

A Comparative Analysis on the Odes of P.B.Shelley & John Keats



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Abstract

First & foremost I wish to state that this research paper is the part of my thesis. P.B.Shelley is famous for his association with Keats and Byron. He loved 'love' more than he loved a woman. I have often thought about the guiding forces of the poets. What makes them compose; is it an inner urge to say something; is it to revolt against some order or is it something beyond. In my research work I have tried to analyze the works and the biographies of both great romantic poets, P.B.Shelley and John Keats, in order to understand their creative impulses.

Many of Shelley's odes include a climactic moment, an instant when the poet's feelings overwhelm him. This is to make above board about what do we learn about Shelley's ideal vision of the human condition as based on his political odes? If the West Wind was Shelley's first convincing attempt to articulate an aesthetic philosophy through metaphors of nature, The Skylarks was his greatest natural metaphor for pure poetic expression. The Skylark issues from a state of purified existence, a Wordsworthian opinion of complete unity with heaven through nature. Its song is motivated by the joy of that uncomplicated purity of being, and is unmixed with any hint of melancholy or of the bittersweet as it is composed by him in "Ode to the Skylark".

The Odes of Keats belong to that group of works in which the English language finds an ultimate embodiment. My view of the Odes has been shaped by several schools of criticism before saying to what I know. I want to say in what spirit I add to this accumulation of learning. The completion of one ode is the stimulus for the next. Most of the Keatsian odes including "Ode to a Nightingale" are written in ten-line stanzas. However, unlike most of the other poems, it is metrically variable- though not so much as "Ode to Psyche". The first seven and last two lines are written in iambic pentameter; the eight line of each stanza is written in trimeter, with only three accented syllables instead of five. "Nightingale" also differs from the other odes in that its rhyme scheme is the same in every stanza. Each stanza in "Nightingale" is rhymed ABABCDECDE. Keats's most basic scheme is seen throughout the odes.

Keywords: Foremost, Romantic, Aesthetic, Melancholy, Embodiment, Accumulation & Stimulus Etc.

Introduction

In Introduction I would like to state that both poets belong to the same generation that is the younger generation of Romantic Revival. But even then they are different on various aspects. The age of Keats is called "*the romantic age*" in literature. Keats himself is one of the greatest romantic poets of England. Shelley is famous for his association with Keats and Byron. He loved 'love' more than he loved a woman. Shelley is famous for Ode to the West Wind and To a Skylark etc. Although it seems very strange that Shelley, the author of 'Adonais' did not care much for any of Keats's poetry except 'Hyperion' and he seems to have thought that Keats had great genius, but possessed wrong method of system and mannerism. But both romantic poets were influenced by one another.

Aim of the Study

To enhance the scholars' awareness about the odes of Shelley and Keats through which I would like to state that both poets of younger generation were melancholic. Their desires did not become true and their endeavor to make an ideal world remained in their dreams. So both poets were very much frustrated although they thought and wrote in the different way.

About Odes

Before discussing something about the odes of Keats & Shelley, I think that it is necessary to discuss what the word 'ode' is. This is simply the Greek word for 'song'. It was used by the Greeks for any kind of lyric verse, i.e. for any song sung with the lyre.

An English ode defined as, "a lyric poem of elaborate metrical structure, solemn in tone, and usually taking the form of an address"¹, very often to some abstraction or quality.

According to Edmund Gosse, "The ode is a strain of enthusiastic exalted lyric verse directed to a fixed purpose, and dealing progressively with one dignified theme"².

From the various definitions, the essentials of an English Ode may be summed up as the following:

1. It is in the form of an address, often some abstraction. It is not written about but written to.
2. It has lyric enthusiasm and emotional intensity. It is a spontaneous over-flow of the poet's emotions.
3. Its theme is dignified and exalted. It has 'high seriousness'.
4. Its metrical pattern may be regular or irregular, but it is always elaborate and often complex and intricate.
5. Its style is equally elevated; it is also sufficiently long to allow for the full development of its dignified theme.
6. The development of thought is logical and clear.

