



Keats as a Writer of Odes in English Literature

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Abstract: The Odes of John Keats represent the consummation of his poetic talent. They are “above criticism, pure gold of poetry--virgin gold” to borrow the expression of S.A. Brooke. As De Selincourt aptly observes, “ In the Odes Keats has no master; and their indefinable beauty is so direct and so distinctive an effluence of his soul that he has no disciple.” Keats deliberately chose this medium. Like the lyric, ode is of Greek origin. It is a Greek word, which means a song usually of some length. The main features are an elaborate stanza – structure, a marked formality and stateliness in tone and style, and lofty sentiments and thoughts. In short, an ode is rather a grand poem, which is of two basic kinds: the public and the private. The public is used for ceremonial occasions, like funerals, birthdays, state events; the private often celebrates rather intense, personal and subjective occasions. It is inclined to be meditative and reflective. Tennyson’s “Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington’ is an example of the former; Keats’s “Ode to Nightingale” is an example of the latter. Pindaric Odes are named after the Greek, poet Pindar while Horacian Odes are written after the model provided by the Latin poet Horace. In England Ben Jonson was the first to write in Pindaric tradition. Later Andrew Marvell wrote his Horacian Ode and Abraham Cowley introduced the “English Irregular Odes.”

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When a reference is made to Keats’s odes it is usually to the five Odes of April and May 1819: it includes “To Psyche,” “On Indolence,” “To a Nightingale,” “On a Grecian Urn,” and “On Melancholy,” and the poem “To Autumn” written later in the year. These Odes mark the epitome of Keats’s poetic achievement, combining an intense and imaginative response to beauty with technical innovation and a peculiar felicity of expression. On the one hand, they are the happy poems but on the other there is too much of awareness of suffering and of the transience of beauty in them. They look at the experience of joy and sorrow, at the decay of beauty and pleasure and consider how humanity can come to terms with life’s contradictions. “To Autumn” was written in a more tranquil mood than the others but it brings to perfection Keats’s command of form and richly meaningful use of language.

(a) The Form of the Odes: The stanzaic form of the great Odes seems so natural and inevitable that it is hard to realize how much of the innovation it was. Keats had long practiced the sonnet but had become disinterested and even dissatisfied with both its Petrarchan and its Shakespearean forms. The ten-line stanza of the Odes, which is Spenserian stanza, has a firmness and clarity of structure without inflexibility or obtrusiveness of rhyme: a quatrain (abab) gives an anchor to the verse and is followed by a variable sestet (generally cdecde) which allows the verse room to expand. The “Ode to Nightingale” features a highly effective short eight line and “To Autumn” replaces the sestet by a septet which gives the stanza an appropriate fuller quality.

(b) Style: The Odes display a fine descriptive power and a concentrated richness of expression. The word pictures are the integral part of the poem and a wealth of details is concentrated into a few words which are often boldly used. Nothing is redundant and so nothing can be spared. The epithets like ‘cool-rooted’ and ‘fragrant –eyed’ in “Ode to Psyche” compresses many images into a very few words; “ To bend with apples the moss’d cottage trees” in “Ode to Autumn” conjures up a vivid picture of a cottage garden with longestablished trees laden with fruit and the phrase “cottage trees” to mean ‘trees in a cottage

garden' is a highly original use of language; "the coming muskrose, in full dewy wine" in "Ode to a Nightingale" contains ideas of freshness conveyed by the words 'coming' and 'dewy' and yet maturity by the use of the word 'full' and heady intoxication by the words 'musk' and 'wine'. Metaphor, more concentrated than simile, provides some of the most notable. (c)images: For example, consider the metaphor "Joy's grape" in stanza three of "Ode to Melancholy," which gives a strongly sensuous quality to the abstract word 'joy'; less direct and forceful but highly ingenious is the 'branched thoughts' and 'wreathed trellis of a working brain' in "Ode to Psyche." This conveys both the scenery that is conjured up in the imagination, and the anatomical appearance of the brain and the nature of the thought process in which ideas branch off from one another and interweave. The figure of personification is also rather prominent and this lends vitality to inanimate objects or abstractions. The terms 'bride' and 'foster-child' of the Urn are rather metaphors than personifications but the phrase 'Sylvan historian' clearly attributes a human characteristic which emerges most clearly in the Urn's speaking in the last stanza. Melancholy is very obviously personified as a veiled female figure. Autumn is given a more subtle personification, 'conspiring' with the sun or 'sitting carelessly on a granary floor.' In each case we are made to feel a direct relationship with the Ode.

Besides, Keats's use of alliteration adds the musicality to the Odes; their sheer beauty as sound sequences depends a good deal on these figures of alliteration and assonance as they reinforce in sound the sense, which the words express. We may notice, for example, the 'i' sound in the opening lines of "Ode on a Grecian Urn" as in the words: bride, quietness, child, silence, and time or the 'ee' sound in stanza four: these, green, priest, lead'st, sea, peaceful, streets and be. The sounds of the insects are clearly present in the nasal 'm' end 'n' and in the 's' sound of "murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves." in "Ode to Nightingale." As is the effervescence of wine in the explosive 'b' of "beaded bubbles winking at the brim," the bark of the trees with the weight of the fruit and crispness of apples may all perhaps be felt in enunciating 'moss'd cottage -trees" in "Ode to Autumn." In this manner Keats exploited the angularities of the English language rather than seeking smoothness not natural to it and doing so he gave his verse a vigour, which quickly counteracts any tendencies to sentimentality or morbidity. The odes of Keats can be studies and properly appreciated as " A Choral Whole" to use the expression of Blackstone if we focus on a useful analogy of music which meant so much to Keats who told his friend Bailey that " had he studied music, he had some notions of the combinations of sounds, by which he thought he could have done something as original as his poetry." As Keats was naturally inclined towards a musical structure, the Odes, like the "To Psyche", "To a Nightingale," " On a Grecian Urn" have a chorus of themes of love, ambition and art. No doubt, the musical analogy holds good in close analysis of the Odes, it is essential to study them from the point of view of still deeper analogy of growth in relationship. "Ode to Psyche" "presents Keats's most acutely realized vision of human love in its relation to nature as there the cosmic nuptials of Eros and Psyche consummated in the lap of nature, in " Endymion" there is a participation mystique between the fruition of human passion and fruitfulness of nature's store. Stuart M. Sperry has given a very fascinating analysis of this ode in the book ,Keats the Poet, and says:

" As patroness of "shadowy thought," the goddess
will at least be forever welcome to the poet, and
there is even the hope that the early love of Cupid
and Psyche can actually be reborn within the
poet's consciousness. The casement of the mind
stands fully open "To let the warm Love in,"
suggesting as Bloom has noted, the continual
accessibility of the poetic imagination."

In "Ode on Indolence" the urn focuses on the details of a flower-strewn lawn. Keats as forcibly extricated himself from the world in which youth grows pale and spectre-thin and dies, and entered into the relaxed and day-dreaming state, a creative indolence. Here the three figures representing Love, Ambition and Poetry are rejected in turn by the poet who is content with his deeper, less highly conscious imaginings. Keats alluded to this ode itself in a letter of June 9, 1819 and says: "You will judge of my 1819 temper when I tell you that the thing I have most enjoyed this year has been writing an "Ode to Indolence" which is indeed "a fresh poetical adventure" All the ode shares a mood of tension between the world and the spirit with other odes. "Ode to Nightingale" has the theme of frustration and its expression too has traces of uneasiness. Bernard Blackstone has made a insightful observation:

" 'Ode to a Nightingale' treats the theme of
ambition ... in no restricted sense: there is an
ambition of love, of friendship, as well as of fame.

But the thought of fame underlies it all: the ode is
a meditation on immortality, in which the deathless
song of the bird is set over against all human
accomplishment.”

