

Semester: V

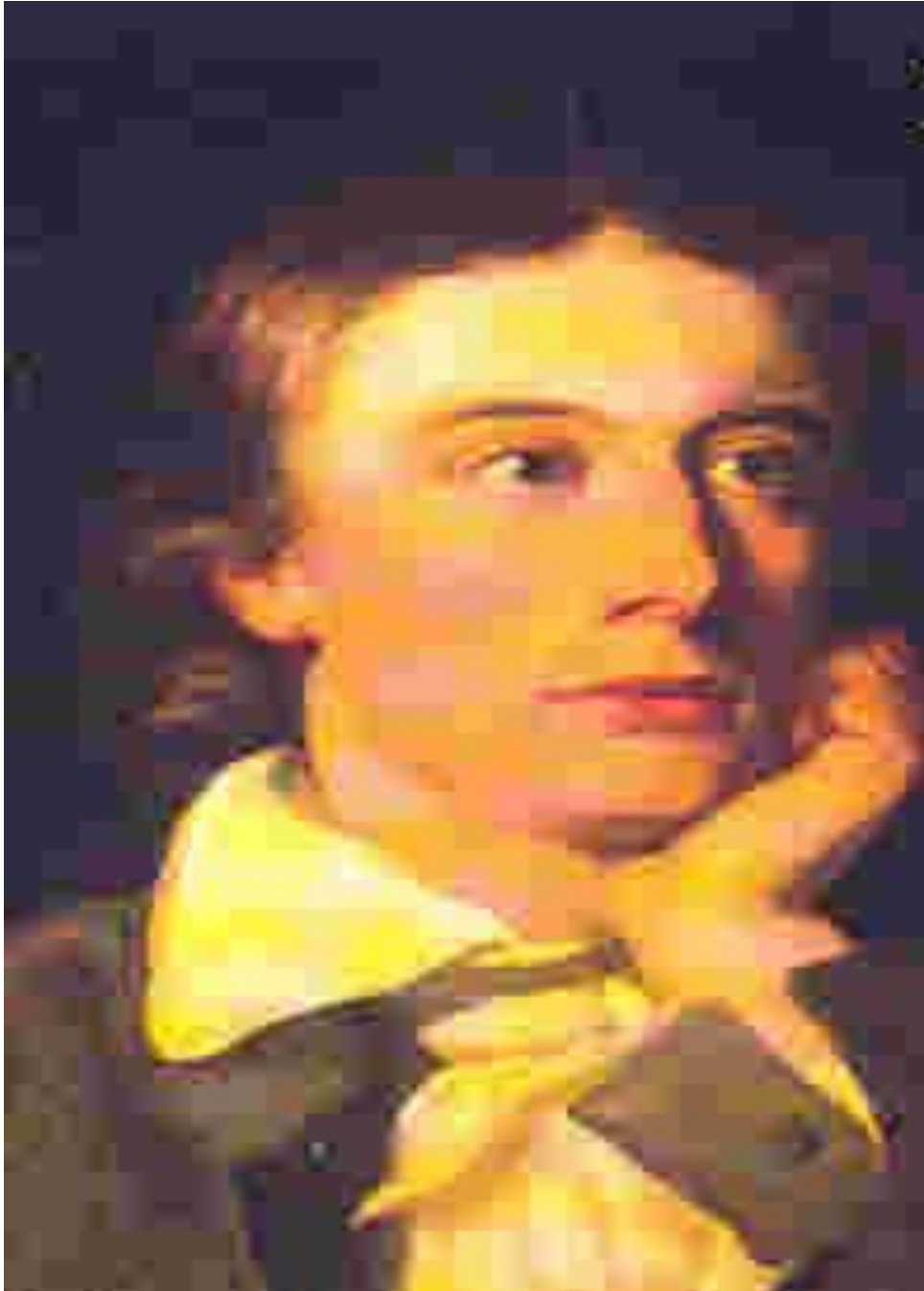
Paper XVI: English Literature III (II)

Lesson: Keats: Selected Poems

Lesson Developer: Shivani Jha

College/Department: Bharati College, University of Delhi

Keats: Selected Poems



John Keats [1795-1821] <http://www.caressa.it/letteratura-en.html#J.-Keats>, www.caressa.it. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial 3.0 Unported License.

