FEAR AND ANXIETY IN JOHN KEATS' SELECTED ODES AND 'LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI'

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ABSTRACT

John Keats remains one of England's most emotional romantic poets, with a penchant for decrying loss love. His poetry, however, reflects a personal tenacity in the face of enormous difficulty, the result of his own personal tragedies. How well Keats came to terms with this personal tragedy is the subject of this paper. The odes are particularly revealing of this intrinsic relationship between passion and pain and how the poetic persona successfully navigates the extremes of loss and the existential reality of truth. Keats' view of reality, subjective as it is, defines an alternative in which the emotionally besieged soul of the poetic persona finds solace in accepting his emotional fragility and in the belief that he will continue to exist in Nature.

KEYWORDS: Fear, Anxiety, Existential reality & Romantic

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INTRODUCTION

John Keats is considered one of the most important romantic¹ poets of his time. His short career produced some of the most astounding poetry of the romantic period including poems such as "Lamia", "The Fall of Hyperion" and "The Eve of St Agnes" and some of the most important odes in English literary history. In spite of this, Keats, like his contemporaries has been accused by critics of being an escapist, that is, running away from the basic realities of their times. Later day critics were to characterize them as such depending on several tendencies recurrent in their poetry. William Wordsworth, William Blake, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Gordon Byron, and Keats who were later considered as Romantic poets never considered themselves 'romantics'. They however considered the human imagination as the foremost aspect of the human mind from which a whole lot of human emotions and attitudes were produced. They were poets that were filled with a lot of empathy for their fellow human beings even though their responses were completely different. Byron and Shelley were more outward going, more critical of the cruelty of the ruling class and the indifference of those who could occasion change. Coleridge, Wordsworth and Keats were more subtle in their critique of their society and the values that characterized their time.

In an article celebrating fifty years of the journal *Studies in Romanticism*, Brian McGrath attempts an inquiry into the conception that John Keats is a poet for beginners, an appropriation from Gerard Manley Hopkins' view. By the time Keats was writing, poets like Wordsworth were already in their forties and have established

¹ The term was coined in the 1840s in England even though as a movement, it had been around since the late eighteenth century. It is assumed that the father of Romanticism was Jean Jacques Rousseau; the movement was however amplified in England by poets such as William Wordsworth, Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Blake and Lord Gordon Byron. For more discussions on this see, Seyhan, A. (2009). "What is Romanticism, and where did it come from?" In N. Saul (Ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism*. (Cambridge Companions to Literature. P.1-20). Cambridge UP, 2009

themselves as romantic poets, consequently Hopkins' assertion reverberated a different kind of understanding of Keats' place among romantic poets. Jerome McGann will push this inquiry further when he writes that romantic poetry: "is everywhere marked by extreme forms of displacement and poetic conceptualisation whereby the actual human issues with which the poetry is concerned are resituated in a variety of idealized localities" (qtd. in McGrath 352). This assumption reflects the romantic poets' intentions to re-create a new kind of identity far away from the damning reality surrounding them. This may not be totally true but in many individual poems, this is the essence of the writings that vindicate this assumption. McGrath will however build on Helen Vendler's reading to give new meaning to the whole notion of Keats as a beginner. The question is more about how Keats allegorizes meanings in his poems, pushing them to the middle or the end of the poems. The merit of this, if merit, we can call it, gives critics a sense that Keats opts out of history and by extension, of reality. Perhaps this was actually a way Keats devised to come to terms with the harsh reality of his life.

In the history of romantic poetry, Keats is not in the same spotlight as Wordsworth or Coleridge, yet he expresses more human sympathy towards the sufferings of human beings than any other key English romantic poet of his time. He is very subtle in his critical appraisal of the world and its inherent suffering. His life and works, as noted by Michael O'Neil, were ridden with tensions. He was, as O'Neil indicates, "ablaze with passion and ambition" and saddled by the "brutal, sapping fact of mortality" (1). Eighteenth century England was riddled with political and economic woes and its own share of diseases especially the 1820 plague². Keats who suffered enormous family tragedy would eventually find subtle ways of escape. He took refuge from personal and socio-environmental tragedies³ in his poetry. As a student of medicine, Keats came face to face with suffering but as his friend and fellow student would later on write, Keats' greater love was for poetry as it claimed the "zenith of his Aspirations" (qtd by Nicholas Roe.31). If one were to consider just the poetry he wrote, one wouldn't believe that there were any political or economic upheavals at the time he and his contemporaries wrote. Yet, this is precisely the point that this paper makes: in the time of fear and anxiety, where there seems to be hopelessness, the belief in the immortality of the soul, the belief in the tenacity of the human spirit is the one thing humans should hang onto.

