

A SENSE OF WONDER IN JOHN KEATS'S ODES

Abstract

A work of art may be analyzed from different perspectives – Freudian, Marxist, sociological, feminist, modernist and legalistic points of view. However, in this essay an eclectic approach will be adopted for the proper elucidation of the work. The essay is divided into three parts. The first part examines the essential features or peculiarities of the Romanticism with a review of their criticisms. The second part deals with the major themes espoused by John Keats, and the opinions of his critics. The third part looks at beauty, love and sense of harmony that exists in the dreamland, which is in contrast with the fretting, the hustle and bustle, the disease, the death and decay that is the lot of man's world of reality.

(i) General Introduction to Romantic Poetry

Man, from time immemorial, has always longed to celebrate and express his fears, love, passion, feeling, aspiration, thoughts, and ideas, and has to leave these expressions in permanent forms for future generations. From the Greek to the Roman creative artists, the only experiences that are worthy to be preserved for immemoriality are those of the kings, the queens, the nobles and aristocrats or the founding of a nation. The old English creative artists copycat from their Roman civilizers; for example, in the oldest surviving poem of the English people, the tragic elegiac poem, *Beowulf*, the anonymous poet celebrates its hero, who is from a royal family, thus:

Then Beowulf ruled over the Scylding realm,
 Beloved and famous, for many a year –
 The prince, his father, had passed away –
 Till firm in wisdom and fierce in war,
 The mighty Heolfdene held the reign,
 Ruled, while he lived, the lordly Scyldings
 (Kermode, F. *et al* 1973:20)

The old English poets do not stop at the blind imitation of the Greek and Roman creative artists like Sophocles, Homer, Virgil and a host of others in their subject matters: the celebration of the birth, life and death of the blue blooded people, the poets ape their grand and ornamental language, grand style, mathematical and precise imagery.

Several centuries after *Beowulf*, which is suspected to be written in the eight century, the Renaissance or Neoclassical writers still cling sheepishly to the intellectual strings of the Classicists. John Dryden, John Donne, Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift, despite their greatness in the literary world, do not divorce themselves from the classical tradition. In Chinyere Nwahunanya's view, 'It is therefore no surprise that the neo-classical writer made efforts to create standards of creative and critical excellence, standards which not surprisingly, but unfortunately, were rebuffed by writers of the Romantic period' (2007:379). However, Alexander Pope borrows the grand style and formal and flowery language of the classical epic form to treat a trivial matter like the stealing of a lady's hair by a lord. Even the heroic couplet of the epic poem is borrowed in the mock epic poem, 'The Rape of the Lock', where in Canto I the lyrical persona declares by invoking the Muse: What dire offence amorous causes springs

What mighty contests rise from trivial things,
I sing – This verse to CARYLL, Muse!
is due; This even Belinda may vouch safe to view
Slight is the subject, but not so the praise,
If she inspire, and he approve my lays.
(Kermode, et al 1973:1868)

The next generation of the English poets after Renaissance feel fed up and suffocated with the strict observation of the conventions of classical poetry. And they believe that there must be a change, a radical one for that matter, in the English poetry. And this radical change would not have been possible if not for the effort of one man, William

Wordsworth, who is rightly regarded as the father of the English Romantic poetry. The editor of The Oxford Anthology of English Literature, Vol. II, Frank Kermode, honestly observes: "Wordsworth, with his massive turn to the subjective, changed Western poetry as decisively as Homer had, or as Freud, with his Romantic rationalism, was to change Western psychology". (1973:6-7).

Also in M.H. Abrams opinion, this new view of poetry 'makes poetry not a mirror of men in action, but an embodiment of the poet's feelings. In addition, the process of composition, because of its spontaneity, becomes to Wordsworth and for the other major Romantics the opposite of the artful manipulation of means to unforeseen ends stressed by the neo-classical critics' (1981:115). And Tunji Adebayo says, '... the Romantics were, generally all rebels, against established order in the society and against established conventions of literary creation' (1977:140).

William Wordsworth, together with Samuel T. Coleridge, sets a new standard for English poetry. He marshals out to his contemporaries, including John Keats that the language of poetry ought not to be formal, pretentious and highfalutin. He states that the language of the ordinary man, not the flowery language spoken in royal courts, is adequate. With this message, it becomes crystal clear that the Romanticists are set to do away with the jaw-breaking words of the Classicists and Neoclassicists. Therefore, the simple, nursery-rhymed, symbolic and imagistic language in William Blake's works is also a good medium for writing poems. In 'The Lamb', the naïve lyrical persona asks these innocent, rhetorical questions to the lamb about its maker and provider:

Little lamb who made thee
Dost thou know who made thee
Gave thee life & bid thee feed.
By the stream & O'er the mead;
Gave the clothing of delight,
Softest clothing wooly bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice

Little lamb who made thee
Dost thou know who made thee
(Kermode, F. *et al* 1973:19).

