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FLEETING MOMENTS, TIMELESS LOVE: AN AESTHETIC ANALYSIS OF THE ROMANTIC PARADOX IN JOHN KEATS' "BRIGHT STAR"

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Abstract:

This study presents an aesthetic analysis of John Keats' "Bright Star", focusing on the romantic paradox between the longing for permanence and the transient nature of human experience. The research aimed to explore how Keats employed symbolism, rhythm, and figurative language to express this tension. Utilizing a qualitative method grounded in aesthetic theory and guided by Mambrol's framework, the study closely examined the poem's artistic elements to uncover its thematic intricacies. The findings revealed that Keats effectively juxtaposed the eternal stillness of the star with the warmth and temporality of human intimacy, using rhythmic variation and vivid imagery to emphasize this contrast. The poem ultimately suggests a preference for fleeting emotional connection over unchanging solitude. This analysis contributes to Sustainable Development Goal 4 by highlighting the role of literary studies in developing critical thinking, interpretative skills, and appreciation for poetic craft. The study recommends further research into the digital pedagogical applications of Romantic poetry in contemporary classrooms.

Keywords: aesthetic analysis; "Bright Star"; figurative language; John Keats; romantic poetry

1. Introduction

Love, with its longing for permanence, often collided with the fleeting nature of life, creating a paradox that resonated deeply in poetry. This study, titled "Fleeting Moments, Timeless Love: An

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Aesthetic Analysis of the Romantic Paradox in John Keats' "Bright Star"", sought to explore how the poem presents the conflict between the desire for lasting love and the reality of change as depicted in Keats's sonnet. We aimed to describe the artistic choices Keats made to show this tension between permanence and transience within the context of romantic expression. Through a rigorous aesthetic analysis, this research examined how the poet's employment of literary devices—such as symbolism, rhythm, and figurative language—articulated the inherent tension between enduring love and the ephemeral nature of human existence.

While extensive scholarly discourse has examined Keats's poetic composition through various critical lenses, there remains a notable gap in research that foregrounds an aesthetic analysis of "Bright Star" in relation to its thematic juxtaposition of constancy and impermanence. Prevailing studies predominantly concentrate on Keats's philosophical inclinations, his engagement with nature, and the autobiographical dimensions of his work. However, fewer inquiries have systematically investigated the role of his poetic techniques in shaping the aesthetic and thematic depth of "Bright Star". This study seeks to bridge this gap by emphasizing the artistic mechanisms through which Keats conveyed the paradox of love's yearning for eternity amidst the transient nature of human life.

To frame this investigation, the study incorporated insights from both linguistic and aesthetic theory. Drawing from Janet Holmes's (2013) framework on sociolinguistic patterns—particularly her observation that women often use language to express intimacy, solidarity, and emotional connection—and Monteza's (2023) conceptualization of the "intimate-low-informal-affective pattern," this research examined how Keats's poetic language achieves profound emotional resonance. While Holmes's theory provides the foundation for understanding affective and relational language use, Monteza extends this by applying the pattern to literary texts. In Keats's "Bright Star", such a pattern emerges through sensory imagery and direct personal address, which together create a sense of immediacy and emotional depth. Through these theoretical lenses, the study offers a richer understanding of the linguistic techniques that give Keats's poetry its lasting emotional impact.

In this research, guided by Nasrullah's (2017) insights on symbol use, rhythm, figurative language, and poetic skill, Keats's use of symbols, like in the case of metaphor and personification, the use of rhythm, figurative language, and poetic skill was explored. This analysis is intended to demonstrate how all these factors contribute to the beauty, musicality, and thematic richness of his poetry, particularly concerning identity, death, and human experience.

Finally, this study was meant to show Keats' ability to convey these deep and opposing ideas in "Bright Star". In observing the way he uses symbols, rhythm, and figurative language, people learning Romantic Poetry will be able to do so. Furthermore, how a poem is built, its form and techniques, was shown here as well, which plays a major role in a poem's reflectiveness and how to be powerful. This brings out how important Keats is to English Literature.

More specifically, this study aimed to achieve four primary objectives:

- 1) Examine the symbolic representations within the poem and their significance in conveying themes of permanence and mortality.
- 2) Analyze the poem's rhythmic structure and its contribution to the emotional and thematic

depth.