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Historical Background:

The first half of the nineteenth century saw the triumph of Romanticism in literature and of democracy in government. This age of popular government and of romantic literature celebrated the essential nobleness of common men and the value of the individual. The period between the Declaration of

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Independence (1776) and the English Reform Bill of 1832, was of tremendous political upheavals characterizing the age as the "the age of revolution". The French Revolution and the American commonwealth, as well as the establishment of a true democracy in England by the Reform Bill, were the inevitable results of ideas which literature had disseminated rapidly and widely. In 1783, King George recognized the independence of the United States of America unconsciously proclaiming the triumph of liberty. The following half century was one of great turmoil, yet of steady advance in English life. The storm center of the political unrest was the French Revolution. It was an uprising which proclaimed the natural rights of man and the abolition of class distinctions, leading to a multiplication of patriotic clubs and societies in England asserting the doctrine of Liberty, Equality & Fraternity, upheld by the Revolution. Then, as the revolution took unexpected turns hope was replaced by disappointment, disillusionment, dejection and despair as particularly evident in the case of Wordsworth. By her invention in steel and machinery, and the carrying trade, England had become the workshop of the world. Where on the one hand her wealth had increased beyond the wildest dreams; the unequal distribution of that wealth had far reaching impact. The invention of machinery had already thrown thousands of skilled hand workers out of employment; heavy duties were levied on corn and wheat in order to protect a few agriculturists, and bread rose to famine prices leading to starvation. It was a classic case of the rich getting richer and the poor poorer.



<http://resourcesforhistoryteachers.wikispaces.com/Key+Concept+5.3>

An image of a battle during the French Revolution (1789), for a detailed discussion see the 'Historical background' in 'Wordsworth: The Poet and his Selected Poems'.

ROMANTICISM

Romanticism in English Literature can be said to have begun with the publication of *lyrical Ballads*(1798) by William Wordsworth and S.T Coleridge. In the 'Preface' to the second edition of *lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth described poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings", a premise that can be read as the touchstone of romantic poetry. The Romantic movement was preceded by several related developments in the preceding century marked by the new appreciation of medieval romance from which the movement derived its name. The first phase of the Romantic movement as seen in Germany (1774-1819) was characterized by novelty in terms of content and style with emphasis on the mystical, the subconscious and the supernatural. The second phase of the Romantic movement (1805-1830) was underscored by its attentiveness to national origins, imitation of native folklore, folk ballads and poetry, folk dance and music and the previously ignored medieval and Renaissance works as apparent in the historical novels of Sir Walter Scott. It was in this phase that English Romantic poetry is seen reaching its zenith with the works of Keats, Byron and Shelley. A byproduct of the interest in the exotic, the far and the remote is the 'gothic, distinguished further by the supernatural as obvious in the works of Mary Shelley, C.R Maturin, Marquis de Sade, E.T.A Hoffman etc. The essence of Romanticism was that literature must reflect all that is spontaneous and unaffected in nature and in man and reflect the same. Imagination, being elevated as the supreme faculty of mind, perceived as the ultimate creative power, helping to constitute reality, as much depended on perception.

For a detailed discussion see in this section 'Literary background: Romanticism' in 'Wordsworth: The Poet and his Selected Poems' .

Biographical Timeline:

1795	John Keats is born, the first child of Thomas and Frances Keats
1804	Father dies. Mother disappears briefly after his death. She remarries William Rawlings.
1805	Grandfather dies. Mother disappears again. John's 69 year old grandmother moves to Edmonton, taking her grandchildren with her.
1806-09	Continues his education at Enfield. In early 1809, after a 3 and a half year absence, his mother visits the house in Edmonton, asking whether she can live with her mother and children. John's grandmother agrees. John's mother is ill with rheumatism and tuberculosis. He nurses her

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	devotedly.
1810	Mother dies. Keats is apprenticed to the apothecary Dr Hammond of Edmonton.
1814	Writes his first poems, 'Imitation of Spenser' and 'On Peace'. In August, he writes 'Fill for me a brimming bowl'.
1815	July 1815, the Apothecary Act is passed. Instead of Keats being able to set up his own practice upon the completion of his apprenticeship, he now must train at a hospital. Around this time, he first meets Joseph Severn, the young painter who will later accompany him to Rome. He also meets William Haslam, who becomes one of his closest friends.
1816	Begins work as a dresser. Publishes his first poem, 'O Solitude!' Writes 'On First looking into Chapman's Homer', his first great work. Decides to abandon his medical career.
1817	Writes the sonnet 'On the Sea' and the great long poem, 'Endymion'.
	Meets Fanny Brawne for the first

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1818	time. Begins 'Hyperion'.
1819	Writes 'The Eve of St Agnes', 'The Eve of St Mark', 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' and his famous Odes, 'Lamia Part I', 'Lamia Part II', 'To Autumn'. Becomes officially engaged to Fanny Brawne.
1820	Has his first lung haemorrhage and is confined to his house followed by a severe second haemorrhage after a few months. Keats sails for Italy with Joseph Severn.
1821	Dies at 26 Piazza di Spagna, Rome and is buried in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome.

