

John Keats: Binaries of Contradiction

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Hazlitt observes in Keats 'tenderness' and 'delicacy' to an 'uncommon degree'. He marks effeminacy in Keats's style – 'All is soft and fleshy, without bone or muscle' (228). This 'effeminacy' "is seen not simply as feminine, but as boyish or adolescent, masculinity not yet confirmed and developed into its matured manliness" (Whale 5). Byron directs his attack towards the excessive florid style of Keats's poetry which he regards to be characteristic of adolescent or immature sexuality. He treats Keats's writing as 'a sort of mental masturbation'¹. To him Keats is a 'poor fellow' 'snuffed out by an article'². According to Z's criticism in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* "this 'young man' Keats had been infected with the 'poetical mania' that was currently also afflicting 'farm-servants', 'footmen', 'unmarried ladies' and 'superannuated governesses'" (Roe, "A Cockney Schoolroom" 12). Keats's tragically premature death, Shelley's composing the tearful elegy "Adonais" projecting a story of the end of a tenderhearted poet – 'a gentle child' with 'weak hands' badly mauled by 'the unpastured dragon'³ all contributed much to the categorization of Keats as 'effeminate' since the time the poet passed away. The tendency was carried to the extreme in the biographies of the mid-nineteenth century using the poet's physical appearance as found in death masks and portraits. The poet's bodily structure, facial outline, hair colour, voice and eyes came under scrutiny⁴. Margaret Oliphant, a late Nineteenth century novelist is quoted by Blades: 'In poetry his was the woman's part' (239).

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Stopford Brooke observes, “[Keats] has, in spite of a few passages and till quite the end of his career, no vital interest in the present, none in man as a whole, none in the political movement of human thought, none in the future of mankind, none in liberty, equality and fraternity, no interest in anything but beauty”(204). Writing in 1907 Brooke is just in the middle, so to say, of the series of critics who have questioned the maturity and substantiality of Keats. He accepts the ‘nineteenth-century image of Keats: unworldly and utterly insulated from actuality’ (Roe, “A Cockney Schoolroom” 13) and in a way anticipates Jerome McGann who writes in “Keats and the Historical Method in Literary Criticism” in 1979: ‘The *Lamia* volume represented Keats’s effort to show his readers how they might, by entering his poetic space, step aside from the conflicts and tensions which were so marked an aspect of that period. The whole point of Keats’s great and (politically) reactionary book was not to enlist poetry in the service of social and political causes . . .but to dissolve social and political conflicts in the mediations of art and beauty’ (53). Though later McGann targets romantic poetry in general in his book *The Romantic Ideology* (1983) and finds romantic poetry ‘marked by extreme forms of displacement and poetic conceptualization whereby the actual human issues with which the poetry is concerned are resituated in a variety of ideal localities’(1); none of the Romantics has been targeted as Keats since his own times and nor has anyone of them been so marginalized again and again. Associated with the New Historicist School in line with McGann, Marjorie Levinson in his *Keats’s Life of Allegory: The Origins of a Style*(1988) attributes Keats’s ‘severe remove from the canon’ to his ‘educational deficits’ (7). She has seen an ‘aggressively literary’ writing in Keats which is according to her only ‘a social-ego project’.

In Susan J. Wolfson’s analysis in her essay “Feminising Keats” in *Critical Essays on John Keats* edited by Hermione de Almeida (1990), John Keats has been regarded as ‘effeminate’ by his contemporaries and many later critics for his ‘gentleness, tenderness, sympathy with suffering, unworldliness, a ‘passive intellect’, and amazingly a too detailed description of dress in *The Eve of St Agnes*’ (Blades 238-239). Thus though in course of time many critics like W. J. Bate, Stuart M. Sperry, Christopher Ricks, Helen Vendler have come to appreciate the beauty of the words, imagery and forms of Keats’s poems and to appreciate the ‘profoundly associated sensibility’ and humanist dimensions of the poems, many have enforced the poet’s minimal status as a man and a poet since the times of the poet. In the last twenty years scholars have reacted to the contentions blurring Keats’s existence as a conscious poet with an