- 3) Explore the figurative language employed by Keats and its impact on the reader's interpretation and the poem's aesthetic depth.
- 4) Demonstrate how the aesthetic approach effectively reveals Keats's artistic craftsmanship and the fusion of beauty with emotional depth in "Bright Star".

2. Literature Review

John Keats, a prominent Romantic poet, is celebrated for his vivid imagery and emotional depth. His work was deeply influenced by the Romantic movement, though he also engaged with elements of Victorian literature, modernism, and symbolism. Marked by his passionate love for Fanny Brawne, his struggles with tuberculosis, and the looming shadow of his early death at 25 in 1821, Keats's brief life profoundly shaped his poetic output (Hough). These biographical experiences inform the emotional intensity of "*Bright Star*", imbuing it with a personal resonance that is central to Romantic expression.

The poem primarily adheres to the Shakespearean sonnet form—14 lines in iambic pentameter with a concluding rhymed couplet—but also incorporates elements of the Petrarchan sonnet, particularly the volta between octave and sestet (Schoenfeldt, 2016). Keats employed a range of literary devices to enhance expressive power, including personification, portraying the star as an eternal observer (Fermanis, 2010), and a stark contrast between the star's cold isolation and human intimacy (Sperry, 2014). Alliteration, such as "soft fall and swell," adds to the poem's rhythmic and lyrical quality.

Given its emotional intensity and artistic depth, "Bright Star" exemplifies Romantic poetry, making an aesthetic analysis rooted in Romanticism particularly fitting. Romanticism championed individual emotion, imagination, and an appreciation for nature. As M.H. Abrams notes in Natural Supernaturalism (1971), the movement marked a shift from neoclassical rationality to subjective experience. The works of can be seen to have shifted. Wordsworth believed that the most significant of poetry were those that came from "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings". Coleridge was interested in how imagination could perform as a mediator between a more disanalogous self and nature (Asim, Amjad, & Akram, 2017).

Romantic literature's focus on nature, emotional introspection, and personal reflection is a Fertile lens for analyzing "Bright Star" is reflection. Scholars can foreground the poem's inherent beauty, its structure, aesthetic and emotional resonance, and better appreciate the poem without doing so in terms of biographical detail.

Recent scholarship has caused "Bright Star"'s layered meanings to be brought back to light. Describing the star's symbolism from the perspective of contemporary astronomy, Hasted (2023) claims that Keats combined Romantic idealism with a scientific quest to portray constancy against cosmic flux. Yamauchi (2015) charts the poem through manuscript versions and traces the concomitant arc of Keats's revisions with the emotional trajectory of his relationship with Brawne. True to this, Ramadani and Shishko (2024) assert that Keats' influence on modern literature remains strong, as Romantic ideals about personality, emotive force, and nature continue to shape contemporary writing.

Together, these studies provide a fresh understanding of Keats's work. Its emotional, historical, as well as poetic qualities. Yet, nonetheless, they hold promise in demonstrating how more should be done to fully investigate the ways in which Keats expressed the paradox of timeless love in mortal existence and, by extension, to frame the aim of this study, which is to deem artistic form important and the emotional effect.

3. Methods

This literary methodology, based on the aesthetic style of the poem, was employed to examine Keats's "Bright Star". The study used a qualitative, text-based approach, close reading, and aesthetic literary theory to explore how Keats harnesses his symbolism, rhythm, and figurative language to convey themes of love, eternality, and mortality. By careful textual analysis and with input from scholars, the research established the depths of the poem's emotional and intellectual content.

Additional qualitative studies expanded the preliminary results, which enabled researchers to examine the artistic structure and thematic elements of Keats's poem. Through this approach, the researcher could explore Keats's artistic control of the poem's content by analyzing his fusion between beauty, form and meaning. Romanticism preferred to combine permanent pursuits with temporary emotional experience through its analytical methods. The poetic form functioned optimally in this analysis since it concentrated on the artistic and affective characteristics of Keats' composition rather than his personal biographical information (Sharma, 2021).

Nasrullah (2017) developed a framework that the research used as supplemental analysis, featuring four key aspects of poetry, including:

- a) symbolism,
- b) rhythm,
- c) figurative language, and
- d) the poet's creative ability.