The Covid-19 pandemic is a turning point in present day world history. Its unprecedented effect on human movements and its impact on the economics of the world require a lot of empathy towards the dispossessed. The world is gripped by fear of and anxiety about a mortal and illusive enemy. The response to the pandemic requires courage and tenacity but perhaps most especially, it requires a certain amount of levelheadedness if one must overcome fear and anxiety. The world seems to stand still, gripped by fear and the feeling of emptiness; the need for a steadier mindset and a positive outlook towards the resolution of the crisis becomes imperative. In this context, the propagation of horror will rather exacerbate the trauma that those who are involved are going through. It is this same spirit that animated Keats' own life in the context of his own personal troubles. Contrary to fear and anxiety, Keats and his contemporaries in their times rather than give in to the psychological trauma of the time, took refuge in the beauty of the environment. The two poems under study should be interpreted in the context of present day malaise, where humans are morally devastated not by the number of deaths but by the present and imminent fear of death that has become the daily companion of everyday life. He was particularly affected by the deaths in his family-that of his mother and father, but especially of the former whom he

² England was under the pressure of the Cholera outbreak and as a doctor apprentice, he must have seen a lot of suffering that eventually affected him tremendously.

³ His personal losses and the dire environment he was born and grew in. The deaths of his siblings, parents and the numerous diseases from which he suffered.

personally nursed. These tragic circumstances as Heidi Thomson indicates "would be tied up with thoughts about transience and the threat of cruelty" and with the fear of abandonment as reflected in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" (39).

In Keats' time, there was appalling human suffering in Europe⁴, amongst which were those caused by the Napoleonic wars, with countries such as Russia suffering the greatest toll. France herself was still struggling to come out of the vestiges of the gruesome French revolution. Many Europeans suffered from mass poverty reflection of the great dichotomy between the haves and the have nots. The United Kingdom, master of a third of the world, was mired in internal dissatisfaction which will be mirrored more effectively by authors such as Charles Dickens. Yet in this context, nature seems unchanged, unchallenged, and unbiased. It remained the faithful companion of mankind. The romantic poets found solace in nature's soothing ability, believed in its redemptive powers, and hoped in a new life through divine meditation in nature. They found solace in its transformative powers and Keats unlike Shelley and Byron transformed his disappointment against worldly affairs and his angst into passionate exuberance for nature and love.

Keats subtly presents in the odes understudy, the fears and anxiety of his own time in the face of human catastrophe. Ravaged by tuberculosis, Keats found the courage and strength to transcend the sadness and morbidity that inhibited exuberance and laughter, present a picture of beauty, love and the grandeur of eternity through art. Put differently, Keats created a world where one can locate the strength to live beyond the pain and suffering in the human race by simply resting their thoughts in the belief in the beauty of nature and the immortality of art which could be read as the immortality of the human soul. The poet in both poems exhorts the inert character in the poems to immortalize suffering by looking at things whose emotions cannot be physically contained. There are two levels of consciousness in the poems under inquiry: to wit, the physical level, and the spiritual level. He literarily suffocated under the weight of personal and communal tragedies. Amid his suffering, Keats suggests that our ultimate source of solace and redemption is in the spiritual realm because in it, is eternity. In *Reading John Keats*, Susan J. Wolfson acknowledges the tremendous impact that Keats' personal life had on the young poet. Keats' personal emotional tragedies, and sense of abandonment will translate into his poetry with "refuges and retreats" (9). He was psychologically affected by the constant reminders that he was not of the respectable class and according to Berth Lau, by the standards of the time, Keats was not of the class that could pretend to a study of classical literature which was considered to be the preserve of the elite and educated class. His attempt to do so was considered to be off-limits. Pain and rejection were therefore a constant presence, and this would haunt Keats then and his legacy posthumously⁵.

"Ode to a Nightingale" is about the reality of mortality and how we can confront and grow out of it. John Barnard has described this ode as "complete and mature" (108). It is a poem that grapples with the tensions between "flux and stasis, process and annihilation, being and non-being, are integral to structure and meaning". He opines that the ode plays on the strings of the to and forth movement "between the spontaneous song of an actual bird and the poet's conscious and deepening reflections" and the nightingale, he concludes, inevitably puts us in an "unforced meditation" of an internal dialogue between humans and non-humans (108). The poetic personae are overwhelmed by the imminence of death

⁴ Keats who trained as a medic must have seen a lot of people with horrible medical conditions. There were lots of diseases and the standards of treatment were wanting. Keats himself had poor health, and in a good number of cases poor diagnosis. See Hillas Smith's 'The strange case of Mr. Keats's Tuberculosis in *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, Vol 38, Issue 7, 1 April 2004 .pp.991-993.

