

A STUDY OF JOHN KEATS: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HIS POETIC STYLE

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INTRODUCTION

Keats' poetic style achieved a remarkable development in his short life. In this paper an attempt is made to make clear the stylistic development of Keats.

Although this paper is mainly meant to be a study of the stylistic development of Keats, his style as well as the subject matter of his poetry are to be considered, because literary works consist of both form and subject matter. And there are inter-relationships between these two important elements of literature. That is to say, the development of the thought of a poet causes the development of the subject matter and style of his poetry. Keats is no exception to this rule.

First, this paper is intended for a study of the development of Keats' poetic style, and second, for a study of the causes of the development.

Keats seems to have developed in matter and style of his poetry by three stages. In the primary stage, which his sonnets represent, his subject is a pure praise of beauties in nature, of great heroes, of gods in Greek and Roman myths, and of great poets. His poetic style is free, light, and luxuriant. These characteristics of this stage are peculiar to him, but he was awakened to them by such great poets as Homer, Petrarch, Spenser, Chatterton, Wordsworth, and Leigh Hunt. The sensuous imagery and the felicity of phrase peculiar to him can be traced even in this primary stage.

In the secondary stage, which his narrative poems represent, the stylistic character is quite different from that of the former stage. It is grand, but often prolix. The subject matter is philosophical. He is influenced in his style by Shakespeare, Milton, and Dryden, and in his choice of subject matter by Coleridge and Wordsworth. Under the influence of these poets, Keats showed a remarkable change in his subject matter and in his poetic style.

In the secondary stage, however, his poetic artistry could not develop to a high degree of maturity but came to a deadlock. In his odes, which stand for the third stage, he discovered the best genre in which he could give free play to his ability as poet. Even in this stage, he owes much to such poets as Shakespeare, Gray, and Collins in his inventing the ode form most suitable to him. Their subject matters are philosophic and meditative, but his views are realistic and personal. The style is not so grand as that of the second stage, but it is concise and condensed.

These three stages do not always correspond to the chronological order of his

poems. They correspond to his stylistic development in each genre of his poetry. As he owes his development to several poets, it will be of interest to give a special consideration to the cause and effect between them. Chapter I is intended as the study of the first stage, chapter II, as that of the second stage, chapter III, as that of the third stage, and finally the conclusion of this paper is given.

CHAPTER I

SONNETS

John Keats tested his genius as a poet in various genres of poetry : sonnet, narrative, ode, and even drama. And he could display his genius in his odes. The style of his own did not suddenly appear in his later odes but has already had its germs in his early poetry, mainly in sonnets, though not so mature as that of his odes. The style of his early sonnets is characteristic of freshness, liveliness, lightness, and some kind of luxury, while that of his later odes is characterized not only by these but also by serenity, peacefulness, ejaculation, and some grandeur. And the main quality of the style of his early poetry still exists in his odes, and it becomes maturer than before. In this sense, it will be significant to analyse the stylistic characteristics of his early sonnets in detail.

As stated above, freshness, liveliness, lightness, luxury, and richness belong to his early sonnets. Properly speaking, they are not to be considered as characteristics of his mature style but as the germs of his mature style. They are often produced owing to his imitation of great poets. And this tendency is clearly recognized in this stage in which he mainly wrote sonnets, as is natural in every young poet.

Those characteristics of his early poetic style are reflected by the characteristics of the subject matters, which are divided into four kinds. The first kind of the subject matters of his early sonnets is the admiration of great men and poets. The second kind shows his interest in social and political problems. The third kind is the admiration of beauties in nature. The fourth kind shows his ideal to be a great poet. In each of them, he is ardent, revolutionary, sensuous, and ambitious. The imagery, which is colourful, sensuous, rich, and warm, as well as the felicities of phrasing, served to bring those characteristics to his early sonnets. Keats owes these characteristics to his predecessors, especially Spenser, and his contemporary Leigh Hunt.

A number of his early sonnets have such titles as imply his devotion to great men and poets. To list the names included in the titles, there are Spenser, Byron, Chatterton, Hunt, Apollo (though he is a god), Emma, G.F. Mathew, Mary Frogley, George (his brother), Clarke, Chapman, Homer, Haydon, G.A.W., and Chaucer.

Imitation of Spenser, which is generally said to have been written in 1814, shows a deep influence of Spenser. One of the most clear proof of the influence is that the stanza form of this poem, though not a sonnet, is the so-called Spenserian stanza, a stanza which consists of nine lines, of which the first eight lines are iambic pentame-

ter and the last line is an alexandrine, and whose rhyme scheme is ababbcbcc. Now the rhyme scheme of this poem being perfect, this poem is a perfect imitation of Spenser's favourite stanza. The more striking proof of Spenser's influence on this poem lies in its imagery. The fact that Keats used the Spenserian stanza means that he longed for the world of allegory which is expressed in its verse form. The "wonders of an isle" and "that fairest lake" that he wished to tell about, remind us of the isle of Mirth and the Bower of Bliss in *The Faerie Queene*. There is also the "brooding love of sensuous beauty"¹ everywhere in this poem, for instance, in the following passage:

It seem'd an emerald in the silver sheen
Of the bright waters....

ll. 25-26.

This kind of love is that to which *The Faerie Queene* owes its irresistible fascination. According to de Selincourt,² the influence of the eighteenth-century allegorists such as Beattie, Thomson, and Mrs. Tigh, is paramount in his earliest writings. M. Allot says that in the following passage,

Now Morning from her orient chamber came,
And her first footsteps touch'd a verdant hill;
Crowning its lawny crest with amber flame,

ll. 1-3.

the word "lawnly," which is an epithet of the kind recommended by Hunt, reflects a line of Thomson's *The Seasons*: Summer,

...opens all the lawny prospect wide...

l. 53.

and the "amber flame" of Morning reminds us of the following lines of Milton's *L'Allegro*.

When the great Sun begins his state
Rob'd in flames and Amber light....

ll. 60-61.

Furthermore, the second line quoted above seems to reflect lines of Spenser's *Epithalamion*,

Early, before the worlds light-giving lampe
His golden beame upon the hills doth spred.

ll. 19-20.

Again Allot insists that the following lines,

There saw the swan his neck of arch'd snow,
And oar'd himself along with majesty;

ll. 14-15.

come from Thomson's *Seasons*: Spring,

...The stately-sailing swan
Gives out his snowy plumage to the gale,

1. E. de Selincourt, ed.: *The Poems: John Keats* (Methuen, 1951), p. xxxii.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. xxii-xxiii.

And, arching proud his neck, with oary feet
Bears forward fierce...

ll. 778-781.

which is an imitation of Milton's *Paradise Lost*,

...the Swan, with Arched neck
Between her white wings mantling proudly, Rows
Her state with Oarie feet...

vii, 438-440.

