

Notes on Keats' Letters (Continuation)

See Page 150 of Bhabatosh Chatterjee's book on Keats (*John Keats: His Mind and Work.*)

It must be taken account that during Keats' time letter writing was the only mode of communication when people had to contact others who lived at a distance from them.

Keats' letters throw light on his own disposition, instability of the small social circle to which he belonged, the hostility of the Tory reviewers, the uncertainties in regards to his own creative endeavours and George's immigration to America (1818). All these made him conscious of the stark problems of human life (See the letters Oct-Nov 1817).

These letters indicated the change in his attitude (Dec-Jan letters). We witness a sudden animation in Keats' foreign letters which show a fine release of his emotions in jollity. The fluctuations of mood are recorded here—such as sudden shift from seriousness to joviality. The tonal shift in Keats' letters from gay to the serious and from serious to the gay indicates an effort to communicate contrary experiences and unfolds a swift movement of thoughts. Nevertheless, we are struck by the author's keen responsiveness and his candour.

“If I scribble long letters” Keats tells Reynolds (3rd May 1818) “I must play my vagaries. I must be too heavy, or too light,” This reveals a relieved situation which indicates to the relieving of tension. Please note the juxtapositions in his letters and his inclusive visions—his fears about his brother's illness.

On studying Keats' letters to Fanny Brawne we come across a lot of thematic and rhetorical repetitions (in other letters and poems). Brawne was initially his neighbour who later became his fiancé. Keats belonged to the medical profession and was always honest about his clinical condition—the letters to Brawne bear testimony to this. Being a doctor his limited time on earth became clearer to Keats. His letters are poetic efforts that revolve around the ideas of love, enchantment, death, honesty and commitment. The Letter of 25 July 1819 through the usage of the word ‘consumption’ highlighted his preoccupation with death.

“You cannot conceive how I ache to be with you: how I would die for one hour—for what is in the world?”

In most of his letters to Browne he harps on the concept of ‘death’ and ‘dying’. In his 25 July 1819 letter to Brawne he mentions “I have two luxuries to brood over in my walks, your Loveliness and the hour of my death. O that I could have possession of them both in the same minute.”

In ‘Ode to the Nightingale’ Keats underlines “Now more than ever seems it rich to die,”

Extra References

1. Graham, Walter. "Some Infamous Tory Reviews." *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 22, No.4, Oct. 1925, pp. 500-517.
2. In *Romanticism and the letter* by Madeleine Callaghan , Anthony Howe (editors) Palgrave Macmillan you could see the chapters titled "Byron, Shelly and Keats and the Limits of Letters" , "John Keats' epistolary intimacy" and "don't imagine it an a propos des bottes: Keats, the Letter and the Poem"
3. Kucich, Greg. "The poetry of mind in Keats' letters." *Style*, Vol 21, No. 1 Rhythm, Rhetoric, Revision, Spring 1987, pp. 76-94.
4. "Consumption," *Desire, and the Refuge of Death in the 25 July 1819 letter to Fanny Brawne*. John C. Leffel and Karla Alwes. SUNY Cortland. (The Keats Letters Project.)
5. Benvenuto, Richard. "The Balance of Good and Evil in Keats' Letters and Lamia" *The Journal of English and Germanic Philosophy*, Vol 1, No. 1, Jan 1972, pp. 1-11.
6. Smith, Hilas. " John Keats:Poet, Patient, Physician." *Reviews of Infectious Diseases*, Vol. 6, No. 3, May-Jun 1984, pp. 390-404.