

The Falconer

From the Editor

The first time I read Keats, I was largely unreceptive to the beauty of his *word*. The next time I read Keats, I had decided to drop my plans for medicine altogether and pursue a degree (and a life) in English Literature. To many, this might seem like an unrelated and far-stretched association; but to me, such was the effect of John Keats' poetry. As our featured artist, Anum Habib, puts it, *reading Keats is a luxury*. For the last two years that I have spent as a student of English Literature, there is no poet that I have read more passionately than John Keats. Naturally, when I discovered late last year that his bicentennial death anniversary was due in February, I reached out to the team and we decided to dedicate the second issue of the magazine to the great Romantic - the greatest Romantic, perhaps - that all of us so admire.

There is little that now remains obscure about his life. Between his open correspondences with his friends and brothers, the reaction of critics to his works, his reaction to the critics' reaction, and the great many biographies that have covered the 25 years of his brief life over the last 200 years, Keat's readers lose no detail, and no stone is left unturned. Yet, with all the essays ,on his life and philosophy, most people still fail to understand him entirely. I own no rights to this sentiment, for I am merely an inexperienced lover of Keats, but I do borrow it from the likes Andrew Motion and G. R. Elliott, the latter of whom argues that Keats' central instinct was "the quietude that comes, not from avoiding life, but surmounting it." It is, then, the real tragedy that we balance out his poetic potentiality with his running fate. When we talk about what he could have done had he lived for a few more years, we dismiss the abject realities of his life that would have dominated his penmanship with a poisoned dagger, instead of celebrating the genius of a man who dodged every tribulation tossed his way to continue pouring out lyrical magic, we reduce him to the possibility of a possibility.

In this issue, we remember John Keats for who he was – a loving friend, selfless brother, hopeless Romantic, and a (poetic) force to be reckoned with. We remember him, not through his work, but through his days; we remember the kind spirit in which he selflessly sacrificed the wants of the self for the needs of the others, be it Tom Keats or Fanny Brawne; we remember him as the man whose work the critics trashed as "*the most incongruous ideas in the*

most uncouth language,” as he continued to write. Today, we celebrate his legacy – in the West as in the East, his philosophies, his friendships, his rivalries, and his poetry. Today, we celebrate John Keats and the bicentennial anniversary of the end of his suffering.

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***The Troubled Romance between Keats, Shelley, and
Byron***

Anum Habib (3rd Year, Morning)

Reading Keats is a luxury - a rare chance to experience the English language in all of its glory. However, Keats was not alone in his poetic journey. Keats' Romantic counterparts, Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron, were the twin stars of English Romanticism. Despite being the forerunners of the movement, Keats, Shelley and Byron were caught up in a friend-foe triangle that dominated not only the literary sphere, but their personal lives as well.

Going against the popular opinion at the time, Shelley was an early admirer of Keats' work. The two were introduced by Leigh Hunt, whose politics had already begun to cast the mark of alienation on Keats. Interestingly, however, Shelley was critical of Hunt's influence upon Keats' work; he believed Keats to be a natural talent led astray by mannerisms and affectation. It would have perhaps been better for the separation to have gone through, but Keats never warmed up to Shelley as Shelley did to him, for his word to have that power. Shelley's belief can best be described in his own words, in this excerpt from a letter he wrote to Marianne Hunt in October 1820 regarding Keats's latest work, *Hyperion*

"Keats' new volume has arrived to us, & the fragment called Hyperion promises for him that he is destined to become one of the first writers of the age. I intend to be the physician both of his body & his soul. I am aware indeed that I am nourishing a rival who will far surpass me, and this is an additional motive & will be an added pleasure."

Pride and social sensitiveness apart, one can imagine that a full understanding was not easy between them; that Keats, with his strong vein on every-day humanity, sense, and humor, and an innate openness of mind, may well have been as much repelled as attracted by the unearthly ways and accents of Shelley- his passionate negation of the world's creeds and society's laws. Yet, upon the death of his dearest's friend, Shelley wrote a beautiful elegy in his memory. The next year, Shelley himself drowned with a volume of Keats's poetry, *Lamia*, in his pocket.

