HUNT, KEATS, AND ROSSETTI
A STUDY IN INFLUENCE AND COMPARISON

by

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INTRODUCTION

One critic has defined Romanticism as 'the reproduction in modern art or literature of the life and thought of the Middle Ages.' (1) While it is true that there are many other elements in Romanticism and that a description of the movement that excludes Wordsworth's love of nature and Shelley's love of the ideal is hardly complete, nevertheless the definition given does indicate one of the most important tendencies of the Romantic movement in art, literature and religion. In Germany mediaevalism was even more characteristic of the Romantic Poets than in England. Heine says,

'Was aber die Romantische Schule in Deutschland? Sie war nichts anders als die Wiedererweckung der Poesie des Mittelalter, wie sie sich in dessen Liedern, Bild- und bau-werken, in Kunst und Leben, manifestiert hatte.' (2)

However, although Romanticism in England began mainly as an antiquarian revival, the movement developed to include any tendencies related to mediaevalism or opposed to eighteenth century classicism. As these other tendencies—the love of nature is one—were a part of romanticism from the first, a wider definition of the romantic character is often preferred—the love of the element of strangeness in beauty. But even with this definition mediaevalism is still an important element of Romanticism.

'The essential elements', Pater says, 'of the romantic spirit are curiosity and the love of beauty; and it is as the accidental effect of these qualities only, that it seeks the Middle Age, because in the overcharged atmosphere of the Middle Age there are unworked sources of romantic effect, of a strange beauty to be won by strong imagination out of things unlikely or remote.' (1)

The charm of the Middle Ages is felt in varying degrees in almost all the poetry of the nineteenth century. Some poets try merely to recapture the adventure, the colour and the movement of mediaeval times; others try also to revive the poetic forms and the manner of speaking. Most content themselves with recreating merely the external appearance of the Middle Ages, not the emotional spirit. Very few really completely reveal—or try to reveal—its 'strange beauty'. Some, however, win 'by strong imagination' to the very heart of the Middle Ages—recapture not only its superficial

details but also its very moods and attitude to life.

Chatterton, the forerunner of Romantic mediaevalism sought to recreate the spirit of the Middle Ages by carefully imitating its poetic forms. His work remains a literary coup de force--beautiful but artificial. Coleridge's poetic imagination and scholarly interest brought him much closer to the Middle Ages. The publication of *La Belle Dame sans Merci* and *The Eve of St. Agnes* marked the climax of the movement. It appeared that Keats had completed the cycle pioneered by Chatterton. One would expect the Antiquarian Revival to pass away as other literary movements before it, leaving its mark on our literature but not dominating the poetic mood. One would not be surprised to find Victorian mediaevalism (as it was for the most part) a development of the romantic movement moderated by the influence of nineteenth century thought. But for the pre-Raphaelite movement of Rossetti one is not prepared. It came as a second Romantic Revival uninfluenced apparently by Victorian rationalism. Like all echoes it was less forceful and less genuine than the original voice but so similar that the relationship is instinctively felt.

It must not be forgotten that, according to Pater, one of the essential elements of the Romantic spirit is the love of beauty. The charm of the literature of the Middle Ages lies to a great extent, in the mediaeval poet's love of colour.
and of over-lavish decoration, in his joy in the material beauty of life. To the romantic poet this offered a relief from the idealism and severity of classicism. Interest in this aspect of mediaevalism developed into the aestheticism which is found in the work of Hunt, Keats, and Rossetti. To them the love of beauty was a creed. That they should seek beauty in the past was only natural.

Keats, Hunt and Rossetti, were interested in the Middle Ages primarily for aesthetic reasons. All three were poets whose work is devoted to the praise of some aspect of beauty—in words, in nature, in the human emotions. It is their interest in the past that relates them to each other, that makes form a movement in themselves—an antiquarian movement in which the aesthetic rather than the adventurous or mysterious aspects of mediaevalism are stressed. This essay endeavors to trace in the three poets this common tendency which is due partly to influence but principally to peculiarity of taste and temperament.
CHAPTER I

No poet is ever quite independent of his predecessors or of his contemporaries. Usually, the influence comes indirectly through the medium of their work. But sometimes, as in the case of Leigh Hunt and Keats, the influence is also a personal one. When friendship is added to admiration, the connection is apt to be marked, since it is not quite possible to adopt an impersonal and critical attitude to a friend's work. Young Keats, enthusiastic and affectionate always, was very susceptible to the influences of his friends—Charles Cowden Clarke, George Felton Matthews, John Reynolds, and Benjamin Haydon. Although from the beginning confident of his own powers, he was not egotistical, and eagerly shared his friends' enthusiasms. Naturally, to Leigh Hunt—the friend who was also a poet—he turned for encouragement in his early literary attempts. Leigh Hunt, who may not have been the greatest poet of his time but who was certainly one of the most amiable, wholeheartedly returned Keats' confidence.

There were several reasons why Keats' other great contemporaries had little influence on his work. In the first place, Keats did not know Wordsworth and Shelley personally
until his style and tastes were formed. Secondly, Keats felt antagonism towards both. His first meeting with Wordsworth was an unfortunate one. Wordsworth was egotistical and unjust. He slightly termed the beautiful *Hymn to Pan* a pretty piece of paganism. Keats could never forgive that humiliation, although he often praised Wordsworth's work. Keats' acquaintanceship with Shelley was marred by rather inconsiderate criticism, this time on both sides. So Keats' pride, of which he had a good deal, kept him from becoming too enthusiastic an admirer of either poet.

Leigh Hunt has been much decried both as a poet and as a man, and it is true that in neither character was he without faults. But in 1815, when the young John Keats met him, he must have seemed the most charming and brilliant of men. From a distance Keats had worshipped 'the wronged Libertas' (1)—a martyr because of opinions with which Keats, being young, sympathized, and a poet who was soon to publish a poem which, it was rumoured, would make him the leader of a new school of poetry. Further acquaintance with Hunt could only have increased Keats' admiration.

'Tall, straight, slender, charming, courteous and vivacious, Leigh Hunt was one of the most winning of companions, full of kindly smiles and jest, of (1) Keats, To Charles Cowden Clarke, 44.
reading, gaiety and ideas, with an infinity of pleasant things to say of his own and a beautiful caressing voice to say them in, yet the most sympathetic and deferential of listeners' 

To Keats he opened up a new world—the world of literature. He did more—he praised and encouraged Keats' own literary attempts as a wise master might encourage a clever apprentice. To a young poet acquaintance with such a man would be both incentive and inspiration.

The friendship of Leigh Hunt was only one step in the development of Keats' poetic genius but, even if that friendship had left no mark on Keats' poetry, it would still be important. As it was, Leigh Hunt was a poet, apparently a master in the craft in which Keats was an apprentice. It was natural that Keats should imitate Hunt as he had imitated Spenser, the master who had first awakened his genius. In addition Keats found that Hunt's tastes were similar, and so felt that he had found a man intellectually akin to himself. He did not, of course, realize that one of the reasons for this kinship was Hunt's intellectual immaturity. Keats might certainly have found a better master. However, since Hunt's influence took the form of exaggerating faults that were as inherent in the young Keats as his poetic qualities, Hunt was not so responsible for the weak qualities in Keats' first work as is so often claimed. Keats himself

(1) (Qolvdım, John Keats, 1918, p. 45.)
made no apology for the resemblance of his work to that of Hunt but declared, 'it is my natural way and I have something in common with Hunt'. (1) The very exaggeration which Hunt's encouragement caused, perhaps, sickened Keats of the faults which he might otherwise not have noticed and thus have kept.

And what interests did Keats and Hunt have in common? Hunt admired Spenser as much as Keats did—and understood him as little. They both were interested in classical mythology, in the Elizabethan and Jacobean poets, and in the Italian romancers of the Middle Ages. Hunt did not introduce the Elizabethan poets to Keats, but under Hunt's tutelage Keats studied and imitated their diction and imagery. Hunt, however, was probably directly responsible for Keats' reading of the Italian romancers—Ariosto, Boiardo and Pulci, interest in whose work led Keats later to a study of the greater Italian writers—Dante and Boccaccio. When in 1819, long after he had outgrown his Huntian period, he wished to learn Italian, he studied it from the pages of Ariosto.

Hunt admired in these pre-Renaissance writers the light-hearted atmosphere of romance and mediaevalism. He liked Spenser, a quite different poet, for the same reason. To Keats they brought a new world of language and romance. Being young, he found himself more in sympathy with the

(1) cit. de Selincourt, The Poems of John Keats, 1926, p. XXVII.
'noble Poet of Romance', Boiardo, than with Wordsworth, 'the miserable and mighty poet of the Human Heart.' (1) Thus Hunt accompanied Keats in the path of the antiquarian movement, often indeed guiding the young man—for it is from classical mythology and the Italian Middle Ages—especially the latter—that Keats was to derive the inspiration for all his narrative poems. Keats' taste had always tended in that direction but Hunt fanned his interest into enthusiasm. Unfortunately Hunt's taste was catholic rather than critical. He could not teach Keats how to distinguish between the crudity and the charm of early poetry. He could only introduce him to its riches. But Keats' wide reading of mediaeval romance was to have many fortunate consequences when his critical sense had developed.

Significant in Keats' and Hunt's study of mediaeval and renaissance writers was their interest in the style and imagery—in the external details of verse. As a student Keats delighted in the sound and colour of poetry, lingered over descriptive passages and exclaimed at the flamboyant metaphors of Chapman. Keats' natural aestheticism needed restraint; unfortunately Hunt gave it only encouragement. Leigh Hunt, like Keats, revelled in the 'luxuries' of poetry, which to him was a pleasant sensation. Of the more serious or more dignified aspects of poetry he had no ap-

preciation. His tragedy, Rimini, was merely a sentimental love story.

Hunt's early verses were all in a gossipy, easy-flowing verse. But for Rimini, his intended masterpiece, he decided to employ a reformed heroic couplet, more fluent than Dryden's. In the Preface to the Story of Rimini (February or March, 1817) he explained his use of this form:

"With the endeavour to recur to a freer spirit of versification I have joined one of still greater importance, that of having a free and idiomatic cast of language. But the proper language of poetry is in fact nothing different from that of real life and depends for its dignity upon the strength and sentiment of what it speaks. It is only adding musical modulation to what a fine understanding might actually utter in the midst of its griefs or enjoyments. The poet therefore should do as Shakespeare or Chaucer did,—not copy what is obsolete or peculiar in either, any more than they copied their predecessors,—but use as much as possible an actual, existing language omitting of course mere vulgarisms and fugitive phrases, which are the cant of ordinary discourse." (l)

Hunt's theory, which merely echoed the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, was strong and defensible, but he himself was incapable of practising it successfully. However, to the young Keats it must have sounded very fine.

Keats looked to Rimini expecting guidance in the practice enunciated by Hunt. If his critical sense had been more acute, he would have found much in the poem worthy of study and emulation. The 'unaffected and contemporaneous' style moves easily and, at its best, is admirable for not too

(1) cit. Lowell, John Keats, 1925, p. 120.
serious narrative. The first canto with its description of the crowds and of the prince's procession is charming and lively. The couplet is used freely: run-on lines are the rule rather than the exception; triple rhymes and feminine endings are frequent. The naturalness is often fortunate but the poem suffers from unevenness. Hunt was by no means master of the style which

'showed Keats and Shelley (and how many more) the way to a freer treatment of the heroic couplet and broke the neck of a convention..... Hunt invented the instrument but had not the skill to play on it.' (1)

The descriptive passages in Rimini are rather superficial, occasionally affected, but just as often natural and colourful. Keats, with his untrained taste, did not always discriminate between the natural and the affected. He was justified, however, in rejoicing in the imaginative richness of the gaily-caparisoned horses and their riders, and the fountain

'which shakes its loosened silver in the sun.' (2)

As pure narrative Rimini does not flag until the very end. The story was told for its own sake and Hunt did not spoil it by unnecessary interruptions. A study of its narrative qualities would have helped the author of Endymion. But Keats was to receive his narrative and dramatic training from other and greater masters.

(1) Monkhouse, Life of Leigh Hunt, 1893, p. 112.
(2) Hunt, Rimini, ed. Sharp, Canterbury Poets, p. 4.
Hunt introduced Keats to a new world—a world of romance and poetry, of music and colour, of delight in beauty both natural and intellectual. He awakened in Keats the love of antiquity and of all beautiful things. It was in his Huntian period that Keats wrote, 'a thing of beauty is a joy forever.'

In addition Hunt's encouragement, his charming personality and the half-literary circle into which he introduced Keats all served to encourage the young poet to devote himself to literature. But unfortunately there were influences arising from Rimini and from Hunt's companionship and conversation which were beneficial neither to Keats' work nor to his career.

Keats would never have been so mercilessly attacked by the reviewers of Blackwoods and the Quarterly if he had not belonged to Hunt's circle. Hunt's private praise was of value to Keats but his public praise through the pages of the Examiner reacted like a boomerang. Lockhart, in launching his attack against Keats, decried first his 'fatal admiration for the character and talents of the most worthless and affected of all the versifiers of our time.'

He went on to comment on Keats' choice of the three 'great spirits' of the time—Wordsworth, Hunt and Haydon.