It is interesting, however, that there are such lines in Donne's *The Progress of the Soule*,

A swan, so white that you may unto him
Compare all whiteness, but himselfe to none,
Glided along, and as he glided watch'd,
And with his arched necke this poore fish catch'd.

ll. 232-235.

Comparing these four poets, who described swans of the same shape, such as Keats, Thomson, Milton, and Donne with each other, Keats is clearly Spenserian in his diction and style. Keats describes the swan in only two lines with felicity without losing the majesty of the swan on account of its concise description. There is a Spenserian archaism here :

I could e'en Dido of her grief beguile ;
Or rob from aged Lear his bitter teen :

ll. 21-22.

But as there are such lines as the following in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*,

My face is full of shame, my heart of teen,

l. 808.

and in his other works, it may owe to Shakespeare rather than Spenser. Above all, the most impressive Spenserian echo in this *Imitation of Spenser* is to be found in colour images which are rather light, gorgeous, and mild than deep, and which present that "fairest" world of "wonders" of Spenser. It is enough to quote a few epithets: "verdant" (l. 2), "amber" (l. 3), "Silv'ring" (l. 4), "silken" and "golden" (l. 12), to illustrate Spenser's influence on Keats' vocabulary. These light and gorgeous colour images are easily found in Spenser's poems, for example, in *Epithalamion*,

The Rosy Morne long since left Tithornes bed,
All ready to her silver coche to clyme ;
And Phoebus gins to shew his glorious hed.

st. V.

Again in the same poem,

How the red roses flush up in her cheekes,
And the pure snow, with goodly vermeil stayne
Like crimsin dyde in grayne :

st. XIII.

From the viewpoint of both the style and the subject matter, this *Imitation of Spenser* clearly shows that Keats was deeply "charm'd" with that Spenserian world.

In the sonnet *To Lord Byron* occurs the epithet "amber" as in the *Imitation of Spenser*.

As when a cloud the golden moon doth veil,
 Its sides are ting'd with a resplendent glow,
 Through the dark robe oft amber rays preveil,

ll. 9-11.

though the "amber rays" here means moonlight, not sunshine. There are sensuous images again in the following passage:

As if soft Pity, with unusual stress,
 Had touch'd her plaintive lute....

ll. 3-4.

The phrase "soft Pity" is an imitation of personification which is peculiar to the eighteenth century English poetry, and it is accompanied with the image of the tactile sense, such as "soft" and "touch'd." The sad but sweet melody of Byron's poetry is perfectly described in the concentrated expressions such as "sweetly" (l. 1), "tenderness" (l. 2), "soft" (l. 3), "sorrow" (l. 6), "griefs" (l. 7). And the last six lines give a decisive colouring to his admiration of Byron with such epithets as "bright" and "beamingly" (l. 8), "golden" (l. 9), "resplendent glow" (l. 10), "amber" (l. 11), especially with a simile

...fair veins in sable marble....

l. 12.

These sensuous images, which are rather limited to colour in his early poems, are quite different from his later ones which are made of all the senses. Moreover, his taste in colour reflects that of the eighteenth century Spenserians. This is a regular Petrarchan sonnet, but it has one eye-rhyme in line 4 and one imperfect rhyme in line 5. It is hard to call this sonnet perfect, because the division of each stanza is not regular.

Later Keats came to use the Shakespearean sonnet form, as in the sonnet *To Fanny*. Before *Endymion*, he wrote thirty-nine sonnets, of which only one is Shakespearean and the others are Petrarchan. Keats' Petrarchan sonnets are, according to their rhyme schemes, divided into four groups, such as Petrarchan A-1, Petrarchan A-2, Petrarchan B-1, Petrarchan B-2, to form them into a table, as follows:

symbol	rhyme scheme	number	total
Petrarchan A-1	abbaabbacdcdcd	21	28
Petrarchan A-2	abbaabba + {variations of the above sestet form}	7	
Petrarchan B-1	abbaabbacdecde	5	10
Petrarchan B-2	abbaabba + {variations of the above sestet form}	5	

According to the table above, Keats preferred the Petrarchan A-1 and A-2 groups to the Petrarchan B-1 and B-2 ones.

The sonnet *To Chatterton* as well as to *Byron* belong to the Petrarchan A-1 group. The *Chatterton* also reflects the eighteenth century poetry in its diction and epithet. In the following lines,

.... Thou didst die
A half-blown flow'ret which could blasts amate. ll. 7-8.

the word "flow'ret" is a poetic diction used by Chatterton himself in *Aella; a Tragycal Enterlude*,

So falles the fayrest flourettes of the playne.... l. 1235.

and the poetic diction "amate" is also in the same poem,

Thou dost mie thoughtes of paying love amate.... l. 58.

Furthermore, the phrase "half-blown flow'ret" is in Chatterton's *Song from Aella*,

Here upon my true-love's grave
Shall the barren flowers be laid; st. VI.

And it is interesting that in the final couplet of *Chatterton*,

On earth the good man base detraction bars
From thy fair name, and waters it with tears. ll. 13-14.

the word "tears" reflects the word "tear" in the first two lines of the same poem quoted above, *Aella*,

O sing unto my roundelay,
O drop the briny tear with me. ll. 1-2.

The following cosmic image seems to owe to that of the eighteenth century English poetry.

...thou art among the stars
Of highest Heaven: to the rolling spheres
Thou sweetly singest: ll. 9-11.

His rebellion against the end-stopped line is not seen before *Endymion*. This sonnet *Chatterton* is still under the spell of eighteenth century poetry, not only in its subject matter but also in its style. The *Chatterton* sonnet is significant, because Keats' early adoration of Chatterton becomes remarkable later, as it is found in his letter to J. H. Reynolds, 21 September, 1819:

He is the purest writer in the English Language... 'tis genuine English idiom in English words.³

It seems that Keats owed much to Chatterton in his later poetry. He again wrote to the George Keatses, 24 September, 1819, that

The purest english I think...is Chatterton's.... I prefer the native music of it to Milton's cut by feet I have but lately stood on my guard against Milton.⁴

3. H. E. Rollins, ed.: *The Letters of John Keats 1814-21* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1958), II. 167.

4. *Ibid.*, II. 212.

One of the poems that show Keats' adoration of Greek myth, which is one of the main sources of his poetic subject matter, is the sonnet *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer*, written October 1816. In this Petrarchan sonnet, metaphor and simile are harmoniously used. His love of Greek myth is recognized in such metaphors as "the realms of gold" (l. 1), "goodly states and kingdom" (l. 2), and "Homer ruled as his demesne" (l. 6). These metaphors are harmoniously used and they are quite suitable for the adoration of the golden age. The simile "Then felt I like some watcher of the skies" (l. 9) or "like stout Cortez" (l. 11) is excellent, and especially the image of "stout Cortez" is effective, because he is said to have had "eagle eyes." Keats is here under the spell of Chatterton whose style is concrete and concise, not of Spenser or the Spenserians, whose style is decorative. The plainness and directness of Chapman's translation of Homer which Keats characterized as "loud and bold," attracted Keats. These lively, concrete, metaphors, similes, and epithets in this sonnet serve to make its style concise and vivid.

