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**Vision or Dream, or Something Between: Uncertain Knowing
and Liminal Consciousness in John Keats' Poetry**



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Abstract

Romantic poetry frequently explores the fluid boundary between perception and imagination; moreover, John Keats' Poetry is especially marked by moments in which vision and dream seem to merge. Consequently, his speakers often inhabit a liminal state of consciousness where knowledge remains ambiguous and unresolved, and therefore this study examines how Keats represents such *in-between* states of awareness and how they produce uncertain knowing. The study aims, firstly, to analyze how Keats constructs liminal states between waking perception and dream-vision in selected poems, thereby highlighting experiences of epistemological ambiguity; secondly, it seeks to interpret how these liminal states embody Keats's philosophy of negative capability and furthermore reveal his acceptance of doubt and suspended meaning. A qualitative, constructivist approach is adopted; moreover, close textual reading and thematic analysis are employed to examine *Ode to a Nightingale*, *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, and *The Eve of St. Agnes*. Besides this, interpretive literary criticism is used to explore how imagery, symbolism, tone, and language construct liminal consciousness. The findings indicate that Keats consistently represents consciousness as an unstable threshold between waking reality and dream-vision; consequently, his speakers are repeatedly suspended between perception and imagination. Furthermore, these liminal states refuse final resolution, thereby embodying negative capability as a meaningful acceptance of ambiguity. The study concludes that Keats's poetry inhabits the space between certainty and doubt, dream and waking, presence and absence; otherwise, if certainty were imposed, the imaginative atmosphere and philosophical richness would diminish. Finally, it is recommended that future research examine Keats's liminal consciousness in relation to wider Romantic and post-Romantic thought; furthermore, interdisciplinary dialogue with psychology and philosophy may deepen understandings of dream-states and uncertain knowing.

Keywords: Liminal consciousness, Negative capability, Uncertain knowing, Romantic poetry, John Keats, Dream-vision

Introduction

Was it a vision, or a waking dream? Fled is that music: —Do I wake or sleep? (Keats, 1973, p. 282). This haunting question from *Ode to a Nightingale* has echoed through literary scholarship for over two centuries. Moreover, it becomes even more powerful when we recall that John Keats died at only twenty-five years of age, leaving behind a remarkably mature poetic philosophy shaped by illness, loss, and uncertainty (Motion, 1997). Consequently, Keats's poetry often dwells in the fragile space between consciousness and dream, perception and illusion, rational knowing and imaginative suspension. Therefore, his work invites readers to pause and ask a thought-provoking question: How do we know what is real, and where does imagination begin?

In essence, this study explores uncertain knowing and liminal consciousness in Keats's poetry — that *in-between* mental and emotional space where waking and dreaming merge. Keats himself famously valued the ability to remain in doubt without seeking resolution, a quality he called *negative capability* (Keats, 2001). Accordingly, his poems repeatedly construct states of ambiguous perception, where the speaker drifts between reality and dream-vision, and where language itself becomes suspended between knowing and not-knowing. This topic is especially important today because, in an age increasingly shaped by psychological inquiry and blurred realities—such as digital immersion, mediated identities, and shifting truths—Keats's reflections on uncertainty feel strikingly contemporary (Wolfson, 2015). Additionally, recent scholarly developments in Romantic studies emphasize perception, consciousness, and the instability of meaning, which further situates Keats as a key figure in discussions of epistemic uncertainty and liminality (Curran, 1990; Vendler, 1983). Thus, the present study speaks not only to Romantic literary scholarship but also to broader conversations about how humans experience ambiguous states of awareness.

However, despite the richness of Keatsian criticism, a problem remains: much scholarship has focused either on aesthetic beauty, mortality, or the imagination treated in purely philosophical terms, while the specific experience of liminal consciousness — especially the merging of dream and waking — has not always been synthesized into a focused thematic study across multiple poems. While critics such as Vendler (1983) and Bate (1963) have explored the emotional and structural depth

of Keats's odes, and others have addressed negative capability in philosophical contexts, there remains a gap in mapping how dream-states function as epistemic spaces that challenge stable truth-claims and create suspended meaning. Consequently, there is a need for a systematic study of how Keats uses dream-like perception not merely as imagery, but as a mode of knowing — and not-knowing.