intellectual and political self. Nicholas Roe in his *John Keats and the Culture of Descent* (1997) has explored in Keats a voice of dissent in terms of both politics and aesthetics. Susan J. Wolfson in “Feminising Keats” has attempted to examine the demeaning reviews over the last two centuries which have tried to identify effeminate characteristics in Keats, and concluded by detecting the poet’s tendency to confuse the terms in conventionally accepted notions about gender. It is very much interesting that critical evaluation of the poet has fluctuated in course of time. This paper attempts to correlate some biographical information about Keats to his poetry and at the same time to detect some contradictory elements coexisting in the poet and his poetry which may be held responsible for the instability in the evaluation of the poet.

We are surprised when we ponder over feminization or marginalization of the man and the poet vis-à-vis some biographical information about him or his voluble assertion of some ideas in his poems. We learn about his penchant for fighting since boyhood, his masculine sporting activity on Hampstead Heath, his friendship with Hazlitt and J. H. Reynolds for their devotion to boxing. We learn about his attraction for female beauty, irresistible manly passion for Fanny Brawne which has occasionally found expression in poetry; though he wanted to be different from the contemporary lovers. Furthermore, he pursued seriously a very much practical course of medical training and qualified as an apothecary, physician and surgeon. He could practise like a general practitioner of today as he ‘had requisite training in surgery, diagnosis and prescription’ (De Almeida 25), though Keats apprenticed to apothecary has often been seen as qualified for a profession which involved feminine works like dressing, nursing etc. in reluctance to understand the transition which the qualification for the profession was undergoing in the poet’s time. Even after qualifying as ‘licentiate of the Society of Apothecaries’, he continued as a kind of resident *locum* in a major hospital (White 17). He gave up the prospect of a vocation of an apothecary and surgeon to adopt a professional poet’s career as he felt in him a genuine creative urge and the courage to take great risk. It is not perhaps much difficult to relate the information about his pugnacious nature to his poetic career in which he has sort of thrown so many challenges in the arena of poetry of his times and wanted to be different even from his contemporaries. When we look at the account of Edward Holmes, one of the poet’s school fellows, about his early boyhood, we find that the young Keats was possessed of boisterous energies and ‘terrier courage’ and he was fond of fighting. He had an extraordinary vivacity which he sustained later in his youth also; though he had to

succumb to an incurable illness ultimately. However, in that mind there was an intensely tender affection for his brothers, sister and mother whom he took care of with utmost sincerity. We have to note especially the poet's patient nursing at the death bed of his mother and brother, Tom. Keats 'tells us repeatedly that his life has been determined by his origins and early circumstances' (Roe, John Keats xviii). Since his early years Keats found gender roles inverted. As he had to place himself in a woman's role as a nurse, he found his grandmother, old Mrs. Jennings, holding 'the reins of the household in her own capable hands' (Gittings and Manton 18), even handling court affairs over the inheritance of her husband's wealth. It is not right to demean his apothecary's training as it took him through the recent developments in medical practice; but it cannot be denied that the experience of the training heightened in him feeling and sympathy, excess of which was one of the factors that prompted him to give up the prospective career of a surgeon. Possessor of a sympathetic heart, a lover of mankind, sincerely sociable, Keats has been a staunch supporter of Leigh Hunt and democracy. Again, this love of democracy points to his dissenting intellectual and political self. Edward Holmes speaks of "his high-mindedness, his utter unconsciousness of a mean motive, his placability, his generosity" (Weeks 8). At the same time it is to be noted that from the late years of his school life the young Keats's 'mind took a strong bent towards study'. This habit of reading was never given up by Keats thereafter and it developed a conscious literary mind which spoke of so many 'axioms' in poetry, though the role of education, mostly a masculine acquisition at the times of the poet, has often been ignored. Thus we find a surprising co-existence of the opposite traits in the poet's mind. Keats's 'vision of the binaries of life' (Banerjee 84) like joy and woe, life and death, eternity of art and evanescence of life or the ideal and the real is oft-discussed; but we can trace in him some more binaries of contradiction - pugnacity and placability, toughness and tenderness of mind, boisterousness and placidity or indolence, qualities both masculine and feminine in the conventional gender paradigms. Moreover, we find in the poet contradictory elements like an acute historical and political consciousness alongside the pursuit of beauty, application of study and thought alongside imagination and emotional exuberance. We find in Keats the Romantic 'refusal of standardisation in aims or agenda' (Blades 201) which led to a search for newer and newer possibilities. His lower middle class background and the unorthodox atmosphere at Enfield school and Guy's Hospital, which were seen in a negative light until recently, certainly contributed to this mental make-up. The understanding of the