Every corner of this coveted literary trio was tainted with unreciprocated affection and rivalry, materializing often in the most blatant criticism of each other's life and work. John Keats and Lord Byron's feud was more of a perennial rivalry rather than a seething hatred. Byron was a flamboyant (and

handsome) nobleman whose wit, charm, and ancestral title gave him access to the most elite circles of English society. Byron, to Keats, was simply a snob with many-a-privilege that he did not work hard to gain. Keats, on the other hand, was an orphaned, weak, and struggling middle-class poet whose work was often savaged by the great critics of the age. And so, quite simply, Byron disliked Keats' poetry on an aesthetic level; Keats hated Byron on a personal level. He considered the former's work to be overrated, slavish, and unoriginal. It was a sort of a reverse snobbery.

Prior to his death, John Keats wrote a letter to his brother, George Keats, in September 1819, where he claimed the comparison between Byron and him to be linearly stark.

"You speak of Lord Byron and me – There is this great difference between us. He describes what he sees – I describe what I imagine – Mine is the hardest task."

The rivalry is further expounded in Byron's view of Keats. When made aware of the tragic news of Keats' death, Byron wrote to his friend, John Murray:

"Is it true – what Shelley writes to me that poor John Keats died at Rome of the Quarterly Review? I am very sorry for it – though I think he took the wrong line as a poet."

The "rivalry", which, at best, was a weak-faced hatred, is quite apparent from the manner in which these letters were conceived.

Throughout his life, and even in death, John Keats remains eternally criticized. He was, and is, accused of amateurish language, being young, inexperienced, and bearing the wrong political ideals. Yet, through his work, we can see that Keats only aimed at the liberty and freedom sought by his fellow contemporary writers, which includes Byron, Hunt, and Shelley. The troubled romance that Keats shared with his contemporaries, then, paints a rather poignant image of what he truly desired: a free artistic country with radical beliefs, set ablaze with the liberty of creative expressionism.

Oscar Wilde, *The Grave of Keats*

Rid of the world's injustice, and his pain,

He rests at last beneath God's veil of blue:

Taken from life when life and love were new

The youngest of the martyrs here is lain,
Fair as Sebastian, and as early slain.
No cypress shades his grave, no funeral yew,
But gentle violets weeping with the dew
Weave on his bones an ever-blossoming chain.
O proudest heart that broke for misery!
O sweetest lips since those of Mitylene!
O poet-painter of our English Land!
Thy name was writ in water—it shall stand:
And tears like mine will keep thy memory green,
As Isabella did her Basil-tree.

ROME.

A Freshman's Guide to Romanticism

Sawera Deedar (1st year, Morning)

While the Age of Enlightenment – a movement characterized by its emphasis on reason as the primary source of authority – brought political modernization to the west, it also led to social upheaval. People were encouraged to 'discard' the existential baggage of emotions and curtail religious and artistic endeavors in favor of science and modernization.

Romanticism, then, was a revolt against the aristocratic rationalization of nature and the idea that human beings thrive on reason rather than imagination. This movement had a monumental impact on literature, music

and sublime art. Poetry of the Romantic times acquired deep implications in every walk of life, and a rapid paradigm shift was seen in the way people saw art. Not only did the Romantics glorify nature and the common man, but they also stressed on the power of self-awareness and unsuppressed melancholy. Isolation was no longer feared, and solitary exploration was seen as the key to creative inspiration.