Wordsworth also persuades his contemporaries that they ought to discard the long-held notion that only people of noble birth are capable of being subjects of their poems. He believes that common people, common-placed things and natural objects are fit and proper subjects of poetry. And being a man who lives by examples rather precepts, he pays tribute to the River Wye, which he frequents in his younger days. He remembers the different forms and colours of natural objects around the river – the mountain, the vegetation, the cataract and the pastoral farms. He remembers with nostalgia the joy and the freedom he enjoys as he plays along the bank of the river and he uses a simile to compare himself with a young, healthy, wild animal, as he recalls “when like a row I bounded O’er the mountains by the sides/Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,” He laments that even though his perception and reaction to that particular natural scenery is dampened and subdued in his adulthood; yet, it still exerts a soothing effect on his frayed nerves in the industrialized and commercialized cities. For he confesses regretfully:

In darkness and amid the many shapes
Of joyless daylight, when the fretful stir,
Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,
Have hung upon the beatings of my heart –
How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,
O sylvan Wye! Thou wanderer through the wood,
How often has my spirit turned to thee
(Kermode, 1973:148).

Besides, he uses the ordinary man, Michael, who is a shepherd, as the subject of his poem, ‘Michael’. In this poem with its pastoral setting, he vividly describes the shepherd’s physique, his strength of character, his mental attitude and his dedication to his profession. He eulogizes the ordinary man in this manner:

Upon the forest-side in Grasmere Vale
There dwelt a Shepherd, Michael was his name;
An old man, stout of heart, and strong of limb.
His bodily frame had been from youth to age
Of an unusual strength: his mind was keen,
Intense, and frugal, apt for all affairs,
And in the shepherd’s calling he was prompt
And watchful more than ordinary men
(Kermode, 1973:158).

He also describes the daily routine of the residents of the countryside, which is not idyllic but backbreaking for Michael who claims, “Our lot is a hard lot”. He describes beautifully and emotionally the diligence and faithfulness of natural objects: the sun and Michael’s old dog that stays by his master throughout his moment of travail. The loyalty and constancy of the sun and the brute are in contradistinction from the fickle-mindedness and shallowness of human beings. Wordsworth not only narrates that Michael’s only son and heir shamelessly and with impunity breaches the covenant with his father, but he also warns of the evil and corruptive influence of the city on unguided and unguarded youth:

Meantime Luke began
To slacken in his duty; and, at length,
He in the dissolute city gave himself
To evil courses: ignominy and shame
Fell on him, so that he was driven at last
To seek a hiding-place beyond the seas (1973:167).

Among the poets he persuades to follow his immeasurable poetic footsteps is his friend and ardent admirer, T.S. Coleridge. Coleridge, unlike his friend who is a pantheist, is not interested in nature-worship. He concentrates his poetic energies on another aspect of Romanticism, the imagination of the supernatural world. He is regarded as the master of the supernatural, mysterious and horrifying lyrics that thrill his readers

with the German, Gothic-influenced poems: 'Christabel', 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner' and 'Kubla Khan'.

In the titillating, horror-filled, blood-cuddling and imaginative poem, 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', the old, bright-eyed mariner narrates the hopelessness of the crew's position as a punishment for his unmotivated killing of the bird of good omen, the albatross. He reminisces sadly over the unrealistic world where all natural objects have gone awry:

All in a hot and copper sky,
The bloody Sun, at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand,
No bigger than the Moon
Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean (Kermode, 1973:241-242).

Coleridge continues with the narration of his fearful and blood-chilling lyric in 'Kubla-Khan'. Here he describes his vision of an awesome land when he is under the effect of a pain-killing drug, anodyne. He states that he sees the King of Xanadu as he commands his subjects to build a never-seen and never-heard of palace in the wonderland.