'Great spirits now on earth are sojourning; He of the cloud, the cataract, the lake,

(1) Keats, Endymion, I, I.
He of the rose, the violet, the spring,
The social smile, the chain for freedom's sake
And lo! whose steadfastness would never take
A meaner sound than Raphael's whispering' (1)

Keats' judgment was at fault but even the wisest of critics—Lockhart included—has erred in his estimation of his contemporaries. Lockhart made it quite evident how much consideration he would give 'Johnny Keats' the follower of Hunt:

'Wordsworth and Hunt? what a juxta-position. The purest, the loftiest and we do not fear to say it, the most classical of English poets, joined together in the same compliment with the meanest, the filthiest, and the most vulgar of Cockney poetasters.' (2)

This was journalistic diatribe of the worst sort, and Lockhart's use of the term 'classical' applied to Wordsworth showed in himself the very weakness of judgment he was attacking in Keats. But the faults which Lockhart proceeded to criticize were in Endymion and were due in great measure to Hunt's influence. To the beauties and promise of Endymion the critic was blind.

Hunt's main fault was that he failed to follow the most important principle of his Preface. He had said that poetry 'depends for its dignity upon the strength and sentiment of what it speaks.' Hunt's verse lacks the strength and sentiment which would make it poetry. It was in the

(1) Keats, Sonnet to Haydon, lff.
(2) Blackwood's loc. cit.
possession of these qualities that Wordsworth, who also often used a language 'nothing different from that of real life', showed himself a real poet. There is a depth and feeling in Wordsworth's poetry that gives it dignity. When these qualities are absent Wordsworth's verse is merely dull. When Hunt's verse lacks 'strength and sentiment'—and it usually does—his verse is worse than commonplace, it is vulgar, as in the love scene in *Rimini*, or trivial and ridiculous as in the passage where Paolo asks 'May I come in?' and Francesca answers '0 yes, certainly.' (1)

Hunt undoubtedly liked beautiful things but his shallowness and bad taste prevented him from discriminating between the truly beautiful and the cheaply sentimental. He papered his cell to resemble a rose bower. Surely a man with better taste would have seen how ridiculous and artificial the imitation was. Hunt, however, played with his own sensibilities and flaunted his love of beauty in the face of the world, until finally his genuine appreciation became an absurd affectation. He was, says Elton (2) the first true 'aesthete'—one of a long line which formed a strange current in Nineteenth Century literature and society.

Keats always worshipped what he called 'the Principle of Beauty'. But his critical sense was not in 1816 keen

enough to realize that excess of even an excellent quality leads to pitfalls and that reticence and self-discipline are as important in poetry as in life. And so we find in *Endymion* the same sickly sweetness, the same lavishness of sentimentality that mars the work of Hunt. 'Poetry,' Keats said later, (1) 'should be great and unobtrusive.' The aesthetes were never unobtrusive in their love of beauty. The Keats of *Endymion* was great and unobtrusive in single lines, such as

'Through the green evening quiet in the sun.' (2)

but the poem as a whole is so obtusive in its delineation of luxuries that the reader is sickened and confused rather than surprised by a fine excess. In *Sleep and Poetry* Keats abandoned himself to sensations--

'Scarce can I scribble on, for lovely airs
Are fluttering round the room alike doves in pairs:
Many delights of that glad day recalling,
When first my senses caught their tender falling.' (3)

Keats always loaded every rift with ore but the ore in the later poems is pure gold, not the false metal of much of his earlier work.

*Dante's Paolo and Francesca* is a bitter tragedy of the effect of deceit on love: Hunt's *Story of Rimini* is a

(2) *Keats, Endymion*, II, 71.
(3) *Keats, Sleep and Poetry*, 326ff.
sentimental and rather trivial story of forbidden love, with an unhappy ending which seems forced rather than inevitable. Rimini is at its best before Paolo and Francesco appeared. The love scenes are ridiculous. However that may be, in the love scenes from Endymion, Keats was perhaps most influenced by Rimini. Keats was by nature a love poet but love is a dangerous subject for a boy of twenty-one. The amorous description in Endymion is far more nauseating than that in Rimini mainly because there is far more of it. The fault was still with Keats when he wrote Isabella, but The Eve of St Agnes has no more trace of it than has Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. The Blackwood's reviewers said that Keats profaned and vulgarized every association of the old Greek myth of Endymion. In the love scenes this was true, but nowhere else.

Leigh Hunt was always ill at ease when writing of women. Keats shared the same lack of sureness, the same embarrassment. They both depicted their women after the model of particularly cheap and sentimental coloured prints. The first quarter of the Nineteenth Century shared with the Middle Ages the idea that heroines must be sweet and beautiful and utterly characterless. How Keats could have conceived a goddess as insipid and as undignified as
Cynthia is hard to imagine. It was evident that, like Hunt, Keats admired the prettiness—one cannot say the beauty—of the old myths rather than their simple dignity. The mythology of Hyperion shows an interesting development in taste. He no longer thought that

\[
\text{the silver flow of Hero's tears, the swoon of Imogen,}
\]
\[
\text{Fair Pastorella in the bandit's den}
\]
\[
\text{Are things to brood on with more ardency Than the death day of empires. (1)}
\]

Hunt in other things besides matters of love lacked the taste which genuine 'sentiment'—to repeat his own word—would have given him. He was a man of essentially cheerful disposition and this cheerfulness often resulted in an unintentional playfulness and want of high seriousness that is sadly out of key with a story like that of Rimini. This lack of seriousness was partly responsible for his failure with the free heroic couplet. 'He invented the instrument but had not the skill to play it.' It could be used for any type of poetry except perhaps dramatic tragedy. But, as Hunt used it, it was only suitable for familiar verse or light, rather flippant romance. It is graceful enough, and easy flowing. But it is the worst medium possible

(1) Keats, Endymion, II, 30. ff.
for Keats who was so much in need of discipline. Rules in art are only successfully broken by the people who know how to follow them. Keats in his two first volumes wrote over five thousand lines of heroic couplet 'which is here mostly as un-heroic as it can be'. (1) The Huntian couplet suited familiar verse such as the Epistle to George Felton Matthew. But it was as unfortunate in Endymion as it was in Rimini.

The new heroic couplet was meant to flow easily and freely, but to make it do so, the form had to be unobtrusive. Both Hunt and Keats mistook licence for freedom in this regard. Both let the rhyme carry them along, forgetting that form and sense had to be co-ordinated. Hunt's ear for the music of lines was never keen; Keats' was as yet undeveloped. The following passage, chosen, at random, illustrates the faults of Hunt's style as used by Keats. The passage contains one or perhaps two perfect lines. The rest is spoilt by faulty form:

'It seem'd he flew, the way so easy was;
And like a new born spirit did he pass
Through the green evening quiet in the sun,
Through buried paths, where sleepy twilight dreams
The summer time away. One track unseams
A wooded cleft, and, far, away, the blue
Of ocean fades upon him, then, anew,
He sinks adown a solitary glen,
Where there was never sound of mortal men,

Saving, perhaps, some snow-light cadences
Melting to silence, when upon the breeze
Some holy bark let forth an anthem sweet,
To cheer itself to Delphi. Still his feet

(1)

Here the poet has a rhyme on an unstressed word 'was'; imperfect rhymes, ('was' and 'pass', 'flute' and 'to't, 'cadences' and 'breeze') and a forced rhyme 'unseams'. Worse still, Keats carried over the errors of his every-day speech into his poetry. Blackwoods' reviewer, as usual, picked on the worst rhymes in the poem--those which suggested imperfect pronunciation—the rhyming of 'higher' with 'Thalia', or the rhyme of 'ear' with 'Cytherea' in

'No, nor the Aeolian twang of Love's own bow,
Can mingle music for for the soft ear
Of goddess Cytherea!' (2)

Ordinarily the pronunciation of words in poetry should be the same as that of words in correct speech. The unnatural pronunciation of 'cadences' in the passage quoted above and the frequently found stress on 'ing', 'y' and other suffixes are inexcusable in modern poetry. True, 'y' is occasionally accented in mediaeval poetry but only when the sound justifies the usage.

Keats' early vocabulary he inherited mainly from Spenser, Chapman, Browne and Chatterton, or received more directly from his association with Hunt and his circle. Hunt was by no means entirely to blame for the faults of Keats'
diction. In nearly every case precedent can be found in the earlier poets that Keats read. But Hunt used in speaking as well as in writing many of the words that seem objectionable in Keats' poetry, thus making them part of Keats' everyday vocabulary. He encouraged Keats' enthusiasm but did nothing to form his taste. So Keats, with a grand disregard for grammar, formed adjectives from nouns and verbs by adding 'y' and more boldly still formed adjectives from other adjectives. Some of these are unfortunate, for example—'bloomy' and 'bowery', which remind the reader of Hunt's decorated cell. Many have not even the excuse of being metrically necessary. That Keats should use the manufactured word 'surgy' in the line,

'The surgy murmurs of the Lonely sea' (1)

instead of the more conventional and equally effective 'surging' showed how he had succumbed to the habit. However, some words, unpromising at first sight, are justified by their use. So the use of the adjective 'spangly' in the following lines seems fortunate:

'As when of healthful midnight sleep bereft,
Thinking on rugged hours and fruitless toil,'
We put our eyes into a pillowy cleft
And see the spangly gloom froth up and boil.' (1)

Other characteristics of his early verse were the excessive use of abstract nouns ending in 'ing' as concrete nouns; the use of nouns as verbs and verbs as nouns, and the use of the manufactured double epithet.

'From the meaning
Of Jove's large eyebrow to the tender greening
Of April meadows...........
.............who could paragon
The fervid choir' (2)

'Perhaps to see shapes of light, aerial limning,
And catch soft floatings from a faint-heard hymning.' (3)

'And Wesper, rising star, began to throe
In the dusk heavens silvery.' (4)

'Woe-hurricanes beat ever at the gate.' (5)

But some of these unconventional usages are so felicitous that Keats cannot be reproached. In any case 'with these words the test is their success, not their irregularity.' (6)

Usages that are particularly Huntian, although often found elsewhere, mar the Poems of 1817 and Endymion. The most distasteful of these are what Bridges calls the languid

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(1) Keats, Isabella, 41, 3f.
(2) Keats, Sleep and Poetry, 169ff.
(3) Ibid, 33f.
(4) Keats, Endymion, IV, 485f.
(5) Ibid, IV, 527.
(6) Bridges, Essays, 1929, IV, 150.
epithets—(1)—quiet, sweet, fair, white, tender, gentle, easy, fresh, pleasant—words in themselves innocent enough, but in their constant repetition almost as sickening as 'balmy', slumbery' and 'lush'. Words such as 'swooning', 'fainting', 'panting' and 'swimming' add to the nauseating sentimentality of the love scenes. The reader's last glimpse of Endymion is of him kneeling 'in blissful swoon' before his goddess. (2) This over-emphasis on the sensations is a characteristic of the worst aesthetic poetry.

Just as in Rimini we find many words used incongruously—words which special connotation has spoilt for serious use—as 'stare' and 'scare';

'Not that the face on which the lady stared
Was hideous, nay. 'Twas handsome; yet it scared' (3)

so Endymion 'stares' and 'raves':

'He did not rave, he did not stare aghast' (4)

and dotes':

'I watch and dote upon the silver lakes.' (5)

Another word found in Rimini which Keats had the bad taste to adopt is 'feel' as a noun. It is first found in Calidore,

(1) Bridges, op. cit. IV, 151.
(2) Keats, Endymion, IV, 999
(4) Keats, Endymion, II, 588,
a poem very much in the Huntian and Spenserian manner:

'Gladdening in the free, and airy feel
Of a light mantel' (1)

and is used five times afterwards, once in one of the worst lines in Endymion.

The use of such words as 'giggle', 'elegantly', 'like' as an adjective, 'tiptop' and 'treat' show that, like Hunt, Keats neglected to omit from his poetic diction 'mere vulgarisms and fugitive phrases, which are the cant of ordinary discourse.' 'Tease' is one example of this cant. It is a word which Keats used over and over again in his letters in the sense of 'worry'. In his poetry it is equally common, but the half dozen misuses of this word are all atoned for by the remarkable line--

'Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity.' (2)

The charge of aestheticism against Keats rests mainly on his sensous love of words and of images and his pre-occupation with sound and colour. In Endymion thought and story were neglected, ideas were continually lost in a maze of imaginative pictures. Keats' love of words dated back to his introduction to Spenser. Clarke has told of Keats' delight in

(1) Keats, Calidore, 139f.
(2) Keats, Ode on a Grecian Urn,
the double epithet in the phrase 'sea-shouldering whales'. Chapman, again with his Elizabethan love of daring sounds and his adventurous use of words, was another exciting experience. Hunt introduced Keats to Browne and the other Jacobeans to whom Hunt's own poetic diction owed much. But Keats had already begun his explorations and adventures in the fields of language. The diction of Chapman and Browne is daring and vivid but it is often affected and bombastic. But the diction of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is rich in sound as well as in connotation and Keats was eager to use it. Later Keats steeped himself in the writings of Chaucer, of Shakespeare, of Milton, of Dryden and of Wordsworth and enlarged and heightened his vocabulary accordingly. Keats kinship with his great predecessors was so close 'that their life became his and their language the only possible utterance for his ideas and moods.' (1)

Hunt's talent in poetry was for mere narrative or pretty description. He was not a great thinker. Keats seemed to have been in sympathy with these limitations of his friend. In his letters he showed that he had an increasingly profound philosophy of life, but for the theories of his time, especially the Godwinian theories of Shelley and of his friend, Dilke, he had no use. He criticized Wordsworth for having a

'palpable purpose'. He read Spenser and the other poets for their beauty of imagery rather than for any ideas they might have.

