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Creative thinking and insight problem-solving in Keats' «When I have fears ... »

Simona Beccone^{1*}

Abstract: According to cognitive psychologists, creativity is a special kind of problem-solving experience, which involves the activation of two opposite but complementary mental processes, convergent thinking and divergent thinking, as well as insight. Creativity as an insight problem experience is a mainly unexplored phenomenon which has attracted increasing scholarly interest in the last two decades ranging from cognitive psychology and sociology to cognitive linguistics and literary studies. This paper aims to enter into the contemporary debate on the topic by analysing a well-known Keatsian sonnet, «When I have fears ... ». The poem stands out for the degree of awareness it shows concerning the mental processing of creative thinking. It artistically models a successful insight problem experience in the domain of poetic writing. This analysis proceeds through an interdisciplinary perspective, which integrates close reading and cognitive psychology.

Keywords: British Romanticism; John Keats; creativity; convergent thinking; divergent thinking; insight problem-solving; writer's block; Cognitive Poetics

The formulation of a problem
is often more essential than its solution.
(Einstein & Infeld, 1938, p. 83)

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Cognitive psychologists consider creativity a special kind of problem-solving experience. This experience often involves the rational and conscious *convergent thinking*, the irrational and unconscious *divergent thinking*, and the *insight*, that is, a sudden, visionary moment of realisation, in which the solver envisages the solution, often surprisingly and unexpectedly, then finally puts it into decisive action. Keats' sonnet «When I have fears ... » stands out for the degree of awareness it shows concerning the mental processing of creative thinking as a problem-solving experience. The speaker of this poem first addresses one of the most challenging questions for any creative individual, how to fully express oneself, notwithstanding the limitations of written language and interpersonal communication. Then, he develops a strategy of mental action based on the subtle and powerful dynamics of creative thought. Finally, he acts on reality by radically changing it and creating it anew.

1. What is creativity?

According to cognitive psychologists (Runco, 1994; De Young et al., 2008, pp. 278–279), creativity is a special kind of problem-solving experience, a situation in which, given a certain goal to be achieved (e.g., representing an object of perception, telling a story, describing a state of affairs, etc.) the subject (i.e. solver) activates a series of strategies to find the solution (i.e. to solve the problem). These strategies often involve the activation of two opposite but complementary mental processes, namely, *convergent* and *divergent thinking* (Gilford, 1950, 1970; also called «reasoning» and «pattern recognition»: see Schooler & Melcher, 1995, pp. 120–126). Moreover, the experience of *insight* is also implied (Bowers et al., 1995; Cunningham et al., 2009; Sternberg & Davidson, 1995; Weisberg, 1995). Before going any further, it is necessary to provide a more thorough definition of these terms.

Convergent thinking is an analytically reductive, critically focused, thus mainly rational and conscious kind of mental process. It consists in the adherence, by the subject, to conventional, socially embedded, and culturally shared sets of hermeneutical constraints, that is, in allegiance to acquired knowledge and previous experience, in his relationship with the world (Sawyer, 2012, pp. 90–91). In problem-solving, convergent thinking gives the solver the ability to correctly answer, in predictable ways, standard questions (such as, for instance, giving the «right» answer to math problems), as it is a cognitive ability which moves linearly and logically toward a single solution, by incremental association. Thus, this cognitive process does not require a great amount of subjective or original contribution by the individual, but instead, it requires appropriate skill, training, and expertise (De Young et al., 2008, p. 281).

Divergent thinking, on the other side, is mostly unconscious, as it consists of a synthetically constructive, free-flowing and open-ended kind of mental process, through which the solver finds the solution to the problem not by following linear logic, as in convergent thinking, but rather by the activation of non-rational, analogical ways of generating, processing and combining ideas and images (Guilford, 1959, 1967; Sawyer, 2012, pp. 46–47, 88; Silvia et al., 2008; 2009). In this case, the solution is approached by generating varied, original, or even unusual ideas, by creating unexpected associations between concepts, and finally by formulating fresh views and novel strategies for approaching and fixing the problem.

In many of the Western models of creativity, the most authentic creative experiences are often associated with the moment of *insight* (Sternberg & Davidson, 1995). Insight, in problem-solving, occurs when the problem solver fails to see how to fix a problem. Then, he or she has a sudden, almost epiphanic realisation of how to solve it, as he/she at first clearly envisages the solution, often surprisingly and unexpectedly, then finally puts it into action (Sawyer, 2012, pp. 108–110). This realisation is usually preceded by an «impasse» (Kaplan & Simon, 1990; Smith, 1995), or «fixation» (Maier, 1931; «functional fixedness» in Duncker, 1945; «content-induced set» in Schooler & Melcher, 1995), that is, by a moment during which the solver initially becomes stuck, as he cannot see how to solve the problem. The impasse often consists of either a period where no problem-solving activity takes place or when the same problem-solving activity is repeated time and again, for instance, through trial and error (Sawyer, 2012, p. 108).

Insight problem-solving experiences differ greatly from non-insight ones, not only in the mental processing involved but also in the degree of informational novelty which both the way of approaching the solution and the kind of solution provided entail. On the one hand, non-insight problems, such as math equations (« $2+2=?$ »), or trivia questions («Who's the author of the *Ode to a Nightingale*?»), are also called «standard» or «well-defined problems» (Getzels, 1975; Metcalfe & Wiebe, 1987; Pretz, et al., 2003; Schooler & Melcher, 1995). In this case, the solution is approached incrementally and analytically, through linear associations of ideas. Moreover, it does not involve great novelty, but instead skill and expertise, as well as conventionality, that is, adherence to prior knowledge and sets of pre-established rules. Since non-insight problems lead to the solution by confirming the framework provided in the question, they more often require the convergent, rather than the divergent, ways of processing ideas (De Young et al., 2008, pp. 279–281).

On the other hand, insight problems, such as the «Nine-dots» and the «Six» problems,¹ arise from non-standard questions, or «ill-defined» problems, that is, questions having neither clear goals, nor expected solutions (De Young et al., 2008, p. 279). Whereas non-insight problem-solving experiences lead to the solution by confirming the conceptual framework provided in the question, that is by confirming previously assumed constraints, in insight problem-solving experiences, on the other side, the solution has to be approached through new, unconventional ways. Thus, only these latter experiences necessarily lead to the insight, as the solver has to envisage in advance the possible solution by disconfirming, rather than confirming, the initial conceptual framework, therefore by reconfiguring a new set of constraints. Psycho-cognitively, this phenomenon entails an often radical restructuring of thought, that is, it consists in a shift in the representation of the problem by the solver, during which the initial faulty way of seeing the question is replaced with a new one, now more appropriate to find the solution (Schooler & Melcher, 1995). This shift in the representation of the problem is known as «breaking frame» (De Young et al., 2008, pp. 278–279). It is envisaged by many scholars as being essential to solve insight problems and requires the activation of both convergent and divergent thinking (De Young et al., 2008, pp. 281–282), since convergent logical analysis is often required to determine the inadequacy of the initial formulation (De Young et al., 2008, p. 281). Divergent thinking, on the other side, enters the process by formulating non-standard ways of approaching the problem (intuitive, synthetic, even epiphanic), through which new and alternative ways of envisaging the question are formulated, so that the whole problem-solving process is reorganised. This latter phase is known as «restructuring» (Dominowsky & Dallob, 1995; Ohlsson, 1992). Therefore, the two complementary processes of convergent and divergent thinking are necessary to foster insight to find the solution, in insight problem solving (Ansburg, 2000; Duncker, 1945; Fiore & Schooler, 1998; Schooler & Melcher, 1995).

From a psycho-cognitive standpoint, insight problem-solving experiences are relatively more difficult and challenging than the non-insight ones. On the one side, non-insight problem-solving experiences require, by the subject, a conventional, ordinary, and stereotyped approach to the problem. As a result, they lead more to a confirmation of convention (i.e., the original framework) than to an overcoming of pre-established norms. Insight problem solving involves more than one cognitive ability (convergent thinking, divergent thinking and frame-breaking). It also involves and elicit an active, as well as creative approach to the problem, as they perform representational changes by generating a new *Gestalt* during the shift from different cognitive modalities and breaking frame. In sum, insight problem-solving experiences result in the production of informational novelty, while the non-insight ones do not, due to the strategic innovation and unconventionality of approach they typically involve. It is for these reasons that contemporary cognitive psychologists envisage insight problem-solving experiences as being more akin to creativity than the non-insight ones (De Young et al., 2008, p. 281; Sawyer, 2012, p. 110).

2. Writings on creativity

The issue of creativity as an insight problem experience has attracted increasing scholarly interest in the last two decades, from many different disciplines and fields of study: psychology, cognitive psychology, sociology, economy, and education (Sawyer, 2012, p. 463). The domain of research on this aspect of creativity, together with its theoretical and practical implications, is vast. It extends over a wide range of contexts (education, business innovation and entrepreneurship),² including analyses on specific instances of creative practice in various areas, such as the arts, science, creative writing and, of course, literature (Pope, 2005, pp. 271–280).

As for this latter aspect, modern research on language and literature has shown great interest in the so-called *writings on creativity* that is, on how the literature of all epochs presents, both theoretically and through its specific means of expression, the creative thinking processes (Allott, 1959; Bennett & Royle, 2004, pp. 85–92; Pope, 2002, pp. 9–11 and 196–199; Rothenberg & Greenberg, 1974), including problem-solving experiences (Runco, 1994; Pritzer & Runco, 1997, pp. 115–141) and problem finding (Csikszentmihalyi & Getzels, 1988, pp. 91–116). As a matter of fact, literary history provides plenty of reflections on creativity. In some cases, it focuses on the nature, dynamics and

goals of this phenomenon (one thinks to Sidney's *Apologie for Poetry* and Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*, to Keats' epistolary, to James' prefaces to *Portrait of a Lady* and *The Spoils of Poynton*: the list is of course endless). In other cases, it artistically enacts this phenomenon in order to display, in meta-literary terms, its intricate as well as largely uncharted mechanisms, as properties of the text's structure (cf. many of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste*, Pirandello's *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*, Calvino's *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore*, and so on).

These works are of great interest for historians and literary theorists, as they document many individual and collective facts concerning the universe of creativity (its phenomenology, psychology, pragmatics, epistemology, to name a few). In other words, this phenomenon is a window kept wide open on an experience which stems from psychic motives, whose phenomenology becomes only metonymically manifest in artistic texts, as formal and semantic choices positively made by authors, but which nevertheless remains mainly unaccountable for scholars, due to its close relationship with the secret processing of the individual mind.

3. A poetic case study

This paper aims to enter into the contemporary debate on creativity by providing a close analysis of a well-known Keatsian sonnet, «When I have fears ... ». ³ In my view, this poem represents a case study as regards the key issues mentioned above: creativity as an insight problem experience, the interplay of convergent vs. divergent thinking, and the literary modelling of creativity. More precisely, «When I have fears ... » is an interesting example of a successful insight problem experience, set in the domain of artistic writing.

In this poem, the speaker, who epitomises, as we will see, the archetypal poetic genius according to the Romanticist worldview, systematically solves the most difficult problem for any artist: the writer's block. What is more, he does so through the deliberate activation of specific mental processes which are in turn peculiar to creative thought (divergent and convergent thinking, breaking frame), as it is described by contemporary cognitive psychology. In the sonnet, these mental processes exert the power of radically changing the speaker's way of approaching and understanding his writing experience. More importantly, he finally overcomes his *impasse* in an epiphanic moment of illumination, that is, in a moment of insight.

The following analysis will proceed from an interdisciplinary perspective, which will include, apart from textual analysis, cognitive psychology also. This choice is due to the fact that this field of study provides the most prolific and developed contemporary perspective on creativity. Thus, it constitutes a crucial interpretive key to gain deeper insights on the issue of problem-solving in literature, which this Keatsian poem so brilliantly enacts.

4. The writer's den

In «When I have fears ... », the speaker reflects retrospectively on the workings of his artistic mind during what appears to be as the most crucial phase in any creative process: the transition from ideation to writing. The many occurrences of technical terms related to writing («pen», l. 2; «books», l. 3; «character», l. 3; «romance», l. 6; «trace», l. 7) and detectable in the three quatrains, make the main theme of the sonnet lexically evident since the opening lines. We are either at the beginning of the poetic effort (in quatrains I–II, «Before ... », ll. 2 and 3, and «I may never ... », l. 7, indicate that writing is seen in prospect by the speaker, as something which has not been yet accomplished) or in a moment of pause during the creative process itself (in fact, he is not actually writing anything at all). Furthermore, «teeming» (l. 2), a progressive form of the verb suggesting the redundancy of the speaker's information processing, and the anaphorically reiterated «When ... » (ll. 1, 2 and 9) indicate that creative action is still in progress in the *hic et nunc* of enunciation and that the moment of *impasse* reoccurs habitually, that is with a certain frequency, during the speaker's writing experience.