For a while the song of the bird achieves the status of a great of poetry, that is meant “To soothe the cares, and lift the thoughts of man.” The journey backward to the habitual self is painful after the supreme vision of being with the bird but “Keats manages his transition with exquisite tact; and the return in a ‘waking dream’ to the initial note of ‘drowsy numbness’ gives the poem a circular structure he so much loved” as Blackstone beautifully sums up. Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn” comes nearest to a formal expression of his philosophy of ‘Beauty and Truth’, which is the centre of power; because of its wisdom it is a “centre of healing” and offers the moving image of eternity. The dramatic action of the symbols and the cluster of images reveal Keats’s reverence for tradition, for ‘sacred customs,’ for a religion that connects the three worlds. It was inevitable that the urn, the all-inclusive symbol, should present this facet of life side by side with the passion of the lovers and the ecstasy of the musician. ‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty’ equation remains mysterious partly through the lack of definition as there can be statistical truth or there can be living truth. Similarly, there can be the intellectual beauty or the beauty of form. But two things are absolutely clear that the essence of the both has to be captured by the imagination and secondly, Keats always moves through impermanence to permanence. Hence we can not reach them without a degree of imagination and detachment. Keats’s “Ode to Autumn” is his “own bid for detachment.” There are three qualities which make it unique as Blackstone sums up:

- (i) It is the only major poem that is completely unisexual.
- (ii) (ii) All other Odes, to a greater or lesser degree , protest and exclaim only To Autumn simply accepts.
- (iii) Here all is ripeness, tumescence, fruition. Hence, Keats seems to be enjoying here the artistic fruition also in the golden sunshine of the season. In his valuable book The Consecrated Urn Bernard Blackstone has give a wonderful insight into the thought structure of all the Odes stating: “Much of the turbulence, the anguish, the questioning of these narrative explorations of ‘the sexual strife’ spills over into the intrinsically calmer lake of the great Odes. There is little relaxation of tension in To a Nightingale and On Melancholy. Pain is an undercurrent in the Grecian Urn, and lingers as regret in the placid wheelings of To Autumn. But there is a difference. Tensions remain, but are integrated in a broader pattern. It is as though what had existed in Isabella, St. Mark and Lamia as pure suffering, loneliness, waste—as pain seen and felt in isolation—is here transmuted through relationship. The Odes form a unity, as the narratives did not. Keats is feeling his way towards an inclusive vision.” Summing up the analysis of the great odes of Keats, Sperry makes a very perceptive observation that they are a “magnificent achievement judged by any standard.” He further adds: “Taken together, the great odes of spring reveal an extraordinary development in self-awareness... They represent the purest expression of Negative Capability in Keats verse. Yet they also demonstrate the way in which that negative precept, when adopted as a cardinal tenet of poetic composition, culminates in a pervasive irony.”

Keats as a Romantic Poet:

Keats subscribes to the Romantic conviction that poetry overrides every other value. He says, “I find that I cannot exist without poetry—without eternal poetry.” Consequently, it leads to the supreme value of imagination and in “Ode to Nightingale” he enters the world of the bird “on the viewless wings of poesy.” It means this belief is not only a theoretical idea but a force to apprehend the truth. He wrote in one of his letters that,” I think poetry should surprise us by a fine excess...This poem (Endymion) will be a test, a trial of my powers of imagination.” A lover of “fine phrases,” Keats shares all the characteristic qualities of other Romantic poets of his generation but still he is unique in many ways in his approach, ideas and substance of poetry. He was an over-sensitive spirit whose poetic powers matured rapidly. His poetry and 89 the letters are “a living and breathing picture of man” to use Roger Sharrock’s words. His imagination is fired by all kinds of beauty, which can be realized through the senses. Even the beauty of the unknown regions or hidden from the mortal eye could fill him with intensity of emotions. When he studied Chapman’s Homer this is what happened to him: Then felt I some watcher of the skies, When a new planet swims into his ken; Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes, He stared at the Pacific, and all his men, Looked at each other with a wild surmise. The pursuit of the unknown, the invisible, and the infinite has inspired the romantic poetry of the world. The romantic poets are dissatisfied with the present order of things and so they prefer to escape from the present into the past and even in the ancient world of Hellas. Shelley being a futurist believed that the Spring or the Golden age is yet to come, while Keats found it in the past. As a result, Greek myths,

Greek literature and Greek art made a special appeal to him. Two characteristics –Love for nature and fascination for the supernatural—attract the romantic poets for different reasons. It may be the delight in the sensuous beauties in nature or its spiritual presence both makes them communicate with these charms. Like the romantic poets he loved nature for its remarkable beauties but there is a difference as Compton Rickett pointed out: “Where Wordsworth spiritualizes and Shelley intellectualizes Nature, Keats is content to express it through the senses. The colour, the scent, the touch, the pulsing music, these are the things that stir him to the depths; there is not a mood of Earth 90 he does not love, not a season that will not cheer and inspire him.” Poetry for Keats is a spontaneous outpouring of the heart, for example take his “Ode to Nightingale,” which he composed within a few hours with all the music and melody that the song of the bird has. Keats’s poetry has the melancholy note which enriches the poetry of all the romantic poets, but Keats brings to his poetry the fact of human suffering, transient nature of human existence and experiences more effectively. Focusing on the morbid state of mind first, he enters into the deeper and tragic mystery of existence measuring even the pain of joy as in “Ode to Melancholy.” It is pertinent to note that the romantic quality of indirection and suggestiveness reaches an aceme in the poetry of Keats when he lingers lovingly over each word and fills it with a wealth of meaning as in “Ode to Autumn.” Keats’s poetry unites, unlike other romantic poets, in the form and the content of his poems the romantic as well as classical traits. The rare union adds perfection to his art. The imagination and restraint move in harness, emotion and self-control achieve a perfect felicity of mood and expression. The romantic spirit with unlimited range of sensations and emotions is given a perfect balance in form and thus the two—the content and the form—are kept in perfect harmony. However, The following characteristics are the hallmarks of Keats’s poetry: (i) Sensation and Sensuousness Keats believed that “Axioms in philosophy are not axioms until they are proved upon our pulses” as he wrote to Reynolds on 3 rd May 1818. It means that we should not only read them but also feel them first as a source of delight, and then as symbols of the life of mind and emotions. Keats was keenly alive to all perceptions as it was a temperamental quality of his poetic genius. As Wordsworth pointed out, a poet possesses extraordinary “organic 91 sensibility,” his sense impressions are more acute and hence there is in him the desire for the greater gratification of the physical senses, which is called “sensuousness.” Keats is “enchantingly and abundantly sensuous” as Arnold remarked, because he is keen to satisfy, unlike other poets, all the five senses. Poetry for Keats finds its origin in what he means by ‘sensation’ and at the same time, poetry exists to express and to communicate sensation. Clarence Thrope writes in his study of the poet’s mind that by ‘sensation’ Keats meant “ feelings or intuitions, the pure activity of the imagination.” Much more recently, Walter Jackson Bate, has noted in his book, John Keats that “Hazlitt’s constant use of the word ‘sensations’ in the traditional empirical sense—virtually equivalent to concrete experience—added a new term to Keats’s own habitual vocabulary.” The first asserts the primacy of the mind and its own intuitions. The second stresses the evidence of the senses and the contact they provide with material phenomena. Nevertheless, the whole fabric of his thinking is charged by the notion of ‘sensation’ and determines the course of his poetic career. More frequently Keats uses the word ‘sensation’ as a synonym for feeling or emotion. And his unique potential to communicate them in language made him a poet par excellence. Poetry, according to Milton’s famous saying, should be “simple, sensuous and impassioned” and no one can question the eminency of the quality of sensuous in Keats’s poetry. As Matthew Arnold admits in his essay on Keats that “Keats as a poet is abundantly and enchantingly sensuous; the question with some people will be, whether he is anything else? Many things can be brought forward which seem to show him as under the fascination and sole dominion of sense, and desiring nothing better.” 92 There is the exclamation in one of his letters: “ O for a life of sensation rather than of thoughts!” while in other he says, “ that with a great Poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration.” In isolation it implies an emasculated longing for indulgence in sensual experience to the exclusion of a more mature understanding or as Arnold put it a lack of “Character and self-control.” But, taken in its difficult context it acquires quite different connotations as Keats himself stated in a letter to Bailey dated 22November 1817: “ 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... I have never yet been able to perceive how anything can