Adapted from: [John Keats Chronology & Timeline Of His Life & Work](#), englishhistory.net

'Ode to a Nightingale'

Written in May 1819 'Ode to a Nightingale' is a poem that might have been inspired by a nightingale in the garden of Keats's friend's house in Hampstead where the bird had built its nest. Charles Brown, a friend with whom Keats was living when he composed this poem, wrote:

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

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grass-plot under a plum-tree, where he sat for two or three hours. When he came into the house, I perceived he had some scraps of paper in his hand, and these he was quietly thrusting behind the books. On inquiry, I found those scraps, four or five in number, contained his poetic feeling on the song of our nightingale.¹

The speaker of the poem is enamored by the beauty of the nightingale's song which has an intoxicating effect on him, and thus he desires to live a carefree existence as that of the bird, free from the cares, "the weariness, the fever, and the fret," of the earthly existence. The poet-speaker feels the bird's existence to be immortal as its songs have been enjoyed for centuries together by emperors and men. It is at this point that the nightingale suddenly flies away and leaves the speaker alone and he is forced back from his reveries to reality, left wondering, "Was it a vision, or a waking dream?/Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?"

The poem opens with a dullness of the senses induced by excessive happiness at the song of the nightingale and a paradoxical unity of pain and happiness is seen in the poem. The slow movement of the first few lines of the stanza gives in to the buoyant state of the last four lines. There is a contrast between the mortal state and the world of perfection that the nightingale symbolizes. It is this ideal world that the poet desires and attempts to reach, initially with the help of wine and then imagination. The word pictures of the poem lend a concentrated richness of expression to the poem as can be seen in 'the coming musk- rose, full of dewy wine' which contains ideas of freshness ('coming', 'dewy') along with maturity ('full') and heady intoxication ('musk', 'wine').

The sound effects become noticeable through alliteration, in the nasal m and n and in the s sounds of 'murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves' as in the

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effervescence of wine in the bs of 'beaded bubbles winking at the brim'. The effect of the wine leads the poet to conjure up a scene of summer gaiety, the coolness of the wine coming as a relief for the Mediterranean heat. Wine is also seen as a mode of escape from the misery of the world of death, decay and the ephemeral, transitory quality of beauty and love.

The imagined world achieves actuality with concrete details. The scene is dark and since the queen moon is on her throne there is an occasional streak of light with the breeze parting the leaves. Keats dresses the scenery with scents and sounds applying to the season 'verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways' reminiscent of the 'beechen green and shadows numberless' of the melodious plot of the nightingale in the first stanza. Once the spell is cast the poet moves to a state of despondency and death ('gloom', 'incense', 'embalmed darkness' and 'easeful Death') in stanzas four and five. He overcomes this feeling in stanza seven, turning back to the nightingale transcending death with its song, heard through the centuries. With the word 'forlorn' the spell breaks and the poet is brought back to the real world. The following tone is of regret and disappointment. The alliteration in I and the hollow o sounds suggestive of the passing bell ringing for the dead and the word 'adieu' emphasizing the same.²

Stephen Hebron in his "Introduction to 'Ode to a Nightingale'" delineates the themes of the poem as not a simple description of arcadian bliss, but an intense meditation on the contrast between the painful mortality defining human existence and the immortal beauty characterizing the nightingale's carefree song with a focus on poetry's ability to create a kind of rapt suspended state between the two.³ In his use of primacy to thoughts over things Emily Rohrbach and Emily Sun hold the view that in both his prose and poetry Keats renounces the "egotistical sublime" that gives primacy to the authorial persona. For Keats it was Shakespeare who was a model poet as he had no fixed identity or poetical character as such and could produce

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unpredictable, unforgettable, aesthetic experience. One can say what the poet meant was since the poetical character had no fixed identity it could take all shapes and sizes, bringing life to all the characters that it chose as its subject. The importance that Keats gave to affective experience also deserves attention with respect to poetical identity which is never a given, always a process in terms of reading. 'The world as a "vale of Soul-making" is imagined specifically as a school for readers, in which affective experience, figured as the "heart," plays the decisive tutelary role.'(233)

In his poetical philosophy Keats refers to the world as a school, the human heart as a book taught in that school and the child able to read the Soul, a creation of the school and its hornbook, the child never perfect as "the master who reads" and the process of reading a dynamic, ongoing process.