Furthermore, although Romanticism is a global field of study, very limited scholarship contextualizes Keats's poetics of uncertainty within South Asian or Pakistani academic discourse. In many Pakistani universities, Romantic poetry is central to English studies curricula, yet students and scholars often engage more with canonical themes such as beauty, nature, and melancholy rather than epistemic uncertainty and liminality. Therefore, this research also aims to strengthen critical engagement with Keats in local academic contexts, supporting more layered readings in literary pedagogy and research practice. Accordingly, the objective of this paper is to analyze how Keats constructs liminal states of consciousness in selected poems — particularly *Ode to a Nightingale* and *La Belle Dame sans Merci* — in order to foreground uncertain knowing and suspended perception. Moreover, the aim is to demonstrate that Keats does not resolve ambiguity; instead, he aestheticizes it, allowing beauty, doubt, and imagination to coexist in a delicate tension. Through close textual analysis and engagement with established Romantic criticism, this study argues that Keats's poetry invites readers to inhabit the threshold between dream and waking — not to escape reality, but to encounter the limits of human knowledge. In doing so, the paper contributes to Romantic scholarship and, at the same time, supports deeper critical inquiry within local literary studies. Ultimately, therefore, this study proposes that Keats's *something between* is not confusion, but a meaningful poetic strategy that keeps truth open, fluid, and imaginatively alive.

Background of the Study

John Keats is one of the most powerful voices of English Romantic poetry, and his work often explores the fragile line between reality and imagination. In many of his poems, the speaker seems to stand in a space that is neither fully awake nor fully dreaming. This space is known as liminal consciousness. In simple words, liminal consciousness in John Keats' Poetry refers to a state of mind that lies between waking and dreaming, certainty and doubt, life and death — a place where meaning is not

fixed and knowledge remains open and uncertain. Therefore, Keats's poetry does not always give us clear answers; instead, it invites us to stay inside uncertainty and feel the emotional depth of that experience.

Moreover, this idea is closely linked with Keats's famous theory of Negative Capability, where the poet must be able to remain *in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts*, without rushing to find logical solutions (Keats, 1970). Consequently, Keats allows his poetic speakers to move freely between real life and imagination. For example, in *Ode to a Nightingale*, the speaker drifts into a dream-like state and finally asks, *Was it a vision, or a waking dream? / Fled is that music—Do I wake or sleep?* This question clearly shows how the poem remains suspended between dream and reality. In the same way, poems such as *Ode on a Grecian Urn* and *La Belle Dame sans Merci* also present moments where the border between real and unreal becomes blurred. In addition, critics explain that Keats often uses liminal spaces—such as twilight, shadows, silence, and dream-worlds—to express these states of in-between awareness (Cox, 2020; Groth, 2011). These spaces allow the reader to experience feelings rather than fixed truths. As a result, Keats's poetry presents a special kind of knowing—not based on logic, but on imagination, intuition, and emotional sensitivity. Therefore, liminal consciousness becomes a productive artistic condition, not a sign of confusion. Furthermore, this in-between state is also linked to mortality and human suffering. Because Keats struggled with illness and the awareness of early death, his poems often hover between earthly pain and the dream of spiritual or imaginative escape. Thus, his poetry suggests that true understanding sometimes comes from staying in the middle of opposites, rather than choosing only one side.

Consequently, studying liminal consciousness in John Keats' Poetry is important because it helps us understand how Keats views imagination, beauty, truth, and human existence. It also shows how his poetry creates a bridge between dream and reality, offering readers a deeper emotional and philosophical experience. Finally, this background leads naturally to the present study, which explores how Keats uses poetic language, imagery, and emotional sensitivity to express *Vision or Dream, or Something Between*.

Research Problem

Although John Keats' Poetry has been widely examined for its explorations of beauty,

mortality, melancholy, and the imagination, there remains a critical gap in understanding how Keats constructs states of liminal consciousness and uncertain knowing through dream-like perception. In particular, poems such as *Ode to a Nightingale* and *La Belle Dame sans Merci* portray speakers who exist *in-between* waking and dreaming states; however, scholarship has rarely treated this liminality as a sustained epistemic mode rather than a purely aesthetic device. Consequently, the problem addressed in this study is that the relationship between dream-vision, ambiguous perception, and negative capability in Keats's poetry remains undertheorized. Moreover, there is limited engagement with this topic in regional and South Asian scholarship, and therefore further investigation is needed.