Identification of women was one of the most predominant themes of the Romantic Movement. *Lucinde*, written by Friedrich Schlegel, denounced the exploitation of women on the basis of patriarchal beliefs. The same can be seen in the works of Keats and Coleridge, who symbolized this characterization by naming their female addressees. Another prevalent theme of the Romantic movement was the power of individualism. The Romantics dissuaded people from giving in to the social canons of the Age of Enlightenment and encouraged creatives to explore their own individuality. They saw the world as a subjective place and were great advocates for fostering an optimistic outlook on life. Contrary to what the Age before them had promoted. Some of the greatest works produced in the Age of Romanticism include the *Odes* of John Keats, the *Lyrical Ballads* by William Wordsworth, and the works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Keats and Urdu Romanticism

Abdul Rehman Jokhio (3rd Year, Morning)

Already with thee! tender is the night,
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;
But here there is no light.

- Keats

یہ روپہلی چھاؤں یہ آکاش پر تاروں کا جال
جیسے صوفی کا تصور جیسے عاشق کا خیال
آہ لیکن کون جانے کون سمجھے جی کا حال
اے غم دل کیا کروں اے وحشت دل کیا کروں
مجاز۔

Hampstead. Late September, 1820. Chilly winter winds are pushing against the curtains through open windows; the mist is brooding on red-bricked homes, with the dry sound of cold-infested cough echoing inside. In such a house, a young man, with his drowsy face and pale complexion, is battling through life. He is packing his luggage to leave for the calmer airs of Rome. This young man, of 24, with all his active tragedy, still plods. Standing in the midst of all this poetry is the great Romantic, John Keats.

Delhi. 4th December, 1955. All is well, except the night is extraordinarily dark and unusually cold. An inebriated man, uncharged with all his senses, is wallowing on the roof of a tavern that was left unlocked by the owner mistakenly. The next day, that man is found half-dead. The man was Majaz Lakhnawi.

Although the two men lived in opposite parts of the world, bounded by different shackles, more than a century apart, their works, much like their lives, bear an uncanny resemblance. Majaz is often called the *Keats of Urdu*. His nazm, *Aawara*, which has, in many ways, outdone the poetry of Faiz's *Mujh Se Pehli Si Mohbat Mery Mehboob Ne Mang* and Sahir's *Taj Mahal*, has the kind of gloomy ring to it that is unique only to the Odes of Keats. Majaz's *Aawara*, *Raat aur Rail* and *Andheri Raat K Musafir* are considered to be his most poignant works. Naturally, then, these poems are Keatsian in the sense that they provide a portrayal of inner confrontation of a man who is longing for a calmer past in the face of the harsh, and often unbearable, truth of their reality.

Another Urdu poet, often likened to Keats, is Akhter Shirani. He changed the course of Urdu poetry from the ethical and religious (by Iqbal, Hali, and Akbar) to the artistic and romantic - an idea that Keats' philosophy of Negative Capability supports. He was one of the very first poets to openly talk about love and romance in his poems by directly addressing them. Like Keats' Isabella and Fanny, Shirani, too, characterized women in his poetry with names like Rehana, Salma and Aazra. These names were always conceived in the symbolism of womanhood and beauty – beauty that was not only confined to women but was general.

On purportedly liberating Urdu poetry from the hands of revolutionary and ethical poets, Shirani harbored the idea that poetry must not be confined to serve any particular idea; rather it must be free to encompass every social as well as individual aspect of human life. Some of his most famous works include *Aye Ishq Kahein Ly Chal*, *Aye Ishq Humein Barbad Na Kar*. Being the pioneer of romantic poetry in Urdu, he is often referred to as the “Poet of Romance & Beauty”.

Other poets, like N M Rashid and Faiz, were influenced, although not as directly as the former two, by the artistic genius of Keats. N M Rashid, from early on, was greatly inspired by Milton, Keats, and Robert Browning. One of his most popular poems, *Hassan Kuzagar*, corresponds to Keats’ *Ode to Grecian Urn* in that, both the poem contrast between “lived experience and its representation” versus the “subjective experience and the object truth”.

Sometimes reading the works of their literary predecessors induces in the readers, and writers-to-be, the same stylistic unconscious, the manifestation of which is fluent in the works of Majaz and Shirani. For seldom does art from different times have the ability to build on the many similarities in themes, images, human experiences, emotion, and the perspective of the writer - that they are not even aware of themselves.