Fanny Brawne

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File: Portrait miniature fanny brawn.jpg from Wikimedia Commons

On a different note in his essay 'The Sub-Text of Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale"' Karl P. Wentersdorf reads the deep yearnings of the poet for his unassuaged and incompletely suppressed desires, the "light winged- Dryad" alluding to the beautiful nymphs, of classical mythology, inhabiting the woods of the Mediterranean area passionately pursued by Satyrs or fauns conjuring up the motif of love. Wentersdorf goes on to say that by the time Keats wrote 'ode to a Nigtingale'" his initial enthusiasm regarding imagination having the capability to act as a panacea for all ills of the world had waned. It is true that his imaginative faculties could "still conjure up powerful imagery to body forth beauties of nature and the glory of the humanistic achievements; but he now knows that it cannot provide a substitute for, or even a temporarily satisfactory retreat from, the pain of loving."(82)



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Wentworth Place (left), now the [Keats House](#) museum, Hampstead, transferred from [en.wikipedia](#); to Commons (Fanny Brawne met John Keats in November 1818 at Wentworth Place, where Keats had been living for some time with Charles Brown)

Proma Tagore throws fresh light in the interpretation of the poem by reasoning that the 'Ode to a Nightingale' is symptomatic of a newly emerging economic order, based on consumption, engendering a new conception of the self and the body. Tracing the consumer culture to rise in trade, industrialization, urbanization and advancement in transport facilities, she finds the revolution in production and consumption reflected in Keats's poems too with the human bodies becoming both the subjects and objects of consumption. In this new scheme of things where the self is a consumer it also stands the threat of being consumed by the new cultural order as seen in a complex representation in the "Ode to a Nightingale". Keats's ode projects a hungry and acquisitive self, boasting a dynamic subjectivity, drawing upon the environment leading to an unhealthy ingestion resulting in alienation from the external environment and a diseased self, exhibiting "in a profound way, the simultaneous filling up and emptying out of the body that occurs in this age of consumption."(73)

Ode:

Greek in origin, a long lyric poem, the ode is a serious and dignified composition mostly in rhyme. Usually the ode is in the form of an address. It is sometimes also used to commemorate an important public occasion. Elevated in style, serious in subject and treatment with an elaborate stanzaic structure, there are two forms of the ode, the regular or the Pindaric ode and the Horation Ode. The Pindaric ode was sung to the accompaniment of a

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dance, its structure: Strophe, Antistrophe and Epode borrowed from the movement of the dancers. In the Irregular ode each stanza had its own pattern of varying lengths, rhyme schemes and lines. The Horatian ode consists of a number of short stanzas with similar length and arrangement was popularized by the Roman poets Horace and Catullus.

'To Autumn'



John Constable The Hay Wain,

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hay_Wain#/media/File:John_Constable_The_Hay_Wain.jpg

Walking along the river Itchen near Winchester on 19th September 1819 Keats was captivated by the natural serenity and beauty of the natural world. Impressed, he conveyed to his friend Reynolds the same in a letter, "How beautiful the season is now--How fine the air. A temperate sharpness about it. Really, without joking, chaste weather--Dian skies--I never lik'd

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stubble fields so much as now--Aye better than the chilly green of the spring. Somehow a stubble plain looks warm--in the same way that some pictures look warm--this struck me so much in my Sunday's walk that I composed upon it."⁴

'Ode to Autumn' is a poem divided into three eleven line stanzas celebrating autumn with the help of progression and personification of the season. An address to the season the poem is a sensuous description reflecting the effect of autumn on flora and fauna; the fruits that had been raw till now ripen and are filled with juices, the gourd and the hazel shells grow in size. The flowers bloom to perfection with bees hovering on them. A feeling of eternal warmth envelops them. Keats goes on to personify the season as a woman farmer, the reaper, gleaner and carrier of grains described sitting on the floor in a store, sleeping by the half reaped, furrowed field, carrying load of grains on its head and sometimes sitting by the winepress.

The last part of the poem is filled with pictorial and auditory images, of gnats, crickets, red-breast, swallows and lambs. The pictorial representation of autumn is of pastoral bliss and peace with clouds in bar shapes to be seen in the sky, the dusk having a rosy hue on the reaped hence "stubble-plains". The willows beside the river are alive with the song of gnats, the hilly sides with bleating lambs, garden crofts with the singing of hedge crickets and the skies with twittering swallows. The progression is achieved with the description beginning from the ripening of fruits to harvest time and the decline of the season, the end of autumn, season "of mists".

