fable of the Gloucester-Edgar-Edmund subplot, and in Spenser's *Faierie Queene*, in which, along with the most recent 'true chronicle history' of King Lear/Leir/Leyr, he would have found several different versions of 'history' and what it can mean to different 'readers' of history or to differently inclined experiences of history: I have in mind chiefly Arthur and Guyon, readers of two different written 'histories' in Book II, and Britomart, Paridell, and Scudamour in Book III, whose experiences have taught each of them a different philosophy of history." See Andrew D. Weiner, "Sidney/Spenser/Shakespeare: Influence/Intertextuality/Intention", in J. Clayton & E. Rothstein, eds., *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History*, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1991, 245-70 (246).
[19] Jan Van Dorsten, ed., *The Defence of Poetry by Sir Philip Sydney*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966, 23-24.
[20] John Hamilton Reynolds's letter to Keats, October 1818, quoted in Stillinger, ed., *John Keats: The Complete Poems*, 33.
[21] Keats, "How many bards gild the lapses of time", in ibid.
[22] T.G. Steffan & E. Steffan & W.W. Pratt, ed., *Don Juan by Lord Byron*, London: Penguin Books, 1973, 97.
[23] Keats, "Sleep and Poetry", in Stillinger, ed., *John Keats : The Complete Poems*, 42. We could also mention here that Keats is not much more indulgent when he refers to Pope's tiny verse in his letters, whose poor quality, he writes, has ironically become a greater, because more reassuring, source of influence for Keats : "(…) yet when, Tom who meets with some of Pope's Homer in Plutarch's Lives reads some of those to me they seem like Mice to mine". See Rollins, ed., *Letters of John Keats*, I, 141.
[24] Keats, "Mother of Hermes! And still youthful Maia", in Stillinger, ed., *John Keats: The Complete Poems*, 199.
[25] Keats's letter to George and Georgiana Keats, 14 October 1818, in Rollins, ed., *Letters of John Keats*, I, 394.
[26] Keats, "Imitation of Spenser", in Stillinger, ed., *John Keats: The Complete Poems*, 1.
[27] Keats's letter to George and Georgiana Keats, 21 April 1819, in Rollins, ed., *The Letters of John Keats*, II, 102.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.
[30] We could also add here this other interesting comment Keats made – "How much of the charm is in the Valley!" – when addressing the following passage in Book II of Milton's *Paradise Lost* : "(…) Others, more mild,/Retreated in a silent Valley etc. (II, 546-47)". See "Appendix 4: Keats's Notes on Milton's *Paradise Lost*", in John Barnard, ed., *John Keats: The Complete Poems*, London: Penguin, 1988, 517-26 (518-19).
[31] "There is more of Milton's influence in the badness of the bad verse of the eighteenth century than of anybody's else : he certainly did more harm than Dryden and Pope, and perhaps a good deal of the obloquy which has fallen on these two poets, especially the latter, because of their influence, ought to be transferred to Milton. (…) There is a good deal more to the charge of against Milton than this; and it appears a good deal more serious if we affirm that Milton's poetry could *only* be an influence for the worse, upon any poet whatever. It is more serious, also, if we affirm that Milton's bad influence may be traced much farther than the eighteenth century, and much farther than upon bad poets : if we say that if was an influence against which we still have to struggle". See T.S. Eliot, "Milton I", in *On Poetry and Poets*, London: Faber and Faber, 1957,138-45 (138-39.
[32] Keats's letter to George and Georgiana Keats, 21 April 1819, in Rollins, ed., *The Letters of John Keats*, II, 102.

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