contradictions in Keats can lead us to gain a fuller knowledge about the poet and his poetry. It is necessary to make an attempt to read historical and political dimensions in his poetry, not ignoring his pursuit of beauty and celebration of sensibility as it is not right to negate the poet's intellectual presence by focusing only the predominance of imagination, feelings and emotions in his poetry.

Actually Z's idea of Keats's being a 'wavering apprentice', an 'uneducated and flimsy stripling' 'without logic to analyse a single idea' (qtd. in Roe, "A Cockney Schoolroom" 12) had a link with his effort to feminize and marginalize the young poet. Twentieth century critic Marjorie Levinson has detected in Keats a 'dream of masturbation'- 'exhibitionist self-fashioning' of the 'petty bourgeoisie' with its 'educational deficit' and 'ignorance' (7). In Nicholas Roe's view, this charge of educational deficiency is rooted in the fact of Keats's being deprived of 'a more orthodox grounding in literary culture'(14). Keats did not have the education or advantages of the social background as his contemporaries like Wordsworth(a lawyer's son educated at Cambridge), Southey(son of a respectable Somerset family educated at Oxford),Coleridge(son of a vicar educated at Cambridge), Byron(son of a Scottish heiress descended from James I of Scotland, educated at Harrow and Cambridge) or Shelley(an heir to a baronetcy, educated at Eton and Oxford) had. Born of a lower middle class family, Keats went to Enfield for his schooling; he was presumed to have little knowledge of Greek or Latin(though, in reality, he had much knowledge of Latin and translated Virgil's *The Aeneid* at school). And then after apprenticeship to an apothecary he entered Guy's for an apothecary's certificate. (At that time only graduates of medicine from the great universities in Britain- Oxford, Cambridge or Edinburgh could earn the official title and prestige of 'physician'; though Guy's was one of the best teaching hospitals of the country.) It was very natural that Keats would be dismissed by contemporary reviewers including Byron; though his connection with Leigh Hunt invited much of the bitter criticism. But notwithstanding his background Keats worked out his poetic destiny quite independently with a free will and self education after taking a liberal education from Enfield School; his self-reliance and courage is very striking. He is revolutionary in his yearning for a release from the shackles of 'musty laws' and 'wretched rule' and 'compass vile'("Sleep and Poetry" ll. 195-196) of the neo-classical poetic lore at the very early phase of his poetic life. Keats is against the ideals of standardization and fixed patterns of the neo-classicals to which the conservative reviewers of the time stuck still. Keats's is a voice of