be known for truth by consecutive reasoning—and yet it must be. Can it be that even the greatest philosopher ever arrived at his goal without putting aside numerous objections?" It might seem very odd to doubt that logical processes of thought can reach the truth, yet Keats is right in thinking that logical thought proceeds nowhere without some intuitive leap or acceptance of what is unproven. For Keats, the intuitive grasp of truth is the main method of reaching it; beauty is the criterion of a truth so attained Thus direct experience i.e. sensation, is not inferior to abstract reasoning but is an essential means to a true understanding of life. There are admirers of John Keats who worship him because of the sensuous strain in his poetry as the poet of "Light feet, dark violet eyes, and parted hair, Soft dimpled hands, white neck, and creamy breast." 93 Sensation, whether real or imagined, was to him the finest experience that life brought because it is senses that are made creative by exaltation. In Keats's poetry a moment of exaltation occurs when more than one sense participates in the same experience at the same moment, for example, consider the following lines of "Ode to Psyche": 'Mid hush'd, cool-rooted flowers, fragrant-eyed, Blue, silver-white, and budded Tyrian, They lay calm –breathing on the bedded grass; Their arms embraced their pinion too; The sense of touch, smell, and sight combined with other shades of coloured emotions, create these lines. His acute awareness of taste is reflected in passages like the following from "The Eve of St. Agnes": While he from forth the closet brought a heap Of candied apple, quince, and plum and gourd, And lucent syrups tinct with cinnamon, Manna and dates, an argosy transferr'd From fez, and spiced dainties every one From silken Samarcand to Cedar'd Lebanon.' Or consider some lines from "Ode to Nightingale": "O for a draught of vintage that hath been Cooled a long age in the deep—delved earth, Tasting of Flora and the country green, Dance and Provencal song and sun-burnt mirth." The following lines From "Ode to Nightingale" are a wonderful example of his sense of smell: "Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs But in embalmed darkness guess each sweet Wherewith the seasonable month endows The grass, the thicket, and fruit-tree wild. Similarly, Keats flutters from one sensuous delight to another in "Ode to Autumn" where a spirit of generosity and prodigal luxuriance is prevails everywhere. The sun conspires with the earth: 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' For Summer has o'er-brimmed their clammy cells. Through the use of the operative verbs, the poet shows the functioning of active spirit of nature expanding the landscape. In the last stanza, Keats enjoys the manifold note of music of nature. "Ode to Nightingale" is the most sensuous of all of his Odes as it thrives in the rich delight of all the senses. The very opening lines shows the effect of the rapturous song on the poet: "My heart aches and a drowsy numbness pains /My senses." For a moment he catches the glimpse of the bird in an exalted, celestial setting when: .. happily the Queen-Moon is on her throne; Clustered around by all her starry fays, To realize the quality of Keats's total sensuousness consider the following passage from the same poem: I cannot see what flowers are at my feel, Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs, But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet, The grass, the thicket, and the fruit tree wild; White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine; Fast fading violets covered up in leaves; And mid May's eldest child. Keats is a gifted word-picture painter. In a poem like "Ode to Nightingale" his sensuous enjoyment of the song of the bird gives some glimpses into eternity and he finds the bird immortal. Middleton Murry says in this context: "With a magnificent sweep of imagination, he sees the song and the bird as one. The bird becomes pure song, and inherits the eternity of beauty." Actually the whole of his poetry is charged by the luxuriant delight generated by his subtle sensitivity. His indulgence in the sensation makes some of the critics think that he is an escapist who wishes to ignore the hard realities of life or even to think about them. It is not true of all of his poetry and his later poetry makes it abundantly clear that "there is in him something more than sensuousness ... signs of character and virtue," "flint and iron" as Matthew Arnold put it. Nonetheless, the sensation to him was all-important, because only through sensation could he come into communion with the principle of beauty. (ii) Keats's Philosophy of Beauty and Truth Keats categorically admits that "With a great poet, the sense of beauty overcomes every other consideration." Then he chooses a goal for himself that "I feel assured I should write from the mere yearning and fondness I have for the beautiful." No wonder, love of beauty is the dominant note in his poetry from the early "Endymion" to his last poem "Hyperion." Keats is an artist who wrote to Shelley that "An artist must serve

Mammon," that is, his own art rather than humanity and his letter perhaps marks the beginning in England of the doctrine that was later to develop into "Art for Art's sake." And almost hundred years later, W.B.Yeats wrote of him, " His art is happy, but who knows his mind?" in Ego Dominus Tuus. His art was happy because its enthusiasm and inspiration lay in the central principle of beauty though out of his suffering was born the noblest poetry. As Geoffrey Crump says: "The central fact of Keats's life was the existence of the spiritual essence called beauty; and instead of his enthusiasm for beauty leading him to philosophical speculation, as it led Shelley, he interested himself in revealing this beauty to human senses, and proclaiming its universal importance, choosing poetry as his medium." Keats admitted as Clarence Dewitt Thorpe quotes in his book, The Mind of John Keats: "In the presence of the natural objects of unusual beauty or significance, the poet becomes oblivious of the present world. He loses himself in contemplation, becomes detached from his surroundings, as 'fainter-gleamings' shoot over his fancy, and visions of human form appear, until presently his imagination takes wing, and poetic creation is accomplished." Keats whose sensibility was so much grounded in the senses could experience how this imaginative process of understanding and comprehending beauty gradually evolves. In his letter to Bailey in which he compares the imagination to Adam's dream he asserts that " I have the same idea of all our Passions as of Love; they are all in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty." He repeatedly says, "an ideal beauty is refined and released from such common ingredients by imagination which, through its energies, bestows a kind of 'finer tone' on what it perceives." As a votary of beauty, Keats believes in two things: (a) it is imagination that generates beauty even in the common things and (b) it evolves toward sublimity. Keats has written in another letter to Benjamin Bailey on 22 November, 1817: " 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." Keats suggests that Beauty cannot be perceived through cold logic or reasoning. Only sensation can lead to beauty. For him sensations include two type of experiences—"the Heart's affections," which refers to instinctive impulses and, "Imagination" which means intuition. Thus 'impulses' and 'intuition' are the two means to perceive beauty. Keats attains the perception of beauty through love as in "Endymion" and firmly believes that "sublimated passion, like love, leads to essential beauty." Beauty in Keats's poetry in the beginning was an entirely sensuous experience. Every common object, which might leave others unmoved and unaffected, thrilled him and filled him aesthetic delight. His friend Haydon bears testimony to his love of beauty when he states; " the humming of a bee, the sight of a flower, the glitter of the sun, seemed to make his nature tremble; then his eyes flashed, his cheeks glowed, and his mouth quivered." The song of the nightingale could cause numbness and transport him to the fairyland into the realm of the delight of the song. Autumn, a season of decay, could fill him with a new charm of the golden mists and its own sweet music. His sensuousness is universal and his love for the sensuous beauty of all kinds includes the female beauty as well as it is conveyed in the oft-quoted couplet of "soft dimpled hands, white neck and creamy neck." As Middleton Murry remarks, "Beauty in all things—this was Keats's great poetic intuition, and the revelation of this Beauty, the great human purpose to which he dedicated himself and for which he was prepared to die." In 98 "Endymion" his yearning passion for the beautiful becomes the quintessence of his poetry and hence a source of perpetual bliss: "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." The idea of beauty gradually became an overwhelming passion for Keats as he wrote in one of his letters, " I feel assured I should write from the mere yearning and fondness for the beautiful, even if my night's labours should be burned every morning." Keats knew that sensuous enjoyment, however intense it maybe, cannot attain permanence as many of his Odes confirm. Therefore he attempts to relate beauty to intellectual and spiritual planes. In other words, it still includes sensuousness but does not stop there. He believes that "What imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth" Thrope explains this idea further stating: " A sense of spiritual reality which the mind apprehends imaginatively – or immediately rather than indirectly—is Beauty; this is also Truth." In this sense beauty does not refer to physical sensuous objects, but to "abiding universal truth." Keats is convinced that truth can not be achieved through muddling intellect. In a letter to Bailey he says: "I am zealous in this affair, because I have never yet been able to