Secondly, the imagery related to the writing process becomes also evident at the structural level, as the division in three quatrains overlaps with the three macrophases occurring in any creative process. Even if in the past years cognitive psychologists have been modelling creativity as a multistage process (Wallas, 1926; Isaksen et al., 2000; Scott et al., 2004; Sternberg, 2006; Sawyer, 2012, p. 88), other recent views, such as the IDEO model (Innovation Design Engineering Organization), elaborated by Kelley at Stanford University (Kelley, 2001), have simplified it by considering some steps as subphases of broader processes, thus combining them in a relatively limited number of macrophases. In Kelley's model, these macrophases can be grouped by threes. First of all, there is an initial phase of observation, that is, the acquisition of relevant knowledge through the activation of conscious processes and the gathering of a broad range of potentially related information, including unconscious data (Kelley, 2001, pp. 28–52). Then, an intermediate phase of brainstorming occurs, in which ideas are generated and expanded through unconscious and conscious combinatory processing (Kelley, 2001, pp. 55–65). Finally, a final stage of externalisation takes place, during which the creative individual selects the best ideas, then prototypes, refines and implements them, in order to communicate to a public (Kelley, 2001, pp. 103–13).

Keats had direct experience, as a professional writer, of the complex dynamics which any writing process entails. This awareness can be detected everywhere in his letters, whose metaliterary character has long been known among scholars⁴ and emerges in Keats' reflections on the various aspects of creative writing: the psycho-cognitive abilities involved in this activity⁵; the prerequisites of the poetic genius⁶; the expressive Romanticist model of creativity, which he inherited from Wordsworth and Coleridge, and to which he adhered, never unproblematically.⁷ In this sonnet, three metaphors (harvesting, astrology, and erotic love) dominate, respectively, quatrains I, II and III. When seen under the lens of cognitive psychology, each of these metaphors imaginatively illustrates the corresponding phase of a triadic creative process. Thus, they can be analysed, without any danger, through Kelley's model.

In the harvest metaphor (first quatrain), the writer's «pen» (l. 2) alludes to the villein's gleaning, that is, the action of gathering the leftover grain after the harvest, and it is analogous to the poet's selection and preservation, through writing, of the contents of his own fertile and vitalistic mental field, the «teeming brain» (l. 2). The «books» of line 3 are the cultural means, both numerous («high-pilèd», l. 3, implies that they are also high in number) and refined («character», l. 3, is a Shakespearean borrow from *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, used by Keats to suggest the uniqueness and almost magical properties of any written language),⁸ for storing the best poetic ideas, analogously as the «rich garners» (l. 4) hold the nutritious and carefully selected, thus also precious, «full ripened grain» (l. 4), at the end of harvest. In this case, the harvest metaphor alludes to the final stage in any successful creative process, the phase of externalisation. This becomes detectable as the two actions alluded to in these lines, that is, the selection of the best ideas (metaphorically, the gleaning of the speaker's «teeming brain», l. 2) and the complementary action of backing this previously selected information data up (again, metaphorically the action of holding the «full ripened grain» in «rich garners», l. 4) through writing («books» and «in character», l. 3), are the two main cognitive operations which the creative individual typically activates during this phase. Cognitive psychologists call these operations «selection of best ideas» and «textualization», respectively (Sawyer, 2012, pp. 88–89).

In quatrain II, on the other side, the dominant astrological metaphor presents the poet as an astrologer who holds a twofold, but at the same time still not actualised power. This power consists, first of all, in the capacity of reading intuitively the natural world by detecting, pareidolically, apparent forms, or constellations, in the night's starry sky («trace/Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance», ll. 7–8). Secondly, he also has the capacity of discerning in them omenic visions of possible futures, that is, the capacity of «behold[ing], upon the night's starred face,/Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance», ll. 5–6. These predictions are both good (the «symbols of a high romance» make him see in advance the accomplished work he presumably desires to write) and bad (both in «I may never live to trace», l. 7, and since the first line, «I may cease to be», he has a presage of his premature death, thus also of the consequent shortage of time for writing). Both capacities allude to the visionary power, typical of the Romantic genius, of intuitively grasping hidden occult truths lying beyond ordinary perception and give them meaning.⁹ Moreover, these

images also allude to a more general cognitive operation, which many creative individuals often activate: the imaginative reworking of experience through which the subject multiplies previously perceived information data by establishing novel links between different and otherwise heterogeneous ideas (Kelley, 2001, pp. 28–52). In these lines, these links are analogical (as suggested by the anthropomorphisation of nature which the image of the starry night sky as «face», l. 5, suggests) and symbolic (in l. 6, the «high romance» the poet sees in advance is a cluster of «symbols»). This mental processing is isomorphic to the Romantic descriptions of the functioning of the most poetical among human mental faculties, imagination,¹⁰ and it is also ascribable to the second crucial phase in any creative process, brainstorming, as this latter typically involves intuitive, divergent thinking processes (Kim & Horii, 2016), such as those suggested by the author in these lines.

In quatrain III, and as it often happens in Keats, from *Endymion* to the great *Odes*, an erotic metaphor is used as a figurative device to depict the creative's mind interaction with the ever-elusive referent of his poetry, beauty.¹¹ In this part of the sonnet, the latter is modelled as a beautiful, although at the same time fleeting, female presence (the «fair creature of an hour», l. 9), who in turn symbolises, for the poet-lover, the goal of his erotic but fatally unattainable quest («never [...] / Never», ll. 10–11). This unattainability is both perceptual («I will *never* look upon thee more», l. 10) and psychosomatic («*Never have relish* in the fairy power / Of unreflecting love», ll. 11–12).

As far as the paradigm of creative writing is concerned, the situation alluded to in the erotic metaphor occurring in these lines overlaps with the phase of observation, described by Kelley, that is, with the moment in which the creative subject gathers useful information data from the world of experience, through the exercise of his sense perceptions (Kelley, 2001, p. 30; Osborn, 1948, p. 269). The more is this phase prolonged in time, that is to say, the stronger is the experience, the more will the collection of information data be accurate and comprehensive, with a consistent quantitative improvement in idea generation (Kelley, 2001, pp. 55–56). Unfortunately, this is not the case of the Keatsian speaker, whose experience with the desired fair creature is seemingly, as well as fatally, weak, as the «fair creature» is transient («of an hour», l. 9).

Compared to the steps of the creative process, in Keats' sonnet, the *dispositio* appears to have been inverted, as the final phase of externalisation occurs in the first quatrain, instead of the third, and the initial phase of observation and information gathering occurs in the third quatrain, instead of at the beginning of the poem. This choice may be due to two reasons. Keats, as a Romantic, propounded an antirationalistic conception of creativity according to whom ideas do not unfold in a linear nor consequential way, as in the mechanistic, rationalistic model of Neoclassicism, but as a cyclical and recursive psycho-cognitive process, similar to vegetable growth, and proceeding along the meanders of the imaginative mind. This conception, basically organicistic and antirationalistic,¹² is still indeed consistent with our contemporary view of creativity. Cognitive psychologists argue that no creative process unfolds in a strictly linear progression, as the stages often «overlap, or cycle repeatedly, or sometimes appear in reverse order» (Sawyer, 2012, p. 138). These stages are, instead, more «habits of mind» activated by creative individuals during the process (Burnard et al. 2006; Scott et al., 2004). Thus, Keats is modelling a familiar psychological reality in the ambit of his own experience of creative writing. Secondly, Keats' choice of presenting the process starting with the last step and then proceeding backwards to the initial phases may structurally transpose a specific movement in the speaker's mind: that of reflecting, retrospectively, on his own creativity, by retracing his steps back within the writing process, in order to overcome the impasse. At the same time, the recursiveness of this action, which the text suggests through the triadic repetition of «when» (ll. 1, 5, and 9), indicates that he does that time and again, presumably because he is not still able, in this part of the text, that is, in this part of his self-analysis, to solve the problem. Both interpretations are of course potentially true as they appear to be two complementary aspects of a wider psycho-cognitive experience of creativity.

5. Convergent and divergent thinking in the sonnet

In conformity with the Romanticist habit of giving prominence to subjective, internalised parameters over objective, external reality, the poem focuses on the components of the speaker's creative mind during the three phases in his creative effort. In terms of cognitive psychology, divergent thinking interacts with convergent thinking.

Divergent thinking can be detected at the level of the enounced, more precisely in three conventional images, activated by Keats and characteristic of Romantic poetry: nature in the first quatrain; imaginative symbolization in the second quatrain; erotic fascination in the third quatrain. In the first quatrain, the naturalistic vegetative imagery, which the harvest metaphor conveys, functions as a figurative device suggesting the organ and products of the speaker's creative mental processing (respectively, «brain», l. 2, and «grain», l. 4). The qualifiers («teeming brain» and «full ripened grain») point to the vitalistic energy of organic growth, a natural force in constant expansion and tension towards boundless plenitude and inexhaustible abundance. The syntactic parallelism of ll. 2–3, conveyed through the anaphoric repetition of «Before», activates a polar opposition with the cultural paradigm writing («pen», l. 2, «books, in character», l. 3) vs harvesting («gleaned», l. 2, and «garners», l. 4). The use of possessive pronouns («my», twice repeated in line 2) for both the means («pen») and organ («brain») of creative writing, sets an ontological equivalence between the external components of creativity (material, intersubjective and socially biased: «pen») and the internal ones (mental, thus individual: «brain»).

Connotatively, and in relation to the speaker's mental activity, these features expressively enact a series of essential characteristics, manifested by the creative mind at this point of the writing process. First of all, they suggest a predominantly unconscious structure whose functioning and contents exist, as it occurs in nature, in the holistic synthesis of the preverbal, if not even non-conceptual, informational content which in turn precedes language, culture, literacy. Secondly, the speaker's mind is an organic whole in which the inner and outer, concrete and immaterial, individual and collective planes are still undifferentiated. Finally, this mind is also pervaded by a luxurious, wide spreading, potentially limitless force, analogous to a *natura naturans* in constant tension towards accomplishment *per se* («teeming», «full ripened», ll. 2 and 4, respectively), apparently devoid of any functional, immediate, nor practical goal, save that of simply *growing* («teeming» aptly suggests this anarchistic movement towards life and expansion, without a predetermined plan).

These metaphors model the subject's creative mental processing as a recurring and uncontrollable wandering of the psyche, that is, as a mental adriftness which continually withdraws him from his writing task. Psycho-cognitively, the mental wandering the speaker manifests in the three quatrains entails the activation of divergent thinking, as both processes share the same dilating, expansive character, that is, unfold as multiple clusters of discrete units («grain», l. 4 as a metaphor for «ideas»), following different and often unexpected directions in a seemingly haphazard chaotic way («teeming», l. 2), not limited by any critically focused, thus rational concern, but in constant *con*-fusion, metamorphosis, and expansion.

Divergent thinking is also active in the second quatrain, where the speaker explores the contents of his imaginative mind. Analogously as the archetypal Romantic genius who, being endowed with the capacity of intuitive vision, grasps inner, occult truths beyond sensible reality, here the poetic «I» eidolically perceives, in the night sky («I behold, upon the night's starred face», l. 5), imaginal truths with opaque meanings («cloudy symbols», l. 6). In this specific case, the speaker's visionary power culminates in the capacity of foreseeing possible future events as he receives an intimation of his potential poetic achievement by symbolizing his experience. The «cloudy symbols» stand for «high romance» (l. 6), the masterpiece he longs to write; their spatial extension, «[h]uge» (l. 6), metaphorically alludes, through reference to the topological signifier, to temporal expansion also, that of a writing effort which will be only accomplished in the far future as it is presumably too demanding for its author.

