

# John Keats as an Artist :- A Study

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## **Abstract :-**

John Keats is an outstanding Romantic Poet. The major characteristics of his poetry are sensuous, pictorial images and concrete representation of human life and nature. Apart from it, his poetry is having features of artistic images throughout his poems. Just as an artist create lively and vivid concrete images before us. The same term is an applicable to his poems. Keats was a conscious artist anxious to load his poetry as fully as possible with its own special kind of excellence. During his short span of life Keats work is always changing and developing. Keats outstanding poems are *Endymion*, *Lamia*, *Hyperion*. In fact Keats poems like *Ode to a Nightingale*, *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, *Ode to Autumn* having all the trends to consider him as an artist.

Some critics points out, “The note of sadness sounds through them all and the vivid joy of the perceptive life, the ideal permanence of art, the glamour of romance, the benison of Nature’s varying moods, are contrasted with the mutability of life and the short duration of pleasure.” Keats sentiment of Nature is simpler than that of the other Romantics. He remains absolutely uninfluenced by the Pantheism of Wordsworth and Shelley, and loves Nature not because of any spiritual significance in her external charm and beauty.

## **Introduction :-**

John Keats was born on Oct. 31, 1795. He was the eldest of the five children of a Stable-Keeper. Keats was considerably influenced by Spenser and was, like the latter, a passionate lover of beauty in all its forms and manifestations. Keats hated didacticism in poetry. He wrote “We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us”. In his poetry, we find a remarkable contrast both with Byron on one side. John Keats poetry is purely artistic nature, he took up in regard to all the movements and conflicts of his time a position of almost complete detachment. He knew nothing of Byron’s strong spirit of antagonism. He had no sympathy with Shelley’s humanitarian real and passion for reforming the world. The famous opening line of *Endymion* – “A thing of beauty is a joy for ever”. He loved nature just for its own sake and for the glory and loveliness which he everywhere found in it. His poetic world is an entirely varied from his contemporaries. He grasped the essential oneness of beauty and truth. His creed did not mean beauty of form done. His ideal was the Greek

ideal of beauty inward and outward, the project soul of verse as well as the perfect form. Keats's observation of Nature is very keen and nothing escapes of it.

According to him, “expresses of nothing but a keen delight and genuine joy in Nature”. Keats had seen a premature death because he had always felt threatened by consumption which ran in the family and which had already carried off his brother Tom. His fear of death finds expression in his well known poem, *When I Have Fears that I May Cease to be*. He was now definitely known to be suffering from consumption. As a lost hope, in September 1820, accompanied by his friend Joseph Severn, he left England for Italy. At Lulworth he wrote his last sonnet, *Bright Star Would I were Steadfast as thou Art*. He died in Rome on February 23, 1821, and was buried in the old protestant cemetery near the pyramid of Caius Cestius.

John Keats was not merely a deeply thoughtful poet; he was also the most studious and inspired artist among the Romantics. He is one of the greatest word – painters in English poetry. His picture in his poems remarkable for its vividness and minuteness of detail. His images are concrete and stand in a striking contrast with Shelley's images which are abstract and vague. *The Eve of St. Agnes* is an abundant artistic images and full of pictures. In *The Eve of St. Mark*, we have two very vivid pictures, one depicting the outdoor scene in the street, and the other describing the maiden over her look in the fire lit of chamber. In the *Ode to Autumn*, we have abundant lively artistic images. The bountry of Autumn has been delineated with all its sensuous appeal. The vivid images like the apples, the gourds, the hazles with their sweet kernel, the bees suggesting honey, all these appeal to our senses of taste and smell. Keats's pictorial quality is here seen at its best. Autumn is personified and presented to us in the figure of the winnower, “sitting careless on a granary floor,” the reaper “on a half reaper furrow sound sleep”, the gleaner keeping “steady thy laden head across a brook,” and a spectator watching with patient. The reaper, the winnower, the gleaner and the cider-presser and the fast ooziings therefrom symbolises Autumn. All these vivid and concrete picture make the poem human and universal.

### **Art is superior to life :-**

According to John Keats art is superior in human life. It is an immortal. In his well-known poem *Ode on A Greeian Urn*, he explains that music which is imagined is much sweeter than music which is actually heard. The music of the flute-players depicted on the Grecian Urn can not be actually heard by us. These unheard, but imaginable melodies are sweeter than the songs that we actually hear. He says:

Heard melodies are sweet,  
 but those unheard  
 Are sweeter, therefore, ye soft  
 pipes, play on.  
 Not to the sensual ear, but  
 more endeared  
 Pipe to the spirit ditties  
 of no tone .... (Lines 11 - 14)

Besides, the lover who is trying to kiss his beloved on the Urn will always be seen in the same mood of pleasurable anticipation. In real life, love and beauty are temporary, but the love and beauty depicted on the Urn will remain ever fresh. The poet says:

Bold Lover, never, never canst  
 thou kiss,  
 Though winning near the goal  
 yet, do not grieve;  
 She can not fade, through thou  
 last not thy bliss,  
 Forever, wilt thou love, and she  
 be fair! (Lines 17 - 20)

In real life, spring is short and the trees must shed their leaves. Similarly, in real life a musician will atleast feel tired of playing his music and song. The real pleasure of love is followed by disgust and society. But the trees depicted on the Urn will never shed their leaves. The beauty of the beloved and the passion of lover to follow he is symbolizing true art. The poet simply want to convey the idea that art is, in one sense, superior to real life. Then, there is picture of a crowd of people going to some place of worship. A priest leads a heifer which has been decorated with garlands and which is to be offered as a sacrifice. The worshippers have come from some little town situated close to a river or on a sea shore or at the foot of a hill on which stands a fortrees. The poet says: "Who are these coming to the sacrificse"? Further the town which has been emptied of

its people. As Keats says:” “Is emptied of this folk, this pious mourn?” The town which has been emptied of its people will always remain desolate, because the people shown on the Urn will always be seen going away to the place of worship but never returning to the town.

*Ode on a Grecian Urn* is really a piece of literary composition which indicates us that art is an immortal, while human life is mortal. In the concluding stanza of the poem, the poet addresses the Urn as “Attic shape.” The feelings which the Urn awakens in the poet are like the overwhelming feeling which arise when the poet thinks of eternity. The generation of men will come and pass, and will perhaps undergo sufferings and sorrows of which we have no notion at present. Beauty and truth are not separate things but two sides of one and the same thing. An important idea in this ode is that art is superior to real life in certain respects.

### **Conclusion :-**

In brief, Keats was a very careful artist. He took the almost pains in revising and polishing his poems. It is believed that if Keats had lived longer he would have attained Shakespearean height in poetry. William J. Long Writes: “When we remember that all his work was published in three short years, from 1817 to 1820, and that he died when only twenty five years old, we must judge him to be the most promising figure of the early nineteenth century. But even judging him by work actually done by him, he is a poet of no mean order. Like Spenser, he is a poet’s poet. He greatly influenced Tennyson, Rossetti, Morris and Swinburne”. While some critics was bitterly and unjust condemned him. In fact, John Keats was one of the memorable poet of the Romantic age. Though he had got short span of life, but he proved to be greatest of the Romantics. Undoubtedly, he was one of most remarkable artist. He devoted his life for art. His poetry is ‘art for art sake’. It was poetry itself that first enlisted his enthusiasm – poetry and art. As Sidney Colvin Says, “... merely to create a paradise of art and beauty divorced from the cares and interests of the world. He did at the creation and revelation of beauty but of beauty wherever its elements existed ....”

### **References**

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