

A - Very neat. Some critics would disagree with your interpretation of Keats, though I do not. His symbols, of course, are very different from Shelley's. -1-

Similarity of Tone in Shelley's Hymn to Intellectual Beauty and Keats' Ode on a Grecian Urn

Both Shelley and Keats felt that the ultimate truth visited the world with "inconstant glance." This was not, however, the truth of the everyday world. It was not the truth of appearance, for that might often be misleading, and what humans thought to be the apparent truth might actually be false. Although neither was a believer in organized Christianity per se, both presented in their poetry a concept of an "ideal realm" which does not necessarily <sup>imply</sup> a relationship to the Christian "Heaven." While Heaven might manifest itself to the Christian in the form of an occasional miracle, the ideal residence of all truth manifested itself to Shelley and Keats in terms of beauty. This applies to Keats more than it does to Shelley; but to both, as with the Christian and his miracles, beauty is only a manifestation, an image of the eternally true.

*underline*

To Keats especially, something is true only if its beauty develops from a disclosure of, or is related to, its essential nature. But the concepts of both Shelley and Keats are to some degree related to the ideas of Plato, for it was he who felt that an object's beauty was a reflection of its inner spirit. Beauty is to these poets the manifestation of that eternal spirit which hovers over man's world in a cloud of the ultimate truth. It is not so much the spirit of the individual object or phenomenon as it is a spirit pervasive in nature - and Nature, also.

In Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, the spirit of BEAUTY visits the world only on rare occasions. When it does appear, it is a force, as Shelley addresses it:

"... that dost consecrate

With thine own hues all thou dost shine upon

Of human thought or form...."

It is like a sun that pervades the world of man, sometimes breaking through a cloud to directly "consecrate" an object and lend to it the quality of beauty. The object then becomes a sort of mirror, reflecting the beautiful light of ideal truth that shines upon it. But to emphasize the inconstancy of its "wing," Shelley likens it to the "summer winds that creep from flower to flower."



Shelley clearly links this beauty to truth by saying:

"Thy light alone...

Gives grace and truth to life's unquiet dream."

In order to compensate for this lack of truth, ultimate truth in terms of the eternal, man has had to rely upon his inventiveness, and from such human inventions have come the terms "Demon, Ghost, and Heaven." But Shelley is never so explicit in openly listing the manifestations of this spirit, mentioning, for example that the "light...gives...truth" like "moonlight on a midnight stream." This could be one of the spirit's images.

Keats, however, is less ambiguous on this point. While Shelley's moonlight image is certainly a beautiful one, it is neither conclusive nor is it permanent, although it is in keeping with his "inconstant wing" motif. In Ode on a Grecian Urn Keats has found a manifestation of this beauty-truth that defies the mortality of either Nature or man. Its timelessness is emphasized by the phrases "for ever piping songs," "for ever wilt thou love," "for ever warm," "for ever panting and for ever young." Not only is it a permanent reflection of BEAUTY. It is also a direct and visible proof that this spirit may be manifested in objects which man may come to know, understand, and appreciate.

In his description of this visual image of BEAUTY, Keats included a phrase which, whether or not he intended it to, has become perhaps his most famous:

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty."

Actually, it would seem that it could be explained by a simple logical system:

If all things evil were to be painted black, then black would immediately equal evil. Similarly, if all things true are to be represented by beauty, beauty will equal truth.

And "that is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."



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English 651  
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