

Naturalism, Romanticism and John Keats: A Discussion

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Abstract: *Romanticism and naturalism is a complex artistic, literary, and intellectual movement that originated in the second half of the 18th century in Western Europe, and gained strength in reaction to the Industrial Revolution. The study begins with a demonstration of Keats as a representative of Romanticism, Naturalism and the explanation of the crucial romantic as well as natural traits. Keats's imagery ranges among all physical sensations- sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell, temperature, weight, pressure, hunger, thirst, sexuality, and movement. Keats's synaesthetic imagery performs two major functions in his poems: it is part of their sensual effect and the natural scenario traits. Author analyzed through the Romantic features such as imagination, emotion, nature and beauty of Keats's creations. This study aims to depict that the artists are influenced by the natural beauty and romantic artistic visions. While idealizing human beings the artists demonstrate a human paradox which indicates the thirst to live forever. This study is exclusively based on secondary source of information.*

Keywords: *John Keats, Romanticism, Naturalism, Imaginations, Beauty*

1 Introduction

Keats belonged to a literary movement called romanticism. Romantic poets, because of their theories of literature and life, were drawn to lyric poetry; they even developed a new form of ode, often called the romantic meditative ode. The literary critic Jack Stillinger describes the typical movement of the romantic ode: The poet, unhappy with the real world, escapes or attempts to escape into the ideal. Disappointed in his mental flight, he returns to the real world. Usually he returns because human beings cannot live in the ideal or because he has not found what he was seeking. But the experience changes his understanding of his situation, of the world, etc.; his views/feelings at the end of the poem differ significantly from those he held at the beginning of the poem.

Most of his poems are imbued with a sense of melancholy, death and mortality, he thought, should spring naturally from his inner soul and should reproduce what his imagination suggested to him; and what struck his imagination most was Beauty, not the "intellectual beauty" of Shelley, but the one which reveals itself to his senses. Beauty, in fact, became the central theme of all Keats's poems, since it was the only consolation he found in life. The memory of something beautiful brought him joy, as he wrote in the opening lines of *Endymion*: "A thing of beauty is a joy forever". Beauty could be either physical (women, nature, statues, paintings) or spiritual (friendship, love, poetry), though they were to be considered together, since physical beauty was simply the expression of spiritual beauty and, even if the former might be subject to time and decay, the latter was eternal and immortal. Imagination recognizes Beauty in existing things, but also it is the

creative force of Beauty. In the letter to his friend Benjamin Bailey Keats wrote: "I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination. What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth – whether it existed before or not". The worship of beauty is the clue to everything in Keats and it is quite usual to find that Beauty and Truth often unite (see closing lines in "Ode on a Grecian Urn"). John Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn* is about the image of two young lovers who sit joyfully under the trees, and the speaker compares this image of the happy lovers to real lovers who have "a burning forehead, and a parching tongue". Thus, the image of the two content lovers functions as an escape from the miserable and painful sides of life. In addition, Keats mentions the importance of present beauty throughout his poem.

2 John Keats's Life and Works in Brief

John Keats, one of the greatest English poets and a major figure in the Romantic Movement, was born in 1795 in Moorefield, London. His father died when he was eight and his mother when he was these sad circumstances drew him particularly close to his two brothers, George and Tom, and his sister Fanny. Keats was well educated at Clarke school in Enfield, where he began a translation of Virgil's Aeneid. In 1810 he was apprenticed to an apothecary-surgeon. John Keats lived only twenty-five years and four months (1795-1821), yet his poetic achievement is extraordinary. His writing career lasted a little more than five years (1814-1820), and three of his great odes--"Ode to a Nightingale," "Ode on a Grecian Urn," and "Ode on Melancholy"--were written in one month. Most of his major poems were written between his twenty-third and twenty-fourth years, and all his poems were written by his twenty-fifth year. In this brief period, he produced poems that rank him as one of the great English poets. He also wrote letters which T.S. Eliot calls "the most notable and the most important ever written by any English poet."

His first attempts at writing poetry date from about 1814, and include an 'Imitation' of the Elizabethan poet Edmund Spenser. In 1815 he left his apprenticeship and became a student at Guy's Hospital, London; one year later, he abandoned the profession of medicine for poetry. Keats' first volume of poems was published in 1817. It attracted some good reviews, but these were followed by the first of several harsh attacks by the influential Blackwood's Magazine. Undeterred, he pressed on with his poem 'Endymion', which was published in the spring of the following year. Keats toured the north of England and Scotland in the summer of 1818, returning home to nurse his brother Tom, who was ill with tuberculosis. After Tom's death in December he moved into a friend's house in Hampstead, now known as Keats House. There he met and fell deeply in love with a young neighbor, Frances Brawne. Brawne (1800-1865) later became his fiancée. Keats's letters to Frances Brawne are among the most famous love letters ever written. As next door neighbors, they exchanged numerous short notes, and occasionally more passionate ones. During the following year, despite ill health and financial problems, he wrote an astonishing amount of poetry, including 'The Eve of St Agnes', 'La Belle Dame sans Merci', 'Ode to a Nightingale' and 'To Autumn'.