The researchers analyzed these elements through the framework to demonstrate their collective contribution to poetic beauty with coded messages and artistic design. The investigation demonstrated how "Bright Star" represents Keats' poetic beliefs and expresses his pursuit of eternal beauty through poetic structures that increase readers' appreciation of its artistic value.

The study followed the principles of Aestheticism, which were later reformulated into a philosophy by Walter Pater (1873) and Oscar Wilde (1891). They developed the aesthetic approach to art, where form, alongside sensory engagement, became crucial components in appreciating art. The examination revealed how Keats (1819) successfully composed a beautiful poetic masterpiece with intense sensory elements that established "*Bright Star*" as a romantic poetry gem.

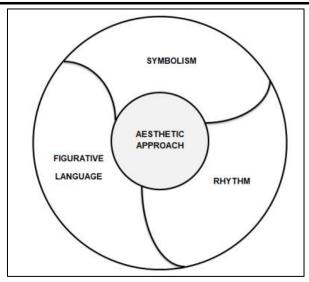


Figure 1: Nasrullah Mambrol's Framework

4. Results and Discussion

"Bright Star" was one of Keats's finest sonnets, written from the perspective of an individual who sought eternal companionship with a beloved (Tang, 2023). The poem expressed the speaker's longing for permanence and eternal love in contrast to the fleeting nature of human existence. The bright star symbolized an eternal force, reflecting the speaker's wish to remain constant. The poem meditated on nature, love, and immortality. Unlike the isolated and distant nature of the star, the speaker yearned for an everlasting union with his beloved (Roe, 2013).

4.1. Symbolism

Symbolic representations within the poem and their significance in conveying themes of permanence and mortality:

"Bright star! would I were steadfast as thou art— Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night, And watching, with eternal lids apart..." (Lines 1-3)

In these lines, the "bright star" was a symbol of something that never changed. When the poem said "lone splendour," it meant the star was beautiful but alone. According to the poet, the star maintained its fixed position in the sky and remained permanent by leaving its "Eternal lids apart." The star in this context represented a desire to achieve permanent and eternal existence. The speaker had to spend time by himself because this quality made it possible to decipher his intricate yearning. The speaker wanted the star's constant qualities, but at that moment, the phrase "lone splendour" immediately produced a feeling of being far away. The star remained alone in space because it existed in total seclusion, far distant from everything. proximity or reciprocal relationship. The star preserved a constant space between its eyes to signify everlasting observation. An observation devoid of emotion or connection. The speaker's wish to be "steadfast as thou art" was thus immediately tempered by the explicit rejection of this isolated

existence. Meaning, he wanted permanence, which is something he seemed to fear only without human warmth and intimacy. The star's symbolic representation of unchanging permanence was therefore intertwined with a lack of emotional engagement and relational closeness. Moreover, Heaney (1996) argued that the star's unwavering presence embodied the speaker's desire for permanence, yet its distant and cold nature highlighted the limitations of such an ideal.

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"Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath..." (Lines 10-13)
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Then, the poem talked about "fair love's ripening breast" in line 10. This was a symbol of human love and closeness. "Soft fall and swell" in line 11 and "tender- taken breath" in line 13 showed how real and alive this love was. This part of the poem showed the speaker choosing to be with someone and enjoying the feeling of love, even if it didn't last forever.

In context, the poem presented a profound choice: to pursue an idealized, unchanging existence, symbolized by the solitary star, or to embrace the ephemeral, yet deeply meaningful, moments of human connection, symbolized by the lover's presence. The speaker's passionate desire to remain in the intimate embrace of his beloved, despite its inherent impermanence, revealed his ultimate preference for the richness of lived experience over the static perfection of eternity. Here, Keats showed that real happiness wasn't about being alone and never changing. Instead, it was found in the warmth and energy of human connection, even though he knew time passes and death is inevitable. The phrase "fair love's ripening breast" is really important for the mentioned idea. The word "ripening" makes you think of something becoming full of life and at its best, which is the opposite of a star that never changes. Furthermore, the breast itself had long been associated with nourishment and sustenance and known as the very source of life for an infant. In this sense, the "ripening breast" symbolized the source of emotional and physical sustenance for the speaker, providing comfort, warmth, and a sense of being alive.