⁵ He worried much about his legacy and expressed this to friends and family. His 1820 letter to his unfulfilled love Fanny Brawne is very indicative of this malaise. He is quoted in this letter as having said that "...if I had had time I would have made myself remembered". This thought was a constant worry all through his short life.

expressed in his “heart” that “aches” and the feeling of “a drowsy numbness pains” (L.1.p.183). His senses feel numb as if sizzled by opium. In these first lines, the persona expresses the desire to tear himself away from the morosity of his environment and to confront a less morbid reality. He envisions flight into the realm of the nightingale because of the happiness the bird’s song exudes as it sings “in full throated ease” (St.1 L.10 p.183). The poet therefore sets the tone in the very first stanza of the poem about the intensity of his suffering and the need to subsume into another level of consciousness. He does not consider suicide in the face of calamity but escape into unreality. He seems to insist on living even though in a different realm. Keats’ persona exhibits the tenacity of Thomas Hardy’s darkling thrush in his poem “The Darkling Thrush”. In the midst of an apparently harsh winter the bird’s “voice arose among/The bleak twigs overhead/In a full-hearted evensong/Of joy illimited;” (St.3 L.16-19) and spewed out in the middle of this “growing gloom” (St.3 L24), “Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew/And I was unaware” (St.4 L 32)⁶. In both excerpts from Keats and Hardy, nature is paramount. It does outlast human suffering and is the reason that justifies existence. Through Nature, one understands the significance of suffering and can come to terms with it. Nature becomes a palliative and a source of moral strength.

In the second stanza of the poem, the speaker’s insistence to leave the world of suffering is rendered with poetic urgency. The wish to “leave the world,/And with thee fade away into the forest dim:” speaks of the anointing presence of the nightingale whose legendary voice echoes in every corner of the speaker’s heart. The speaker echoes Wordsworth’s speaker in “The world is too much with us” when he insists on wishing to “Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget/What though among the leaves hast never known,” (St.2 L. 21-22). In a subtle but persistent manner he will tell the nightingale of the “weariness, the fever, and the fret” (St.3 L3) but also of the gruesome human suffering “where men sit and hear each other groan;/.../Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies/Where but to think is to be full of sorrow/And leaden-eyed despairs” (St.3 L 23-28). The speaker captures the essence of human suffering, an image which particularly describes present day suffering and fear. He brings to life an environment where “Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes/Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.” (St.3 L29-30). This is the world of ephemerality, where everything is elusive, but in contrast the voice of the nightingale is immortal. Keats by implications suggests that in the face of human misery humankind should look up to the life that transcends ordinary human condition. His poem expresses the nullity of human life. In the face of calamity, we come to terms with the reality of the nothingness of life and in that regard have a better appreciation of what we are. Beauty, love and materiality have no meaning in the face of danger because they are unable to resolve our personal misfortunes. The poet then considers flight into a temporal ecstasy as the only possibility of survival in the face of difficulties. Recurrently, Keats betrays this sense of insecurity and fears in his letter, which as Jon Mee indicates in the introduction to *John Keats: Selected Letters*, took the form of a “desire to escape the fever and the fret of the life around him” (xxviii). Keats was so much closed to death because of numerous tragic occurrences in his family that it had become a way of life and critics would later on relate this to the content of his poetry. Brendan Corcoran in his study on this associates Keats’ last days in Rome with the desire to die easefully, arguing that “His uncanny end matches his writing and his writing life thoroughly animated by this literally timeless subject” (322). This is one proof of the poet’s resilience in the face of death and the mounting pressure of failing health. Corcoran intimates that Keats imbued his poetry with “a resolute materiality” but insisted also in being present in his poetry. He found a way to be part of this massive emotional paradox of both having a voice and at the same time being voiceless.