It can be said that both sonnets and odes are sub-categories of a lyric. Here I would like to state that the ode is as a sub-genre of poetry just as we have studied sonnets, elegy, dramatic monologue, elegy etc. Ode is a form that has been widely practiced from the time of Spenser to the Victorian Age. But the most productive age, as far as composition of odes is concerned, is the Romantic age.

Comparative Analysis

Shelley expresses love as one of the godlike phenomena in human life. Beauty is the intellectual beauty to him. We find very clear idea of Shelley's love and beauty through *Hymn to the Intellectual Beauty*. The poem's process is doubly figurative or associative. In that, once the poet abstracts the metaphor of the Spirit from the particulars of natural beauty, he then explains the workings of this Spirit by comparing it back to the very particulars of natural beauty from which it was abstracted in the first place. Keats expands the range of his sensuousness from pictures of physical love to the pictures of natural beauties. In "Ode to a Nightingale" the poet looks for eternal beauty. The beauty of the Nightingale's song is charming. It delights all people in all ages and everywhere. The Urn itself is a symbol of everlasting beauty. The painter may die but the beauty of the painting is everlasting. The poet may die but poetry is undying.

Although Shelley was believed that he will be a great poet due to his revolutionary thinking about the society and nature but Keats like Goswami Tulsidas who wrote Ram Charit Manas, wrote for his

own satisfaction i.e. to satisfy his innermost feelings. He painted the picture for his own mirth and merriment whenever he became overwhelmed. I find Tulsidas as sensuous as Keats for a while on certain aspects because they composed their poetry "Swantaha Sukhay" i.e. for the satisfaction of their own conscience. To suffice this I think that the following lines from 'Ram Charit Manas' may be quoted:

*"Nana purannigamagamsammatamyad
Ramayanenigaditamkwachidanyatoapi,
Swantahasukhayatulsiraghunathgatha
Bhashanibandhmatimanjulmatnoti."*³

Keats's painting of nature's picture became universal. The voice of his conscience became of nature and with the passing of the time it became the voice of the people. Keats has found a very tremendous popularity increasingly. On certain aspect, I would like to similarise Shelley with an Indian writer and politician (first Prime Minister) Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru because of their aristocracy. Both studied and tried to feel the hard realities of life. Pt. Nehru wrote 'The Discovery of India' in which he expressed his care, love and affection towards not only the higher people but also the poor and very ordinary people.

Robert Frost, a great critic and poet of English literature, has written: "Woods are lovely, dark and deep, and have promise to keep, have miles to go before I sleep."⁴

These Robert Frost's poetic lines were found at the table of Pt. Nehru when he died on May 27, 1964. These lines show Nehru's deep affection for the nation and society. He expressed his desire to reform at many places in his book 'The Discovery of India' with full devotion. It was his wish that his ashes should be thrown in the Ganga and in the fields where the farmers would be toiling hard. Thus I, hereby, would like to state that Shelley may be similarised with Pt. Nehru on certain aspects because Shelley also thought to reform the whole society. Shelley wanted to reform the whole society and the whole world. He loved mankind and wanted that it should get rid of priests, kings and religion that would turn this garden of love into a graveyard. He wanted liberty and equality for every individual.

It seems that Shelley was a great lover of non-violence. There will not be many people who know that Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the man of the millennium was inspired by P. B. Shelley's non-violence. Who would have imagined, not even Shelley himself, that someone in a far off land would use his political philosophy of non-violence in an active politics. After reading the following lines I think so and expect that everyone will believe that Shelley liked non-violence:

*Henry David Thoreau's civil disobedience and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's passive resistance were influenced and inspired by Shelley's nonviolence in protest and political action. It is known that Gandhi would often quote Shelley's Masque of Anarchy, which has been called "perhaps the first modern statement of the principle of nonviolent resistance."*⁵

Although Shelley preferred the friendship of books and his own thoughts to society, as I see in 'Ode to Night' but people found him as friendly and social. Shelley's ambitious approach to the weather is different from Keats because Keats enjoys the season for what it holds and asks nothing from it. Thus Keats doesn't seem to be ambitious.

