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KEATS: A TRIBUTE TO BEAUTY

by

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Department of English.

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KEATS: LOVER OF BEAUTY

'If I should die,' said I to myself, 'I have left no immortal work 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.'

These are the outpourings of a soul, agonized, fearful, at the prospect of approaching death; fearful not because of the pain of death, but fearful because death itself is the iron gate which shuts out all hope of this soul achieving its supreme utterance in the realization of an intense communication with ideal Beauty, the transcendence of mortality through the immortality of created Beauty. And this is not the soul of just any man—no, it could not be so—but only a soul possessed by an impassioned, profound young man, a man undeniably sensitive to the beauty of all things around him, a man whose very life was a search for "the principle of beauty in all things" through the external motif of beauty in poetry, a beauty which is truth. This is the soul of an inspired young poet named John Keats, a poet whose passion for the beautiful lifted him to creativity which Professor Selincourt, a critic, admirer, and authority on Keats, claims is "matched only by Shakespeare and Milton."  

It is this love of beauty that is the thread of unity which explains both the life and poetry of John Keats. His writings, particularly his letters, reveal a unique concern with beauty—physical and intellectual—which was for him a dynamic, profound principle of life. He was searching


2 Professor Ernest De Selincourt, "Warton Lecture on Keats," The John Keats Memorial Volume, (New York: John Lane Co.), p. 4.
for the truth of life, the principle which explains man's mortal destiny, the sufferings and evil, and he felt certain that the apprehension of beauty was the most immediate and instinctive idea of truth we have. In his letters he has repeatedly emphasized the idea that, "I can never feel certain of any truth but from a clear perception of its beauty." And again,

I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination—what the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth—whether it existed before or not—-for I have the same idea of all our Passions as of Love they are all in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty.

Life could then mean only one thing—a search after the Ideal of beauty. In "Endymion" Keats has made a parallel with his own life which demonstrates his search for beauty as a principle of life. Endymion's love-sick wanderings in search of the moon goddess are the wanderings of the soul in search of this Ideal.

But the love of beauty was more than just a principle of life for Keats, it was an active, dynamic philosophy of life. He felt that the pursuit of Beauty as an aim in life was justified only when it was accomplished through a devotion to human service, as a sympathy toward all human destinies, as a means of transcending and overcoming the suffering and evil in the world. Keats was not fully aware of this until he himself had experienced tremendous suffering. In 1813 his brother Tom was dying. This sensitive young man, consumed with what he found unconsolable sorrow,

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3 Forman, p. 258.
4 Ibid., p. 67.
was now faced with the task of reconciling his principle of life with
the reality of pain and suffering. But from this crisis Keats' greatest
poetry was to evolve as he discovered the quality in beauty which enabled
him to accept ugliness and pain, that quality of beauty which transcends
the evil and makes living a mortal existence possible through a communion
with eternal beauty and truth. As Professor Selincourt phrased it: "...when
he (Keats) is most conscious of the decay and sorrow of man, he is
also conscious of the victory of beauty over death and time."7

This philosophy of beauty as a self-sacrifice to humanity, and
ultimately to the attainment of his ideal, was to be realised through a
surrender to beauty in the particular. Just as the moon goddess in
"Endymion" symbolizes ideal beauty, her transformation into an Indian Maid
signifies that the ideal can only be procured through the concrete par-
ticular.8

And Keats did love particular beauties, seeming to have a natural,
instinctive sense for the comprehension and appreciation of beauty in all
things around him: "Nothing escaped him. The humming of a bee, the sight
of a flower, the glitter of the sun seemed to make his nature tremble."9
But more than this he was able to transfer this acute observation of beauty
into poetry making it the concrete particular which he would use to touch
with what he called "The mighty abstract idea of Beauty."10 That is why
poetry was life itself for him, why without it he felt he must cease to be.

But poetry could only fulfill this aim if it were totally engulfed
in a veil of beauty. In a letter to his friend John Taylor, speaking of

7 Selincourt, p. 16.
9 Selincourt, p. 4.
10 Forman, p. 238.
poetry, Keats writes: "Its touches of Beauty should never be halfway —ther(by) making the reader breathless instead of content." He demanded beauty in intensity—"intensity capable of making all disagreeables evaporate from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth." And certainly his poetry is intense, reaching out to exhaust every source of its graces of beauty to thereby increase its own, making beauty not the end of poetry but the only environment from which the truth of life would emerge, what Maritain would term an "end beyond any end."

The poetry of Keats is a history of his life and his philosophy written in beauty, expressing his soul-struggle for a tangible communication with eternal beauty, so that the intensity and depth of development in his poetry is the intensity and depth of his soul development. The uncertainty which prohibited the completion of the young Apollo in "Hyperion" is the uncertainty of the young poet of his capability in immortalizing beauty of his own making which would consequently uplift the destiny of humanity and lead him into contact with abstract beauty and truth, a fear of his future success as a poet. It was such a sense of failure as this which prompted the strains of melancholy which are the opening lines of this paper. He did, however, remain certain of one thing—his love of beauty which was the inviolable principle of his philosophy of life.