Again, the psycho-cognitive attitude, manifested by the speaker in these lines, can be equalled to divergent thinking, as both mental processes share the same feature of adriftness, that is the tendency of digressing from its conceptual focus. In this case, and unlike what occurs in the first quatrain, where the aggregative expansiveness of divergent thinking is modelled in naturalistic terms, as unrestrained organicistic growth, the processing of the speaker's creative mind also includes the cultural dimension of rhetoric. This feature becomes detectable as the speaker's pattern of mental processing semantically shifts from simple literality (the night's starry sky) to figurative imagery, as suggested by the allusions to metaphor (the anthropomorphisation of the night's sky as a «starred face», l. 5) and symbol («symbols of a high romance», l. 6). The mental adriftness which is characteristic of divergent thinking is here structurally transposed as a gradual signic metamorphosis, undergone by the contents of the speaker's mind and developing as a progressive loosening of the signifier-signified relationship. This metamorphosis begins as direct correspondence (as in the night's sky), then moves to iconic simile (as in the pareidolic metaphor of the firmament as «face» of the night's sky, l. 5),¹³ finally culminates into symbolic arbitrariness (as in the «cloudy symbols» prefiguring the future, possible composition of a «high romance», l. 6).

In the third quatrain, the use of «feel» (l. 9) in this specific context suggests the activation, by the speaker, of emotion in combination with intuition, as the «fair creature of an hour» (l. 9) is both the object of his erotic desire, and at the same time a bad omen on the fatal weakness of this relationship, due to the psychosomatic unsteadiness involved in it («of an hour», l. 9; «never look upon thee more», l. 10; «Never have relish», l. 11). Secondly, the use of «fair» (which in turn connotes both ocular perception and fascination), and of «love» (ll. 9 and 12, respectively) indicates that the speaker's mind is at the moment dominated by emotion in combination with sensory perception. These features tell us that the speaker's mind is governed by the irrational, aggregative clusters of the unconscious; thus, its processing is mainly divergent.

This impression is corroborated by the lexical choices made by Keats in this part of the text, and attributed to the speaker: the lexical vagueness of «fair creature», that is, the epithet used here to indicate the goal of erotic (as well as artistic) desire, instead of a more precise naming; the use of «unreflecting» (l. 12) as a qualifier for the nature of the speaker's relationship with the woman («love»); the allusion to a «fairy power» (l. 11). These choices indicate that the speaker's mind is dominated by the preverbal, non-conceptual representational contents which are characteristic of the unconscious, thus again by divergent thinking. First of all, clear naming would imply the activation of the Aristotelian logic which is characteristic of rational thought and linear conceptualisation, thus of convergent thinking. Secondly, «unreflecting» not only implies, in the *langue*, the semantic field of «non-rationality» (cf. *OED*, adj.: A.1.), but it also figuratively suggests here the notion of «unreflectingness» (cf. *OED*, adj.: A.2. and «Derivatives»), that is, the existence of a fundamental unrelatedness, in this case concerning the speaker's worldview, between the internal dimension of his mind and the external world of experience, where the «fair creature» presumably lives. In other words, the lexeme alludes to the fact that the speaker's attachment for the woman is unilateral, solipsistic, thus mainly dominated by the unconscious. Finally, «fairy power» further suggests the dominant irrationality of the speaker's mind, as the syntagm implies the activation, by the speaker, of magical thinking, a kind of nonrational processing which typically does not exclude the existence of the supernatural, and which is therefore akin to both the anti-logic of the unconscious and the conceptual openness of divergent thinking.

The level of the enounced also manifests the activation, by the speaker, of convergent thinking. In the case of creative writing, convergent thinking becomes active in the crucial passage between brainstorming and externalisation (Sawyer, 2012, pp. 88–90). In this liminal phase, the contents of the creative mind are still mainly divergent, thus clustered in larger associative aggregates, as they are oriented toward the subject's inner dialogue with himself, as it occurs in individual, or «nominal group», brainstorming (pp. 88–90, 235), that is in the type of brainstorming which is performed individually, not in a group. For this reason, these contents must undergo a process of informational reduction (for instance, through the selection of the best ideas), and verbal encoding (for

instance, through textualisation), to be successfully communicated to the public, that is, to be externalised. Of course, this operation has to be performed in accordance with the external constraints of writing (social conventions such as language, literacy, genre, and culture; material boundaries, such as space and time). In other words, it has to be done on the basis of the intersubjective and pragmatic awareness which is characteristic of the convergent modes of thought, analytically selective and practically utilitarian (pp. 88–90).

In Keats' sonnet, convergent thinking is first of all implied in the dense harvest metaphor which dominates in ll. 1–4 (the «pen» as a tool for «glean[ing] » the speaker's «teeming brain» and the «books» as «rich garner» storing the precious «full ripened grain»). As we already know, the image figuratively suggests, in the ambit of creative writing, two complementary operations within the phase of externalisation: the selection of the best ideas and textualisation. Thus, this mode of thought, analytically selective and culturally biased, is here implied. The same can be said of «high romance» (l. 6), as it presupposes again textualisation (even in its noblest form: literature), thus again the activation of convergent thinking.

This cognitive ability becomes again evident in the speaker's preoccupation with time, which spreads over the three quatrains and is closely related to the accomplishment of the creative process. He is afraid («I have fears», l. 1) he will not finish his writing task, because of his premature death («I may cease to be», l. 1); because of his incapability of cognitively sustaining, nor reviving through poetry, his nebulous imaginary insights («I may never live to trace/Their shadows», ll. 7–8); because of the evanescence of the desired beautiful object (he perceives the «fair creature» as being «of an hour», l. 9). The time concern, besides presumably being an allusion to a dominant theme of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, the war with time, is characteristic of the more conscious and rational parts of the mind, thus of convergent thinking. Moreover, it is only through the activation of this cognitive ability that any creative subject, thus also the Keatsian speaker, becomes aware of the unavoidable material constraints of writing, including time boundaries. The verb «think» (l. 7) also implies the activation of the more rational and conscious parts of the speaker's mind, thus again of convergent thinking. It indeed reintroduces the shortage-of time concern which reoccurs later in the text («I may never live to trace/Their shadows», l. 7–8), and we cannot forget that it is a key lexeme Keats often uses, in both his poetry and letters, as a synonym for several convergent abilities, such as consequent reasoning and logical assessment.¹⁴

Moreover, we can also detect in these lines another symptom of the activation of convergent thinking: spatial awareness. This feature becomes evident in line 6, where the «symbols of a high romance» are qualified as «[h]uge». The choice for this adjective indicates that the speaker is also manifesting, along with intuitive vision, characteristic of divergent thinking and which is responsible for the ability of beholding the omenic symbols in the starry sky, also the capacity of assessing the size of the objects of this vision, that is, of rationally evaluating his experience in terms of dimensions. Again, he is activating convergent thinking.

6. The impasse and its causes

Creative writing is a complex and multifaceted psycho-cognitive activity in which the convergent modes of thought (conscious, critically focussed, and analytical), and the divergent ones (unconscious, dispersive, and synthetical) should cooperate in the various phases of the process, without obstructing each other (Sawyer, 2012, pp. 88–90). This is precisely what does not happen in the Keatsian speaker's mind. Here, the interplay between divergent and convergent thinking is indeed highly problematic: instead of working as in an integrated polarity, the two cognitive abilities entail a relationship of mutual exclusion (*aut-aut*). Consequently, instead of cooperating, they fatally hinder each other. As we will see now, this state of affairs inevitably leads to the cognitive and operational impasse which affects the creative process of the Keatsian speaker since the beginning of the poem. Let us explore this phenomenon in more detail.

The mutual incompatibility between divergent and convergent thinking lays deep in the text, as it entails the ontological plane. In quatrains I–III, the divergent mental processing exists in

a different spatiotemporal dimension than that of the convergent ones. In the first two quatrains, this condition has been modelled as a binary opposition between the internal and the external conditions of writing. As we already know, the divergent processes are more closely related to the dimension of the individual psyche (the vitalistic «teeming brain», l. 2; the «[h]uge, cloudy symbols», subjectively caught by the speaker in line 6), and follow the specific rules of the inmost and unconscious parts of the mind. On the other side, and as we have seen, convergent processes (book writing, ll. 2–4; composition of a «high romance», l. 6) are more directly related to the phase of externalisation; thus, they are envisaged by the speaker as being located outside his mind, in the intersubjective dimension of literacy and public communication, in which the convergent modes of thought (selection of the best ideas, textualisation, awareness of the spatiotemporal boundaries of writing) should prevail over the divergent ones, like it or not. In the third quatrain, the *hiatus* between the divergent and the convergent components of the speaker's mind becomes even worse, as it takes the form of a polar opposition between the dimensions of the human (represented by the speaker) and the supernatural (embodied by the «fair creature» of line 9, and related to the ambit of magic, as «fairy power» suggests in l. 11). Here, the mutual incompatibility of the two planes thus broadens, as it now involves the whole chronotope. Moreover, their relative roles have been reversed: the speaker incorporates the convergent modes of thought, while the «fair creature» embodies the divergent ones.

As a consequence, the speaker cannot maintain a stable apprehension of the «fair creature» (then a relationship based on convergent thinking), neither in time («of an hour», «thee more», ll. 9 and 10, respectively), nor in space («Never have relish», l. 11). At the same time, the «fair creature» exists in a different ontological plane, whose rules are *other* («faery», l. 11) than those which apply to the human. It is for this reason that their relationship is doomed to unilaterality («unreflecting love», l. 12), thus again implicitly to failure («Never have relish»).

In the three quatrains, the *hiatus* between the divergent and convergent components of the speaker's creative effort remains unsolvable. If the goal is that of giving verbal form to the poetic *cogito*, that is, of make divergent informational content converge, therefore establishing a continuity between the inner and outer components of the creative process (in terms of the idealistic and self-expressive poetics of Romanticism: to make real the ideal), writing is thus impossible. This is why the speaker models himself as one who inexorably and repeatedly faces a situation of creative failure. Images of accomplishment of the creative process are still present: book writing in ll. 2–4; the capacity of verbally reviving the vision by tracing the shadows mentioned in ll. 7–8; the capacity of sustaining the vision of l. 9 by having a stable ocular and emotional perception of the «fair creature of an hour», in ll. 10–12. However, these actions still exist in the unreal dimension of future, prospected actions, desired by the speaker but not yet fulfilled.

The problematic cognitive configuration of the speaker's mind during the creative process exerts a dramatic effect on his way of envisaging the poetic task and himself as creator. This perception is dysphoric, that is, pervaded by a deep and generalised state of unease and dissatisfaction. This feature becomes evident at both the levels of the enounced and of the enunciation.

Since the opening line, the speaker manifests an overall and recurrent sense of fear («When I have fears», l. 1). Its main outcomes, anxiety, inadequacy towards the writing task and awkwardness in speech, then reverberate in the subsequent quatrains. Anxiety can be detected in the first quatrain, when the speaker has to face the concluding and more crucial phase of the creative process, externalisation. This psychodynamic condition has been modelled by Keats in chronotopical terms, as a disproportion, subjectively perceived by the speaker, between the spatiotemporal dimension of his creative mind's processes and that of the external world. The former is characterized by perpetuity of development, as suggested by the naturalistic imagery of plant cycles and fertility which dominates in this part of the text: the anarchistic movement of the «teeming brain» (l. 2) is, in fact, akin to the vitalistic energy of fertile, organic nature; «brain» is rhyme fellow

with «grain» (ll. 2 and 4), with whom it then shares the same features of spontaneous growth (the grain is a vegetable), richness and abundance (the grain is «full ripened», l. 4).

The outer world, on the other hand, corresponds to the dimension of the externalized human activities, such as rural operations (gleaning, l. 2; grain storage in «garners», l. 3–4) and, by analogy through the dense harvest metaphor, writing and publishing («pen», l. 2; «books, in charactery», l. 3). The disproportion between these two dimensions of the creative process is in relative speed and extension: the growth of the vitalistic mental plane is overabundant if compared with the speaker's paltry and limited means, as his pen is similar to a meagre tool for gleaning leftover wheat. At the same time, a third element worsens the framework. The speaker's worried perception of his temporal dimension is too limited (he is afraid of dying without accomplishing his writing task: «I may cease to be», l. 1) if compared with the indefinitely dilated time of organic growth and with the time which would be required to write, and possibly publish, a great number of literary works («high-pilèd books, in charactery», l. 3).

What is more, the speaker also manifests a sense of inadequacy towards his writing task. This condition is modelled as a disproportion in relative value between the creative process (the metaphorical gleaning of the «teeming brain», l. 2) and its potential finished products (the «high-pilèd books, in charactery», l. 3). The former is seen by the speaker as relatively lesser in prestige if compared with the latter: «in charactery» alludes to the literary excellence of the authors of the past, and in turn constitutes, to the speaker, a model he humbly tries to follow. In the *langue*, «charactery» alludes to handwriting or printing (*OED*, n.: 1. a. and b.), but it is also, as we have seen, a Shakespearean word.¹⁵ Moreover, we shouldn't forget that Keats was an enthusiastic admirer of Shakespeare, as he frequently quoted this author both in the letters and in the poetical writings,¹⁶ and that the sonnet itself has been modelled after the Shakespearean canon (three quatrains and a final couplet). Thus, the syntagm carries with it the whole weight of Keats' creative responsibility as a young author, as well as the speaker's, towards this illuminating, but at the same time so demanding, literary model.

