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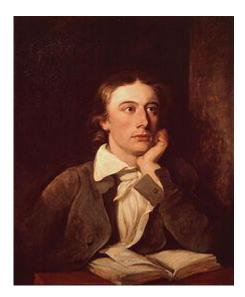
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A Study of the Comparative Elements in the Poetry of Keats and Ghani Khan

Mian Shah Bacha, Ph.D. Scholar Bakht Sheema Bibi



Ghani Khan 1914-1996



John Keats 1795-1821

Portrait of John Keats by William Hilton. National Portrait Gallery, London, www.wikipedia.com

Abstract

Keats and Ghani Khan hold a unique position in literature due to the contribution they have made to the poetry of Pashto and English languages respectively. This paper presents the comparative elements in the poetry of these poets. Both the romantic poets seem to share several similar thoughts in their poetry. Their love for Beauty and Nature, and their concern for the Eternal and Political turmoils are also manifested in their poetry. Escapism is the hallmark of these great poets and, on the wings of their imagination, they seek shelter in the imaginary world from the harsh realities of life, but it does not mean that they do not look at the world realistically. Despite the fact that they lived in two different centuries and that they dwelled in different countries with different cultures, they got so many things similar in their poetry.

Introduction

This comparative study on Keats and Ghani aims to find the elements of similarity between Ghani Khan and John Keats. Despite the fact that they belong to two diverse cultures, their backgrounds are different and even the times they lived in were different, yet these two giants of literature have got certain things in common. Looking at their poetic works, it is easily seen and felt that both these poets are blessed with the romantic spirit in them.

On the surface, both these poets seem different, i.e., Ghani's use of Pashto language and Keats's use of English. They have almost the same feelings but have used different languages for expression.

John Keats is essentially a poet of love, beauty, nature and life. Imagination was a chief characteristic of Keats' poetry. He roamed in the realm of imagination by his poetic wings and they helped him to be a poet of senses, warmth, expression of sensitive emotions and humanistic feelings. These features kept him away from self-centredeness and selfishness.

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Keats was a prophet and staunch believer in beauty. He was also aware of the harsh realities of the world. Similarly, Ghani Khan was a great romantic Pashto poet. He holds an important position in the galaxy of the Pashto poets. His poetry is an expression of the culture, traditions, civilizations, and Pushtoons`way of life. Ghani Khan's romantic bent of mind is fully expressed through the Pashto language.

Like Keats too, Ghani Khan, by his poetic imaginative wings, flies to the world of ecstasy, he talks of the romantic lands of pleasure, and happiness in palaces, music, beloved, masti (wantonness). But he is also aware of the harsh realities of life. Amidst his adoration for love, beauty, life, and poetry, he is also known to be a Crazy Philosopher.

John Keats

Born: October 31, 1795 (London, England), died February 23, 1821(Rome, Italy).

Keats' Style and Genres

Keats was an English poet whose rich poetry was full of romantic spirit. He suffered from family tragedies. He lost both his parents when he was a young lad of eight years. Tuberculosis killed his mother and brother and he himself died of it at the age of just twenty-five, when he was receiving great recognition for his work. The brevity and intensity of his life added some on his entire literary wo and impact upon this Romantic poet. He breathed for the sensation and transcended imagination in his poetry. From his early sonnets to his incomplete poem, "Hyperion" his poetry like "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" and Isabella or the pot of the Basil," had impressed many poets, group of artists, including the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the symbolists, writers and critics and it had influenced giants of literature.

The mysterious and musical closing lines of his, "Ode on a Grecian Urn".

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty, that is all,

Ye know on earth and all ye need not to know"

are some of the most discussed, debated and argued over lines in the English poetry. Keats' lovely, intelligent and deeply sympathetic nature befriended him easily to other authors and cultural figures like Leigh Hunt, Hazlitt, Wordsworth and Shelley. His close friend John Hemilton Reynold remembers him as having, "the greatest power of poetry in him, of any one since Shakespeare."

