

## BEAUTY: THE KEATSIAN AESTHETIC IDEAL

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When Keats wrote "Sleep and Poetry" in the summer of 1816, he expressed the wish for "ten years that [he] may overwhelm/ [Himself] in poesy; so [he] may do the deed/That [his] soul has to itself decreed" (96—8). However, as early as January 1818, when he wrote the sonnet titled "when I have fears," he was almost certain of the imminence of a death that would inevitably prevent him from overwhelming himself in poesy or beauty, and from glenning and storing the riches or beauties with which his brain teemed. Therefore, like one writing his own epitaph, he states in a letter to Fanny Brawne, February 1830, "If I should die, I have left no immortal works behind me — nothing to make my friends proud of my memory — but I have lov'd the principle of beauty in all things and if I had had time I would have made myself remember'd."<sup>1</sup>

Evident in this "memorial" is Keats's consideration of immortal works as great poetic creations that derive their profundity and immortality from being able to embody, in an effective manner, the essential beauty which the poet perceives in all things. Since he also implies that these "eternal works" are the sources of the immortality of their creators, it is natural that, in contemplating his impending early death, Keats should express disappointment at the possibility of not having enough time to produce works that would truly reflect his love of beauty after his death. Nevertheless, he draws some consolation from his love of the principle of beauty in all things because he believes that "the supreme thing in life is beauty" (F. R. Leavis 1936: 238). Aware that the love of beauty is the ultimate human achievement from which all enduring acts of creation spring,<sup>2</sup> Keats maintains that his love and knowledge of the essential

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<sup>1</sup> See John Keats's Feb. 1820 letter to Miss Fanny Brawne in *The Letters of John Keats* (1951:242—3).

<sup>2</sup> The Keatsian idea of immortal acts of creation is reminiscent of the Platonic notion of creativity which regards all human achievements as products of man's soul. See Plato's *Symposium* (Jowett 1948:46).

beauty of the world — however inadequately this beauty may be embodied in his poetic works — are sufficient to give him some measure of eternity.

Essentially, Keats views all great or immortal poetic works as “beauties” through which all real poets gain immortality. In “How Many Bards Gild the Lapse of Time,” for instance, he maintains that all the important poetic works of previous generations are “beauties, earthly and sublime” (4). As the title of the sonnet suggests, the poetic beauties and the poets who created them are one and the same; hence, the bards can gild the lapse of time and continuously exhibit their beauties in a timeless context. The earthly nature of these beauties signifies their existence in the normal world while their sublime quality remains a tribute to their eternity. Keats’s wish to overwhelm himself in poesy may thus be seen as a wish to explore the essential beauty in the world, while the “deed/That [his] soul has to itself decreed” may be seen as that of ultimately creating lasting beauties from those he enjoys. For him, all previous aesthetic works are eternal creations that constitute the mass of beauty which poets create “from grand materials” and the “events of this wide world” (“Sleep and Poetry”, 81), and put into “etherial existence of the relish of all (*Letters* 1952:170).

Implicit in this equation of great artistic works with beauties is Keats’s belief that immortal works are enduring embodiments of the principle of beauty in all things. Keats feels that poets fashion these beauties from materials in the phenomenal world and from man’s experiences of existence. In other words, he maintains that all subjects, be they sources of pleasure or pain, are potentially replete with the beauty that informs the whole world. This assumption underlies his treatment of various subjects in his poems. He also believes that love or the love of beauty is the aesthetic ideal which inspires all poets to seek and depict the beauty of the world: “Wherever beauty dwells, /In gulph or aerie, mountains or deep dells/In light, in gloom, in star or blazing sun,/[Love] pointest the way and straight ‘tis won” (*Endymion*, III, 94—71). Beauty, as revealed by love, becomes the irresistible Keatsian muse of poetry. It is the poetic muse that inspires the investigation of that poetic beauty which unites the apparently contradictory elements of human life. Keats’s fascination with this kind of muse is thus more that what Leavis regards as the poet’s worship of a beauty that is “a concentration upon the purely delightful in experience to the exclusion of the ‘disagreeables’” (Leavis 1936:237).

## I

This Keatsian conception of beauty or of the aesthetic ideal is, in some respects, Platonic. For instance, the poet’s contention that beauty is immanent in all things is more Platonic than Hazlitt’s conditional statement in the “Essay on Beauty” that beauty “is in some way inherent in the object” (Hazlitt

1902—6:68). Keats’s view is, in this respect, analogous to the Platonic idea in which “beauty in every form is one and the same” (*Symposium* 1948:51) — making his ideal some form of abstraction: “The mighty abstract idea I have of the beautiful in all things stifles the more divided and minute domestic happiness” (*Letters*:261), he declares. For him, a poet’s duty consists of seeking, exploring and depicting this beauty which inheres in nature and man’s life, and which in a way, is a substitute for the Wordsworthian “Presence.”<sup>8</sup> His belief that poets attain immortality through the eternal existence of their beautiful works also parallels the Platonic, since “men who are creative in their souls” create beauties that guarantee them the respect of posterity (*Symposium*: 50—51). In fact, Keats refers to immortal works of beauty as “souls of poets” that serve as the means by which they “hold lofty converse/with after times” (“Epistle to George Keats”, 72—3).

