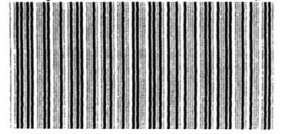


A Brief Study of the Color Sense  
of Keats

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Thesis  
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Brief

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## A Brief Study of the Color-Sense of Heats.

In general it may be stated that Heats is more at home in studies of blacks and whites. With a rich and varied spectrum spread out before him he passes by positive and definite colors and appreciates the result of the whole, rather than detail color blending. In the poems which form the definite basis for this paper there is no use of the violet shades nor of its blending color, - indigo. Blue, while often mentioned, is singularly limited in its application. The references are usually relating to the sky. So we have "blue firmament"; "blue! 'Tis the life of heaven!" and "through cloudless blue" Again it is used in application to

flowers.

Blue! gentle cousin of the forest  
green,  
Married to green in all the  
sweetest flowers—

Forget-me-not, — the blue bell, —  
and that queen  
Of secrecy, the violet: what  
strange powers  
Hast thou a mere shadow! But  
how great when  
In an eye thou art alive  
with fate."

Purple-stained is used but  
once and then in reference to a  
"beaker with purple stained mouth."  
Green, —

I can not find that Keats  
uses in any one of these references  
any sharp distinguishment of  
varying shades of this color.

"Why should I spurn the green  
turf as hateful to my feet."

"Rejoice O Delos with thine olives green,"

+ + +

"murmurs noise of waves  
Though scarcely heard in many  
a green recess."

+ + +

"In some melodious plot  
Of beechen green,"

+ + +

Most manifestly the varying shade naturally appearing in the foregoing quotations are unnoticed. But Keats uses green in other respects than merely in regard to nature. We find,

"Lonely Laura in her light green dress"  
or the term is applied to cat's eyes in

"Gaze with thy bright languid  
segments green."

and applied to ocean "with its vastness of blue green."

Here is a slight separation

of shades. The emerald shade is "used in

"Which the emerald waves at  
your feet gladly threw."

The vivid yellow does not appear in the notes but Keats is not at all blind to the existence of this color. He revels in it. He sees it everywhere. It may partake of the properties of brightness to the extent of becoming gold, but yellow it is in very truth. Keats ricks in this color yet with how many different meanings! Many and many a poet has seen the white purity of Diana in the moon light but Keats saw the mellowness of moonlight.

"As when a cloud the golden moon  
doth veil,"

The sunset sky is rich in the tints of yellow and gold,—

"The laurelled peers,  
Who from the feathered gold of evening lean."

Day cloud hovers or night cloud, had its edging of the golden glow, - a soft outline of light. The golden sky and the golden cloud belong naturally to summer.

"O how I love on a fair summer's eve,  
When streams of light pour down the  
golden west."

In the world of nature Keats always caught this color. He saw it in the sands of the ocean, in the crest outlines of waves, in the hues of the fishes that swarm in the seas, in the shells, in trees, "golden feathered." In the human world he found the color in the life glow upon the cheek, but there was a tint which he always saw, - the gold in the hair. He liked the color either in man or woman. Even this color became a medium for graphic figure when the hands of the artist, model.



In describing the abode of the Gods, in order to make the place superior to that spot occupied by mortals, it is described as a "golden region". Does Keats desire to open a field of speculation to us he endows a God with the title of "gold" Hyperion. If he wishes to call to his own few excellent virtues, he says, "Give me a golden pen," (that I may write.)—

The red colors play a prominent part in Keats's color scheme. Contrary to the treatment of the greens there are many variations in the mode of expression and an apparent appreciation of shades. The color is often a part of the mood <sup>in</sup> which intensity is a factor. This intensity of mood is represented by the following passage.

"Flush everything that hath a vermeil hue,  
Let the rose glow intense and warm the air

And let the clouds of even and of morn  
 Float in voluptuous fleeces o'er the hills:  
 Let the red wine within the goblet boil,  
 Cold as a bubbling well: let faint lipped shells  
 On sands, or in great deeps, vermilion turn  
 Through all their labyrinths: and let the maid  
 Blush pearly, as with some warm kiss surprised"  
 The poet in the foregoing passage, has  
 abandoned himself to the intoxication of  
 the moment and the color of the glamour  
 is all red. Again, in a moment  
 of passion attraction, if such is  
 possible, this same color plays a part.

"And let there glide by many a pearly car,  
 Pink robes, and wavy hair and diamond  
 jar."

Red formed a background of horrid  
 suggestion. In speaking of the phe-  
 nomena of Hyperion's palace Keats  
 says, -

"His palace bright  
 Basted with pyramids of glazing gold,  
 And touched with shade of crazed obelisks,  
 Glared a blood red through all its

thousand courts,

Arches and domes, and fiery galleries."

This passage furnishes a preface to an enumeration of horrors.

Red is a color used to express the sense of the awful presence of Godhood.

"And like a rose in vermeil tint and shape,

In fragrance soft, and ev'ness to the eye,

That inlet to serene magnificence

Stood full blown, for God to enter in.