Keats, then, is not only alive in what he wrote, but what we write that comes through him.

اندازِ بیاں بدلتا ہے بات کو ہر بار
-ورنہ کوئی بھی بات دنیا میں نئی نہیں ہوتی

In Conversation with Dr. Faisal Nazir: *Keats, the Self, and the Idea of Literature*

This month, The Falconer is remembering John Keats on his bicentennial death anniversary. Although the general perception of Keats as a Romantic poet is the same for most people, different people relate to him for different reasons. This nuance in understanding, then, must have some relation to his overall presentation as a person and poet. How would you describe John Keats?

Well, the most common way that we approach Keats - the academic way – is as a Romantic poet. Generally, our understanding of Keats is conceived within the context of Romanticism. Personally speaking, I differ in my understanding of Keats in that I like those poems of his where he is more open and direct. For example, the general opinion is that *Ode to Autumn* is his best poem, and from an academic point of view, that may even be true. It does not, however, appeal to me as much as, say, *Ode to a Nightingale*. I remember many lines from this Ode and barely any from all of his other poems. The Keats I see here- the Keats who is open about his suffering, despite all the flaws, I find more engaging than the one present in his more mature works. Oftentimes,

people say that he overdoes it, and in some places, he *does* overdo it, but most of the time, I don't find that bad. In fact, I find it rather beautiful.

I remember I had this discussion when I was a student here. I was talking about Wordsworth and my teacher passed a remark that 'Wordsworth has no intensity' or that his intensity is more artistically concealed than the more intense Romantics like Keats or Shelly. It is that intensity, then, that I admire the most in his poetry.

Keats was a part of this mammoth artistic movement, with two generations of exceptional poets. What do you think distinguishes Keats from his Romantic counterparts?

Well, I believe it is his approach to poetry, along with the question of the self that distinguishes him from the other Romantics. Keats himself was an admirer of Shakespeare and Wordsworth, but he differentiated the talents of these two poets. He called Wordsworth 'the egotistical sublime' - someone who is always talking and thinking about himself – but he identified in Shakespeare what he refers to as Negative Capability. Keats would define Negative Capability as being in uncertainty, mystery, and doubt - without any reaching after fact or reason.

Romantics, they are self-absorbed. They always talk about the experiences of going through life. Paul de Man, in his essay on Keats, wrote that Keats realized later in his life, especially when he was dying of tuberculosis, that one has to confront oneself. You can always empathize with people, you can talk about ethics and endurance, but when you face death, it is only at that time that you are awakened to yourself. The question of the Self, according to Paul de Man, is only unobscured to one when one has suffered and endured. It is this same question that differentiate Keats from his Romantic counterparts.

You mentioned Keats' Negative Capability. Could you break it down for our readers?

One of the things that I have personally experienced and can relate to Keats with (and many other poets) is the problem of the *Self*. You are always

thinking about, of, and through yourself. *Is there, then, a way to move out of this self-absorption, this self-centered approach?* As a person, the culmination of what I have learned at this department, under the guidance of some teachers – including Iftikhar Shafi Sahab, Tayyab Zaidi Sahab, Dr. Kaleem Ur Rehman and Miss Huma Shakir and my wife, Miss Lubna Hassan - is that you have to move away from this self-centeredness to grow. Our teacher, Dr. Kaleem Ur Rehman, used to say about T.S Elliot:

“Eliot’s main concern was to associate himself with something outside of himself. He found religion to be that frame within which you could move away from yourself.”

As per my understanding, this is the primary idea behind Negative Capability, which is to move away from yourself and develop empathy.