dissent propelled by an intellectual dynamic which was behind the democratic cultural revolution discernible from the latter 18th century alongside the rise of radical dissent in politics of England. Many of the poems of Keats bear evidence to the poet's belief in radical politics and love of liberty. "Written on the day that Mr. Leigh Hunt left Prison" celebrates the free and immortal spirit of the poet's radical mentor. In "To Hope" the poet does not want to see Great Liberty oppressed 'with the base purple of a court'. In the epistle to Charles Cowden Clarke he has referred to Hunt as 'the wrong'd Libertas'. He has also referred to 'The might of Alfred, and the shaft of Tell;/ The hand of Brutus, that so grandly fell/Upon a tyrant's head'. Keats looks back to the past in preference to the contemporary rule of England. 'His sonnet "To Kosciusko" celebrates this Polish freedom-fighter in terms akin to those in Hunt's "Political Examiner" editorials, which iconised Kosciusko as reformism in action, an antidote to political apostasy' (Kandl 4). Keats, in his strong reaction to the rational, is 'certain of nothing but of the holiness of the heart's affection and the truth of the Imagination' (Gittings 36-37) and in the epistle to George Felton Mathew 'the need for imagination to be interpretative is ... clearly underlined' (Phukan 16). In the epistle to his brother George the poet 'values poetry as creative of enchantment and its dreamlike beauty as reductive of earthly beauty, and indeed he thinks of the proper 'poetic lore' as full of wonders...' (Phukan 16). *Endymion* with its 'undisciplined luxuriance' and 'sensation introduced for its own sake' (Daiches 916) revolts against dry rationalism. The poem is also remarkable for flaunting the 'liberal loosening of the closed couplet of Augustan poetry' (O'Neill 275) corresponding, though arguably, to a 'political hope'. Love of sensation in *Endymion* may be regarded by the young poet himself to be 'mawkishness'; but it will be wrong to take the poet for a mere weakling. It is the young poet of only twenty two who does not spare the conservative critics who assailed the new spirit of the times which opposed establishment. Keats 'vents his ire on 'men-slugs and human serpentry', the counterfeits, parasites, and reactionaries conspiring to diminish society's true visionaries, men and women who promote liberal or progressive ideas in the service of mankind' (Blades 43). Book III of *Endymion* starts by scathing the false gods 'who lord it o'er their fellow-men' (III. 1). Again, in *Lamia* he exalts the role of the poet-as-visionary against the scientific rationalists as imagination is a keyword to him. Again, Keats's stand against the capitalist industry of his times is very much clear in *Isabella*. Isabella's brothers accumulate wealth by exploiting the workers in 'torched mines and noisy factories' and also from slave labour driven by the 'stinging

whip'. 'The brothers also profit from the suffering of men who dive for pearls, and from brutal trade in animal furs'. (Vassallo 364). But it is to note that Keats the dissenter is primarily a seeker of beauty; or rather in his very pursuit of beauty he opposes the ideas of establishment in the sphere of letters. In his early days as a poet of the 'cockney' circle he has shared the aesthetics of 'delight and liberty' of Leigh Hunt who considers poetry to be 'the utterance of a passion for truth, beauty, and power' (Wu 40). After attacking effeminacy in 1818, again in 1826 'Z' describes the poet as an 'infatuated birdling' who has written 'a species of emasculated pruriency that[...]looks as if it were the product of some imaginative Eunuch's muse' (Mellor 214). Keats enjoys the beauty of nature: a melancholy heart, he has been soothed by the beauty of nature at Enfield and Edmonton, later by his walking tour of the Lake District and Scotland. The human beauty, especially female and even the beauty in its abstract ideal form ravish him. He finds beauty in art, in Shakespeare, even in Thomas Chatterton, too. He starts *Endymion* with the words of his strong conviction: 'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.' In Book II of *Hyperion* we have the fullest exposition of his theory 'first in beauty shall be first in might'. Keats is aware of beauty in sorrow: 'Sorrow more beautiful than Beauty's self'; he can apprehend tragic reality of life and its beauty. *The Fall of Hyperion* carries further the poet's philosophy of beauty – beauty is attainable by only those who have experienced pain. He ignores the severe criticism of the *Blackwood's* and the *Quarterly*: "Praise or blame has but a momentary effect on the man whose love of beauty in the abstract makes him a severe critic on his own his works...when I feel I am right, no external praise can give me such a glow as my own solitary re-perception and ratification of what is fine' (Gittings, 155). Keats has been misunderstood as unworldly for this love of beauty in the abstract, though the lines should be read as a serious artist's view about his pursuit of his vocation in a creative world of his own. The concluding line of "Ode on a Grecian Urn", the idea of the letter to Bailey (22 November, 1817): 'What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth- whether it existed before or not...' (Gittings 37) has formed idea of the poet as an aesthete, as a 'pure poet'. The idea is reinforced when he observes, '...with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all considerations' or when he advises Shelley to 'curb [his] magnanimity' and to 'be more of an artist', and 'load every rift' of his subject 'with ore'(Gittings 390). But the fact is that Keats's poetry addresses the crisis of his times obeying his own rules of the art of poetry which were against the values of both literary and