Keats's second volume of poems appeared in July 1820; soon afterwards, by now very ill with tuberculosis, he set off with a friend to Italy, where he died the following February. When Keats became ill he was unable to have any physical contact with Frances, so they would send letters to each other and would see each other through glass screens. Keats and his friend Joseph Severn arrived in Rome, after an arduous journey, in November 1820. They found lodgings in a house near the Spanish Steps. Keats rallied a little at

first, and was able to take gentle walks and rides, but by early December he was confined to bed, extremely ill with a high fever. Keats requested that on his tombstone all that would be written was

"Here Lies one whose name was writ in water".

3 Major Themes in Keats's Poems

Douglas Bush noted that "Keats's important poems are related to, or grow directly out of inner conflicts." For example, pain and pleasure are intertwined in "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn"; love is intertwined with pain, and pleasure is intertwined with death in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," "The Eve of St. Agnes," and "Isabella; or, the Pot of Basil."

Cleanth Brooks defines the paradox that is the theme of "Ode to a Nightingale" somewhat differently: "the world of imagination offers a release from the painful world of actuality, yet at the same time it renders the world of actuality more painful by contrast."

Other conflicts appear in Keats's poetry:

- transient sensation or passion / enduring art
- dream or vision / reality
- joy / melancholy
- the ideal / the real
- mortal / immortal
- life / death
- separation / connection
- being immersed in passion / desiring to escape passion
- natural beauty
- love/affection
- romance, etc.

Keats often associated love and pain both in his life and in his poetry. He wrote of a young woman he found attractive, "When she comes into a room she makes an impression the same as the Beauty of a Leopardess.... I should like her to ruin me..." Love and death are intertwined in "Isabella; or, the Pot of Basil," "Bright Star," "The Eve of St. Agnes," and "La Belle Dame sans Merci." The Fatal Woman (the woman whom it is destructive to love, like Salome, Lilith, and Cleopatra) appears in "La Belle Dame sans Merci" and "Lamia."

Identity is an issue in his view of the poet and for the dreamers in his odes (e.g., "Ode to a Nightingale") and narrative poems. Of the poetic character, he says, "... it is not itself--it has no self--it is everything and nothing--it has no character--it enjoys light and shade--it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, right or poor, mean or elevated..." He calls the poet "chameleon."

Harold Bloom and Lionel Trilling summarize Keats's world view succinctly-Beyond the uncompromising sense that we are completely physical in a physical world, and the allied realization that we are compelled to imagine more than we can know or understand, there is a third quality in Keats more clearly present than in any other poet since Shakespeare. This is the gift of tragic acceptance, which persuades us that Keats was the least solipsistic of poets, the one most able to grasp the individuality and reality of selves totally distinct from

his own, and of an outward world that would survive his perception of it. They believe that Keats came to accept this world, the here and now, as the ultimate value.

4 Keats and Natural Attribute

Other significant aspects of Romanticism are Individualism and the love of Nature. As mentioned in the introduction, with the influence of industrialization and urbanization which occurred with the Industrial Revolution, Romanticism highlighted Individualism and the love of Nature. According to *The History Guide* “one of the fundamentals of Romanticism is the belief in the natural goodness of man, the idea that man in a *state of nature* would behave well but is hindered by civilization”. This indicates the harmony between man and nature, which is destroyed by the urban life. Therefore, Romantic rejected to live in a city. As a result of this faith, Individualism came into sight with the acceptance of man as an independent valuable entity. “The idea of man's natural goodness and the stress on emotion also contributed to the development of Romantic individualism, that is, the belief that what is special in a man is to be valued...” (*The History Guide*). Thus, with a great emphasis on the expression of emotion and passion of man opened a path to the significance of a poet's individuality. The American modern poet and critic T.S. Eliot mentions this in his famous essay called *Tradition and The Individual Talent* by asserting that “...not the best, but the most individual parts of his [a poet's] work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously”. What Eliot means here is the pivotal impact of the past affects the poet's feelings and thoughts. Thus this pushes him to write under the impact of these influences and they constitute a poet's individuality as well as subjectivity.