Despite growing and increasing recognition of his talent, his first volumes of poems and Endmion, he was held in scathing derision, much of this collection was directed to his poor origins, his "Upstart" pretensions and his cockney rhymes."

Shelley did much to decrease the intensity of this crushing attack on his works by paying tribute to him (Keats) in his elegiac poem, "Adonais" noting that those canker worms caused the genius of Keats to be blighted in the bud.

Despite of the crushing attacks on his maiden works and personal loses and sufferings, he said, "I think I shall be among the English poets after my death" (501 Great Writers p. 139).

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Abdul Ghani Khan

Born (1914, Ashtanagar, village Uthmanzai, NWFP (Old), Khyber Pakhtunkhaw, Pakistan, died in 1996 at Lady Reading Hospital, Peshawar. Abdul Ghani Khan was the first born son in 1914 of Abdul Ghaffar Khan. He was was very much dear to both of his parents.

Ghani khan became a victim of influenza epidemic at the age of six and his parents began prayers earnestly to Allah for the recovery of Ghani Khan. The severity of this illness was so intense that made Ghani Khan's mother ask God to transfer the illness of her son to her in lieu of his recovery and it happened as his mother had wished. She died of this prayer which she had made for Ghani Khan's recovery. Ghani Khan, therefore, recalls her mother's intense love for him in his poem, "Mother, Moor"

The Pashto verses of his Poem "Mother" are translated into the English script.

"Gar chi Khauru ki di phat wajud stha moree,

Mata yaad haga shan stha stargi thuri,

Moree stha lasuna mana na di heer.

Chi takleef ki ba zamana wu chapeer."

English translation of Ghani's above verses:

"Though you have been buried and hidden in dust,

I still remember your black beautiful eyes,

I do still remember your arms,

Around me in my pains."

Ghani Khan's Poetry

Abdul Ghani Khan, a big and impressive figure in the modern romantic Pashto poetry, enjoys an enviable position among the galaxy of Pashto poets. He had his own individual style. He rebelled against the traditional forms and writing of poetry. He seemed impressed by no one but followed the inner call of his own self and soul and fit his poetry in his own individualistic style. His followed his conscience rather than his intellect. He did not write poetry for the sake of criticism but rather believed in the freedom of thought and expression and always seemed working against the set traditions. Ghani Khan's style, words, thoughts, ideas all are his own and his emotions and sensitive feelings are the result of his own personal experiences in life.

Besides, Ghani Khan also staunchly believed in the love of nature and beauty. Like Keats on the wings of his imagination, he flies to the lands of happiness, fancies, ecstasy but it does not mean that he forgets the harsh realities of life.

Ghani Khan's Poetry

Despite being a great admirer of beauty and nature, he is also titled as a crazy philosopher for

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his eccentric and complex expressions and philosophical musings. Ghani Khan's poetry can conveniently be categorized into romantic, political and revolutionary poetry but, here, in this article, the romantic elements in his poetry are compared with the famous English romantic poet, John Keats.

Ghani Khan's poetry has the philosophical depth and profundity which are similar to the Keatsian thoughts. These have been discussed, debated and argued by the modern poets and critics. His poetry has given new vistas and aspects to the Pashto poetry and because of such depth, live expression, musicality of thought, courage, reality, spontaneity and high flight of imagination, he was considered a world class philosopher, poet and thinker.

Ghani Khan, like any matured, original philosophical genius, romantic, rebel and revolutionary figure, has the potential to be classed in the ranks of the literary giants of the world of literature.

The Comparative Elements between the Poetry of John Keats and Abdul Ghani Khan

Poets do share the elements of universality in their poetry which transcend the limits of time and space. Poets are born geniuses that live for ever and get secure place in the hearts of people because the message they give is universal, timeless and spaceless. They represent all that is inner and they express all those feelings of hearts which appeal to the soul. The universality in the poetry of both Abdul Khan and John Keats has made them immortal and for all times to be read and to be impressed by.