⁶ Curtailed from the guardian by Carol Rumens

Dec.28,2009/www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2009/dec/28/poem-of-the-week-darkling-thrush-thomas-hardy

He was concerned with the fact of not being regarded with respect especially as he was diminutive in stature, an issue he raised with his sister and brother (Georgiana and George) in a letter to them “ ‘You see what it is to be under six foot and not a lord’ ” (14 February-3 May 1819). Romanticized as it may appear, “Ode to a Nightingale” is charged with biographical data. In this poem, Keats wrestles with the sense of personal loss and with the fear of anonymity. In a February 1820 letter to Fanny Brawne, he echoes this feeling: “ ‘If I should die,’ said I to myself, ‘I have left no immortal work behind me-nothing to make my friends proud of my memory-but I have lov’d the principles of beauty in all things, and if I had had time I would have made myself remember’d.’ ” (335). He lived with the gruesome reality of his own finitude, wondering about the misery of his own life when in a letter to his friend Charles Brown on November 1st 1820, he wonders “ ‘Was I born for this end?’ ” (369). The tone of the rhetoric reveals the macabre reality that surrounded his daily life and that eventually accompanied him to his grave. He will repeat the imminence of this reality to Charles Brown on a November 30th 1820 letter from his visits in Rome “I have an habitual feeling of my real life having past, and that I am leading a posthumous existence.” (369). He goes further in the same letter to reveal the tragedy of his present existence “there is one thought enough to kill me -I have been well, healthy, alert & walking with her-and now-the knowledge of contrast, feeling for light and shade, all that information (primitive sense) necessary for a poem are great enemies to the recovery of the stomach.” (369). And he will go along to say that “it runs in my head we shall all die young” (369).

The message of flight is recurrent in “The Ode to a Nightingale” especially in stanzas three and four. Keats knows that physical flight is not possible, but mental flight is the only means by which he can forget the vagaries of a troubled world. The hopes of living a new life with the nightingale is refreshing in a world where “there is no light” (St.4L38). It is in the “viewless wings of poesy” that the true meaning of life can be sought. (St.4 L.33). It seems at this stage that the poet is not suffering from any malaise, yet in the deepest of his feelings, he is suffering from the scourge of sickness whose remedy is in the Nightingale’s beautiful voice.

The speaker is immersed in the world of the Nightingale by the fifth stanza. He can feel the bliss of being in the nightingale’s idyllic environment. The environment is lush and attractive and for a good while, the speaker gives no impression of any physical suffering as he is intertwined with the natural vegetation of “the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;” (St. 5, L.55). The poetic personae is caught in the blissful ease of spring and summer and is overwhelmed by the sheer presence of flowers around her. These same emotions culminate in his easeful death wish, where he hopes he can die now and it will be so easeful. He will not feel the sting of death at the moment when he is enveloped by the sound of the bird’s song. When he concurs that “Now more than ever seems it rich to die,” (st.5 l. 65) because the bird’s song will be his requiem.

The song is a symbol of the immortal part of man⁷. It is a bridge from the sad truths of life to the idyllic fantasies of man. The song might have been the sole companion of those in great sorrows like the biblical Ruth. The biblical allusion to the “sad heart of Ruth” (st.7 l.76) reveals the extent to which the Nightingale’s song pierces into the very soul of sorrow. This is the culminating point of the speaker’s happiness, and the understanding of it, revealing the extent to which he is deceived into believing that he is in a different reality. At least for once he forgets for a while the troubles of the earth. He deceives himself into some internal peace. He dominates his anxiety and fear and believes that he is out of danger from the cataclysmic troubles of daily life.

⁷ Thomas Hardy’s “The Darkling Thrush”; William Wordsworth’s “The Solitary Reaper” are among the poems in the tradition that celebrate the power of bird’s song.

The beauty of this poem and perhaps one of the most important statements is the recognition that we can momentarily escape our reality without necessarily denying it. The word "Forlorn" (st.8 l.71) is the expression of the grim realization of that truth. Here, the speaker wrestles himself from fantasy to reality; this does not however obfuscate the feeling of satisfaction arising from a supposed blissful moment with nature. He understands that "the fancy cannot cheat so well" (st.8 l.83) as it is now "buried deep" (st.8 l.87) as both the speaker and the reader wonder about the veracity of the created new world whether it was a "vision" or a "waking dream" (St.8 L.89). The last stanza of the poem is very telling of the speakers' consciousness. He has to come to terms with the possibility that "Fled is the music:-Do I wake or sleep?" (st.8 l.90). The question raises both disappointment at the possibility that the blissful ease is ended and continued enchantment that he will still revel in the ecstasy of the bird's world. It foreshadows the speaker's dilemma; he is caught in between the world of truth and the world of fantasy. He must wake up to one of these choices.