John Middleton Murry has written that great poetry is that to which the human soul responds, that which the human soul endorses, because a true poet must utter his own soul, so that the history of the souls of great poets is the most essential history of the human soul itself.  

11 Ibid., p. 107.
12 Ibid., p. 70.
14 Murry, p. 2.
It is my hope to provide evidence in this paper which can only lead to the fervent endorsement that John Keats, a poet, philosopher and lover of beauty, is truly one of our great poets for the sensual and intellectual beauty found in his poetry reveals the history of the unfolding of his soul in its search for communion with the "principle of beauty in all things."

THE PHILOSOPHY OF BEAUTY

Transcendental Beauty

Throughout the history of philosophy one of the questions properly considered is the question 'What is beauty?' Is beauty a quality of things or is it a relating of something to us which arouses an emotion in us? Is it subjective or objective? If it is a quality, what is that quality? If it is a relation, what is that relation? One of expression—expression of reason, will, or desire? Naturally enough, there are almost as many theories on beauty as there are varying philosophies—beauty considered as a subjective quality, beauty as an objective quality, beauty as utility, and so on. But one stream of thought carried down from the Greeks, expanded in the philosophy of St. Thomas, and today employed by one of our foremost authorities on beauty and art, Jacques Maritain, maintains that beauty is a transcendental and as such is both subjective and objective. It is this tradition which is the basis for my own theories on beauty and which is the foundation for this brief summation of the philosophy of beauty.

St. Thomas defines beauty as, "that which being seen, pleases." In all its simplicity this definition concisely but adequately contains all.

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16 Ibid, p. 50.
that is necessary for a definition of beauty. It is a vision, that is, beauty must involve perception by the senses. But beauty requires more than mere perception, it is intuitive knowledge, an apprehension of an object which produces joy, not all joy, but joy in knowledge; not a joy peculiar to the act of knowing, but a joy superabounding from the act itself because of the object known. Beauty hence is properly an object of intelligence, perceived by the senses.17

Beauty then involves the senses, but the beautiful is not concerned with all senses but only those sense which minister to reason. Hence the beautiful relates only to two of the senses, sight and hearing, because these two are "maxime cognosci".18

But beauty appeals not only to the senses, for, as Plato says: "It is no physical thing like gold, but rather some relation of things to our mind,"19 and must therefore appeal also to our intellect. How to do this beauty must contain certain qualities that correspond to the state of mind, certain essential requirements which St. Thomas has called: 1) perfection, 2) due proportion or harmony, and 3) clarity.20 Jacques Maritain in Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry specifies why St. Thomas considered these particular three the essential, objective qualities of beauty. The first is perfection (or integrity as Maritain calls it) because it is that fullness of being which delights the intellect. Secondly, proportion because the intellect is pleased by order and unity. And, lastly clarity, which Maritain considers the most important, because it is the light or

18 Ibid., p. 23.
19 Carritt, p. xxiv.
20 Ibid., p. 51.
color emanating from things which causes intelligence to see, a splendor of form, the inner ontological principle which determines things in their essence and qualities (being intelligible in itself, but not always to us). These three qualities together form then a harmony which we call beauty. Put in the words of the Schoolmen, beauty is "the splendor of form shining on the proportioned parts of matter." These three qualities cannot, however, be univocal. Beauty differs. They must therefore be analogous, and their analogous character lies in the fact that beauty belongs in the realm of the transcendentals—Unity, Truth, and Goodness—which are but various aspects of Being, they are one with Being. Now the good is based on form the same as is beauty, therefore, the good and beautiful can be identified as the same, differing only in aspect. But this difference is a purely logical difference, for "goodness properly relates to the appetite (goodness being that which all things desire); and therefore it has the aspects of an end (the appetite being a kind of movement towards a thing). On the other hand beauty relates to the cognitive faculty; for beautiful things are those which please when seen." If it is true that "pulchrum est idem bono, sola ratione differens," beauty is a transcendental as well as the good.

Beauty, then, is being, truth, and goodness; its being is existence; its goodness brings forth the harmony and perfection of order in which creature are related to each other and their final end, who is the perfection of order; its truth shines forth with the clarity of intelligibility for the enrichment of our soul.

We have established then that beauty is a transcendental quality.

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23 Carritt, p. 51.
24 Maritain, Art and Scholasticism, p. 23.
Is this quality found in the subject or in the object? Or does it require elements of both? Beauty delights because it is a certain excellence or perfection in the proportion of things to the mind, that is, there are certain elements within an object which arouse within us a certain emotion called esthetic.²⁵ But the beauty of an object, in order to delight requires apprehension and appreciation, for a beauty not perceived is a pleasure not felt. Therefore beauty also exists in perception, it is an emotional, subjective element.²⁶ It is true then that beauty involves both the subject and the object. The objective elements are the essential requirements which St. Thomas has enumerated, those qualities which relate to the mind and are found in the object itself. The subjective elements are found in the delight taken in an object requiring apprehension and appreciation of the object through the intellect and will of the subject.