It is recorded of him that, as a student in London reading poetry, he

'admired more the external decorations than felt the deep emotion of the Muse. He delighted in leading you through mazes of elaborate description.' (1)

And it was in description that he delighted and excelled. His fertile brain never failed to find an image to suit the occasion. In his later poems, although every image is rich in connotations, the whole effect is one of restraint and discipline. In the early poems, however, the abundance of images—some good, some bad—

'fatigue the reader, who feels like a sight-seer in a gallery overcrowded with pictures, which by degrees he ceases to regard with attention.' (2)

Hunt's description of Francesca's bower is enfeebled by this same abundance of detail. Keats' advice to the poet, John Clare, would apply to Hunt and to Keats himself in Endymion:

'The description too much prevailed over the sentiment ........your images from nature are too much introduced without being called for by a particular Sentiment.... As if the description overlaid and stifled that which ought to be the prevailing Idea.' (3)

(2) Bridges, Collected Essays, 1929, IV, 162.
To Keats nature and literature were equally manifestations of beauty and here again Hunt shared his taste.

'To the everyday pleasure of summer and the English fields Hunt brought in a lower degree the same alertness of enjoyment which in Keats were intense beyond parallel.' (1)

Unfortunately Hunt was unable to broaden Keats' experience in this regard because his own appreciation was limited by a superabundance of animal spirits and a lack of any real sensitiveness and by an experience which, while not confined as the reviews claimed, to the contemplation of potted flowers, gave him no conception of the grander side of nature. Hunt, however, was a keen observer. Keats must have found his companionship very profitable in their Hampstead walks.

Hunt's description of nature is colourless when compared with Keats'. But in some ways it is very similar. Neither poet describes on a grand scale. Neither gives in one broad or swift stroke the impression of a landscape, but rather each creates the desired impression by the accumulation of details. With Hunt the result is confusion, as it is with the Keats of Endymion. 'The poet is dazzled by his own ardour, which leads him to diffuse his attention over mere details, making him lose his sense of organized wholes; the

(1) Colvin, John Keats, 1918, p. 5.
contours of the landscape, just as those of the action, are confused and blurred. (1)

'......., a rare summer-house, a lovely sight,
Small, marble, well-proportion'd, creamy white,
Its top with vine leaves sprinkled,--but no more-----,
And a young bay-tree either side the door.
The door was to the wood, forward and square,
The rest was domed at top and circular,
And through the dome the only light came in,
Ting'd as it enter'd by the vine leaves thin.' (2)

Both poets loved to describe in detail dresses, tapestry and furnishings—an aesthetic tendency. Both emphasized colour, touch and sound rather than line or movement. We have Hunt's description of the accoutrements of the horses—an example of Hunt at his best:

'The bridles red, and saddle-cloths of white,
Match well the blackness with its glossy light,
While the rich horse-cloths, mantling half the steed,
Are some of them all thick with golden thread;
Others have spots, on grounds of different hue---
As burning stars upon a cloth of blue;
Or heart's ease purple with a velvet light,
Rich from the glary yellow, thickening bright;
Or silver roses in carnation sewn,
Or flowers in heaps, or colours pure alone:' (3)

Keats was more subtle, preferring to suggest rather than to state colours. But he, too, loved to combine the full, rich

(1) Cazamian, History of English Literature, 1926, 1094.
colours—gold and purple and red. Indeed colours are so much a part of his poetry that one critic has said 'Exuberance of colour was the gift of Keats to poetry.' (1)

What in brief are the similarities in the work of these two poets, so far removed from each other in many ways—similarities which, it must be remembered, are only partly due to influence? In both the reader finds a love for beauty in all things and consequently an enthusiasm for the romantic aspects of Mediaevalism—its chivalry, its mystery, its colour and its picturesque architecture—where beauty was so strange and so far removed from the present. Both poets loved colour and movement which they found not only in the Middle Ages but also in nature—not nature in its grander aspects—but the nature which they knew best—that of the environs of London. In their interest in mediaevalism and in nature they were typical of the Romantic Movement. And in other ways though they were apart from their time. Neither allowed philosophic or political interests to intrude into their poetry. To both beauty alone was a sufficient standard of value. Both tended to over-emphasize their delight in the beauty of words, of images and of sensations. It was this lack of restraint which often marred their work. Of the two, Keats alone, was able to work away from this, to be exuberant without being flamboyant. But in their whole—

(1) Drinkwater, Story of Literature, 1923, III, 684.
hearted devotion to the cult of beauty they remain the most aesthetic of the early Romantic poets.
CHAPTER TWO

Keats in 1817 was young, flowing over with enthusiasm for everything beautiful, and eager to express himself. He was very susceptible to influence, too idealistic to see his friends' faults. Hunt's influence was, as has been shown, unfortunately evident in the form and diction of Keats' early work. In addition Hunt set Keats an example of lack both of dignity and of depth of feeling. Rimini gave Hunt a subject worthy of a great tragedy. Dante had told the story before, but it is one of those subjects so universal in scope that it could have been retold without loss of its freshness. D'Annunzio has done it in our time. But Hunt failed and his failure affected not only himself but also Keats. In the Keats of the first period we find the same affectation, and insipidity, the same feminine love for pretty phrases, and the same often blurred description. Hunt, as Keats complained later, perplexed one 'in the standard of Beauty.' (1)

(1) Keats, Letters, to George and Georgiana Keats, December, 1818, ed Forman I, 273.
But, short as was Keats' poetic career, the period of Hunt's influence was only one phase. Keats and Hunt at one time seemed to resemble each other--a resemblance only in that both had the same faults and the same enthusiasms. Indeed the faults were frequently outgrowths of the enthusiasms, but the resemblance was so superficial that it soon ceased to exist. The Reviewers classed Keats as a member of the Cockney School with Hunt, Hood and Webb, in order to compare him unfavourably with the Lake School of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey. But Keats belonged to no school. *Endymion* represented not a static period but a period of progress in Keats' career. In it he worked through and out of the influence of Hunt. *Endymion* represented fulfilment and promise. That was why Keats could never rewrite it. It was, as Rossetti has well said, 'a plaything fit for the childhood of a divine poet'.

But Keats outgrew his poetic childhood, and turned from his old teacher. By October, 1817, when he was still occupied with the Fourth Book of *Endymion*, he had realized that both his idols, Hunt and Haydon, had feet of clay. His disillusionment in regard to Hunt was made evident in a letter to Benjamin Bayley. Keats with his characteristic manliness
and generosity apologized for speaking of something so 'paltry' and said that his ill-feeling was due to the 'vexation of a day'. But it was more than this. Keats was really annoyed at the pettiness and pretension of Hunt and Haydon. He wrote:

'Haydon says to me, Keats don't show your lines to Hunt on any Account, or he will have done half for you--so it appears Hunt wished it to be thought. When he met Reynolds in the Theatre, John told him that I was getting on to the completion of 4000 lines--Ah! says Hunt, had it not been for me thy would have been 7000! If he will say this to Reynolds, what would he to other people?' (1)

Keats then quoted a letter he had written to George Keats that spring, in which he stated his intention of writing a long poem, an intention which Hunt had tried to discourage. But against Hunt's advice Keats proceeded with his task for he wished to write a book in which 'Lovers of Poetry' might 'have a little Region to wander'. Besides, he said a long poem is 'a test of invention' and he pointed to the great poets before him who had written long poems. Vigorously he protested his independence.

'You see, Bailey, how independent my writing has been. Hunt's dissuasion was of no avail--I refused to visit Shelley that I might have my own unfettered scope;--and after all, I shall have the Reputation of Hunt's élève. His corrections and amputations will by the knowing ones be traced in the Poem.' (2)

(1) Keats, Letters, to B. Bailey, 8 October, 1817, ed. Forman, I, p. 55
(2) Ibid.
Had the only result of Hunt's meddling been irritation on Keats' part this letter would be of no special significance. It is interesting, however, to notice that, once having opened his eyes to the weaknesses of Hunt and Haydon, Keats quickly freed himself from their influence.

Keats had such a keen poetic sense that his taste developed rapidly and he was soon able to put his finger on the weak points in the art of his contemporaries. In a letter to Reynolds he writes:

'It may be said that we ought to read our contemporaries, that Wordsworth, etc., should have their due from us. %Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself--but with its subject.---Modern poets differ from the Elizabethans in this: each of the moderns like an Elector of Hanover governs his petty state and knows how many straws are swept daily from the Causeways in all his dominions, and has a continual itching that all his Housewives should have their coppers well scoured: The ancients were Emperors of vast Provinces, they had only heard of the remote ones and scarcely cared to visit them. I will cut all this--I will have no more of Wordsworth or Hunt in particular--Why should we be of the tribe of Manasseh, when we can wander with Esau?---Why should we be owls, when we can be eagles? Why be teased with "Nice-eyed wag-tails," when we have in sight "the Cherub Contemplation"? Why with Wordsworth's "Matthew with a bough of wilding in his hand," when we can have Jacques "under an oak," etc.?--I don't mean to deny Wordsworth's grandeur and Hunt's merit, but I mean to say we need not be teased with grandeur and merit when we can have them uncontaminated and unobtusive.' (1)

The criticism of Wordsworth, not all quoted here is severe but just. Keats, although so different from Wordsworth, always recognized the latter's 'grandeur' as well as his faults. And how subtly he has distinguished between the poet and the poetaster, even while criticising both alike! 'Grandeur' and 'Merit'. 'Merit' implies just the extent of Hunt's gift as a poet. But a genius possesses more than merit. Keats, it will be noticed, in his rejection of the 'nice-eyed wagtails' in favour of the Miltonic 'Cherub Contemplation' picked a phrase characteristic of the Cockney Hunt--colloquial, affected and very reminiscent of Hampstead. Keats' comments in this letter are evidence that he had inherited his full poetic birthright and had rejected the pettiness of his contemporaries for the 'vast Provinces' of Milton and Shakespeare.

In two later letters Keats gave his final word on the 'merit' of Hunt. His remarks were unkind to his old friend, but as criticism they were accurate. Keats' revulsion was only natural. To Haydon he wrote:

'It is a great Pity that People should by associating themselves with the finest things, spoil them. Hunt has damned Hampstead and masks and sonnets and Italian tales.' (1)

Later to George and Georgiana he showed his disgust at Hunt's affectation:

'If I were to follow my own inclinations I should never meet any of that set again, not even Hunt who is certainly a pleasant fellow in the main when you are with him—but in reality he is vain, egotistical, and disgusting in matters of taste and in morals. He understands many a beautiful thing; but then, instead of giving other minds credit for the same degree of perception as he himself professes—he begins an explanation in such a curious manner that our taste and self-love is continually offended. Hunt does one harm by making fine things petty and beautiful things hateful—many a glorious thing when associated with him becomes a nothing. This distorts one's mind—make(s) one's thoughts bizarre—perplexes one in the standard of Beauty.' (1)

Keats was henceforth free of Hunt's direct influence, but to what extent did the traces of their association remain in Keats' later work?—to an extent so slight as to be almost almost unnoticeable. We have said that Endymion represented 'the progress of poetry in the poet himself. The difference between 'Endymion' and 'Rimini' was a sure guarantee that one poet would reach the heights of poetic experience and interpretation and that the other would stay as he was—a mediocre verse-maker. Mackail expresses it well:

'But the vital difference is this, and it transcends or ignores all merely technical points: the Hunt is static, inert, finished; the Keats thrills and is alive. The growth and progress of poetry pulsate in it. Then Keats passes forward and leaves it behind.' (2)

Hunt in his later book, Foliage, was still the poet of 'Rimini'; Keats in Hyperion had progressed in the eighteen months since

Endymion further than almost any other poet in so short a space of time.

The poem Endymion is formless. How this partly was due to Hunt's influence in the matter of diction and verse form, and to his encouragement of Keats' already over-enthusiastic love of sensuous beauty has been seen. But Keats found other masters. Dryden showed him how to perfect the heroic couplet of Endymion, and taught him the difference between ease and formlessness. Hunt, always the just critic, acknowledged the superiority of Lamia. He spoke of the 'lovely poetic consciousness' in Lamia in which the lines seem to take pleasure in the progress of their own beauty, like sea-nymphs luxuriating through the water.' (3) From Lamia on, Keats mastered every form he attempted—the Spenserian stanza in The Eve of St. Agnes, the Chaucerian four-stress couplet in The Eve of St. Mark, and the Ode form in the great Odes. His final master was Milton, Keats learned from all the master of form in turn. It was a pity he had not turned to them sooner. But Hyperion fully atones for Endymion.