One of the most perfect Petrarchan sonnets by Keats in its structure and imagery is "Keen, fitful gusts." The first quatrain of it ends in a full stop, and the second, in a colon. The expression "I have many miles on foot to fare" (l. 4) suggests his mission as a poet. He has made up his mind to conquer all the difficulties until he becomes a great poet. The rest of the sestet explains the reason why he can be so defiant: that is he has such great men in his cottage as Lycid, Laura, Petrarch, and Milton.

For I am brimful of the friendliness

That in a little cottage I have found;

ll. 9-10.

The word "brimful" recalls wine which is a traditional symbol of happiness. There are several sensuous images in this sonnet: the auditory images are "gusts" (l. 1), "whisp'ring" (l.), and "rustling" (l. 6); the visual images are "leafless" (l. 2), "stars" (l. 3), "miles" (l. 4), "dead leaves" (l. 6), "silver lamps" (l. 7), and "lair" (l. 8); the tactile images are "dry" (l. 2), "cold" (l. 3), and "cool bleak air" (l. 5); but no olfactory nor palate images such as are to be used in his later poems. But the unity of the imagery, and the agreement of structure and content are enough to ensure that this sonnet is regarded as one of his best sonnets.

Finally, there are four sonnets addressed to Hunt, who had the greatest influence on Keats at this period. They are the sonnet *Written on the Day that Mr. Leigh Hunt Left Prison*, *On Receiving a Laurel Crown from Leigh Hunt*, *Dedication to Leigh Hunt, Esq.*, and *On 'The Story of Rimini'*, all of which are written in the form of the regular Petrarchan sonnet.

The sonnet *Written on the Day* (2 February, 1815) proves that Keats was already under the spell of Hunt through Hunt's *Examiner* which Cowden Clarke used to lend to him, because he did not meet Hunt until October 1816. Keats already knew Hunt's admiration for Spenser and Milton. The following passage of this sonnet evidently

tells that Hunt loved these two poets.

In Spenser's halls he strayed, and bowers fair,
Culling enchanted flowers, and he flew
With daring Milton through the fields of air : ll. 9-11.

And it is worthy of note that Keats owes much to Hunt in his later admiration for both Spenser and Milton, and there are many passages in Keats' early poems that clearly prove Hunt's influence on Keats. The Spenserian world, the world of "bowers fair" and "enchanted flowers", is found in his early poems, such as the *Imitation of Spenser*, and especially, *Endymion*, as follows :

It was a jasmine bower, all bestrown
With golden moss. ll. 670-671.

It is not necessary to quote passages from Keats where the beautiful world of flowers is represented, because his poems are full of such passages. One passage from 'I stood tip-toe upon a little hill' may be enough for the illustration of such passages.

So I straightway began to pluck a posey
Of luxuries bright, milky, soft and rosy.

A bush of May flowers with the bees about them ;
Ah, sure no tasteful nook would be without them ;
And let a lush laburnum oversweep them, ll. 27-31.

It is noteworthy that he shows this tendency to love nature even in his later poetry, narratives and odes.

The sonnet *Dedication to Leigh Hunt, Esq.*, shows again that Keats loved the beautiful in nature, which was the main subject matter of Hunt's poetry. Although Keats can not live in the ancient Greek world of "glory and loveliness" (l. 1) any more, he can find it in Hunt's poetry. It is the world of "wreathed incense" (l. 3),

No crowd of nymphs soft voic'd and young, and gay,
In woven baskets bringing ears of corn,
Roses, and pinks, and violets, to adorn
The shrine of Flora in her early May. ll. 5-8.

It is necessary to note the main characteristics of Hunt's poetry in order to clarify its influence on Keats. The following statement of Hunt's is suggestive of his taste.

...I had a greater love for the beauties of external nature ; I think also
I partook of a more southern insight into the beauties of colour...⁵

According to his *Autobiography*, Hunt knew the Greek myth through Lempriere's *Classical Dictionary*, which was also read with pleasure by Keats. In his *Essays*, Hunt points out that he seeks for "enjoyment and repose,"⁶ which is, in his poetry, often found

5. *The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt* (Oxford, 1928), p. 310.

6. *Leigh Hunt: Selected Essays* (Everyman's Library, 1947), p. 213.

in "woods and meadows." It is interesting that Keats also loved to use these images in his poetry, as stated above, while Hunt loved "the meadows between the rains of May" best.⁷ To sum up, Keats owes to Hunt the love for beauties of nature, myth, luxurious enjoyment, and sensuous imagery, which are dominant in his early poetry.

The sonnet *Dedication to Leigh Hunt, Esq.*, shows his love for the world of "Flora" and "Pan." And Keats' sonnet *On 'The Story of Rimini'* shows Hunt's love for the beautiful in nature with such images as "meadows" (l. 4), "delights" (l. 9), and "bower" (l. 12) which Hunt specially loved to use. Keats later uses these images again in *Endymion* in more rich and decorative expressions.

Hunt exercised political as well as poetical influence on Keats, who is generally thought, however, to have known nothing about politics. This opinion is not right, for such poems as the sonnet *On Peace, Written on 29 May: The Anniversary of the Restoration of Charles II*, and the sonnet *To Kosciusko*, show us Keats' interest in politics.

The sonnet *On Peace* was written to celebrate the end of the war against France, probably in April, 1814. This sonnet shows his ardent patriotism and his love for "Liberty" (l. 9). But the fact that this Shakespearean sonnet is irregular in its rhyme scheme and in its versification (i. e., "thou art" must be read as a monosyllable) makes it difficult to call it successful.

The fragmentary sonnet *Anniversary* also reveals his political liberalism, and it is expressed in his memory of patriots such as Sydney, Russell, and Vane, in the early seventeenth century. Keats' sympathy with politicians extends from Englishmen to a Polish patriot Kosciusko, whose name is

...with Alfred's, and the great of yore
Gently commingling...

ll. 11-12.

The simile "the glorious pealing / Of the wide spheres" (ll. 3-4) and other cosmic images of this sonnet are suitably employed in the praise of the famous revolutionist in Poland. Though this is an irregular Petrarchan sonnet, the harmonious use of its cosmic images is successful.