Nevertheless, the notion of beauty in Keats’s works is un-Platonic in some other respects. For instance, the poet does not regard an individual example of beauty or “personal beauty as a trifle” that is an imperfect shadow of “the beauty absolute” (*Symposium*:50—51). Rather, he conceives of specific instances of beauty as “particles” that are integral parts of the essential beauty in all things. The concept of an abstract beauty that exists apart from particulars is alien to the Keatsian system. His “abstract idea of beauty” is conterminous with the “mass of beauty” formed from the various particulars: “An amiable wife and sweet Children I contemplate as part of that Beauty, but I must have a thousand of those beautiful particles to fill up my heart” (*Letters*: 1261), he declares. Moreover, Keats does not believe in the Platonic progression from particular beauties to the absolute or ideal beauty — a progress “from the beauties of the earth upwards to the beauty absolute.” The Platonic steps or stages leading to the absolute beauty — “from one to two to all fair forms, and from fair forms to fair practices, and from fair practices to fair notions ... and from fair notions to the notion of absolute beauty or the essence of beauty” (*Symposium*:52) — are irrelevant to Keatsian system. For Keats, a passionate concentration on anything, irrespective of whatever Platonic stage the object is classed, leads the poet to the discovery of the essential beauty in all things.

Keats’s idiosyncratic definition of essential beauty explains why he always stresses what Goldberg refers to as “the corporeality of beauty rather than its abstracted quality” (Goldberg 1969:77). The poet usually identifies specific examples of this beauty rather than discusses its abstract qualities. For instance, he calls the myth of Endymion “A thing of beauty”, talks about specific beauties which he finds in the works of other poets, and expresses his commit-

<sup>8</sup> See “Tintern Abbey” 93—102.

ment to creating beauties in his own works. For him, Shakespeare's sonnets abound in beauties: "I ne'er found so many beauties in the Sonnets — they seem to be full of many fine things said unintentionally in the intensity of working out conceits" (*Letters*:69). Also, in the sonnet titled "On Seeing a Lock of Milton's Hair," Keats summarizes Milton's achievements in terms of the beauties he creates: "By all that from thy mortal lips did roll/And by the kernel of thy earthly love/Beauty, in things on earth, and things above/I swear" (19–22). And, in the "Ode to Apollo," after depicting the particular beauties that the poets he considers to be great contribute to Apollo's eternal music, he concludes by calling all the beauties created by these bards and Apollo, "eternal music." This eternal music represents the vital beauty which is also the aesthetic ideal.

To consider the beauties created by poets like Milton and Shakespeare, among others, as constituting part of the principle of beauty in all things implies that Keats regards poetic creations as veridical realities. Indeed, he maintains that these beauties exist side by side or in conjunction with the other realities in the world. For him, the current of beauty flows through products of the poetic imagination as well as through all things in the phenomenal world. This conviction of Keats is even more obvious in his discussion of the nature of "Ethereal things" (*Letters*:120) because he attributes the same measure of reality to Shakespeare's passages as he attributes to natural elements like the sun, moon and stars. He contends that poetic beauties — insofar as they are products of the aesthetic imagination — are integral parts of the beauty of the world: "What the imagination siezes as Beauty must be truth — whether it existed before or not" (*Letters*:72) he maintains. Thus, poetic works are true because they are real — making truth, beauty and reality, the same in this context.

This equation of beauties with truths or realities informs Keats's statements on the immortality of aesthetic works and their creators. Evidently, if beautiful works do not really exist after the mortal lives of their creators, then it is impossible to talk of the eternal existence of poets. Since aesthetic works eternally reflect their creators' visions of the aesthetic ideal of the world, it follows that what is of prime importance in the poets' lives — their distinctive perceptions of the world's beauty — lives on for ever. Hence, all great poets can be seen as being in constant communication with later generations.

The undying poetic beauties are, to Keats, the enduring souls of poets that are in communion with posterity. "The living pleasures or beauties of these bards" become "richer far posterity's award" ("Epistle to George Keats," 67–8). Poets of later generations have a double heritage of beauty. Inheriting the creations of the "dead" poets as well as the world from which they originally created, poets of later times are able to appreciate the dual existence of poets of former times. Keats emphasizes this point in "Bards of Passion and of Mirth":

Thus ye live on high, and then  
On the earth you live again;  
And the souls ye left behind you  
Teach us, here, the way to find you  
Where your other souls are joying  
Never slumber'd, never cloying. (23–8)

The true poets have a timeless and dual existence because their works serve as sources of, and guide to, the principle of beauty in all things. The benefits which later generations of poets derive from the immortal works produced by former epochs are identical with those they gain from the beauty in nature and in their personal experiences of existence. Thus, inherited poetic beauties are as real as those personally experienced by poets in their life-time.

For Keats, the task of discovering and depicting the essential beauty in great works and in life itself is not easy. Since it entails the aesthetic use of the human imagination, only poets who are capable of rising above their selfish identity by means of the poetic imagination can intimately experience an external event and perceive its beauty. The reality or validity of all poetic works is based on the truth of the poetic imagination: "What the imagination siezes as Beauty must be truth, whether it existed before or not" (*Letters*: 72). The reality of poetic creations, expressed abstractly in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" as "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," is reinforced in Keats's works by references to particular examples of beauty. All these beauties are, for Keats, raised by art above the uncertainties of time and space; hence, "A thing of beauty ... will never/Pass into nothingness" (*Endymion*, I, 1–3).