Endymion as an example of narrative is worthless. But in Isabella, Keats' last great work in which the influence can be felt to any extent, the poet, in a poem by no means his best, surpassed in suspense and passion and irony one of the great masters of story-telling, Boccacio. In Isabella, however,

(1) Monkhouse, Life of Leigh Hunt, 1893, p. 114.
as has been mentioned, Keats still betrayed his weakness in
the treatment of love scenes. But in the Eve of St. Agnes
these have lost their sickliness. There Keats claims
equality with Shakespeare.

Keats had first delighted in Spenser and the Elizabethans
and to the end he continued to see beauty much after their
manner and to express it in their language(1) Spenserian rich-
ness he had discovered before he wrote Endymion; Spenserian
clearness he found later. The Eve of St. Agnes is Spenserian,
but with a difference that makes it an original work of art.
The Odes are simpler and more modern but they too have the
same richness. Keats had 'the power of concentrating all
the far-reaching resources of language on one point, so that
a single and apparently effortless expression rejoices the
aesthetic imagination at the moment when it is most ex-
pectant and exacting, and at the same time astonishes the
intellect with a new aspect of truth.' (2) The Keats of
Endymion had this power only occasionally; the Keats of the
Odes had mastered it completely.

Was Keats as much of an aesthete as Hunt--an aesthete
with greater genius but with the same tendency to make a
cult out of his love of beauty? Hunt's aestheticism em-

(1) Elton, A Survey of English Literature, 1780-1830
(2) Bridges, Collected Essays, IV, p. 158.
phasized beauty—material beauty—to such an extent that other elements were neglected. Keats has put into immortal words his worship of beauty.

'A thing of beauty is a joy forever.' (1)

'I have lov'd the principle of beauty in all things.' (2)

'Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty.' (3)

But there was a great gulf between their two types of aestheticism. Hunt's was superficial, affected, resembling, in many ways, the decadent aestheticism of the Nineties. Keats' aestheticism, originally superficial, developed into a deep and genuine philosophy. Keats did not write for the sole purpose of expressing the beautiful or of conveying his personal sensations to the reader. He believed that poetry was more than that—that it was, in fact, one of the great influences in the development of civilization. In Keats' letters was outlined a poetic creed, more genuine than the various 'Prefaces' and 'Defences' of other poets because it was not intended for publication. As yet no good poet has been entirely faithful to his creed. Keats was no exception, but he came closer to following his own principles than most poets.

Although a poet must be judged finally by his poetry,

(1) Keats, Endymion I, 1.
(2) Keats, Letters, To Miss Bréwne, February 1820, ed. Forman, II, p. 510.
(3) Keats, Ode on a Grecian Urn, 49f.
the statements he makes regarding that poetry or regarding poetry in general--whether in a formal essay or in informal letters to friends--are of great value to the student of poetry. They show not what the poet has accomplished--his poetry shows that--but what he has tried to accomplish.

What according to Keats must be the aim of the man gifted with poetic talent? The life he planned for himself shows what he thought.

'In the Second place, I will speak of my views, and of the life I purpose to myself. I am ambitious of doing the world some good: If I should be spared, that may be the work of maturer years--in the interval I will assay to reach to as high a summit in poetry as the nerve bestowed upon me will suffer, the faint conceptions I have of poems to come bring the blood frequently to my forehead--all I hope, is, that I may not lose all interest in human affairs--that the solitary Indifference I feel for applause, even from the finest spirits, will not blunt any acuteness of vision I amy have. I do not think I will.' (1)

'I am ambitious of doing the world some good': that is significant. The poet must not be a mere passive dreamer, set apart by his genius from the rest of men, for that genius is given him to serve mankind. Even the boy of Sleep and Poetry believed this, despite the somewhat deceptive lines

'O for ten years, that I may overwhelm Myself in poesy' (2)

He will begin by enjoying the pleasures of life, a purely hedonistic existence. But can he bid these joys farewell?

(1) Keats, Letters, To R. Woodhouse, 27 October 1818, ed. Forman, I, 246.

(2) Keats, Sleep and Poetry, 9 f.
'Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life, 
Where I may find the agonies, the strife 
Of human hearts!' 

for it is 

Of poesy, that it should be a friend 
To soothe the cares, and lift the thoughts of man. (1) 

'Poetry,' he felt, 'is not a mere luxury and rapture, it is a deed.' (2) To Keats writing a poem was as practical and useful as building a bridge, although on a far higher plane, because it benefited the minds of his fellow-men.

But how did Keats intend to benefit the minds of his fellow-men? By teaching them philosophic creeds, which belong to the world of argument, rather than that of poetry? By prophesying of future perfection? Or interpreting his own sensuous experiences? These aspects of experience are found in poetry. But note any was the standard by which Keats recognized the highest poetry. Poetry should appeal not to the intellect, nor to the senses, but to the heart. It should be 'a search after truth' (3) by the poet who, by communicating his findings to his fellow men, adds to their experience and helps 'make' their souls. In a letter to George and Georgiana Keats set forth his system of theology.

'Call the world if you please 'The vale of Soulmaking'. Then you will find out the use of the world (I am

(1) Keats, Sleep and Poetry, 9f.
(3) Keats, Letters To B. Bailey, October 1817, ed. Forman, I, p. 57.
speaking now in the highest terms for human nature ad­mitting it to be immortal which I will here take for granted for the purpose of showing a thought which has struck me concerning it) I say 'Soul-making'—Soul as dis­tinguished from an Intelligence--------I will call the world a School instituted for the purpose of teaching little children to read--I will call the human heart the horn Book read in that School--and I will call the Child able to read, the Soul made from that School and its hornbook. Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a Soul?-------Not merely is the Heart a Horn­book, it is the Minds Bible, it is the Minds experience, it is the text from which the Mind or intelligence sucks its identity.' (1)

The poet—a man gifted by nature with an insight more acute than that of common men to whom the language of the winds is but

'a barren noise

Though it blows legend-laden through the trees.' (2) interprets that Horn-book, the human heart. He must 'think into the human heart, as Wordsworth has done' (3) It is there he searches for truth. Frequently 'truth', to Keats, meant not proven facts but intuition that comes from the heart.

'What the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth--whether it existed before or not, for I have the same idea of all our passions as of Love, they are all in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty.-----------------The Imagination may be compared to Adam's

(1) Keats, Letters, To George and Georgiana Keats, April, 1819, F36a
(2) Keats, Hyperion, A Vision, II, 5f
Dream,--he awoke and found it truth:-----I am the more jealous in this affair, because I have never yet been able to perceive how anything can be known for truth by consecutive reasoning--and yet it must be. Can it be that even the greatest Philosopher ever arrived at his goal without putting aside numerous objections?" (1)

The poet, expressing the passions of the human heart, reveals beauty, and since beauty is truth, that is, since beauty is the concrete expression of truth, the poet helps men to find truth.

It is obvious that Keats' definition of 'Beauty' must be explained. In a broad sense, Keats was philosophic, but he did not possess the skill in making delicate distinctions among abstract ideas that is characteristic of the metaphysician. His letters make it evident that he used words like 'beauty', 'truth', 'sensations' and 'philosophy' in a sense that is certainly not orthodox and not always consistent.

Beauty is always the keystone of Keats' poetry. He idealized beauty as Shelley idealized love. But the word as he used it has no limit to its connotations. We have already said that he regarded it as identical with truth. But the 'Beauty is Truth' passage is a great advance on the first line of Endymion,

'A thing of beauty is a joy forever.'

Beauty to him then meant what it always meant to Leigh Hunt--

(1) Keats, Letters, To B. Bailey, 22 November, 1817, I, p. 72.
mere loveliness. It is sensuous and concrete. If it had always meant this to Keats we would be right in calling him an entirely aesthetic poet.

But there is nothing too aesthetic about the noble dignity of *Hyperion*. Keats' development in the two years intervening between *Endymion* and *Hyperion* is one of the miracles of literary history. His old enthusiasm for the beautiful was not lost. It was only changed. "I have loved," he wrote to Fanny Brawne in 1820, "the principle of beauty in all things." This was still his creed. He still used the word 'beauty' but it meant far more to him than it had. In *Endymion* he said of beauty---

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  thou wast the deep glen;
  Thou wast the river--thou wast glory won;
  Thou wast my clarion's blast--thou wast my steed--
  Thou wast the charm of Momen, lovely Moon!
  O what a wild and harmonized tune
  My spirit struck from all the beautiful.' (1)
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This is the beauty of the eye, ear, touch and taste, of glory and of love. But the 'beauty' of *Hyperion* is not the beauty of the aesthete. It is a synonym more for 'reality' or 'truth' than for 'loveliness'. It is won through knowledge, effort and experience, not through passive appreciation. In order to appreciate the true beauty, the poet must first learn 'to bear all naked truth, And to envisage circumstance all calm' (2)

This was the Beauty of the Olympic gods. The Titans were beautiful in the lower sense of the word; physically and mentally they seemed perfect. But Apollo who had gone through the ordeal of pain to reach 'knowledge enormous' is 'a power more strong in beauty' (1) and, being more beautiful, must naturally succeed Hyperion for

'tis the eternal law
That first in beauty should be first in might.' (2)

So the poet, before he can really interpret beauty to man must receive a similar preparation. Keats, during the writing of *Endymion*, realized Hunt's faults, but he realized also that he too lacked something he must have if he would do the world some good.

I know nothing I have read nothing and I mean to follow Solomon's directions of 'get Wisdom--get understanding'—I find cavalier days are gone by. I find that I can have no enjoyment in the World but continual drinking of Knowledge— I find there is no worthy pursuit but the idea of doing some good for the world—some do it with their society------there is but one way for me----the road lies through application study and thought.'(3)

Like Apollo he must receive 'knowledge enormous'. For what purpose?

An extensive knowledge is needful to thinking people--it takes away the heat and fever; and helps, by widening

(2) Ibid, II, 228f.
speculation, to ease the Burden of the Mystery, a thing I begin to understand a little,-----The difference of high Sensations with and without knowledge appears to me this: in the latter case we are falling continually ten thousand fathoms deep and bing blown up again without wings and with all horror of a bare shouldered creature--in the former case, our shoulders are fledge, and we go thro' the same air and space without fear.' (1)

Sensations, here, are not the mere material enjoyments of the senses, but all intuitions--all fruits of the poet's imagination. Knowledge is not needed to portray sensuous loveliness. But Keats has made his choice--

I have been hovering for some time between an exquisite sense of the luxurious and a love for philosophy--were I calculated for the former I should be glad--but as I am not I shall turn all my soul to the latter.' (2)

He has left the 'Chamber of Maiden Thought' with its 'pleasant wonders'. He had thought to stay there forever in delight.

'However among the effect this breathing is father of is that tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of Man--of convincing one's nerves that the world is full of Misery, and Heart-break, Pain, Sickness and Oppression--whereby this Chamber of Maiden Thought becomes gradually darkened, and at the same time, on all sides of it, many doors are set open--but all dark--all leading to dark passages--we see not the balance of good and evil--we are im a mist--we are now in that state--we feel the 'burden of the mystery'. ' (3)

(2) Ibid, To John Taylor, 24 April, 1818, I, p. 146.
We have said that Keats wished to do good to mankind by interpreting the Beauty of life. But he did not wish to do this in the Wordsworthian manner. He complained—

'We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us, and if we do not agree seems to put its hand in its breeches pocket' (1)

But the poet does influence man.

'Perhaps the honours paid by Man to Man are trifles in comparison to the benefit done by great works to the 'spirit and pulse of good' by their mere passive existence.' (2)

This influence must be unobtrusive.

'Man should not dispute or assert, but whisper results to his neighbor.' (3)

The poet to affect men most should not be polemical and argue, or didactic and teach. He should whisper or hint his findings to men, and so arouse them to think that ultimately they should realize the eternal truth which the poet wishes them to see.

Keats believed in a 'grand march of intellect'—that is, in the intellectual progress of man. He had no illusion of future perfection, nor did he, like Shelley, want a quick overthrow of all that was stupid or evil. But Keats did believe in the steady growth of the human mind. Wordsworth he said, explored into the Dark Passages leading from the Second Chamber

(1) Keats, Letters, To J. H. Reynolds, 3 February 1818, I, p. 103.
(2) Ibid, 19 February 1818, I, p. 111.
(3) Ibid, p. 112.
in Keats' 'Mansion of Many Apartments'; but Milton's Philosophy 'may be tolerably understood by one not advanced in years'.

'Here I must think Wordsworth is deeper than Milton, though I think it has depended more upon the general and gregarious advance of intellect, than individual greatness of Mind.' (1)

It is the vision of a few in every age that aids this slow development.

'Thus by every germ of spirit sucking the sap from the mould ethereal every human might become great, and humanity instead of being a wide heath of furze and briars, with here and there a remote oak or pine, would become a grand democracy of forest trees.' (2)

But the development is there, and it is poetry, as the greatest intellectual force in the world, that is sowing the seeds that will someday grow and spread into a grand intellectual democracy.