The lexical choice for «gleaned» (l. 2), in the harvest metaphor for writing, further deepens the speaker's sense of inferiority towards his writing task. In fact, and unlike the lexeme «harvest», which indicates the action of collecting the best parts of a plantation (cf. *OED*, v.: 1.a.), «glean» instead refers to the action of collecting leftover crops, often by poor people, after they have been harvested (cf. *OED*, v.: 2.a.). By opting for this lexeme instead of the other one, Keats thus dysphorically reverses the more conventional metaphor of writing as harvesting, which in turn would connote composition as a noble and useful activity, that is as a collection of the best parts of the fertile poetic *cogito* analogously as the «full ripened grain» of l. 4 is collected in the fields. On the contrary, the speaker envisages his creative effort in self-devaluative terms, as he presents it as a mere, humble collection of the worse, unimportant parts of his anyway fertile imaginative mind («teeming brain», l. 2). His creative effort is thus a less productive action than that of other authors of the literary tradition, such as Shakespeare (a rich harvester of the mind's grain). In other words, the creative self, depicted in this sonnet, is no more than a low-class gatherer of the leftover remains of more precious wholes (the field of tradition, the imaginative mind).

In the first quatrain, the speaker's dysphoric psychological condition also becomes detectable at the level of the signifier, where a repeated prosodic babbling expressively suggests his subjectively perceived linguistic awkwardness, if compared to the creative models of the past. The alliteration in «b» («Before [...] / Before high piled books», ll. 2–3) and in «g» («garners [...] grain», l. 4) and the irregular, agitated rhythm (the regular iambic pentameter of ll. 1 and 2 shares the textual space with the more agitated spondee of lines 3 and 4), structurally transpose the hurried, panting, wheezing breath which is characteristic of one who, like the speaker, is temporarily experiencing a condition of stress.

In the second quatrain, the dysphoric attitude manifested by the speaker takes the form of an awful feeling of really being unable to accomplish his writing task («I may never live to trace/Their

shadows», ll. 7–8). This uncertainty becomes even worse in the third quatrain, where it turns into a bad omen («I shall *never* look upon thee more./*Never*», l. 10–11), perhaps the worst one for a creative individual: that of having permanently lost contact with the object of the erotic, as well as aesthetic, desire (the «fair creature of an hour», l. 9), that is, of having broken the crucial link between the subject and object of poetry, between the lyrical «I» and his beautiful («fair») referent. Here, the anaphoric repetition of «never» (ll. 10 and 11) even aggravates the speaker's devaluative self-depiction: he has now become the negative version of the canonical Romantic genius, a creatively sterile subject, linguistically inadequate, his creative effort doomed to failure. Here the metre reinforces this sense of inevitability. The second occurrence of «never», at the opening of line 11, receives emphasis through a sudden shift from the iambic pattern which dominated in the preceding line, to the trochee in the first foot, then, it is supported by a new emotional apex in the third foot, due to the presence of the pyrrhic. The awful feeling has now turned into gloomy depression.

This problematic attitude, manifested by the speaker during the impasse, is also characterised by another crucial feature. Even if the model of creativity he enacts proves to be a flaw, as the process does not successfully lead to writing, he nevertheless reiterates it as a compulsory, as well as creatively sterile, mental behaviour. Paratactic syntax and lexical repetition expressively suggest this feature: «when», anaphorically repeated in combination with «and» (ll. 1, 5 and 9), shows that the speaker's block is an iterative event, thus occurring frequently, in the writing process. In terms of cognitive psychology, the mental behaviour the speaker manifests in this part of the text, ineffective but at the same time repetitive, can be interpreted as a condition of «functional fixation», that is, as a moment of actantial block in a problem-solving experience, during which the subject «fixates» in an incorrect solution, again and again, without overcoming the impasse, and in some cases even aggravating it (Sawyer, 2012, pp. 110–11).

Moreover, other features reveal this similarity between the condition the speaker manifests in this part of the sonnet and functional fixation. Psycho-cognitively, functional fixation entails a set of recurrent mental behaviours which, in turn, are commonly envisaged by many scholars as some of the major causes of impasses. Two of them are useful for the present analysis. Typically, in problem-solving experiences, the subject at first gets stuck by either being misled by ambiguous or irrelevant information in the problem (Dominowsky & Dallob, 1995, pp. 33–62; Smith, 1995, pp. 135–156). It is this informational opacity in the representation of the problem which blocks the solver into fixation, since it diverts his mental processes from an unambiguous, lucid apprehension of the problem, which in turn would lead him to find the answer, thus to overcome the impasse, to a confused and misleading one, which instead leads to the formulation of a series of unsuccessful solving strategies, thus to a further deepening of the block itself.

In Keats' sonnet, the behaviour the speaker manifests in the first three quatrains overlaps the condition of informational puzzlement described above, and which in turn characterises the solver's mental processes during the phase of functional fixation. First of all, and as a solver during fixation, the speaker is portrayed in a condition of bewilderment in front of his problematic writing task. This condition is presented, in the text, as a generalised impasse involving the internal and external planes, as it at the same time affects the speaker's inner states, in the form of an emotive block, and the outside, as manifest actantial stasis.

At each of the three phases of the creative process, he is indeed petrified both internally, due to his psychological condition of depression, and externally, in his capacity of performing actions. As we have seen, in the first quatrain, he doesn't «glean[...]» (l. 2) his thoughts with his pen; in the second quatrain, he doesn't «trace» (l. 7) the visionary shadows he has detected in the night's starry sky; in the third quatrain, he cannot follow with his sight the fleeting movements of his coy mistress, the «fair creature of an hour» (l. 9), that is, he cannot sustain the imaginative vision or referent of poetry. In sum, the speaker's poetic task has become a collection of unperformed mental and practical actions. Moreover, in the speaker's perception, the inner impasse is

inextricably interwoven with the external impasse, as his emotive block is both antecedent and consequent to his actantial block. This is due to the fact that the dysphoric complex is so eradicated in the speaker's writing habits that we cannot know for certain, as it is not presented clearly in the text, if his operative inadequacy in putting ideas into practice, in each of the three macrophases of the writing process (observation, brainstorming and externalisation), is the cause of his gloomy depression, or, on the contrary, it is his inferiority complex towards literature which is responsible for the actantial impasse. It is for this reason that the speaker's poetic task has become a seamless and chaotic whole of repeated blocks, having no causal consequentiality.

Secondly, and as it occurs in any problem-solving experience, where the solver at first fixates on the incorrect answer, the Keatsian speaker is initially misled by ambiguous and irrelevant information in the problem. In the sonnet, this preliminary misrepresentation of the problem can be detected in the speaker's way of envisaging his problematic writing task. Irrelevant information occurs in the first quatrain. More precisely, it becomes evident in the connotation of inadequacy and waste which emerges in the naturalistic imagery of the poor gleaning, used in lines 2–3 by Keats to metaphorically undervalue the speaker's writing effort, and already analysed. In psycho-cognitive terms, this image can be interpreted as an irrelevant kind of information in the representation of the problem by the speaker. Indeed, when he opts for the verb «glean» instead of «harvest», he is in fact devaluating his capacity of externalising the contents of his creative *cogito* through verbal language. This attitude introduces a type of information in the solving process (assessment of the creative subject's personality rather than of his actions) which proves to be useless to the solution. Instead of leading him to the overcoming of the impasse, this cluster of thoughts makes him stagnate into a psychic condition of self-commiseration and unworthiness. This latter diverts him from both his real task, that of verbalizing through his «pen» (l. 2) the contents of his fecund «teeming brain» (l. 2), and from more prolific and effective attitudes, such as self-confidence and self-esteem, which are instead fundamental to succeed in any creative act (Kelley & Kelley, 2013). Psychologically, when the Keatsian speaker equals his writing to a poor gleaning, he is in fact sabotaging his capacity of achieving the desired poetic goal, and he does so by engulfing the creative process with this kind of irrelevant information.

Ambiguous information, on the other side, becomes evident in the second quatrain. More precisely, it can be detected in the imaginatively caught («behold», l. 5), but at the same time too unclear vision («cloudy», l. 6; «shadows», l. 8) the speaker has of the symbols he detects in the night's starry sky, and in the ensuing assumption of being unable of transposing them into verbal communication («I may never live to trace/Their shadows», ll. 7–8). In this case, ambiguous information corresponds to the symbolic regimen of these signs («symbols», l. 6), whose informative density («[h]uge», l. 6) and semiotic opaqueness («cloudy», l. 6; «shadows», l. 8) are felt by the speaker as incompatible with the linear and consequential structure of verbal language and discourse, that would instead constitute their chief means of expression, in the creative effort of the speaker. According to the Romanticist paradigm, based on Idealism, the poet has to create a phylogenetic link between the ideal and the real, to seamlessly connect psychic content with poetic form, and most of all to do all this *effortlessly*.¹⁷ In this case also, the speaker's perception of the contents of his poetic mind prevents him from overcoming the block, since the action of tracing, that is of transcoding the «symbols» into verbal language, is seen by him as potentially unachievable («I may never», l. 7). This impression is due to the subjectively perceived incompatibility between the opaque and ungraspable objects of his poetic *cogito* and the task of externalising them verbally («trace», l. 8), an action which instead connotes exactitude and linearity.

Irrelevant and ambiguous information in the speaker's representation of his writing problem can be also detected in the third quatrain. Both features become evident in the relationship he entails with the object of his erotic desire (the «fair creature of an hour», l. 9). Ambiguity emerges in the semantic vagueness which characterizes the depiction of the woman as a not better defined «creature», while the character of irrelevance emerges in the effort, made by the speaker, to

establish a stable connection with her, both on the plane of sensory perception («look upon thee more», l. 10) and psychosomatically («have relish», l. 11). As we already know, this desire remains fatally unattainable, due to the ontological incompatibility between the speaker and the creature. The former is subject to the laws of natural space and time which govern humanity, while the latter escapes those laws (she is «of an hour», l. 9) as the «creature» seems to be subject, instead, to the domain of the preternatural, where other rules apply. For the speaker as a solver of the writing block, these unattainable aspirations can be thus equalled to an irrelevant kind of information in the problem, as they worsen the impasse by diverting him from other strategies which would be more functional to attain the solution.

In sum, the Keatsian speaker's impasse involves, on the plane of content, psycho-cognitive imbalance, while on the structural plane functional fixation dominates.

7. The overcoming of the impasse: breaking frame and insight

In the phase of functional fixation, the solver's block can last indefinitely unless a restructuring of thought occurs, that is, unless a drastic change in the habitual, but at the same time also ineffective, psycho-cognitive behaviour takes place, thus introducing a discontinuity of thought in the subject's mental processes (Weisberg, 1995, pp. 157–196). This change must significantly turn the informational quality of the subject's representation of the problem from an ambiguous and misleading way of envisaging it, to a more lucid and clear one. As long as the solver remains in this preliminary psycho-cognitive mode, repetitive as well as unsuccessful, the problem will remain fatally unsolved, the goal unattained. Only the subject's awareness of the opportunity and inevitability of wilfully acquiescing to being more flexible to alternative solutions and, most of all, to being open to modify his habitual way of relating to the problem, constitutes the necessary psycho-cognitive precondition for overcoming the vast majority of blocks in problem-solving experiences (De Young et al., 2008, pp. 279–283; see also Zabelina & Robinson, 2010, pp. 136–143). This mental behaviour is called «breaking frame» (De Young et al., 2008, pp. 280–283).

Analogously, in the case of the Keatsian speaker, the solution of his writing problem, therefore the unblocking of the impasse, will be precluded until a radical transformation in his repetitive and ineffective mental attitude towards the creative process takes place. In other words, as a solver in a problem-solving experience, he has to overcome fixation by breaking the old, habitual frame of thought, that is, by substituting the previous and ineffective representation of the problem with a new one, more useful to find the solution, therefore to overcome the impasse. In the specific case of the speaker, this change will consist in turning his dysphoric and depressive mood into a more positive and self-affirming attitude, in supplanting initial informational puzzlement by clear-mindedness, in transforming the unbalanced interplay between convergent and divergent thinking into a polarity of complementary opposites, now working together for the same creative goal.