Research Objectives

Accordingly, this study seeks to achieve the following objectives; moreover, each objective contributes to filling the identified gap:

1. To analyze how John Keats constructs liminal states between waking perception and dream-vision in selected poems, thereby foregrounding experiences of uncertain knowing.
2. To interpret how these liminal and ambiguous states reflect Keats's philosophical concept of negative capability, and therefore reveal his acceptance of doubt and suspended meaning.

Research Questions

1. How does Keats represent the *in-between* space of consciousness — neither fully waking nor fully dreaming — in his poetry, and how does this space produce uncertain knowing?
2. In what ways does Keats's portrayal of liminal consciousness embody the principle of negative capability, and consequently allow ambiguity and doubt to remain unresolved?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it re-centres Keats's poetry around the experience of uncertain perception and liminal consciousness, themes that continue to resonate in contemporary discussions of psychology, identity, and reality. Moreover, it contributes to Romantic literary criticism by showing how Keats uses dream-like states not to escape reality, but to question the limits of human understanding. Additionally, the

study strengthens South Asian and Pakistani scholarly engagement with Romanticism, offering new interpretive frameworks for teaching and research. Therefore, the findings will be useful not only to Keats scholars, but also to students, educators, and researchers interested in the intersections of literature, consciousness, and philosophy.

Limitations of the Study

Despite its value, this study also acknowledges certain limitations. First, it focuses only on a selected group of Keats's poems, particularly *Ode to a Nightingale* and *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, and therefore it does not claim to represent Keats's complete poetic output. Second, the analysis is qualitative and interpretive, and therefore it is shaped by theoretical and textual reading rather than empirical data. Nevertheless, these limitations do not weaken the research; instead, they help ensure a focused and coherent examination of the topic.

Originality and Novelty of the Study

What distinguishes this study from earlier scholarship is that it explicitly interprets Keats's dream-like states as epistemic zones of uncertain knowing, rather than simply as romantic or aesthetic imagery. In other words, the study treats liminal consciousness as a philosophical condition that Keats deliberately sustains, which therefore deepens our understanding of negative capability. Furthermore, the research offers a fresh regional academic perspective from a South Asian context, where such readings remain comparatively rare. Thus, the study contributes both a theoretical innovation and a widening of the global conversation on Keats. It is original not because it discovers new poems, but because it re-reads familiar texts through the lens of uncertainty, suspended meaning, and liminal perception.

Literature Review

Romantic poetry frequently explores the fluid boundary between perception and imagination; however, John Keats's poetry is especially marked by moments in which waking life and dream-vision merge into one unstable field of awareness. Critics generally agree that this *in-between* state reflects Keats's philosophy of Negative Capability, the capacity to remain in *uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts* without forcing resolution (Keats, 1817/2002). The present review therefore examines how scholars have interpreted Keats's liminal consciousness, how these interpretations connect to ambiguity and epistemological uncertainty, and where tensions, contradictions, and

gaps remain in current research.

Liminal Consciousness, Imagination, and Uncertain Knowing

Several studies argue that Keats consistently represents consciousness as a threshold space in which imagination and perception blur together (Abrams, 1971; Stillinger, 2001). For instance, critics note that in *Ode to a Nightingale* and *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, the speaker enters an oscillatory state in which art, dream, and lived experience coexist rather than compete (Wlecke, 1969; Ricks, 2011). In contrast, other scholars suggest that this liminality signals anxiety and existential fragmentation rather than harmony, since the self is repeatedly destabilized by ambiguity and loss (Bloom, 1973; Roe, 2012). Taken together, these interpretations highlight both the creative power and emotional cost of dwelling in uncertainty.

A major strand of criticism connects liminal consciousness directly to Negative Capability. While several scholars maintain that Keats deliberately refuses logical closure to preserve imaginative openness (Ward, 2014; Gigante, 2015), others question whether this openness is as serene as often assumed. They argue that the poems reveal a struggle between the desire for meaning and the acceptance of indeterminacy, particularly in the tension between beauty and mortality (Roe, 2012). Thus, the literature suggests that Keats's liminality is neither purely celebratory nor purely tragic, but dynamically suspended between the two.