The impressive bulk of Endymion and the beautiful lines that are scattered through it have caused it to be considered as more important among Keats' works than it really is. If Keats had lived longer and written more, it might have been regarded as a mere experiment, not as an accomplishment. It should be remembered that all Keats' poetry was more or less of an experiment. Certain passages are considered typical of him, but it is another thing to say whether they would be

(2) Ibid, To J. H. Reynolds, 19 February, 1818, I, p. 112.
considered so, had he a few more years to write in. These passages are those in which Keats is most aesthetic. In some passages the sensuousness is expressed in language so perfect that Keats is above criticism. But in many other cases he is not: and it is in these latter passages that the influence of Hunt is apparent. It is Keats' fate to be judged by poems which he himself considered immature.

In theory, however, and often in practice, Keats was no aesthete. He believed that the poet must write to benefit mankind and to contribute to the great progress of the human intellect. The poet's great subject is the human heart. He must search for truth but must not try to force his findings on his fellow men. Nor must he go to the other extreme and write for purely aesthetic pleasure which is personal and selfish. The path of a poet is not an easy one for a true poet needs both knowledge and experience. The poet seeks beauty, but the real beauty is not that of material loveliness, but that of

'human life: the war, the deeds,
The disappointment, the anxiety,
Imagination's struggles, far and nigh,
All human; bearing in themselves this good,
That they are still the air, the subtle food,
To make us feel existence.' (1)

(1) Keats, Endymion, 11, 153ff.
CHAPTER III

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood esteemed Keats so highly that their first work as a group was the illustration of Isabella. While in their painting they took as their models the artists who had preceded Raphael--Giotto, Giorgione and Angelico--they felt a direct kinship with Keats. It was natural that Dante Gabriel Rosetti, poet as well as artist, should feel that kinship more clearly even than did his fellow-artists. Rossetti and Keats, with different environments and with a quarter of a century between them show surprising parallels in taste, mood, and technique. Rossetti's love for Keats came before that other great influence on his work, his love for Dante, who had been so much a part of the family conversation in Rossetti's boyhood that the poet had perversely developed a dislike which only disappeared when he was able to discover for himself the beauties of his namesake. Rossetti was too original a poet to be a mere versifier in the Keatsian manner. Definite analogues have been drawn between his work and Keats' (1), but the plagiarism is as infrequent and

probably as innocent as Keats' plagiarism of Shakespeare. The most important influences, however, which cannot be illustrated by direct reference to certain passages, are due to a spiritual kinship between the poets. Rossetti's love of Keats undoubtedly deepened in him certain tendencies in thought and in manner of expression.

Rossetti's knowledge of Keats' work was such that he could not help being influenced. His Marginalia in a copy of Keats' poems (1) show a minute study of the origins, technique and subject matter of Keats' poems. In addition he quoted from Keats' letters. Keats, he said in one of his letters, was 'a glorious fellow' and continued with his discovery that Keats felt about art as the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood did,

'Keats says in one place (to my great delight) that, having just looked over a folio of the first and second schools of Italian painting, he has come to the conclusion that the early men surpassed even Raphael himself.' (2)

Art was not the only or the most important field in which their tastes were similar. Literary preferences that they had in common were Dante, Chatterton, Blake and Coleridge.

Both men were remarkable for their lack of interest in contemporary affairs in a century when the influence of current events on literature was very strong. Both lived enthusiastically in worlds created by their own imaginations.

Of Rossetti it was said that his real life was "more that of Florence in the fourteenth than London in the nineteenth century." (1) In Rossetti this was an escape from reality, which became more marked as trouble and sickness overtook him; in Keats it was that and more, for, as a student of life, he wished to regard it from an objective standpoint, to stand at a distance that he might see it the more clearly. As a result of this seclusion there was a certain similarity in their themes and in their treatment of these. One result was lack of any impulse to annex philosophic speculation to poetry—an impulse which according to Benson (2) was one of two great tendencies in the poetry of the Nineteenth Century. Neither attempted to find a poetical solution for the problem he presented; neither appealed to emotions of a philosophic kind. Both were apparently interested merely in the purely poetic aspects of their subject.

'Poetical pre-Raphaelism as he (Rossetti) expressed it consisted in an attitude of the artist and a system of expression.' (3) It was in these two points, as Cazamian defines them, that Rossetti approached Keats. The attitude was one of ecstatic, religious devotion to poetry. To

(2) Benson, Rossetti, 1904, p. 78.
(3) Cazamian, History of English Literature, 1926, p. 1209.
Rossetti as to Keats literature was a priesthood. The intensity of this emotion was betrayed by a sudden insistant stress on one word or phrase--one aspect of reality, which is thus brought into extraordinary relief. Both poets made a religion of beauty, and attempted to convey to the reader by imagery and diction the beauty they worshipped.

Despite Rossetti's recognition of the greatness of *Hyperion* it was not the Keats of the last period with whom he was most in sympathy. Although he knew well the faults of *Endymion*, he owed more to it than he did to the perfect and 'kingly' *Hyperion*. He felt beauty more intensely than Hunt; his taste was better because he had no comprehension of any philosophic interpretation of beauty. The poems to which he owed the most were *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, *The Eve of St. Agnes* and the *Eve of St Mark* and the influence of these three poems on his work was so strong that expressions and ideas from each can be found repeated in his poems. (1)

Both Keats and Rossetti wrote with the same 'deliberate intention of wringing beauty out of the moment and the scene.' (2) Both were pictorial rather than musical or dramatic. The beauty they expressed was that of colour and form. Rossetti was an artist and seemed to visualize his subject before he attempted to express it. His friend, Theodore Watts, said:

(1) Shine, op. cit.
(2) Benson, op. cit., 141.
'his imaginative conceptions, came to him, as I know, actual pictures which he afterwards translated into words.' (1)

Even in a narrative the picture counted more than the action. The characters seem to pose in a tableau while the painter described them, and they move not from action to action but from one tableau to another. In *The Bride's Prelude* the main tableau is that of the unhappy bride telling her story to her sister who kneels beside her. The latticed window, the perfumed caskets, the lute, the scattered gems, the sunshine—Why were they introduced? They have no direct connection with the plot. They are there principally as a background to what might be a painting in the Pre-Raphaelite manner. The comfort of the over-luxurious atmosphere is a contrast to the two tragic figures and heightens the effect. Keats, an artist's poet, visualized his themes in the same way. No wonder the Pre-Raphaelites like to illustrate his work. In *The Eve of St. Agnes* a series of tableaux are presented, but these tableaux—with one exception, the feast Porphyro lays out for Madeline—are far more closely related to the action than the scenes in Rossetti's dramatic narratives or in Hunt's *Rimini*, another example of this pictorial narrative. In addition Rossetti's characters are like models posed for a picture. Keats' people

(1) Watts, op. cit. p. 408.
are real, and being real, they are seldom entirely still. There
is always some movement, small but nevertheless significant
since it gives life to the picture.

Both poets appealed to the emotions depending on the senses
more than they did to the intellect. This was less true of
Keats than of Rossetti whose pictures have been accused of
being more intellectual than his poems. Shine (1) pointed out
that both poets were fond of that half-dream state in which the
senses are most acute. Keats and Rossetti seemed to deliver
themselves to a hyper-aesthetic appreciation of sensations
which with a skilful choice of words they conveyed to the reader.
Thus in a few exquisite lines Rossetti pictured a Silent Noon--

'All round our nest far as the eye can pass
Are golden kingcup-fields with silver edge
Where the cowparsley skirts the hawthorn-hedge
'Tis visible silence, still as the hour-glass.

Deep in the sun-searched growth the dragon fly
Hangs like a blue thread loosened from the sky:
So this winged hour is dropped to us from above.' (2)

Here as always Rossetti described nature not for its own sake,
but as a background and mirror to human emotions.

'The excellence of any art,' said Keats, 'is its intensity.' (3)
For a passage to be intense it must show such depth of feeling
that the intellect and the emotions of the reader realize its

(1) Shine, op. cit, p. 188.
(2) Rossetti, The House of Life, Sonnet XIX, 28 December, 1817.
(3) Keats, Letters to G. and T. Keats, 28 December, 1817, ed.
(3) Forman, 1931, I, P. 74.
beauty and truth. Both Keats and Rossetti at their best had this quality, which is a mark of the greatest poetry. Keats' *La Belle Dame sans Merci* is intense—more so than any poem Rossetti ever wrote. Rossetti called it one of those 'masterpieces of the condensed and hinted order so dear to imaginative minds.' (1) Rossetti's poetry at its best was also 'condensed and hinted' as when by describing one detail he gave the impression of immense space

> 'the curled moon
> Was like a little feather
> fluttering far down the gulf'. (2)

This intensity in description was secured by choosing words and images with such care that the impression given the reader is one of an exquisitely detailed painting.

Rossetti's poetic descriptions were as minutely and fastidiously detailed as his painting. As a painter he decried the work of Fantin Latour and this 'incredible new French School' as a 'great slovenly scrawl.' (3) His poetic as well as his pictorial work was the very opposite of the Impressionistic School. Both he and Keats worked with the technique and skill of artists in mosaic. Both concentrated on a few

(2) Rossetti, *The Blessed Damozel*
suggestive details that suggested as much as they stated.

'To the north, a fountain glittered free;  
To the south, there glowed a red fruit-tree;  
To the east, a lamp flamed high and fair;  
To the west, a crystal casket rare  
Held fast a cloud of the fields of air.'  (1)

'The same that oft-time hath  
Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam  
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.'  (2)

and both were apt to employ too many details and add 'luxury' to 'luxury' until the reader is exhausted, confused and sickened. This was a fault that Hunt had encouraged in Keats. Keats as we have already said disciplined himself to moderation. Rossetti's work, however, all tended to be over-luxurious. Swinburne, too partial a critic, said of the House of Life that 'The whole is lovelier than its loveliest part', (3)—a statement which cannot be accepted for any of Rossetti's work with the possible exception of The Blessed Damozel.

Rossetti was as sensitive to colour as Keats, but the colours he chose are less vivid and are applied more sparingly. The Blessed Damozel is a painting in white and gold. No other colour mars its purity. And these were Rossetti's favourite colours with the occasional contrast given by the sparkle of

(1) Rossetti, Rose Mary, III.  
(2) Keats, Ode to a Nightingale.  
jewels or the 'world of mirrored tints minute' of the 'rippling sunshine'. His colours—except for contrast—are cold. Often they are symbolical of purity and holiness. This choice of colours was not accidental. Always the reader senses a certain studied selectiveness that seems artificial—beside Keats' unlimited variety of colours. Keats used colours purely for pictorial purposes—for what they were, not for what they suggested. His poems are:

'Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes
As are the tiger-moth's deep-damasked wings.' (1)

Rossetti was as fond as Keats of the contrast of light with shadow—so important to the artist.

... yet there's a stress
Of love-spangles, just off yon cape of trees,
Dancing upon the waves. (2)

'The shadows cast on the arras'd wall
Mid the pictured kings. (3)

'the gold hair upon her back
Quite still in all its threads, the track
Of her still shadow sharp and black. (4)

The scene in the bride's chamber in The Bride's Prelude recalls in its lavish richness the chamber of Madeleine or the bowers of Francesca in Rimini. Hunt, Keats and Rossetti

(1) Keats, The Eve of St Agnes, 24. 5 f.
(2) Keats, Endymion, III, 81.
(3) Rossetti, The King's Tragedy.
(4) Rossetti, The Bride's Prelude
were all fond of scenes that to them were typical of the Middle Ages—tapestried walls, colorful draperies, carved stone columns and light entering through latticed windows. It is more than mere coincidence that both Keats and Rossetti should give the moon the power to cast a red reflection through the stained glass window of a mediaeval castle. ([The Eve of St. Agnes and The King's Tragedy]

Although Keats was not an artist it is obvious that he had the artist's fondness and skill for visualizing picturesque objects as an artistic composition, and for taking full advantage of form, of colour and of light and shade. Both Rossetti and he found in Gothic romance the perfect subjects for their art. With both, though, the description is mainly external. Neither was a mediaeval scholar. A great deal of Rossetti's knowledge came at second hand through Keats, as is obvious from his repetition of Keats' favourite details of Gothic architecture and mediaeval costume—the 'Catholic elegances' (as Hunt called them), many of which Keats had first discovered under Hunt's tutelage. Rossetti showed his love for this in Keats at the same time that he betrayed his own ignorance. He remarked that in the [Eve of St. Marks'] Keats showed 'astonishingly real mediaevalism for one not bred and artist' (1)

(1) cit. Colvin, John Keats, 1918, p. 439.
The many anachronisms in the poem are witness that neither the poet nor his admirer was bred a scholar.

In appreciation of one aspect of beauty Rossetti showed himself markedly inferior to Keats or even to Hunt. Both Keats and Rossetti loved details of architecture and dress, but Rossetti never possessed Keats' genuine feeling for nature. True, occasionally some aspect of colour appealed to him and with his artist's eye and his poet's felicity of phrase he was able to describe the scene charmingly. But such passages are rare. His lack of any interest was shown in a passage from one of his letters (1) when he asked an acquaintance for 'a feature or incident characteristic of the glen at nightfall' to put in his poem, when he had just visited the place to which he referred. Obviously if he had had even an ordinary sight-seer's interest and certainly if he had had a poet's imagination he would not have had to ask such a question. His attitude to nature was so unappreciative that he wrote of it only when he felt it was necessary. 'It is wonderful', he remarked somewhere, 'how much a bit of nature helps.' The artificiality, the lack of 'intensity'--to use Keats' word--of some of his poetry is accounted for by these remarks. Nearly all his description was artistic and literary rather natural. The inspiration for his nature and for his mediaeval

(1) cit. Woodberry, Studies of a Litterateur, 1921, p. 65.
descriptions, the reader feels, was too often derived from secondary sources.

