

## Poems Of John Keats And The Human Psychology!

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**Abstract:** John Keats ranks as one of the finest poets the world has ever seen! Scholars and psychologists have often attributed many aspects of human psychology in his poems. Records reveal that he had struggled both professionally and personally during his life time. The nineteenth century poetry lovers had showered only a modest love for his poetry. A man suffering from tuberculosis and struggling to make both ends meet could hardly have been their poetic hero. Keats himself confided before his death that his works would gain immortality after his death. Keats died at a very young age. Life had been an indescribable struggle for him. He had seen his mother and brother die of tuberculosis. He had seen the capricious behaviour of his lady love. He had seen his contemporary poets enjoying rich fame which had unfairly eluded him! Professional and personal lives had been unkind to him for a while. But Keats was a determined personality. Despite the struggles in his personal life, he wrote prolifically. He wrote with grace and poise. Representing the great romantic age, his works personified the spirit of beauty. His poems spoke of the ruthlessness with which the whole world looked down upon an ailing and struggling aspirant of an art. Amidst the taunts and intimidating outlooks of the world, Keats developed his psychology through his works, especially the odes. The NEGATIVE CAPABILITY of accepting and living through the life's worst phase has been the hall mark of most of his works. Many psychologists have termed this quality as a POSITIVE OUTLOOK as against the phrase NEGATIVE CAPABILITY which is often misconstrued by young scholars!

**KEYWORDS:** Keats, Romantic age, Negative capability, Research, Psychology of life, Psychological studies, Spiritual beauty, Physical beauty, Positive outlook, Scizophrenia, Ode to a Nightingale, Ode on a Grecian Urn, Universities in the UK and US.

### I) OVERVIEW:

Psychological theories demand that a person should possess positive attributes to fight the negativities of the mind. A sense of appreciation for life's beautiful things and a sense of balance or even-headedness in handling life's crises are psychological approaches recommended for leading a comfortable life. It is quite unlikely that Keats might have had access to books on psychology in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. So, we can safely infer that Keats had an inherent psychological outlook in him.

### II) ODES OF KEATS, A SELECTIVE STUDY:

While all his odes bear testimony to his psychological outlook, two poems could be cited as stand out pieces. The poems ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE and ODE ONE A

GRECIAN URN are the ultimate examples of this quality in Keats. The beauty, elegance and grandeur of these poems are embellished by psychological overtures that define the pangs of life and the approaches we should have in handling them!

### III) ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE:

ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE is indeed a recollection of a melody the poet had enjoyed not long ago. At some other point in time, the poet hammered it into the shape of a poem. A brief analysis of the poem is obligatory here. The poet feels that the song of the nightingale has numbed his senses as if he has consumed a powerful drink. The reference is far-fetched as in the past Socrates was forced to drink poison for he had been pronounced guilty of misleading the world. After his death, the world regretted its bias. Keats here cleverly takes a dig at the world that would someday regret its prejudice on him!

The poet refers to the illnesses that shake the world. There are images of humans growing lean like ghosts and dying. His own brother and mother are perhaps being referred to here! Yet Keats believes that the song of the nightingale is a panacea for one's depressed state of mind. It is a psychological remedy to one's troubled mental disposition.

### IV) ODE ON A GRECIAN URN

ODE ON A GRECIAN URN is an exquisite example of both his craft and psychology. The grandeur and elegance of the poem are complemented by his psychology that urges the humans to love the inner or soulful beauty. The famous line BEAUTY IS TRUTH AND TRUTH BEAUTY is a classic example of his theory.

The poet sees an ancient Grecian urn. He discovers the innateness of the beauty of the soul from what has been inscribed on the urn. The poet unleashes a number of imageries to praise the inner beauty of an object. For the naked eye, the urn is just an object which can at best be considered a piece of relic.

Keats, with a psychological and philosophical bent of mind sees what a lay man is unlikely to see. He sees a lover pining for his lady love. He sees parched lips longing for a kiss. He sees a musician playing the flute. He sees sacrificial lambs being led to the altar. He sees many other unique images! The poet does not miss out on the sensual qualities of human life.

Every image that he sees on the urn illustrates a deep psychology of life. They are not just physical images. The neurological literature in psychology confirms that human brain is capable of seeing both physical and internal beauty of an object. The brain, however, needs training or conditioning to do this.

## **V) PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDIES AND THE HUMAN MIND:**

Psychological studies have clearly illustrated that creative writing, music and reading are some of the remedies for states of minds like schizophrenia. Again it is quite unlikely that Keats would have read any psychological literature to suggest proven remedy for mental dispositions of humans. For such literature was seldom available during his time.

