



POETRY AS A REFLECTION OF ‘SELF’: A STUDY OF JOHN KEATS’ POETRY

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Abstract

During the Romantic Era, a certain conception of the self emerges, emphasising the importance of one’s inner life. Like other romantic writers of his day, John Keats questioned the foundations upon which romantic poetry rested. Keats's poems reflected his inward struggles. Although Keats acknowledged sensation's value, he saw it only as a means to an end—acquiring information about the world around us. His odes are unparalleled in their sensuality and depth of imagination, setting them apart from all others. The paper delves into exploring the ‘self’ in the poetry of John Keats, one of the most renowned poets of the Romantic era. His poetry is known for its rich sensory imagery and vivid descriptions of sensual experiences, which often serve as reflections of the self. Through a close analysis of selected poems, including "Ode to a Nightingale," "Ode on Melancholy," "To Autumn," "The Eve of St. Agnes," and others, this paper examines how sensuality is portrayed as a reflection of the self in Keats' works. By shedding light on the interplay between sensuality and identity in Keats' poetry, this paper contributes to the existing scholarship on Keats' works. It provides insights into the Romantic understanding of the self as portrayed through the lens of sensuality. It offers a deeper appreciation of Keats' poetic artistry and philosophical musings on the complexities of the human condition, particularly in relation to the concept of selfhood.

Keywords: *Emotions, poetry, self, Keats, romanticism, sensuality*

Introduction

During the Romantic Era, a certain conception of the ‘self’ emerged, emphasising the importance of one’s inner life. Poets have explored the complexity of the human experience throughout history, using words to express the essence of the human soul. The concept of self, or the understanding, exploration, and depiction of one's own identity, feelings, and consciousness, is a significant and persistent theme in poetry. The idea of the self has been the focus of reflection, introspection, and self-expression in poetry throughout history. The notion of self in poetry transcends cultural, societal, and temporal boundaries, encompassing diverse perspectives, emotions, and experiences. They have explored the duality of self, the inner conflicts, and the evolving nature of the self as it navigates through life's challenges and changes.

Scholars like Sigmund Freud, Jean-Paul Sartre, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler, among others, have contributed to the understanding of self and identity in literature through their influential theories. As literary studies have evolved, the concept of self has continued to be a significant topic of investigation, offering insights into the human condition, the complexities of identity, and the



role of literature in shaping our understanding of selfhood.

The paper delves into the exploration of the self in the poetry of John Keats, a renowned poet of the Romantic era. Keats' poetry is known for its rich sensory imagery and vivid descriptions of sensual experiences, which often serve as reflections of the self. By examining the interplay between the self and its external influences, we will also explore how societal, cultural, and historical factors shape one's perception of self and influence self-expression in poetry. We will investigate the relationship between the self and the world, the construction of identity, the negotiation of the self in relation to others, and the search for authenticity and meaning.

Literature Review

Keats known for his deeply introspective and emotionally rich poetry has grappled with questions of self-identity, self-awareness, and the nature of existence, making the concept of 'self' a recurring theme in his poetry. The literature review examined Keats' poetry's treatment of the idea of the self, its development, and its interactions with nature, emotions, and the arts. The paper looks at Keats' use of sensual imagery, his investigation of the conflict between inner and outward realities, and his engagement with the idea of beauty as a vehicle for self-expression. The gap identified is of comprehensive understanding of Keats' literary genius and his deep awareness of the human condition. The paper contributes by analysing his poems through the lenses of self-exploration and identification.

Recurring 'Self' in the poems of Keats

The concept of self is a recurring theme in the poetry of John Keats, a renowned Romantic poet known for his rich imagery, vivid sensuousness, and exploration of human emotions. In his poems, Keats often delved into the complexities of self-identity, self-awareness, and self-expression. He often explored the sensuous aspects of the self, delving into the pleasures of the senses and the richness of sensory experiences. As Sartre proclaims, "existence precedes essence," emphasising the idea that individuals create their own identities through their actions and choices, shaping their sense of self in the process. Keats has also dwelt into a similar process of reflecting and responding to the 'self'.

In poems such as "Ode to a Grecian Urn" and "Ode to Autumn," Keats celebrates the sensory beauty of art, nature, and life, expressing a deep connection between the self and the sensory world. Keats also grappled with issues of self-awareness and self-expression in his poetry. In poems like "When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be," Keats reflects on the limitations of human existence and the fear of death, expressing a desire to leave a lasting legacy through his poetry as a means of self-expression and immortality. Keats often explored the tension between the inner self and the outer world in his poetry. In poems like "To Autumn" and "La Belle Dame sans Merci," Keats portrays the contrast between the beauty and vitality of the natural world and the darker, more complex aspects of human emotions and desires, reflecting on the complexities of the self in relation to the external world.

In his poetry, Keats has also delved into the themes of self-identity and self-discovery. In the poems like "Endymion" and "The Eve of St. Agnes," Keats explores the journey of the protagonist towards self-discovery and the development of their sense of self through experiences, emotions, and relationships.



Sensuality as a Reflection of Self

Sensuality in writing can also be understood from an aesthetic perspective, where it is seen as a means to achieve aesthetic pleasure or beauty in literary works. Drawing on theories of aesthetics, such as those proposed by philosophers like Immanuel Kant or Friedrich Nietzsche, sensuality in writing can be seen as an expression of aesthetic sensibility and a way to create sensory delight or aesthetic arousal in the reader. It may involve the use of lush language, rich imagery, and vivid descriptions to create a sensory aesthetic experience that engages the reader's senses and emotions.

In the poetry of John Keats, sensuality is often depicted as a reflection of the self, revealing aspects of the individual's identity, emotions, and desires. Keats was known for his vivid sensory imagery and his exploration of the sensual pleasures of life, which he often used to convey deeper meanings and insights about the human experience. Keats often used sensual imagery to embody and express emotions. In poems such as "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode on Melancholy," he used vivid sensory descriptions of sights, sounds, tastes, and textures to evoke the emotions of joy, longing, and sorrow. Sensual experiences are portrayed as an outward manifestation of the inner emotional landscape of the self, reflecting the poet's emotional state and innermost feelings. Keats' portrayal of sensuality in his poetry often emphasises the importance of self-expression and authenticity. Sensual experiences are depicted as a means of connecting with one's innermost self and expressing one's true emotions and desires. In poems like "Ode to a Grecian Urn," Keats explores the idea of immortalising one's emotions and experiences through art, suggesting that sensual beauty can reflect the self and a form of self-expression that transcends the limitations of time and mortality.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the concept of self is a rich and multifaceted theme in the poetry of John Keats. Through his lyrical and evocative verses, Keats delves into various aspects of selfhood, including identity, consciousness, self-awareness, self-transcendence, and the subjective experience of self. He employs vivid imagery, rich language, and poetic techniques to explore the complexities of the self and its relationship with the world, nature, and art. Keats' poetry reflects a nuanced and complex understanding of the concept of self, encompassing various facets of human existence, including its fleeting nature, sensory richness, self-awareness, and inner conflicts. His poems often invite readers to ponder the mysteries and complexities of the self, revealing his deeply philosophical and psychological insights into the human condition. In Keats' poetry, sensuality is often portrayed as a reflection of the self, encompassing emotions, desires, connections with nature, and the transient nature of human existence. It serves as a means of self-expression, revealing the inner world of the individual and offering insights into the complexities of the human condition.



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