Form, Language, and Liminal Experience

Beyond philosophical readings, critics also explore how poetic form and language construct this liminal awareness. Several studies emphasise Keats's use of semantic ambiguity, fluid syntax, and sensuous imagery to unsettle stable meaning and invite multiple interpretations (Faflak, 2011; Ricks, 2011). Moreover, scholars note that the movement between sensory immediacy and reflective distance produces a layered consciousness where knowing remains partial and provisional. However, some critics contend that close formal readings sometimes overlook the psychological dimension of uncertainty — namely, how liminal awareness reflects an inner negotiation between desire, imagination, and the limits of human understanding.

Vision, Dream States, and the Unconscious

Another body of scholarship highlights Keats's engagement with dream-vision structures and subliminal states. Studies of poems such as *La Belle Dame sans Merci*

and *The Eve of St. Agnes* suggest that dreamlike encounters allow Keats to dramatize uncertain knowing, where truth is glimpsed yet never secured (Stillinger, 2001; Ward, 2014). Although earlier criticism tended to interpret these states symbolically, more recent work positions them as psychological or proto-modern explorations of the unconscious, thereby widening understanding of Romantic interiority (Faflak, 2011). Nevertheless, this scholarship often treats dream and waking states as symbolic devices rather than as sustained states of liminal consciousness shaping the speaker's epistemological experience.

Research Gap and Justification

Overall, the literature demonstrates strong consensus that Keats is a poet of ambiguity, suspended meaning, and threshold consciousness. However, three key gaps remain.

First, although critics frequently mention liminality and Negative Capability, few studies systematically analyse how liminal states construct *uncertain knowing* as a distinct epistemological condition across multiple poems. Second, existing research tends either to emphasise philosophy or poetic form; consequently, there is limited synthesis showing how language, imagery, and dream-vision together produce liminal consciousness. Third, while psychological perspectives are emerging, a coherent account of liminal awareness as a sustained mode of being — rather than a momentary motif — remains underdeveloped.

Addressing these gaps is important because it clarifies how Keats uses uncertainty not merely as a theme but as a way of knowing and experiencing reality. Accordingly, this study contributes by offering an integrated, text-based analysis of liminal consciousness and uncertain knowing across selected poems, foregrounding their philosophical, psychological, and linguistic dimensions in relation to Keats's Negative Capability.

Methodology

The present chapter explains the methodological framework adopted for this study; consequently, the philosophical assumptions, research design, population and sampling, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques are outlined in a systematic and logical manner. Moreover, issues related to reliability, validity, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and methodological limitations are also discussed so that the reader may clearly understand how the study on uncertain

knowing and liminal consciousness in John Keats' Poetry is conducted. Therefore, this chapter serves as a guide to how the inquiry has been structured and implemented. This study is grounded in a constructivist–interpretivist research philosophy; accordingly, it is assumed that meaning is not fixed but is instead constructed through interpretation, language, imagination, and cultural context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Therefore, Keats's poems are treated as spaces containing multiple meanings where uncertainty, ambiguity, and liminal states are explored rather than resolved. Moreover, a qualitative research approach is adopted, since the focus rests on textual meaning, thematic depth, and interpretive understanding rather than numerical measurement. Consequently, the study seeks to explore how liminal consciousness and uncertain knowing are represented, constructed, and emotionally experienced within Keats's poetic world.

A textual qualitative design using close reading and interpretive analysis is employed; furthermore, the study analyzes selected poems by John Keats in order to examine how dream-like states, uncertain perception, and liminal awareness are presented. Moreover, this approach allows the researcher to interpret imagery, symbolism, tone, and philosophical reflection in the poems (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, the research design is exploratory and interpretive because the study does not test a hypothesis; otherwise, it would be limited to predetermined variables instead of allowing meaning to emerge organically through poetic language.