The poet says that generations have listened to the song of the nightingale and this has helped them tide over the worries. There are moments of distress and disappointment in each one's life. Resignation to one's fate or destiny and brooding over the negativities would hardly help a person tide over demons of mind. On the other hand, diverting the mind to the finer aspects or silver linings of life would give a troubled mind a lot of solace. This theory has been a part of psychological literature since the twentieth century!

The bitter experiences in his life find utterances in Keats' poems. Although subjective (like most other odes) in nature, his poems do not complain about the unjust ways of the world. The unjust and cruel ways of the world contribute to his psychology. Like a physician, he urges his readers to overcome their bitter experiences by seeing and enjoying the beauty of art!

## **VI) BEAUTY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDIES:**

Psychological studies reveal that beauty is an abstract concept which needs a concrete study for its exploration. There are visual, physical and spiritual aspects to the exploration of beauty. Physical aspect of beauty is perishable. The visual aspect of beauty is saved in one's memory for some time. The spiritual aspect of beauty is for eternity. Keats' famous line HEARD MELODIES ARE SWEET AND THOSE UNHEARD ARE SWEETER is a classic example of his clear understanding of the spiritual aspect of psychology.

## **VII) PESSIMISM IN KEATS, A FALLACIOUS ANALYSIS:**

There are critics and students of literature who attribute pessimism to Keats and his works. This is indeed a fallacy. The first piece of research for a student of literature is often a poet's personal life and experiences. Today, with the availability of sources online, biographies are read in minutes and inferences are drawn instantly. However, the inference that Keats is a pessimist is fallacious because his works show proofs to the contrary. Even teachers and critics fall a victim to this cognitive fallacy.

## **VIII) SHAKESPEARE'S INFLUENCE:**

Shakespeare revered as the greatest literary figure in English must have been Keats' definite influence in formulating some of the psychological aspects in his poetry. Available evidences say neither Keats nor Shakespeare had any access to the science of psychology. But here are two men from whom many psychologists have developed various models of psychology down the ages!! Many psychologists have openly confessed to this.

#### **IX)THE APPEAL OF THE TWO POEMS:**

The poems ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE and ODE ON A GRECIAN URN appeal to the people not to be desperate with the negativities of the world. These poems urge the world to develop a sense of balance, purpose and even-headedness to live. For all its negativity, the world has an innate beauty about itself. Be it the song of the nightingale or the images carved in the Grecian urn, they all urge the world to develop senses to enjoy the spiritual beauty of an object!

The above poems talk a lot about the anguish and pain of the world through which the poet himself has gone. However, the poems do not tell us to condemn ourselves to despair and lead a miserable life. Most of Keats' poems have elements of pathos and poignancy. However, not even a single poem glorifies pessimism. There are pessimistic references. But these references are to strengthen one's resolve by building a psychology of resolve and determination.

#### **X)THE PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORY:**

Keats has been successful in propounding a psychological theory which urges a reader to understand that miseries are part of the world and one cannot change the world. However, his poems make an appeal to the readers to develop the quintessential toughness to deal with the miseries of the world.

In the twentieth century, many psychologists developed PSYCHOLOGICAL MODELS TO BUILD CONFIDENCE. Many of these psychologists openly admit that the poems of John Keats are their biggest inspiration in developing psychological theories of positive thinking. Today, many psychologists continue to use his poems to create scientific models of thinking!

#### **XI)THE SCEPTICISM:**

There are many critics who are sceptical about the psychological outlook in Keats' poems. Some critics say that Keats either unconsciously slips into psychological theories or he leaves it all to the inferences of readers. Some others opine that his poems should be read only for their aesthetic appeal and any attempt to deduce psychological interpretation would be inappropriate. But then majority of critics, readers and learners subscribe to the theory that Keats has a psychological approach to his poems.

There is a line of argument that Keats developed his psychology unconsciously. The argument does not hold water because Keats is nearly explicit about his personal tragedies in

most of his poems. It can be deduced easily that he wants his readers to develop a sense of positivity and confidence to fight their despairs.

### **XII)PSYCHOLOGISTS AND THE SCIENTIFIC DATA:**

Keats' theory of appreciation for inner beauty has been adopted by psychologists down the generations. Many psychologists have produced scientific data to support his theory. Many poets of the later generations have also drawn inspiration from Keats' psychology of the eternity of spiritual beauty.

### **XIII)CONCLUSION:**

Scholars continue to be engaged in research in unearthing the deeper aspects of psychology in Keats' poems. Universities in the UK and USA have already set up research centres for this purpose. Keats is one poet whose poetry entertains us aesthetically and educates us psychologically. Even the elements of pathos in his poems have a sense of aesthetics in them.Keats' works continue to be subjects of scrutiny and research for both their aesthetics and psychological value. It is therefore obligatory on every scholar, student, teacher or critic to devote more time for reading his works. Reading of Keats' poetry as always would throw up inspiring insights and even perspectives on life!!!

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