Nature was one of the greatest sources of inspiration for Keats. Like Wordsworth he had a cult of nature, though, unlike him, he did not see an imminent God in it. He simply saw another form of Beauty, which he could transform into poetry without the aid of memory; he only enriched it with his Imagination. While Wordsworth thought that “sweet melodies are made sweeter by distance in time”, Keats believed that “heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter”, i.e.: beauty imagined is superior to beauty perceived, since the senses are more limited than the Imagination and its creative power. While Wordsworth's love for nature is well explained by the fact that he grew up in the Lake District, thus being influenced by the suggestive landscape, it is harder to understand the connection between Keats and nature, since he was a city boy. For this reason, unlike Wordsworth, whose relationship with nature was spiritual, he looked at nature with the eye of the aesthete, recreating the physical world, including all living things.

Nature was a major theme among the Romantics, but Keats turned natural objects into poetic images. When he already knew that he was going to die, he looked back at childhood and realized that concrete contact with natural objects at that time was responsible for the positive associations they continued to communicate in adulthood. Nature led Keats to the formulation of a concept he called “negative capability”, described as the ability to experience “uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact or reason”, managing to negate personality and opening to the reality around. It is an intuitive activity of mind, a metaphysical process in which nature is a potential source of truth. That of the poet is a visionary activity, which uses natural objects as means to represent the poet's ideas. Though a great number of images connected with nature in Keats's poems are used only to represent experiences, thus becoming a symbol of the psyche.

As a poet of Nature, Keats follows the previous poets such as Wordsworth by deriving inspiration from Nature. Keats connects senses such as sight, smell, touch and hearing with Nature in his poem *Ode on a Grecian Urn*. It is possible to find these aspects in this pastoral poem. Keats enriches his depiction of nature by highlighting various colours of Nature as an example to sight through many different examples. For instance; in the first stanza he talks about "A flowery tale", which indicates the colorfulness of the scene.

Westland said that,

Keats is content to express his nature through the senses; the colour, the scent, the touch, the pulsing music – these are the things that stir him to his depths; there is not a mood of Earth he does not love, not a season that will not cheer and inspire him.

It would seem appropriate to present the words used by Keats in "*Bright Star*" in order to refer to the concept of 'nature'. In the poem "*Bright Star*" by John Keats the desire to experience a life that never moves forward is expressed. The impossibility of this desire leads to its melancholic feeling.

*Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art—
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
Like nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,*

In this scenario, the metaphor here is between the star and himself (*Keats*). The poet establishes the image of the star that is the central focus of the poem. The star is said to be eternal ("patient"), unchanging ("sleepless"), and beyond the speaker's immediate grasp ("aloft"). the star is immortal "And watching, with eternal lids apart,"; unlike him, who is sick and knows he is going to die soon. He wishes he didn't have to die so that he could be with his loved one.

*The moving waters at their priestlike task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors—*

Keats seems to feel that watching life changing from afar would be better than living in it and having to change with it. He ends the poem by saying that he would like to live as a star "or else swoon to death". It is apparent that Keats understands the sacrifices of living as a star, but acknowledges its benefits as well.

John Keats wrote "To Autumn" that is referred to as Keats' 1819 Odes. He was inspired to write this poem after going on a walk on an autumn evening near Winchester. He wrote it on September 19, 1819, and it was published in 1820, a little more than a year before he succumbed to tuberculosis. The poem shows the progression through the autumn season, from fruitfulness, to labor, and ultimately to its decline. It also has a strong sense of imagery.

*Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,*

*And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease,
For summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.*

The poem "A Thing Of Beauty" has been composed by "John Keats". It is based on a Greek legend. The poem is an extract from 'Endymion - A Poetic Romance' written by "John Keats". The poet has described the fact that the natural beauty provides a joy forever. The poem can be summarized in following ways .Beauty a boon of nature - John Keats says that a thing of beauty is a joy forever. The beauty of nature and natural things increases with loneliness; because it never passes into nothingness. The natural beauty gives peace of mind and sound sleep.

*A THING of beauty is a joy forever:
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.
Therefore, on every morrow, are we wreathing
A flowery band to bind us to the earth
Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth.....*

In "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn," Keats tries to free himself from the world of change by identifying with the nightingale, representing nature, or the urn, representing art. These odes, as well as "The Ode to Psyche" and the "Ode to Melancholy," present the poet as dreamer; the question in these odes, as well as in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" and "The Eve of St. Agnes," is how Keats characterizes the dream or vision.

Furthermore, John Keats creates many others poems of natural traits, like as; "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" (1816). "Sleep and Poetry" (1817), "La Belle Dame sans Merci" (1820), "Ode on Melancholy" (1820), "Ode to Psyche" (1820), "To Autumn" (1820).

5 Keats and Romanticism

Romanticism emerged in the late eighteenth century and continued until the middle of the nineteenth century. Keats belonged to a literary movement called romanticism. Romantic poets, because of their theories of literature and life, were drawn to lyric poetry; they even developed a new form of ode, often called the romantic meditative ode.