Fortunately, this crucial change occurs in the text when, between the three quatrains and the final couplet, the speaker declares: «then on the shore/Of the wide world I stand alone, and think,/Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink» (ll. 12–14). In the metaphorical seascape image which dominates in these lines, the speaker, now in pensive aloneness («I stand alone and think») remains on the shore of the «wide world»—seemingly a metaphor for the whole creative process—and observes, now unperturbed, the disappearance into «nothingness» of «love and fame». In other words, he is witnessing that which seems to be a significant turning point in his poetic effort.

In this diairetic *tableau*, the key components of the speaker's creative mind («love and fame»), after they have been presumably externalized from the intrapsychic domain of the subject to the external world of experience, as personification suggests, gradually disappear from the subject's sensory range: «love and fame» sink into the nullifying sea of «nothingness». Thus they go out of his sight. On the one side, «love» alludes to the subjective components of creativity, the innermost unconscious, therefore divergent and inwardly oriented necessities of the individual's psyche. On

the other side, «fame» alludes to the socially biased demands which attract the creative mind outwardly, towards the public, as a drive for attaining success. The lexemic pair, thus, anaphorically resumes the two key topics which dominated in the three quatrains and whose relation of mutual exclusion was responsible for the impasse. But why are they now sinking into «nothingness»? And why does the speaker witness this event imperturbably? The answer to these questions is crucial to the correct understanding of this sonnet.

In the final couplet, «love» and «fame» remain fatally separated, as two lexical entities that are merely juxtaposed by coordination without integration in a couple of balanced opposites, as it should happen in a successful creative mind. The image may thus present, at first sight, the yielding by the speaker to the mutual incompatibility of the internal and external components of creativity. As most critics propound, the couplet structurally transposes the poet's renunciative attitude towards the protagonist's erotic and poetic ambitions, and it allegedly culminates with his resolution of giving up writing, as he finally «succumbs»¹⁸ to the difficult challenge of creativity in an «almost Leopardi-like *naufragare*».¹⁹ In other words, this part of the text presents the poet's final succumbing to the creative impasse.

However, this interpretation becomes unconvincing when we read the sonnet in cognitive psychological terms. The sinking of «love and fame» into «nothingness» metaphorically visualises, on the contrary, the moment of breaking frame in the speaker's creative process, that is the moment in which he abandons the old way of envisaging the problem, and adopts a radically different attitude. In other words, the image presents a significant step towards the accomplishment of the poetic effort, not its failure.

The fact that a significant change has occurred in the speaker's mind becomes first of all detectable in the formal and logical break which these lines introduce in the text, with the result of sharply splitting the sonnet into two parts: ll. 1 to the first hemistich of line 12; second hemistich of line 12 to the closure. The presence of the semicolon («;») and of the inferential connective «then», at the *caesura* of line 12, indeed indicates that a separation between a “before” and “now” of the psyche has taken place in the speaker's mental processing. This separation is even drastic, as the segment «; then» falls in the middle of line 12, instead of at the beginning of the final couplet, that is line 13. This partial violation of the Shakespearean norm in terms of syntax (three quatrains and a final couplet) makes this twist occur unexpectedly, in the text, therefore heightening the degree of emphasis in this part of the sonnet.

In psycho-cognitive terms, and as far as problem-solving is concerned, the couplet also manifests the overcoming of the functional fixation which in turn dominated in the three quatrains and was responsible for the psychological and actantial petrification of the speaker, that is, of his creative impasse. This overcoming becomes first of all detectable at the actantial level, as now the subject's behaviour towards the contents of his poetic *cogito* (now re-encoded as the synthetic lexical pair of «love and fame») has significantly changed from patient to agent. Keats suggests this key feature through the visual signifier, in the form of the ocular dominion manifested by the protagonist in front of the sinking of «love and fame» into «nothingness» as he, calmly and self-assuredly, keeps his gaze steady on the metamorphosis of his mental contents, for the whole duration of this event («Till», l. 14). This attitude has, first of all, substituted the speaker's ocular instability of the second and third quatrains—where he couldn't even reconstruct pareidolically the ambiguous symbolic forms, hidden in the constellations of the night sky, nor maintain a stable psychosomatic grasp of the «fair creature of an hour». Secondly, this attitude has also replaced the relative ocular inferiority of the speaker in front of the quantitative and qualitative superiority, subjectively perceived, of the «high-piled books, in character» (l. 3) and of the «huge cloudy symbols of a *high* romance» (l. 6), and which modelled the poet's inability to fully comprehend them visually, thus also, and by analogy, psycho-cognitively. The speaker's new attitude towards «love and fame» suggests that his apprehension of the contents of his poetic mind has finally

become stable, thus strong, unlike what repeatedly occurred in the previous phases of the creative process, thus in the three quatrains, when it was constantly unstable, thus weak.

The overcoming of functional fixation also becomes detectable in the different emotive attitude manifested by the speaker and regarding the contents of his mind («love and fame»). The encumbering depressive mood which monopolised his mind in the quatrains as a thymically dysphoric conglomerate of fear, anxiety and frustration has turned, in the closure, into mild emotional trepidation and untroubled excitement. This feature becomes evident at the level of the speaker's voice, whose acoustic and rhythmic features convey a marked sense of auditory revivification which in turn artistically models the protagonist's new emotional attitude while sharply contrasting with the gloomy, depressive mood, which instead dominated in the quatrains. First of all, in this part of the text, rhythm has evolved from the duple modules which characterized the iambic pentameters of the preceding lines, and whose repetitive regularity prosodically echoed the cognitive redundancy of the first three quatrains, to the triple modules of the anapaestic, whose relative prosodic energy and activity expressively convey the psychological shift towards action and resolution which in turn has just taken place in the subject's mind.

Secondly, and as far as sound is concerned, it is important to note that in the three quatrains, an oxytonic pattern of release vs. restraint of acoustic-articulatory energy dominates. A sense of release is conveyed through the long vowels (12 occurrences), diphthongs (26), and triphthongs (2 occurrences of [aU@], in «hour» and «power», ll. 9 and 11) which spread evenly across lines 1 to 12 and a half. Voiced and voiceless fricatives also convey this phonosymbolical quality (even if through the partial articulatory obstruction these sounds imply) and they abound in this part of the text (45 occurrences, that is, up to the 12% of the total amount of phonemes, 362). This phonological texture, acoustically fluent and connotatively smooth, almost impalpable to the hear, besides being reminiscent of Shakespeare's sonnets (e.g., Sonnet 30), structurally transposes the speaker's deepest thoughts, those which cannot find full expression, at the moment, as clearly audible sounds. It is for this reason that they flutter in the text as the feeble whispers which the fricatives convey among the concomitant and more vivid sound clusters. This impression finds support in the fact that some of the key lexemes composing the paradigm of the speaker's depressive attitude towards writing include these sounds: «have fears» (l. 1), «cease» (l. 1), «gleamed my teeming» (l. 2), «face» (l. 5), «symbols» (l. 6), «high romance» (l. 6), «shadows» (l. 8), «feel, fair» (l. 9), «of an hour» (l. 9).

This pattern is interrupted, again and again, by the injection of an opposite and complementary phonetic pattern, instead composed of consonantal clusters conveying a strong sense of limitation, or even block, as they compress acoustic and articulatory energy without any immediate release. This is the case of the textual segments manifesting a sudden thickening of voiceless consonants, mainly [k] (initial, medial and final, for a total of 10 occurrences) with the addition of other consonantal sounds and clusters, acoustically compressive such as voiceless [t], and vehement, such as the sound cluster [tr], and the affricates [tʃ] and [dʒ]. These consonants and sound clusters convey an overall sense of confinement, if not block, of a burst of energy which desperately tries to erupt, without finding any release. Other consonantal sounds carrying a similar strong energetic load, such as [p] and [r], have been added to heighten this effect («pen», l. 2; «piled», l. 3; «ripened», l. 4; «upon», ll. 5 and 10; «power», l. 11). It is not by chance that these clusters occur in the key lexemes which punctuate the paradigm of the writing impasse («character», l. 3; «huge cloudy», l. 6; «magic», l. 8; «creature» (l. 9); «unreflecting», l. 12). This feature occurs since the creative block of the speaker has been sapiently injected by Keats in the deepest texture of the protagonist's voice, as a distinctive mark which is inscribed in his *parole* and takes the form of a compelling, but at the same time also fatally thwarted, phonetic energy. The phonosymbolic patterning of the three quatrains thus structurally transposes the basic features of the speaker's temporarily blocked creativity: a desperate desire to find a free and unrestrained mode of expression coexisting with a huge bulk of constrictive and regressive elements, without any possibility of mutual integration.

The phonosymbolic patterning of the closure shows a completely different asset of these two opposing forces. Fricatives and long vocalic sounds are still present (10 and 5, respectively) so that they provide the same smooth and impalpable phonological background as in the quatrains. However, the vehement and constrictive consonantal clusters, which continuously hindered sound emission by the speaker in the first part of the text, have drastically decreased in number (3 occurrences: «stand», «think», both in l. 13, «sink», l. 14; here clusters are even shorter, as they include only consonantal pairs). Moreover, their acoustic impact has now been circumscribed, as they occur near more harmonious and agreeable sounds, such as those conveyed by the nasals [n] (initial and near-final position, as in «nothingness», l. 14; final position, as in «then on», l. 12, and «alone», l. 13), and [N] in combination with other more pleasant sounds, such as the voiced alveolar [d] and the liquid [l] («stand alone», l. 13), and such as the “light” vowel [I] in combination with [t], [l], [T] or [s] («think/Till», ll. 13–14; «nothingness [...] sink», l. 14), [l] in combination with [d] in final position (as in «world», l. 13). The frequency of these sound clusters is similar as in the quatrains ([n, m]: 35% compared with 33%; [l]: 15% compared with 19%; [ld]: 3% compared with 4%) with one exception ([nd]: 5% compared with 14%), which nevertheless confirms this trend towards energetic release and perceivable in the closure. What has changed is the context in which these clusters occur. Now the blocking sounds, which were responsible in the quatrains of the oxymoronic opposition of energy and restraint, have been not only reduced in quantity (only three lexemes), but also they have been disciplined, as the three lexemes compose a triad of keywords synthetically suggesting the newly acquired capacity of the speaker, that of having a stable («stand», l. 13) mental grasp («think», l. 13) of the fleeting and almost unconscious contents of his mind («sink», l. 14).

The shift, operated by the speaker’s mind, from the negative self-evaluation, and consequent actantial petrification, which dominated in the information processing related to creativity during the three quatrains, to the enlivenment, steadiness and self-assurance he instead manifests in the closure, is a clear sign of the overcoming of functional fixation, thus of the impasse. Cognitively, his mind has finally passed from irrelevant to relevant information processing since, in terms of creativity, this psychological metamorphosis entails a shift from a depressive, therefore noxious and useless, attitude to a more profitable and successful one. As cognitive psychologists have found, keeping a steady positive attitude towards one’s capacities during all the phases of the creative process and putting under control the dysphoric ones, such as negative self-evaluation, fear and anxiety, is indeed the key for any successful problem-solving experience, including creativity (Kelley & Kelley, 2013, pp. 2–18). As we have seen, only the former attitude constitutes a set of relevant information concerning the process, thus leads to the successful accomplishment of the creative task. By changing his attitude from the negative to the positive poles of the information processing relating to creativity, the Keatsian speaker has thus operated a crucial shift from irrelevant to relevant information, besides taking a significant step towards the overcoming of his block.

On the other side, the second decisive step in the overcoming of functional fixation, that is the transition from ambiguous to unambiguous information, becomes detectable in the shift from the informational puzzlement, which characterized the speaker’s apprehension of the objects of his poetic *cogito* in the first part of the text, to the clarity of vision he instead manifests in the closure. This phenomenon is conveyed by Keats both formally and semantically. Morphosyntactically, the quatrains show a predominance of subordinate clauses («Before my pen has gleaned», «Before high piled books», «in characterly», «upon the night’s starred face», «fair creature of an hour»: ll. 2, 3, 3, 5 and 9), and syntactic pauses («» in ll. 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10; «;» in ll. 4, 8, 12), while the closure consists of a single main clause. Moreover, in the three quatrains there are more polysyllables per line (including the repeated words: 22 over a total of 94 words, that is about 23% of the total lexemes occurring in this part of the poem),²⁰ whereas in the closure there are more monosyllables, apart from two exceptions, «alone» and «nothingness» (from line 12 and a half to line 14 we have 19 monosyllables over a total of words: 90%) and compounds («high-piled», l. 3; no compounds in the closure). In the quatrains, there are more noun modifiers («teeming brain», l. 2;

«high-piled books, in character», l. 3; «rich garner» and «full ripened grain», l. 4; «night's starred face», l. 5; «huge cloudy symbols», l. 6; «high romance», l. 6; «magic hand of chance», l. 8; «fair creature of an hour», l. 9; «faery power/Of unreflecting love», ll. 11–12: for a total of 17), while in the closure only one («wide», l. 13). Morphosyntactic proliferation has thus been replaced by morphosyntactic conciseness, in the speaker's voice. This linguistic variation from digression to synthesis suggests that a shift from dispersion and adriftness, to focus and concentration has also taken place in the speaker's way of processing information concerning the poetic *cogito*.