The timeless existence of aesthetically fashioned things is guaranteed by their truth, but any individual wishing to partake of this truth must personally or imaginatively experience it. In the "Ode on a Grecian Urn," Keats insists that this truth, which exists only through the medium of beauty or the beauty which exists through the medium of truth, is the aesthetic ideal that all men must embrace if they are to live complete and worthwhile lives: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" — that is all/Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know" (V, 9–10). The truth-beauty of beauty-truth which is Keats's poetic capsule of the ideal of human existence in the world, can be known by only those who are capable of intimately experiencing the beauty in art and life — "for even axioms in philosophy are no axioms until they are proved on the pluses" (*Letters*:152). Through intense experiences, the poetic individual gives free rein to the beauty within him which naturally flows out and unites with the beauty that flows through all things in the world. Coleridge aptly describes this process as "a silent communion of Spirit [or Beauty] with the Spirit [or Beauty] in nature"<sup>4</sup> — a process that simultaneously creates and releases the

<sup>4</sup> Quoted from Coleridge's manuscripts by J. H. Muirhead (1930:195).

beauty in the material world. Thus, "the 'greeting of the Spirit' is itself as much a part of nature or reality as its object" (Bate 1963:517).

The manner in which a receptive reader perceives and participates in the truth-beauty of an immortal work is, for Keats, identical with that in which a poet apprehends and participates in the beauty of his own world. In partaking of the beauty of art, the reader is actually reliving the poet's experience: "We read fine things," Keats states, "but never feel their beauties to the full until we have gone the same steps as the Author" (*Letters*:154, 72-3). Just as the poet's imagination enables him to transcend his selfish nature in order to capture the beauty of his subject, so also does the reader's imagination aid him in his attempt to appreciate the beauty of art.

Keats insists that the reality of the beauty in any experience is usually established through a passionate employment of the poetic imagination. All proper involvements with beauty entail an intimate use of the human imagination: "all our passions ... are in their sublime, creative of essential beauty." Sublime passions, in the Keatsian system, are basically intense feelings that can intimately perceive the beauty which is immortalized in great works. Since the individual's intimate sensations are invariably true to him, Keats contends that the beauty which the individual apprehends in a state of passionate excitement must be true. Intense or sublime passions — insofar as they inform the poetic imagination — are the means to the discovery and subsequent depiction of the world's essential beauty, and they also serve as the means to the authentication of the created beauty.

For Keats, the human passions do not only guarantee beauty's truth, they also ascertain truth's reality by clearly defining the beauty of truth. He writes, "I never can feel certain of any truth but from a clear perception of its Beauty. A year ago, I could not understand in the slightest degree Raphael's cartoons — now I begin to read them a little" (*Letters*:281). His belief that the human passions cannot effectively respond to truth except by perceiving its beauty explains why he approaches all experiences through their beauty. He contends in "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" that the truth of Homer's immortal works became patent to him when he attained a clear perception of the Homeric beauties in Chapman's translation. Symons is thus correct in declaring that "With [Keats], beauty was always a part of feeling, always a thing to quicken his pulses" (Symons 1909: 303).

Inasmuch as the human passions cannot, within Keats's system, directly perceive truth except through the medium of its beauty, and inasmuch as the authenticity of truth depends upon the passions, the certainty of any truth depends principally on its beauty. Moreover, since human passions authenticate all things and experiences by perceiving beauty in them, it is reasonable to conclude that whenever Keats refers to the aesthetic ideal as beauty, he also assumes its truth or reality. And although he resolves beauty and truth into a

single aesthetic ideal, beauty still remains the primary term and focal point of the ideal. Little wonder then that he maintains that "with a great poet the sense of beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all considerations" (*Letters*:77).

## II

Keats's enthronement of beauty as his poetic idol has unfortunately misled many critics into regarding him as an unquestionable aesthete. Arthur Symons, for instance, explicitly declares the poet an aesthete when he remarks that "Keats, when the phrase had not yet been invented, practised the theory of art for art's sake" (Symons 1909:306). Although Symons does not rigidly apply the standards of the nineteenth century Aestheticism in his determination of the value of Keats's writings, Leavis correctly argues that "Keats's aestheticism... does not mean anything as the cutting off of the special valued order from direct vulgar living ... as is implied in the aesthetic antithesis of Art and Life" (Leavis 1936:257). Since Keats's notion of beauty is always informed by the harmonious relationship between art and life — a relationship which enhances the distinctive qualities of art and life — beauty as conceived by Keats is radically different from the beauty in the extreme views of pre-Raphaelites like Rossetti and Johnson.

Leavis does not only succeed in identifying the main weakness in an unqualified hailing of Keats as an aesthete, he also attributes to Keats a form of aestheticism that is even more objectionable than that suggested by Symons. His belief that Keats's distinctive idea of beauty is that of "the delightful in experience to the exclusion of the 'disagreeables'" (Leavis 1936:255) is incongruent with Keats's notion of beauty. What Leavis sees as Keats's version of aestheticism seems no more than a disguised support for the erroneous consideration of Keats as a poet of sheer sensuous luxuries.