perceive how anything can be known for truth by consecutive reasoning.” Reason fails to discover it while intuition discovers it automatically. Hence, beauty is nothing but intuitively discovered truth. As he again reiterated it in a letter of 1 st January 1819, “ I can never feel certain of any truth but from a clear perception of its beauty.” Middle Murry corroborates the idea thus: “He (Keats) is unable to recognize truth except 99 by the sign of beauty” while Thorpe sums up Keats’s concept of beauty stating that “a direct and intuitive perception of truth is Beauty.’ Arnold confirms it when he says: “To see things in their beauty is to see things in their truth, and Keats knew it.” In “Ode to Grecian Urn” Keats had identified that “Beauty is truth, truth beauty.” However, beauty ceases to be an abstract idea; it is not a cloistered beauty of the dream world but has been closely linked to a realistic world of humanity and social or individual suffering. Keats’s concept of beauty gradually evolves from being only sensuous, aesthetic and intellectual to its spiritual basis as his imagination mellowed with experience and sobered with intimate contact with humanity that matured his thought and sense of judgment. In other words, with a knowledge of human suffering – the severe illness and death of his brother Tom – and personal sorrows, came the fullness and profundity to know the mystery of existence. He could realize that even beauty must die as he says in “Ode to Melancholy”: “She dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die; And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips Bidding adieu; If the principle of Beauty and Truth prevail eternally, death too is the certainty, which dominates human life. The reality has left tone of melancholy and sadness. Keats, who is oppressed by the idea of death, pessimistically reflects in the “Ode to the Nightingale”: “Darkling I listen; and for many a time I have been half in love with easeful death.”

..... “To take into the air my quiet breath; Now more than ever seems it rich to die,” On seeing the Elgin marbles Keats was moved; he says: “Of God-like hardships tell me, I must die.” In his beautiful sonnet, “Why did I Laugh ToNight” he admits: Verse, Fame, and Beauty are intense indeed, But death intenser, Death is life’s high weed.” Keats is capable of viewing life as a whole and not life and death as separate parts. With this comes a profound acceptance of life as it is, passing beyond all rebellion, “into a condition of soul, to which the sum of things- foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor,” become necessary and true and beautiful. If earlier he believed that beauty resides only in the bright side of human life now he realizes that “the principle of beauty” resides “in all things” good and bad alike. Thus, Keats achieved a high poetic ideal when he could seek beauty in “the agonies, the strife, /Of human heart” beyond the “ realms of Flora and Old Pan.” Keats’s ideal vision of beauty in “The Grecian Urn” of “ Beauty is Truth, Truth beauty” went a step further in the evolution of his concept of beauty in “Hyperion.” He correlates beauty with power. According to him, the prettiest is the mightiest. Apollo is more beautiful than the Titans. Therefore he is also more powerful and overthrows Hyperion and other gods of the earlier order. For its eternal law That first in Beauty should be first in might. S.A.Brook’s comment on these lines is noteworthy,” Where there is highest Beauty, there is of necessity the greatest power. It is the instinct of all spirits to bow unquestioning to beauty, if they have the heart to see it.” The poetic height of John Keats can be measured by his aesthetics of Beauty and his dedication to it. He says: “ If I should die I have left no immortal work behind me—nothing to make my friends proud of my memory; but I have loved the principle of beauty in all things, and if I had had time I would have made myself remembered.” Matthew Arnold aptly sums up stating: “It is no small thing to have so loved the principle of Beauty as to perceive the necessary relation of beauty with truth, and of both with joy. ”And this is the supreme value of Keats’s poetry (iii) Keats’s Hellenism and Medievalism Shelley said, “Keats was a Greek” and rightly admired him as “a Greek of Greeks” because Greek literature and culture absorbed and fascinated him so deeply. Keats’s poetry is steeped in Hellenistic spirit. Hellenism implies admiration and attachment for Greek culture, outlook, literature and art. It is derived from the word ‘Hellene,’ that is, Greek. In one of the letters to his friends Severn, Keats expressed his undiminished wonder at “ all that incarnate delight” of the Hellas. He has himself admitted, “ I feel more and more everyday as my imaginations strengthens that I do not live in this world alone, but in a thousand worlds. No sooner am I alone than shapes of epic greatness are stationed around me... I am with Achilles shouting in the trenches or with Theocritus, in the vales of Sicily.” Keats could have a temperamental affinity with the Greeks and hence he could grasp the secrets of Hellenism in a way never

attained by other poets. If one attempts to discover the sources of his knowledge of Greek, it is selfevident that like Shakespeare, Keats knew little Latin and less Greek but he came under its spell through three significant sources; (a) Keats had read the translations of the Greek classics through the Elizabethans. It was George Chapman's translation of Homer, which inspired his mind and stimulated his interest in Greek mythology and literature. After reading it he composed his famous sonnet, "On Looking Into Chapman's Homer" which reveals his intense joy: "Then felt I like some watcher of the skies, When a new planet swims into his ken."

(b)It is believed that he learnt by heart Lempriere's Classical Dictionary, which made him well-versed in classical mythology.

(c) He devoted himself seriously to the works of those Renaissance poets who and dramatists who had used classical mythology in their works profusely. He read Spenser, Llyly, Milton, and Flecher. Through them he could catch the spirit of the ancients.

(d)Besides, Greek sculpture also wielded significant influence on Keats and his poetry. According to many critics Hellenism came to Keats more through Greek sculpture than through Greek literature. The famous Elgin Marbles, which were brought from Greece by Lord Elgin and placed in the British Museum in 1816, also fired his imagination and he recorded his appreciation in his sonnet, "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles." De Selincourt has emphasized that Keats had an essential kinship with the thought of Greece. Two aspects of the Greek spirit attracted Keats most: its cult of Beauty and Sense of Joy, which is the integral part of Greek way of life.

However, his presentation of the Greek or Hellas is romantic and not realistic because he had entered the world of Greek culture and art imaginatively. Keats visualized the beauty of Greek mythology and literature and out of sheer love chose Greek stories and legends as the themes for his poetry. "Endymion," "Hyperion," "Lamia," "Grecian Urn," and "Ode to Psyche" all have themes borrowed from the Greeks. He captures their spirit using the Greek form, that is, the 'Ode.' His "Ode On Grecian Urn" is the remarkable feat of the poet's imagination, which shows his power of entering into the world of Hellenic Beauty, love, festivity, ritual and celebration. Briefly, the Greek spirit permeates through out the poem and transports the reader into that entirely different world of "eternal whispering" to borrow a phrase from his sonnet "On the Sea." 103 To convey the intensity of experience and recognition of the diverse strands of sensation Keats adopts two devices: one of cataloguing of different items, which mysteriously coalesce to yield the desired goal and other of using Greek allusions. For example take an early sonnet, " After Dark Vapours": The calmest thoughts come round us—as of leaves Budding—fruit ripening in stillness—autumn suns Smiling at eve upon the quiet sheaves, -- Sweet Sappho's cheek, --a smiling infant's breath, The gradual sand that through an hour glass runs, -- A woodland rivulet—a Poet's death. In the landscape of nature, the presence of the Greek goddess of wisdom "Sappho," the mystery of the ever-advancing time and the death of a poet shows that Keats works out on a thought only by analogy. Obviously Keats had a "philosophic" mind and he was occupied with the idea of making the highest use of poetry. He frequently refers to Muses, Apollo, Pan, Endymion, Diana, Narcissus and a number of other Greek gods and goddesses. In "Ode to Nightingale," an ode not based on a classical subject, he refers to the Greek deities, Dryads, nymphs, the goddess Flora, Bacchus and his pards etc. instinctively. W.M.Rossetti has found in the "Nightingale" " a surfeit of mythological allusions" which are, to quote the words of Douglas Bush, " are so harmonious that one may forget they are there." In this context De Selincourt observes that "He realized instinctively the spirit in which the legends had taken their rise, and by the same artistic sense which led the Greek to incarnate in human form the spirit recognized by his religion in the beauty and the power about him, Keats made it his own." 104 Keats uses such allusions not as merely conventional personifications but for their charm as they are the "vital embodiment of ideas" to use a phrase of William Michael Rosssetti. Like the Greeks, the poet, who takes innocent delight in the physical side of life, masters the realm of Flora and Pan. However, there are two major areas in which the Greek influence manifests itself rather strongly: (a) His poetic style and (b) his attitude to nature. Keats, unlike the romantic poets, observes strictly the rules of proportion and symmetry and form. His poems specially the Odes are the finest example of his mastery over form. He has a Hellenic feeling for style, that is, about the selection of the right word and phrase.

