



From theme of everlasting to Escapism- A study of Keat's Poetry

Dr. Liyaquit Ali

Assistant professor SCS GDC Mendhar
Email:-Liyaqatali9858@gmail.com

ABSTRACT :

It is impossible to say how much has been lost by Keats's early death. His reputation grew steadily throughout the 19th century, though as late as the 1840s the Pre-Raphaelite painter William Holman Hunt could refer to him as "this little-known poet." His influence is found everywhere in the decorative Romantic verse of the Victorian Age, from the early work of Alfred, Lord Tennyson, onward. His general emotional temper and the minute delicacy of his natural observation were greatly admired by the Pre-Raphaelites, who both echoed his poetry in their own and illustrated it in their paintings. Keats's 19th-century followers on the whole valued the more superficial aspects of his work, and it was largely left for the 20th century to realize the full range of his technical and intellectual achievement.

Keywords:-Hellenism-Romantic- Psyche-Art -Greece

Introduction :

John Keats was more fully committed to poetry than the other romantic poets and Keats' life of devotion to beauty and to poetry is all the remarkable in view of his lowly origin. Keats' achievement in English poetry is unique: he was able to perform in a few years, more than what other poets could not have performed in decades. In him we have a fulfillment of what another poet merely dreamt of:

A lily of a day

Is fairer far in May

Though it fall and die that night

It was the plant and flower of light.

In small proportions we just beauties see:

And in short measures May life perfect be

The aim of present study is to scrutinize the poetry of John Keats to know how he moves from The Everlasting Nea (Negation) to The Everlasting Yea (Affirmation). For this purpose John Keats' life and poetry are divided into three phases and Carlyle's concept is applied on his life and poetry because he also moves from The Everlasting Nea to The Everlasting Yea. This thesis is based on Carlyle's Sartor Resartus. As he was a strange combination of greatness and narrowness and he was exasperatingly blind and bigoted in regard to the things in which he had no personal interest, though the spheres of their respective enthusiasms and antipathies were altogether different. Carlyle viewed pleasure and merely esthetic art with the contempt of the Scottish Covenanted fanatics, refusing even to read poetry like that of Keats; and his insistence on moral meanings led him to equal intolerance of such story-tellers as Scott. Though his obstinacy was a part of his national temperament, and his physical and mental irritability in part a result of his ill-health, any candid estimate of his life cannot altogether overlook them. In Sartor Resartus, Carlyle moves from The Everlasting Nea to The Everlasting Yea, but only through The Center of Indifference.

The Everlasting Nea is a state of moral and ethical negation where the philosophy of opposites is denied, where life is defined in terms of negative absolutes, and where contradiction precludes confirmation. Carlyle defines this state as the arena of Satan, the "genuine Son of Night . . . The shrewd, all-informed intellect he has, is an attorney intellect; it can contradict, but it cannot affirm . . . Thus does he go along, qualifying, confuting, despising; . . . so universal a denier, both in heart and head, - is undoubtedly a child of darkness, an emissary of the primeval Nothing

The Centre of Indifference occurs toward the end of The Everlasting Nea and continues into the beginning of The Everlasting Yea, making it the center and the link of the triadic structure rather than merely the second of three movements in a linear progression. Carlyle, in his Lecture on Dante in On Heroes, states that "the Three compartments [of The Divine Comedy] mutually support one another, are indispensable to one another" (On Heroes, 82.21-22). This structural relationship, constructed of intersecting cycles, allows Carlyle to make the point that 'No' (negation) and 'Yea' (realization) have no meaning without 'Centre' (defiance).

"Ode to Psyche"

It was completed before April 1819 and it has its origins, as he tells us in the journal-letter, in Apuleius, the late Latin author (he was born and lived in North Africa) whose fictional narrative *The Golden Ass* is the only remaining Latin “novel,” and whose philosophical works show a strong neo-Platonist strain. *The Golden Ass* contains, as one of its embedded stories, the story of Cupid and Psyche retold in Spenserian stanzas by Mary Tighe, in a poem that Keats had read years before, echoes of which reappear in his *Ode*.