Semantically, the shift from informational dispersion to clarity of vision becomes evident in the speaker's new way of envisaging the objects of creativity, in the closure. Copiousness in number and concreteness in detail, which characterized the presentation of the poetic mind's contents in the quatrains (plural nouns: «books», l. 3; «garner», l. 4; «symbols», l. 6; «shadows», l. 8; noun modifiers and concrete imagery, both already mentioned) has turned, in the poem's closure, into scarceness in number and abstract non-detailed description (absence of plural nouns; absence of noun qualifiers, except for «wide», l. 13; concrete imagery substituted with two abstract entities, personified as «love and fame», in line 14, and a semantically vague «nothingness», in the same line). Moreover, this semantic emptying out also affects the ontological plane in the poem's final *tableau*, where «love and fame» sink into «nothingness» (line 14).

This state of affairs is thus the exact opposite of what occurred in the three quatrains, where the contents of the poetic mind existed in a more marked condition of “beingness”, as they were perceived and thus presented, by the speaker, as real objects, that is objects existing in the world of outer experience, therefore fatally separated from him. Thus, the psycho-cognitive change which is now taking place in the speaker's mind, also consists of a shift from events to concepts, that is from the domain of concrete and externalized experience, in which fullness of percepts and proliferation of object qualifications prevailed, to that of conceptual abstraction and internalized experience, in which stylization of ideas instead dominates.

This change from events to concepts, and from mental puzzlement to clarity of vision, can also be detected in the way the subject now presents the topical space of his creative activity. The naturalistic imagery, which dominated in the first part of the sonnet, was a physical and overland scenery, detailed and varied, representing the subject's externalised experience of the phenomenal world. It embraced the earth (cornfields and garner in quatrain I), the sky (the firmament in quatrain II) and the preternatural dimension, where the speaker presumably meets the «fair creature of an hour» (quatrain III). The phenomenological quality of this scenery was consistent with the fleeting world of outside experience because it was bound, as we have seen, to relativistic space-time parameters, which in turn existed beyond the subject's control. In the closure, this scenery has suddenly turned into the «shore/Of the wide world» (ll. 12–13), a terraqueous landscape (psychologically, the «shore» is a frontier between land and sea alluding to the archetypal elements of earth and water), perceptually concrete and linguistically concise, whose spatiotemporal coordinates now depend on subjective parameters (in «[t]ill love and fame to nothingness do sink», l. 14, individual perception has finally become the measuring system of this chronotope), and in which the subject has become a detached witness of his mental processes («love and fame»).

This frontier between land and sea is thus fundamentally symbolic of an experience which goes beyond the *Ego* and the outside world. The act of standing on the “shore/Of the wide world» is indeed suggestive of the same absorption in the sublime, metaphysical transcendence of the absolute which characterises many romantic ecstasies of the period, such as that of Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, painted in the same year of the composition of this sonnet, even if ignored by Keats. Archetypally, the image depicts the frontier between the conscious and the unconscious in which the «transcendent function», which is in turn responsible of the integration of the mind's polar oppositions into dynamic and complementary pairs, sets the stage for incoming psychological regeneration and rebirth.²¹ The shift from the concrete, organicistic overabundance, which characterised the chronotope in the quatrains, to the abstract, conceptual stylization, which

instead characterises the topical space of action in the closure, suggests that the speaker's mind has undergone a crucial shift in focus. This shift proceeds from the externalised world, where dispersion prevailed and where the poet experienced loss, puzzlement and anxiety, as well as psycho-cognitive ambiguity, to the internalised world of the mind, where instead concentration dominates and where he experiences reflection, self-awareness and balance, that is, clear-mindedness. Thus, again, the speaker's cognitive processes have switched from an ambiguous to an unambiguous way of processing information.

Now, in problem-solving, any discontinuity, or breaking frame, in the thinking process leads to a step further towards the solution. This is especially true in the case of all representational changes in the problem, as these mental leaps, by introducing a discontinuity in the process, create the psycho-cognitive preconditions to attain the solution (Knoblich et al., 1999, pp. 1534–1555; 2001, pp. 1000–1009). As we have seen, this is what happens in the case of the Keatsian speaker, as the transition from the quatrains to the couplet marks a drastic change which can be detected at all textual levels, and which at the same time structurally transposes a corresponding, as well as decisive, break in the continuity of the speaker's mental process. For these reasons, the situation presented in the closure overlaps with a moment of breaking frame.

Secondly, in problem-solving, any breaking frame will be useless if the previous representation of the problem, inadequate to unblock the impasse thus to find the solution, is not substituted with a new one, instead useful (De Young et al., 2008, pp. 278–290). Again, and as we will see now, this is what occurs in the poem's closure, where the discontinuity in the speaker's thinking progression, that is the moment of breaking frame, also coincides with a shift from irrelevant to relevant information and from ambiguous to unambiguous information processing. This event leads to the solution as it turns the representation of the impasse from that of a *sterile block*, fatally leading to insurmountable creative stasis thus useless to find the solution, to a *fertile pause* in the process, instead prefiguring imminent writing reboot, thus useful for the successful accomplishment of the poetic task. In other words, Keats' image is now suggesting that the speaker has re-encoded his impasse in terms of a moment of *incubation*, a subphase in the creative process during which the subject processes information unconsciously, while taking time off from his hard, focused work, either by engaging himself in an unrelated activity—e.g., gardening, walking—or, by refraining from any external action (Sawyer, 2012, p. 20 and 97; Wells, 1996). This phase—as the Romantics knew well, and chief among them Wordsworth—²² is crucial in the ongoing creative work, as the process of unconscious recombination of thought elements it entails renovates the process itself with fresh new ideas (Sawyer, 2012, p. 105). The speaker's meditative attitude («I stand alone and think», l. 13) corresponds to this refraining from deliberate and focussed action; the sinking of «love and fame» into «nothingness» metaphorically suggests that the speaker has let his mental contents freely recede into the depths of the unconscious, thus that he is in a moment of incubation.

A further component of this psycho-cognitive picture is that the speaker's mental processes now manifest a feature which was dramatically lacking in the quatrains: the integration between divergent and convergent thinking in a balanced couple of psycho-cognitive functions, no more entailing a relation of mutual exclusion, as it occurred in the quatrains, but rather existing in dynamic and complementary opposition. As we have seen, in the three quatrains the divergent and convergent thinking processes entailed an *aut-aut* relationship. Worse than that, divergent thinking tended to prevail over its convergent counterpart. This fact became evident in the speaker's misrepresentation of the objects of his creative mind as external phenomena, therefore as ontologically separated entities, rather than the products of his imagination. As a consequence, a sense of potential loss constantly haunted the poet's relationship with them, and it besides triggered a corollary of dysphoric emotional outcomes (fear, anxiety, frustration). At the same time, the dysphoric attitude towards the phase of externalisation, manifested by the speaker since the first quatrain, that is, his fear of losing contact with the objects of his creative mind during the writing process showed his inability to functionally integrate the divergent

components of his creativity with the convergent ones. In other words, he could not manage the difficult, as well as necessary, interplay of the imaginative components of creativity, based on the unconscious parts of the mind, with all the mental and practical operations, predominantly conscious and directed, which are instead responsible for successful intersubjective communication.

In the closure, and as a consequence of the new psycho-cognitive configuration now manifested by the speaker's mind, convergent thinking acts no more as an obstacle, but rather as a decisive tool for the accomplishment of the creative process. More than this, it does so by acting along with its divergent counterpart. Keats' use of the verb «think» in line 12 is crucial, as its emergence in this part of the text, therefore in the speaker's mental process, introduces the activation of two important cognitive operations which in turn do not interfere with divergent thinking, that is, which do not disturb the sinking of «love and fame» into «nothingness», thus incubation. On the contrary, they even potentiate it. These cognitive operations are *abstraction*, or the process of representing situations and objects out of a conceptual, rather than a being-in-the-world, situational, framework,²³ and *cognitive detachment*, that is, a form of psychological distancing from situations and objects which provides the solver the necessary separation to view the problem more objectively, thus more autonomously, from previous unsuccessful and blocking assumptions.²⁴

Abstraction becomes evident in the representation of the objects of the poetic *cogito* as conceptual categories («love and fame», l. 14), rather than as a proliferation of concrete situations and characters, as it occurred in the quatrains, thus as concepts rather than events, ideas rather than phenomena. The choice for «nothingness» (l. 14), suggesting the new ontological dimension now acquired by the objects, is moreover crucial. The noun does not indicate a devaluative nor indifferent attitude by the speaker. Rather, this lexeme is the verbal mark of the cognitive and ontological shift which has resulted from this new representation of the problem: a perception of the poetic mind's contents as purely *mental* objects, thus as cognitive entities having no phenomenological character, nor material consistency for themselves. It is for this reason that they can now disappear from the speaker's consciousness, therefore sink into the unconscious, without exerting the dysphoric emotional outcomes as it occurred before, in the quatrains. This disappearance is only temporary, as they «sink» into the indistinctness of the unconscious, divergent parts of the mind, during the subphase of incubation. At the same time, and since «love and fame» are now envisaged as concepts, that is *parts* of the speaker's mind, he will never lose contact with them, but only make them latent for a while. It is for this reason that the speaker *thinks* (thus, a verbal sign of conceptualisation) without an object and that this action takes place for a certain period («Till love and fame [...] sink», l. 14), that is, it has become steady. Moreover, this awareness, which is besides evident in the attitude of self-confidence manifested by the speaker in the final couplet, and is so decisive for the overcoming of any creative impasse, would have never happened without the activation of convergent thinking (abstraction: «think», l. 13; «love and fame», l. 14) in dynamic interaction with divergent thinking (the action of sinking into «nothingness» by «love and fame», line 14).

Contemporary cognitive psychologists have observed the interplay of convergent and divergent thinking during the subphase of incubation (Ellwood et al., 2009; Wells, 1996). Even if the former plays an important role in the most externalised phases of creativity, it is also crucial in incubation, as creators can benefit from this subphase only in the context of ongoing conscious processing (Sawyer, 2012, p. 104), that is, only if they have worked hard on the problem beforehand, and then continue to work hard on it afterwards. Keats thus manifests a striking awareness of the nature and functioning of these processes in relation with creativity as this sonnet's closure testifies.

The direct outcome of abstraction is the fact that now the speaker finally activates a healthy form of cognitive detachment as regards the contents of his creative mind, while in the three quatrains, where emotional attachment did not allow this kind of relationship with the objects of his poetic *cogito*. This phenomenon becomes evident, as we know, since now the speaker is not only separated from the objects of his mind and peacefully contemplates them at a distance, but

also, in the fact that he does not suffer any more for this separation: although he is now «alone» (l. 13), he is now become also steadfast, self-confident, emotionally balanced, and serene.

Through the activation of convergent thinking, he has thus become aware of another key competence in any successful creative process. According to contemporary cognitive psychology, a reasonable level of cognitive detachment allows the subject to verify the validity of his ideas, therefore gives him or her the freedom to either keep or discard them, without any *trauma* (De Jonge & Dormann, 2017, p. 97). Secondly, this mental process unleashes unconscious, divergent thinking to freely elaborate ideas and alternate solutions, by processing them undisturbed during incubation and in preparation to the apical point of the process, externalisation (Sawyer, 2012, p. 133–134). In the sonnet's closure, convergent thinking now finally cooperates with the divergent components of the speaker's mind, rather than interfering with them.²⁵ Thus, conscious thought has finally turned from an obstacle to a key tool of creativity.