Five miles meandering with mazy motion
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran
Then reached the river measureless to man,
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean:
And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
Ancestral voices prophesying war!
(Kermode, 1973:256)

Other poets that heed the poetic call for reform of William Wordsworth are Lord Byron, P.B. Shelley and John Keats. Lord Gordon Byron, for example, borrows the epic tradition of roll call to treat a trivial issue – the sexual escapade of a teenager. He employs all the features of

social satire like digression, doggerel, the mood and tone that swing from serious to comic and episodic narrative to dissect the hypocrisy, the

social mask and the pretensions of his society. Though his critics believe that Byron's *Don Juan*'s hero, Don Juan, is a rake and the work has been described as a 'mind that preys on itself'. However, Byron believes that a man should be natural and be what he is and not pretend to be what he is not. Don Juan is a sixteen-year old boy whose mother pretends to be wise and knowledgeable. He is sent to the best schools and he participates in what his mother presumes to be best activities, but at the end of the day, his actions do not portray those things the society feels he has acquired to make him live above board. Don Juan's mother is part of the sham in society for she exhibits her piety, but it is rumoured that Donna Julia's husband is her man-friend and she ironically uses her son to break the latter's marriage. Byron humorously parodies Donna Inez thus:

His mother was a learned lady, famed
For every branch of every science known –
In every Christian language ever named,
With virtues unequalled by her wit alone;
She made the cleverest people quite ashamed,
And even the good with inward envy groan,
Finding themselves so very much exceeded
In their own way by all the things that she did (1973:321).

The Romantics agree that the mathematical and mechanical imagery of the Neo-classical poets must be dumped as exemplified in John Donne's description of two lovers:

If they be two, they are two so
As still twin compasses are two,
Thy soul the fixed foot makes no show
To move, but dot, if th' other do (1973:1039).

The Romantic nature poets dissociate themselves from the precise, far-fetched, crisp and emotionless imagery of the metaphysical poets. Shelley, for instance, in 'Ode to the West Wind', uses the wind,

which he calls a "Destroyer and preserver" as a symbol of destruction and regeneration. Also the wind has an image of force and motion. This wind, that is his poetry, he hopes ought to be an instrument of change, of revolution in human affairs. For he appeals to his spirit to:

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth
And by the incantation of this verse,
Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Be through my hips to unawakened earth.
The trumpet of a prophecy! O, Wind,
If winter comes, can Spring be far behind (1973:449).

Also John Keats, that master of sensuous imagery that appeals to his reader's sense of perception, is not left out in the cold in the use of imagery from nature. In his *Ode to Autumn*, he gives the season an image of a man or lord who is contented and proud of his harvest. In stanza two of the poem, he personifies it with this imagery:

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
Or on a half-reaped furrow sound asleep,....(1973:556)

Furthermore, the Romanticists' poems appeal to the emotion instead of reason. The poet puts his personal feeling and experiences into rhyme. His imagination, the Romanticists believe, is superior to his reason. To Blake, the imagination is the Real Man and this creative power in man is autonomous. And Rev. Fr. (Prof.) Akwanya, discussing 'The Poetics of the Word' in his *Verbal Structures*, asserts:

In any event, the Renaissance period regarded the greatest poets of the ancient world as extraordinary individuals with superhuman powers. Homer was blind, and clairvoyant, and Virgil was believed to be a magician.

'Wings to fly' and 'vans to beat the air' are in the first instance metaphorical expressions for poetry and failing poetic powers respectively. In the literary tradition, poetry is the imagination itself in flight; as is suggested in Keats's 'viewless wings of Poesy' ('Ode to a Nightingale', stanza iv) poetry is equally the means of that flight (1997:78).

However, despite the giant stride of the Romanticists in their poetic reform, they have been subjected to criticism – some mild, others acidic. Kermode discussing Ruskin's contribution to Romantic criticism observes: "Ruskin, who consolidated so much of Romantic criticism, calculated the price of this estranging ecstasy as what he called "the pathetic fallacy", the imputation of consciousness to an objective world secretly known to be lifeless. Though himself an inheritor from Wordsworth and Coleridge, Ruskin expressed profound uneasiness to this characteristic mode of Romantic vision" (1973:5).