political establishment which was a confident flag-bearer of the notions of the 'coterie' and reluctant to approve of anything which it did not consider to be orthodox and 'masculine'.

Even at a trying time of financial trouble Keats opts for a challenging life of a poet: 'I have the choice as it were of two Poisons...the one is voyaging to and from India for a few years; the other is leading a fevrous[sic] life alone with poetry –This latter will suit me best- for I cannot resolve to give up my Studies... Yes, I would rather conquer my indolence and strain my n[e]rves at some grand Poem ...I must take my stand upon some vantage ground and begin to fight – I must choose between despair and Energy - I choose the latter...' (Gittings 257). 'Keats's 'indefatigable energy' to succeed at his studies' (Roe, "A Cockney Schoolroom" 23) drove his powerful ambition in writing *Endymion* or later a sizeable corpus of poetry within a brief span of time. The poet's strong emotional sensitiveness and 'gusto' is characteristic of the boisterous energies of his mind and finds outlet in poetry. We find Keats in the throes of giving birth to poetry time and again as in

Physician Nature! Let my spirit blood!

O ease my heart of verse and let me rest;

In his 'The Terrors of Death' he fears that he may cease to be before his pen gleans his 'teeming brain'. In a letter to George and Georgiana Keats in America written in April 1819 the poet writes, "I have for the most part dash'd off my lines in a hurry" (Gittings 253). Keats himself regarded the six great odes just incidental work, though the critics have regarded them to be finished work of art (Gupta 66). Though Keats wrote in an era when 'the culture of Sensibility transformed the understanding of masculinity' (Pinch 51), his indulgence in 'undisciplined luxuriance' of *Endymion* or 'exquisite sense of the luxuries' of *Isabella* or *The Eve of St. Agnes* leads him to a rejection of 'conventional, ego-based identity that prizes confirmed individuality as well as the dominance of rational self-consciousness and the exercise of will' (Whale 8) and this rejection marks him as deficient in expected masculine traits. 'Just as we have seen passion, relationship and objectivity combined successfully in his narrative romances so, in Keats's odes, the presence of the poet is often interestingly removed from the object of attention - at times occluded' (Whale 90). In poems like "Ode on Indolence" 'the effeminate is also clearly defined as a zone of passivity and inertia' (Whale 109). In the ode "To Autumn" the picture of the reaper is suggestive of a lack

of energy which is consistent with the scene of autumn with minimal sign of life. The placidity of the poet's mood is born of a complete 'occlusion' of his self and his 'imaginative ability to appreciate the otherness of things' (Whale 111) Keats is, indeed, an admixture of sheer opposites. His poetry is born of restlessness and energetic roving as well as repose and tranquility and almost complete absence of motion. Keats experiences uncertainties of existence in his mood of indolence while he indulges in visions.