The point is that everything in Keats is romantic poetry. He is a romantic, and everything he does is romantic. Several important elements of Keats's poetry came to define Romanticism.

- Interest in the lyric, the personal.
- Interest in the transcendent, that which is beyond human understanding.
- Interest in the transcendent as it relates to nature.
- Interest in a glorified or romanticized past, both the medieval and the classical.
- Interest in the role of the poet, as well as in the creation of his art.
- Interest in the imagination, which intuitively connects with nature and the transcendent and develops over time.

Keats's works reflect the major characteristics of Romanticism such as imagination, affection and love. Kelvin Everest argues that:

The theory of Keats has often been interpreted as an example of a 'typical Romantic' subjective recoil from the pain, ugliness and transience of actual human experience. Keats' medievalism, his associations of poetry with dreaming, with drugs and alcohol, or even with peaceful death, all seem to point towards some intense desire to shelter from reality in a visionary realm of imagination.

What makes Keats a Romantic is his intention to attempt to run away from the hazards of life by creating a new world in his imagination, which he hopes will protect him from the pitfalls of life. He builds a dream world in his poems, like the other Romantics in order to break away from the actuality. He seeks for an escape from the hard conditions of life in a realm of beauty and romance as he says in *Ode on a Grecian Urn*.

A famous cited of John Keats that "I love you the more in that I believe you had liked me for my own sake and for nothing else". He said in his poem '[You say you love; but with a voice](#)'

*You say you love; but then your lips
Coral tinted teach no blisses,
More than coral in the sea—
They never pout for kisses—
O love me truly!*

Keats's feeling was very romantic, it is clear in his words, "Love is my religion - I could die for it. You are always new; the last of your kisses was ever the sweetest. Now a soft kiss - Aye, by that kiss, I vow an endless bliss".

*Sweet, sweet is the greeting of eyes,
And sweet is the voice in its greeting,
When adieus have grown old and goodbyes
Fade away where old Time is retreating.
Warm the nerve of a welcoming hand,
And earnest a kiss on the brow,
When we meet over sea and o'er land
Where furrows are new to the plough.*

This ballad tells the story of a melancholy knight who is enchanted and enslaved by a beautiful woman without pity.

Last but not least, both in terms of diction and metres Keats's poetic style is romantic. Though it has classical finish, it possesses that romantic touch of suggestiveness by which "more is meant than meets the ear." His poetry is full of such unique suggestive expressions :

*Then green-robed senators of mighty woods.
How tip-top Night holds back her dark-grey hood.
My sleep had been embroidered with dreams.
Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
Bidding adieu,
The silver snarling trumpet 'gan to chide.
Thou foster-child of Silence and Slow Time.*

But true romanticism, though it sometimes flings our imagination far into the remote and the unseen, is essentially based on truth—the truth of emotion and the truth of imagination. Keats was a true romantic—not

a romantic in the hackneyed sense of dealing with the unrealities of life. He loved not merely beauty but truth as well, and not merely the world of imagination but that of reality; and he saw beauty in truth and truth in beauty. He never escaped from realities of life in pursuit of the beautiful visions of his imagination; in fact, the visions of his imagination are based on reality. He persistently endeavored to reconcile the world of imagination with the world of reality. Therefore, Middleton Murry calls Keats “a true romantic.”

He also wrote Hither, hither, love, Hush, hush, tread softly, hush, hush, my dear, I cry your mercy—pity—love!—aye, love, Isabella; or, the Pot of Basil, Modern Love, Sweet, sweet is the greeting of eyes, To Emma, You say you love; but with a voice and so on that are all related to romance, love and affection.

6 Conclusion

According to John Keats “...the excellence of every Art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeable evaporate, from being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth.” In one of his letters Keats mentions the greatness of Art as being intense and associated with Beauty and Truth just as he says in *Ode on a Grecian Urn*: “ ‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty, – that is all/ Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know’ . According to the poet an ever-lasting imprint on human mind is left by the natural beauty. To sum up the all poems it is clear that beautiful natural things give joy forever. Beauty increases with the passage of time. It is eternal on the other hand physical or artificial beauty fades away with time and at last dies out completely. Keats was, first and foremost, a romantic dreamer. Everything seems beautiful under his pen, even the rockiest and most sorrowful subjects. Love and death became one desire for Keats, especially towards the end of his 25 years on earth. His poetry is a fine example of highly romantic poetry; in fact, it touched almost all the aspects of romantic poetry—love of beauty, love of nature, love of the past, supernaturalism, glow of emotion, and last but not the least in importance, the revealing power of imagination. He is one of the great sonneteers in the English language and his Odes, with their musical flow in long stanzas, stand as unique specimens of romantic poetry.

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