A long practitioner of the ode Keats innovated the ten line stanza for firmness and clarity, a quatrain (abab) followed by a variable sestet (cdecde). 'To Autumn' has a septet (seven line stanza) instead of sestet (six lines). In 'To Autumn' can be seen a vivid picture etched of a cottage garden with trees laden with fruits. The poem is rich in sensuousness and gets its feel with a confluence of sights, sounds, scents and tactile sensations. Use of alliteration

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adds to the effect, the p sounds suggesting fullness to bursting in the first stanza, the f and w sounds for the light wind in the second stanza, and the z sounds with the long vowels suggestive of the juice squeezed out of the apples. The addition of a line to the usual stanzaic forms also adds to the effect of fullness to overflowing. The use of personification creates a sense of intimacy between the season, the poet and the reader, forming a triad. In the first stanza, like a beneficent deity, Autumn loads, blesses, bends, fills. In the next stanza it is a reaper and one who sleeps on the furrow. The personification is there in the third stanza as well and the poet asks the season not to think of the songs of spring for it has its music too, but the trope dies out with the dying day and season. The images of departure and death are evident but with the implications of renewal.⁵

B. C Southam is of the opinion that the rich and fruitful aspect of autumn as presented in stanzas one and three provides a contrast to "the austerity of the harvested country side." Contrariness is however, not only seen here but in the opening line as well with the descriptions, "Season of mists" and "mellow fruitfulness" appearing together where the reader is "confronted with a paradigm of season's moods beginning, strikingly, with a reminder of the last days of autumn."(93)

In the first stanza autumn is seen leading nature to fruition, from a divine, creative force it turns more human ,personified, taking human shapes and postures, "sitting," "sound asleep," and "drows'd" suggestive of repose after a period of intense activity. Progression becomes further notable with what the land's bounty ready for harvest and so the farmer is ready with the scythe bringing on a note of finality, death.

Southam points toward what he refers to as "the paradox of time; as it gives life, so must it take away." In the third stanza again time is treated as a menacing, threatening force, with reference to death. The day is "soft-dying", the gnats "mourn" and the light wind "lives or dies"; the visual beauty of the

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countryside is seen as ephemeral introducing pathos in the poem. The feeling of loss however is compensated for by the poet as the focus in the third stanza shifts from the flora to the fauna; life is seen flourishing amidst the sounds made by birds and insects, and the wind. Southam comments, "[T]o anticipate, and meet these hints of sadness which accompany autumn's close, Keats makes a beautifully judged entry to the stanza...And this correction of feeling, away from the yearning of nostalgia which enervates, not inspires, is towards a positive and finer discrimination, the recognition of the very special beauties which are to be found at the end of the season."(97)

James L. O'Rourke (1998) observes whereas earlier criticism has explored the pessimistic side of the poem it is different for the contemporary critics. Douglas Bush (1966) considers the end of the poem "funereal in tone" where the poet achieves, "the power to see and accept life as it is, a perpetual process of ripening, decay, and death". W.J Bates feels that the poem reflects the Keats's "Inability to conceive fulfillment without a spring of promise still implicit within it." As opposed to such views Geoffrey Hartmann finds the Ode reflecting Keats's nativist satisfaction with the English landscape.

Paul Fry's suggestion of the ode representing a return to the classical tradition in the archaic mode of the ritual hymn and his comparison of the ode with "Hymn to Mercury" is equally interesting. In "Hymn to Mercury" Homer enumerates God's powers through a series of episodes and does not ask for anything. Fry concludes through the eloquence of the poem, that the poet has already been blessed by God and the poem is a form of thanksgiving and not an entreaty. In the same vein Fry finds autumn not an emblem of loss but fullness. (O'Rourke: 145)

Selections from Keats's Letters (1817)

BY [JOHN KEATS](#)

**[On Negative Capability: Letter to George and Tom Keats, 21, ?27
December 1817]**

Hampstead

Sunday

22 December 1818

My dear Brothers

I must crave your pardon for not having written ere this [. . .] [T]he excellence of every Art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty & Truth—Examine King Lear & 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—The picture is larger than Christ rejected—I dined with Haydon the sunday after you left, & had a very pleasant day, I dined too (for I have been out too much lately) with Horace Smith & met his two brothers with Hill & Kingston & one Du Bois, they only served to convince me, how superior humour is to wit in respect to enjoyment—These men say things which make one start, without making one feel, they are all alike; their manners are alike; they all know fashionables; they have a mannerism in their very eating & drinking, in their mere handling a Decanter—They talked of Kean & his low company—Would I were with that company instead of yours said I to myself! I know such like acquaintance will

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never do for me & yet I am going to Reynolds, on wednesday—Brown & Dilke walked with me & back from the Christmas pantomime. I had not a dispute but a disquisition with Dilke, on various subjects; ***several things dovetailed in my mind, & at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason—Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetratum of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge.*** This pursued through Volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration. ..