Keats appears on the scene of English poetry when the tradition of the polished manly excellence of the neo classical poetry is already challenged. Keats renews the challenge in his *Sleep and Poetry* (1817) and later poems. But romanticism also would take a new dimension in his hand. Like Wordsworth he creates poetry out of his sensations- the cognitive experiences. But his poetry comes of the very 'raw' sensations - gustatory, olfactory or tactile- besides visual or auditory ones, though they ultimately prove to be the gateway to the world of thoughts and imagination and to the world of the supernal. Wordsworth restricts himself to the respectable sensations only. The aching joys are not so important in his poetry; the wisdom and the sobriety take the lead. Keats yearns for a life of sensation and goes his own way to celebrate his feelings and sensations. Even in his odes the rapturous sensuous joys and the sober thoughts are in a relation of tension. Again, Keats for the first time in English poetry introduces the strong sexual urges of both men and women leading to passionate feelings and erotic fantasies. *Endymion* suggests that women experience erotic desires. *Lamia* has an intensity and a sexual verve supplied by the character of Lamia. In *Isabella* there are hints of carnal love as an antithesis to spiritual love. '*The Eve of St Agnes* ... is really a celebration of sensuality as the gateway to a fuller, higher, and more satisfactory comprehension of the mystery of life' (Dhar 48). His medical training has much to do with his awareness of the sexual realities. But at the same time it is to be kept in mind that the poet abandoned medicine in preference to poetic pursuit in which he was to explore the world of beauty - physical, spiritual and the ideal.

Sensuous experience is often a matter of great excitement; but sense-impressions or sensuous gratification is not all to Keats, in his tender youth itself he has reached a stage of deeper realizations. Since his earliest days of writing he has been acutely conscious of his poetic principles. In 'Sleep and Poetry' he thinks of bidding farewell to the joys of the world and of passing them 'for a nobler life' where he 'may find the agonies, the strife of human hearts'. In *Ode to a Nightingale* we find a poet aching

and restless, stirred by the sublime beauty of the nightingale's song, striving to reproduce his sensuous excitement and to reach the world of the nightingale and embody the beauty of the song in his poem. Though initially roving through the sensuous world of 'a beaker full of the warm South', 'blushful Hippocrene' 'with beaded bubbles winking at the brim', Keats's experience of being stirred by the nightingale's song reaches one of those 'rare ecstatic moments when consciousness loses its sense of self, and the ego is overwhelmed by visionary being, freed from clock time' (Barnard 111). Looking beyond the immediate reality the poet catches glimpse of the realm of immortal truths of goodness and beauty, though ultimately returns the tension between the sensuous and the supra-sensuous. The poem does not merely indulge in 'youthful imagination'. We find the same restlessness in the first lines of *Ode on a Grecian Urn* born of a great stirring of the poet's sense of beauty by the suggestive urn. The poet reaches the moment of stasis at last when the urn leads him out from the 'morose brooding induced by contemplation' (Blades 116) to the 'sacred'. The 'dizzy rapture'-the restlessness indicates the young poet's strong sensitivity. But he has disciplined his sensation into symbolic meanings and "Attic quality of luminous esthetic perception" in moments of restraint (Daiches 920-921). This passage from sensation to thought and his glimpse of eternity indicate that he is no neophyte in the realm of the poets. The infinite possibilities in the art world and the impossibility of sensuous/biological fulfilment there are suspended in a delicate balance. However, *To Autumn* is replete with the beauty of nature in all its placidity and suggestions of sensuous enjoyment of life. Enjoyment through visual, auditory and olfactory senses are not sufficient here. The nature's bounties enjoyed through tactile and gustatory senses are also present here. However, the poet presents the sensuous aspects of autumn as the working of Divinity in the season which is all ripeness- all fruition. There is no hurry, no restlessness, no cares, no anxieties. On another level of meaning, life is full ripe and is waiting for the end symbolized by the sunset, gnats' wailful choir or hedge-crickets' chirping.

In *Fall of Hyperion*, written at the final stage of his short poetic career, "Moneta's command to think of the earth is in truth a command to tame the feverish, sensation-mongering, enchantment-loving and self-gratifying imagination by intuiting one's way into the reality of suffering, and this alone can prelude the realization of the poet's greatest powers"(Phukan 20). Keats seems to warn himself against being a dreamer who venoms his days and advise to be a poet who sympathizing with suffering humanity 'pours out a balm upon the world' and who is 'a humanist, physician to all men'. In his

short life of twenty five years Keats enjoyed his youthful life, he had to walk under the shadow of death; and he could, again, think of a state beyond death also. He is self-critical of his own writings. He gives up Hyperion poems as they were, in his view, too Miltonic. Restless and, as if, in a hurry, Keats the prodigy “moved, with an amazing rapidity from apprenticeship to mastery, during the concentrated phase between 1816 and 1819” (Banerjee 2).