Basically, Leavis, like Garrod, believes that Keats's beauty is identical with the "exquisite sense of the luxurious" (Garrod 1939:42). However, while Garrod maintains that Keats's "'exquisite sense of the luxurious' luxuriates to consummate effects in *Isabella* and *The Eve of St. Agnes*" (Garrod 1939:43), Leavis sees all the poems as illustrations of Keats's relish for the purely delightful in experience. The great odes are, for Leavis, the ultimate manifestations of Keats's addiction to hedonistic beauty. He even distorts the poet's treatment of the theme of melancholy to suit his limited definition of Keats's aestheticism, insisting that the "Ode on Melancholy" is "one of the most obviously decadent developments of Beauty-addiction — of the cult of 'exquisite passions' and 'finest senses'" (Leavis 1936:260). Even intense passions (which in Keats's view are the touchstone of the reality of beautiful things) become, for Leavis, the means for the poet's perpetration of his decadent cult of delightful beauty.

The only useful purpose served by Leavis's objection to Symons' rather

unqualified consideration of Keats as an aesthete is to point out that Keats's idea of beauty is not abstract or transcendental. But this usefulness is nullified by his mistaken account of Keats's definition of beauty and the way this beauty operates in the world. He is obviously wrong in suggesting that Keats's idea of beauty precludes the "disagreeables" and solely cultivates the sybaritic. As has been indicated earlier, Keats maintains that beauty is present in both pleasant and unpleasant circumstances of life. The element of beauty celebrated in poems like "On the Sea" and "Hadst Thou Liv'd in Days of Old" is quite different from that celebrated in "On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again" and *The Hyperion* fragments. Thus, while the beauty of natural phenomena in "I Stood Tip-toe" and that in "Hadst Thou Liv'd in Days of Old" illustrate Leavis's sense of the delightful, the tragic beauties of *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion* illustrate a kind of beauty that transcends mere sybaritism. In fact, most of Keats's poems illustrate the interpenetration of the painful and the pleasurable aspects of beauty. The great odes and the *Hyperion* fragments demonstrate the complexity of the notion of beauty in Keats's works. Evidently, Keats's concept of beauty is more subtle and complex than Leavis's statements suggest.

Douglas Bush does recognize the complexity of Keats's concept of beauty. Aware that Keats describes beauty in pleasant and unpleasant experiences of life, he remarks that the central assumption in Keats's works is that "In a world of inexplicable mystery and pain, the experience of beauty is the one sure revelation of reality". He argues, "if beauty is reality, the converse is likewise true, the reality of man's experience of suffering can yield beauty in itself and in art" (Bush 1957: 22). In like manner, Gerard maintains that "There is truth (in a somewhat Platonic sense) in the Elysian vision of the first scene captured in the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' and there is beauty in the vision of ordinary life, suffering and death described in the second scene" (Gerard 1962:22). Similarly, Wigod's identification of the difference between the tragic beauty of the *Hyperion* fragments and the "Epistle to J. H. Reynolds", and "the warm, pulsating beauty" of poems like *Isabella* and *The Eve of St. Agnes* (Wigod 1957:117) is valuable only if these different elements of the Keatsian aesthetic ideal are regarded as inseparable parts of the essential beauty in all things.

Keats's apparent worship of beauty can, however, be broadly regarded as a form of aestheticism, Saito seems to reflect the distinctive complexion of Keatsian aestheticism when he maintains that the poet "engages in art for life's sake" (Saito 1929:42). Saito's declaration will, of course, fully represent Keats's position if it also implies that the poet engages in life for art's sake, for the harmonious interrelation of art and life is of cardinal importance in Keats's aestheticism. Sharp also correctly defines the poet's position — in spite of the broad religious significance that he attributes to the poet's aestheticism — when he states that Keats's notion of beauty is "human and functional" (Sharp 1979:

34). In fact, Keats's aestheticism derives its distinctiveness from making the beauty of art and life serve some practical purposes in the lives of human beings.

Keats believes that, because the loveliness of beautiful things increases eternally, they become "joys for ever" by providing those who partake of their beauty "with a quiet bower ... and a sleep/Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing" (*Endymion*: I 30—34). All beautiful things in art and life are thus life-enhancing, for they are "a cheering light/ Unto our souls, and bound to us so fast,/ That whether there be shine, or gloom o'ercast/They must be with us, or we die" (*Endymion*: I, 30—34). As "friends to man, in the midst of our woe," these beauties "soothe the cares and lift the thoughts of man" ("Sleep and Poetry", 246—7). Thus, as poets create beautiful things and reveal those already in the world, they are actually wreathing

A flowery band to bind us to the earth,  
Spite of despondence, of inhuman dearth  
Of noble natures, of gloomy days,  
Of all the unhealthy and o'er darkened ways  
Made for our searching eyes: yes, in spite of all,  
Some shape of beauty moves away the pall  
From our dark spirits. (*Endymion*, I, 6—13)

For Keats, all created and revealed beauties combine to produce "An endless fountain of immortal drink/Pouring into us from heaven's brink" (23—4) to give us comfort in this "World of Pains and troubles" (*Letters*: 363).