Both painters and poets must master the technique of their craft. Neither Keats nor Rossetti was always instinctively right in his choice of form. Both poets in their apprenticeship period were fond of verse contests in which they practised their technique. Keats wrote sonnets on assigned subjects, Rossetti bouts rimes. Both improved with experience—Keats rapidly, Rossetti more slowly. Rossetti's language in his first volume was not always 'the incarnation of the thought'. (1) His last volume, however, as Watts Dunton (2) has pointed out was more even and 'often his style is as lucid as Keats'.

Keats regarded the language of other poets as his birthright and made use of it. He looked upon this borrowing as perfectly natural. His opinion of what is meant by 'artificiality' is rather curious. Chatterton's diction was to him purer and less artificial than Milton's because it was purer English. Milton's verse, he said, was the verse of artifice because of its Latin constructions. For this reason he first revised and then abandoned his Miltonic Hyperion. However, the reader never feels that Keats' diction is artificial, whether it is Miltonic or Spenserian, so completely had he

(1) Watts, op. cit., p. 421.
(2) Watts, Loc. cit.
made the vocabulary of his predecessors his own. Even his Huntian mannerisms seem natural to him, as indeed they were. On the other hand Rossetti did not see the fault in such artificiality and strove consciously for effect with the result that his poems were 'frequently fanciful rather than imaginative.' (2) This might be expected in the ballads, which are imitations, but it is also evident in The House of Life where some of the conceits recall the work of Donne. The octave of The Love Letter is an example of this type of fanciful artificiality at its worst:

'Warmed by her hand and shadowed by her hair
  As close she leaned and poured her heart through thee,
  Where of the articulate throbs accompany
  The smooth black stream that makes thy whiteness fair,
  Sweet fluttering sheet, even of her breath aware,
  Oh let thy silent song disclose to me
  That soul wherewith her lips and eyes agree
  Like married music in Love's answering air. (2)

Sometimes too his diction is like that of the young Keats, combining eighteenth century poetic idiom with nineteenth century colloquialisms,—a completely unpoetic combination. In Sonnet XX, entitled Gracious Moonlight, he asks his love to lighten his grief even as 'Queen Dian' lightens the night. The somewhat familiar and undignified shortening of the moon goddess's name is reminiscent of Keats 'Dian' and 'Adon'.

(2) Rossetti, The House of Life, Sonnet XI.
The rest of the sonnet hardly atones for this colloquialism. It begins:

'Even as the moon grows queenlier in mid-space
When the sky darkens, and her cloud-rapt car
Thrills with intenser radiance from afar,—
So lambent, lady, beams thy sovereign grace
When the drear soul desires thee.'

Language was perhaps as important to Keats as any other element in his poetry. It has been said that his 'language was his meaning'. With Rossetti we do not feel this instinctive relationship between form and sense, because with him the two were often not arrived at simultaneously. 'I have been reading up all manner of old romants, to pitch upon stunning words for poetry', he wrote to W. M. Rossetti. He deliberately searched for words and the reader often feels the artificiality resulting. In the ballads his language is studiously simple and archaic. Nevertheless they are farther removed in spirit from the Middle Ages than the poems of either Keats or Coleridge.

In the House of Life his diction is rich and sensuous, recalling in many passages the Keats of Endymion, although the latter poem is the work of a far more immature artist and man. As Benson points out, (1) his use of double words was perhaps traceable to Keats—such as 'we late-tottering world-worn hence', 'Love's soul-winnowing hands', 'labor-laden moonclouds'.

(1) Benson, op. cit. p. 85.
Like young Keats he sometimes used his words with a rather strange disregard of their sense. The words with which he most often erred are exotic or high-sounding classical words. The following passage illustrates this 'most affected choice of Latin diction' (1) as well as some of the other faults of his diction.

'From winds that sweep the winter-bitten wold,--
Like multiform circumfluence manifold
Of night's flood-tide,' (2)

A needless affectation of which Rossetti, Hunt and Keats were guilty was the use of the accents of mediaeval poetry—particularly the accentuating of the last syllable in words which in ordinary speech are accented on the penultimate.

'Saturday night is market night
Everywhere, be it dry or wet,
And market night in the Haymarket.' (3)

Like Keats Rossetti was fond of inexcusable rhyming combinations. The avid Robert Buchanan seized on these—especially those which seemed to be used intentionally to give an archaic effect—and branded them a 'meretricious tricks'.

Neither Keats nor Rossetti is lyrical in the sense that Shelley is lyrical. Their verse-music, while as melodious as Shelley's, is of a different type. It is characterized by a slow soft beat that is eloquent and liquid, often dignified and always beautiful.

(1) Buchanan, The Fleshly School of Poetry and other phenomena of the day, 1872, p. 29.
(2) Rossetti, House of Life, Sonnet XLI; 'Through Death to Love' (3) Rossetti, Jenny.
'And the lilies lay as if asleep
Along her bended arm.' (1)

'And in the midst, 'mong thousand heraldries,
And twilight saints, and dim emblazoning,
A shielded scutcheon blushed with blood of queens and kings.' (2)

With no apparent effort the poets have succeeded in expressing
the image in the only way possible. This music is smooth-
flowing, but it lacks vigour. Too much of it drugs the reader's
senses. Fortunately both Keats and Rossetti skilfully vary
the rhythm of their longer poems. But even Rossetti's most
vivid narrative, The King's Tragedy, seems a little effeminate,
as if lacking the intensity which a more vigourous style might
have given it. Hyperion, however, true to its great model, is
both vigourous and majestic.

It is this lack of vigour that opens Rossetti's poetry to
the charge of being decadent. The style of The Eve of St.
Agnes is so ornate that it shows traces of decadence. Keats'
'over-strung sensibility carries each notation to the extreme'
and a design of seductive grace and conscious charm is
expressed in a language which is often artificial, loaded
with elaborate ornaments, with rare, archaic, or affected
epithets. The whole savours at the same time of over-
refinement, of profusion, of the strain of an ever-present
intensity, and finally somewhat of morbidness.' (3)

But there is a genuineness of inspiration and depth of feeling
as well as an exquisite control of language and emotion that

(1) Rossetti, The Blessed Damozel.
(2) Keats, The Eve of St. Agnes, 24. 7ff.
(3) Gazamian, op. cit. p. 1094.
raises this poem to heights where its aestheticism is beyond
censure. But Rossetti's aestheticism was decadent. His in­
spiration was derived at second hand. The depth of feeling
which in Keats was due to pure emotions degenerated into
hysteria in Rossetti. His work is pervaded with an atmosphere
that becomes stifling and sickening. Keats' sensuousness
was perfectly under control: Rossetti's was not.

Rossetti lacked the earnest humanitarian aim which raised
Keats above the level of a mere 'Art for Art's Sake' poet. To
Rossetti a thing of beauty was always a joy--and nothing more.
He could not have understood how the Olympian gods were 'strong
in beauty'. He wrote, objecting to a statement about Keats
made by Hall Caine:

'I must say that I should not have thought a longer
career thrown away upon him (as you intimate) if he
had continued to the age of anything only to give joy.
Nor would he ever have done any "good" at all. Shelley
did good, and perhaps some harm with it. Keats' joy
was after all a flawless gift.' (1)

This is partly true, but an excess of 'joy' of this sort leads
to mere voluptuousness. Keats was of too serious a nature
'only to give joy'--as Rossetti used the word---with no idea of
intellectual and spiritual as well as sensuous pleasure.

Both Keats and Rossetti worshipped the Principle of Beauty.
Rossetti's worship never developed beyond that of Keats at the

(1) Caine, Recollections of Dante Gabriel Rossetti,
Endymion stage. There is a curious parallel between his House of Life and Keats' Endymion. In the House of Life the love of beauty is for Rossetti the love of woman. As Wordsworth finds his ideal in things of nature, Shelley his in things of the spirit, so Rossetti idealizes love for woman. In Keats' poem Endymion, the poet, seeks the moon who represents Poetry or the Principle of Beauty. Cynthia is the personification of this principle but she is also the Indian Maiden who represents real passion. Both in the end are discovered to be the same. The poet's conclusion is that the love of women is the same as all love of beauty. Thus the theme of Endymion is the same as that of the House of Life.

Neither Keats nor Rossetti dealt with abstractions. Endymion's Cynthia is a very human creature although she represents an ideal. When Keats wished to show the disastrous effect on a poet of a life of mere enjoyment, he personified sensuous pleasure as Lamia, the snake-woman. Rossetti, fonder of abstract ideas than Keats, always expressed them in the concrete. This expression of the spirit through the flesh was characteristic of him. Sensuous as he was, he had to make all his ideas tangible. Like Keats, he had his snake-woman represent the temptations of the flesh—Lilith (Eden Bower).
To him there were no abstractions. Even life was personified.

'Look in my face; my name is Might-have-been;
I am also called No-more, Too-late, Farewell;
Unto thine ear I hold the dead-sea shell
Cast up they Life's foam-fretted feet between;' (1)

This same technique he applied even to his saintly figures---
the Virgin Mary (in Ave) and the Damozel. The latter has been
described as the most fleshly being ever to enter paradise.
She represented an ideal but her spirituality was depicted in
terms of physical beauty. Madeline who 'unclasps her warmed
jewels' is no more of this world than the Blessed Damozel
whose

'bosom must have made
The bar she leaned on warm.'

The touch of realism in those lines, while it dispels any
illusion of the spiritual nature of the Damozel, is worthy
of the inspiration of Keats. There is nothing vague or
nebulous about Rossetti's conception of life after death. The
joys of paradise which the Blessed Damozel offers her lover
closely parallel those that Cynthia promises Endymion. They
are certainly more Classical and Pagan than Romantic and
Christian.

Robert Buchanan in his article on 'The Fleshly School of
Poetry' accused Rossetti of extolling 'fleshliness as the
distinct and supreme end of poetic and pictorial art.'

(1) Rossetti, The House of Life, Sonnet XCVII, 'A
Superscription'.
'Fleshly' as Rossetti's poetry may be, the accusation that he deliberately made it so is unfair. Rossetti's innocence of this intention was shown by his anger and grief after the publication of the article and by his suppression of the most offensive poem. In his reply to 'The Fleshly School' article, he maintained that he had not asserted that 'the body is greater than the soul' but rather that sensuous pleasures are 'as naught if not ennobled by the concurrence of the soul at all times'. (1) To him 'the material expression of beauty was the only key to its mystery and indissolubly connected with it'. (2) This creed he expressed in 'Love-Lily'--

'Whose speech Truth knows not from her thought,  
Nor Love her body from her soul'  (3)

(2) Benson, op. cit., p. 79.  
(3) Rossetti, Love-Lily.
Rossetti was, like Hunt and Keats, a product of that mediaeval revival which had so many and such varied manifestations in the Nineteenth Century. The movement brought with it a genuine interest in the art, religion, literature, and life of the Middle Ages. The life that the Nineteenth Century associated with the Age of Chaucer was not so much the living reality of the Canterbury Tales as the enchanted world of Spenser which offered an avenue of imaginative escape to minds seeking relief from a too material existence.

Time had caused the beauty and picturesqueness of the Pre-Renaissance period to stand out while its commonplace and often ugly reality faded into the shadow.

In the more imaginative this enthusiasm developed into an attempt not only to revive but also to relive—intellectually at least—the past of legend. This was in effect, an artificial tendency as any attempt to revive a by-gone age must of necessity be. The artificiality increased as the
genuine spiritual relationship felt by the first adherents of this revival degenerated into artistic imitation. In Keats and Coleridge that kindred feeling resulted in an interpretation which, while it did not depict the Middle Ages as they really were, caught the mediaeval spirit and mood as closely as was possible after a period of four or five centuries. Scott, too, bridged the gap of years but in a different way, recapturing not so much the emotional spirit as the external appearance and movement of the period. The Middle Ages, however, were as much idealized in his work as in Keats'. He was the interpreter of 'Romantic action', says Beers (1), as Keats was of 'Romantic emotion'. Hunt in Rimini tried his hand at mediaevalism, but his characters were merely elaborately dressed puppets posed against a quasi-mediaeval background. Tennyson and Morris followed Scott in the depiction of Romantic action. Their mediaevalism was more external than that of Scott but cannot be called artificial, because its spirit was a genuine one—a spirit, however, not mediaeval but Victorian.

Rossetti attempted to infuse a new enthusiasm into the Romantic movement in literature by linking it with the corresponding movement in art, which had developed more gradually and was just then reaching its peak. But two circumstances

made this second revival more artificial and more purely aesthetic than the first. By 1848 the freshness of the early romantic movement was gone, and Rossetti was never quite able to recapture that early enthusiasm. In addition Rossetti lived in a rational rather than an emotional age. He was never able to free himself entirely from that intellectual viewpoint. As a result his poetry is literary rather than natural. His Ballads are not truly lyrical. His work lacks spontaneity. He did not express the common emotions of mankind; it is almost as though he did not feel them. The House of Life treats of love but in too artificial a manner. The reader does not sympathize with the characters of Rossetti's narrative poems because his attention is too much taken up with the skilful versification to feel pity or love.