The first and last stanzas of the poem indicate the poet's emotional orientation but also the reaction to physical trauma by the speaker. The opening line of "The Ode" express the sense of pain, the burden of life and the psychological weight that comes with sickness; the last stanza ends with the consciousness of a dreamy world and the fear of returning to reality. In between is a kind of bubble where the speaker is stuck in some form of eerie joy. His mind is in a state of delirium, reflective of the possibility of having been drugged with "hemlock" (st.1 l.1) and his desire to leave this world through any means. The second stanza of the poem is replete with the images of drinking "a draught of vintage" or "a beaker full of the warm south.../with beaded bubbles winking at the brim" all of which betray a taste of the desire to transcend mortality with all its accompanying misfortunes. He has been in love with "easeful death" (st.6 l.62) especially at this moment when the nightingale is pouring out its soul "In such an ecstasy" (st.6 l.68).

Keats immortalizes the tenacious spirit of man in the guise of the song of the nightingale. He contrasts human suffering to the blissful nature of the bird's song and its environment. He catalogues from the beginning of the poem to the end, the emotions of an individual undergoing excruciating physical pain, his struggles to cope with and at the same time to escape from it. Keats is in no way an escapist from the physical reality of his world, but rather like Thomas Hardy paints a picture of the reality as it is.

The reality of coping with pain is that we must at some point try to ignore it without which it will eat us deep. The decision to find other palliative means of relieving the pain does not in any way symbolize denying it. It simply translates into abating the fears and anxiety which by themselves can be the source of the individual's psychosomatic illnesses. The romantic imagination is therefore a remedy to anguish and trauma. In the present circumstance, Keats would suggest some form of escape from a horrifying mental torture from a pandemic that has become a part of the human imagination and psyche. For once, the mind must freeze into a different reality, an acknowledgment of both the truth of the existence of the illness but also the belief in a spiritual essence. There is a need for the healing of both the body and the soul and in other odes than in "Ode to a Grecian Urn" Keats expresses this ultimate vision of the emotional battle between the soul and the body. In his discussion of mortality, Shahidha Bari draws parallels between the tragedies in Keats' life and the portraits he paints in his poems arguing that the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" could be a reflection of that funeral weight, and perhaps the poem is a relic of the poet's own mortality.

In "Ode to a Nightingale", Keats enters into an emotional trance on hearing the voice of the nightingale, and in "Ode on a Grecian Urn" he allows himself to be carried away by the utter beauty of the urn, and perhaps most especially by the immortal nature of that beauty. In "Ode to a Nightingale" he complains that "Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,"

yet in "Ode on a Grecian" he sings the triumph of endless beauty "Beauty is truth, truth beauty"-that is all/ Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know" (st.5 l.49-50). The assertion is as categorical as it is an established truth. The contrast in both poems is evident as in one beauty is ephemeral phasing away amid danger, but in another it is a permanent condition. In other words, Keats celebrates both illusion and permanence of beauty in different contexts. Beauty becomes in 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' something with an intrinsic value, an immortal spirit that is not dictated by the demands of time and the physical world.

The first stanza like the fourth is replete with rhetoric questions, the product of a mind wondering in the maze of incomprehensible thoughts about the timelessness of beautiful things. Beyond the rhetoricity of these questions is the inability of the poet to come to grips with time's powerlessness to erase static beauty. Time's incapacitation to create real life adjustments of the paintings on the urn is the real reason for the poet to praise this urn and to give eternity to its ethereal nature. The urn which is described as an "unravish'd bride of quietness" (st.1 l.1) "foster-child of silence and slow time" (st.1 l.2) and as "Sylvan historian" (st.1 l.3) is the living memory of immortality. In questioning the urn as to what it has done, the poet only shows his fascination for spiritual things. The poet's fascination with entrapped beauty is indicative of this sense of spiritual elevation. The poetic persona makes a recognition of the tremendous appeal of the urn, especially because of its inability to tell its own story. The people and shapes painted in the urn are entrapped and therefore do not suffer the scourge of decay and temporarity. This is one of Keats' major statements on the urn and the beauty of changelessness.

In the second stanza of the poem, the speaker determines what makes this changelessness more appealing. It is their appeal not to the senses but to the "spiritual ditties of no tone" (St.2 St.14) because there is less grief in these circumstances. The "Bold Lover" (st.2 l.17) who can "never, never" kiss is emphatic of the lasting sense of youth. Even though the lover cannot kiss his love, yet the lover herself cannot fade from the scene, an insinuation that their love is more enduring because fadeless "For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!" (st.2 l.20). In this stanza, like in the entire poem, there is a sense of infinity which captures the imagination and soothes the soul.