Source: Selections from Keats's Letters by John Keats, www.poetryfoundation.org [Note: Italics mine]

To Richard Woodhouse

October 27th, 1818

My dear Woodhouse,

Your Letter gave me a great satisfaction; more on account of its friendliness, than any relish of that matter in it which is accounted so acceptable in the 'genus irritabile'. The best answer I can give you is in a clerk-like manner to make some observations on two principle points, which seem to point like indices into the midst of the whole pro and con, about genius, and views and achievements and ambition and cetera. 1st. ***As to the poetical Character itself (I mean that sort of which, if I am any thing, I am a Member; that sort distinguished from the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone) it is not itself - it has no self - it is every thing and nothing - It has no character - it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated - It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher, delights the camelion[sic] Poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things any more than from its taste for the bright one;***

because they both end in speculation. A Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity - he is continually in for - and filling some other Body - The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute - the poet has none; no identity - he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's Creatures. If then he has no self, and if I am a Poet, where is the Wonder that I should say I would write no more? Might I not at that very instant have been cogitating on the Characters of Saturn and Ops? It is a wretched thing to confess; but is a very fact that not one word I ever utter can be taken for granted as an opinion growing out of my identical nature - how can it, when I have no nature? When I am in a room with People if I ever am free from speculating on creations of my own brain, then not myself goes home to myself: but the identity of every one in the room begins so to press upon me that I am in a very little time annihilated - not only among Men; it would be the same in a Nursery of children: I know not whether I make myself wholly understood: I hope enough so to let you see that no despondence is to be placed on what I said that day...

Your's most sincerely

John Keats

For more see www.john-keats.com/briefe/271018.htm [Note: italics mine]

'La Belle Dame Sans Merci'

Based on the folk ballad meant to be sung and on a popular theme at the narrative level the literary ballad 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' seems a simple poem of a pale looking, love-sick knight being accosted by a passerby who wants to know the cause of the knight's plight. The knight replies that he fell in love with a woman and was later abandoned by her, a plight that is not singular to him but shared by many others who met a similar fate through the woman. In an interesting study Putzer J. Hung draws a parallel between

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the suffering knight and the suffering of the poet resulting from tuberculosis. According to Hung the physical condition of the knight in the poem is akin to that of the consumptive patient/poet. He finds a considerable rise in cases of consumption (pulmonary tuberculosis) in the late nineteenth century seen due to increase in urbanization, a condition which had been afflicted and resulted in the death of Keats's brother Tom and came to plague him as well. The sickly pallor of the tubercular illness is seen in the knight's fever, fatigue, pale cheeks and pale, cold forehead of the knight as well.⁶

Apart from the biographical parallel another striking feature of the poem is its gothic features: nightmarish dream, supernatural power, wintry landscape, *femme fatale* (a very beautiful woman that men find sexually attractive but who brings them trouble or unhappiness) and entrapment. The pale knight is seen as haggard and on the verge of death. He had been accosted by a beautiful woman who he had fallen in love with and who had taken him to her cave. There she had sung him to sleep. In his nightmarish dream he came across many pale kings and princes who told him that he was under the influence of a beautiful but cruel woman. The theme of *femme fatale* and entrapment is introduced here. The spiritual entrapment "thrall" of the lovers is much worse than physical for it is utterly destructive in nature, thus even when on awakening when the knight finds lying himself "on a cold hill side" the poor physical condition of the knight is indicative of his imminent death. The *femme fatale* destroys because she is destructive in nature a physical representation of the supernatural.⁷

Keats valorizes "Negative capability" as "when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." (Sandner: 147) It is winter and the loss of the bewitching woman haunts the knight. The narrative of remembered pleasure mixes with necessary pain that the loss of a beautiful world in which the knight had been led for some time embodies. The Knight's problem lies in having become lost

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“yet in the dream he knows only as dream”- he has become spectral vanishing into an enchanted world of ghostly figures that “break up” and leave a painful emptiness, in the blockage of the sublime moment. As the knight remains trapped with the other ghosts between past and present, memory and desire, fairy and the world, the reader becomes trapped between the ballad and its imitation, between identification with the knight and an inability to enter an exploded fairyland never even glimpsed but only recollected in the memory of a fabulous past that never has been, in a reality that has never been more than an enchantment. (151)



John William Waterhouse, *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, 1893, English@ESF - Keats - La Belle Dame Sans Merci, englishesf.wikispaces.com, [Contributions to http://englishesf.wikispaces.com/](http://English@ESF - Keats - La Belle Dame Sans Merci, englishesf.wikispaces.com) are licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution Share-Alike 3.0 License](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/).

‘On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer’

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Often seen as Keats's first successful poem that in Leigh Hunt's word, "completely announced the new poet taking possession" (Pollack-Pelzner: 39), 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer' was written by Keats at the age of twenty, and published in Leigh Hunt's weekly newspaper 'The Examiner' in December 1816. A Petrarchan sonnet the poem is divided in two parts of the octave and the sestet with eight and six lines respectively, with the rhyme scheme *abbaabbacddc*. The octave describes Keats's experience before reading Chapman's translation of Homer and the sestet after reading it.

