

John Keats

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John Keats (1795-1821) is one of the main figures of second generation of Romantic Age along with Lord Byron and Shelley. Romanticism primarily was a revolt against the artificial pseudo-classical poetry in 18th century. Though Wordsworth was the founder of this movement, Keats is said to be the most romantic of all the Romantics. He was inspired by Greek art, culture, mythology and Elizabethan poets especially by Edmund Spenser.

Keats writes his poetry for the sake of poetry. He believes in 'art for art's sake'. He does not write poetry for any palpable design or any propaganda. His major concern is to give pleasure. Where some other romantics have been writing poetry for the propagation of their objectives as Wordsworth and Shelley were in the favour of French Revolution, But Keats is least concern with the social issues of life. His poetry is characterized by sensual imagery, most notably in the series of odes. His love for nature is the chief characteristics of all the Romantics. and he is known for its vivid imagery and great sensuous appeal. He used the term 'negative capability' to discuss the state in which we are capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts and reasons. His work Endymion is a poem first published in 1818. It begins with the line

"A thing of beauty is a joy for ever". It is written in rhyming couplets in iambic pentameter. It is very easy to find strongest themes in his poetry. The themes of love, beauty, imagination, truth and nature. All these flow through his words and weave great webs of love and passion. Keats loves nature but he loves nature for the sake of nature. He does not give any theory or ideology about nature. He only admires the beauty of nature. But on the other hand Wordsworth spiritualizes nature, Coleridge finds some supernatural elements in nature, Shelley intellectualizes nature and Byron is interested in the vigorous aspect of nature. He wrote the great poems those are followings: The Eve of Saint Agnes, Lamia, Belle Dame Sans Merci, Hyperion, The Fall of Hyperion, Isabella, Lamia and To Autumn. The most famous are the odes particularly "Ode to a Grecian Urn" and "Ode to a Nightingale". Keats struggled to find balance between reality and fantasy. He used his poetry to escape the world. Another aspect that is important to Keats was love. He contemplates on death in various ways in connection to nature and love. But he does not give any theory or ideology about nature. He only admires the beauty of nature. But sometimes he longs to escape reality and loves to live in a fantasy. Keats experienced the first signs of Tuberculosis, the disease that had taken away his mother and brother. The fear of dying is reflected in his poems. In order to overcome this fear he stands alone, thinks of the love and fame by contrasting himself to the wide world. Keats was greatly affected by death and since he had to lose many

of his loved ones at a young age. And the concept of Negative Capability are examples of his struggle to balance between reality and fantasy. Keats believes in 'Negative Capability' - the capability of being impersonal. He writes poetry only for pleasure. But Shelley lacks Negative Capability. Shelley lends his personal sorrow and feelings in his poetry. So we can consider him as the purest poet in the history of English literature. He has been bestowed with wonderful power of imagination. He is the most escapist of all other Romantic poets. He finds pleasure in his imagination, and he creates world of his own. For example - in 'Ode to Nightingale', he creates his imaginative world where he enjoys sweet eternal song of nightingale which provides peace to his mind and harmony to his soul.

Hellenism is the soul of his poetry. Keats is also Hellenistic like all romantics. Its features in his poetry are:- Greek instinct, love for Greek literature, love with Greek sculptures and art, Greek temperament, love for beauty and touch of fatalism and tragedy and his attitude of melancholy is also Hellenistic.

In short, we see that Keats fully imbibed the spirit of his age. His poetry is a fine example of highly romantic poetry; in fact, it touched almost all the aspects of romantic poetry - love for beauty, love for nature, love for the past, supernaturalism, glow for emotions, and last but not the least in importance, the revealing power of imagination.