8. The insight

The presentation of the scene in symbolic terms and the emotional enlivenment which characterizes the already analysed thematic and formal planes of this part of the text, respectively, indicate that the final *tableau*, far from suggesting an image of creative failure, imaginatively presents the moment of insight, that is, the epiphanic, sudden grasp of the solution by the creative individual who, at the climax of incubation finally envisages the solution to his problem and prepares externalisation. In the specific case of the Keatsian speaker, this solution coincides with the sudden vision of the mental configuration which is more suitable to solve the impasse, thus to restart the writing process. This vision includes a balanced interplay of the analytically focused, conscious processes (convergent thinking) with the synthetically dispersive, unconscious ones (divergent thinking), self-confidence, clear-mindedness and the capacity of seeing, now with cognitive detachment, that is at the right distance, the products of imagination. This picture strikingly anticipates the models of successful creativity which have been propounded by contemporary cognitive psychologists and mentioned at the beginning of this essay. Thus, it also shows Keats' maturity in terms of insightful investigation of the creative psyche's dynamics.

Reuven Tsur is right in arguing that «Keats's image suggests a process that leads to a highly-activated mental state that involves self-abandonment, and self-oblivion, what some mystics call “peak experience”» (Tsur, 2015, pp. 72–74). Indeed, the experience of transcending the limitations of one's self-centred *Ego*, now freed from the bondage of Time and Space, is characteristic of insight experiences also, as cognitive psychologists report (Ohlsson, 1992; Simon, 1986; Weisberg, 1995). However, the activation of convergent thinking in parallel with divergent thinking surpasses, in this poem, any experience of this kind, as it introduces a radically different component. The intellectual, abstract faculties («think», l. 13) have now become, along with the intuitive, imaginative ones, the key dynamic operators of the creative mind, as in Keats' poem, without this cognitive process, the transcoding of the objects of the poetic *cogito* from a multitude of concrete, phenomenal percepts («teeming brain», l. 2; «full ripened grain», l. 4; «huge cloudy symbols of a high romance», l. 6; «shadows», l. 8; «fair creature of an hour», l. 9; «fairy power/Of unreflecting love», ll. 11–12), to a pair of abstract, mental categories («love and fame», l. 14), and culminating into a semantically empty verbal void («nothingness», l. 14), would have never taken place. In other words, without the activation of this mental faculty, the rebooting of the creative process would have been impossible. In the sonnet's closure, thinking has thus become not only a method of mental action but also a tool for creativity, as it transforms the world of experience first of all semiotically, through this reiterated re-encoding of the mind's contents. Unlike what happens in the second quatrain, where conscious thought leads to the experience of loss and frustration in creativity, thus to poetic failure («I think that I may never live to trace», l. 7), and unlike what happens in Keats' theoretical reflections on creative writing,²⁶ in the closure it has finally become a function which complements imagination in the creative process, instead of interfering with it.²⁷

This promotion of the intellectual faculties, with their complementary functions of abstraction and cognitive distancing, as a fundamental key tool in the creative process, acting in connection rather than in opposition, with divergent thinking, is uncommon, but not unique in Keats' poetics. The young poet propounded this idea again in a letter to Bailey, written on 13 March 1818 (*Letters I*: 240–44), thus 2 months after the composition of the sonnet (around 22–31 January 1818; see Allott, 1970, p. 296).

In this letter, Keats addresses quite the same issues as in the poem (the problematic aspects of the creative process, the dynamics and contents of the creative mind, the subject's attitude towards creativity). While doing this, he even uses: A) the same words («think», in *Letters I*: 241, 242, ll. 7 and 13 in the sonnet; «chance», in *Letters I*: 240, 241, 242, and in l. 8; «romance», *Letters I*: 241, and in l. 6; «Love» noun, in *Letters I*: 243 and in l. 14); «fair» in *Letters I*: 240, in ll. 6 and 11 of the embedded sonnet Keats transcribes in the same letter, *Letters I*: 243, and which occurs in l. 9 of the sonnet); B) words of the same semantic field (cf. «Nothings» and «no things» in *Letters I*: 242 and 243, «nothingness» in l. 14 of the sonnet; «stars» in *Letters I*: 243 and the «night's starred face» in l. 5; «Clouds» in *Letters I*: 243 and «cloudy» in l. 6); C) other allusions reverberating in both texts: «passages of Shakspeare [sic] », in *Letters I*: 243 echoes the Shakespearean allusions occurring in the poem, such as «character», line 3, and the sonnet's structure, which follows the Shakespearean norm; «Moor's Almanac [sic]» in *Letters I*: 241 is reminiscent of the poem's second quatrain, as both relate to astrological predictions.²⁸

In this letter, Keats deals again with the dynamics of the creative mind. He does so by concentrating his attention, similarly as he did previously in the sonnet, on the nature and dynamics of the poetic mind's contents. In this case, instead of opting for a visual and metaphorical representation of these objects (harvesting, astrological imagery, erotic love, seaside environment), Keats now opts for a more analytical and conceptual kind of language, besides created *ad hoc*, as it often happens in the theoretical speculations of this young author. In the letter, he defines the objects of the creative mind as «ethereal things» (*Letters I*: 242). The adjectival form «ethereal» is an umbrella term he often adopts in his writing (14 times in the letters, 19 in the poetry, between February 1815 and August–September 1819)²⁹ to allude to several philosophical and poetical issues. In some cases, it addresses the metaphysical aspects of Nature, when this latter functions as interactional space connecting the human and the divine (cf. the «ethereal dew» descending from the celestial sphere and evoked by the narrator in *Endymion*, I.131). In other instances, the term alludes to the preternatural in general, such as in the «Ethereal presence» of the disembodied «voice[s]» arising from the fallen Titans in *Hyperion*, I.340. The lexeme also designates the spiritual components of imagination, when the subject feels this faculty as unblemished by materiality (cf. the depiction of imagination as «ethereal and high-favouring donor» occurring in *Endymion*, II.437, or as an «ethereal balm», in «To Hope», line 5). Moreover, Keats uses «ethereal» in a more general sense, with the meaning of 'subtle, "light"' (cf. the description of the evening breeze as «ethereal, and pure», in «I stood tip-toe upon a little hill», line 221). Finally, the term is also used by this author as a synonym for «sublimation», with a medico-chemical, if not even *alchemical* meaning (cf. «a touch ethereal—a new birth», in *Endymion*, I.290: see Wunder, 2008, pp. 99–100, 166).

In this letter, Keats uses «ethereal» as a synonym for «subtle», by extension as a «mental» or «internalised» object, as it refers to the contents of the poetic mind. These latter are threefold: «things real», «things semireal» and «no things» (*Letters I*: 242–43). The «things real» correspond to the «existences of Sun Moon and Stars and passages of Shakspeare [sic] », the «things semireal» are «Love, the Clouds &c», and the «no things» (elsewhere in this same letter «nothings» occurs with the capital letter Keats often uses to categorize ideas: *Letters I*: 243) are mental objects «which are made Great and dignified by an ardent pursuit» (*Letters I*: 243). In a sentence earlier, Keats also states that all «mental pursuits» manifest the same characteristic of *nothingness* as in the case of the objects which fall under this third category: «every mental pursuit [is] in itself

a nothing», as its «reality and worth» depends on «the ardour of the pursuer» (*Letters I*: 242), analogously as «Tradesmen say every thing is worth what it will fetch» (*Letters I*: 242).

According to Keats, all objects of the creative mind are «ethereal», as they have already undergone a process of imaginative processing by the subject.³⁰ Thus they shouldn't be interpreted as phenomenological, concrete entities, but rather as internalised realities resulting from the activity which is taking place inwardly, in the poet's mind. Still, there exists an ontological differentiation between these mental objects, as the scale ranges from objects which are still reminiscent of the phenomenal («Sun Moon and Stars and passages of Shakspeare [sic] », *Letters I*: 243), objects which are more internalized and closer to the psyche, if not to the pre-conceptual domain (as the semantically empty «no things» and «Nothings» suggest, *ibid.*), and objects located in the liminal level of the «semireal[s] » («Love, the Clouds», *ibid.*), that is mental contents which need an acknowledgement of existence by the subject (they «require a greeting of the Spirit to make them wholly exist», *ibid.*).

Since the «ethereal things» exist only as contents of the subjective mind, the more they are abstract and impalpable, that is, internalised, the more they need an acknowledgement of existence by the subject, more precisely, they need the emotional agreement of this latter. It is for this reason that the «semireal» things («Love, the Clouds») require «a greeting of the Spirit to make them wholly exist» («greeting» being a sign of welcome, thus implicitly of recognition), and the «no things» or «Nothings» are made «Great and dignified» (thus their presence, reality, is made palpable to individual conscience), by an «ardent pursuit», that is, through the subject's emotional involvement («ardent»), protracted in time («pursuit»). The same applies to the «mental pursuits», which are again classified, elsewhere in the letter, as «nothing[s]», thus included in the third category of «ethereal things», as their existence («reality») depends on the affective validation («ardour», «worth») afforded by the subject («every mental pursuit takes its reality and worth from the ardour of the pursuer—being in itself a nothing», *Letters I*: 242).

On the one side, the statement «every mental pursuit takes its reality and worth from the ardour of the pursuer—being in itself a nothing» appears as epistemologically idealistic, as it presupposes that the contents of the human mind are psychologically determined and formed, in that they do not come from external conditions. This impression finds evidence in Keats' tripartite classification of the «ethereal things», which follows this sentence, and which subordinates these latter to the subjective dimension of the psyche, as we have seen. Thus, in this passage Keats seemingly reaffirms, 2 months after the sonnet, his *credo* in the Romantic model of creativity, in which a phylogenetic continuity between the ideal and the real, as well as emotions and events, must always be kept active by the poet, as well as by the thinker. This statement also implicitly reaffirms the expressive postulate, again fundamentally idealistic, of poetic language as a «spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings», and which had been propounded by one of the fathers of the Movement, Wordsworth, in his «Preface» to *Lyrical Ballads*, since 1800. At the same time, Keats' reference to the notion of *nothingness*, in the letter, seems to be giving further support to this line of reasoning, as it introduces, since the beginning of the passage, another idealistic assumption: «being itself a nothing». Again, this indeed presupposes that no mental pursuit exists outside the human *cogito*.

At the same time, however, this statement appears as paradoxical, as it also affirms the vacuity of all mental actions and, by extension, of their «ethereal» contents. Thus, it also implicitly advocates a kind of ontological scepticism (the contents of the mind are «nothings» in themselves), which not only goes far beyond the ontological positions of his friend Shelley³¹ but it also opens up the possibility of creating a cognitive and emotional distancing from both mental contents and actions, by the creative subject. In other words, since they are *nothings*, without the subject's emotional corroboration («ardour of the pursuer», «ardent», «Greeting of the spirit»), they would not exist. Thus, since they are separable from him, he can let them go, if necessary. That is, he can develop a detached attitude towards them without any emotional outcomes.

This impression finds support in the subtle humoristic vein which is absent in the sonnet, but which can instead be traced in this part of the letter (*Letters I*: 242–43). Its function is that of underestimating the importance of the idealistic move Keats has taken, with more trivial references to trade («As Tradesmen say every thing is worth what it will fetch», *Letters I*: 242) and wine bottling (soon after the serious analysis of the «ethereal things», Keats lightens the mood by saying that his own reasoning «by the by stamps the burgundy mark on the bottles of our Minds», *Letters I*: 243). If scepticism is customary in Shelley, humour is not uncommon in Keats' letters.³² These forms of distancing, both cognitive and emotional, from objects and situations, often enabled both poets to reflect in more critical and objective ways on life and art. Thus, it is not by chance that it occurs in this passage, to reinforce Keats' attitude of introspection and self-detachment.

If compared with the whole passage of the letter, the use of «nothing» (in the two morphological variants of «no things» and «Nothings», as we have seen) is analogous to what occurs in the closure of the 1818 sonnet, with respect to the three quatrains, through the speaker's use of «nothingness» in line 14. In other words, the activation of this semantic field signals a moment of cognitive and emotive distancing, rooted in convergent thinking, and activated by the subject towards the contents of his mind. In the passage taken from the letter, the first half of the opening sentence, before the dash and the rest of the paragraph («every mental pursuit takes its reality and worth from the ardour of the pursuer—», *Letters I*: 242), shares the same philosophical foundations of the sonnet's three quatrains. Both are grounded in epistemological idealism, with all its practical and potentially detrimental consequences, according to Keats' view, as it is from this philosophical position that, in the poem, an analogous assumption of the indissolubility of the emotive link between the subject and the objects of the creative mind is constructed, and generates the impasse.

This presupposition is suddenly wiped out by a statement on the notion of *nothingness* which occurs in both texts after a syntactic interruption. In both the poem and the letter, this interruption coincides with a new sentence (second half of line 12) and is introduced by a dash. In both texts, this statement testifies a discontinuity which has already occurred in the logical progression of thought. This discontinuity corresponds, as we have seen in the analysis of the sonnet and as Keats is seemingly annotating in the letter also, to a moment of breaking frame. Both in the poem and in the letter, the subject distances himself from the ideological foundations of his reasoning (epistemological idealism, subsequent impossibility of breaking the emotional link between the subject and his mental contents) and draws conclusions which in turn contradict the premises (ontological scepticism, subsequent possibility of distancing from the contents of the poetic *cogito*).

As it already occurs in the sonnet, the two sides of Keats' reasoning, as well as of his creative mind, do not function in mutual exclusion. Rather, they coexist as a couple of complementary opposites which in turn unblock the writer's impasse. It is not by chance that Keats, after having expressed his ideas on the «no things», attaches a sonnet presumably written a few days before the writing of the same letter to Bailey. The sonnet is «Four Seasons fill the Measure of the year», and it is, as is well known, an imaginative transposition of the cyclical nature of the human mind's processes as organic growth, in which every change occurs in connection with the whole, with its appropriate rhythm and purpose. The writing impasse which troubled the Keatsian speaker in the sonnet has been overcome with the successful accomplishment of the creative process, as this new poem, now dedicated to the continuity of life processes and not to an impasse, boldly testifies. Again, cognitive distancing, lexically marked through reference to the domain of preverbal non-existence, that is, to the domain of *nothingness*, has played its important role in Keats' writing practice and poetics.

To return to the sonnet, and as we have seen, in the poem's closure a deep restructuring of the speaker's mind takes place, and this process represents a great cognitive and psychological achievement for him as a creative individual. His is now a mind which actively confronts the totality of its psycho-cognitive contents and processes, both divergent and convergent, without succumbing to the magmatic indistinctness of the unconscious, nor neurotically focusing on conscious control. Through abstraction and emotive distancing, that is through the integration of

the rational faculties with the other functions of the mind, the speaker's creative process now transcends the conscious vs. unconscious opposition, characteristic of the Romanticist paradigm, as its new configuration involves the activation of both psychic poles.

The closure also allegorically embodies a great theoretical achievement by Keats in the issue of creative writing, which dynamically interplays with other metaliterary assumptions expressed by him elsewhere in the letters, above all the notion of «*Negative Capability*» (Letter to George and Tom Keats, 21–27 December 1817, in *Letters I*: 193; italics in the original). According to Keats, Negative Capability is the capacity of mature writers, such as Shakespeare, to intuitively pursue the imaginary insight regardless of the dizziness and intellectual confusion it often produces in the creative mind. It opposes to the philosophical certainties of other writers (such as Coleridge, *Letters I*: 193) whose attempt to intellectually control (in Keats' terms, to keep an «irritable reaching after fact and reason», *ibid.*) the irreducible semiotic ambiguity and epistemological fluctuation («uncertainties, Mysteries and doubts», *ibid.*) which both the Romantic and Keatsian imagination entails, is always doomed to failure.

The speaker's attitude of serene and self-affirming distancing from the ever-changing imaginative vision, and which closes the sonnet, poetically counterpoints to but also completes, the attitude of Negative Capability Keats had described, 1 year before the composition of this poem, to his brothers George and Tom. Although in both cases we see a creative individual keeping a stable sight of the fluctuating contents of his imaginative mind, without interfering with them, but instead letting them arise, develop and decline, the two positions differ concerning the role of the intellectual faculties in the creative process. On the one side, Negative Capability is central to the creative individual as it unleashes imagination by encoding as irrelevant any mental content which is conveyed through reason and which would hinder the creative process.³³ The sonnet's closure, on the other side, shows another attitude which is also central to creativity: psycho-cognitive detachment in connection with abstraction, that is, the capacity of unobtrusively activate the more rational, that is convergent, parts of the mind, without interfering with its more imaginative, that is divergent, components. In this case, also, imagination is unleashed, as the contents of the speaker's mind are finally left free to evolve, even if they «to nothingness do sink», that is, in spite of their tendency to recede into the depths of the unconscious. If Negative Capability avoids the dangers of any rationalistic excess in the creative process, by acting as a discriminating factor between convergent and divergent thinking and by promoting the latter through the avoidance of the former, psycho-cognitive detachment and abstraction lead to this same result through an opposite but complementary attitude, the integration of convergent and divergent thinking. As we have seen, this ability also introduces a balancing effect in the process, as it avoids the dangers of any emotive excess in creativity, by preventing the subject's attachment to the ever-fleeting and uncontrollable contents of imagination.

In the Keatsian view which has emerged in this essay, both «capabilities» are thus central to the creative individual, in that they form a couple of key technical skills for any successful writing. However, psycho-cognitive detachment and abstraction appear to be even more useful, for the professional writer, than Negative Capability, as in the sonnet's closure they act as decisive unblocking factors in the creative process, by turning a creatively sterile impasse into a moment of fertile incubation: without this attitude, any rebooting of writing would be impossible.

Among all literary works on writing, this text thus stands out for the degree of awareness it shows concerning the mental processing of creative thinking. Even more interesting than that, the Keatsian speaker represents a model to be followed by anyone in both writing and life. This model consists in positively responding to difficulties, above all those which are generated by our limited and conditioned selves, by developing a strategy of mental action which, after having become aware of its dynamics, enables us to overcome even the most challenging problems, and finally act on reality by radically changing it. In other words, by creating it anew.

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Notes

1. The «Nine-dot problem»: «Given a 3 × 3 square of 9 dots, draw four continuous straight lines, connecting all the dots without lifting the pencil from the paper». The «Six problem»: «Add one line to IX to make six». Both problems as cited in Sawyer (2012): 108. Solutions in Appendix. Other examples in De Young et al. (2008, p. 280), Table 1.
2. See Pope (2005, pp. 25–26) for a more detailed survey of these issues.
3. The text of the poem comes from Allott's edition (1970). The quotations from Keats' letters are taken from Rollins' edition (1958), indicated here as *Letters*, followed by the volume and page numbers. All italics in the quotations are mine, if not otherwise indicated. Sonnet composed between 22 and 31 January 1818 (cf. letter to Reynolds, 31 January 1818, in *Letters* I: 222).
4. See Wigod (1952), Bate (1939), and Sperry (1973), Fish (1989b), and Baker (2014, pp. 54–63).
5. See his reflections on the functioning of imagination (*Letters* I: 170, 184, 325), fancy (*Letters* I: 170, 325) and invention (*Letters* I: 170).
6. See his «Axioms of poetry» (*Letters* I: 238–39), his notion of «*Negative Capability*» (italics in the original; *Letters* I: 193), his theorisation of the poet as a «camelion poet» (*Letters* I: 386–387), and his definition of the «men of genius» (*Letters* I: 187).
7. Although Keats was a sincere and passionate admirer of the Fathers of the Movement, Wordsworth and Coleridge, he always kept contrasting feelings about the former, as his letters clearly show. In September 1817 the young author labels Wordsworth's verse as «sentences» written in the «Style of School exercises», and although he admints that they are composed «in a fine way», he finally parodies them (*Letters* I: 151–52). In February 1818 (*Letters* I: 224) he argues on Wordsworth's inferiority in comparison with Shakespeare and Milton. A few days later (*Letters* I: 237), he scolds his elder brother genius for his «egotism, Vanity and bigotry», but soon after he adds: «yet he is a great Poet if not a Philosopher», *ibid.* As we will see, this attitude is not simply the result of Wordsworth's scornful indifference to the work of his younger colleague, as he labelled Keats' «Ode to Pan» (*Endymion* I: 279–306) as «a pretty piece of Paganism» (Forman, 1933, p. 72, note). Rather, it conveys Keats's increasing dissatisfaction with the theoretical foundations of Wordsworthian Romanticism, which he felt as too dogmatic and rigid for a poet, like a «stiff collar» (*Letter* I: 197).
8. In this Shakespearean work, the lexeme is associated with the preternatural: see *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, V. v. 72: «Fairies use flowers for their charactery».
9. For a more detailed discussion on this important topic, see Abrams (1953).
10. According to the Romantics, imagination is a synthetic, aggregative function of the mind as it is capable of creating new mental contents by breaking the usual links between the phenomena of the outside world and establishing new connections, through analogy and symbol. Cf. Coleridge's definition of this notion (*Biographia Literaria*, XIII, 1817); Shelley's definition (*Defence of Poetry*, par. 1, 1821) and of course Keats' version, as it is recorded in his letters (*Letters* I: 170 and 184–85; II: 97 and 323).
11. For the elusiveness of Keats's beauties, see Boulger (1961, pp. 244–259).
12. See Sawyer (2012, pp. 23–24) for a presentation, in psycho-cognitive terms, of the two models. Cf. also Keats' famous statement about the organicistic nature of composition: «If poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree it had better not come at all» (Letter to Haydon, 4 March 1818, in *Letters* I: 238–39).
13. Cognitive psychologists have found evidence for this close connection between *pareidolia*, that is the mind's tendency to reconstruct a familiar pattern from vague, ambiguous *stimuli*, and the activation of subcortical, therefore subconscious, information: see, for instance, Hadjikhani et al. (2009): 403–7.
14. Keats discusses the topic in these terms in a letter to Bailey (22 November 1817, see *Letters* I: 186). The second occurrence of «think» in the poem (line 13) will be discussed later.
15. See note 8.
16. See White (1987) for a detailed discussion on this topic.
17. Cf. for instance, Wordsworth's famous definition of poetry as «spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings» («Preface» to *Lyrical Ballads*, 1800 and 1802, in Brett and Jones [eds.], 1965: 246). See Doležel (1990, pp. 80–90), for a more detailed discussion of this problem.
18. See Goldberg (1957, pp. 125–131), Ford (1971), Gentili (1978), and Elliott (1979, pp. 3–10).
19. Gentili (2000): 89.
20. «Before», ll. 2 and 3; «teeming», l. 3; «high-pilèd», l. 3; «charactery», l. 3; «garners», l. 4; «ripened», l. 4; «upon», ll. 5 and 10; «cloudy», l. 6; «symbols», l. 6; «romance», l. 6; «never», l. 7, 10 and 11; «shadows», l. 8; «magic», l. 8; «creature», l. 9; «relish», l. 11; «faery», l. 11; «power», l. 11; «unreflecting», l. 12.
21. C.G. Jung: «The Transcendent Function», *CW* 8: 408–86, and «Definitions», *CW* 6: 480.
22. From «I wandered lonely as a cloud ... » to *The Excursion*, from «To Vallombrosa» to the «Song for the Wandering Jew», this activity is central in Wordsworth's poetical imagination. The lexeme (verbal, substantival and adjectival forms) reoccurs 108 times in the works of this author.
23. B. Hayes-Roth and F. Hayes-Roth (1979) have shown that different levels of abstraction constantly interact when humans solve everyday problems. See also Wiener and Mallot (2003) and Shivhare and Kumar (2016).
24. See Sigel (1970), VanGundy (1981, p. 183), and Clark (2008).
25. As stated by cognitive psychologists: «Detachment from a problem also represents a form of perspective-taking, in which an individual may respectively be considering a problem and, at an unconscious level, be considering alternate representations of a problem» (Glover et al., 1989: 406).
26. See for instance, his letter to Bailey, 22 November 1817 (*Letters* I: 186).
27. The evidence provided in this analysis thus confirms Luisa Conti Camaiora's cursory statement concerning the possibility that the final couplet of the sonnet metaphorically admits the importance of integrating the intellectual faculties in poetry: cf. Conti Camaiora (1978, pp. 344–345).

28. *The Old Moore's Almanack* was a bestselling hand-book containing weather forecast and astrological information, such as zodiacal charts and horoscopes. It has been published in Britain since 1697. Several continuations of the *Almanack* are still published annually by W. Foulsham and Company Ltd.
29. Bornstein (1969, pp. 97–106).
30. Bornstein (1969, p. 1).
31. For a detailed discussion of Shelley's scepticism, see Wasserman (1971, p. 138).
32. See Pack (1984, pp. 175–191).
33. See Bate (1939) and Fish (1989a1989a) for a thorough analysis of these aspects of Keats' Negative Capability.

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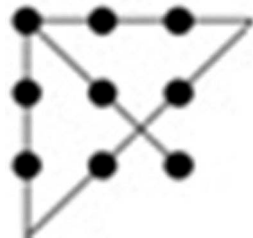
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Appendix

Solution to the «Nine-dot problem:



Solution to the «Six problem»: SIX.



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