Through a reading of the poem it can be concluded that though Keats had read Homer's works earlier as translations of Dryden and Pope the delight experienced on reading George Chapman's translation of Homer, introduced to him by his friend Charles Cowden Clarke was unparalleled.

It is this feeling of sheer delight at a recent discovery made and the corresponding excitement that forms the crux of the poem. In his essay "Indolent Minds, Indolent Men, and 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer'" Richard Marggraf Turley posits that In the year 1816 a heated debate was going on between conservative reviewer John Wilson Croker and political essayist and poet Leigh Hunt over poetic diction.

Against formulaic diction Hunt found modern Translations without any character or force and favoured the pre-Restoration diction. In his endeavour Hunt was fully supported by Clarke. Keats rejected Pope's Homer and his neoclassical diction while aligning himself with Leigh Hunt's linguistic project and Clarke's defence of this. "As an attentive student of Hunt and the likely reader of Clarke, in the high summer and autumn of 1816 Keats would have been weighing the merits of a native, pre-Restoration diction (such as Chapman's) against those of the 'French School of Poetry' with Pope at its head." (207)

Keats conveys his state with the help of two metaphors, the first being the discovery of an astronomer on having found a new planet and the second Cortez's conquest of Mexico and his sighting of the Pacific ocean from Central America. The "realms of gold", literary works experienced by Keats were inspired by the God of Poetry, Apollo. The method employed to convey his delight has been referred to as "synaesthesia" by Paul McNally. McNally explains the term as 'using the terminology of one sense to describe the sensation of another.' (530)

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He also cites W.J Bates observation of Keats's use of synaesthesia as Keats having done something more if not different with it. Bates opines, "this imagery [in Keats] is less concerned with replacing one sense with another than it is with substantiating one sense by another, to give further dimension and depth." (530)

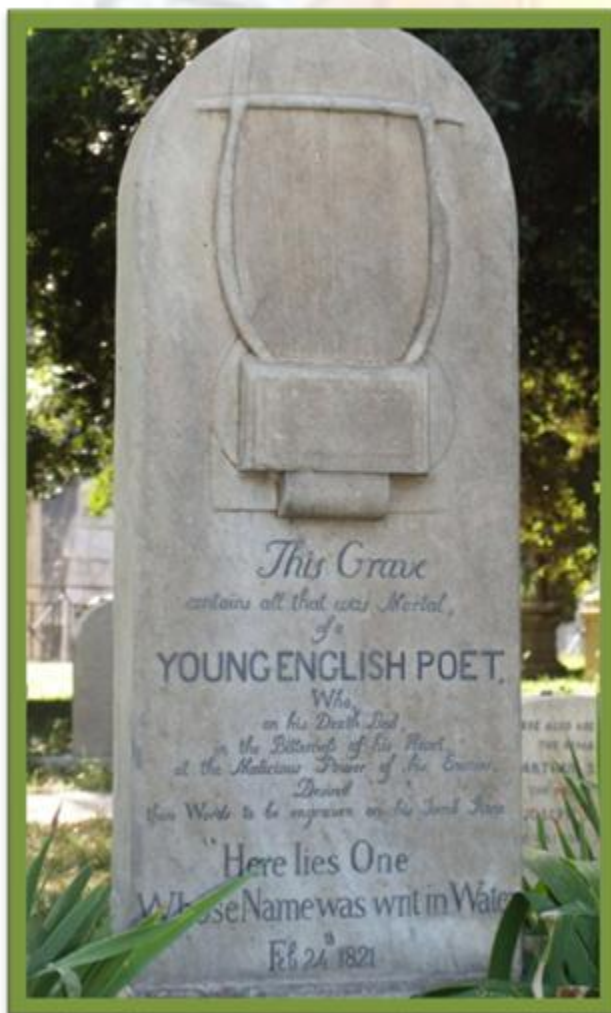
Pollack-Pelzner (2007) is of the opinion that beneath the celebration of the first looking there is a suggestion of "second sight" on the part of the poet as evident in Keats's revision of the sonnet. In the initial version of the sonnet sent by Keats to Clarke the morning following their reading session, Keats had compared himself to "stout Cortez, when with wond'ring eyes / He star'd at the Pacific," in The version had undergone revision, however, before Hunt published it on 1 December. Keats had substituted Cortez's "wond'ring eyes" to "eagle eyes." It was a revision reflecting the deliberate stylistic choice of shifting the tone of the sestet from passive amazement to aggressive observation, a change that reflected a more confident self. Pollack-Pelzner believes that Keats, in revising "wond'ring" to "eagle," was signaling an affiliation with Dante, and through Dante with Homer as In the fourth canto of Dante's Inferno, when Virgil points out Homer to the pilgrim, Dante describes the Greek poet soaring "like an eagle" above his fellow poets. He concludes that 'Keats looking into Chapman's Homer became Dante looking at Virgil's Homer, poeta sovrano (the supreme poet), and thereby gained the greatness of vision ("eagle eyes") that the soaring Homer imparted to both.'...Keats's second sight revealed his deep identification with the poetic tradition and his ability to revise an earlier poet's scene to place himself within it. (42)