Beauty then is a transcendental, a quality of objects which relates to the mind and arouses within us a certain emotion. This emotion is dependent on apprehension by both the senses and the intellect, and is therefore an expression of both the intellect and the will.

Aesthetic Beauty

According to St. Augustine, "beautiful things are beautiful not because they please us, but please us because they are beautiful."²⁷ But not all things please all men. Are some things therefore not truly beautiful, or is man's knowledge of the beautiful limited?

We know that beauty is a transcendental and all things by their

²⁷Peter Coffey, PhD., Ontology. (New York: Peter Smith), p. 198.
mer|existence participate in the beautiful, hence all things are truly
beautiful, though beautiful in their own way. The diversity must then be
in man himself as the receptor of the principle of beauty in things.
And this brings us into the realm of aesthetic beauty.

Individual beautiful things participate in universal beauty in
different ways so that beautiful things are not absolutely beautiful.
Now the beauty which our senses perceive is not that of transcendental beauty,
but the beauty of the particular which is considered aesthetic beauty.
Because we are partially dependent on the senses not all individual things
will be beautiful to us, but instead certain objects will even appear ugly
and nauseous for the senses perceive as beautiful those things which are
most naturally proportioned to the human mind, and anything else is con­sidered ugly because it is repugnant to the inner proportion or harmony of
the sense itself. The perception of beauty, or the judgement that some­thing is or is not beautiful is then the product of an act of taste. The
eye and the ear are trained in appreciation of certain stimuli and on
different levels which constitutes a personal taste which judges the beauty
of an object.

Aesthetic beauty could then be considered a particular determination
of transcendental beauty: "It is transcendental beauty as confronting not
simply the intellect, but the intellect and senses acting together in one
simple act."  

Man is aware of the limitation which aesthetic beauty encounters
and so through art he attempts to overcome the ugly, the foul, to take us
beyond it; art struggles to surmount the distinction between aesthetic and
transcendental beauty and absorb the aesthetic in transcendental beauty.

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26Maritain, Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry, p. 164.
29Coffey, p. 197.
30Maritain, Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry, p. 164.
31Ibid., p. 165.
Sensible beauty is not solely a perception of the senses but is permeated with intellection and consequently keeps its transcendental essence and analogous character even though encompassed within the limits of aesthetic beauty. We can see this illustrated by examining different artistic works. A Rembrandt and a Shakespearean drama are both works of beauty, but they differ. This difference is not, however, essential; both contain the essence of transcendental beauty—integrity, proportion, and clarity—used in an analogous way. And too, it is the transcendental nature of aesthetic beauty in poetry which stirs within us a sense of our mysterious identity and draws us toward the source of being. As Baudelaire put it, it is the sense of beauty "which makes us consider the world and its phenomena as a glimpse of, a correspondence with, Heaven..."32

It is then through created beauty that man attempts to triumph over the limits of sensible beauty and evoke an insight into that portion of transcendental beauty which can be found in the most insignificant of things.

Poetry and Beauty

Poetry as a form of art is necessarily a form of aesthetic beauty. But what is the relation of beauty to poetry?

Poetry can be distinguished from science and other arts by the fact that it has no object, i.e. it is not subordinate to any object in its creativity. Thus in poetry the creativity of the spirit is free creativity; there is nothing which may exercise mastery over it. There is only the urge for expression of the knowledge which is poetic intuition in which the subjectivities of the poet and the realities of the world find a single awakening. Poetry then has no object but by its nature tends toward that in which the intellect takes pleasure or delight. Thus, beauty cannot be the object of

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32 Ibid, p. 166.
poetry. There is, however, a necessary relationship between poetry and beauty. Poetic expression tends toward that in which the intellect takes pleasure; it tends toward beauty, what Maritain calls the "transcendental correlative" of poetry, a necessary correlative like the native climate and air it breathes. If poetry has no specifying end, it does have an end beyond and beauty is that "end beyond any end," for in order that poetic expression find sufficient expression it must be through the natural habit of beauty.

Poetic intuition by its nature must give expression in the creation of something and therefore, having no object, it must make for itself an object, something through which the power of intuitive reason can release its utterance in production. Poetry then is "the tendential movement which is inherent in everything created, tends toward beauty as to its natural correlative, and to an end beyond any end; and that poetry is engaged by nature in the movement of art striving toward production." And this production is aimed at bursting the limits of the aesthetic and taking us closer to the real transcendental beauty.