The third main subject matter of Keats' early sonnets is the praise of beauties of nature, for which he is indebted to Hunt, as stated above. His praises are mainly concentrated upon the beauties of woods, meadows, rivers, flowers, weeds, birds, and natural phenomena. He seldom takes up insects, fishes, and animals in his poetry. The sonnet *On the Grasshopper and Cricket* provides us with one example in which insects are the subject matter of his poetry. This sonnet is successful in its versification and structure. Moreover, his minute observation of nature is very marked in this poem. His style is not so slow or stern as that of his earlier poems such as the *Imitation of Spenser* written in end-stopped lines, but it is free and fluent, because he now uses the run-on lines everywhere in this sonnet. Knowing the different use of these two kinds of line, he uses them in suitable cases. The following two end-stopped lines,

7. *Ibid.*, p. 215.

The poetry of earth is never dead :

l. 1.

and

The poetry of earth is ceasing never :

l. 9.

are rhetorically successful, because they serve as the starting point of two subjects, a grasshopper and a cricket. The structure of this Petrarchan sonnet is divided into two parts according to its two subjects, and each part consists of a line in which the poet presents the subject matter and of several lines in which he develops the subject matter. Although there is no comment on Richard Lovelace in Keats' letters, the first and ninth lines quoted above recall the fifth line of *The Grasshopper* written by Lovelace :

The joys of earth and air are thine entire,

l. 5.

and Keats' sonnet *On the Grasshopper and Cricket* seems to surpass Lovelace's because of its concise style. Such run-on lines as the third and the fourth are most successful.

...a voice will run

From hedge to hedge about the new-mown mead ;

ll. 3-4.

where the swift spread of cricket's voice from hedge to hedge is effectively described by using enjambement. His observation of nature, for example, in the following lines,

On a lone winter evening, when the frost

Has wrought a silence...

ll. 10-11.

is so minute that it enables this sonnet to be called successful.

It is generally said that Keats' early poetry shows the simple praise of beauties of nature, and that he sought for sensuous beauties. Such a misunderstanding should be corrected, because he sought for not only sensuous beauties, but also true poetry at the same time even in his early poetry. The *Sleep and Poetry* has lines simply praising sensuous beauties.

First the realm I'll pass
Of Flora, and old Pan : sleep in the grass,
Feed upon apples red, and strawberries,
And choose each pleasure that my fancy sees ;

ll. 101-104.

But unsatisfied with it, he wishes to "bid these joys farewell" (l. 122).

Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life,
Where I may find the agonies, the strife
Of human hearts :

ll. 123-125.

This passage in nothing but the evidence that he was not satisfied with mere praise of the beautiful of nature but wished to write somewhat sublime poetry, such as *Endymion*, *Hyperion*, *The Fall of Hyperion*, and *Lamia*.

Sleep and Poetry has also some passages that are intended for the description of

beautiful nature as follows :

What is more gentle than a wind in summer ?
What is more soothing than the pretty hummer
That stays one moment in an open flower,
And buzzes cheerily from bower to bower ?ll. 1-4.

His style is light and rhythmical here. The diction is simple and easy. The images are sensuous. The fact that he uses here the heroic couplet that he is criticising because of its

...musty laws lined out with wretched rule
And compass vile :ll. 195-196.

is very ironical. The images he uses in this poem are sensuous, for example, as follows :

...life is but a day ;
A fragile dew-drop on its perilous way
From a tree's summit ;ll. 85-87.

or in the following passage :

Till in the bosom of a leafy world
We rest in silence, like two gems upcurl'd
In the recesses of a pearly shell.ll. 119-121.

And according to his confession that

It was a poet's house who keeps the keys
Of pleasure's temple.ll. 354-355.

it was Hunt that led him to that sensuous world.

'I stood tip-toe upon a little hill' whose subject matter is his ambition to be a great poet, shows the influence of Hunt in its sentiment and style again. It is too obvious to require any argument that this poem has faults of style and temper. The heroic couplet used here is not suitable for the free and fresh mood of this poem. Its stanza form is rather loose than free. It should be noted, however, that this poem is well composed in its structure, which is divided into three parts. In the first part, the stage where the poet stands tip-toe on a hill in the early morning of May is skillfully set to express his fresh feeling. In the second part, he observes beauties of nature in detail, or to borrow the words of de Selincourt, he gives us "an indiscriminate catalogue of natural delight."⁸ In the third part, he explains that the origin of poetry is the beautiful in nature, by using his favourite four myths concerning Psyche and Cupid, Pan and Syrinx, Narcissus and Echo, and Endymion and Cynthia. The natural description is so detailed that the style is tedious in many cases, but there are such exceptions as follows :

The clouds were pure and white as flock new shorn,
And fresh from the clear brook ;ll. 8-9.

8. de Selincourt, *op. cit.*, p. xxix.

which are written concretely. As it is explained in this poem that the beautiful in nature had stimulated poets to create myth and poetry, the third subject matter of Keats' early poetry, which is the praise of beauties in nature, often co-exists in a poem with the fourth subject matter of his ambition to be a great poet.

To summarize this first chapter, Hunt's influence on Keats was so deep that it appeared in the subject matter of all his early poetry. It was mainly Hunt that introduced such great poets as Spenser to him, that guided him to have interest in politics and society, that awakened him to beauties in nature, and that inspired him with the ambition to be a great poet.

CHAPTER II NARRATIVE POEMS

Keats clearly began to criticize the heroic couplets that were regarded as the model of orthodox poetry by Pope and his followers at that time, not only in the contents but also in the forms of his second genre of poetry, narrative poems. This tendency is already noted in his *Sleep and Poetry* and *I Stood Tip-toe*, but more definitely in the usage of various verse forms in his narratives, such as *Endymion*, *Isabella*, *Hyperion*, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, *The Eve of Saint Mark*, *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, *Lamia*, and *The Fall of Hyperion*.

The general view of these eight narrative poems seems to confirm the conclusion that Keats gives full play to his genius in suitable and effective description when their subject matter is romance, but that when their subject matter is Greek and Roman myth, they are unfinished, or if finished, immature. It is noteworthy that there are necessary relationships between subject matter, verse form, structure, and style in his successful narrative poems.

His narrative poems are divided into two groups. *Endymion*, *Hyperion*, *The Fall of Hyperion*, and *Lamia* belong to one group, whose subject matter is metaphysical problems such as the quest for beauty and love or poetics, whose verse form is as free as his inspiration, and whose style is almost prolix but sometimes grand. There seems to be some influence of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Spenser on his choice of this kind of subject matter. These poems are not written in the closed couplets which Pope used in his poems, but in the open couplets that are accompanied with run-on lines, or in the blank verse which was used by Milton in his *Paradise Lost*, or in the versification of *The Fables* of Dryden, and they are not finished or remain immature.

The Eve of St. Agnes, *The Eve of Saint Mark*, *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, and *Isabella* belong to the other group of his narrative poems. Their subject matter is romance, and they are successful in their structure and narration. He develops these narratives by free use of various verse forms such as Spenserian stanza, rhymed couplet, ballad metre, and ottava rima.