The poet describes the everlasting doomsday of humanity where everything stands still. Trees that grow and fade will no longer do so. It is a picture of eternal spring for both vegetation and love. The lovers on the urn will not suffer the scourge of dicing time and the emotional changes that come with it. The physical trauma "That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd, / A burning forehead, and a parching tongue." (st.3 l.29-30) will not be the experience of the lovers painted on the urn. The representation of unfading love as portrayed on the urn is a reflection of the eternity of Keats' own wishful love for Fanny Brawne. Rather than remain entrapped in the bubble of disappointment and unrequited love, Keats creates a fantasy world where love does not fade. He transforms his pain from his failed love relationship into an idyll of passion and emotions where time is not a player.

Keats' endgame in writing this poem is perhaps to answer the question of what it means to be fulfilled. How much of our life can we escape. The last four lines of the poem define the essence of the poet's message and vision:

When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in the midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,
"Beauty is truth, truth beauty,"-that is all

Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know (st.5 l. 46-50)

The speaker recognizes the ephemerality of the human species, passes judgment on our invincibility and at the same time reveals to us the ultimate sense of human pain. He recognizes that pain shall be forever, but we must find other means of assuaging this pain. We cannot permanently be locked in the mindset of suffering; we must find a vent of escape and that vent is an alternative truth to human reality. His, is a testament that in the midst of suffering there is hope in art. Looking at the urn becomes a therapy against the pains of our daily life. By immersing us in the beauty of the urn, the speaker doesn't in any way refute the existence of physical pain, he rather shows us a different path by which we can cope with it. Susan J. Wolfson has described the "ode on a Grecian Urn" as a "romance of timelessness" (102), a recognition that physical pain last only for a while and aesthetic pleasure last forever.

The two odes carry us through different emotions of pain and different fantasies of how we can come to grips with that. In the first ode, the poetic persona is completely carried away by the voice of the nightingale to a different realm. In the second, he is bewildered by the striking beauty of the paintings on the urn and their representation of endlessness. In both circumstances, pain is a constant presence and refuge is a necessary factor for healing. The universe is both psyche and soma-body and soul, with one soothing the other. In writing an ode to both a bird- a living object and an urn, an inanimate object, Keats subject the persona like the reader to the possibilities of coping with the inert and the animate. Both the beauty of the urn and the soul searching nature of the song give vitality to the human soul and thereby the possibility of respite. In both poems, the poet takes us gradually from the beginning where he complains of the trauma of our physical condition to the end of the poem where after temporal respite, we come back to the harsh reality of physical nature.

In both odes under study, the poet justifies Nature's grandeur by elevating it to human proportions and in so doing, he eviscerates human life. He objectifies and deifies Nature creating in so doing an alternative universe where reality is void of the pains and aches of earthly existence. His images tell of the trauma and the sense of hopelessness that can only be relieved if in an alternative world. The Nightingale like the urn are raised to human forms creating a picture of Nature's abundance.

The opening lines of the poem foreshadow the desire for flight. Wine becomes a symbol of escape and a medium of some form of self-expression. The persona wants a different kind of consciousness occasioned by some "hemlock" or some "dull opiate" so that he can be relieved of the "heart aches" and the "drowsy numbness". In personifying wine as medium of transport, Keats takes comfort and develops confidence in wine. His images are vivid and come to life. He talks of the "blushful Hippocrene/With bearded bubbles winking at the brim"; it is an image of attraction that contrasts sharply with the suffering in the physical world. He intensifies his imagery by contesting the essence of beauty especially as it doesn't last. The speaker describes beauty as not being able to keep "her lustrous eyes" evoking in so doing its ephemeral nature.

The moon itself, a symbol of sublimity, is described in its majesty, shown as a monarch with all her attributes. The surrounding atmosphere is very sublime with the night being "tender" and the "Queen-moon" "haply" sitting on "her throne" revealing a totally different mindset. The approach of summer is announced by "Fast fading violets" that are "mid-May's eldest child". All of this is an announcement to the end of spring and the beginning of summer but also the end of his faery dreams. The poetic persona raises the status of the Nightingale to an "immortal Bird" giving it prescience over all other birds and in some ways comparing it to humans. The aura of the bird envelops the poem and makes the presence of

any other objects human or inanimate elusive.