The population of the study consists of the poetic works of John Keats; however, since analyzing the complete body of poems is neither necessary nor practical, purposive sampling is used. Accordingly, poems are selected based on their strong engagement with dream states, vision, uncertainty, and liminal awareness. Therefore, *Ode to a Nightingale*, *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, and *The Eve of St. Agnes* are included because they most clearly reflect the themes under investigation. Moreover, purposive sampling is appropriate in literary research because texts are chosen for their conceptual relevance rather than for numerical representation (Given, 2008); besides this, it allows deeper engagement with meaning. Since this is a literary study, the primary data consists of the selected poems of John Keats; accordingly, the poems are accessed from reliable published collections. In addition, secondary data is collected from scholarly books, journal articles, and

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critical essays on Keats, Romanticism, liminality, imagination, and consciousness. Moreover, interpretive reflections, notes, and thematic observations are recorded during multiple readings; consequently, repeated engagement with the poems allows deeper insight into tone, symbolism, and emotional resonance.

The collected texts are analyzed using thematic analysis and close reading techniques; therefore, the poems are read repeatedly to identify recurring motifs such as dream states, uncertainty, imaginative escape, mortality, and blurred reality. The six-phase model of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) is followed, and, furthermore, interpretive literary criticism is employed to connect imagery, diction, sound, and symbolism with the concepts of liminal consciousness and uncertain knowing. Consequently, meaning is developed gradually through layered interpretation rather than mechanical coding; otherwise, the richness of poetic nuance might be lost. In qualitative literary research, validity is understood as credibility, authenticity, and coherence of interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, trustworthiness is ensured through prolonged engagement with the texts, cross-checking interpretations with established scholarship, transparent explanation of analytical procedures, and the consistent use of direct textual evidence. Moreover, reflexivity is maintained; consequently, the researcher remains aware that interpretation is shaped by personal and theoretical perspectives. However, interpretations are always grounded in textual evidence in order to maintain scholarly credibility.

Although the study does not involve human participants, ethical standards are still maintained. Accordingly, all secondary sources are fully acknowledged and cited using APA referencing conventions; furthermore, the poems are treated with scholarly respect, and misrepresentation or distortion is carefully avoided. This methodology is interpretive; therefore, it does not claim absolute or universal truth. Consequently, alternative interpretations of Keats's poetry may also be valid. In addition, the study is limited to selected poems rather than the entire Keats corpus; however, this limitation allows for depth rather than breadth of analysis. Otherwise, the research might risk becoming superficial.

In summary, this chapter has outlined the methodological framework of the study, and a constructivist, qualitative, interpretive design has been employed to analyze

uncertain knowing and liminal consciousness in John Keats' Poetry. Moreover, purposive sampling, thematic analysis, and close reading techniques have been used to explore how Keats represents dream-like and ambiguous states of awareness. Therefore, the methodology provides a rigorous and coherent foundation for the analytical discussion presented in the following chapters.

Discussion/Analysis

This chapter interprets how John Keats constructs liminal states between waking perception and dream-vision in selected poems, and consequently how these states generate uncertain forms of knowing. Furthermore, the discussion explores how such ambiguity reflects Keats's philosophical principle of negative capability, whereby unresolved doubt is not resisted but embraced. Therefore, the analysis is structured around the idea that Keats's speakers frequently inhabit a threshold space — neither fully grounded in reality nor entirely absorbed into dream — and, moreover, it is in this *in-between* state that poetic insight is produced.

Liminal Consciousness and Uncertain Knowing in *Ode to a Nightingale*

In *Ode to a Nightingale*, the speaker's awareness repeatedly oscillates between waking and dream, and therefore the poem becomes a primary site for the experience of liminal consciousness. Early in the poem, the speaker confesses, *My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains / My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk* (Keats, 1819/2001, p. 296). This state is neither ordinary perception nor sleep; rather, it is a suspended condition in which clarity is blurred. Moreover, the wish to *fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget* signals a desire not for death itself, but for entry into a dream-like escape from the limits of rational reality.

The border between dream and waking deepens when the speaker admits, *Already with thee! tender is the night* (Keats, 1819/2001, p. 298). Here, consciousness moves imaginatively into the bird's world, and consequently the poem dramatizes the very question that drives this research: is the speaker imagining this transition, or has perception itself altered? Besides this, the final uncertainty — *Was it a vision, or a waking dream? / Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?* (Keats, 1819/2001, p. 299) — refuses closure. The poem therefore affirms that knowledge remains unresolved; nevertheless, this ambiguity is not portrayed as failure but as essential to poetic experience.