It is interesting that six poems out of eight of his narrative poems are written in

the iambic pentameter, namely, in the heroic verse (heroics). This fact is nothing but the proof that he fulfilled the oath he swore, when he said, "I must pass them for a nobler life" in his *Sleep and Poetry*.

Endymion is the story of the journey of a love-seeking youth Endymion and an allegory of the pursuit of ideal beauty. His lover appears in three figures, Cynthia, the moon, and an Indian maid. Endymion, the hero of this poem, does not recognize that these three figures are the same, but he continues to think that they are different from each other up to the end of this poem. It seems to be important to clarify the meaning of these three figures, because they seem to be love or beauty for which the poet of this poem sought. As the first figure Cynthia always appears in the dream of Endymion, she may be the poet's ideal beauty which appears only in the dream or imagination of the poet. The moon, the second figure, may represent sensuous beauty in nature, for Endymion feels it beautiful through his eyes. The third figure, an Indian maid, may mean love based upon sympathy between human beings. The three episodes of Venus and Adonis, Alpheus and Arethusa, and Glaucus and Scylla, are inserted to accelerate the development of the story in which these three figures are sought for.

In *Endymion*, Keats chose the form of narrative rather than the form of lyric which is poetry of private emotion, and this selected form and method of expression in *Endymion* are suitable for its subject matter. Its structure, however, is loose because of its too many decorative descriptions. Tedious and picturesque descriptions, which are due to the influence of Spenser and the Spenserians, hinder the speedy development of the story, and furthermore, the three love episodes add ambiguity to the reason of their existence in this poem.

It is generally recognized that there are in fact certain necessary relationships between the subject matter and style of a poem. When a poet intends to express his matured thought, his conviction of its maturity enables the style of his poem to be persuasive, just as in the heroic couplets of Pope or the blank verse of Milton. When a poet is seeking for an ideal which is elusive to himself, like Keats at that time, the elusiveness of his ideal makes the style of his poem obscure and unstable.

It is natural that Keats was criticized severely in contemporary magazines, because he used the heroic couplets in an unconventional way different from that which had been used by those who still had great influence over the literary world of those days. Typical English verse in the age of Pseudo-classicism was the heroic couplet which was regarded as an orthodox metre. Dryden's heroic couplets were written in open couplets, but Pope's were written in closed couplets. In *Endymion*, Keats did not imitate the closed couplets but used open couplets which were assisted by enjambement. Moreover, this poem is non-stanzaic as is common to his early poems, such as *Sleep and Poetry*, or *I Stood Tip-toe*.

Heroic couplet is essentially suitable for the logical expression of intellectual content and for their speedy narration. It was right that Keats should make the most of enjambement in this poem so that he might freely develop his subject matter which

was intellectual and required free style rather than a logical way of expression. This open couplet may seem to be eccentric as compared with the closed couplet used by Pope, in which every two lines form an antithesis and complete a sentence, as follows :

Some drily plain, without invention's aid,
Write dull receipts how poems may be made.⁹

But the subject matters of Pope and Keats are quite different from each other, so that it is no wonder that Keats uses different methods of poetic expression from Pope.

His selection of relatively free forms such as open couplet and non-stanzaic verse, however, is one thing, and the felicitous development of his subject matter by means of these forms is another. Literature begins with the selection of genre, form, and style suitable for its subject matter. In this sense, it seems to be fatal to *Endymion* that its style is tedious. This tedious element did not enable Keats to avoid the dangers of liberty, licence, and incoherence which the open couplet and nonstanzaic verse imply.

The following passage is one example of tedious lines in *Endymion*. In this passage, twelve lines are spent to describe the scene in which Endymion awakes from his dream.

O magic sleep ! O comfortable bird,
That broodest o'er the troubled sea of the mind
Till it is hush'd and smooth ! O unconfin'd
Restrain ! imprisoned liberty ! great key
To golden palaces, strange minstrelsy,
Fountains grotesque, new trees, bespangled caves,
Echoing grottos, full of tumbling waves
And moonlight ; aye, to all the mazy world
Of silvery enchantment ! — who, upfurl'd
Beneath thy drowsy wing a triple hour,
But renovates and lives ? — Thus, in the bower,
Endymion was calm'd to life again.

I. 453-463.

As the story is accompanied with this kind of catalogue, its tempo is very slow.

Open couplets are found everywhere in *Endymion*. The following passage, for example,

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever :
Its loveliness increases ; it will never
Pass into nothingness ; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep

I. 1-4.

are effective enough to give powerful vigour to them. But there are cases where the end-stopped line rhymes with the next line. And what is worse, the last line of a section often rhymes with the first line of the next section with an interval of a line between it and the first section as follows :

They always must be with us, or we die.

9 Pope, A. : *An Essay on Criticism*, ll. 114-115.

Isabella; or the Pot of Basil belongs to the second group of his narrative poems, because its subject matter is romance. Most of its images are as sad, gloomy, and weird as the tragic mood of this story, though there are images common to his earlier poems, such as the image of "jasmine" which means bliss. The style of this poem is quite different from that of his earlier poems, and his skill in exclamatory and compressed expressions, which is regarded as the intrinsic value of his major poems and which was perfected in his great odes, has something in common with that of his earlier poems such as 'Ode to Sorrow' in *Endymion*.

As its sub-title shows, the subject matter of *Isabella* comes from Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Day IV, Novel 5, which is a tragic love story. Although the subject matters of *Isabella* and its original work are the same, there are some differences in structure between them. The original work has six main characters: Lorenzo, Lisabetta, her three brothers, and her nurse, all of whom lived in Messina. Her brothers fled to Naples when they discovered Lorenzo's head in a pot of basil. And this story is told by a narrator, Philomena. *Isabella*, however, has five main characters, Lorenzo, Isabel, her two brothers, and her nurse. It is not told where her brothers fled, because it is not important at all. And the poet himself is the narrator here.

The story is divided into four parts; the love of Lorenzo and Isabella, the murder of Lorenzo by her brothers, her discovery of Lorenzo's body, and the flight of her brothers and her death. Several invocations are effectively inserted to raise the mood of this story. The decoration of the structure and the style of *Endymion* is, in *Isabella*, supplanted by simplicity and speed. This change shows that Keats' ability as a poet has reached maturity.

His resistance to the heroic couplet is apparent in his use of the ottava rima as the verse form of this narrative. The ottava rima forms a stanza of eight lines whose rhyme scheme is abababcc. It is called Italian when its metre is iambic with eleven syllables, or called English when its metre is iambic with ten syllables. He used the English ottava rima in this poem. The ottava rima is ordinarily used in romance to keep the force of its narration, and it is successfully used here to create a tragic mood swiftly.