Keats' use of ruby in the following passage is very questionable to me. Of the fish he says,

Whose silken fins and golden scales' light

Cast upward through the waves a ruddy glow.

It is quite possible that the momentary glimpse of the iridescent light of the fish would warm the colder tone of the waters, but ruddy glow seems not a natural world color.

Amber is used in a strangely im-  
aginative sense. Previous mention  
has been made of the fact that Keats  
is very prone to see, in the light  
of the moon, a richness not or-  
dinarily found there. He says  
of the moon under a cloud,

"Through the dark robe of  
amber rays prevail."

This same color is found by him  
in the morning glow. Morning  
touched a hill 'crowning its lawny  
crest with amber flame'.

Bright, as a color word is  
constantly used; it is used con-  
stantly to express a certain sen-  
sation perceived by the organism  
of sight, yet what that color is  
I am at a loss to say. I sometimes  
think that the color is a yellow  
compound, but I do not know that  
it is so. The sun is 'bright';  
Hyperion's palace is bright.

"His palace bright  
 Bastioned with pyramids of glowing  
 gold  
 And touched with shade of bronzed  
 obelisks  
 Glared a blood red through all  
 its thousand courts,  
 Arches and domes and fiery galleries,"  
 Again,

"It seemed an emerald in the  
 silver sheen  
 of the bright waters."

Or, of drink,

"Or bright elixir peerless I had  
 drunk."

Sometimes it expresses a sense  
 impression received from the  
 sparkle, the speed, the glint of feather  
 of bird life.

As,

"There the kingfisher saw his  
 plumage bright

"Fying with fish of brilliant dye  
 below."

or again,

"Bright as the humming bird's  
green diadem

When it flutters in sunbeams  
that shine thro a fountain"

To express a sense of Godhood  
this word is sometimes utilized,-  
as 'bright Titon'.

As an instance of a composite  
color word and one that is replete  
with suggestiveness may be cited,  
(from Hyperion and referring to his  
palace)

"And all its curtains of Aurorian  
clouds

Flushed angrily:"

There are left the com-  
binations of blacks and whites;  
'flat' colors they are, in Keats'  
scheme. From the tabulation may  
be seen the very great proportion  
of their use,- nearly one half  
the color references are comprised

of them. It seems to me that Keats' use of dark is very often an interpretation of this mixture of blacks and whites. There is one use of the word 'dark' that must imply a consideration of other color but only one. I cite it, —

"Hast thou a goblet for dark  
sparkling wine?"

Note the beauty of the imagery in  
" — like the bulk

of Memnon's image at the set of sun  
To me who travels from the dusky  
east."

This color idea is applied to the  
skies in rainy condition.

As,

"After dark heavens have oppressed  
our plains"

The cloud veiling the moon is  
dark; the trees and hazel thickets  
are "thick dark stemmed beneath  
the shade"

Grey is a shade which is frequently found in the descriptions of rocks and clouds. In speaking of "Ailse" this line occurs, -

"Or when grey clouds are they  
 all covered."

Again the morning clouds are  
 "gold, grey, and dew."

Jet is not found describing the world of nature; its only use is found in application to people and their attributes, so we have, -

"Sparkled his jetty eyes; his  
 feet did show

"Beneath the wars like Africa's  
 ebony."

Or, we find 'eyebrows of jet.'

Swart is used in picturing the color of stone and sable marble especially.



Silver as a color word is exceedingly popular. It is used especially of clouds, stars and moon.

Compare, —

"And on the balmy zephyrs rest  
The silver clouds."

"One moon with alteration slow  
had shed  
Her silver seasons fount upon the  
night."

"Or of those silver lamps that  
burn on high."

The word silver is a favorite expression of description of God-homes, i.e. —

— "round each silver throne.

It is used many times to describe the thing which may be conceived to be in the mind but not seen in material being, such as

angel's wings.

"If a cherub on pinions of silver  
descending"

"Two fair <sup>+</sup>argent <sup>+</sup>wings"

"Those <sup>+</sup>silver <sup>+</sup>wings expanded <sup>+</sup>sightly"

Silver is frequently used to  
impress the color of river or sea,  
brook or rill.

In the following instances  
'pale' is surely used as a  
color word:

"Pale were the sweet lips that  
I saw."

"Pale cheeks"

"Phantoms pale"

'White' is a common word used  
in its ordinary color sense. It  
is found in reference to waters,  
(h) to the snow, to the sky.

As,

Through clouds of fleecy white  
laughs the caerulean sky.

Again, in ordinary sense of

of birds, as  
 "while his white melodious  
 throat

throated with the syllables."

The length of this paper precludes a further discussion yet, I must say, what, in view of the paucity of this report is most evident, - that the man Keats was peculiar in that he possessed a singularly sensitive soul in regard to color impression.

It is certainly true that contemplation of gloom, shade, or darkness, caused a reduplication of the state within his soul. It is certainly true that the exalted moods and frenzied utterances were incited by the red and the yellows often and if the contemplation of these shades were prolonged that a climax of feeling results.