While the young poet declares on 22 November 1817: “O for a life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts!”(Gittings 37) he realizes on 3 May 1818: “The difference of high Sensations with and without knowledge appears to me this: in the latter case we are falling continually ten thousand fathoms deep and being blown up again, without wings and with all the horror of a bare-shouldered Creature-in the former case, our shoulders are fledged, and we go through the same air and space without fear...(Gittings 92) Keats sees life as a passage in development of mind and consciousness and his idea is reflected in his letter to Reynolds 3 May 1818: “...I compare human life to a large mansion of Many Apartments, two of which I can only describe, the doors of the rest being as yet shut upon me. The first we step into we call the Infant or Thoughtless Chamber in which we remain as long as we do not think...we remain there a long while, and notwithstanding the doors of the second chamber remain wide open, showing a bright appearance, we care not to hasten to it; but are at length imperceptibly impelled by the awakening of the thinking principle within us - we no sooner get into the second – which I shall call the Chamber of Maiden Thought, than we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere, we see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there for ever in delight...the world is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and Oppression”(Gittings 95). Keats expresses similar idea in one of his letters: “Until we are sick, we understand not,” Keats wrote to Reynolds and continued: “in fine, as Byron says, ‘Knowledge is Sorrow’; and I go on to say that ‘Sorrow is Wisdom’ - and further for aught we can know for certainty” (Gittings 93) “Do you not see,” he wrote to George Keats , “how necessary a World of pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a soul” (Gittings 250). We discern a similar vein in the poet’s words:“This is the world – thus we cannot expect to give way many hours to pleasure...while we are laughing the seed of some trouble is put into the wide arable land of events- while we are laughing it sprouts[it] grows and suddenly bears a poison fruit which we must pluck.”(Gittings 228) As Tapati Gupta points out, Keats in spite of protesting that poetry should come “naturally as leaves to a tree” never

undervalued the importance of intellect and knowledge in the making of a poet (66). She refers to Keats's opinion in his letter to his brothers George and Tom on 23 January, 1818: "Nothing is finer for the purposes of great production than a very gradual ripening of the intellectual powers"(Gittings 57). Keats's letters, indeed, uphold the poetic theories of the poet whom we find intellectually very much alive. Keats does not cease to be a paradox all through his life: he luxuriates in sensuous delight and, again, is aware of the importance of sorrow and knowledge and intellectual powers.

John Whale speaks of Keats's preoccupation with feminine beauty and romance seen from a determinedly masculine perspective(103). "Bright Star" indulges in a very obvious male erotic romance. "To Fanny" projects a jealous male lover's gaze. In "Ode to a Nightingale" the colour of blushing, Beauty figuratively meaning beautiful young woman all are caught by a masculine consciousness, though played down by a very tender voice of the liminal mind now very sensitive and now losing its sense. In "Ode to a Grecian Urn" the Grecian urn conceived as an 'unravished bride', the 'bold lover' in 'mad pursuit' of 'maidens loath' implies the male instinct of the poet. "Ode on Melancholy" depicts the picture of a male lover imprisoning the hand of his female partner. Her peerless eyes are the object of a male onlooker. In Aniket Jaware's view, '...femininity, womanhood - call it whatever - is specifically objectified and codified as an object of desire in a lot of 'healthy ,English poetry', by male poets, by Keats, and most particularly so in *The Eve of St. Agnes*' (39). The binary of transient and permanent is, however, present. According to Whale, in "Ode to Psyche" 'Keats turns his attention to feminine beauty and its mortality, in particular its being subject to decay and its tendency to pall with familiarity... The poem locates the possibility of an ideal of feminine beauty beyond real women and their bodies'(94). He quotes Keats's poem "And what is love? It is a doll dressed up" and argues that the poet leaves contemporary scene behind 'in preference for an idealised realm of romance, often located within a pagan, classical mythology or a chivalric medievalism'(12). In a poem as early as "I stood tip-toe upon a little hill" the poet metaphorically suggests with the help of the phrase 'tip-toe' that he wishes to soar while standing on the solid earth. He does not want to lose touch with the real world but at the same time he wishes to have glimpses of the truths underlying the physical world. Moneta is dominant, initiating and still elusive. Lamia takes the sexual initiative, she is enchanting youth and magic, still ethereal and elusive. In real life love Keats wrote to Fanny, 'If we love we must not live as other men and women do - I cannot brook the wolfsbane of fashion and foppery