On the other hand, R. Grillouin as quoted by Arthur O. Lovejoy in his 'On the Discrimination of Romanticisms' in *English Romantic Poets*, acidly declares that Romanticism is the imperialist mood, whether an individual or nations – a too confident assertion of the will-to-power, which arises from the mystic feeling that one's activities have the advantages of a celestial alliance (1960:5). And Neilson quoted by Lovejoy in the same critical essay believes that the function of the human mind, which is to be regarded as peculiarly 'romantic' is for some the 'heart as opposed to the head'; for others, 'the Imagination, as contrasted with Reason and the Sense of Fact. And to the French critic, M. Seilliere, the Romantic mind tends to be affected with an inferiority-complex. And G. Chatterton-Hill in *Contemporary Review* (1942:720) makes this ominous pronouncement on Romanticism as spelling anarchy on every domain. It is a systematic hostility to everyone invested with any particle of social authority – husband or *pater-familias*, policemen or magistrate, priest or cabinet minister (M.H. Abrams (ed), 1960:5).

William K. Wimsatt, Jr. in *Modern Criticism* observes that in Mrs. Langer's literary criticism of one of the poetic works of the father of English Romanticism: "Her observation on Wordsworth's *Intimations*

Ode suggests some of the embarrassment to which she is exposed by a poem of greater complexity. This philosophical poem, she points out properly enough, is not really a very formidable piece of philosophizing. The poet could not have elaborated and defended his position. He evidently did not really believe in the doctrine of Platonic anamnesis to which the poem seems to commit him. The logical structure of the thought is really very loose" (1970:706).

(ii) John Keats' Odes

John Keats, who during his lifetime and immediately after his death, was ignored by his contemporaries and critics at present enjoys an eminent position with other Romantic poets. He died very young at the age of twenty-six years, but in that short life he had produced great works like *Hyperion*, *The Fall of Hyperion* and the great odes: 'To Autumn', 'Ode to a Nightingale' and 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'. Today in literary criticism, he is compared with such renowned literary artist like William Shakespeare and this is because it is assumed that no other creative artist has treated dispassionately the theme of mortality like Shakespeare and Keats. He is a Romantic poet who takes a tragic view of natural existence because he believes that there is neither permanent pain nor permanent joy in human existence. The two abstract qualities - joy and pain - alternate in human affairs as he himself admits that he cannot divorce either of the two if he is to write good poetry. And this is what Tanure Ojaide calls the 'totality of vision that the poet seeks' (2008:viii).

He explores the theme of the human desire or quest in his works. He believes that man longs for more love and beauty than nature can bestow on him. Man's desire for these two states can only be fulfilled in his imagination, which is the dreamland or the world of unreality; and the opposite of this utopian world is the world of reality, which is hellish because of the unrealisation of his desires. Man's hellish world of reality is one that is filled with sadness, pain, death and decay. His world of fantasy 'appeals most to the unconscious' (Yakubu, 2008:177), which

Clyde Kluckhohn says answers the puzzle of how and why of human life (quoted in Ekemezie, 2008:153).

He also uses several sensual imagery and other figurative language to bring to the forecourt of his reader's mind man's quest for aesthetics and fulfillment in the wonderland and the actual unfulfilled dreams that leave him tormented, torn apart and sorrowful at the realization that he cannot get what he yearns for.

Moreover, he believes that the disorder and anarchy in nature can be harnessed and brought into intellectual coherence. In his effort to do that, he has recourse to mythology. The effect of this on the reader is that he is transported to a world of fantasy and partakes of an unconscious pleasure with the author, and with his narcissistic self (Lapsley & Westlake, 1993). Basil Willey also puts it in 'On Wordsworth and the Locke Tradition' in M. H. Abrams' *English Romantic Poets*: "The new poet must therefore either make poetry out of the direct dealings of his mind and heart with the visible universe or he must fabricate genuine new mythology of his own (not necessarily rejecting all old material in so doing). Keats and Shelley often follow the second of these methods; Wordsworth typically follows the first" (1973:85).

Critics of Romantic poetry have pointed out that there is inner turmoil or conflict in John Keats, which leaves its imprint on his poems, particularly in his 'Ode to a Nightingale', 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' and 'Ode on Melancholy'. In the last ode, for instance, there is no clear distinction between pleasure and pain as words that conjure up the images are juxtaposed as in the last stanza:

She dwells with Beauty – Beauty that must die;
And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
Bidding adieu; and aching pleasure nigh,
Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips:
Ay, in the very temple of Delight
Veiled Melancholy has her sovereign shrine
(Kermode, 1973:543).

These unresolved conflicts or tensions between the utopian and actual worlds have attracted several comments from literary critics. Douglas Bush is quoted by Richard H. Fogle as maintaining that "at first sight Keats's theme in the Ode to a Nightingale and the Ode on a Grecian Urn, is the belief that whereas the momentary experience of beauty is fleeting, the ideal embodiment of that moment in art, in song, or in marble, is an imperishable source of joy. If that were all, these odes should be hymns of triumph, and they are not. It is the very acme of melancholy that the joy he celebrates is joy in beauty that must die" (1960:380).

