

Keats' Sensuousness

Keats is a mystic of the senses and not of thoughts as he sought to apprehend the ultimate truth of the universe through aesthetic sensations and not through philosophical thoughts.

Sensuousness is a quality in poetry which affects the senses i.e. hearing, seeing, touching, smelling and tasting. Sensuous poetry does not present ideas and philosophical thoughts. It gives delight to senses, appeals to our eyes by presenting beautiful and colourful word pictures to our ears by its metrical music and musical sounds, to our nose by arousing the sense of smell and so on.

Keats is the worshiper of beauty and perceives beauty everywhere; and it is his senses that first reveal to him the beauty of things. He writes poetry only out of what he feels upon his pulses.

Thus, it is his sense impressions that kindled his imagination which makes him realize the great principle that: 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty'

Keats loves nature for its own sake. He has a straightforward passion for nature by giving his whole soul to the unalloyed enjoyment of its sensuous beauty.

It goes without saying that John Keats belongs to the younger generation of Romantic poetry who is primarily known for his sensuous expressions in his poetry. His ode poetry speaks volumes of his highest poetic achievement, and are the best specimen of sensuous poetry ever in the history of English literature. A minute observation of John Keats' poetry shows how the poet uses his images and things of nature presenting sensuousness. There is no doubt in denying the fact that the poet is particularly successful in depicting the reality as his poetry manifests a kind of concreteness which has the capability of convincing the readers. On the whole, Keats' poetry is abundantly rich in sensuousness, suggestiveness and freshness, and the vision of beauty perceived by the poet has the finest essence of what he senses gathered from his environment.

John Keats was a passionate lover of Beauty, Beauty in all its forms, shapes, and varied manifestations. In fact, Beauty is a source of joy as he himself says:

"A thing of Beauty is joy forever".

He again says:

"With a great poet, the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all considerations."

It is the love for beauty which introduces the element of sensuousness in the poet. Thus, Matthew Arnold is also right when he says in this connection:

"Keats is enchantingly and abundantly sensuous".

Keats' life and his works bear ample testimony to his sensuousness as in one of his letters, he writes:

"O for a life of sensation rather than thoughts. Keats had acute sensibility."

The humming of bees, the sight of a flower, the glittering of a sun ray seemed to make his

whole nature tremble, then his eyes flashed, cheeks glowed, and mouth quivered.

Indeed, Keats' sensuousness is universal, not one or two, but all of his five senses are equally acute. The *Eve of St. Agnes* is full of sensuous imagery as the description of the feast spread by Porphyro by the side of the sleeping mistress is no doubt, full of sensuous details. Candid apples, plum jelly, Manna dates etc. make our senses more and more active as far as the senses of taste, smell and sight are concerned. All these sights are full of sensuousness not only by their own natural richness, but also the association of the distant countries from which they come as the poet also asserts:

"Full on the casement show the wintry noon
And threw warm gules on Mackline's fair breast."

The pictures of dead objects are made more vivid as the poet gives them life and the power to feel, see and think. Keats describes the dead and the senseless things in terms of life, movement and feelings when the poet also refers to the angles carved on the stories when he himself says:

"The carved angels, ever eager eyed
Star'd where upon their heads their cornice rests".

This quality is perceptible in the phrases like of 'Azure lidded sleep' when the poet also points out:

"And thy beauty is shield, heart
Shaped and vermeil eyed"

The more sensuous picture is described in the action of undressing as Madeline removes the pearls from her hair as the poet also describes it as:

"Unclasping the jewels one by one, and loosens her bodice and she looks like a mermaid in the sea weed."

The lines which explore powerfully Madeline's physical beauty in her room have highly sensual effect to produce. Here, sensuousness takes the form of sensuality which we feel in certain other poems also, for instance, in *Endymion*, and in the sonnet, *Bright Star*.

In *Ode on Grecian Urn*, we have the sensuous pictures of passionate men and gods chasing maiden flute-players playing ecstatic, music, and young men advancing to kiss his beloved, and so on.

Similarly, *Ode to Nightingale* is also rich in sensuousness where we have an abundance of rich, concrete and sensuousness imagery. The picture of a beaker full of warm wine and of the moon shining in the sky surrounded by stars appeal to our senses of smell, taste and seeing. The stanza depicting flowers, soft incense, the fruit tree, the fast fading violets, and the coming must raise full of sweet juice, all this is a delight for our senses.

In *Ode on Melancholy*, we have a delightful sensuous picture of the mistress showing 'some rich anger' and raving while the lover holds her hand in his tight grip.

Ode to Autumn is also a powerful exploration of rich sensuous expression where the beauty of autumn has been described with all its sensuous appeals.

Thus, we see Keats' sensuousness as universal and all pervasive. Indeed, he is the most sensuous of all English poets after Edmund Spenser. Not only he is sensuous, but also has the unique gift of communicating his sensuous pleasure through the use of such sensuous phrases as 'warmed jewel', 'melodious plot', 'fragrant zone,' 'pillowy softness', 'clummsy cells',

'embalmed darkness', etc.

Keats does not present the concept of love as only sensuous, but at the same time, it projects the idealistic and spiritual elements in it. Even in *Endymion*, we come across a note of mystery in the form of Endymion's union with Cynthia who presents the poet's attainment of goal of ideal beauty.

In this way, after going through different poems and different sensual expression in them, we can safely and rightly aver the fact that Keats is abundantly sensuous, but the question is whether his sensuousness degenerates in to sensuality, is pointed out by Matthew Arnold and some other critics. The detailed study of Keats' poetry explores the fact that he is not sensual, but his poetry shows him a nature poet as Finny asserts:

"Keats was much more than a poet of sensuous beauty. He was a thinker, a critic, and an interpreter of life".