This unresolved space exemplifies negative capability, for the speaker does not require resolution. Moreover, the uncertainty becomes productive, since it enables emotional and imaginative truth rather than empirical certainty. Otherwise, if the poem insisted on a stable answer, the mysterious reverie would collapse into explanation rather than remain as lived experience.

Vision, Stillness, and Suspended Meaning in *Ode on a Grecian Urn*

In *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, the liminal condition appears not through dream states but through arrested time. The figures on the urn are *For ever panting, and for ever young* (Keats, 1819/2001, p. 303), and therefore they exist in a permanent threshold where desire is eternal yet never fulfilled. Furthermore, the observer is caught between temporal reality and the urn's timeless scene; consequently, perception itself is suspended.

The paradox that the urn *teases us out of thought / As doth eternity* (Keats, 1819/2001, p. 304) signals another moment of uncertain knowing. The object does not reveal meaning directly; rather, it produces a contemplative state beyond rational comprehension. Moreover, the famously debated closing lines — *'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,'—that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know* (Keats, 1819/2001, p. 304) — do not offer doctrinal clarity. Instead, they remain provocatively ambiguous; besides this, the uncertainty surrounding who speaks the statement further reflects liminal voice and perspective.

Thus, the urn functions as a liminal artifact, situated between life and art, movement and stillness, voice and silence. Consequently, the reader's knowledge remains suspended, and this suspension itself becomes meaningful.

Fatal Enchantment and Dream–Reality Blurring in *La Belle Dame sans Merci*

In *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, the knight's encounter with the mysterious lady further demonstrates Keats's fascination with in-between consciousness. The knight recalls, *I met a lady in the meads, / Full beautiful — a faery's child* (Keats, 1820/2001, p. 312), and the narrative unfolds in a state already tinged with unreality. Moreover, the dream vision — *And there I dreamed — Ah! woe betide! — / The latest dream I ever dream'd* (Keats, 1820/2001, p. 313) — collapses into waking despair when he finds himself abandoned.

What is striking is that the poem never clarifies whether the lady truly exists or

whether the knight's experience is entirely visionary. Consequently, the poem refuses final epistemic certainty. Furthermore, the refrain-like closing description — *And I sojourn here / Alone and palely loitering* (Keats, 1820/2001, p. 314) — leaves the knight trapped in perpetual aftermath, neither fully in dream nor fully returned to normal life. Otherwise, resolution would end the haunting effect.

Threshold Ritual and Dreamlike Passage in *The Eve of St. Agnes*

The Eve of St. Agnes explicitly stages a ritual of boundary-crossing between waking and visionary experience. Madeline seeks a prophetic dream by following the St. Agnes ritual; consequently, the narrative itself rests upon liminal expectation. When Porphyro observes her trance-like sleep, the description — *She seemed a splendid angel, newly drest* (Keats, 1820/2001, p. 289) — blurs spiritual vision and physical presence. Moreover, when Madeline awakens, she initially confuses Porphyro with her dream image, thereby reinforcing the fragile boundary between inner vision and external reality.

The romance concludes ambiguously, as it is unclear whether the lovers escape into a real world or into symbolic oblivion. Therefore, the narrative does not simply endorse dream over reality; instead, it dwells in the uncertainty between them.

Liminal Consciousness and Negative Capability

Across these poems, liminal consciousness consistently embodies Keats's principle of negative capability, which he famously defined as the capacity to remain *in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason* (Keats, 1817/2002, p. 43). Moreover, the poetic speakers do not attempt to stabilize meaning; besides this, they accept that knowledge may remain incomplete.

Consequently, the research questions are answered:

1. Keats represents the *in-between* space of consciousness through dream-visions, suspended time, trance states, and blurred perception. These states produce uncertain knowing because the poetic self cannot fully distinguish between dream and waking reality.
2. These liminal states reflect negative capability, since ambiguity is not resolved but sustained. Furthermore, poetic insight arises precisely because certainty is withheld; otherwise, the poems would lose their philosophical depth and emotional resonance.

Therefore, Keats's poetry suggests that truth may not always be accessible through logic or certainty. Instead, truth may dwell in ambiguity itself.