More than that, however, the problem I find with Keats is that he does not accept orthodox religion. Mr. Iftikhar shared with me that towards the end of his life, Keats was often reading the Bible. It is this turn towards religion that I equate with Negative Capability. Our *self* is one of the things we need to confront and rise above. Yet the question remains: *rise above to what?* I found my answer in religion, since it provided me with stability and structure. I remember I wrote a poem very early on in my career,

*All things round the center run,
The planets revolve around the sun,
And the pilgrims found the Holy Kaaba;
Only my soul that no center holds
Roams wildly in the world*

This was something I was looking for - a *center*. My opinion, one that I share with Mr. Iftikhar, is that the problem the Romantics face is no exception to the universal problem that we all face. They were always trying to create their own way of dealing with life – finding their center - so they embraced ways

which were always questionable. As a result, they were perpetually dissatisfied. Romanticism, however, is about looking for satisfaction within this dissatisfaction.

On the question of Ethics versus Aesthetics, do you think this conflict, present consciously in Keats' mind, manifests itself in his work?

The conflict is always *there*. Keats thinks that poetry has to do more than just please. He wants poetry to be a source of consolation and even *ethics*. There is always this claim, but I think this conflict between ethics and aesthetics lingers in Keats's poetry, and remains present even in the last few poems that he wrote. This, I think, is a recurring problem with everyone who reads and write – *Should there be something greater than just pleasure in what we do?* My brother once very kindly said, "Novels and stories are to be read, to be enjoyed; so what do you really teach?" This simple question of wondering whether or not there is more to literature than enjoyment, haunts our discipline to this day.

Coming back to you, what was your first time reading Keats like?

The first poem I read by Keats was *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* and it is one of my favorite poems. *Ode to a Nightingale*, too. I read this Ode in my earliest days of reading Keats and it has remained a favorite ever since. Obviously, works that you can relate to naturally become important. At that time, these were the poems I could relate to and they have remained with me since then.

Would you say that your initial opinion of Keats has changed, even if slightly, or has it remained fundamentally unchanged over the years?

Although most of my reading and understanding of Keats is because of my wife, Miss Lubna Hasan, who specializes in Keats; I think my opinion about Keats hasn't changed, neither has my association. People often ponder over what could have been had Keats lived. I like to think that regardless of the time he had, Keats was a great poet. That time period of 6 years, from when was eighteen, until he turned 24, constitutes the entire development of his

body of work – from his juvenilia to his magnum opus. It is amazing how he developed as a poet in such a brief time, and it is a lesson for all of us that it does not necessarily take a lifetime to create great art. It is the intensity of the efforts and experience that determines that course.

Q7: You said that Keats composed the majority of his work between years 18 to 24. Do you think that young, impressionable students, from roughly the same age group, who study him relate to that particular fact about him?

I think that as students, and even as teachers, Keats is not everybody's cup of tea. Yes, he is a major English poet, but to get into that frame of mind is not easy. Most young people prefer Wordsworth. They believe him to be the better poet, simply because his poetry is easier to read, and understand. After Wordsworth, of course, people read Shakespeare. So, it is not so common, after all, for individuals to relate to Keats. If you do, however, face the same ordeals as Keats, are troubled by the Intellectual and the Aesthetic, and find the answer to the question of Literature elusive, then Keats might be appealing to you. He may not have the kind of revolutionary spirit that Shelley had, but I see a very different kind of approach in him that beckons and calls to someone like me - someone who searches for structure, and a means to deal with emotions and passions as disturbing and bewildering as they may be.

A Glimpse into the Eternal Pen of John Keats: *The Odes*

Umna Salman (2nd Year, Morning)

John Keats, a poet who managed to carve out his name in the minds of many generations to come, has an intriguing manner of articulating his thoughts. His artistic style gives credit to the beauty of everyday things - things that the heart and the mind often take for granted.

The profoundness of his writing can be best studied in an *Ode to a Nightingale*. This seemingly modest poem explores the enchanting song of the Nightingale, and also touches on the theme of literary immortality. The speaker of the poem believes that literature outlives the writer. Throughout the Ode, this beautiful idea is juxtaposed with the singing of the Nightingale. The nightingale's song, which lives on past its death, is beautiful and haunting, all at once. The nightingale has sung the same song for generations, and will continue to do so for all the ages to come, preserving its timeless beauty forever.