Rossetti has been called 'a mediaeval man born out of his time'.(1) In the qualifying phrase of the description lies Rossetti's misfortune. He wanted to be 'a mediaeval man', in many ways he was akin to Dante and even to Spenser; but he belonged definitely to the middle of the Nineteenth Century and his mediaevalism was not that of experience but that of art. Hunt still more belonged to his generation. Indeed his very mediocrity made him more typical than greater poets. Keats, while less a product of his age than any of his contemporaries, was affected as all writers must be, by his

historical position. Yet Keats, Rossetti and, to a lesser degree, Hunt sought their ideal beauty in the life of the Middle Ages, and all three found a certain aesthetic sympathy with that period.

Keats and Rossetti were in many ways very different types of men. That difference was marked in their poetry. Rossetti's poetry, also, shows definitely the influence of his historical period. Keats was nearer than Rossetti to the Ballad Revival and was able to share in great measure the excitement of Chatterton at the discovery of the beauty and mystery of the past. The literature of the Middle Ages was to him real, a part of his own experience. Rossetti's interest was more that of a connoisseur; to him the ballads were interesting and beautiful curiosities to be treasured and imitated, but not really connected with nineteenth century life. In another way too Keats and Hunt were separated. There had intervened between the two an important influence—The Oxford Movement. It gave Rossetti a new source of inspiration, although he was not affected by it in matters of faith. The ritual appealed to him for its beauty's sake and he made it part of his poetry. While he did capture some of the beauty of the Catholic Church, he lacked always the real devotion, even in Ave, his most Catholic poem. However, the subjects
of many of his poems were related to the church, and the stress
ton the ideas of penitence, atonement and purity was reminiscent
of the more pious side of mediaeval life. His description was Gothic and Catholic. And he received from the church
the atmosphere of mysticism and mystery—the element of the
strange in the beautiful—which is part of the appeal of
Catholicism to the imaginative mind. 'The Oxford Movement
had intervened between him and Keats, and had given to romance
a new mediaevalism, another tone and other themes.' (1)
Hunt had encouraged Keats' love of the Gothic but the
encouragement was hardly needed. Although Keats in the Odes
and Endymion approached classical simplicity, he was by nature
more Gothic than classical. In Endymion he treated a classical
subject with Gothic elaborateness and intensity. This love of
colour and of detail appealed to the Pre-Raphaelite taste of
Rossetti. Certain Gothic characteristics of the verse of
Hunt, Keats and Rossetti have already been mentioned. But,
while Keats' and Rossetti's description is Gothic, it is not
the description of Spenser or of Dante. There is too much
subtlety, too much artful suggestion. Keats and Rossetti
suggested as much as they said. 'They leave so much to the
imagination', as Keats said of the early Italian painters.

While Keats saw this quality in mediaeval art, it was really a Romantic characteristic for the poet to give to his subject 'the light that never was on sea or land'.

Both Rossetti and Keats were interested in the supernatural—an important element in mediaeval thought. Caine (1) even goes so far as to say that this was what Rossetti most admired in *La Belle Dame sans Merci* and *The Eve of St. Mark*.

'It was not so much the wealth of expression in the author of *Endymion* which attracted the author of *Rose Mary* as the perfect hold of the supernatural which is seen in *La Belle Dame sans Merci* and the *Eve of St. Mark*. Rossetti's interest in the supernatural was almost morbid and later developed into a belief in spiritualism. His brother said "Any writing about devils, spectres or the supernatural generally, whether in poetry or in prose, had always a fascination for him" (2). So superstition formed the basis of *Rose Mary* and *Sister Helen* and played an important part in the *King's Tragedy*. Somewhat allied to this was Rossetti's tendency to mysticism which showed itself in his symbolism. His symbolism, however, like his description was influenced by Nineteenth Century Intellectualism and was far more abstract and esoteric than mediaeval allegory.

When Hunt chose *Rimini* as a subject he selected a theme

characteristic of the Middle Ages—a bitter story of love forbidden by fate and its inevitable tragic consequences. Hunt spoilt the story in his telling of it, but even so, Rimini was a forerunner of Isabella, a very similar story, of Rose Mary, a story of unfaithfulness, of The Bride’s Prelude, a tale of love turned to hate. All these were reminiscent of one type of mediaeval story, the tragic romance, for it was to the melancholy side of mediaevalism that the Romanticists and Neo-Romanticists turned. The cause of this tendency lay, to a great extent in the nature and lives of the poets. Keats and Rossetti had had their share of sorrow. Keats was undoubtedly the most melancholy of the Romantic poets. His sadness was more genuine than Byron’s; he was unable to escape from reality as did Shelley. Keats’ imagination was too closely connected with reality, and the reality he had experienced was not pleasant. It would have been unnatural for him to express any other mood in his poetry. The great contrast in Keats’ poems is that of unreality and reality, idealism and experience. He sings ‘the joy of pain and the pain of joy’, says Cazamian. (1)

Love

'dwell with Beauty—Beauty that
must die;
And Joy, whose hand is ever at its lips
Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh,
Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips;’ (2)

(2) Keats, Ode on Melancholy.
Even nature has its bitter reality. Keats saw

'Too far into the sea, where every maw
The Greater on the less feeds evermore.' (1)

This bitter strain developed and grew more morbid through­
out the century in both France and England. In the Middle
Ages it had been due to the influence of the church--the belief
in the vanity of worldly things, and the spiritual value of self­
punishment. In the Nineteenth Century it became an aesthetic
tendency--the delight in the 'joy of pain' which developed into
such a morbid analysis of the emotions that Alfred de Musset
could exclaim,

"Le seul bien qui me reste au monde
C'est d'avoir quelquefois pleuré."

Keats was never morbid. Even when describing Isabella's care
of her dead lover's head he relieved the horror of the situ­
ation by arousing the reader's pity so that Isabella's
actions seem not unnatural. Although he found 'a bitter sweet
voluptuousness' (2) in meditating on death, he was of too
healthy a mind to succumb to the morbid fancy of a Baudelaire,
a Swinburne or a Wilde.

Rossetti had a certain strain of morbidness in his char­
acter. We are told by William Michael Rossetti that until the
end of his life he took a great interest in gruesome murder

(1) Keats, Epistle to J. H. Reynolds.
(2) Cazamian, op. cit., p. 1098.
cases. He had little sense of humour. Nor was his melancholy lightened as in the case of his sister Christina, by the solace of religion. But his poems, nevertheless, lack the same dark despair of Baudelaire. In Jenny --first written when he was quite young--he was almost sentimental. Like Keats he tried to arouse pity. This was not the manner of the French decadents. Rossetti's other poems with similar subjects--Eden Bower and Troy Town are saved from morbidness by the obviously artistic way in which the subject is presented. The reader is so conscious of this that, appreciative though he may be of the aesthetic beauty of the form, it is impossible for him really to feel the emotion or to feel that the poet himself had experienced it.

Gothic profusion and a melancholy mood were individual aspects of the Middle Ages that Keats, Rossetti and Hunt were able to reproduce with varying degrees of skill and feeling. Keats and Rossetti also revived interest in the supernatural and the use of allegory. To these might be added the identification of the spirit with the body, of the abstract with the material, a tendency which is especially strong in Rossetti. All these elements convey to the reader a suggestion of the Middle Ages. But how far did each of the three poets succeed in recreating the spirit of a past age? Rimini is a failure in this regard. Hunt, trying to make it seem real through
the use of natural language, put Cockney idiom into the mouth of Francesca da Rimini. The elaborate description which served as a background for Francesca and the other puppet characters, merely emphasized the hollowness of the whole play.

Rossetti, by praising the mediævalism of the Eve of St. Mark, gave higher tribute to Keats' powers than he knew of. Examined carefully, the poem belongs to modern times and Keats might have meant it to be so. Chinese Lacquer screens did not exist in the fourteenth century. Yet most readers will prefer to think of Bertha as a mediæval damozelle of the time of Madeleine and Isabella. As for The Eve of St. Agnes, it was

'ages long ago
These lovers fled away into the storm.' (1)

But when exactly? It does not matter. The reader feels that Porphyro and Madeleine belong to the period of romance and chivalry— to that world of 'faery' upon which the casements of Keats' mind so habitually opened. In the same way La Belle Dame sans Merci belongs to the time of Thomas the Rhymer.

No accurate description of facts could convey the sense of reality as does Keats' imaginative description. The details he gives become so vivid that even impossibilities become for the moment living realities. It was impossible that

'The long carpets rose along the gusty floor' (2)

(1) Keats, The Eve of St. Agnes, 42. 1f.
(2) Ibid, 40. 9f.
of the wide hall of the castle. However, the line, anachronistic as it is, is so suggestive that it adds to the realism of the poem rather than detracts from it. Keats' knowledge might be at fault but his poetic instinct was so sure that he was able to convey in words the reality of a long dead age.

Rossetti in The King's Tragedy borrowed the idea from Keats' anachronistic line but made it historically correct:

'The night wind wailed round the empty room
And the rushes shook on the floor', (1)

Rossetti thought to improve on the line but with all his care he has not been able to recapture the life and movement of his model. In his poems Rossetti has made no anachronistic errors. But his care about details, his search for the correct words often caused him to lose the spirit of his subject.

Care with details is not a necessary qualification of historical poetry or of historical novels. Shakespeare's historical plays are never historically accurate. It did not seem strange to Shakespeare that Julius Caesar and even Macbeth should dress as Elizabethan noblemen. To him they were not historical figures but people, and so

'He fills Ilion, Rome or any town you like
Of olden time with timeless Englishmen' (2)

who possess more life than their originals in the history book.

(1) Rossetti, The King's Tragedy
(2) Edwin Arlington Robinson: Ben Jonson meets a Man from Stratford.
For the virtue of poetry is that the great poet is able from inaccurate facts to create 'truths', for

the poet's object is not to tell what actually happened but what could and would happen either probably or inevitably--------For this reason poetry is something more scientific and serious than history, because poetry tends to give general truths while history gives particular facts--------Even supposing he represents what has actually happened, he is none the less a poet, for there is nothing to prevent some actual occurrences being the sort of thing that would probably or inevitably happen, and it is in virtue of that that he is their "maker". (1)

Similarly since the poet is a "maker", accuracy in regard to details of setting need not worry him. The scenes Shakespeare described in immortal poetry become real because of their vividness and therefore are fitting background for the action of the play.

Rossetti's accurate mediaevalism was unfortunate. His attention to detail took much life out of his poetry, so that it was not only artificial mediaevalism but also artificial nineteenth century. Tennyson, obviously inspired by a nineteenth century spirit, was more natural because his characters are types universally true and not, except in the details of dress and customs, typical of the age they are supposed to represent. Rossetti's poems belong not to the living past but to the artistic present of the nineteenth century. The King's Tragedy, however, comes unusually close to the Middle

(1) Aristotle, Poetics, IX, William Heinemann, 1927,
Ages of Scott. But *The White Ship*, a moving poem of bravery and death, might have been based on a contemporary incident. It is a poem like *Rose Mary* that can most fairly be compared with *The Ewe of St. Agnes*. The story takes place at an indefinite time in the Middle Ages. But Rose Mary and her mother are only shadowy figures against a background which is usually vague. The 'altar-cell' of the beryl stone is minutely described but its details are symbolical. The effect is pictorial not natural. To recreate a past age a writer must reproduce not only the external characteristics but also the reality of the time. We shall see, too, that Rossetti's ballads lack the real atmosphere of the Middle Ages. And all his poems lack the naivety which is an essential characteristic of the poetry of a nation's youth.

Keats too failed to achieve—indeed, did not try for—naivety in form. And it was in this that even Keats was of necessity artificial. In *La Belle Dame sans Merci* he used a Nineteenth Century version of a mediaeval form. It was impossible for him to express himself in the language and manner of the ballad authors. He did not attempt it. He used enough archaisms to give a suggestion of antiquity, but not enough to make reading an intellectual exercise. The reader does not need notes to understand 'zone', 'meads', 'manna', 'grot' or 'thrall'. They are simple in form and their context is so vivid that even
a child realizes their meaning by association. The spelling 'faery' instead of the ordinary 'fairy' is employed not because it is old but because of the extra associations the word receives and perhaps because of the beauty of the lengthened vowel sound. Chatterton, carried away by the magic of old English words used terms that instead of being suggestive are almost meaningless:

'Black his cryne as the wintry night,
White his rode as the winter snow'

or spelling whose only excuse was the exigencies of rhyme:

'With my hands I'll dent the briers
Round his holy corse to gre:
Ouph and fairy, light your fires,
Here my body still shall see: '

Keats' diction is the universal diction of poetry which is always modern; each word he uses seems to be the only word capable of expressing the idea. One does not feel this with Chatterton. Chatterton's words are obviously selected and therefore artificial even when he is at his best, as in the passage quoted. Keats has kept the ballad conventions but they are far from obvious. The old question and answer form is there. There are repetitions that form a subtle refrain. The last verse is a varied repetition of the first--

'Ah! what can ail thee, knight at arms,
Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge is withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.'