In "Ode on a Grecian Urn" which Martin Aske describes as Keats' "most concrete and determinate emblem of antiquity" (103), Keats pushes further the hyperbole of the inanimate urn as a Godlike form from which lifeless objects and humans become active. Here again, Keats will describe the Grecian Urn as a "foster-child of silence and slow time", and a "sylvan historian" reflecting a world of its own with people expressing their various desires. The urn becomes a geographic space where lovers and musicians display their emotions. The speaker completely annihilates the physical world around him in pursuit of a subtle consciousness in which the pain of the world is a stranger. The stark reality that the poem enunciates is the constant presence of truth-the reality of death. This thought is evident in "ode to a Nightingale" when the speaker awakens to the reality of life "Adieu, the fancy cannot cheat so well"

In both poems, the essence is the creation of an alternative world which transcends the physical difficulties encountered by the poetic personae. The remedy to pain is an abstraction, a certain kind of escape based on the belief that there is an alternative life within the same physical reality from which emanates the challenges facing the poet's character. The odes sing praises to a world of hallucination, where humans shed their sufferings albeit momentarily and revel in the cosmic harmony of their new found freedom. This is the paradox of joy in pain, the only possibility left for humans to connect to their essence in a world stricken by maladies and different forms of distasteful ills. It is in pain that Keats found self-expression and the ability to refocus his energy to a more sustain form of psychic survival.

Keats' rendition of pain was reflected in such moments of loss and pain as in his "La Belle Dame sans Merci" and "Ode to Psyche". In "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" Keats captures the psychic stress associated with loss of love. The "wretched wight" who is "alone and palely loitering" (st.1 l. 1&2) is a symbol of the anguish of loss and the internal pain that comes with it. The words that convey this sense of malady are littered everywhere in the poem as testimony to the pain and grieve associated with loss of love.

From the first stanza to the last, Keats catalogues the emotional dryness of the Knight and the difficulty of his accepting his new found status. We are told that the "sedge is wither'd from the lake"/And no birds sing" (l.3-4).The Knight is described as being so "haggard and so woe-begone?" (l.6) and "...on thy cheek a fading rose? Fast withereth too" (l.8-9). His psychological malaise is the result of an emotional disappointment from an unfulfilled love affair with a fairy lady. The knight has been entrapped in this sweet but temporal emotional trance. He is the victim of the snare of the 'lady in the meads' who is "Full beautiful, a faery's child" (st.4 l.13-14).

The wight's tale is exactly like that of the speaker in the "Ode to a Nightingale" when he awakes from the dream and discovers that the fancy cannot cheat so well. He is a victim of a fairy tale that ends too soon; but also of a belief in the ephemerality of physical love. The last three stanzas of the poem are indicative of the extent of the psychic trauma the speaker undergoes.

I saw pale kings, and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
Who cry'd- "La belle Dame sans merci
Hath thee in thrall!" (st.10, l .37-40)
I saw their starv'd lips in the gloam

With horrid warning gaped wide,
 And I awoke, and found me here
 On the cold hill side. (st.11 l.41-44)
 And this is why I sojourn here
 Alone and palely loitering,
 Though the sedge is wither'd from the lake,
 And no birds sing. (st.12 l.45-48)

These last three stanzas of the poem express dejection, disappointment and disillusionment but perhaps and above all, they express the internal pain of a dream deferred or destroyed. The arid environment in which the poet finds himself is reminiscent of his internal distraught. However, while the physical environment of the poem is characterized by aridity, the poet's tone is less critical of his state and does not betray much of his suffering. He seems to accept what has befallen him and attribute that suffering to his own foolishness.

This poem, like the one before, under study is a statement of endurance under stress. It speaks to our ability to come to terms with the emotional fragility of love and with the necessity for courage in the face of disappointment. The wight with all his physical might is pulverized by the reality of life. His vision of the beautiful faery dawns on him when he wakes up to find that the faery was an illusion. Love, the poem indicates, is an evanescent reality that cheats on the truth of life, yet the poetic personae maintains a dignified calm in the face of emotional adversity. This is precisely the point of the poem, to wit, calm in the face of emotional angst, and Keats is a master at this.

This theme follows through in "Ode to Psyche", where the reader has to deal with another fancy ridden emotional relationship. Keats here again revitalizes Greek mythology by remaking the story of the love relationship between Psyche and Cupid.

"Ode to psyche" is a statement on the importance of feelings but also of the elevation of the Greek goddess of feelings. It is also according to Martin Aske the celebration of "the authority of the poet's own voice" (105). The tone of the poem is symptomatic of the sense of loss expressed by the speaker; of the need for recognition and the knowledge of the eternity of its presence. The poem echoes the same theme as in "Ode on a Grecian Urn". The love affair between Psyche and Cupid is not material and therefore eternal as "Their lips touch'd not, but had not bade adieu" (st.2 l.17).

The poetic persona equally expresses in hyperbolic but subtle ways the sense of loss and the possible oblivion of Psyche. The following stanza is charged with the urgency of fear of abandonment.