HELLENISM AND ESCAPISM :

the aim of this paper is to apply the concept of Carlyle’s *Everlasting Nea* on Keats’ life and poetry. Because Keats, too, like Carlyle, had dwelt with *The Everlasting Nea*; difficulties of all kinds had beset him, family tragedies from young age and plagued his short life, feelings of loneliness, financial difficulties, bitter criticism on the poem, meted on him by Blackwood and the *Quarterly*, unsuccessful love affair with Fanny Brawne and his growing illness. So he seeks an escape in the Hellenic world from the oppressive realities of the present. His imagination is attracted by the ancient Greeks as well as by the glory and splendour of Middle Ages. He rarely devotes himself to the pressing problems of the present. In a *Letter to George* and his sister-in-law Georgiana Keats, 14-31 Oct, 1818, he wrote and his letter too bears witness to his escapism, “I feel more and more every day that I don’t live in this world, alone, but in thousands of worlds . . . The roaring of the wind is my wife and the storms through the door are my children.

Keats uses the goddess Psyche as a symbol to describe his longing to identify the soul through the use of mythology and sensual imagery. “*Ode to Psyche*” is important as a stepping-stone piece, as the poem that squared away all his conflicting emotions and rose victoriously out of disillusionment and desperation to make sense of his pain. It tied up the loose ends of a very dark stage of his life, an amazing feat of finding peace among paradox, and cleared the slate for the rebirth of inspiration, with a vengeance. The first way that Keats describes his longing to identify the soul is through mythology. Keats introduces his reader to the goddess Psyche in the opening lines of the ode,

*O Goddess! hear these tuneless numbers, wrung
By sweet enforcement and remembrance dear,
And pardon that thy secrets should be sung
Even into thine own soft-conched ear:
Surely I dreamt today, or did I see
The winged Psyche with awaken’d eye*

Conclusion :

Of all the great poets of the early nineteenth century, John Keats was the last to be born and the first to die. He was the son of a poor stable keeper at Moorefield. He was born in 1795 and attended school at Enfield, where the headmaster’s son, Charles Cowden Clarke encouraged his literary tastes. Keats was a lively and restless boy. He left school in 1810, and was apprenticed to a surgeon at Admonition. In 1814, he went to London and studied at Guy’s and St. Thomas hospitals. His father died when he was only eight, and his mother when he was 14. These sad circumstances drew him particularly close to his two brothers, George and Tom, and his sister Fanny. During 1815-17, he continued his studies at the London hospitals but his heart was not in medicine and he felt that he was born to be a poet. Finally, he abandoned medicine for poetry. Under the influence of Leigh Hunt and with the help of Clarke, Keats now settled down to a literary life. At the time when John Keats was born it was said that ‘poets are born, not made’. Poets at that time were either gentlemen from the upper classes where incomes were unearned, or well educated with broad intellectual backgrounds that gave them the ability to make a living from writing. Keats’s background was, at the time, definitely of the ‘lower’ classes. He didn’t have any of the cultural and social advantages that many of his contemporary poets enjoyed. In Keats’s early life there was nothing to indicate a poetic talent. The fact that he grew to become a poet whose writing has lived for one and a half centuries, is almost unbelievable. This is why Keats’s poetry becomes much more meaningful with a little knowledge of the facts of his life. The poet who once declared that he wanted to “fade for away, dissolve and quite forget” the world of ‘weariness’, ‘fever’ and ‘fret’ accepts the same world of ‘fever’ and ‘fret’ with calm stoicism. He is converted to the extent of eulogizing the dullest seasons of the year as, “season of mist and mellow fruitfulness” what brought this conversion from utter negation of life to final assertion of life and all of its frenzied activities. The circumstances of Keats’ life specially of the years 1818 and 1819 had such an impact on him that he is lift with a negative attitude towards life and in the same year the conversion from *Everlasting Nea* to *Everlasting Yea* appeared in Keats’ life and poetic career and found its full expression in the six great odes. It is quite evident that neither spring nor autumn is full of tensions or delight respectively but Keats’ attitude towards them is such. He tried to find solace in his world of ‘poesy’ and ‘fancy’ but failed in his attempt. With calm stoicism Keats accepts the situation and ultimately finds only contentment and happiness in this world of activity. The same transformation is of the poet John Keats from the pessimistic (*The Everlasting Nea*) involvement with the misery-laden life to the optimistic (*The Everlasting Yea*) involvement and stoic acceptance of the same life through conversion (*The Center of Indifference*) can be traced out in his poetry. Thus, a critical analysis of Keats’ poetry reflects that with a changed attitude towards life his poetry also went a sea change. The circumstances of the years 1818 and 1819 had made a negative attitude towards life, therefore, poems written during that time reflect that Keats is trying to escape from the concrete and factual world in the world of Hellenic Beauty to forget the miseries and frustration of his life. It can be called *The Everlasting Nea*. In this primary stage Keats feels disappointment from every side whether it is in the field of love or fame or poetry but instead of mourning about it, he tried to find some solace in the imaginary world of beauty. Although Keats depicts the long forgotten pagan world of ‘Psyche’ and the ‘winged boy’ yet he cannot escape the world of love and sex, the world of ‘Fanny Brawne’ and ‘Jane Cox’. It can be seen in “*Ode to Psyche*.” In it we find his wistfulness and hope to achieve the object of love and ideals of love and beauty. The subject and theme of the poem is taken from mythology, and the poet while expressing his passion for beauty transports himself in his Imagination to the days of ancient Greeks, “O brightest! though too late for antique vows/. . . I see, and sing, by my own eyes inspired.”¹ Psyche, then, is without temple or altar, has no virginal priestesses, or lutes or incense. She was too late for such worship, at a time

