



REGRESSION OF PAST LIFE REFLECTED IN
JOHN KEATS' SELECT POEMS

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ABSTRACT

The present paper aims to explore the theme of regression of past life in John Keats' select poems such as La Belle Dame Sans Merci and Ode on a Grecian Urn. Regression of past life means taking an individual back through time to their previous lives. It means incarnations by accessing memories and experiences that are normally hidden in their subsections mind. It Connects one to past life experiences; to understand deep connection with certain places. The same experience is sought by John Keats and its result is the composition of great poems La Belle Dame Son's mercy and Ode on a Grecian Urn. Keats love of medieval legend, fairy tale is reflected in the first poem and love of old Grecian art is reflected in the later poem. The interpretative analytical and evaluative method is adopted to explore this theme.

KEY WORDS: Regression, in carnations, Grecian is urn medieval legend.

INTRODUCTION

John Keats (1795-1821) was one of the most poetic of all the English poets. He was born in 1795 on the 31st October, at the Swan and Hoof Livery Stables outside the precincts of the City of London, his father being the head Oster at these stables, and his mother daughter of the Proprietor of the stables. He attended the school of the Rev. John Clarke at Enfield, where he received a sound general education. He acquired knowledge of Latin and history, and some French, but no Greek. At the age of fifteen, he was apprenticed to a surgeon, but his overmastering passion for poetry made him break away from surgery and he, travelled through many parts of England. In 1817 'Poems by John Keats' was published; In 1818 Keats wrote his long poem 'Endymion' which was bitterly criticized in Blackwood's Magazine and the Quarterly. He began 'The Eve of St. Agnes' in 1819, and wrote 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' and 'the Eve of St. Mark'. About the same time he wrote his great odes - On a Grecian Urn, To a Nightingale, To Autumn, On Melancholy, On Indolence and To Psyche. His health, always delicate, was broken by his unfortunate love for a lady called Fanny Browne. By 1820 he was seriously ill with consumption.



He sailed for Italy in September, 1820, reached Rome in November, and died there on 23rd February. He was buried in the English cemetery at Rome, and upon his tombstone was inscribed, at his own request, the words 'Here lies one whose name was writ in water.' Keats had a passionate love of beauty and turned to Greek myth and mediaeval romance for material for his poetry. The line of his long poem 'Endymion', 'A thing of beauty is ivy forever' really sums up his outlook on life. His poetry is

marked by a deep passion for beauty especially of the sensuous type, a magical felicity of phrase, and a delight in what is romantic and mysterious.

La Belle Dame sans Merci

La Belle Dame sans Merci' is a ballad. This is a story poem, and has for years been a favorite selection for the editors. Simply the story is "A knight was walking aimlessly, alone and pale of face, by the banks of a gloomy lake in winter. The poet accosted him, asking why he was so sad and forlorn, and the knight replied, "I met a lovely lady in the meadows, and I gave her a garland. I loved her, and she said that she returned my love. Then I placed her on my horse beside me, and we rode off, laughing and rejoicing. She sang me a song of fairyland. She gave me sweet roots to eat, and also honey and manna. At last we arrived at the cave where she lived. Once more she said that she loved me, and lulled me to sleep. Soon I had a dream, and in it I saw pale kings, princes, and knights. They all exclaimed that I too had become a victim to the lady without pity. The dream ended, I woke up and found myself alone on the side of a cold hill."

The love of mediaeval legend, and the fairy-tale atmosphere mixed with a suggestion of supernatural horror which are typical of the 'romantic' poets are clearly seen in this poem. 'A haunting and mysterious' ballad, it has been described as a 'little masterpiece of direct and simple narrative laden with ineffable suggestion'. The hero in this poem is a romantic figure, a knight of the middle ages on a prancing horse. The language is deliberately made like the old fashioned language of the middle ages, with words like 'withered, meads, elfin grot, Hath thee in thrall.' The French title, which means 'The beautiful lady without pity', adds to the romantic setting. The background of decaying nature, the cold hill-side, the withered sedges, the silence of the birds all enhance the gloom and spirit atmosphere. We may, therefore, call this poem a fantasy. Some critics say that there is no ulterior meaning or significance in this poem, and that the cruel lady in the poem is an elf and not a symbol; but others do not. Agree with this view. According to them the poem has an underlying significance; it describes the fate of those lovers who are disappointed in love and such a lover was Keats himself. The poem, therefore, refers to the soul of Keats in thralldom to Fanny Brawn, his lady-love, and generally the devastating power of overpassing. This love he magically incorporates in this poem.