O latest born and loveliest vision far
 Of all Olympus' faded hierarchy!
 Fairer than Phoebe's sapphire-region'd star,
 Or Vesper amorous glow-worm of the sky;
 Fairer than these, though temple thou hast none,

Nor altar heap'd with flowers;
Nor virgin-choir to make delicious moan
Upon the midnight hours;
No voice, no lute, no pipe, no incense sweet
From chain-swung censer teeming;
No shrine, no grove, no oracle, no heat
Of pale-mouth'd prophet dreaming. (st.3 l.24-35)

The speaker prophesies the imminent sense of loss by indicating the tragedy of abandonment. The aim of the stanza is to raise awareness for and plead against the dying memory of Psyche who in the speaker's opinion deserves a better place and recognition than any of the goddesses. The tone of the poetic personae is bittersweet and reflective of the urgency to raise Psyche to her deserved position.

In "Ode to Psyche", Keats celebrates the beauty of feelings and the capacity of the mind to keep track with it. In the midst of the personal and collective tragedies surrounding Keats in his private life, he succeeds to withdraw to fancy and concoct a new kind of life. Keats takes us far away from the hustle and bustle of life to a different level of perception. In revering in the beauty of inner feelings, Keats succeeds to make the reader forget even if for a while the hardships of life. His influence in this regard has been very far reaching. David E Goldweber writing on Keats' influence on Countee Cullen indicates that this influence has a pervasive effect on the 20th century. One of those pervasive influences was the recognition of the "primacy of pain in human life" arguing that there are "sometimes when truths faced-but other times when they must be avoided".

There is a strong sense of urgency in restoring the value of Psyche. This urgency is the result of the recognition that no one pays attention to the need for restoration. The speaker insists that he will be Psyche's priest and in his mind build a space to honour her. The last stanza of the poem speaks volumes as it expresses the necessity to erect a space in the mind where "A bright torch, and a casement ope at night, /To let the warm Love in" (l. 66-67). This is Keats' ultimate statement on the response to stress, fear, anxiety and loss. Psyche has been essentially lost to the world, reason why in the second stanza, the speaker will recognize Cupid in the love scene, yet not recognize the other person. The speaker creates his own bubble which will help as a detoxifier of the mental crisis resultant of the numerous personal mishaps during his very short but momentous and passionate life on earth. There is no doubt that Keats lived his life, brief as it was, courageously. Hillas Smith contends that even though his life was short, Keats gave each moment of that an "increased intensity" (390), creating what Algernon Swinburne would describe as "one of the masterpieces of human work in all time" (qtd. in Smith 397), that is, the "Ode to a Nightingale". This assumption is echoed by later Keatsian critics such as Shelley and William Hazlitt who will say of Keats as one who "...gave the greatest promise of genius of any poet of his day. He displayed extreme tenderness, beauty, originality and delicacy of fancy; all he wanted was manly strength and fortitude to reject the temptations of singularity in sentiment and expression" (qtd. in Mizukoshi 2).

Keats' "Odes" are a call to calm in times of difficulties. They resonate with the urgency of a people in times of need who take refuge in the changeless and timeless structure of an alternative universe lodged in the bowels of nature. The nightingale and the Grecian Urn are symbols of solace in a world ridden by malice and pain. They provide in Keats'

cosmovision a bubble in which humans can, for a while, come to terms in a more peaceful and relax manner with the reality of their circumstances. The images used in the two poems are expetive of a new paradigm where anxiety and fear play second fiddle in the dance macabre of earthly suffering. In an age of generalized suffering, the best refuge is an alternative consciousness that occludes the physical world of mundane reality. The odes give us a false sense of security no doubt but it is the palliative to the generalised angst in the moments of disproportionate struggle. Keats, it should be noted was an avid reader of Greek and Roman mythologies⁸ and filled his mind and works with thoughts of immortality deriving from those. He may not have had the deep religious sense of William Wordsworth, on whose footsteps he followed, yet, he attempted to create in his own right a certain way to salvation that relieves the reader of the pain of loss. He understood the need for “soul making” through the combination of “mind and heart and the world of human suffering” (291). He learned this from Wordsworth, ascertaining like Wordsworth, that the soul undergoes birth and change. Keats’ forte is calm and resilience in the face of fear and anxiety and his life was testimony of this. He bequeathed to the world, a collection of poetry that speaks to our sense of fear and our ability to overcome this with gentility and grandeur.

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⁸ For more details, see Alex Zwerdling *The Mythographers and the Romantic Revival of Greek Myth*. PMLA. vol.79, no.4 (Sep.1964) pp.447-456. JSTOR. www.Jstor.org/stable/46075. Accessed Dec.28 2020.

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