The relation between poetry and beauty can be considered one of co-equality or connaturality; they love one another without subordination. Poetic intuition desires the expression of the inner poet with the realities surround the poet, and it is only natural that it would inevitably be expressed in beauty because any real expression will be derived of integrity, proportion and clarity. Poetry cannot therefore do without beauty, not because it is submitted to it, but because it is "in love with beauty, and beauty is in love with poetry."
Although John Keats is not considered one of the great scholars of his era, he reached a level of intellectual maturity and understanding which astoundingly supercedes the maturity of his age. He was not a poet pure and simple, but a man deeply concerned with human life and all of its facets; he wrote not for art's sake only, but for the sake of truth and for the sake of life. All this can only be attributed to his earnest desire for knowledge and his ardent love for philosophy commented on so often in his letters, for example: "I have been hovering for sometime between an exquisite sense of the luxurious and a love for Philosophy--were I calculated for the former I should be glad--but as I am not I shall turn all my soul to the latter."  

By philosophy Keats does not refer to the study of philosophy as a subject, but instead to a comprehension of the mystery of life, a constant search for knowledge which would lead to an enlightenment of the truth of life. He had probably never read St. Thomas or any philosophers in the strictest sense as he considered them cold and sterile:

Do not all charms fly  
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?  
There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:  
We know her woof, her texture; she is given  
In the dull catalogue of common things.  
Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,  
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,  
Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine— (Lamia)

When he speaks of philosophies he speaks in the general sense of the thinking of those of Milton or Wordsworth. And yet he can readily be considered a philosopher in his own right as many of his best critics point out.

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37 Forman, p. 134.
38 Murry, p. 60.
T. S. Eliot writes: "He had no theories, yet in the sense appropriate to the poet, in the same sense though to a letter degree that Shakespeare, he had a 'philosophic' mind." Arthur Lynch proclaims: "Keats was a philosopher first, a poet afterwards..." And A. C. Brooke assures us that, "Keats was a philosophic poet, and for that very reason he fell into no philosophic errors in his conception of poetry."

Keats' philosophy, a philosophy of Beauty as the ultimate explanation of life, is based on the central axiom, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty." For him this was the one unshakeable principle of his philosophy, the counselor of his soul, the foundation of the 'vast idea' to which he refers in one of his earliest poems "Sleep and Poetry":

...yet there ever rolls
A vast idea before me, and I glean
Therefrom my liberty; thence too I've seen
The end and aim of Poety. 'Tis clear
As anything most true; as that the year
Is made of the four seasons—

This 'vast idea' involves the apprehension of Beauty as Truth, but more than that it is a passionate drama of life—he desired to reveal the truth of life, not through abstractions, but a true reflection of life itself. And his "Beauty as Truth" was the high reason which brought with it 'the love of good and ill', the acceptance of the burden of the mystery of things.

In "Endymion" we see a clarification of this 'vast idea', "The rational faculty was impotent to achieve truth, that intuitive apprehension was the sole faculty by which an ultimate truth could be known, that this

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40 The John Keats Memorial Volume, p. 126.


52 Murray, p. 71.
truth could be recognized for what it was only by its beauty, that the perceptions of beauty were premonitions of a final reality, that the way toward intuitive knowledge of this reality lay through a reverence for the instinctive impulses, and that somehow in this final knowledge all discords would be reconciled.\textsuperscript{43}

In Keats own words he again emphasizes this same conception:

"The imagination may be compared to Adam's dream—he awake and found it truth. I am the more zealous in this affair, because I have never yet been able to perceive how anything can be known for truth by consequitive reasoning—and yet it must be."\textsuperscript{44}

But what exactly did Keats mean by Beauty? He refers to a "principle of beauty in all things." Does he suggest a principle found in the things he sees as beautiful, or a principle of beauty in which everything participates? After studying the poetry and letters of Keats, I am convinced that without the aid of other philosophers, he has reached a conception of transcendental beauty which corresponds to that of Thomas or Maritain. Again I must refer to the letter to his brother George in which he speaks of the "mighty abstract Idea I have of Beauty in all things." This statement can only, in conjunction with his other writings, signify his belief that there is a universal ideal in which all things by their very being must partake so that all things are beautiful in their own way.

There has been an overabundance of criticism written on "Ode to a Grecian Urn" which contains the dictum of his philosophy, much of which I feel is unnecessary and unjust. Too often the criticism of the last lines seems to be an interpretation according to the critics own definition of Beauty and Truth rather than a consideration of what exactly Keats meant by the two words.

\textsuperscript{43}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{44}Forman, p. 67.
There is, too, a problem with the punctuation of the last lines which results in various interpretations of who is speaking this wisdom. In some editions "Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty" the quotes are omitted, giving the impression these are the words of the poet.