4.2. Rhythm

Rhythmic structure and its contribution to the emotional and thematic depth.

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"Bright star! would I were steadfast as thou art—
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night,
And watching, with eternal lids apart..." (Lines 1-3)
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Just as Keats used symbolism to express the contrast between permanence and mortality, his rhythmic choices further reinforce this emotional conflict. In this part, the poem began with a steady, regular beat, established by Keats' use of iambic pentameter (Gillespie, 2009). This created a calm, even rhythm, mirroring the tranquil image of the star. The measured cadence of these lines reflected the speaker's initial contemplation and admiration for the star's unchanging

nature. This rhythm set a tone of thoughtful observation, drawing the reader into the speaker's initial desire for a steadfast, unchanging existence.

"No—yet still steadfast, still unchangeable, Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast, To feel for ever its soft fall and swell, Awake for ever in a sweet unrest..." (Lines 9-12)

But then, line 9 hit with a sudden "No-," which totally changed the smooth rhythm we had before. It's as if the speaker suddenly stopped and thought differently, turning away from the idea of just being a perfect, lonely star. When he repeated "still" in "still steadfast, still unchangeable," it really pointed out how the star never changes, making it different from what comes next. As the poem starts talking about his "fair love's ripening breast," the rhythm gets softer and more flowy, like it's trying to feel the warmth and closeness of being with someone. Phrases like "soft fall and swell" and "tender-taken breath" made you imagine gentle movements and how things feel, bringing life into the picture. Furthermore, "sweet unrest" kind of sums up how love can be both nice and exciting at the same time. So, the rhythm of the poem changes as the speaker's feelings change. The steady beat at the start felt like wanting to stay the same forever, but the softer rhythm later shows the energy and warmth of being with someone. Keats utilized the rhythm to really highlight what the poem is about: choosing between being alone and unchanging, or being with someone and feeling alive, even if it doesn't last. The change in rhythm helped us feel how the speaker goes from wanting this perfect, untouchable thing to wanting the real, warm feeling of being loved.

The concluding line, "Awake for ever in a sweet unrest," even made the speaker's wish to last forever more complicated. Even though he wanted to stay in that close moment "forever," adding "sweet unrest" shows that things are moving and there's a mix of feelings. "Awake for ever" reminds us how the star always watches, but now it's mixed with feeling his lover and this "sweet unrest." This phrase shows that love is a bit of a contradiction: it feels good and safe ("sweet") but also keeps you very aware and perhaps a bit worried that it won't last ("unrest"). This "sweet unrest" felt like a more real way of lasting, one that includes all the changes in feelings and knowing that time passes, instead of just a cold, lonely forever. It suggested that the speaker finds a better, more satisfying way to feel like things will last within the lively and emotional experience of love, even if it doesn't stay exactly the same, than in the star's cold, separate forever.

4.3. Figurative Language

To further enhance the poem's emotional and thematic depth, Keats employed figurative language to paint vivid pictures and express deep feelings through non-literal expressions. In John Keats' "*Bright star*," we saw this through (a) personification, (b) metaphors, and (c) imagery, which helped us understand the poem's themes of permanence and human experience. Ultimately, figurative language, as a departure from literal expression, employed words and phrases that transcended their usual meanings, often through comparison, personification,

onomatopoeia, or exaggeration (Sala-Suszyńska, 2016), and significantly influenced the reader's interpretation while adding aesthetic depth to the poem.

4.3.1. Personification

"And watching, with eternal lids apart, Like Nature's patient sleepless Eremite, The moving waters at their priestlike task Of pure ablution round earth's human shores..." (Lines 3-6)

In this part, Keats made the stars and nature seem alive, giving them human qualities that made them more powerful in the poem. Specifically, the phrase "eternal lids apart" (eyes always open) suggested the star never stopped watching, showing how constantly it observed. Furthermore, by comparing the star to a "patient sleepless Eremite" (calm, never-sleeping hermit)—someone who lived alone and thought deeply—Keats stressed its isolation and lasting presence, making it seem both sacred and distant. Similarly, the "priestlike task" (holy work) of the moving waters added a religious feel to nature, showing it as performing a cleaning ritual. Consequently, by personifying these elements, Keats mixed nature with spirituality, changed the star from just a star into a symbol of something that always stayed the same. Moreover, by putting the unchanging sky against the always-moving water, he showed the tension between stillness and change, which reflects the main idea of the poem. Ultimately, the employment of personification made the poem feel thoughtful and reflective, drew the reader into its philosophical depth and enhanced its aesthetic richness.

