

QUEST FOR PERMANENCE IN KEATS'S ENDYMION

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ABSTRACT

Undoubtedly, Keats is the one of the greatest of the English Romantic Poets. His letters and poems throw light on his spiritual quest. Infact, he searched for system of thought that would explain the sad mystery of existence and provide a mode of release. His search for his own poetry is essentially related to his perpetual quest of reality. His life journey was miserable and so he knew suffering to the core. He found everything transitory and ephemeral. He tried to seek a world of permanence through his poetry. He achieved it in his longer poems and great Odes.

Keywords: Annihilate, exploration, discontentment, incarnated, slaughtered, Sculptural, consecutive, ephemeral, enshrines, Pictorial, drudgeries etc.

Keats is without doubt one of the greatest of the English Romantic poets. Dorothy Sayers has suggested that Keats is a 'typical poet of Search'. Keats's spiritual quest is revealed in his letters and poems. The quest is twofold. He searched for system of thought that would explain the tragic mystery of existence and offer a mode of release. Keats's search for his own poetry is necessarily related to his ceaseless exploration of reality.

Though during a particular phase of his life his poetical aim was to portray the passions of all kinds and conditions of man, the theory that a poet should annihilate his self was derived from Hazlitt and his own inner urge prompted him in a different direction. The world he saw around him moved round a centre of his own and he wrote that may be called a very special kind of poetry. His own doubts and worries are transformed into universal experiences- this universality is to be traced in his profound humanity. By plunging into his

own inner self he sought to grasp the reality of the human situation. Throughout his life he attempted to reconcile the artistic conscience and the social consciences.

Keats was doctor by profession so he knew the pain of patients. The suffering of the people in the Guy's hospital made him a realist. He was thrilled with beauty of nature, no doubt, but also shared the pain of suffering people and therefore, he aspired for a world there would be no pain, no misery no suffering but eternal joy. Upto age of eighteen he was a healthy and stout young man but unfortunately he contracted Tuberculosis. Now he came to know that life is not only full of pain but is of short duration. He had been in love with Fanny Browne. She also loved him. But he knew their love was going to end sooner or later. Towards the end of his life he asked Fanny Browne to forget him as he was to leave the world soon. Because he did not want to make unhappy Fanny Browne after his death.

Endymion is a Poetic Romance. Keats's first major work was published in 1818 and it is considered as one of the master pieces of the early nineteenth-century Romantic movement in English literature. The most often-quoted line, "A thing of beauty is a joy forever", tells that a beautiful thing of nature always provides a satisfying pleasure to the soul.

According to John Keats *Endymion*, the title character also searches for the sources of the joy and due to his discontentment he faces different situations. In *Endymion* Keats takes and embellishes a tolerably familiar story from the Greek mythology, he learnt in Chapman's *Homar* and through another retelling of the stories available to him. Each book is proceeded by a traditional kind of introduction- as Milton uses in *Paradise Lost*- in which Keats generalizes upon the experience before moving into his story.

Book I describes the isle of Latmos (of which the young Endymion is lord; its most beautiful, fleet, manly and strong figure) and the people assembling to celebrate the rites of Fan in a formal and (for the latter Keats, too) preparatory ode acclaiming the 'ripen'd fruitage; the chuckling linnet and summer completion. During the subsequent festivity, Endymion, who has been trying to conceal heaviness of spirit, confesses to his sister Poena

his consuming love for an unearthly maiden seen in dream. He determines to search for her hearing a disembodied whisper which encourages him in the deepest forest.

In Book II he ranges the land until, guided again by the voice, he ventures into a strange vaulted world, an immeasurable distance below ground, where he stumbles on strange visions of cupid, of Adnais lover of Venus, and is blessed by Venus, goddess of love. The vision fades and he is alone again in file weird caverns. He is swapt up by an eagle who drops him in 'a' jasmine bower' where he finds his goddess, briefly enjoys passionate and sensuous love and is alone again.

In Book III he plunges deep below the ocean to recover his lost cynthia spirit of the moon. He encounters an ancient man, Glaucus, whom he releases from a spell cast by Circe: Thus reanimating the bodies of drowned lovers, and attends the celebratory rites paid by the resurrected crown to Neptune and Oceanus, gods of the seas. The vision vanishes and in Book IV he rediscovers his goddess incarnated as an Indian damsel who sings the ode to sorrow before she declares her undying love for him, and her unattainability for mortal man. Yet again, he is abandoned, but as his sister returns to welcome him back to the solid, human world, the goddess of the moon, alias the Indian damsel, alias Phoebe, alias Cynthia, returns and 'spiritualizes' Endymion so that he is fit for celestial living." Say, 'Poena went home through the gloomy wood in wonderment.'

Endymion is an extended narrative poem divided into four books about one thousand lines each, written mostly in heroic couplets. The title *Endymion* is named after a figure from Greek myth. The poem starts from Endymion's impossible desire to get the love of the Goddess Diana (also known as Cynthia). In the end when he feels the love for the mortal India maiden, he realizes she is really Diana, his immortal desire in mortal disguises. He apprehends the danger of denying his own human nature and learns that he can achieve the abstract ideal only if he accepts the concrete human experience. This is the central idea Keats wants to deliver through this poem. *Endymion* (A thing of beauty) is usually read as a direct and honest declaration which caters a main idea that any beautiful thing provides us

with continuous pleasures. Even if the beautiful thing fades away, decays, or dies, we never stop loving them despite the adverse situation.