Commenting on his polished and chiseled style W.J.Long comments “ he seems to have studied words more carefully than did his contemporaries, and so his poetic expression, or the harmony of word and thought , is generally more perfect than theirs.” Arnold admired him stating that, “in rounded perfection and felicity of phrase, he is like Shakespeare.” Keats’s poetry has a style which is marked by Hellenic lucidity and directness, for example, consider the following lines from “Ode to Melancholy”: “And joy, whose hand is ever at his lips Bidding adieu; and aching pleasure nigh, Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips.” The whole picture emerges with a classical clarity and directness. Though he indulges in the romantic excesses in poetic style but he combines it with classical restraint if the content demands. For example take the following lines of the “Ode to Nightingale”: Forlorn! The very word is like a bell To toll me back to my sole self. Or the lines Charm’d magic casements, opening on the foam Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn. Precise and at the same time concrete picture carries the effect of Grecian style which is marked by a “calm grandeur, majesty, simplicity and austerity.” Keats celebrates both the aspects of the Greek life: Dionysian and Apollonian- -- the former represents the emotional life and love pursuits and the latter ecstatic excitement and luminous order and his “Ode on Grecian Urn” epitomizes the culture of the Helles. In his famous book, The Starlit Dome Wilson Knight has pointed out that Keats derives the significant portion of his imagery from the ancient Pagan rituals and ceremonies. For example consider that stanza of “Ode on Grecian Urn” where a ‘heifer’ is being taken for the sacrifice or the lines from “Ode to Psyche” where the poet wants to build a temple “in the untrodden region of my mind” to worship the goddess Psyche. Another feature of his poetic style that directly has the influence of the Greek poetry if the pictorial quality, for illustration, in the opening stanza “The Eve of St. Agnes” which presents a vivid picture of the January chill: “Ah bitter chill it was! The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold; The hare limp’d through the frozen grass.” Likewise, “Ode to Autumn” impersonates the season through its manifold activities as a reaper, gleaner and cider-presser. She is personified as “Sitting careless on a granary-floor. Her Hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind; Or On a half –reaped furrow sound asleep, Drowsed with the fume of poppies, while her hook Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers. Keats’s attitude to Nature is marked by the typical characteristics of Greek temper that is three -fold in its feelings:- (a) worship, (b)joy and (c) wonder and thrill. According to Stopford A. Brooke, “ the temper of the soul with which he looked on nature had all the simplicity, and the same feeling of joy and worship together, which a young Athenian might have had.” Similarly, Courthope affirms “he indeed resembles the Greeks in his vivid sense of the joyous and multitudinous life of nature.” Keats’s child-like wonder at the beauties of nature led him to impersonate them and mythologize them as most of his poems including the Odes reveal. Being a true artist, Keats combines in his poetry the classical traits with the romantic zeal in an ideal balance. Keats enjoyed Greek art with a passion of a lover. Like them he was a devotee of beauty and asserted; “With a great poet the sense of beauty overcomes every other consideration.” Hence it is the ultimate object of all art. Like the Greeks he uses Beauty as an all-inclusive term, which has a large scale to cover from the physical to spiritual where it is identified with Truth, for instance, in “Ode to Grecian Urn.” Weekes observes “ for him as for them (Greeks), beauty is not exclusively material, nor spiritual, nor intellectual, but finds its expression in the fullest development of all that goes to make up human perfection.” Keats talks about Greek polytheism as a “religion of joy.” If there is the intoxicating delight in the momentary experience of the song of the bird, ideal embodiment of the moment in art, in song, or in marble as in “Ode to Nightingale” or “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” it is an imperishable source of joy. In his book, On Study of Celtic Literature and On Translating Homer, Arnold praises Keats for being Greek, “as Greek as a thing from Homer or Theocritus... composed with the eye on the object, a radiancy and light 107 clearness being added.” Commenting on “Ode to Maia” Douglas Bush has said something so very true that it can be suitably applied to all his poetry that “ the concrete details are suffused with a rich nostalgia. The hard edges of the classical Greek writing are softened by the enveloping emotion and suggestion. In his classical moments Keats is a sculptor whose marble becomes flesh.” If the classicism emphasizes the concrete and the sensuous Medievalism, that is the revival of interest in the middle ages, stresses the abstract and the spiritual. The romantics were dissatisfied with the present and the sordid reality of their immediate surroundings. Therefore they looked to the past or the future. If Shelley found relief by imagining the future to be the golden age of perfect happiness, Keats, like many

other poets, escaped into the past and was fascinated by the colour and pageantry, tales of love and adventure of the middle ages. For illustration, consider his poems like "The Eve of St. Agnes," "Isabella" and "La Belle Dame Sans Merci." The middle ages were the ages of Feudalism where the mentions of the feudal lords were the centre of life. In "The Eve of St. Agnes" Keats depicts such a feudal mansion with a vivid account of medieval pomp, colour and pageantry: A casement high and triple-arched there was All garlanded with carven imageries Of fruits, and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass. And diamonded with panes of quaint device, Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes. The medieval life was characterized by the beliefs of a host of superstitions Keats strikes a medieval note when he refers to one such superstition: They told her how, upon St Agnes Eve, 108 Young virgins might have visions of delight, And soft adoring from their lovers receive, Upon the honeyed middle of the night, If ceremonies due they did aright. The poem closes on a note of supernatural terrors: The lovers fled away into the storm, That night the Baron dreamed of many woe, And all his warrior guests, with shade and form, Of witch, and demon and large coffin-worm, Were long be-nightmare. The weird and uncanny atmosphere of the Middle Ages is often evoked by the use of suggestive words and images. Thus, in the "Ode to the Nightingale", the mystery and magic of those bygone times are artistically suggested by the following lines: The same that oft-times hath, Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam, Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn. Another aspect of the Middle Ages that fascinated Keats is its spirit of knighthood and chivalry. For instance, take the following lines of "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," a ballad steeped in medieval atmosphere where the ballad metre and ballad manner is used effectively: I saw pale kings and warriors too, Pale warriors, death pale were they all; They cried- La Belle Dame Sans Merci Hath thee in thrall. The revival of the old metre forms is an essential part of the medievalism and Keats with his historical imagination could recreate the romantic charm of the remote and even the unknown ages. (iv)Keats's Idea of 'Negative Capability': On 21st December 1817, Keats wrote a letter to his brothers George and Tom in which he used the term 'Negative Capability' while enumerating the qualities of a man of letters. He says: "... what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean Negative Capability that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable searching after fact or reason" If one examines the statement of Keats dispassionately, one realizes that for him a necessary condition of poetry is submission to things as they are, without trying to intellectualize them into something else, submission to people as they are without trying to indoctrinate or improve them. Keats found this quality in Shakespeare at its fullest. Walter Jackson Bate analyses Keats's idea of "Negative Capability" in his article of the same name very thoughtfully. He says that there is a three-fold idea at the heart of his concept of "Negative Capability": First, the problem of form or style in art; second, the ideal toward which he is groping is contrasted more strongly with the egoistic assertion of one's own identity. Third, the door is further opened to the perception—of the sympathetic potentialities of the imagination. The occasion, which provoked this idea, was when he went to see an exhibition of the American painter, Benjamin West, specially his picture "Death on the Pale Horse". Keats found it "flat" He writes in the letter: "The excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth. Examine 'King Lear', and you will find this exemplified throughout; but in this picture we have unpleasantness without any momentous depth of speculation excited, in which to bury its repulsiveness...." Keats makes it almost compulsory that in art all that is irrelevant and discordant must "evaporate." Hence "Truth" and "Beauty" spring simultaneously into being. The harmony of these two would excite the "depth of speculation" of human insight. Keats quotes the example of King Lear. As it is believed Hazlitt's essay "On Gusto," which suggests the word 'briskness' for "an imaginative intensity" also influenced Keats's thinking about the poetic style. The second part of his idea of "Negative Capability" is direct and even "transparent" as his friend Bailey pointed out. It involves negating one's own ego. It hints at two significant things: first is 'capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts' etc. which means merging one's identity completely with the object contemplated. He should have no self at all and "should be capable of picking with the sparrow on the gravel" as Keats wrote in his letter to Woodhouse. Further he added, "A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence; because he has no identity, he is continually in, and filling, some other