It has been shown that Keats recognized a principle of beauty that was transcendental, extended beyond all concrete thing, but in which all concrete particulars participated. He felt that his whole life must be a search for communication with the divine, and this would be realized through beauty in the particular. But particular beauties, because they are in touch with abstract beauty are eternalized. "A thing of beauty is a joy forever" begins "Endymion", and hence the perception and creation of beauty lead to an endurance of a mortal destiny because it is lasting. "Wherein lies happiness" Endymion asks, and Peona tells him it lies in communion with essential beauty. Why? Because beauty in all its forms is a contact with a truth which externally exists. Keats knew this just as Thomas and Maritain knew it. Beauty and Truth are essentially one, they are different aspects of the same reality, so that whatever is felt, perceived, or imagined as beautiful would if adequately expressed in intellectual form be found a reality truly conceived and truth adequately transformed into the shape of sensation or imagination would have turned into beauty. Through Beauty we can know truth, the truth of reality which allows us to transcend the suffering of mortal existence and accept death. His own acquiescent acceptance of Tom Keats' death is shown in "Hyperion". Why is Saturn being overthrown—the good, wise Saturn? He is being overthrown by another who is good and wise, but one who is even more beautiful.

45 Murry, p. 30.
46 Bradley, Memorial Volume...., p. 45.
47 Murry, p. 85.
This is the wisdom revealed by Oceanus:

So on our heels a fresh perfection treads,
A power more strong in beauty, born of us
And fated to excel us, as we pass,
In glory that old Darkness: nor are we
Thereby more conquer'd, than by us the rule
Of shapeless Chaos. Say, doth the dull soil
Quarrel with the proud forests it hath fed,
And feedeth still, more comely that itself?
Can it deny the chiefdom of green groves?
Or shall the tree be envious of the dove
Because it cooeth, and hath snowy wings
To wander wherewithal and find its joys?
We are such forest-trees, and our fair boughs
Have bred forth, not pale solitary doves,
But eagles golden-feather'd who do tower
Above us in their beauty, and must reign
In right thereof; for 'tis the eternal law
That first in beauty should be first in might;
...Give consolation in this woe extreme.
Receive the truth, and let it be your balm.

By "first in beauty should be first in might" Keats means that "perfect power can only spring from knowledge, from the widening of the mind till it comprehends all intellectual and spiritual experience." Only then can we reconcile ourselves with the pain and suffering. As M. H. Abrahms said:

In a world of inexplicable mystery and pain, the experience of beauty is one sure revelation of reality; beauty lives in particulars and these pass, but they attest a principle, a unity behind them. And if beauty is reality, the converse is likewise true, that reality, the reality of intense human experience, of suffering, can also yield beauty, in itself and in art.

This is what John Keats contended and this is what he has shown in his poetry. In "Isabella" he has wrought beauty out of intense pain and suffering--this is the truth of life which yields beauty able to overcome all.

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48 Raynor, p. 212.

It has repeatedly been proven and widely acknowledged that beauty and truth are one. It should then not be so difficult to accept the dictum of Keats' philosophy. As Santayana says, "We know on excellent authority that beauty is truth, that it is the expression of the ideal, the symbol of divine perfection, and the sensible manifestation of the good." And Keats did not mean anything different than the perception of essential beauty is the perception of essential truth. Man passes but beauty is immortal. When Keats is most conscious of decay and sorrow he is also conscious of the victory of beauty over death and time. The urn shows that art distills the beauty and truth of a fleeting moment and gives it immortality, immortality because it represents external beauty and truth which is timeless. The very first line of the poem gives us this impression:

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time
Sylvan historian.

"Coming down through the centuries, unravished by time, adopted by time and silence, historian of the past, its creator long since forgotten, the urn and its decorations are eloquently illustrative of the permanence of beauty..." Because it is deathless, and because it signifies the permanency of beauty it leads to a worship of "the principle of beauty in all things" as a philosophy of life. That is the function of art and of Keats' poetry, to know the real identity of man, the inner beauty and truth of being, and to portray it in the language of intensity. These are the words of the urn, what it is telling us, what all created beauty must tell

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52 Ibid.
us if it is to be great art.

"That is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." What did Keats mean by this? The line which precedes it was the basis of his whole philosophy of life. He was certain of the truth of his statement and felt it the most obvious and important concept we have, everything else was tied in with his identity of Beauty and Truth, hence this was all that was necessary to know in order to live a mortal life. Any beauty which is not truthful (if there is any) and any truth not beautiful (if there be any) are unnecessary to man in his mundane condition. The truth which our Sylvan historian gives is the only kind of truth we are likely to have on this earth, and the only kind we need, this type of truth gives us an insight into essential truth. This is what Keats meant by the last two lines, and as Mathew Arnold pointed out this may not be all we know "but it is deeply true, and we have deep need to know it."

Briefly this was the basis of Keats philosophy of life. He worshiped the "principle of beauty in all things" and worked for a communication with it. His philosophy was a search for knowledge and truth through beauty in the particular which would bring him into contact with the abstract ideal. But the concrete beauty was that which he would create, beauty of his own making which would serve as the urn did "in the midst of other woe, Than ours, a friend to man," to tell man that it is a love of beauty, and only that which will lead him to an acceptance of sorrow and eventually death, for beauty is truth and it is this eternal beauty and truth which will live on after us to serve other men, and lead us ultimately

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53 Ibid.
55 Lyon, p. 43.
to a communion with essential beauty and truth which is a communion with the divine. Such a philosophy of life left no alternative but that John Keats be a poet, and the kind of a poet that he was.