The Visual imagery of Keats is for the most part synthetic, while Shelley's is analytical. Keats's imagery for the most part is static, as in 'Ode to Autumn' whereas Shelley's imagery is dynamic, as in 'Ode to the West Wind'. Keats imagery is mostly concrete whereas Shelley's is abstract. Keats was a great master of establishing relationships between the different modes of sensation, finding analogies between colour and music, music and odour, odour and colour. I think the following example will suffice this:

.....the blushing Hippocrene
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stained mouth.⁶

From the point of view of manner or matter, the great odes touch perfection. They are things of beauty and so, as Keats puts it, "joy forever." They bring us in to intimate contact with the mind of Keats. While doing an assessment of the odes Prof. Long says: "*The odes are like an invitation to a feast; one who reads them will hardly be satisfied until he knows of more such delightful poetry.*"⁷ In second generation Romantic Poets idealism is very common feature. Romantic idealism has favored the phenomenological outlook on life. Here I would like to try to design some ideological differences between P.B. Shelley and John Keats with the help of the following chart:

Subject	Handling by P.B. Shelley	Handling by John Keats
The Nature	Dynamic Object	Soft object
Represent nature	Power, force, reformation	Beauty, joy, truth
Philosophy	Social reformation	To uphold beauty and truth through the poetry
As a Poet	Philosopher, reformer	An Artist
Frequently used Figure of speech	Metaphor	Personification
Imagination	Natural metaphor for pure poetic expression	The mortality of human life
Lover of	Humanity	the beauty of nature
Style	Subjective	Objective to some extent
Sensuousness	Organic sensibility	Sensuous
Appeal	Intellectual	Sensuous

Conclusion

It seems that Shelley's natural imagery is dynamic. He likes the changing aspects of nature i.e. floating clouds and blowing of winds etc. whereas Keats's natural imagery seems to be soft. He enjoys her seeming repose and calm i.e. he loves the sleeping woods and Grecian urns etc. Shelley represents nature as Power, force, reformation whereas Keats like an artist represents nature as an object of Beauty, joy and Truth.

Their philosophical approach also seems to be different. Shelley's philosophy is to do the work of social reformation whereas Keats' is to uphold beauty and truth through the poetry. Keats thinks if the people know about the beauty of nature only then they will fall in love with that. In this way this nature will be loved by them. He wishes to make the people fall in love with nature. It appears that on certain aspects Shelley's purpose of writing the poetry is name and fame and to do something for social reformation whereas Keats aims at satisfying his conscience i.e. swantahsukhay and art for art sake. Shelley writes like Philosopher and social reformer whereas Keats is an excellent artist.

Keats and Shelley express different emotions about the autumn season. Shelley looks at autumn as being wild and fierce while Keats has a more gentle view of the season. Shelley perceives autumn as an annual death, calling it "*Thou dirge of the dying yea.*"⁶ He uses words such as "corpse" and "sepulchre" in the poem. He also uses words such as

"hectic" and "tameless", and looks upon the autumn horizon as being "*the locks of the approaching storm.*"⁸ A great difference in the odes is the intentions of the poets themselves. Shelley, in his thirst for being reputed, wishes to attain power as the wind has. He asks of the wind, "*Be thou, Spirit fierce, / My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!*"⁹ Shelley's more ambitious approach to the weather differs from Keats. Keats thoroughly enjoys the "*stubble-plains with rosy hue,*"¹⁰ and listening as "*the red-breast whistles from a garden croft.*"¹¹ John Keats may be the most sensuous and aesthetically satisfying poet but P. B. Shelley synthesizes aesthetic sensibility with his deep concern for the humanity. Shelley is concerned about the whole mankind and his concern can be traced in his poetry, though the concern never gets overt. Keats is passionate lover of beauty in all forms of nature, but Shelley loves the mankind and uses nature only as a medium to express his ideology. Keats may have lot of fire but Shelley has a lot of light to emit.

Thus I personally feel and conclude from Shelley's descriptions of the poet, poetry and humanity, that Shelley is a more mature poet than Keats. His poetry is not just an overflow of powerful emotions but also a homogeneous mixture of idealism, concern and love for mankind.

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