Ode on a Grecian Urn

The inspiration of this great poem is said to have been partly derived from a marble urn belonging to Lord Holland, and still preserved in the garden at Holland House, Kensington. However, it is fairly certain that Keats is also thinking of Greek sculpture in general as revealed to him by the famous Elgin marbles. The urn belonging to Lord Holland represents the scene of a sacrifice. There is an altar bearing fruit carved in the middle; a priest stands nearby, and a figure playing on a pipe is carved above. Other details recalling the idea of Keats are two trees, and a bull that is brought to be killed at a sacrifice.

Here is a short analysis of the poem. In the first stanza Keats addresses the urn as unravished bride of quietness. Questions follow which flash their own answer upon us - these questions are at the same time pictures. Keats asks 'what men or gods are these?' In other words, 'what is the legend that is carved on the sides of the urn?' In the second stanza, Keats passes to direct consideration of *that* sculptured legend: the flute-players, the youth singing under the trees, and the lovers about to kiss. It gives us a contrast between the permanence of the scenes carved on the urn and the transitoriness of human joys. For example, the lovers carved on the urn will never suffer a setback in Beauty and Love like the lovers in the actual life. The third stanza continues the same thought. 'The crayon life such as the silent music of the marble pipes, the unuttered song, the love that never reaches fulfillment etc... - all this life of imagery and imagination is more real and more enviable than the human life of audible melody and tangible embraces.' This is true especially of love, because the fulfillment of love never brings real happiness. The boughs, or the piper, or the lover carved on the urn must retain youth and beauty, forever and forever. Keats has so far confined himself to the actual figures on the urn. However, in the fourth stanza the questioning begins-again and here Keats not only animates the marble, but goes beyond it to create a whole landscape of river, seashore and city in

which the figures carved on the urn can live and move. We get pictures of an altar, priest, sacrifice, the heifer dressed with garlands and the people moving to the scene of sacrifice. In the last stanza, Keats draws the moral of the urn. It is also the moral of his whole life's work. The moral of the poem is : 'the generations of men pass and die, but amid the changes and chances of this mortal life Beauty and Truth - not two things, not even twin things, but one and the same thing seen from different aspects — are permanent forever.'

It is interesting to note here what both G. E. Hollingworth and A. R. Weekes remark, "The central thought of this ode is Keats's main contribution to the sum of speculative thought in and since his day. Generations of artists have based and are basing both faith and practice on Keats's creed. As soon as the notion of the unity of truth and beauty is lost from sight, we get weak art, false art, evil art, and the school of gross realism on one side, the school of ornament for ornament's sake on another. 'Midway between the two stands Keats, holding up his own severe ideal like a torch. To the one he says: "your work is not beautiful, therefore ultimately it cannot be true; there is a flaw in your foundations." To the other, and perhaps more sternly : "Your work is not true, and therefore necessarily it has no beauty; it may have for a day the false semblance of beauty, but it cannot endure; for it is built on no foundations at all." What right has Keats thus to lay down the law? The right of a mastermind; who by his work has illustrated his principles; whose work, now that nearly a century has gone by, is by the suffrages of our men of letters confirmed in the very highest rank of art; from whom if we differ at our own peril, as much as we differed from a great scientist in science, or from a great musician in music."

The 'Ode on a Grecian urn' is a progressive poem, having a neat and recognizable plan in three parts: introduction, main subject and conclusion. The first stanza gives the introduction, the second, third and fourth stanzas the main* subject and the fifth the conclusion. The introduction presents the urn in its mystery and shows what questions it poses to the poet. The main subject consists of the scenes on the urn. The conclusion tells the experience gained from the urn to its special order of reality and answers the questions which the poem has raised. The poem has what Aristotle would call a beginning, a middle and an end; it asks questions and answers them; it evokes a special state of mind and relates this to ordinary life; it moves from eager curiosity to delighted amazement, exalted rapture, and devout solemnity; it closes on a note akin to revelation and summarizes its message in words of astonishing, paradoxical clarity. The poem has more than a direct line of development, it has its contrasts of height and depth, and the richness which these add to it — this analysis of the poem given by C. M. Bowra is quite 'telling and remarkable.