(1) Chatterton, *Song from Aella*
(2) Keats, *La Belle Dame sans Merci*. 
Only the best of the ballad writers would have been capable of the subtle repetition in the second verse where the first line alone repeats the words, but all four lines repeat the idea of the first verse--

'Ah! what can ail thee, knight at arms,
So haggard and so woe-begone?
The squirrel's granary is full,
And the harvest's done.'

The metre of the poem marks it as the verse of art. Keats has kept the old ballad metre but has varied it. The difference is slight but so significant that the poem is worlds removed from the old ballads. It is as well that Keats has done this, for, by matching subtlety in form with subtlety in diction, he has made the poem seem perfectly natural. Simplicity would have seemed out of place.

Rossetti wrote not one but several ballads. They are more naive in form than *La Belle Dame sans Merci*. But the naivety is a studied one. Rossetti obviously tried to approach his models in diction. The language he used in the ballads was the precise opposite to that used in the *House of Life*. He attempted to reproduce the old simplicity by a careful choice of words of Anglo-Saxon origin. Occasionally he used archaisms apparently with the intention of increasing the effect of mediaevalism. Instead the artificiality is usually obvious, partly because of the contrast between the
unfamiliar although picturesque archaic word and the simple
language of the context--

'King Henry fell as a man struck dead;
And speechless still he stared from his bed
When to him next day my rede I read.'  (1)

Rossetti's love of words for their own sake tempted him to
use words which appealed to him by their chivalrous connotation
but confuse and distract the reader

'And braced and shifted daintily
The loin-belt through her cote-hardie
---------------
Around her throat the fastenings met
Of chevesayle and mantelet.'  (2)

Rossetti seems to have realized that sometimes his mediaevalisms
were not successful. He writes to his brother, W. M. Rossetti;

'I wish that you would not attempt to defend my mediaevalisms,
which were absurd, but rather say that there was enough
good in the works to give assurance that these were merely
superficial. (3)

Apparently, however, he did not realize that "the superficial
character" of his archaism counteract the effect of the 'good'
in his work.

Rossetti observed the ballad conventions---often very
carefully. He made use of question and answer and of the
refrain in Sister Helen, Eden Bower and in Troy Town. The
form of these three poems is as simple and naive as he could

(1) Rossetti, The King's Tragedy,
(2) Rossetti, The Bride's Prelude,
(3) Rossetti, Letters to W. M. Rossetti, Sept. 1851, ed.
    W. M. Rossetti, 1895, p. 94.
make it. But it is the simplicity of art not of nature. The refrain in *Sister Helen*, for example, is subtle, often ironic. It is not the utterance of a chorus spontaneously echoing the words of the main singer but that of a poet carefully noting the effect of every turn of phrase--

'The hour, the sweet hour I forecast,  
Little brother!'  
O Mother, Mary Mother,  
Is the hour sweet, between Hell and Heaven?' (1)

The refrains in *Eden Bower* and *Troy Town* are more purely repetitive and closer to ballad simplicity. *The White Ship* while called a ballad, is really a longer narrative, but in it he has used with great skill a refrain that suggests the relentlessness and impartiality of fate--

'Lands are swayed by a King on a throne  
-----------------------------  
The sea hath no King but God alone.' (2)

But this refrain which occurs only three times in the poem is extraneous to the narrative, reflects the opinions of the speaker, and is not therefore characteristic of the ballad.

Artificiality is not the only fault of the burdens to Rossetti's ballads. A repeated burden was quite suited to the folk-ballads because they were meant to be sung, but the refrain in the literary ballads of Rossetti has no such justification. It is annoying when read silently, causing an un-

(1) Rossetti, *Sister Helen*.  
(2) Rossetti, *The White Ship*. 
necessary pause in the reader's progress. Oral reading is the fairest test of a poem. To be appreciated Rossetti's ballads must be read aloud. The refrain in *Sister Helen*—half prayer, half curse—is haunting and wierdly suggestive. In *Troy Town*, however, not only is the repetition meaningless but the sound becomes disagreeable.

One reason why Rossetti's use of the refrain was not always successful was that his poems lacked the lyric quality of the old ballads or of *La Belle Dame sans Merci*. Keats' poem was not written primarily to be sung, although like all true ballads its simplicity and dramatic movement make it decidedly lyrical and therefore suitable at least for dramatic recitation. The first three lines are written in simple iambic feet—a light and easy rhythm—and the poet's skill gives it life, especially in the lines where the effect of light-hearted movement is desired—

'I met a lady in the meade,
Full beautiful—a fairy's child,
Her hair was long, her feet were light,
And her eyes were wild.

'I set her on my pacing steed,
And nothing else saw all day long,
For sideways would she lean and sing
A fairy's song.' (1)

Rossetti's verse lacks this nervous rhythm, a characteristic of the folk ballad, which had to depend for its survival and

(1) Keats, *La Belle Dame sans Merci.*
popularity on just such a rhythmical flow of words—easy to remember, and difficult to forget. But Rossetti has made his rhythm more complicated, as for instance, in *Eden Bower*, where he added an extra unaccented syllable to each tetrameter line—

> 'Only of one tree eat not in Eden,
> (And 0 the bower and the hour!)
> All save one I give to thy freewill,—
> The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.' (1)

This versification is effective, but it is not the versification of the Middle Ages, which was intended for oral reading or recitation.

The vigour that is characteristic not only of lyric poetry but also of good narrative is often lacking in Rossetti's ballads. *Sister Helen, The White Ship, The King's Tragedy*—each tells a story well, creating suspense and a sense of impending doom, but the story is delayed by the poet's artistic endeavors. The reader is too conscious of the poet at work. The story, with the possible exception of *The King's Tragedy*, is not told for its own sake. Rossetti's preoccupation with the ballad form was such that he was constantly on the search for material to suit it. Consequently the story was only a secondary consideration to him.

Rossetti's interest in the poetry of the folk was purely intellectual. It was not based on any knowledge or love of the people and their traditions. People of any period—mediae-

(1) Rossetti, *Eden Bower*. 
eval or modern—never really interested Rossetti. His interest never went beyond his family and his circle of friends—those who, like himself, were interested in literature or art. His world was a small one converging on himself. His seclusion is reflected in his poetry. He is not interested in the characters but in the setting and presentation of his story. He would have understood the effectiveness of Angela’s presence in The Eve of St. Agnes as an artistic contrast to the young lovers but never would he have felt any interest in her as an individual. On the other hand Keats was by nature sociable. His many friendships are a witness to his ability to make other men feel that he was interested in their joys and sorrows. And his interest was genuine. He was early developing the dramatist’s power of projecting himself into the character of another person.

Keats’ circle of acquaintances had been in the Leigh Hunt days a very limited one, but it widened quickly. He showed his interest in everyone he met. He had no chance to know the country people—the ‘folk’—until his trip through Scotland. There he showed a real interest in them. It was there he first came to know people like ‘Old Meg’ who

'was a gipsy
And lived upon the moors.' (1)

(1) Keats, Old Meg.
This was a new world to Keats who had not been fortunate enough, as were Wordsworth and Scott, to know it in his childhood.

Ballads were written by the folk. The modern ballads which come closest in many ways to the old ones have been written by a man who grew up with the folk and their traditions—Sir Walter Scott. Rossetti's ballads were based not on this intimate knowledge but on a rather superficial research. He reproduced the outward forms of mediaevalism but beyond that he could not go. Having no real sympathy with the people, he could not think as they do. Only in Sister Helen did he come close to a mediaeval way of thinking. But this was because he kept to an old plot. Every detail of Sister Helen—the melting image, the pleading relatives, the relentless avenger and the lost souls of both the victim and the instrument of his punishment—is found in the old ballads. In Eden Bower and Troy Town Rossetti supplied his own material, but he was unable to tell it in a mediaeval manner. As a result neither in subject matter nor in mood are the two poems true ballads.

La Belle Dame sans Merci is in form a work of art but in spirit it belongs to the Middle Ages. The theme like that of Sister Helen is a characteristic one, but the reader feels that the poet has for the time lived in a past age to tell his story. The tale is told with all the careful detail
and all the air of truth that a thirteenth century poet might have used. The ballad writer always wrote as if he had been an eye-witness of the incident. As if expecting to be challenged as to his accuracy, he substantiated every statement. So in La Belle Dame sans Merci no action is vague. We know exactly where everything happened—'in the meads', 'on my pacing steed', in 'her elfin grot', 'on the moss', and 'on the cold hill-side'. We know definitely what the knight and La Belle Dame ate—

'relish sweet
And honey wild, and manna-dew,'

The supernatural in folk poetry was not made mysterious, but natural—and so it is here. No shadowy vagueness dims the reality of the subject; the full light of day shines on it.

This naive realism was beyond Rossetti's power. He could be subtle and elaborate but he could not attain the greatness of simplicity. Simplicity of diction he did attempt, but at the expense of dignity and naturalness. But Keats, who could be far more subtle than Rossetti, had instinctively realized that a great deal of the charm of the Middle Ages lay in its childlike view of life. Naivety of thought was as characteristic of Gothic art and literature as simplicity of form was
of Classical. This simplicity was often combined with the elaborateness that is usually associated with the Gothic. In both these aspects *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, *The Eve of St. Agnes* and the *Eve of St. Mark* come close in spirit to the Middle Ages.
CONCLUSION

'But the vital difference is this, and, it transcends or ignores all merely technical points: the Hunt is static, inert, unfinished; the Keats thrills and is alive.' (1)

This passage, already quoted, regarding Keats and Hunt, makes clear the essential difference between great poetry and minor poetry. And, gifted although Rossetti was, that same quality of vitality is lacking in his poetry. It, too, is static. Rossetti, in attempting to 'perfect' the art of the Middle Ages, has deprived it of life and movement. The charm of mediaeval verse is due to its naivety both in subject matter and in style. It is completely natural whether the story is told with the dramatic simplicity of the ballads or with the conscious but original artistry of Spenser.

Of Hunt, Keats and Rossetti, Keats alone was able to capture the spontaneity of the original ballads and romances.
Hunt was never consciously artificial but he lacked Keats' emotional power. Moreover, in Rimini, Hunt made no attempt to avoid nineteenth century sentiment or diction. *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, however, belongs both to the nineteenth century and to the middle ages. Keats was fortunate enough to live at a time when emotional kinship with the Middle Ages was possible. It was a time when a great literary movement had reached the crest of its inspiration--when the emotional side of English literature had been revived after a period of lethargy. People were tired of sophistication, and turned to emotionalism in religion and literature for relief. A Romantic poet, rediscovering the wonder and beauty of life, felt—

'like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken:' (1)

It is this wonder that inspires great art. The greatest and most original minds usually come early in a civilization—to the pioneers of literature only is it possible to "see life clearly and to see it whole". The knowledge and the ideals that make up civilization, as they accumulate, have the effect of choking up that originality, that confidence from which comes great art. The most impassioned and most imaginative poetry does not thrive in the atmosphere of sophistication

(1) Keats, *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer.*
that is characteristic of advanced civilization. Thus it is that with a Homer, a Dante, a Shakespeare or a Goethe the poetic literature of a nation reaches its climax early in its history, and thereafter declines. Occasionally, however, as in fifth century Greece and early nineteenth century England, there is a reawakening that rivals the early period in genuineness of emotion. Thus with Keats and his great contemporaries the reader feels an intensity that gives life and originality to their work.

In Keats' poetry the reader is always aware of the poet's suppressed excitement as he discovers the beauty and wonder of the world. With Rossetti this excitement was of a different order. The novelty of discovery was gone. Rossetti's interest was that of a connoisseur. He knew well the superficial details of his subject—the diction, the form of the verse and the descriptive details—but he was unable to share the life behind. The Middle Ages of the Bride's Tragedie and Rose Mary are merely a shell of the original. Courthope, writing in 1885, said, 'The inspiration of the romantic school is now failing.' (1) The work of Swinburne and Rossetti he called the 'Literature of Artifice' because 'we are always conscious of the presence of the artist: it is plain that he is thinking less of the theme itself than of its capacities

(1) Courthope, The Liberal Movement in English Literature, 1885, p. 230.
for enabling him to display his powers of word-painting or of
metre-music."(1)

Keats is one of the great masters of word-painting
in English--greater than Rossetti because of the warmth and
life he imparted to everything he touched. The Romantic
poet is by nature, as Rossetti is, subjective, and for that
reason incapable of producing the two highest forms of
literature--dramatic and epic poetry. Keats is a paradox--
a Romantic,--more than that--an aesthete, who was able at
times to divest himself of his own personality and enter into
the object he was portraying. Thus it is that the People of
Keats' poems live and the scenery and atmosphere belong to
the world of reality. To everything--even inanimate objects--
his enthusiasm imparted movement and feeling. To the figures
on a Grecian urn he gave more life and reality than Rossetti
or Hunt ever gave to a living character. Rossetti's snake-
woman, Lilith, is an abstraction in human form; Keats' 
temptress, Lamia, 'though liable to be turned into painful
shapes has a soul of humanity.'(2) Keats is able to recreate
life--life that he knew only through his imagination. For
this reason he must always hold a place not with the purely
aesthetic poets but in the company of the great creative poets
whose genius is above classification.

(1) Courthope, loc. cit.
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