KEATS: POET OF BEAUTY

Physical Beauty of Poetry

In Poetry I have a few Axioms...I think Poetry should surprise by a fine excess and not by Singularity—it should strike the Reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a Remembrance—Its touches of Beauty should never be halfway ther(by) making the reader breathless instead of content: the rise, the progress, the setting of imagery should like the Sun come natural to him—

"The excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth."57

Two of the keywords found in these passages of Keats are Beauty and intensity. Poetry must radiate Beauty that is so intense that the reader is left only with the joy in the knowledge of its truth. Keats poured all his experiences and knowledge of beauty into his poetry so that there emerged a work bathed in the richness of words and sounds exquisitely embroidered, echoing his philosophy of Beauty:

Let us inspect the Lyre, and weigh the stress
Of every chord, and see what may be gain
By ear industrious, and attention meet;
Misers of sound and syllable, no less
Than Midas of his coinage.58

This quote from a letter to George Keats is a perfect summation

56 Forman, p. 107.
57 Ibid.
of his preoccupation with sounds in poetry. He had a special theory on the principle of melody in verse based upon the iteration of open and closed vowel sounds which Benjamin Bailey explains as the theory that "vowels should be so managed as not to clash with one another so as to mar the melody, and yet they should be interchanged, like different notes in music, to prevent monotony..." The beauty of Keats' verse can indeed be partially attributed to the richness of his vowel sequences.

Walter Jackson Bate with the aid of Professor Cabell Crecit, a phonetics expert, has set up a system whereby we can study the melodic patterns within his verse. By open vowels Keats was probably referring to dipthongs and historically long vowels, while closed vowels signify historically short vowels. If we let a represent the open vowels and b the closed vowels we can demonstrate Keats' ingenious ability to compose various musical patterns in a study of two later works, "Ode to a Nightingale" and "The Eve of St. Agnes."

Often times Keats' maintained a strict alteration of vowels:

b a b a b a
And purple-stained mouth (Nightingale)

But frequently the pattern became more complex, using one vowel sound at the first of a line and increasing the other toward the end of a line:

b b a b a b a b a
With silver taper's light, and pious care; (St. Agnes)

Or a balanced use of both sounds:

b b //a a / b a b a b a b a b a b a
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core (St. Agnes)


60 This study of vowel iteration is taken from Bate, Stylistic Development, pp. 50-65.
Again heavy emphasis may be laid on one particular sound:

\[ b \ b \ b \ b / b \ a \ b \ a \ b \ a \]

Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains

(Nightingale)

But it is the more intricate, delicate patterns which lead one to believe Keats intended to produce any interplay of sound that would ultimately produce the effect "like differing notes in music:"

\[ b / a \ b \ b \ b \ a / b \ b \ a \]

Innum'erable of stains and splendid dyes (St. Agnes)

\[ a \ b \ b / a \ b \ b / a \ b \ b / a \ b \ b / a \]

Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth (Nightingale)

\[ b / a \ b / a b \ b / a b b b \]

As are the tiger-moths deep-damask'd wings (St. Agnes)

\[ b b b b / a a a b b a \]

Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep (Nightingale)

But Keats' keeness with the beauty of sound is perhaps even more obvious in his unmatched artistic use of assonance. In studying the changes Keats made in his original copies of verse, can be seen a definite, conscious attempt to create a tonal quality which heightens the beauty of the language and mood of the verse itself, for example in "Endymion" he changed:

Round every spot where touch'd Apollo's feet to:
Round every spgt where trgd Apollo's feet.\(^{61}\)

And in Hyperion:

And bid old Saturn seize his throne again to:
And bid old Saturn take his throne again

In fact, Keats became so adept at assonance that few lines in his maturer poetry are lacking its fine quality, at least in some variety of simple assonance with repetition of one vowel within a line:

\(^{61}\)This Study of Assonance is taken from Bate, *Stylistic Development*, pp. 50-65
And all night kept awake for sinner's sake to
grieve (St. Agnes)

Yet let me tell my sorrow, let me tell (Hyperion)

But many of the lines contain a more complicated schema involving con­
secutive assonance of two or more vowels:

And on her silver cross soft amethyst (St. Agnes)

Nor let the beetle, nor the death-moth be (Melancholy)

And in some lines the consecutive assonance is further complicated by
additional variations:

Cannot I form? Cannot I fashion forth (Hyperion)

Save wings for heaven:—Porphyro grew faint (St. Agnes)

But the certitude of Keats mastercraftsmanship in the employment of as­
sonance is readily testified to by an examination of consecutive lines of
poetry which are intertwine in the same vowel patterning. "St. Agnes Eve"
stands out as a witness to this testimony:

The wakeful bloodhound rose and shook his hide

But his sagacious eyes an inmate owns.