Despite the fact that both belong to different time periods, different back grounds, different cultures and they have even different languages altogether and they are even of different ages, Ghani lived to see the ripe days of his life while Keats did not even see the beautiful days of his youth fully and the cruel death cut him up in the very bud and prime of life. Ghani had at least the opportunity to visit the birth place of Keats but on the other hand, Keats might not have even heard of Ghani's people and homeland.

Despite having so many differences in their cultures, languages, backgrounds, ideologies and even huge difference in age, there are still many points of similarity between the poetry of Abdul Ghani Khan and John Keats, besides they were also alike in many ways.

The core and crux of their poetry is basically one, they were highly romantics and staunch believers in beauty. Quite surprisingly, both of these romantic poets were not appreciated in their lives for their poetry. Keats was severely criticized for his poem, "Endymion" by the reviewers. Even Keats admitted the faults he had in his poem but he was still not spared. His fame started to grow when Shelley treated him in glowing terms in his elegiac poem, "Adonais".

Similar was the case with Ghani Khan whose genius, talent, potential as a poet and philosopher was not recognized and he remained unappreciated during his life. There were very few persons around him who had sympathy and love for his works and were also able enough to comprehend him and understand his poetry and to see in him a philosopher of high rank. His grandson Mashal Khan, in one of the articles in the *Frontier Post* 31st March 1997, is quoted in these words:

"We do not remember, appreciate and evaluate people when they are around but extol them when they retire to the hereafter."

This was true in Ghani Khan's case, when he died, a host of his fans thronged to his residence

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"Hala yaar warta neezdi shoom chi yaar shoma lare

Hala puha shoom pa khabaru chi ye na aorama khabarey".

Translation:

"I got closer to my beloved only by leaving,

I understood only as I heard them not."

Both poets had interests in many things but turned more seriously to poetry for which they were made and they were gifted profusely. Keats was apprenticed for medicine but he never practiced medicine. Ghani Khan also had command on Persian, Arabic, English and Pashto. He had also done chemical engineering but took up poetry only. The expertise in different things was not suitable for their nature but they found poetry to be the only medium for their soul solace and satisfaction.

Similarly the concept of beauty and nature in the poetry of Abdul Ghani Khan and John Keats. Both these great romantic poets of Pashto and English were great admirers of nature and beauty. They loved nature and they had genuine interest in it to express their inner most and deepest feelings. They found nature to be a source to recognize and see God. Their godly feelings arose because of their naturalistic description in their poetry. Keats' Odes specially brim with the nature and its beauty descriptions but in his "Ode to Autumn" he reached the height of his poetic genius and his poetic expression finds the best description of nature and beauty and is fully well explored. As Leonard Unger finds, the words are descriptive in their phonetic qualities and rhythmical arrangement. The Ode opens with the vivid description of autumn.

"How to load and bless with fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run,

To bend with apples, the moss'd cottage-trees,

And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core,

To swell the gourd and plump the hazel shells with a sweet kernel to set budding more,

And still more, later flowers for the bees

Until they think warm days will never cease,

For summer has over brimm'd the clammy cells

(Ode to Autumn)

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The description of the nature imagery becomes stronger towards the end of the poem as the ode continues,

"Or by cyder-press, with patient look,

Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

(Ode to Autumn)

The poem is suggestive of the transitory and short-lived things. Similarly thoughts about the description of nature and beauty imagery in "The Hymn to Pan" in Endymion are presented. As Keats says about the fruition in these beautiful imagery laden lines:

"Broad leaved fig trees even now for doom,

Their ripened fruitage; yellow girted bees,

Their golden honey combs, our village leas,

Their fairest blossom'd beans and poppied corn,

The chuckling linnet, its five young unborn,

To sing for thee; low creeping strawberries,

Their freckled wings; yea the fresh budding year,

All its completions (Endymion 1.252-260)

In Keatsian vision, everything, be it winter or summer, moves in consummate harmony, nothing is isolate, everything everywhere is moving in an orderly fashion. The emergence of one is dependent upon the fall of another - i.e., melancholy ensues delight.