Since Keats insists that the intense experiencing of the pains and pleasures of existence yields the essential beauty of the world to the individual, it is important to reiterate that his belief in the soothing and consoling effects of the poetic ideal does not imply that beauty is a means of escape from the bitter realities of the world. Rather, the Keatsian aesthetic ideal "binds us to the earth" (*Endymion*: I, 7), enabling the poetic individual to partake intimately in both the delightful and the disheartening situations in life as he seeks the harmony of existence. Essentially, Keats's concept of the poetic ideal of beauty weds two distinct but related elements — the sybaritic and the tragic. The sybaritic (which partly parallels what Leavis refers to as the only real indicator of Keats's aestheticism) "soothes the cares of man," while the tragic aspect of beauty (which Leavis considers to be absent from Keats's concept of the ideal) "lifts the thoughts of man" ("Sleep and Poetry", 246—7). Intense human experiences reveal the harmonious relation of these elements of man's life and the world to the passionate individual.

### III

The foregoing discussion has established the complex and all-embracing nature of the Keatsian ideal of beauty which is variously referred to as "streaks of light," "eternal music," "souls of poets," "essential beauty," "the poetical in

all things", and "Beauty is truth, truth beauty."<sup>5</sup> The numerous shades of meaning suggested by these references fall into two main categories — beauty as the theme and beauty as the style of poetry or art. As the theme of all immortal works, Keats conceives of beauty as true knowledge, the source of power, and as a pointer to the comprehensive "moral order" of the world. As the style of poetry or art, beauty is organic form, the source of creative excellence.

Whether as style or theme, the Keatsian ideal is authenticated by sensations. The poetic state of passionate excitement (capable of discovering the aesthetic ideal and free from the limitations of the purely intellectual division between pain and pleasure) is able to embrace the immanent beauty of the world and reveal the harmony and wholeness of human experiences. Hence, intense passions perceive and create beauty by bringing together opposing extremes (Caldwell 1945:170). In *Endymion*, for example, Cynthia, while involved in the pleasures of love, becomes suddenly aware of a feeling of pain which causes her to ask, "is grief contain'd/In the very deeps of pleasure?" (II, 823—4). A typically Keatsian answer to this question can be drawn from the "Ode on Melancholy":

Ay, in the very temple of delight  
Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine,  
Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue  
Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine;  
His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,  
And be among her cloudy trophies hung. (III, 5—10)

The presence of Melancholy's shrine in the temple of delight is only recognized by those who can intimately feel delight. This perception of beauty in which opposing conditions are united is the source of real joy in the Keatsian world view.

The care of man in this world is, for Keats, soothed by the fervent participation in the beauty formed from the coalescence of opposing extremes. In "The Eve of St. Agnes", for instance, Madeline's ability to discern the relationship between her dream and reality, to perceive the qualities of her ideal in the "physical" or real Porphyro, and to accept the interpenetration of the spiritual and the material, enables her to partake of the essential beauty of the world which gives her joy in her love for the human rather than the spiritual Porphyro. Madeline is wise enough to realize that her encounter with the angelic Porphyro in a dream is no more than an encounter with partial beauty.

Like the knight-at-arms in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci", Madeline awakens from a sweet dream and experiences the apparent contrast between the dream and reality. Her initial reaction to the normal world after the dream — alarm at "the painful change" (XXXIV, 3) and felling of "eternal woe" (XXXV, 8) or

<sup>5</sup> See "To George Felton Matvey", "Ode to Apollo", "Bards of Passion and of Mirth", and "Ode on a Grecian Urn".

anguish — is identical with that of the knight-at-arms. Nevertheless, while the sensing of change and feeling of woe aid Madeline in her attempts to establish a harmonious link between her dream and reality, they cause the knight-at-arms to bemoan the lost bliss of the dream and to substitute anguish for joy. By perceiving the unity of the angelic and real Porphyro, Madeline awakens from the illusions of her dream and embraces the beauty which unites the dream and reality. In the intensity of joy, the opposition between dream and reality is eliminated: "Into her dream he melted, as the rose/Blendeth its odour with the violet/Solution sweet" (XXXVI, 5—8).

Unlike Madeline, Lycius in *Lamia* is also an unfortunate victim of the destructiveness of false beauty or joy emanating from a partial perception of the nature of the world's beauty. Lycius's misfortune arises from his inability to distinguish between false beauty or joy on the one hand, and true beauty or joy on the other. The mirage-like nature of the beauty and joy which Lamia offers him is obvious to the reader early in the poem. Lamia is "not one hour old" before she shows signs of having a "sciential brain" which can "unperplex bliss from its neighbour pain,/Define their pettish limits, and estrange/ Their points of contact" (I, 191—4). She puts her unusual powers to work almost immediately and creates a world of absolute bliss in which pain is non-existent. Then she prevails upon Lycius, and makes him to abandon the real world for the Lamian one of airy bliss.

Overcome by Lamia's beauty, Lycius is unable to detect the inherent fallacy in Lamia's argument in which the normal world of Corinth is seen as "empty of immortality and bliss" (I, 278). As a student of Philosophy, he ought to have recognized the airy nature of the Lamian world absolute bliss. Also, if he were able to understand the essential beauty of life, he may have saved himself from the agony and death which attend the destructions of his illusions. "Tangled in Lamia's mesh", he yearns to escape from his mortal nature (I, 295). His recoil from Apollonius after his involvement with Lamia (I, 362—377) represents what to Keats is a desire to run away from the intensely beautiful fate of mankind.