and tattle' (Gittings 376). Thus the poet yearns for feminine beauty, but he desires it in his own terms. He does not want to dally in the regions of commonality; he wants to soar higher. Indeed, Keats is not to be pigeon-holed in the narrowness of the conventional gender paradigms. Susan J. Wolfson in "Feminising Keats" reviews the critical receptions of Keats's works down the two centuries and observes: 'If Keats continues to animate discussions of gender in literary and social experience, he continues, just as surely, to confuse the terms. Even as he provokes us to describe and differentiate among what is 'masculine', 'feminine', 'effeminate', or 'feminist', he confronts us with the need to complicate and redefine the judgements that underlie these categories'(qtd. in Blades 240). John Blades sums up the view of Wolfson: 'Keats is essentially an androgynous figure, exhibiting characteristics from both masculine and feminine genders, as we have usually conceived them, and it is not valid to propose that any one side or trait is intrinsically more valuable than the other'(241).

Finally, just as while conceiving of an idea Keats cannot rest without summoning up its opposite, his mind cannot but be conceived as a reservoir of opposites. After all debates and deliberations what always remains in our hand is a binary of contradiction in Keats – a feeling smothered by sensuous beauty, a mood of placidity, acceptance, and even negation of self and at the same time a voice of dissent, an intellectual self, an industrious mind. Keats is a poet who exudes radical dissent/republicanism throughout his poetic career and still refrains from making any explicit political comment, even at the turbulent times of the deplorable Peterloo massacre of August 1819. Though Nicholas Roe has explored the connection of "To Autumn", the poem written in the autumn of 1819, with "The Calendar of Nature" of Leigh Hunt and pointed to the dormant theme of justice in bountiful nature which is in contrast to the tyrant's trampling the demand for reform of the inhuman laws of the country, the sign of protest is very difficult to discern as even the sign of life and energy in the poem. Actually Keats has yearned for attaining a poetic space 'to soothe the cares, and lift the thoughts of man' in this world where he finds an unending procession of sorrows and sufferings, disease and death. The 'ancient mythology became in Keats's hands, a means of touching the deepest levels of the psyche in order to imagine a world better and truer than the world around him' (Coote x); however, he has never lost touch with the solid earth full of beauty which also takes him to the world of ineffable satisfaction by means of imagination. In moments, like Cortez or the 'watcher of the skies' in "On First Looking

into Chapman's Homer" he is in his dreams to explore the worlds unfathomed for the good of the world. Avoiding involvement with the immediate realities he wants to dive deep into the basic issues of life and find remedy for the pains of mankind which are irremediable to medicine or any other branch of knowledge or politics. By singing the saga of personal suffering and melancholy his poetry is a self therapy to him and in reverberating with universal suffering it becomes a remedy for the whole mankind by way of 'understanding and consolation' White.

Notes

1. See G.M. Matthews (ed.), Keats: The Critical Heritage (Routledge and Kegan Paul: London, 1971), p.129.
2. See A.R. Weeks (ed.), The Odes of John Keats (Books Way: Kolkata, 2010) p.16
3. See A.R. Weeks (ed.), The Odes of John Keats (Books Way: Kolkata, 2010) p.12
4. See John Blades. John Keats: The Poems. P. 240.
5. See the idea of dialectical imagination of Keats in Michael O'Neill. Romantic Forms: an introduction. Romanticism: An Oxford Guide. Nicholas Roe (Ed.). p.288.

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