Ghani Khan, also like Keats, has the similar feelings of joy and sadness in the cycle of Seasons in the poem of spring (Sparlay). In this poem, we feel him shouting with joy at the defeat of death by new life.

"O gora janana da tyari na rana jura shwa,

Naway sparlay da gulanu dunia jura shwa,

Zmaka laka shara abora warka spora wa,

Chata marawara masti thali da khapal korawa,

Panee ghati na we pa har boti da marg sorayoo,

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Shrang da jwandun ghale mekhanai thasha thora wa,

Ya sandi ou okkki ya thri speena khanda jora shawa,

Ogora da tyari na rana jura shwa,

Ya jwandun armaan o ya rangeen nasha ranguna shwa,

Meena ru muskai shwa pa khanda warta guluna shu."

Translation

"O my beloved, come, see darkness has changed into light,

A new spring has created a new world of flowers,

The earth was utterly barren and dry,

The happiness and playfulness had departed from earth,

Leaves were yet to sprout, it seemed as if they were overshadowed by death,

Life was bereft of sound music,

The spring brought back and filled with laughter,

O my beloved, come, see the darkness has changed into light,

Or life was desired or colored intoxication became different colours,

The love laughed and the flowers accompanied her."

Keats once again very vividly and graphically expresses his feelings about beauty in his famous "Ode on a Grecian Urn," as he ends the Ode with these significant lines:

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty, that is all,

Ye know on earth, and all Ye all need to know.

Feelings like these are also given inn Ghani Khan's poetry when he writes the following verses:

"Husan de bus husan che hum khuday ao hum janaan de

De faani makan ke bal mashal da laa makaan de

Yao da gulaab makh ke che khakara kom jawaboona de,

Nishta yao hum nishta da manteeq pa kitaboona ke."

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Translation

"Beauty is beauty which is both God and Jaanan,

In this mortal world, this is immortal thing,

A single short look at a rose answers your many questions that are not to be found in the books of logic."

Similar things are meant by Keats when he says in the "Hyperion":

"A thing of beauty is the a joy forever:

Its loveliness increases; it will never,

Pass into nothingness."

Like Ghanian thoughts, similar Keatsian thoughts are also expressed in the ending linesof "Ode on a Grecian Urn."

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty that is all

Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

Some critics hold Ghani's concept of beauty as eternal and Keatsian concept of beauty is considered as transient which they have also called "a phase Beauty" but the Keatsian impermanence of beauty has got its own importance and an eternal joy as these lines of Keats express his impermanent nature of beauty beautifully.

"She dwells with Beauty--- Beauty that must die;

And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips

Bidding adieu (St III)

But it does not at all mean that Keats does not believe in Eternal Beauty, his overall poetic works and specially his Odes are expressively explicit in the concept of Eternal beauty. Keats, very much like Ghani, has the belief in reaching to the divinity by losing himself in the beauty around him. Davies describes three circles of beauty, the first circle has the creation of material and the condition of humanity, the second circle has the happiness that follows after the first circle is over but the third circle, the circle of which Keats refers to in his long poem,

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"Endymion"

"Wherein lies happiness? In that which beck's

Our ready minds to fellowship divine,

Full alchemiz'd, and free of space. (Book I. 777-780)

The concept of the circle of happiness is not still accomplished and over, but an essence of oneness has got in:

"Like spirits"

..... But there are

Richer entanglements, enthrallments far

More self-destroying, leading by degrees,

To the chief intensity: the crown of theses

Is made of love and friendship, and sits high

Upon the forehead of humanity. (Book I. 797-802)

It is natural for a man to attain a point of liberty and happiness by virtue of his patience and fortitude and Keats very correctly points out to the freedom from self-hood and other worldly pursuits which push him to such a high point of happiness that love can attain.

As these lines in Book I (807-815) express such highest of point of happiness:

"Its influence

Thrown in our eyes, genders a novel sense,

At which we start and fret; till in the end,

Melting into its radiance, we blend,

Mingle, and so become a part of it,

Nor with aught else can our souls interknit,

So wingedly: when we combine therewith,

Life's self is nourished by its proper pith,

And we are nurtured like a pelican brood.

