



## DESTRUCTION OF DEATH BY NEVER DYING SPIRIT OF POETRY – AN EXPLORATION OF JOHN KEATS' POETIC PHILOSOPHY

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### ABSTRACT



English literature as it is not limited to a single country or race of the people so it is replete with varied kaleidoscopic representation of themes and motives. As literature, according to New Historicism and Cultural Materialism, represents society and human life, it also fathoms deep into the enigmas surrounding existence. One of those enigmas, as it has been expected to be never solved is the enigma of death and mutability of life. In Romantic age spanning across 1798 to 1850, many writers like William Wordsworth, P B Shelly, Lord Byron, S T Coleridge, John Keats dealt with the predominant questions of life, death, mutability of time, nature in the thick and thin of humanity's life experiences.

My paper deals with the 'Concept of death and its destruction' in the poetry of John Keats.

**Keywords:** *Death, Destruction, Immutability of art, Impermanence of life, Negative capability.*

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John Keats (1796-1821) belongs to the Romantic age in English literature. Romantic age begins with the publication of Lyrical Ballads in 1798 jointly by William Wordsworth and S T Coleridge. This age preferred human emotions and feelings over arid reason and logic. The Romantic age faced the fundamental questions of life and death head on. It is in contrast with the preceding ages of Neo-classicism and Restoration age.

John Keats lived life for twenty five years, in very young age he tasted the sense of mortality. Like the youth of his own time he too had ambition in life, he mastered the art of a surgeon as well as a poet, he too had nurtured the feelings of youthful love, but the fate had something different impending for John Keats. He suffered from consumption from early age. He experienced the pain of death solemnly waiting for it. He did not know when it comes but for sure he knew it would come soon.

Keats might have feared of death, it might have made him shivered with pain and it might have caused his life to skip existential sublimity and conjugal bliss. But if we delve deep into his poetry we come to conclude that Keats at last conquered the death, death itself had become a thing of insignificance.

#### **NEGATIVE CAPABILITY**

Keats in his letters to his friends evinced his poetic theory known as negative capability. We need to understand it in order to enjoy his poetry and its underlying themes. He stated "Negative capability is capability of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason". A poet has to bury his own self consciousness and become the object on which he is meditating. Keats' basic question is why we shall run after facts and conclusion, why can't we enjoy our existence in its own uncertainties. In the strife ridden world, the question shows a direction to life in amity and leave off the world in peace.

Death is a recurrent theme in Keats' poems. It is not yielding to the ultimate death but facing it with indomitable spirit of poetry and reality of human existence.

In his poem "Ode to a Nightingale" he says :

"Thou wast not born for death, immortal bird  
No hungry generation tread thee down  
The voice I hear this passing night was heard  
In ancient days by emperor and clown"

The voice of the Nightingale never dies, it is immortal, a bird may die but the voice lives forever, the voice of Nightingale it is same immutable and deathless. Its voice has made the bird everlasting creature.

Poet enjoys the bliss of life not by the titillating experiences extended by the Bacchus but by the blissful melody of the bird. The song of the nightingale rejuvenated John Keats' deathless spirit.

The beginning lines of *Endymion* proclaim vastness of beauty which can't be cornered in a tiny vessel of death. He declares:

"A thing of beauty is a joy for ever  
Its loveliness increases; it will never  
Pass into nothingness"

The joy which surrounds subliminal beauty never fades off. In other words beauty of life, beauty of creation never becomes a void within; it fills itself with vivid subtleties. It is immortal. The beauty of the soul is immortal.

Keats declares "Beauty is truth, truth beauty; ye all need to know (in this world). Beauty is immortal. In the ode "Ode on a Grecian Urn" Keats notated

"When Old age shall this generation waste  
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe"

The generations may change but the men, women and their mirthful dance never face into nothings they go on living and enjoying unheard melodies encased in the art on Grecian Urn.

"A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme"

Nature, art and their grandeur even overlaps the mechanical construction of poetry in rhyme. The flower is also deathless; it goes on living and blooming. For Keats life is not singular, it is the



varied representation of creation which goes on forever. In "Ode to Autumn" he declares;

"Warm days will never cease, For summer has O'er brimmed their clammy cell"

John Keats in "When I Have Fears That I May Cease To Be" expressed life's dilemma by stating

"Of the wide world I stand alone, and think  
Till love and Fame to nothingness do sink"

Yet he reverted back to the truth of immortality of beauty of existence and the soul.

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