Finding

The findings of this study reveal that John Keats consistently constructs liminal spaces of consciousness in his poetry, where the boundary between waking perception and dream-vision becomes fluid and uncertain. Moreover, these threshold states do not simply decorate the poetic surface; rather, they form the emotional and philosophical core of the poems. Consequently, the speakers in *Ode to a Nightingale*, *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, and *The Eve of St. Agnes* experience a form of uncertain knowing, where reality and imagination repeatedly overlap.

Firstly, the analysis demonstrates that Keats represents the *in-between* space of consciousness through dream states, trance-like reflection, arrested time, enchantment, and visionary perception. Furthermore, these devices create experiences in which the poetic self cannot fully determine whether what is perceived is real or imagined. For example, in *Ode to a Nightingale*, the closing lines — *Was it a vision, or a waking dream? ... Do I wake or sleep?* — clearly show that knowledge remains unresolved. Besides this, *La Belle Dame sans Merci* leaves the knight suspended between dream-memory and present suffering, while *The Eve of St. Agnes* blurs the difference between ritual dream and waking encounter. Consequently, uncertainty is not a momentary disruption; instead, it becomes the sustained psychological condition of Keats's speakers.

Secondly, the findings indicate that these liminal states directly embody Keats's philosophical concept of negative capability, because the poems resist the urge to supply definite explanation or closure. Moreover, the speakers inhabit ambiguity without demanding resolution; otherwise, the poems would collapse into rational certainty and lose their mysterious emotional intensity. *Ode on a Grecian Urn* particularly demonstrates this, since the urn *teases us out of thought*, inviting reflection while never fully explaining its meaning. Consequently, Keats treats doubt not as failure but as a legitimate and even necessary mode of being.

Therefore, the research questions are answered as follows:

1. Keats represents the in-between space of consciousness by immersing his speakers

in dream-like perception, suspended temporality, visionary enchantment, and imaginative projection. These liminal conditions, moreover, produce uncertain knowing because the boundaries of reality and imagination remain constantly unstable.

2. Keats's portrayal of liminal consciousness embodies negative capability, since meaning is deliberately left unresolved. Furthermore, the acceptance of ambiguity becomes a philosophical stance — one that values imagination, emotion, and mystery over logical certainty.

Overall, the study finds that Keats's poetry does not seek to escape uncertainty; rather, it dwells within it. Besides this, the poems suggest that truth may emerge not through clarity but through openness to mystery and in-betweenness. Consequently, Keats offers a poetic model of consciousness in which vision and dream, self and world, life and art continuously merge and separate without final conclusion. This contribution is significant because it shows that Keats's work anticipates modern and post-modern ideas about subjectivity, perception, and the instability of knowledge.

Conclusion

This study set out to address the central problem of how John Keats represents the unstable threshold between vision and dream, and how this liminal consciousness produces a state of uncertain knowing in his poetry; moreover, it sought to demonstrate that such uncertainty is not a poetic failure but a deliberate epistemological stance grounded in Negative Capability. The analysis of *Ode to a Nightingale*, *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, and *The Eve of St. Agnes* revealed that Keats repeatedly situates his speakers between perception and imagination, so that knowledge becomes fluid, suspended, and unresolved; furthermore, these liminal states resist closure and instead cultivate openness to ambiguity and emotional intensity. The implications of these findings are significant, since they suggest that Keats offers an alternative model of knowing in which meaning emerges through uncertainty rather than despite it; besides, this challenges rationalist assumptions about truth and affirms the creative and philosophical value of doubt. Nevertheless, the study is limited by its focus on a small number of poems and by its primarily textual methodology; consequently, broader cultural, historical, and psychological perspectives could not be fully explored. Future research may therefore

examine Keats's liminal consciousness in relation to Romantic psychology, reader-response theory, or comparative studies across poets and periods; also, digital or cognitive approaches may deepen understanding of how ambiguity is processed and experienced. In conclusion, Keats's poetry teaches that vision and dream do not simply oppose reality; instead, they coexist in a dynamic space of becoming where the richest insights arise from uncertainty — otherwise, poetry would collapse into mere certainty and lose the imaginative freedom that defines it.

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