These Keatsian circles are almost like the Ghanian circles of "Jahan (World), Zaan (Self) and Janan (Beloved)." Ghani Khan also gives us the same things which are shown through these circles. As he says in the Pashto poem, Zama, Zama, Zama (Going and Keep Going):

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"Khu za zama, zama, tal rawan yam pa makha,

Yu maqam tha rawan yama, yu maqam tha ba rase gam,

Ao pa lara chi sa ragala ka tiara vi ka raana,

Za raana ki yama khushala khu tyaruna na vireegam."

Translation:

I am on my way to my destination and am determined to reach there,

Whatever befalls me on the way whether light or darkness but I like light

And darkness does frighten me.

The main aim of Ghani's life is movement to his Janan, his beloved who seems to be his end point and in another poem of his "Jalaal" his this feeling of meeting and finding him is hinted at.

"Da chi thai ae janana, da chi stha masti raana da,

Da zama meena armaan day da zama jaraa khandaa da,

Day zama sarur ki pat raaz stha da husan ao kamal day,

Da zama kamzure stargi stha da khaist jaa or jalaal day (Jalaal)"

Translation:

When you are there my janaan (Beloved), your playfulness and happiness is my light,

Your love turns my tears into laughter,

All my ecstasy is due to your love and beauty,

Your glory and grandeur are reflected in my weak eyes (Jalaal, Grandeur)

Earthly Love Expression and Wine: Impact in the Poetry of Ghani Khan and John Keats

Some critics blame Ghani and Keats to be devoid of earthly love. But they are wrong as both the poets are very much aware of this love and through this love they want to reach the ultimate end and highest levels of spiritual love.

Ghani is noted saying about this kind of love in the following lines.

"Ka dunia ke wahadat nawoo,

Ma ledalee da cheena,

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Da Allah da nagsh kamal day

Makh zama da dilruba.

Translation:

It is not easy to see the vision of God but presence of spring and my beloved face are the sufficient proofs of God's existence.

Both the poets have the imprint of women in their poetry but Ghani's approach seems to be more mature than Keats' as he lived to see the ripe days of life. But in his youth he was like any young person impressed by every beautiful face he saw, as the following verses indicate:

"Dalta yu khwata azghi di,

Bal khwa saange da nargas,

Da hunar elam saya ki,

Garzee gul lubana mees.

(Da Landan Mashuqai, London Beloved or beloved from London)

Translation:

The thorns and Nargis (Tulip or Narcissus) branches exist side by side,

Under the pretext of education, many roaming beauties are seen.

But, in one of his poems, like any other traditional poet, he is found singing in praise of his beloved and wanting to meet her as soon as possible.

"Stha firaaq pama qayamat ko,

Yara sa ba vi qayamat os,

Stha pa eeshaq ki rooswa khwaakh yam,

Yara sa ba vi eezat os,

Stha yu khoog nazar dibari,

Stha yu dua pasti khabari,

Ma ta mulk janat janat kar

Gura sa ba vi janat os,

Yar da roon jalbal manam,

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Stha da dwaoo stargu pa thama,

Khwaar Ghani logaran proot day,

Stha ba sook kavi sifat os.

Translation:

"Your isolation made my life very miserable,

And how this miserable isolation would be,

I love to be disgraced in your love,

Without you honor means nothing now,

Your one single lovely look,

Your short sweet wordings,

Can change my life into heaven,

The heaven means nothing if I have your love,

Lying abject on the ground for your single glimpse of your eyes,

If he is there, who is going to praise your and your beauty.

Ghani's concept of love got deeper when he married Roshan. In his love for her, he wanted to find solace. This strong feeling of love is seen in these lines as he had just read a letter from her in jail.

"Ma da duaoo lapu khwaoru tala jwand au jehan jur kro,

Khapali meene dase yuram bal me tala janaan jur ka,

Da chez a da wafa daka da junon jehan la laram,

Da me laal haghalta oomnt da hama laaloonu khwwale,

Da sabot zama da meene da emaan au wafa da,

Da zama rooh chi rokhan shu da stargiyi kree balee.