body." The second is the use of the pejorative word, "irritable" that refers to deliberate and frustrated efforts to justify the one's egoistic assertion. The third extension of this thought is to "explore the potentialities of the imagination so that one could attain what Wordsworth calls "wise passiveness" or "ripeness" with a view to making humanity "a grand democracy of Forest Trees" to borrow a phrase of Keats himself. To achieve this goal, the ideal of "disinterestedness" is directly helpful for realizing the "sympathetic potentialities of imagination" "because it "was not a mere escape hatch from the prison of egocentricity, but something thoroughgoing, something indigenous and inseparable from all the activities of the mind" as Hazlitt stated in Principles of Human Action. In this respect, Shakespeare was to be "The least of an egoist..... he was nothing in himself : but he was all that others were, or that they could become.... He had only to think of anything in order to become that thing, with all the circumstances belonging to it" as Hazlitt stated in his lecture on "Shakespeare and Milton." Thus, the "Negative Capability" adds to the power of imagination and " a great degree hieroglyphic visioning" to use the expression of Walter Jackson Bate. Sidney Colvin identified Keats's "Negative capability" with sympathetic imagination and writes, " the very essence of his genius was the predominance, namely of the sympathetic imagination over other faculties." Hence his work was not inspired by his own personality but by the things outside himself, be it a Nightingale or an Urn , a season or a book.. What Maurice Bowra has said about the Romantic poet in general can be truly applied to Keats with a view to appreciating him properly. He says: "The Romantic poet appeals to us because he does something which we can not but respect. He believes that in exercising his imagination he creates life and adds to the sum of living experience.... We may not accept all his assumptions and conclusions, but we must admire the spirit in which he approaches his task., and admit that the problems which he seeks to solve must not be shirked by anyone who wishes to understand the universe in which we live."

Critical Appreciation of Keats's "Ode to Nightingale," "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and "Eve of St. Agnes"

(a) "Ode to Nightingale" Keats's Ode to Nightingale" is one of his finest Odes and it embodies the poet's spontaneous reaction to the rapturous song of the bird. The poem was written in April 1819 when Keats was staying at Wentforth Place, Hampstead with Charles Brown. Mr. Brown himself has given a first hand account of the extempore and spontaneous composition of this ode. "In the spring of 1819 a nightingale had built her nest near my house. Keats felt a tranquil and continual joy in her song, and one morning he took his chair from the breakfast-table to the grassy plot under a plum-tree, where he sat for two or three hours. When he came into the house I perceived that he had some scrapes of paper in his hand, and thesecontained his poetic feelings on the song of our nightingale." In spite of the swiftness of the composition, the poem is marked by a complex thematic structure and artistic excellence. The perfect art of music of the bird, Poetry, Metaphysics and Dreams form one layer of the themes while the contrast between the existential conditions in the world of the bird and the world of man form the other and they are cemented together by the subtle poetic devices. The poet's primary poetic concern is for the synthesis, that is, for the creation of bird as evolving symbol while the dramatic thematic development of the poem shows that "frustration is the theme, not the expression. Yet the expression too has the traces of uneasiness. The dull pain of the first strophe is more real than the triumphant escape from it" as Blackstone has beautifully summed up the thought. 113 The ode has eight stanzas and they are held together by an organic unity and logical development. The first stanza introduces the reader to the effect of the song of the bird on the poet. The contrast between the benumbed lethargy of the poet and the ecstatic song of the bird is implied. The first stanza vividly depicts the sensation of "drowsy numbness" that is akin to the mood of indolence, that is celebrated in the "Ode to Indolence." The second stanza shows the craving for " a draught of vintage, " for a beaker full of the warm South, Full of the true, the bluish Hippocrene, With beaded bubbles winking at the brim, And purple-stained mouth; The contrast between what is and what ought to be in the second strophe shows that the poet's primary concern is for synthesis and for the creation of the bird as an evolving symbol. When the poet directly confronts the problem of creative process he seeks the help through the imagery of wine. The movement of the poem is a vertical one—up and down. First four lines of the first strophe plunge downward while the last sextet sore upward to the "melodious plot/ Of

beechan green.” But with the first line of the second strophe we are underground again in “the deep-delved earth.” The poet makes it clear that earth has its value and can be enjoyed immensely in the “realm of Flora and Old Pan,” that is, sensuous beauty. As a result of the luxuriant richness of experiences and train of associations the poet escapes from personal frustration into a community of happy human beings. The phrases like “sun-burnt mirth,” “warm South,” “blushful Hippocrene” “beaded bubbles” and “purple-stained mouth” present vivid world pictures. His craves for “a beaker full of warm South” and as Wasserman rightly points out in his book, *The Finer Tone*, “wine was at one time or another explicitly linked with poetry, with imagination, with happiness, with “heaven” in short with all that the nightingale represents. Moreover, in the second stanza, wine resembles the nightingale in being associated with summer, happiness and song....Like the “immortal Bird” the wine comes from a “long age,” and reiteration of the word “full” the fullness of the beaker , suggests a desire for an intense , gluttony experiencing similar to the poet’s deep reaction to the song of the nightingale.” He soon realizes that wine is an aid not to community but to forgetfulness, the forgetfulness of the world in its sinister aspects of “The weariness, the fever and the fever.” Thus, in the third stanza Keats presents what he has actually known while the Provencal song and other delights he has only imagined. The stanza opposes to the gaiety of the second stanza and with its stark realization of the misery of life and personal griefs caused by the death of his brother Tom becomes autobiographical. This for Keats is the real world , the world of impotence and frustrations. Here the Ode also shares other themes like the ambition of love, of friendship, as well as of fame. But, the fame underlies it all. As Blackstone assesses with the same human feeling which Keats deeply felt that “Life is pain; and there can be no anodyne, Keats rejects the aid of wine in the forth stanza and relies on “the viewless wings of Poesy” to enter the world of the bird though his trust in himself is partially justified.” The stanza is a superb expression of Keats’s impulse of the imaginative escape in the face of the knowledge of the tragic human limitations but the poet still wishes to escape from the ugly facts of life and says, “Away! 115 away! for I will fly to thee.” From the “disagreeables” of the third stanza, which deal with sickness, sorrow and death, the poet experiences “the solace of romance.” He notices that discordant associations have evaporated and for a moment he catches the glimpse of the bird in an exalted, celestial setting of the moon and stars in that “tender night.” The illumination is fleeting and yet effective. It has the power to order and tranquilize the poet’s anguished thoughts; it brings harmony. In this psychological state of mind there is a willful exclusion of the tragic knowledge of life. The fifth stanza carries the illusions of recovering the primal garden of eternal spring. The tranquility prevails and the central vision brings acceptance. “The song-haunted darkness stimulates the imagination” to borrow an expression of David Perkins from his article “The Ode to Nightingale” and he tries to “guess each sweet.” Through the eye of imagination the poet can see more than the sensory eye can ever see. He says he cannot ‘see’ but he can ‘guess’ and he is content to guess. The acceptance is in line with his doctrine of ‘negative capability,’ of patience with halftruths. He returns to himself and in returning to himself he attains for the first time to what existed around him. The initial self-centered disquiet is replaced by a self-surrender to the spirit of here and now. Precisely, the poet realizes the limitations of the urge to imaginative escape and so returns to the reality by listening to “The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.” The stanza satisfies four out of five senses. And thus provides what Masson calls “The universality of his sensuousness” which makes Symon describe Keats as “a purely sensuous poet.” Through out the poem darkness has been gathering about the poet as he moves into the world of nightingale. He repeatedly says, ‘there is no light”; “I can not see”. The sixth stanza opens with the line, “Darkling I listen” and he returns to the thought of death. This darkness is no longer terrible and bears within itself the possibility of transmutation because it is as Blackstone stated “an integral part of the total process, the unending three-fold rhythm of birth, growth and death” which Keats recognized in life and in the dialectic of poetry itself. Keats believes that the presence of death might lead to the prolongation of ecstatic moment and might reconcile it with other value—love, beauty, and happiness which the bird symbolizes. As David Perkins has shown, the bird, taken as poetic image is no longer natural bird, becomes an essential and primary spirit of art, a symbol, a value that exists independent of the world of man. Keats says: Thou wast not born for death, immortal bird! No hungry generations tread thee down; The poet attempt to unite the earthly and the eternal but the seventh stanza once again