Similar themes have been explored in 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' where Keats marvels at an urn's artistic timelessness and imparts an enigmatic message:

“*Beauty is truth, truth beauty; that is all Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.*”

When it comes to the penmanship of beauty - or at least beauty that the eye is capable of capturing - John Keats is enthralled by Psyche, the loveliest Greek goddess from *Ode to Psyche*. The poet, however, laments that she has no temple devoted to her, hence he vows to build her a sanctuary in his mind, where she will live on forever. Nevertheless, Keats is acutely aware that the beauty of all mortal things is fleeting. *Ode to Autumn* captivates the readers with its luscious imagery that captures this concept while making the readers appreciate the abundant aesthetics of fall.

Despite being followed by suffering and misfortune all his life, Keats celebrates the feeling of melancholy, and advises his readers to do the same. Joy and melancholy are intertwined and part of the temple of life. In order to be fully immersed in the depths of joy, one must experience the acridness of melancholy as well. It is this concept that haunts and lingers in his beautiful *Ode to Melancholy*.

Strangely enough, however, Keats dismisses his own advice in *Ode to Indolence*, where he has personified ambition, love and poesy as figures approaching him. Keats, however, rejects them as he would rather remain in the state of indolence that he has cultivated. This ode was written sometime after Keats' brother Tom's death, which is why it may be interpreted as Keats' aloofness from life.

If one takes the time to immerse themselves into the depths of his poetry, Keats has much more to offer than just the lines on the page. Despite all that he had to endure, Keats has produced poetry that is not only ever-living, but is as beautiful today as it was a hundred years ago.

Leading a Posthumous Existence: *Keats in the words of the English Department*

Sui generis

(Basmah, 2nd Year – Morning)

He is a visionary. I think his work is poetic in the truest sense. His imagination knows no bounds, and that has a great impact on his reader's creative faculties.

(Fareeha, 4th year - Morning)

Every time I read his poems, the portrayal of nature through vivid imagery really captivates me. I love how he has this gifted ability; the magic of words that put a spell on your senses and enchant your sight. His remarkable skills make you experience everything that is on the page.

(Anonymous, 3rd Year – Morning)

Bright-Star

(Mahwish, 3rd Year – Evening)

He lost his mother and brother to tuberculosis, and still wrote some of the best poetry I have ever read. Not every person can go through serious loss and still turn out to be a great writer.

(Sabika, 3rd Year – Evening)

Sensational

(Bisma, 3rd Year – Evening)

I am deeply inspired by *Ode to a Nightingale*. The poem explores two main themes: the first is the connection between agony and joy, and the second is the connection between life and death. The poet artistically draws a comparison between the natural and imaginative world- his and the nightingale's world. I particularly like the latter in the poem.

(Aneeq Ahmed, 2nd Year – Morning)

Ambitious

(Umna, 2nd Year – Morning)

I just really loved how he was unafraid to write about deep human conflicts and issues that involved realism and passion. His work has taught me to grasp the best experiences that I can from each passing moment.

(Anum, 3rd Year - Morning)

Brilliant
(Faiza, 4th Year – Morning)

His poetry gratifies my longing to be around beauty and nature. Heaven must be stealing ideas from him to glorify itself.

(Anonymous, 3rd Year – Evening)

John Keats is a genius. Of all the poets that we studied in second year, his poems were the one that had the greatest impact on me. I remember reading an Ode to Autumn, and feeling the world around me fade into the background somewhere. The busy street outside my house had silenced itself; the TV set in the living room was now nothing more than an old metal scrap full of wires and junk. It became clear to me then, that Keats had spoken. Naturally, the world had no choice but to fall silent, if only for a fleeting moment. From that day onwards, I've learnt a secret. Whenever Karachi gets too noisy and cruel, I start reading Keats again.

(Maham, 3rd Year- Evening)