It will be too hasty to judge that this poem shows only his resistance to Pope, because it is written in the form of end-stopped lines which Pope always used, and because the technique of enjambement which was frequently used in *Endymion* is rarely found in this poem. It is convincing, however, that Keats intended to write in pure English, as the following passage shows:

But it is done — succeed the verse or fail —

To honour thee, and thy gone spirit greet;

To stead thee as a verse in English tongue,

An echo of thee in the north-wind sung.

ll. 157-160.

His style in this poem has become far more concise and clear than that of *Endymi-*

on. Keats seems to owe this clarity and conciseness of his style at this stage to Shakespeare.

Then with her knife, all sudden, she began
To dig more fervently than misers can. ll. 367-368.

The diction and vocabulary of this poem completely differ from that of his earlier poems. For example, there was no such imagery of money in his early poems.

How was it these same ledger-men could spy
Fair Isabella in her downy nest?
How could they find out in Lorenzo's eye
A straying from his toil? Hot Egypt's pest
Into their vision covetous and sly!
How could these money-bags see east and west? — ll. 137-142.

This imagery is used throughout the story, in the descriptions of the avarice and meanness of Isabella's brothers, of their crimes of murder and their punishments, and even of Lorenzo's love for Isabel. The imagery of a bosom is also Shakespearean.

Soon she turn'd up a soiled glove, whereon
Her silk had play'd in purple phantasies,
She kiss'd it with a lip more chill than stone,
And put it in her bosom, where it dries
And freezes utterly unto the bone
Those dainties made to still an infant's cries: ll. 369-374.

The imagery of Keats' earlier poems is wholly concerned with nature, not with human characters or emotions. In *Isabella*, however, such imagery of nature has become subordinate to the concise expression of humanity or emotions and to the deep observation of life, and it is used more effectively than before.

As its subject matter is not romance, which was that of *Isabella*, but Greek and Roman myths, *Hyperion* belongs to the first group of his narrative verse. This is a story of the fall of old gods who are symbolized in the destiny of Hyperion, and the birth of new gods who have beauty and knowledge and who are symbolized in the rise of Apollo. The poem, which is composed of three books, begins with the description of the fallen god Saturn, then develops into the expression of the agony and despondence of the fallen Titans, and finally reaches the description of the rise of Apollo, though it is not finished. The imitation of Milton's blank verse and its majesty, which Keats' earlier poems lacked, makes it clear that Keats was at a turning point from the influence of Spenser and the Spenserians to that of Milton.

It should be carefully noted that Greek and Roman myths contain only a brief allusion to Hyperion, and that they tell us that the sun god was thought to have changed from Helios, a son of Hyperion, to Apollo, not from Hyperion to Apollo. A study of the Greek and Roman myths makes it clear that Helios came to be identified with Apollo after the age of Homer, and it seems that Keats misunderstood the myth according to Lemprier's *Classical Dictionary*, and that he should have made Helios

the hero of his poem if he was interested in the destiny of this old god of the sun.

The subject matter of this poem seems to be the fall of old violent gods and the rise of new gods who have beauty and knowledge, of whom Apollo is symbolic. Here Keats seems to be greeting Apollo, though he is in sympathy with Hyperion who is symbolic of the destiny of the old gods. Keats' intention is to insist on

the eternal law

That first in beauty should be first in might:

ll. 228-229.

From the view point of its structure as well as from that of its subject matter, this poem should be titled *Apollo*, not *Hyperion*. If its subject matter is vitally concerned with Hyperion, the climax should be the expression of Keats' sympathy with Hyperion. Actually, however, this poem reaches the climax where Apollo becomes powerful, whether it is finished or not. As the poet wrote this poem, his interest seems to have changed gradually. As he noticed this change when he was describing the rise of Apollo, he might have recognized that he should stop writing this poem and that he should try to express his true subject matter in another poem.

Hyperion is written in blank verse in imitation of the verse form of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The blank verse is a traditional English verse form to write a long poem with effect, and it is a standard verse form for dramatic, narrative, and meditative poems. It was successfully used by Milton, but it decayed as the heroic couplet rose in the eighteenth century. It may be clear that Keats resisted the Pseudo-classicism in choosing blank verse for this poem. This verse form is suitable for its subject matter, but his genius was not suited to such a grand poem.

Milton's *Paradise Lost* is an epic, which is a kind of narrative verse and which essentially deals with a series of acts and achievements of gods and heroes who appeared in history and legend, as the reflection of national and racial ideal in high and grand verse. The subject matter of *Paradise Lost* is religious and moral, because it is about the fall of Adam and Eve, their exile from paradise, and their salvation through their penitence. As this is a grand and long narrative poem, Milton was right to use blank verse for it.

The subject matter of *Hyperion* is not religious at all but pagan and metaphysical. Further, rich and decorative style which is expected of pagan poetry is disturbed by the effect of the grand style of the blank verse. The limp, light, and decorative style of his early poems is supplanted by strong, stern, and compressed style in this poem. This technique of compression is successfully achieved by Keats in his odes. It might have been unavoidable for him to be an admirer and an imitator of Milton's grand style because he himself had a skill in compressed expressions. Keats could not finish this poem in this verse form and style because of the inadequacy of his ability as well as of the immaturity of his technique and ideas for the dramatic development of this poem.

In *Isabella*, Keats gives full play to his genius in more vivid and skillful narration

than Boccaccio, the author of its original work. The same holds good of *The Eve of St. Agnes* which was written in February, 1819. Its subject matter being romance, it is one of the second group of his narrative poems. Its subject matter, love, is ingeniously developed in the verse form of the Spenserian stanza, which he has not used since he wrote his first poem, *Imitation of Spenser*. His style has come to maturity in *St. Agnes*, in which he displays his skill in compressed expression which is especially found in his later poetry odes.

The subject matter of this poem originates in a true story of a Christian girl only thirteen years old called Agnes who was killed in 304 because she refused to marry a pagan, and also in a legend that a virgin who prays for her future husband on the eve of St. Agnes can have a vision of him in her dream that night.

The Eve of St. Agnes begins with a proem in which is presented the extreme coldness of St. Agnes' Eve which is the central mood of this story. The opening passage is one of the successful expressions of the coldness of that eve in an extreme way.

St. Agnes's Eve — Ah, bitter chill it was !
The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold,
The hare limp'd trembling through the frozen grass,
And silent was the flock in woolly fold. ll. 1-4.

These concrete and effective expressions show no influence of Milton's Latinism or of Spenserian picturesque description, but the influence of such poets as Chatterton and Shakespeare whose styles are purely English.

After the stage-setting, the heroin Madeline appears. She is captivated by the legend of St. Agnes's Eve told by old dames. Keats' keen observation may be seen in the following description of Agnes' enthusiasm for the legend.

She danc'd along with vague, regardless eyes,
Anxious her lips, her breathing quick and short : ll. 64-65.

His early observation was limited especially to the beauties of nature, but now he has a wide range of observation of human characters and the free capacity to express them in pure English.