shows the gap between them. Keats achieves a universal vision which includes an ever-widening circle of human experience and feels that the song of the bird might served mankind for ages. The poet's wish to identify with the bird is slowly dissipated. He feels that the voice he hears 'was' heard by generations of men, kings and clown alike and even by the biblical characters like Ruth, and it might have consoled the wounded heart of the love-sick princess. Under the spell of the song of the bird, the poet had forgotten himself for a while but he realizes that the faery lands are "forlorn" because man is not born to live there. The journey homeward to the habitual self painfully begins. The song of the nightingale ceases to be a happy song and becomes the high requiem and slowly declines into a "plaintive anthem." In other words, the illusion of the mythic oneness is dissolved in the awareness of change and human history. The poet awakens from the trance and bids farewell to his vision. He says: Adieu! The fancy can not cheat so well As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf. 117 It is pertinent to note that it is not the bird that first fades away, it is the song. It so happens when the poet comes to his "sole self." The point of the whole experience is driven home by the closing lines and the question they pose: Was it a vision, or a waking dream? Fled is that music: -- Do I wake or sleep? The question arises when the poem has ended. As David Perkins aptly suggests, "The question is one that has haunted poetry ever since the romantic age, and poets, writing their own versions of Keats's great ode, have often used virtually an identical symbol....." In his fascinating and lucid analysis of the odes of Keats, he sums up "Ode to Nightingale" in a very convincing, familiar and common sense logic stating: "We are not left on the heights; for Keats knew well that in the courses of this world such transfigurations are not permitted. There must be a descent from the Mount. Keats manages his transition, it seems to me, with exquisite tact; and the return, in "a waking dream" to the initial note of "drowsy numbness" gives the poem that circular structure he so much loved." Keats finishes his poem with his feet on the ground, precisely from the point where he began. (b) "Ode on a Grecian Urn" The "Ode on a Grecian Urn," which invites special attention among Keats's Odes, was written in May 1819. The pattern on the urn does not exactly correspond to any surviving Greek vase. Keats's imagination may have fused together memories of scenes from two or more different Greco-Roman vases in the Louvre, Paris. C.M.Bowra has enumerated some of these artistic 118 pieces from which Keats evolved his imaginary Urn in his book The Romantic Imagination. They are: (a) A marble vase constructed by the sculptor, Sosibios. (b) Another marble vase depicting a revelry-scene in Louvre.(c) Famous Elgin marbles which Keats saw in the British Museum (d) A marble Urn that belonged to Lord Holland and is kept at Holland House, Kensington, might have partly inspired this Ode. The ode makes the final selection from this material and organizes various themes into a single poem. A major contrast between "Nightingale" and "Grecian Urn" is indicated by the different nature of the central images – the difference between the living creature and artifact. Nightingale moves from mortality toward essence, from time to eternity; in the Grecian Urn Keats begins from the world of myth, and seeks to elucidate its mystery within the terms of human life and history, make it speak of the impatient needs and questions of his human situation. Both share 'the great aim' of poetry, that is, "To sooth the cares, and lift the thoughts of man." One can but agree with Bate's judgment that "Urn is in every way a more considered poem than the "Nightingale." Bernard Blackstone aptly says, " 'On a Grecian Urn' is the Hamlet among Keats's Odes in more than one sense." It is the most familiar, the richest in texture and the most obscure. Of all the Odes, it comes nearest to a formal expression of Keats's 'philosophy.' The Urn, which is an artifact, gathers to itself the resonances of all other urns, vases, pots and jars that stud Keats's poetry. The poem opens with the images of exceptional compression: Thou still unravished bride of quietness, Thou foster-child of silence and slow time. 119 The urn is a bride and yet still maiden, "unravished"; it is the foster child of silence and still most vocal. Such paradoxical collocations of contraries affirm that " the ode is a symbolic action in term of the urn, its intrinsic theme is the region where earth and the ethereal, light and darkness, time and no-time become one; and what the symbolic drama ultimately discovers is the way in which art (the urn) relates man to that region." The urn depicts two scenes in four stanzas: The first scene, which is a lovescene of "mad pursuit" is depicted in the first three stanzas; here in the "wild ecstasy" of love a youth plays pipes under a tree for the "sensual ear" and another fair youth chases a pretty girl to kiss her. These human emotions are "For ever panting, and for ever young;" unlike our world. Still the urn, which is endowed with a voice, reconciles the dead with the living, past and present

by projecting the similar emotions and needs and thus provides a vehicle of continuity. The second scene pertains to a sacrificial procession in which a priest leads a garlanded heifer to a ‘green altar’ and is followed by a company of pious worshippers. They present two sides of Greek genius – Dionysian which stands for ecstatic excitement and Apollonian which represents luminous order. These two scenes depict two different moods of man’s life – first of passionate celebration that presents personal desire and emotion and second of calm, serene Pagan ritual which is a community activity. Keats has said in the first stanza that the urn is a “Sylvan historian”: it is the chronicle of our brief lives and their mystery without mentioning the facts, dates and names, as a historian would do. It is an artistic method and gives us the knowledge of life attained through “imaginative engagement and disengagement that defines the circular shape of both of the urn and the ode” to use the expression of Stuart M. Sperry. It is after the mysterious significance of the religious ritual that the urn enters the context necessary 120 for such a conversion that the urn eternally withholds. The ode’s famous concluding apothegm: “‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty,’ - that is all Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.” has assumed crucial importance and remains the major challenge in any attempt to reinterpret the poem. T.S.Eliot in his well-known judgment went to the extent of calling these lines “a serious blemish on a beautiful poem.” Cleanth Brooks in his brilliant essay “Keats’s Sylvan Historian” says that the poem is ‘beautiful’ and ‘true.’ What the urn presents is beautiful and is based on the imaginative experience of “essentials of human life and nature” and nature” by a “good historian.” The phrase, ‘Beauty is Truth, Truth beauty’ in which the second part is the mirror image of the first part, if thus isolated by this punctuation, carries a curious suggestion of a motto or a proverb spoken by the Urn itself. But the whole statement of these two lines is the message of the Urn to those who contemplate it (hence the change to the second person plural – “that is all Ye know on earth”). The message is only incidentally an assertion of the permanence of art; it declares that the imagination can achieve states of intense illumination or ecstasy, transcending the actual moment of experience, and that the imagination speaks through art; imaginative knowledge can satisfy us when the activity of the discursive thought never can: in Keats’s language, a sense of the beauty of life and the world comes nearer to truth, to understanding the meaning of existence, than the activity of thought or reason. In his letters also he expressed this conviction. To Benjamin Bailey he wrote on 22 November 1817 he says, “I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart’s affections and the truth of Imagination – what imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth – whether it existed before or not.” Thus, the urn asserts that beauty and truth are identical. Beauty of art can attain permanence and it leads to truth which is ‘of lasting value’ to use a phrase from Graham Hugh. In the words of Bowra, the message of the urn is that “Imaginatively perceived reality is both Truth and beauty.” Philosophically speaking the Urn teaches us to visualize the beauty of life “upon our pulses” and truth in every fact of life including the pain and ugliness as Middleton Murry concluded. Briefly the lines convey Keats’s philosophy of art and the ethics of human life. (c) Eve of St. Agnes The Eve of St. Agnes was composed in Jan. & Feb. 1819. It marks Keats’s momentary abandonment of Milton for Spenser, of the spirit of heroic endeavor for imaginative escape, of epic for a return to romance. “Eve of St. Agnes” is a romance of a sort totally different from any he had yet attempted. The poem was written in the early day of Keats’s love for Fanny Brawne, before the rapture of his passion had given way to doubts and anxieties. The story of this poem is derived from a romance of the Italian writer Boccacio. The two lovers Porphyro and Madeline belong to the two families which are at daggers drawn with each other. Such love is fraught with danger & tragic possibilities. But the poet brings about a happy ending. The lovers escape on a stormy night. It is happy love story. St. Agnes was a Christian martyr of the fourth century. The Eve of St. Agnes falls on 20 th Jan. “St. Agnes was Roman virgin who suffered martyrdom in the reign of Diocletian. A few days after her parents are said to have a vision of her surrounded by angels and attended by a white lamb which afterwards became sacred to her. In the Roman Cathartic Church formerly the nuns used to bring a couple of lambs to her altar during Mass. The superstition is that by taking certain measures of divination, damsels may get a sight to their future husbands in a dream. The ordinary process seems to begin by fasting. This note was added to the poem when it was published by Leigh Hunt in 1835, long after Keats’s death. The poem is written in Spenserian Stanzas, a form invented by Edmund Spenser for his Faerie Queene. The rhymes link all the lines together in an unbroken series. The most distinctive