when earth, air, fire and water were imbued with the forces of pantheism and the entire natural world was sacred. The poet, living in a more mundane time, far from 'happy pieties', can still see her wings and still sing her praises in the beauties of the world around him. Keats' builds a temple or shrine in his mind dedicated to the worship of psyche, "Yes, I will be thy priest and build a fane/In some untrodden regions of my mind./ Where branched thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain./ Instead of pine shall murmur in the wind:"² Keats uses the goddess Psyche as a symbol to describe his longing to identify the soul through the use of mythology and sensual imagery. "Ode to Psyche" is important as a stepping-stone piece, as the poem that squared away all his conflicting emotions and rose victoriously out of disillusionment and desperation to make sense of his pain. It tied up the loose ends of a very dark stage of his life, an amazing feat of finding peace among paradox, and cleared the slate for the rebirth of inspiration, with a vengeance. The first way that Keats describes his longing to identify the soul is through mythology. Keats introduces his reader to the goddess Psyche in the opening lines of the ode and also acknowledges the reader about his mental state by stating, "surely I dreamt...with awaken'd eyes.

REFERENCES :

1. John Keats to his brother George, September 1819 2.
2. Ben Johnson: The Noble Nature, English Poetry I: From Chaucer to Gray. The Harvard Classics. 1909–14.
3. Carlyle, Goethe's Helena (1828), Essays 1:p.157-58.
4. Report of Lecture by Eli Siegel Poetry, Atmosphere and Neatness
5. Severn, Incidents from My Life, 1858
6. Hyder E. Rollins (ed.), the Letters of John Keats, 1vol, 1958, p. 186 and 292. 7. Caroline Jacks, John Keats, English literature, 30 March 2011
7. Sidney Colvin, John Keats: His Life and Poetry, His Friends, Critics and After-Fame, 1917
8. John Keats, The Complete Works of John Keats, Volume 5, p. 197
9. Brown's account reprinted in Keats circle, II, pp.73-4.
10. Walter Jackson Bate, John Keats, Harvard University Press, p. 636.
11. Keats House Museum Guide, (6thed.), 1966, p. 85.
12. Charles Cowden Clarke, Recollections of Writers, 1878.
13. Robert Gittings, John Keats. London: Heinemann, 1968, p.61. 16. Ibid., p. 63.
14. Robert Gittings, John Keats. London: Heinemann, 1968, p.69.
15. Compare C. Cowden Clarke, Recollections of Writers.
16. H. W. Garrod, Keats Poetical Works, Oxford University Press, London, 1970
17. Walter Jackson Bate, John Keats, Harvard University Press, p. 50.
18. Stephen Coote, John Keats A Life, Hind press, 1st Ed.2005, p.23 24. H. W. Garrod, Keats Poetical Works, Oxford University Press, London, 1970