Keats again shows his deepened insight in social affairs and his skillful expression of it when Porphyro, the hero of this poem, steals into the castle of his enemy where his love Madeline lives.

For him, those chambers held barbarian hordes,
Hyena foemen, and hot-blooded lords,
Whose very dogs would execrations howl
Against his lineage : ll. 85-88.

Guided by Angela who knows him well, Porphyro secretly enters Madeline's bedroom, where he heaps delicate fruits for her after she has gone to sleep. Picturesque descriptions are not superfluous but moderate, and when they begin, they are rich and gorgeous.

A casement high and triple-arch'd there was,
All garlanded with carven imag'ries
Of fruits, and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass,
And diamonded with panes of quaint device,

ll. 208-211.

This kind of decoration is characteristic of Keats' taste, but the following fondness for light colours may be hinted by Spenser.

Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,
And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast ;
As down she knelt for heaven's grace and boon ;
Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest,
And on her silver cross soft amethyst,
And on her hair a glory, like a saint :

ll. 217-222.

Keats succeeded in using sensuous imagery. He was apt to be absorbed in visual expression in his early poems, but as he passed through varied experiences and as his sense of beauty became mature, he came to recognize that he needed every sense to express human emotions and that he had a talent for sensuous expression, especially the expression of the senses of smell and hearing. The final couplet of the following passage is effectively rhymed, where Porphyro curses the noise which comes from the hall but he is glad when he hears nothing when the door shuts.

The boisterous, midnight, festive clarion,
The kettle-drum, and far-heard clarinet,
Affray his ears, though but in dying tone : —
The hall door shuts again, and all the noise is gone.

ll. 258-261.

The catalogue of fruits which Porphyro heaps in the thirtieth stanza of this poem is made up of the imagery of four senses.

These delicacies he heap'd with glowing hand
On golden dishes and in baskets bright
Of wreathed silver : sumptuous they stand
In the retired quiet of the night,
Filling the chilly room with perfume light. —

ll. 271-275.

The senses of colour, smell, hearing, and touch are used freely here, and only the sense of taste is not used, because Madeline is not tasted by Porphyro yet, that is to say, she is a virgin.

After they arrive at an agreement on fleeing from their enemy, their actions become as fast as the speed of the narration. The following passage compels the reader to imagine their hasty flight vividly.

A chain-droop'd lamp was flickering by each door ;
The arras, rich with horseman, hawk, and hound,
Flutter'd in the besieging wind's uproar ;
And the long carpets rose along the gusty floor.

ll. 357-360.

The story ends in the same chilly and horrible mood as that of the opening stanzas.

The verse form as well as the style of this poem make it successful. The Spenserian stanza which is used here is a distinguished verse form for narrative verse. It was also used in his early poem, *Imitation of Spenser*, and the present poem proves the maturity of his sense and his style. The stanzaic verse form, alexandrine, and enjambement are so harmoniously used that the story is developed with moderate speed which his early poems lack and which he seems to owe to such poets as Shakespeare and Dryden.

Lamia is not so successful as *The Eve of St. Agnes*, but it is more successful than *Endymion*. It is a narrative poem of his first group whose subject matter is a Greek myth. This story is derived from Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholie*, Part 3, Sect. 2, Memb. 1st, Subj. 1st, whose summary is given at the end of *Lamia* by the poet himself. Its subject matter seems to be the ruin of beauty and love by the power of philosophy, and its form is allegorical. It is written in Drydenian heroic couplets, and its style is more concise and speedy than that of *Endymion*, but not so powerful as that of *The Eve of St. Agnes*.

The original story of Lamia found in Burton's *Anatomy* has no comment on the love story of Hermes and a nymph, and Keats seems to owe that story to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Keats' insertion of the episode of Hermes in *Lamia* is effective to explain the process by which a snake changes into a gentlewoman in order to entice a young man Lycius and to make him her victim. The original work seems to be a story of vampirism. Though inspired by this subject matter, Keats did not copy it but created an allegory of love and beauty which are inevitably ruined by the power of philosophy. The meaning of the allegory is clearer than that of *Endymion*. Love and beauty are symbolized by Lamia. Apollonius, as a matter of course, is symbolic of philosophy which is regarded to be in opposition to love and beauty which are indispensable to human beings, who are symbolized by Lycius. This poem seems to suggest his idea that men are happy when they love each other, but once they are caught in a trap of philosophy, love and beauty and even humanity will have no meaning. This is the result of Keats' ingenious interpretation of the original story.

Keats had to treat this subject matter in heroic couplets because they are so swift that they are suitable for narratives, and in a non-stanzaic form because the subject matter needed a rather free form. It was Pope that perfected heroic couplets, but there were many other poets who used this verse form. One of them was Dryden. In contrast with Pope's strict closed heroic couplets, Dryden devised his own heroic couplets by inserting many triplets and alexandrines, which make couplets suitable for emotional narrative verse such as his *Fables*, whose narration is very smooth and swift. The triplet in the following passage of one of his *Fables*, *Palamon and Arcite: or the Knight's Tale from Chaucer*, where Theseus returns to Athens after he captured his prisoners, including Palamon and Arcite, shows his skillful handling of triplets by rhyming important words.

This done, he march'd away with warlike Sound,

And to his Athens turn'd with Laurels crown'd,
Where happy long he liv'd, much lov'd, and more renown'd. ll. 163-165.

And it is noteworthy that as the last line of the passage quoted above is alexandrine, the dignified state of the king Theseus is effectively described here and moreover, it also sharply contrasts with the miserable state of the captive Palamon and Arcite, because in the passage no alexandrine is used.

But in a Tow'r, and never to be loos'd,
The woful captive Kinsmen are enclos'd. ll. 166-167.

Lamia consists of two Parts, each of which is divided into ten more parts. Six parts out of ten have alexandrines as their last lines, and this kind of alexandrine seems to be hinted at by Drydenian alexandrines which do not occur as the last line of each part of his poems, and also by the alexandrine which occurs as the last line of each Spenserian stanza, bringing each stanza to a conclusion.

Her throat was serpent, but the words she spake
Came, as through bubbling honey, for Love's sake,
And thus; while Hermes on his pinions lay,
Like a stoop'd falcon ere he takes his prey. I. 64-67.

Part I has eight triplets, and four triplets out of the eight have alexandrines as their last lines. The last lines of two triplets out of three in Part II are also alexandrines. Keats clearly learned this kind of alexandrine which occurs as the last line of a triplet, from Dryden.

Late on that eve, as 'twas the night before
The Adonian feast; whereof she saw no more,
But wept alone those days, for why should she adore? I. 319-321.

The alexandrine is effectively used to lay stress on the rhetorical question in the last line of the triplet. *Lamia* has three alexandrines which occur in the last lines of triplets and also in the last line of each part of the poem at the same time. This kind of alexandrine with three stresses which is most effective from the technical point of view, may be Keats' invention.