Sonnet:

A sonnet is a poetic form, practiced first by Giacomo da Lentini, consisting of a single stanza of fourteen iambic pentameter lines linked by an intricate rhyme scheme. There are two major varieties of sonnets: Italian or Petrarchan sonnet (named after the Italian of the fourteenth century poet Petrarch) and the Shakespearean or the English sonnet. The Petrarchan sonnet has two parts: Octave and Sestet of eight and six lines respectively. The rhyme scheme as *abbaabba* of the Octave is followed by the rhyme cdecde or some variant as *cdccdc*. The Petrarchan sonnet is usually in the form of an argument. The first part (octave) proposing a problem or a question the resolution of which comes in the second part (sestet). The turn,

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or “volta” from proposition to resolution is usually seen in the ninth line. It was first introduced into England by Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard in the early sixteenth century and some other practitioners of the form were Milton, Wordsworth, Christina Rossetti and D.G Rossetti. The English or Shakespearean sonnet, named so after its famous practitioner Shakespeare has the form of three quatrains with a concluding couplet: *abab cdcd efef gg*. Poet Edmund Spenser experimented with the form to produce what is today known as “Spenserian Sonnet” a variant of English sonnet with each quatrain linked to the other by a continuing rhyme as *abab bcbc cdcd ee*.



Keats's Tomb

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Keats#/media/File:John_Keats_Tombstone_in_Rome_01.jpg

Rid of the world's injustice, and his pain,
He rests at last beneath God's veil of blue.
Taken from life when life and love were new
The youngest of the martyrs here is Iain,

'The Grave of Keats', Oscar Wilde

Audio Visual Resources

Keats' poetry is known or its sonorous music. Please listen to the recordings below to get a taste of this.

- [John Keats - On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer - Video Dailymotion www.dailymotion.com](http://www.dailymotion.com)
- [Ode To A Nightingale-John Keats,read by Robert Donat - YouTube, www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)
- [Ben Whishaw Recites "La Belle Dame Sans Merci", Ben Whishaw Recites "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" - YouTube www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)
- ['TO AUTUMN' by John Keats 1819 - YouTube www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)

Glossary

Arcadian: Of a region of ancient Greece in the Peloponnesus offering rural simplicity and contentment.

Crux: The decisive or most important point at issue.

Egotistical: Having an exaggerated sense of self-importance.

Formulaic: Constituting or containing a verbal formula or set form of words/ produced in accordance with a slavishly followed rule or style; predictable.

Materialism: Philosophy which holds that matter is the fundamental substance in nature, and that all phenomena, including mental phenomena and consciousness, are identical with material interactions.

Nativist: A philosopher who subscribes to nativism i.e. the policy of protecting the interests of native inhabitants against those of immigrants.

Pastoral: Showing country life or the country side.

Poetic diction: Term used to refer to the linguistic style, the vocabulary, and the metaphors used in the writing of poetry.

Posits: Assume as a fact/ put forward as a basis of argument.

Sublime: Of very high quality and causing great admiration.

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Symptomatic: Serving as a symptom or sign, especially of something undesirable.

Trope: A literary trope is the use of figurative language for artistic effect such as using a figure of speech.

Unassauged: Not soothed or relieved.

Notes:

1. See 'Ode to a Nightingale', academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu as accessed on 25/5/15.
2. For a detailed discussion see *Notes on Keats's Poetry and Prose* compiled by Deryn Chatwin 1983: Methuen London Ltd.
3. See more at: <http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/an-introduction-to-ode-on-a-nightingale#sthash.WHFTxe2.dpuf>
4. See for more "To Autumn" academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu
5. For a detailed discussion see *Notes on Keats's Poetry and Prose* compiled by Deryn Chatwin 1983: Methuen London Ltd.
6. From Putzer J. Hung's 'Where no birds sing: tuberculosis in Keats' "La Belle Dame Sans Merci"', www.hektoeninternational.org
7. See [The Gothic Elements in the Poetry of John Keats | Hanieh Mehr Motlagh - Academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu), www.academia.edu

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