(Da Faridun da Moor Khatha, a letter from Faridun's Mother)

Translation:

I made a new life and world for you from two handfuls of dirt,

I got so much engrossed in your love, from that deep love I made a new beloved for you,

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With this deep feeing of love, I entered the valley of madness,

I found you, my beloved, (my gem) the best than all the other gems,

This extreme madness in your love is the proof of my love, faith and belief,

As my soul got enlightened, then it made the two eyes shine.

(Da Faridun da Moor Khatha, a letter from Faridun's Mother)

Having such strong belief in love, still he considers the concept of women very realistically. In contrast Keats had little belief so far as women and love were concerned. In "Endymian" he is not happy much with love. We find in book III, the moon goddess is not presented very cheerfully but as a lovely maiden who

....dost pine

For one as sorrowful, they cheek is pale,

For one whose cheek is pale.

His concept of physical love realization could not fit into his spiritual idealization of love. But it does not mean that his concept of love altogether too rigid that finds no place in his poetry but rather it is so deep for Fanny that made him compose unique poetry for the world. His intense feeling of love he expresses in letter to Fanny in these words:

"I have two luxuries to brood over in my walks, your loveliness and the hour of my death, O, that I could take possession of them both in the same moment".

His fear like this might be interpreted in the lines from the sonnet,

"When I have fears that I may cease to be."

His poetry sometimes also is brim with the romantic feelings and the following lines from St. Agnes clearly reflect his romantic love.

"Beyond a mortal man impassion'd far,

At these voluptuous accents, he arose,

Ethereal, flush'd and like a throbbing star,

Seen mid the sapphire heaven's deep repose,

Into her dream he melted as the rose

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Blended its odour with violet,

Solution sweet, meantime the frost wind blows,

Like love's alarum patterning the sharp sleet,

Against the window-panes, St. Agnes moon hath set. (St.36)

Both these great poets share their feelings for wine and its intoxicating effects upon them in their poetry. As Ghani says about this in the following verses:

"Chi nasha shama da khapal zana ozam,

Laka ooze tanzare da pangrena,

Mast zargay da ghama da range ochat she,

Laka poorta par karei gul da aderee na,

Da rond wajud majbora thaan makan kie pregdam,

Au da kyal pa khaperai bandi shama sour,

Da oowam asman pa seelei karan rawan,

Laton da jwand cheena da rana kor.

Translation:

"When I get intoxicated, my soul leaves my body,

Like a caged bird leaves its confinement,

My soul is then lifted like a flower raising its head in the graveyard,

I leave my physical body,

And by the help of my imagination I sour to the seventh sky to roam about,

I come here in search of life source and the place of light.

Looking at Keats's Nightingale, almost similar feelings are sought as the following Keatsian verses indicate,

"O, for a draught of vintage that hath been,

Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,

Tasting of Flora and the country green,

Dance and Provencal song, and sun burnt mirth,

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O for a beaker full of the warm South,

Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,

With beaded bubbles, winking at the brim,

And purple-stained mouth,

That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,

And with thee fade away into the forest dim.

Conclusion

The list of similarities between these two great romantic giant poets of literature of two completely diverse cultures may be very long. Ghani and Keats are similar to a great extent with few exceptions. Both the poets give expression to feelings and emotions, which can be appealing to everyone of any age or time or place.

Ghani Khan, like Keats, was also a great lover of beauty. His beauty concept transcends the limitations of time and enriches the essence of civilization and culture. Keats did not have, like Ghani Khan, the experience of life - the reasons being his ill health and youth. In both poets, love goes quite musically, the elements of musicality in the expression of love in the poetry of both poets is very strong. Despite having the various aspects of similarity between the poetry of these two poets, there are also points of differences. Keats' style is sensuous while Ghani's style is more simple and straight forward. They both believed in the natural expression of poetry. Both of these great romantic poets from East and West are great sources of inspiration for the lovers of literature.

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