Saying, "Mercy, Porphyro! hie thee from this place:

They are all here tonight, the whole bloodthirsty race"

The examples I have used for both the vowel iteration and the as­
sonance are all taken from Keats' later poetry. It was in this period when
Keats was striving for an increase in intensity, endeavoring to triumph
in the composition of concrete beauty, the path to his 'mighty abstract
ideal', that he achieved such eminent success in creating poetry whose
beauty has reached his own axiom, the beauty of which no one can say it is
only half-way.
Keats consummate manifestation of his passionate desire for absorption into what was for him, at the moment, poetical,—his desire for identity with the particular objects of beauty which he apprehended, coerced him to be precise about his choice of language that the imagery which ensued is beyond question some of the most beautiful, yet truly concrete in English poetry. It was his concern with sounds and words which brought Keats to the heights of the sensual imagery for which he is most noted and praised. An examination of certain manuscript revisions allows us an insight into the extreme care Keats took to insure that he would capture the almost intangible nature of his object and in doing so disclose its unique individuality from which the beauty would emerge, and at the same time its truth. In "The Eve of St. Agnes" he revised:

A drooping lamp was flickering here and there to:
A chain-droop'd lamp was flickering by each door

Here the substitution of a few words has created a more specific, visual picture, an intense, concrete image. And again in this same poem:
And touch'd with chequer black of Obelisks to:
And touch'd with shade of bronzed obelisks

In the revision of
Unclasps her bosom jewels, one by one to:
Unclasps her warmed jewels, one by one

the use of an epithet, which is very characteristic of Keats' writing, has aided not only the visual sense of the image but gives the tone a sense of feeling or sensuousness. Another change within this same poem is in the line "O'er the silent carpet" which became "hush'd carpet" evoking a soft

\[62\text{Ibid., p. 2}\]
\[63\text{Ibid.}\]
\[64\text{Ibid., p. 2}\]
tone and augmenting the quality of the image with sound.

In "Ode to Melancholy" Keats made the change

Or on the wealth of globe like peonies to:

Or on the wealth of globed peonies

in which one word increases the intensity of the image by contributing a new dimension so that one can almost feel his hand cupped around the flower. In "Ode to a Nightingale" the replacement of "cooling by "cool'd" in "Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth," he has once again summoned a new reality in an image—the vintage is no longer in the process of being cooled, it has been cooling a long time and at present is already cooled.

Another unusual feature found in Keats' writing is synaesthetic imagery or imagery that usually appeals to one sense but is also made to address another, for example "the touch of scent," "fragrant and emwreathe'd light" or "embalmed darkness." This too is a part of the intensity of concrete created beauty which substantiates his aim to capture the intangible identity of an object. Keats so perfected his ability to fully express the concrete that he could so enjoin language as to truly make the intangible tangible as in "Ode to a Nightingale" the line "Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs" we are really led to believe that we can feel the incense hanging there.

Keats managed so well the welding of language that the imagery of his poetry is sublime. He was particularly skillful with descriptions of nature:

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65 Ibid., p. 7

66 Ibid.


The soul is lost in pleasant smotherings:
Fair dewy roses brush against our faces,
And flowering laurels spring from diamond vases;
O'er head we see the jasmine and sweet briar,
And lovely grapes laughing from green attire;
While at our feet, the voice of crystal bubbles
Charms us at once away from all our troubles:
(I Stood Tiptoe Upon a Little Hill)

It was once again his desire for intensity and great love of beauty
which moved Keats to the vivid concreteness of his imagery, utilizing
sounds, colors, tastes, any technique which would appeal to the senses
and perfect the image:

She was a gordian shape of dazzling hue,
Vermillion-spotted, golden, green, and blue;
Strip'd like a zebra, freckled like a pard,
By'd like a peacock, and all crimson barr'd;
And full of silver moons, that, as she breath'd,
Dissolv'd, or brighter shone, or inter-wreath'd
Their lustres with the gloomier tapestries—
So rainbow-sided, touch'd with miseries,
She seem'd, at once, some penance'd lady elf, (Lamia)

While he from forth the closet brought a heap
Of candied apple, quince, and plum and gourd;
With jellies soother than the creamy curd,
And lucent syrups, tinct with cinnamon;
Nana and dates, in argosy transferr'd
From Fez; and spiced dainties, everyone,
From silken Samarcand to cedar'd Lebanon. (St. Agnes)

A living death was in each gush of sounds,
Each family of rapturous hurried notes,
That fell, one after one, yet all at once,
Like pearl beads dropping sudden from their string: (Hyperion)

Matthew Arnold in his "Preface to the Poems" has described

Isabella as a perfect treasurehouse of
graceful and felicitous words and images: almost
in every stanza there occurs one of those vivid and
picturesque turns of expression, by which the
object is made to flash upon the eyes of the mind,
and thrill the reader with a sudden delight.69
And certainly this beautiful passage will bear him out:

_Parting, they seem'd to tread upon the air,_
_Then roses by the zephyr blown apart_  
_Only to meet again more close, and share_  
_The inward fragrance of each other's heart._

One of his noted biographers, Sidney Colvin, remarked about Keats' poetry: "...and through the shining veils of his poetry his creations make themselves seen and felt in living shape, action and motive."  