As though in Cupid's college she had spent
Sweet days a lovely graduate, still unshent,
And kept his rosy terms in idle languishment. I. 197-199.

But this passage does not seem worthy of being emphasized with an alexandrine as the last line of the triplet. The next passage where Cupid's jealousy is described, ends in a successful alexandrine which stresses the mood of the scene by triplet and which also concludes the first part of Part II.

Hover'd and buzz'd his wings, with fearful roar,
Above the lintel of their chamber door,
And down the passage cast a glow upon the floor. II. 13-15.

It is clear that Keats intended to use the alexandrine in the last line of the triplet at the end of this poem in order to conclude this poem at its climax.

On the high couch he lay ! — his friends came round —
Supported him — no pulse, or breath they found,
And, in its marriage robe, the heavy body wound. II. 309–311.

But as the conclusion of the story is not so effective, the alexandrine used here is not successful. Keats shows a clear stylistic development in this poem, namely, in his use of triplets, and alexandrines, and this use enables the poem to be more swift, dynamic, and concise than *Endymion*, though not so successful as *St. Agnes*. This metaphysical and symbolic poem, *Lamia*, shows his main idea of humanism, that

There is no such a treat among them all,
Haunters of cavern, lake, and waterfall,
As a real woman, lineal indeed
From Pyrrha's pebbles or old Adam's seed. I. 330–333.

or his concern with the gap between the mortal and the immortal

Thou a scholar, Lycius, and must know
That finer spirits cannot breathe below
In human climes, and live : I. 279–281.

but Keats is most skillful in presenting an atmosphere such as the stillness expressed in the following passage.

"Lamia !" he shriek'd ; and nothing but the shriek
With its sad echo did the silence break. II. 269–270.

The Fall of Hyperion is one of his narrative poems of the second group whose subject matter is his sympathy with the fall of old divinity in Greek myth. This poem is adapted from his former *Hyperion*, but it is incomplete, too. These two poems may be the same in subject matter, but different from each other in structure. Blank verse is used in both poems. While *Hyperion* has three books, *The Fall of Hyperion* has two cantos and an elaborate proem and stage-setting. The style of *The Fall of Hyperion* is one of the grandest and richest in compressed and sensuous expressions in pure English.

The fall of the old sun-god Helios, which Keats mistook for Hyperion because Lemprier's *Classical Dictionary* had told him so, is not mentioned in Greek mythology, as stated before. The change of the sun-god from Hyperion to Apollo, which is explained in *Hyperion*, is not alluded to in *The Fall* but the poet stopped writing at the description of the insecure Hyperion. It is clear that it was a "Lofty theme" (I. 306) that Keats intended to deal with in this poem, but it is hard to confirm its subject matter completely because it is unfinished. As far as the first part of Canto I of this poem is concerned, its subject matter seems to be his ideal of poetry. The theme of the latter half of this poem seems to be his sympathy with the fallen divinities, the

Titans.

As the subject matter of this poem is lofty and sublime, the blank verse is suitable for this poem. Keats is more successful in imitating and digesting Milton's grand style and in creating his own style in this poem than in *Hyperion*. His original sensuous expression is now less prolix than in *Endymion* and more concise than in *Hyperion* but not so compressed as in *St. Agnes* or odes which were written before *The Fall*. The following passage is written in pure English words, and such images as marble, dust, bones, pavement, are skillfully used here to express the cold, horrible and indifferent but imperative tone of Moneta.

“ If thou canst not ascend
These steps, die on that marble where thou art.
Thy flesh, near cousin to the common dust,
Will parch for lack of nutriment, — thy bones
Will wither in few years, and vanish so
That not the quickest eye could find a grain
Of what thou now art on that pavement cold. I. 107–113.

Owing to the blank verse which requires no rhymes at the end of lines, the syntax of this poem is rather prosaic as follows:

Only the dreamer venoms all his days,
Bearing more woe than all his sins deserve. I. 175–176.

There are such Elizabethan descriptions of the brain and eyes as follows:

In the dark secret Chambers of her skull I. 278.
Her planetary eyes.... I. 281.

Although his style is still indebted to such poets as Milton and Shakespeare, he is skillful in sensuous expression which is no more prolix but as concise as in his successful narrative poems and odes. The following passage shows his skillful handling of the senses of touch and hearing.

...when suddenly a palsied chill
Struck from the paved level up my limbs,
And was ascending quick to put cold grasp
Upon those streams that pulse beside the throat
I shriek'd, and the sharp anguish of my shriek
Stung my own ears.... I. 122–127.

A good example of his visual expression is seen in the following passage:

.... Then saw I a wan face,
Not pined by human sorrows, but bright-blanch'd
By an immortal sickness which kills not;
It works a constant change, which happy death
Can put no end to; deathwards progressing
To no death was that visage; it had pass'd
The lily and the snow.... I. 256–262.

He also succeeds in the expression of another sense. For example, in the following passage, he uses an original visual image in order to express silence which is ordinarily expressed by an auditory image.

...the Naiad 'mid her reeds
Press'd her cold finger closer to her lips. I. 317-318.

Again in the following lines, the image of the sense of smell is used to express the loud voice of Saturn, which is ordinarily expressed by the image of the auditory sense.

As the moist scent of flowers, and grass, and leaves
Fills forest-dells with a pervading air,
Known to the woodland nostril, so the words
Of Saturn fill'd the mossy glooms around,
Even to the hollows of time-eaten oaks,
And to the windings in the foxes' holes,
With sad, low tones, ... I. 404-411.

It would seem to be a logical conclusion that Keats' poetic style has two aspects at this stage of narrative poetry. The prolix style of his early poems such as *Sleep and Poetry* still lingers on in his first group of narrative poems whose subject matter comes from classical mythology, in such poems as *Endymion*, but it disappears in his second group of narrative poems whose subject matter is a romantic love, in such poems as *The Eve of St. Agnes*. Keats' poetic style has passed through three stages corresponding to the three poetic genres, sonnets, narratives, and odes. The second stage corresponding to his narrative poems has been regarded as a turning point at which he turned from Spenser, who captivated Keats in his early poetry, to Milton as a source of inspiration. It may be parenthetically noted that Chatterton, Shakespeare, and Dryden were powerful factors in forming the poetic style of his successful narrative poems. Shakespeare seems to have taught him to observe human life and emotions, and to describe them with so-called "negative capability", which means the ability of a great poet who is not only capable of descriptions in a most effective style but also capable of the perception of every phenomenon in the world. Needless to say, Keats' poetic style is no match for Shakespeare's on the whole, but it sometimes matches Shakespeare's when it is successful in such poems as *Isabella* and *The Eve of St. Agnes*.

To be continued.