Apollonius's role at the end of the poem has led to the common belief that the Lamian world of the lovers would have been saved from utter destruction if the Philosopher had not mercilessly destroyed it with cold facts. Keats even rails against Apollonius's approach to the airy world of beauty and bliss:

Do not all charms fly  
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?  
Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,  
Conquer all mysteries by the rule and line,  
Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine —  
Unweave the rainbow, as it erewhile made  
The tender-person'd Lamia melt into shade.

(II, 229—30; 234—8)

For the poet, Apollonius represents a kind of truth that is devoid of the complementing aspect of beauty. In fact, Apollonius is unreceptive to the world of love in which Lycius is caught. Being unable to experience intimately the beauty of his philosophical truths, Apollonius cannot penetrate the substratum of truth in the Lamian beauty. Since his approach to his ward's experience is based on the conflict between truth and beauty, he can be regarded as an advocate of the unhealthy fragmentation of human experience — a fragmentation which destroys the sense of wholeness necessary in the perception of beauty.

In spite of Apollonius's villainy, Lycius is himself responsible for both the destruction of his airy world and his subsequent death. His ignorance of the illusory foundation upon which the Lamian world is built causes him to seek its authentication in the real world. By arranging a public marriage, Lycius exhibits his ignorance of the true nature of visionary experiences. Keats reveals Lycius's ignorance and folly when he asks, "senseless Lycius!, Madman!, wherefore flout/The silent-blessing fate, warm cloister'd hours/And show to common eyes these secret bowers?" (II, 157—9). By making his secret dream-world public, Lycius inadvertently invites its destruction. Moreover, by escaping from the world of pain into that of absolute bliss, he renders himself vulnerable to pain. His inability to cope with the pain attendant upon normal human existence reveals how far he has escaped from reality and its everlasting beauty. Consequently, incapable of "bearing naked truths" (*Hyperion*: II, 202), Lycius loses both his life and bliss: "And Lycius's arms were empty of delight/As were his limbs of life, from that same night" (*Lamia*: II, 307—8).

Lycius's fate, for Keats, can befall anyone who is unable to experience the beauty in this world of apparent contradictions. Basically, beauty is the point of contact between "bliss ... and its neighbour pain" (*Lamia*: I, 191—4). Hence, whoever is unable to partake of the world's beauty is prone to self-destruction like Lycius. In the "Ode to a Nightingale," for example, the poet is saved from utter destruction or death by his ability to apprehend the beauty which unites the real world of pain and the nightingale's world of ideal melody. Through intense passionate involvement in beauty, the poet is able to take part in all that both worlds offer without being lost in either of the worlds. As in *Lamia*, the two worlds are apparently in opposition to each other. The nightingale's world is a counterpart of the Lamian one, while Corinth and the real world are the same

... where men sit and hear each other groan;  
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,  
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;  
And leaden-eyed depairs  
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,  
Or new Love pine at them beyond tomorrow. (III, 4—10)

In contrast to these stark realities of existence is the nightingale's world of bliss and unceasing melody.

Although the distinction between the world of bliss and that of pain is fundamentally the same in *Lamia* and in the "Ode to a Nightingale," there is a remarkable difference in the manner in which the protagonists of both poems react to the opposing worlds. While Lycius's total absorption in the Lamian bliss excludes the possibility of the opposite, the poet's delight in the nightingale's song does not prevent him from understanding the painful possibilities of the real world. Consequently, while Lycius and the poet enjoy complete involvement in visionary bliss, only the poet retains an intense feeling of the opposite state, a beauty which enables him to return to the normal world unscathed: "Forlorn! the very word is like a bell/To toll me back from thee to my sole self/Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well" (VIII, 1—3). In the case of Lycius, the fancy cheats so well that there is nothing capable of tolling him back to his "sole self". Absorbed in his dream-world, Lycius loses the necessary self-consciousness which can make his transition to the real world possible.

#### IV

Since in Keats's view beauty provides the point of aesthetic unity between opposites, it follows that beauty is the link between art and life. In a sense, the Lamian world is comparable to art, while the world represented by Apollonius symbolizes the unpleasant truths of life. In fact, the ideal offered by the Lamian existence is a false ideal of beauty, for it is unrelated to the realities of normal existence. It is a form of artistic escapism which cuts the individual loose from life. Lycius is thus unlike the poet who, though receptive to the ideals which the nightingale's song offers in the ode, remains truly conscious of the beauties of the real world. The nightingale's ideal complements that of the real world; it does not replace "the world of circumstances." Art is not viewed as the source of escape from the world; rather, it is seen as capable of furnishing the receptive individual with the beauty which "binds us to the earth/Spite of despondence".

The balance which the aesthetic ideal of beauty maintains between art and life is also aptly depicted in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn". On the urn, some intense aspects of the world and of human experience are poetically represented. In the second stanza, for instance, the trees portrayed are eternally green with leaves, a youth is portrayed singing continually, and a bold lover, for ever poised for a kiss, is shown in relation to his lady who is in an eternal gesture of reciprocating:

Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave  
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;  
Bold lover, never, never, canst thou kiss,

Though winning near the goal — yet, do not grieve;  
 She cannot fade, though thou hadst not thy bliss,  
 For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair! (5—10)

“The tress that can never be bare” are products of an artistic “arrest” of that process of change which is integral to the yearly seasonal cycle. Since in actuality “four seasons fill the measure of the year,” the poem, by presenting the effect of one of the four seasons on the tress, cannot represent more than a fraction of life’s reality. The eternally green trees exist through an imaginative prolongation and intensification of part of the whole truth or beauty of the world. Hazlitt refers to this kind of poetic enhancement of part of reality as “the abstraction of anything from the circumstances that weaken its effect, or lessen our admiration of it [and] it is also the filling up of the outline of truth or beauty” (Hazlitt 1902—6:429). To perceive the essential beauty in these trees, it is not enough to regard the abstracted or enhanced summer-beauty of the trees as the total reality. This kind of beauty must be seen in perspective or in relation to the beauty of the other seasons. The artistic prolongation of one condition, therefore, must not be mistaken for the whole truth of beauty.