4.3.2. Metaphor

"Like Nature's patient sleepless Eremite..." (Line 4)

The metaphor compared the star to an "Eremite," a religious person who withdrew from society in search of deeper meaning. This showed the star's separation—it lived outside of human problems, watching but not joining in. At first, the speaker liked this unchanging life, wanting its steadiness and permanence. However, this comparison also showed how lonely such a life was, hinting that the speaker would eventually choose human closeness over being alone. This comparison helped the reader follow the speaker's changing view, from thinking unchanging steadiness was perfect to seeing that it was empty. It made the reader think about whether being alone and lasting forever was really good. Also, the religious feeling of the Eremite added to the poem's respectful, almost prayer-like tone, making it more thoughtful.

4.3.3. Imagery

"Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast, To feel for ever its soft fall and swell, *Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath..."* (Lines 10-13)

Subsequently, Keats transitioned from the star's detached observation to a deeply intimate scene, employed sensory imagery. Specifically, tactile imagery like "soft fall and swell" evoked the gentle, rhythmic motion of the lover's breathing that created a sense of warmth and closeness. Moreover, auditory imagery like "tender-taken breath" allowed the reader to almost perceive the delicate sound of her breathing, heightened the scene's tenderness and intimacy. Essentially, the contrast between the distant, visual portrayal of the star and the immediate, sensory experience of the lover highlighted the opposition between eternity and fleeting human connection. Consequently, this sensory richness allowed the reader to understand the speaker's intense desire for permanence in love, rather than in the cold, distant eternity of the star. Additionally, by shifting from cosmic imagery to embodied experience, Keats underscored the beauty of human connection, suggested that love's impermanence enhanced its value. Ultimately, the repetition of "still, still" reinforced the speaker's longing to preserve this moment, which reinforced the poem's central theme: the wish to immortalize temporary love.

In essence, Keats strategically used symbols, rhythm, and descriptive language to show us how much people want things to last forever. But, he also showed us that real happiness comes from the warm, changing moments we share with others, not from being alone and unchanging. Basically, Keats made it clear that life is more meaningful when we connect with people, even if those moments don't last.

4.4. Author's Craftsmanship

Keats' poem "*Bright Star*" really showed his skill as a writer, blending beautiful language with deep feelings. He employed (a) symbols, (b) rhythm, and (c) descriptive language to turn a simple poem into a powerful look at what it meant to be human.

As we had already discussed, Keats used symbols to show a clear choice between something that lasts forever and the short, meaningful moments of human life. The "bright star" (Lines 1-3), with its "lone splendour" and "eternal lids apart," represented a lonely, unchanging existence. On the other hand, "fair love's ripening breast" (Lines 10-13) stood for the warmth and closeness of human love. This symbolic contrast, as we had seen earlier, helped us understand the poem's main ideas about life and death. Also, Keats' use of rhythm made the poem's feelings stronger. The steady beat in the first lines, like the calm image of the star, created a peaceful feeling. But the sudden "No" (Line 9) broke this rhythm, showing a change in the speaker's mind. And then, when it came to the words of love, the beat became gentler, softer and more human. Once again, as we had talked about earlier, this change in rhythm indicated the feelings of the speaker.

The figurative language added to make this poem more vivid was also used by Keats. For instance, he finds the star a patient, sleepless Eremite, as he once gave it human qualities (Line 4). According to him (Line 5), nature acts as a "priestlike task". Additionally, he compared the star to an "Eremite" (Line 4), i.e., a solitary star. The contrast of the distance of, and feeling of closeness to, the star when described in Lines 10–13 brought out detailed descriptions of how

love operates. As we had discussed, these elements in the poem are rich to see, which makes the poem more beautiful and helps it make more sense.

