

## **John Keats as a Poet of Beauty**

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### **ABSTRACT**

John Keats was a prominent romantic poet of the 19th century. *Romanticism* is an artistic and literary movement that originated in Europe towards the end of the 18th century. Emotion and imagination are the chief characteristics of Romanticism and the bedrock of Keats's poetry. Keats was the youngest and the most gifted of six great romantic poets (Blake et al.). The poetry of Keats deals with the theme of joy and melancholy, the ideal and the real, life and death, the sensuous and the beautiful, etc. Keats is called the poet of beauty and sensuousness. Beauty became the central theme of all his poems as it consoled his troubled heart. In this paper, I will analyze the concept of beauty in Keats's poetry.

**Keywords:** Romanticism, Emotion, Imagination, Beauty.

### **Introduction**

John Keats, who holds a key position among romantic poets, lived from (1795-1821). He belonged to the second generation of Romantic poets. Keats enjoyed a short life span but left behind a treasure of grand odes, unique in temper and thought and poems of excellent order with skillful touches and artistic design, which posterity will never forget. Although his poetry was subjected to harsh criticism during his lifetime, Keats's reputation as a poet grew substantially after his death. Some of his critical poetical works include Ode on a Grecian Urn, Ode to a Nightingale, Ode to Autumn, Endymion, The Eve of St Agnes, La Bella Dame Sans Merci, etc.

Every Romantic poet has his writing style. During words worth preferred nature, Coleridge dealt with the supernatural elements, and Byron and Shelly displayed the rebellious spirit. John Keats choose the world of beauty and escapism. Nawaz and Jabeen maintain that Keats's poetry presents the "Beauty of imagination that gives delight to our senses." According to Keats, poetry should have a gratifying effect on our senses of touch, taste, color, and sound. Keats's poetry may be aptly termed as a search for beauty. The development of Keats's mind and art is nothing but the development of the concept of beauty.

In the presence of the beautiful aspect of nature, he almost forgot all his sorrows and sufferings. Keats's friend Haydon rightly pointed out that for Keats, glory is always in the setting sun and the autumnal fields. Keats once said, "I feel assured I should write from the mere yearning and fondness for beautiful, even if my night labors should be burned every morning." "To see beauty in all things," says Middleton Murry was Keats's great poetic intuition, and revelation of this beauty was the ultimate purpose to which he dedicated himself and for which he was prepared to die. We will discuss Keats's concept of beauty with examples of his various odes and poems in detail.

Keats's love of beauty is not platonic. In his early life stages, his appreciation of beauty is purely physical. He is passionate about physical objects and is interested in the human body. Keats's love of beauty constitutes his aestheticism. He found beauty in nature, women, and art. The following lines of "Bright star, would I were steadfast as thou art" gives an attractive picture of women:

Yet still steadfast, still unchangeable,  
Pillowed upon my fair love's ripening breast,  
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,  
Awake forever in the sweet unrest,  
Still, still to hear her tender-  
taken breath, And so live ever—or else swoon to death.

(Lines: 9-14)

To produce the successful effect of beauty, Keats associated it with sense organs through his power of imagination. His poetry offers us escape from the weariness, fret a fever to the world of beauty where we have no politics or propaganda. Keats adorned art for art's sake. The memory of something beautiful gave his joy, as he writes in "Endymion."

A thing of beauty is a joy forever: Its loveliness increases; it will never.

Pass into nothingness.

(Lines: 1-3)

Keats's admiration of beauty is a striking feature of his entire poetry. In the ballad "La Belle

Dame Sans Merci", the lady is described as:

Full beautiful—a fairy's child,  
Her hair was long; her foot was light,  
Moreover, her eyes were wild.

(Lines: 14-16)

Keats's fascination for beauty was not limited to things considered beautiful according to recognized standards. He had deep insight into seeing beauty in things ordinary people could not visualize. In his ode "To Autumn," he looks at autumn and highlights its beauty and charm in the following lines:

Where are the songs of spring? Ay,  
where are they?

Think not of them; thou hast thy  
music too,--

While barred clouds bloom, the soft-

dying day,

And touch the stubble-plains with

rosy hue; (Lines :23-26)

Akhtar enunciates, "Keats ode on a Grecian Urn offers a complex and new concept of beauty." In "Ode on a Grecian Urn," Keats remains faithful to the vision and adoration of beauty. He identifies truth with beauty. For Keats, truth and beauty are different aspects of one supreme reality. In his letter to his friend Benjamin Bailey Keats wrote, "I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of Heart's affections and the truth of imagination—what the imagination seizes as Beauty must be the truth—whether it existed before or not." His philosophy of beauty is contained in the following lines of the poem:

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty, -- that is all

Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

(Lines: 49-50)

In "Ode on a Grecian Urn," the poet urges the piper who craved the Grecian urn to keep playing the pipe. The scenes engraved on the urn's surface have no reality yet remain enchanting and impressive. The music one actually hears is sweet, but the music perceived by imagination or spiritual ear is much sweeter. The following lines depict the auditory image:

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard Are sweeter. Therefore, ye soft pipes play on;

(Lines:11-12)

Keats's passion for beauty can be further seen in the following lines of the poem Ode on a Grecian urn", where he describes men, women, and nature as;

O Attic shape! Fair attitude! With bread

OF marble men and maidens overwrought,

With forest branches and the trodden weed.

(Lines: 41-43).

### **Conclusion**

When we closely analyze the poetry of John Keats, we realize that he remained faithful to his vision and adoration of beauty. In this context, Mathew Arnold states, "To see things in beauty is to see things in their truth, and Keats knew it." The beauty of nature is pervasive in his poetry and plays a vital role in framing and forming the psychological setting of a reader. The readers need to discern the concept of beauty in Keats's poems to understand, analyze, and interpret them. When a reader visualizes the Keatsian world of beauty, it strikes the chords of his heart and provides him enjoyment, besides enhancing his literary and sensual experiences.

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