The fair youth who “can not leave/His song” is also an artistic intensification of an aspect of human activity. The truth and beauty of one who sings eternally is restricted to the artistic milieu. However, since the youth’s song indirectly points to other possible events in the real world, it is a useful contribution to life. Similarly, the lover’s unchanging poise for a kiss is related to the normal world by its capability for suggesting other truths of life. The lover cannot kiss because his “move” is “frozen” just before the act takes place. This aesthetic arrest of the lover’s action raises it above change and time, both of which are crucial factors in man’s normal existence. While this artistic arrest guarantees the lover constancy, it denies him of the warmth and consummation that are possible in real life. Yet, the warmth of real life cannot be frozen as in art, because change is an integral part of its existence. Since art and life have distinctively different beauties, no one of them can become a complete substitute for the other. The “arrested moment” in art cannot replace the “changing instant” in life. Art and life must complement each other in order to produce the essential beauty that is coterminous with true knowledge in Keats’s world.

A knowledge of this beauty which underlies all experiences is, in Keats’s view, a source of power or sovereignty for the individual. Apollo, for example, is deified in *Hyperion* as a result of his knowledge of the unity of all things in beauty. His intimate experiencing of the aesthetic ideal makes his power immediately obvious to all who see him, for there is “a glow of beauty in his eyes” (II, 237). Apollo himself maintains that “Knowledge enormous makes a God of him” (III, 113). Therefore Balslev is correct in asserting that “the basic idea of *Hyperion* is beauty as the governing principle of the world (Balslev 1962:101).

In a sense, even Oceanus’s mere recognition of Apollo as the new and powerful embodiment of the beauty which rules the world confers a measure of power on him. It is no mere coincidence that Saturn, in his moment of utmost grief turns to Oceanus for consolation:

“O speak your counsel now, for Saturn’s ear  
 Is all a-hunger’d. Thou, Oceanus,  
 Ponderest high and deep; and in thy face  
 I see, astonied, the severe content  
 Which comes of thought and musing: give us help.” (II, 162—6)

Saturn recognizes Oceanus’s feeling of contentment in spite of the woes of the Titans. Oceanus seems to have imbibed the beauty which gives him solace by understanding the course of events that led to their fall.

Though Saturn asks for “some shape of beauty [to move] away the pall/From [his] sad spirits”, his receptiveness to beauty seems to diminish as Oceanus discloses what truth he discovered in his rumination. Oceanus’s preamble to the truth emphasizes the inherent beauty in the apparently hopeless situation of the fallen gods:

“Now comes the pain of truth, to whom ‘tis pain;  
 O folly! for to bear all naked truths,  
 And to envisage circumstances, all calm,  
 That is the top of sovereignty”. (II, 202—5)

Power or sovereignty is the reward for an intimate experiencing of the beauty inherent in the disheartening changes of human life. Oceanus is himself given power over his fellow Titans because of his equanimity in the face of trying conditions. He becomes the guide and governor of his mates because he understands the bitter-sweet nature of their fall and the nature of responsibility that goes with Apollo’s good reign.

Oceanus first reviews the historical process or natural evolution which brought the Titans to power some time ago:

First there was Chaos and parental Darkness, from those ferment at the ripe hour for wonderous workings came light. And light joining with the progenitor, Darkness, “forthwith touch’d/The whole enormous matter into life” (II, 196—7). The Heavens and the Earth were then manifest; mysteriously they united to bring forth the Titans, among whom Saturn was the first born. Then the Titans found themselves ruling new and beautiful realms. (Wigod 1972:112)

Having established the circumstances that brought the Titans to power, Oceanus proceeds to relate them to those that now lead to their fall:

“On our heels a fresh perfection treads,  
 A power more strong in beauty, born of us  
 And fated to excel us, as we pass  
 Into glory that old Darkness; nor are we



Thereby more conquer'd than by us the rule  
 Of shapeless Chaos...  
 ... for 'tis the eternal law  
 That first in beauty should be first in might:  
 Yea, by that law, another race may drive  
 Our conquerors to mourn as we do now". (II, 212-7; 229-31)

Thus, the fall of the Titans is not caused by their weakness alone but by the continuous process of evolution which decrees beauty as the ultimate reason for change of leadership.

For Oceanus, the perception of the undistorted truth about the rise and fall of the Titans entails the necessary beauty which lessens the tragedy of the fall. Since the Titans themselves did come to power through circumstances that were beyond their control, it is only fair that they should be prepared for evolutionary changes that may dethrone them. Moreover, just as they were conscious of the various changes that took place as they came to power, so are they expected to have been able to predict their imminent fall from the changes that they now see in the system of the world. It ought to have been clear to them that the eternal law which made them more beautiful than Chaos and Darkness is also capable of bringing into existence Apollo, who is more beautiful than Saturn, as a signal of a new era. Oceanus correctly argues that the Titans must be content in the knowledge that their successors are worthier than themselves and that they, the Titans, have successfully completed their task in the ever-changing and inevitable evolutionary process.