The following lines refer to the Nibbe who was changed into stone after her children were slaughtered by Appollo as a punishment for her arrogance. It represents the pictorial and sculptural, aspect of Keats's poetic art.

The various hopes and visions of immortality are accord with Keats's expressed in notable letter to Bailey of November 22, when he was just finishing the poem, "that we shall enjoy overselves here after by having what, we called happiness on earth repeated in finner tone....."

The summary of conversation and hymn to Pan prepare for the vision and the quest of the hero.

"Poor, lonely Niobe, where her lovely young
Where dead and gone, and her caressing tongue
Lay a lost thing upon her paly lip, and very, very deadliness did nip
Her motherly cheeks."¹
"A thing of beauty is 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."²

It is true the beautiful object, whether flower, river, tree, sky, landscape of person gives constant happiness which we long to escape from drudgeries of life to the world of happiness and peace.

It is as Keats himself knew in the incidental beauties of *Endymion* that its life really shine, and these consider altogether undeniably assert that poetry can be luxurious and, as we now say, escapist. Even his thought in his work is rather a disorderly reveal of thoughts than a controlled intellectual essay. It is a poem of 'quotations' from phrase to paragraph. Endymion reaches the eternal life through a long suffering. The poem is a 'parable of the

poetic soul in a man seeking communion with the spirit of essential beauty in the world." Endymion's first awareness of the ideal has come through a dream vision.

N.F. Fords says Keats was almost unquestionably using the word 'essence' as a synonym for "a thing of beauty" or "shape of beauty" or dazzling moon then a dazzling goddess who had carried him through the skies and brought him down to earth, the return to actuality. The voice of common sense reproaches him for sullyng.

"High and noble life with thoughts so sick.

But Endymion declares that, though he has cherished ambitions of public service, has distracting vision was no sick fancy. Then comes the revised passage (1-777) that Keats wrote of so urgently to his publisher "a consecutive Man" (like Peona) "mere words" bu

"O Known unknown from whom my being sips
Such darling essence, wherefore may I not
Be even these arm?"³

Same commentary applies for the lines as in Book I line 770 regarding "essence". Plus we want to cup the hands of imagination that "orbit" form as we do round his "globed peonus" and indeed round "the cool and bunched leaves" which start out momentarily from the tissue of pastiche developing them.

"Where in lies the happiness? in that which beck
our ready mind to fellowship divine,
a fellowship with essence, till we shine
full alchemized, and free of space, behold
the clear religion to heave
if human soul did never kiss and greet?"⁴

Keats pleasure thermometer measures happiness by its intensity and selfless absorption. The four gradations are in ascending order, sensual enjoyment of the world represented here by a rose Leaf (1782), music and its association (I-783-97) friendship (I803-5) and passionate love (1805-2p)

Keats intended of the imagination towards a truth it set before him the gradations of happiness like a kind of pleasure thermometer i.e. playing of different natures with joy and sorrow.

Though critics have said much over it, a major crux being the interpretation of 'fellowship' with essence which is taken in transcendental sense by Colvin, De Selincourt, Bridges, Middleton Murry and C.L. Finny who sees Keats 'pleasure Thermometer' variously as an idealistic or neo-Plan tonic hierarchy.

Keats thought of life of the imagination as the nobler life and he thought that those who cultivate the imagination and the life of sensations' rather than those who strained after consultive reading like his friend Bailey, had a better change of experiencing the imaginative life of heaven.

The cultivation and enjoyment of beauty are the greatest things in this life and beauty and the absolute being are connected. Keats had hopes of success in his life through the creation of great poetry which enshrines beauty. He had also a faith in happy life to come after death. The life to come is very much like life here and now. Only it is of a nobler and more refined quality of life in this world in spite of the hopes of great achievement is by no means seen by Keats as a bed of roses. There is suffering and frustration and part of the problem of finding meaning in life is to find a satisfactory explanation for these.

Monterily poor, socially backward and physically frail and short, Keats knew suffering to the core. He found everything transitory and ephemeral in the world. Naturally he strove for permanence in everything evanescent. His poetry is a continuously struggle to achieve permanence. He achieved it in Hyperion and the fall of Hyperion and the great odes- "Ode to a Nightingale, Ode on a Grecian Urn and Ode to Autumn."

References:

1. Edmund Blunden, *The Poem of John Keats* (Rupa & Co. 2003), p.117.
2. Ibid, p. 109.
3. Fords N.F.: The meaning of "Fellowship with Essence" in *Endymion*, PMLA IXII (Dec. 1947) 1061-76 and Prefigurative Imagination of John Keats (1951) op. 13-19 and 46-8.
4. Edmund Blunden- *The Poem of John Keats*. (Rupa and Co. 2003), p.129.