Richard Fogle himself has a contrary view from Douglas Bush. In 'A Note on Ode to a Nightingale', he is of the opinion that "the Odes do not express the very acme of melancholy any more than they express the very acme of joy. They express an exquisite awareness of the existence of joy and melancholy, pleasure and pain, and art and life. They express a feeling that these are identical, and they express acceptance of this inseparability of the elements of human experience" (1960:380).

(iii)

In this essay, three of John Keats's poems – 'Ode to Autumn', 'Ode to Nightingale' and 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' will be used to illustrate this apparent conflict between the world of unreality and that of reality, the opposition between pleasure and pain and the tension between mortality and immortality, which illustrate the sense of wonder in the poet's odes. In his 'To Autumn' there is not much conflict but he explores extensively like Shakespeare the theme of mortality. He uses one of the seasons in Europe, the autumn, which *Reader's Digest Universal Dictionary* defines as a "time or period of maturity verging on decline" (1990:116). In this particular poem, he shows his wizardry in the use of different sense-impressions to concretize objects in the reader's mind. In the very first line of the first stanza, he uses apostrophe to address 'autumn' and he also uses personification for the season by addressing it as a "close bosom-friend of the maturing sun", which "conspires with him how to load and to bless". He goes on to show that autumn, indeed, is a season of fruitfulness, and bounteous

harvests and mentions some of the beneficiaries of this season: "To bend with apples the mossed cottage-trees, And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core; To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells With a sweet-kernel; to set budding more, And still more, later flowers for the bees,..." (Kermode, 1973:556)

The personification of the season of bountiful harvest continues as he presents the reader with mental pictures that show autumn as a very wealthy and confident man that surveys with satisfaction his plenteous harvest. The poet paints the season of abundance as a gleaner who lays his laden head across a brook and watches with patient look hour after hour the last oozing.

In the third stanza, the joyful mood and tone of the preceding two stanzas change to a mournful and sad one as the poet sadly reflects that autumn is not only a time of fruitfulness and plentiful harvest but also the season that heralds the twilight of both plants and animals. Such words as 'mellow fruitfulness', 'maturing sun', 'ripeness', and 'clammy cells' that suggest fruitfulness and bountifulness fade away as they are replaced with such words as 'soft-dying day', 'rosy hue', 'sallows', 'wailful choir', 'sinking', 'barred clouds', and 'treble soft' that conjure the mental pictures of sickness, death and decay. The poet makes it clear that 'autumn' is not only a symbol of fruitfulness, but it also represents the cycle in man's life. He mentions the living things – animals and plants that react negatively because of the approaching winter, a season that the autumn heralds. He says ruefully that:

Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
Among the river shallows, borne aloft'
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft
The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies
(Kermode, 1973:557).

However, in the second poem, 'Ode to a Nightingale', there is conflict as the poet presents the human predicament – the world of

wonder or unreality that man quests for in his imagination and the world of reality, which he lives in. The wonderland in his imagination is a place of happiness, pleasure, love, beauty, harmony and fragrance which contrasts with the world of actuality where he lives, which is a world of sorrow, despair, pain, suffering, disease, death and decay.

It is doubtless that the nightingale represents or symbolizes this world of unreality. He also makes a Biblical allusion to Ruth, a name that conjures up in every Christian notion of love, dedication, faithfulness, selfless service and strength. The world of the nightingale, he longingly refers to as an 'immortal bird not born for death'. He contrasts the bird's world of immortality with men's mortal one and he says from the very first line of the first stanza that his 'heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains/My sense' as if he has taken poison or narcotic drugs. He wishes for an 'easeful Death' to join the happy, free and utopian world of the nightingale or to join it under the influence of strong, intoxicating or alcoholic drinks and to fly and fade away with the bird. The poet realistically thinks:

Fade far away, dissolve and quite forget
 What thou among the leaves have never known,
 The weariness, the fever, and the fret
 Here where men sit and hear each other groan;
 Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey hairs,
 Where youth grows pale and specter-thin and dies;
 Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
 And leaden-eyed despairs,
 Where beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
 Or new Love pine at them beyond tomorrow (1973:539).