## V

Apollo's reign is symbolic of the poet's reign in the sense that the sovereignty or power of the poet springs from his ability to apprehend and create the essential beauty of existence. Apollo's intimate feeling of the supremely opposite elements of existence has a direct counterpart in "The Fall of Hyperion". Moneta maintains that the poet is able to gain admission into the temple of Saturn because of his sincere concern about the plight of man. Moneta insists that "None can usurp this height/But those to whom the miseries of the world/Are miseries, and will not let them rest" (I, 146-9). Therefore, the moment the poet realizes that "Every sole man hath days of joy and pain" (I, 172), and that only a proper or an aesthetic response to joy or pain in this world is the key to unlocking the secret treasure-house of the essential beauty of the world, he attains a new life which consists of a mastery of life's contradictions — a life so good that he can communicate it to others through the medium of his art. Any poet who, for Keats, is able to attain power through his knowledge of the aesthetic ideal,

"...has felt  
 What 'tis to die and live again before  
 His fated hour, that [he] has power to do so  
 Is [his] safety; [he] hast dated on [his] doom." (I, 141-5)

The poet's power comes from his intense experiencing of existence which yields the beauty that he communicates to his fellow men. He "rules" over others by giving them the balm that can make their lives pleasant.

The beauty which the poet knows also entails a strong and comprehensive moral sense that is useful in attempts to solve problems in human life. His belief in the practicality of this moral sense informs his offering of "a poetic comfort" to his friend Bailey. Disgusted with the supposed villainy of the Bishop of Lincoln which prevented his friend from procuring a curacy soon after his studies in Oxford, Keats wished "for a recourse somewhat human... of the Beautiful — the poetical in all things — O for a Remedy against such wrongs within the pale of the World!" (*Letters*:64). In Keats's view, if all men were able to partake of the essential beauty of life, the world will be a better place because the poetic ideal subsumes a sense of comprehensive morality; hence, great works "Benefit ... the 'Spirit and pulse' of good by their mere passive existence" (*Letters*:111).

The aesthetic ideal is also, for Keats, the imprint of form and structure in all great works of art. His belief in beauty as the "formal cause" of poetic works is partly discernible in his axioms of poetry. In the first axiom, he maintains that "Poetry should surprise by a fine excess and not by a Singularity — it should strike the reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a Remembrance" (*Letters*:116). The first part of this axiom sets up the "exuberance of things of beauty" (Saito 1929:96) as a necessary condition for good poetry. The exuberance of things of beauty refers here to abundant aesthetic disposition of images and metaphors in poetic creations.

In the second axiom, "fine excess" is firmly related to the framework which provides structural coherence for the ideas in art. Since this philosophical structure of a poem is, for Keats, based on the highest thoughts of man, it is reasonable to assume that Keats views the reader's highest thoughts as intimately true and beautiful. The profound thoughts may then be regarded as the basic knowledge of beauty. And since the great thoughts encountered in the reading of a poem "appear almost as a Remembrance", it follows that the reader and the poet, inasmuch as they have intimate passionate experiences of life, perpetually share some profound thoughts about life — thoughts that are products of their perception of the beauty in all things. The reader and poet share the beauty and truth of existence that are depicted in poetry or art in general. Essentially, the manifold stylistic devices, and highest thoughts of men found in poetry reflect the beauty of the world and of man's life.

The second axiom is really an amplification of the first. In it, Keats main-

tains that "the touches of beauty should never be half way thereby making the reader breathless instead of content: the rise, the progress, the setting of imagery must like the sun come natural to him — shine over him and set soberly... in magnificence, leaving him in the luxury of twilight" (*Letters*:116). Beauty in this axiom is specified as imagery because in Keats's view imagery incorporates elements of style and poetic ideas. Thus, he insists that imagery, that complex of style and ideas, must be skillfully made to elicit a feeling of contentment from the reader. For him, this feeling of contentment results from the reader's response to the essential beauty that signifies the world's harmony; hence, "The excellence of art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate from being in close relationship with beauty and truth" (*Letters*:76).

Keats's belief in the aesthetic ideal of beauty underlies his approach to criticism too. Since he feels that "with a great poet the sense of beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all considerations" (*Letters*:77) it is understandable why he insists that the major task of criticism is the revelation and assessment of the beauty in the works. He states that his "love of beauty in the abstract makes [him] a severe critic of [his] own writings" (*Letters*:242). For instance, he seeks to verify the truth of beauty in *Hyperion* when he asks Reynolds to "put X to the false beauty proceeding from art, and one // to the true voice of feeling." (*Letters*: 419)

In conclusion, it is pertinent to remark once again that the Keatsian aesthetic ideal of beauty embraces virtually everything that the poet reveres in great or immortal works of art. Beauty is for him the focal point of all profound ideas and organic form in art. Since the reality of beauty is guaranteed by the intense feeling of life and its experiences, all great works of art are beauties to Keats. Hence, Keats's life-long aspiration was to add "a mite to the mass of beauty" already in existence as a means of ensuring his own immortality.

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