By choosing human love over its perfect and lonely star, Keats gave the key idea of Romantic poetry, which is that beauty and meaning were most powerful in our human experiences, all their ups and downs in experiences. The poem's beauty helped us see the speaker's feelings and think about the poem's deeper meaning. Keats' ability to express these complex feelings in a short poem showed his skill as a writer. It was through "*Bright Star*," where he showed us the human desire for things to last, and our acceptance of life's short moments, which made it a great example of Romantic poetry.

Beyond these literary devices, several themes emerged that deepened the poem's exploration of the human condition. Notably, "Bright Star" grappled with the tension between transience and eternal love. As Hamilton (2016) observed, the poem aligned with the Romantic notion that passion and beauty were intensified by their fleeting nature. Keats' choice to embrace the ephemeral warmth of human connection, "Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast," Line 10 over the star's static perfection "Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night," Line 2 underscored this theme. Furthermore, the themes of death and immortality resonated profoundly and reflected Keats' personal struggles with his own mortality. As Garvey (2019) pointed out, Keats' confrontation with illness lent an urgency to his contemplation of permanence and the desire to transcend the limitations of human existence. The star, with its perceived eternity "eternal lids apart," Line 3, served as a poignant counterpoint to the speaker's awareness of his own mortality. Keats also utilized nature and the universe as a backdrop for philosophical contemplation. As Keats himself demonstrated in his poetry, natural imagery was a powerful tool to ponder meaningful questions about life and death (Keats, 1991). The star, referred to as a celestial entity, "Bright star! would I were steadfast as thou art—," Line 1, became a focal point for this exploration that allowed the speaker to reflect on the vastness of existence and the human desire for meaning within it.

Building upon this understanding of Keats' masterful use of literary techniques and the emergence of significant thematic concerns, "Bright Star," with its strong emotional core and carefully crafted artistry, served as a compelling example of Romantic poetry, making an analytical approach grounded in Romanticism particularly insightful. This literary examination adopted an aesthetic perspective, prioritizing the poem's inherent artistic qualities and emphasizing its capacity to evoke beauty and profound emotional responses. Within this framework, Romanticism emerged as a significant intellectual and artistic movement that championed the importance of individual emotion, the powerful nature of imagination, and a deep and often spiritual connection with the natural world. This fundamental shift, as articulated by M. H. Abrams in Natural Supernaturalism, represented a notable departure from the emphasis on reason and order characteristic of Neoclassical thought, instead foregrounding the subjective experiences of imagination and personal feeling. This key transformation was readily apparent in the thematic concerns and stylistic choices of prominent Romantic poets. For instance, William Wordsworth (1800) famously underscored the significance of the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" as the origin of authentic poetic expression in his lyrical works, while Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1817) explored the crucial role of the imaginative faculty as a vital link

between individual consciousness and the encompassing natural world, a concept thoroughly discussed in Biographia Literaria (Asim, Amjad, & Akram, 2017).

6. Conclusion

The analysis of John Keats' "Bright Star" revealed a profound longing for love and the desire for eternal connection. The poem exemplified the Romantic tradition by emphasizing aesthetic beauty and emotional intensity, achieved through the masterful use of figurative language, particularly (a) personification, (b) metaphors, and (c) imagery. These elements created a rich and immersive experience, reinforcing the Romantic ideal that beauty was most poignant because of its impermanence. Moreover, his artistic mastery in "Bright Star" was shown to enhance literary appreciation and deepen understanding of core Romantic themes, namely love and the yearning for eternal bonds. Additionally, this study argued that analyzing this poem advances Sustainable Development Goal 4 by developing critical thinking, literary appreciation, and interpretative competence, which are essential for language and symbolic literacy. The research concluded that the study of Romantic poetry cultivates empathetic, reflective, and culturally informed individuals, thus contributing to the advancement of literary education.

Despite today's rapid digital world, Keats's "Bright Star" proved that literature continues to inspire deep thought and emotional strength. Reading these kinds of works helps us appreciate beauty and human nature, which makes us more caring and thoughtful people. Future research could examine why Romantic poetry remains relevant in modern education and discover new ways to teach Keats in the digital age. Ultimately, reflecting on love and how things change through his poetry shows that literature is crucial for our personal and intellectual development.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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