The opening passage from "Hyperion" demonstrates his remarkable ability to give life and form to his work:

_Deep in the shady sadness of a vale_  
_Far sunk in the healthy breath of morn_  
_Far from the fiery noon, and eve's one star_  
_Sat gray-haired Saturn, quiet, as a stone._  
_Still as the silence round about his lair_  
_Forest on forest hung about his head_  
_Like cloud on cloud. No stir of air was there,_  
_Not so much life as on a summer's day_  
_Robs not one light seed from the feather'd grass,_  
_But where the dead leaf fell, there did it rest._  
_A stream went voiceless by, still deadened more_  
_By reason of his fallen divinity_  
_Spreading a shade; the Naiad hid her reeds_  
_Press'd her cold finger closer to her lips._

From Keat's admirer, A. C. Bradley, comes this precise summation of the quality which Keats has captured in his poetry:

_One of the main qualities of Keats' poetry:_  
_the power of concentrating all the far-reaching resources of language on one point, so that a single and apparently effortless expression rejoices the aesthetic imagination at the moment when it is most expectant and exacting and at the same time astonishes the intellect with a new aspect of truth._

And isn't this a direct echo of what Keats himself had intended when he wrote "Beauty is truth, truth beauty."

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70Colvin, p. 149.

71Jurry, p. 9.
Because of the sensual quality of his poetry Keats has often been considered a poet of physical beauty, but the truth is that "the yearning passion for the Beautiful which was with Keats, as he himself truly says, the masterpassion, is not a passion of the sensuous or sentimental man, is not a passion of the sensuous or sentimental poet. It is an intellectual and spiritual passion..."\(^7^2\)

Accompanying the polished, physical beauty of his poetry, Keats has found the seeds of expressed intuitions in the heart of his philosophy. It was his love of beauty that led him to be such a poet and most of his poetry deals in some manner with intellectual beauty. He is not creating beauty for beauty's sake. "The object of poetry for Keats is the 'identity'—the nature or 'truth' of individual, concrete reality...and the aim of poetry is the intense expression of this reality, of this energetic fulfillment of identity, caught in in its concrete moment of unfolding, and felt and understood by the poet through sympathetic identity. In this state of intense awareness, the 'true' is seen as the 'beautiful!' For with this 'swelling into reality' of the character and identity (or truth) of the object its essential form and function (or beauty) are grasped and relished by the imagination in their full significance."\(^7^3\)

Consider for a moment "Endymion" as an excerpt from Keats' philosophy of beauty. What is the identity? The identity of the poet's soul, the human soul initiates passion for beauty. It tells of the passage of the soul from perception and creation of beauty to consumation—"a thing of beauty is a joy forever." Why? Because the perception and creation of beauty lead to endurance of a mortal destiny, and it is lasting because it is a contact with a truth which externally exists. "Happiness lies happiness"—it lies in communion with essential beauty—life can only be

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\(^7^2\) Lyon, p. 43.

\(^7^3\) Bate, Criticism, p. 347.
a search for this communion just as it was for Endymion. And as Endymion discovers it can only be accomplished through a surrender to beauty in the particular.  

Another revelation of Keats belief in the principle of beauty as the principle of life is in "Hyperion." One of the saddest poems ever written, begun during the illness of his brother, it throbs with the warm sadness of a heart determined to control its pain, the strains of the still, sad music of humanity, boasting divine figures human in their loneliness and suffering. Their wisdom too is humane allotting beauty its primacy over man and death. This is their only consolation in their sorrowful situation.  

"Isabella" tells of the triumph of beauty and truth over pain and suffering. "Sleep and Poetry" reveals the early awakening of his awareness of the supremacy of the intuitive process of poetry to expose the truth or identity of an object through its beauty. "Ode on a Grecian Urn" which contains the famous axiom "beauty is truth, truth beauty" analyzes created beauty through created beauty as it exemplifies and testifies to this inviolable principle.

All the poetry of Keats in some manner contributes to the construction of a scaffold from which we can determine this poet's theories on life, poetry and beauty. His poetry is a fragmented documentation of the long search for a communion with essential beauty. It signifies the soul exposing itself over and over again, longing, struggling to be united with "The principle of beauty in all things."

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74 Barry, p. 29.
75 Ibid., p. 85.
Keats loved philosophy and he loved Beauty. His philosophy was a philosophy of beauty which led him to a worship of the principle of beauty as a way of life realized through the creation of beauty in poetry which would serve as a soother of human souls and uplift the human destiny. This is what Keats poetry reveals.

If great poets are those who utter their own souls through their poetry, it is with great certitude that John Keats be proclaimed one of our truly great poets, and it must be true.
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