The poem abounds in examples of the most delightful phrasing and a happy selection of the most melodious words. The pictorial power is high; the description is appealing and almost as clear to see as if painted in colour. The poem has a wealth of rich expression and imagery. Therefore, even if we had nothing but this single 'Ode' we would still **have** ten class K>at<; with the highest.

A Thing of Beauty

This extract (lines 1 to 62) forms one of the most significant passages in Keats's poetry. It is taken from the opening of his first long poem 'Endymion'. Let us first consider the background of this long poem in four books. This long narrative poem was more or less an exercise. It was the poem which was savagely criticized by the reviewers of the day. The story which Keats selected was an old and vague one. It is doubtful whether an epic poem could have been made out of a misty legend, with insufficient incident to give it coherence and unity. From the old Greeks, Keats took a myth about a shepherd who loved and was loved by Selene, the Goddess of the Moon. The story of *Endymion*, a mortal shepherd loved by the Goddess of the Moon, is told in four books — the first Book describing *Endymion* on the Earth, the second his wanderings under the Earth, the third describing his adventures under the sea, and the fourth and last Book dealing with his adventures in the air. The original story was in reality only a framework on which to hang beautiful words and descriptive passages, and scene passes into scene without much forward movement or progression. There are plenty of very beautiful passages, but they are often not well related to each other; it is a profusion of poetry without system or method, genius working at random.

Lines 1-62 (Section I) are prescribed here for our study. This section consists of three paragraphs all devoted to the theme in the opening line: 'A thing of beauty is a joy forever.' The first paragraph (lines 1-24) states that things of beauty keep their charm always, and appeal directly to the senses and the imagination. They exert a tranquilizing and exalting effect upon human beings, in their days of trouble and sorrow. These things of beauty are real and concrete. First come the delightful objects of Nature — the sun, the moon, the trees old and young, flowers, rills and forest under-growths. Next is the beauty attached to the memory of the dead poets and noble spirits of the past? Finally, there is literature, "all lovely tales that we have read or heard."

The second paragraph (lines 25-33) stresses that these things of beauty are not material in the crude and simple sense of the word, but they are essentials that will last, and that will cover themselves round our whole being, evoking a response from our whole spirit. In the third paragraph (lines 34-62), the poet with pleasure outlines his programme of work against the leafy calendar of the season. The name of *Endymion* is sweet music to his ears. So he is very happy in setting about his noble task of telling his story in the prime of spring and his hopes of finishing it before winter. The prospect of the lovely sights and scenes of the season (April - November), as seen in Nature and humanity, cheer his spirit. He, so, does not want to prolong his task of composition beyond sober and golden autumn to the bare and hoary winter. So he energetically takes up the work.

It is now generally admitted that in spite of its faults. *Endymion* is one of the notable poems produced in the Age of Romanticism. Its characteristic faults are those of youthfulness and romantic imagination, while its virtues are its own; imaginativeness, lyricism, loves of Beauty. In *Endymion*, the story is Grecian, but the technique reminds us of the Elizabethans. Keats makes use of the heroic couplet but avoids the regular beat of the closed couplet. *Endymion* was thus the most ambitious attempt of Keats. There may not be much subject-matter in the poem, apart from description of scenery, of emotion, and the like; perhaps there is an allegory, whether intentional or not. *Endymion* is overcome by his obsession for ideal beauty in god-like form; and Keats himself was to end his brief life in a search for the beautiful.

CONCLUSION:

Regression of past life means taking an individual back through time to their previous lives. It means incarnations by accessing memories and experiences that are normally hidden in their subsections mind. It Connects one to past life experiences; to understand deep connection with certain places. The same experience is sought by John Keats and its result is the composition of great poems La Belle Dame Son's mercy and Ode on a Grecian Urn. Keats love of medieval legend, fairy tale is reflected in the first poem and love of old Grecian art is reflected in the later poem

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