However, the poet remembers that if he dies, he loses his consciousness, and; therefore, he can no longer enjoy the dreamland which the bird offers. And he also rejects travelling to the wonderland "charioted by Bacchus and his pards". He says that he can fly to the wonderful, free imaginative and utopian world of the nightingale "on the viewless wings of Poesy."

He lives up to his reputation as a poet that uses different sense impressions to represent objects. For examples, the 'soft incense' suggests tactile, visual and olfactory images while 'embalmed darkness' and 'charmed magic casements' conjure up synaesthetic images in the reader. Also he uses such words as 'drowsy numbness', 'dull opiate', 'melodious plot', 'lustrous eye', 'Beauty', 'Queen-Moon', 'Fade', 'dissolve', 'fairy lands' to suggest the beautiful, stress-free, happy fairyland of the nightingale. He contrasts this world with the world of reality which he uses such words as 'weariness, fever and fret', 'green', 'palsy', 'leaden-eyed despairs', 'last-grey hairs', 'pale', 'spectre-thin and dies' are words that create the mental pictures of sickness, tiredness, aches, diseases, decay and death.

Also he makes an effective use of the onomatopoeic words "forlorn" and "toll", and the latter assonated with "sole". These three words are superbly used to bring him back from the nightingale's world back to the world of reality. He also refers to the mortality of man like in his other odes.

One may note that this poem that is largely exclamatory and does not state much is irrational and may be compared with Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind' in which the radical poet presents a picture of the wind that is real. He presents it as a 'destroyer and a preserver', and he uses the wind to symbolize not just the cycle of season but also his poetry that he wishes to revolutionize the world. He says:

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is
 What if my leaves are falling like its own!
 The tumult of thy mighty harmonies
 Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,
 Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, spirit fierce,
 My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!
 (Kernode 1973:449)

Besides, the young poet persists in his portrayal of the inner tension between a beautiful art object, which represents the world of unreality and the human world, which is that of reality. He presents the theme of immortality and agelessness of an art object. In the poem, the

lyrical persona admires a beautiful vase where beautiful paintings have been drawn and sculptured. The drawing on the vase thrills him that in the first two lines of the first stanza he uses an apostrophe like in 'To Autumn' to address it. This shows the high level of his excitement. He uses the metaphor, 'unravished bride' and 'foster-child' to show the purity, inviolability and the endearing nature of the sculptured work. He also personifies it as a 'sylvan historian' to show how natural and peaceful it is. He wonders whether the story it tells is not sweeter than men's rhyme and whether its tale is about 'deities or mortals, or of both'. He makes reference or allusion to 'Arcady', which is an idyllic Greek countryside. And in stanza two he again refers to the pastoral setting of the artwork as 'happy, happy boughs' with a lifeless 'Cold Pastoral' in the background.

Keats's imagination or mind flies to the figures etched on the sculptured work and he mentions the beautiful maiden, and the young, fair lover who in vain wants to kiss her; a priest that is leading a heifer that is a sacrificial animal, and the unwearied musician who eternally plays his pipe. And he gives us an epigrammatic statement or a paradox that 'Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard/Arc sweeter,...' This paradoxical statement may mean that a thing of beauty exists more in the imagination than in reality. And that may be the purport of the statement 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty'.

Besides, he presents us with irony in the fourth stanza where he states that despite the lively activities he sees on the urn, at the background, the villages are deserted and nobody can ever offer any explanation for their emptiness. Keats' tone changes from blissful to a sad one as he laments:

What little town by river or seashore,
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
Is emptied of this folk, this pious mourn?
And, little town, thy streets for evermore,
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

He makes use of rhetorical questions here like in William Blake's 'The Tyger' to show his sense of awe or astonishment at the desolation of the pastoral setting of the urn. Keats realizes that even though the art object is beautiful, priceless, ageless and timeless; it lacks human warmth and, therefore, is lifeless. At this stage, he calls it a 'silent form', a 'cold pastoral' that will eternally remain and continue to teach generations of men its eternal wisdom as man's friend.

Conclusion

The three Odes have shown that John Keats is a poet who believes in the love, harmony and beauty of natural objects, but these virtues can only be admired and enjoyed in the imaginative world that is unreal. However, man's world of reality is filled up with *thorns* and *brambles* – a world of weariness, sadness, sorrow, despair, disease, death and decay. The only means that man can escape from his world of reality and transcend into the world of unreality or wonderland is through natural objects, poetry and artistic works. And one needs to be conscious in order to appreciate that world of fantasy, which Keats's odes explore with a sense of wonder.

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