feature is the lengthened last line of six feet technically called Alexandrine. It is not just that the poem reveals a new, breath-taking advance in technical mastery. More important, the apparent simplicity of Keats's late conceals a new Sophistication, an extra ordinary awareness of the devices of romance, and a fascination with both their possibilities and limitations. St. Agnes grants a greater sensuous & emotional intensity to a world of dreams and makes –belief, and thus makes them seriously intellectual & dramatic. For Keats's contemporaries and the Victorians who in one way or another came under its spell the meaning of the poem was absolutely clear. It was for them the essence of romance, a gorgeous bit of tapestry, full of color, tenderness passion, and high feelings. So the commonest response to "The Eve of St. Agnes" has been the celebration of its 'heady and perfumed loveliness'. The poem has been called " a monody of dreamy richness", "one long sensuous utterance", "an expression of lyrical emotion," "a great affirmation of love", "a great choral hymn", an expression of "unquestioning rapture", and many things else. Even Leigh Hunt thought it to be the most delightful & complete specimen of Keats's genius. These remarks confirm that this poem is 'a romantic tapestry of unique richness & color'. One is moved less by the experience of characters & more by incidental innumerable beauties of descriptive phase & rhythm; to use the expression of Jack Stillinger. 123 The poem is above all dramatic as Keats's himself saw it a step toward a chief ambition "the writing of a few fine plays". The poem opens on a note of "bitter chill" & progresses through images of cold & death before the action gets under way. When young Porphyro comes from across the moors to claim his bride, he enters a hostile castle, where Madeline's kinsmen will murder even upon holy days; and in the face of this danger he proceeds to Madeline's bed-chamber. Madeline is sober and demure, "St. Agnes Charmed Maid", rising beneath her solitary candles gleams to pious observances. Yet the rites she must observe like 'going supperless to bed, nor look behind nor side ways,' while rooted in folk superstition suggest a little child put to bed early with the vision of sugar plums. Porphyro in softvoiced and trembling, yearning for his lady in the darkness still disliked to interrupt her slumbers. However, with the sexual consummation of their love, storm comes up; they must escape the castle passed "sleeping dragons" porter, porter, and bloodhound into night. The ending is reverse to the opening notes of "bitter chill & death"; Madeline's kinsmen are be nightmared, & old Beadsman & Madeline's nurse Angela are grotesquely dispatched into the next world. It is pertinent note that the warmth & security of Madeline's chamber are contrasted with the coldness and hostility of the rest of the castle. However, St. Agnes is not primarily a glorification of sexual experience or even, for all the condensed richness of its imagery, of human senses. It is, rather, an exceptionally subtle study of the psychology of imagination & its processes building the relationship between this world and the next. More than anything else the element most central to the poem is its concern with for wish-fulfillment, a fundamental aspect of romance that had fascinated Keats from time of his earliest verse. To describe "The Eve of St. Agnes" as a romance of wish fulfillment is to regard its activities as artless & even 124 simple-minded while the fact remains that the reality and activity it shows is not simple but complex & continually shifting. Stuart M. Sperry rightly points out that, " 'The Eve of St. Agnes' is a supreme example of art as wish-fulfillment.... of an exceptionally practiced and self-conscious kind that gives the work its essential character. The poem, that is, achieves its magic, but only in such a way as to dramatize the particular tensions that oppose it and the kinds of device it must employ in overcoming them - repression, anxiety, disguise, censorship, sublimation. The very artistry that brings the dream swelling into reality draws our attention to itself in such a way as subtly to qualify, even to unsettle, its own effects. Once we go beneath the surface melodrama we discover a mixture of the naïve and sophisticated, the sentimental and the disenchanted, fantasy and psychological realism." Though Madeline or Porphyro are not directly introduced, it is in the portrayal of Madeline and her dream that Keats's treatment becomes more subtle. The shifting use it makes of different conventions and attitudes continually affirm that this narrative romance is full of the masterpieces of Keats's technique. For example take his brilliant use of images. The most significant use is that of sculptural imagery, which reflects the harsh repression of human warmth and feeling, the note from which the poems commences and ascends. At the most critical moment of the poem, the moment of Madeline's apparent withdrawal from her dream and her awakening, Porphyro kneels as if frozen by her bedside, "pale as smooth 125 sculptured stone." Keats uses the imagery of sculpture to express the way feeling is arrested or repressed, then liberated and

fulfilled in a new onrush of emotion. There is a similar logic at work in the poet's use of musical themes and images which indicates another range of experiences in the single moment. When Beadsman passes through the little door, "Music's golden tongue/Flatter'd to tears this aged man and poor." Similarly, the image of tear defines a particular moment central to the poem's harmony. The image occurs twice at important turning point in the poem – once when Porphyro first learns of Madeline's hope for St. Agnes's night and again when Madeline weeps on awakening from her dream to observe her lover kneeling By her bedside - and thus perpetuates and extends, almost like a theme in music, the power of a single mood. There is much in the poem, which reminds the reader of the trappings of "old romance." As R.H. Fogle has justly observed, the effects of the poem are "complex and even self-contradictory." It is certainly "not the poetry of a simple romancer." Though the poem carries the world of romance, the characters nevertheless lay claim at various times to different levels of existence or reality that continually play off against , challenge , or modify each other. It is worth noticing that Porphyro is "no rude infidel" and called her twice his bride. Sperry sums up the poem thus: The poem, in fact, seems virtually on the point of ending on a note of domesticity, with the storm, for all its icy gusts, marking a return to the world of the natural elements and breathing humanity. Such homely expectations, however, are quickly lost amid the onset of some final magic. "Hark 'tis an elfin storm from faery land," Porphyro exclaims. The lovers are not destined for a return into the mortal world but for some nebulous transcendence of their own.." There is something sad about the way they flee away as "phantoms" unfelt, unheard and unseen by all. We remain charmed but also perplexed by the poem and its blend of domesticity, elvishness, Gothicism, realism, courtly romance, riddle, fairy tale and legend, a combination that remains to the last deliberately anachronistic and refuses to relate itself to what is commonly known as 'reality' that can be readily defined.

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