

Degree - 1
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Paper - 2

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Discuss John Keats as a Poet (Lecture-1)

John Keats is regarded one of the most outstanding and brilliant poets of Romantic Era. He was not only the best but most perfect of the Romantics. While Scott was merely telling stories and William Wordsworth reforming poetry or upholding the moral law, and Shelley advocating impossible reforms and Byron voicing his own egoism and political discontents of the times, Keats lived apart from men and from all political measures, worshipping beauty like a devotee, perfectly content to write that was in his own heart, or to reflect some splendour of the natural world as he saw or dreamed it to be. He had, moreover, the key idea that poetry exists for its own sake, and suffers loss by being devoted to Philosophy or politics or, indeed, to any cause, however great or small. As he says in "Lamia":

"..... Do not all charms fly
At the mere touch of cold Philosophy?
There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:
We know her woof, her texture; she is given
In the dull catalogue of common things.
Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,

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Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,
Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine -
Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made
The tender person's ~~Lament~~ melt into a ~~sad~~
shade."

Partly because of this idea of poetry, partly because he studied and unconsciously imitated the Greek classics and the best works of Elizabethans, Keats' last little volume of poetry is unequalled by the work of any of his contemporaries. When we remember that all his work was published in three short years, from 1817-1820, and that he died when only twenty-five years old, we must judge him to be the most promising figure of the early 19th century, and one of the most remarkable in the history of literature.

The Work of Keats

"None but the master shall ~~pr~~ praise us; and none but the master shall blame" might be written on the fly leaf of every volume of Keats' poetry; for never was there a poet more ~~dev~~ devoted to his ideal, entirely independent of success or failure. In strong contrast with his contemporary, Byron who professed to despise the art that made him famous, Keats lived for poetry alone, and as Lowell pointed out, a virtue went out of him into everything he wrote. In all his work we have the impression of this intense loyalty to his art; we have the impression also of a profound dissatisfaction that the deed falls so far short of the splendid dream. Thus after reading Chapman's translation of Homer he writes: