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From Sensuous Beauty to Revolutionary Longing: A Comparative Study of Romanticism, Melancholy, and Social Consciousness in the Poetry of John Keats and Asrar-ul-Haq Majaz

Abdul Rouf Malik
Post-graduate Student.
maliksujaad43@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0009-0009-7196-6690
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Abstract:
The paper compares the poetry of John Keats and Asrar-ul-Haq Majaz through three connected ideas: romantic imagination, melancholy, and social consciousness. Although the poets belong to different languages, centuries, and political settings, both turn intense feeling into a musical and image-rich poetic form. While Keats usually begins with sensory beauty and moves toward questions of mortality, transience, art, and the limits of imaginative escape, Majaz similarly begins with beauty, love, music, and loneliness, but his lyric voice repeatedly enters the modern city and confronts gender restriction, political domination, and class inequality. The paper argues that Majaz does not merely repeat European Romanticism in Urdu; rather, he revises romantic longing by directing private sorrow toward collective awakening and revolutionary possibility. At the same time, Keats is not treated as an apolitical worshipper of beauty; his poems show a serious awareness of human suffering and the fragile conditions under which beauty is experienced. By analysing Keats's major odes and Majaz's poems such as "Vagabond," "The Traveller," "Revolution," "Broken Lute," and "To the Young Lady," the paper identifies a shared poetics of longing but two different destinations for it: aesthetic understanding in Keats and socially engaged transformation in Majaz. Ultimately, this comparative approach helps in placing English Romanticism and Urdu progressive poetry in a relation of creative dialogue rather than influence alone.

Keywords: Romanticism, Melancholy, Sensuous Beauty, Revolutionary Longing, Social Consciousness, Comparative Literature.

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Introduction

John Keats and Asrar-ul-Haq Majaz are rarely studied together because they belong to distinct literary histories. Keats is a central poet of English Romanticism, while Majaz is usually discussed within twentieth-century Urdu poetry and the Progressive Writers' Movement. Nevertheless, their poems meet at a productive point, as both poets channel beauty, desire, sorrow, music, and unfulfilled longing through lyrical speakers who are strongly affected by what they see and hear. For both poets, Moonlight, flowers, music, night, love, and loneliness are not decorative objects, but fundamental ways of thinking about the human condition. This comparison becomes especially meaningful when one notices how differently the two poets direct this emotional intensity. Keats often transforms pain into reflection on beauty, mortality, and art. Majaz, while retaining romantic lyricism, increasingly transforms pain into protest against the conditions that create loneliness and deprivation.

Keats's reputation rests partly on the extraordinary sensory power of his language, which allows physical senses to enter thought. In his biography, Walter Jackson Bate connects this sensuous gift with Keats's rapid intellectual and poetic development (411-17, 580-85). Helen Vendler's study of the odes demonstrates the formal complexity through which sensation becomes philosophical inquiry: “It has not been generally realized that Keats’s search for ‘intensity led him as much to a deliberate limiting of sense-variety as to a broadening of sensation, and led him as well to a search for an ‘intensity’ of intellect that would rival the intensity of sense”(46). Majaz's poetry has likewise been praised for lyric charm and musical force. Professor Asloob Ahmad Ansari said that Majaz’s work is a celebration of self rather than a revolutionary statement. His widespread popularity stems from his joyful, engaging, and deeply romantic poetry, reflecting a personality immersed in self-obsession and intense ecstasy (Rafiq 39). This

lyric charm and musical force can also be traced to what Mehr Afshan Farooqi said about him: “His verse had a disarming simplicity, an exuberance which made his compositions seem effortless. His style reminds one of a much older generation of poets who excelled in the craft of composing in meter, rhyme and end rhyme. But Majaz also brings subtle, delicate themes to the ghazal that are novel and charming.” Professor Carlo Coppola also praised Majaz’s lyricism, identifying it as the poet’s most remarkable talent. This lyrical gift primarily shines through his vivid use of similes, as beautifully captured in these lines: “That wan moon arose from behind the palace/ Like a *mulla’s* turban, like a *baniya’s* ledger,/ Like the youth of a beggar, the youth of widows.” While much of his other writing remains grounded in mundane reality, moments of lyricism like this reach extraordinary heights. It is precisely this lyrical quality that bestows upon Majaz a position among the greats of modern Urdu poetry (61). But his critical identity is often captured by Carlo Coppola's influential description of him as a “revolutionary romantic”(60). The phrase is useful because it helps avoid a false choice between romance and politics. In Majaz, romantic feeling is not abandoned when social consciousness appears; rather, it becomes the emotional energy of social criticism. Rakhshanda Jalil's history of progressive Urdu writing places such poetry within a broad movement from youthful passion toward anti-colonial and class-conscious expression (244-45).

This paper argues that Keats and Majaz share a poetics of longing, but they organise its meaning differently. Keats's longing seeks an intense union with beauty while recognising that every human experience is temporary. Majaz's longing begins in the wounded self but refuses to remain private; it moves through the city toward freedom and collective action. The difference is not absolute. Keats's poems contain social and historical pressure: The final lines of “Ode to a Nightingale” express a mournful loss of imagination that reflects the disillusioned mindset of the

post-French Revolution and post-Waterloo era. No longer captivated by idealistic concepts, the poet's final confusion, "Do I wake or sleep?" mirrors a broader historical crisis of the time. This period was deeply conflicted, struggling to reconcile the divide between romantic, detached dreamers and those focused on practical social reform (Roe 59-60). Majaz's revolutionary poems retain beauty, tenderness, and personal vulnerability. Their poetry is therefore best understood as a spectrum rather than a simple opposition. At one end, sensuous experience becomes aesthetic and existential knowledge; at the other, it becomes revolutionary desire.

Research Questions and Objectives

The study asks four main questions. First, how do Keats and Majaz use sensory imagery to create a romantic vision of beauty? Second, how does melancholy function as a source of poetic insight rather than as mere sadness? Third, how do nature, the city, love, and music shape the relation between the private self and the external world? Finally, how does Majaz transform romantic longing into a language of social and political awakening, and how does this transformation clarify the less obvious human and historical concerns in Keats? The objective is not to claim direct influence without sufficient evidence, but to develop a comparative framework in which two lyric traditions illuminate each other.

Methodology

The paper uses comparative close reading. It examines selected poems by Keats, especially "Ode to a Nightingale," "Ode on a Grecian Urn," "Ode on Melancholy," and "To Autumn," alongside Majaz's "Vagabond," "The Traveller," "Revolution," "The Broken Lute," and "To the Young Lady". Historical context is used to explain, not replace, textual analysis. Keats is read in

relation to English Romanticism and the pressures of mortality and historical change; Majaz is read in relation to colonial modernity, Urdu lyric tradition, and progressive writing. English translations of Majaz are used with awareness that translation cannot reproduce every sound, rhythm, and cultural association of the Urdu originals. For that reason, the argument focuses mainly on durable patterns of image, voice, and idea rather than on claims about minute verbal effects that may belong to the translation.

Review of Literature

Scholarship on Keats is extensive and often concentrates on sensuousness, negative capability, imagination, mortality, and the formal achievement of the 1819 odes. Bate presents Keats's career as a remarkably compressed growth from early luxuriance toward mature tragic understanding: “For, to begin with, we have to do with a type of poetic genius that—whatever the handicaps or restrictions with which Keats starts—quickly acquires a personal relevance to a wide variety of readers. We find the steady growth of qualities of both mind and character that are equally appropriate to other forms of achievement, and that are at the same time being practically and dramatically tested in Keats’s daily experience from the age of twenty-one to the end of his short life”(vii). Bate discusses Keats’s recognition of the limits of youthful luxuriance and examines the programmatic commitment to move past the pastoral bower into the “agonies” of human life (124-30). Vendler examines the odes as carefully constructed lyric systems in which image, voice, myth, and argument develop together(10-14). Jeffrey N. Cox's Norton Critical Edition is especially valuable because it restores Keats to his cultural moment and places the poetry beside letters, contemporary reviews, and later criticism(xii). These studies challenge

the old idea that Keats is merely an escapist poet of beautiful surfaces. His beauty is difficult because it is always exposed to time, loss, and death.

Majaz scholarship is smaller but offers an equally important debate. Mehr Afshan Farooqi said "It does not come as a surprise then that there are few studies of his work, although there was a time when his poems were on everyone's lips, and their perfect, natural melodiousness charmed even the skeptics." Carlo Coppola identifies the central tension between romantic lyricism and revolutionary commitment in Majaz's poetry, a tension that later critics continue to explore: "…Asrarul Haq Majaz, one of the most charismatic of the progressive poets, a writer whose work display some of the most delicate, lyrical images in modern Urdu letters, while at the same time expressing some of the most violent sentiments expressed by progressive poets. It is from the tension of these two polarities—that of the romantic and that of the revolutionary—that Majaz's poetic inspiration sprang"(48). Jalil situates Majaz within the Progressive Writers' Movement and shows how progressive poetry negotiated love, youth, anti-colonial feeling, class struggle, and the desire for social change(259). The collection *Ahang* (Melody), first published in 1938, contains many poems in which romantic and revolutionary modes are already intertwined, exemplified by "Broken Lute," "Vagabond," "Revolution," and "To the Young Lady." The MULOSIGE translations further make visible the range of his work, from inward loneliness to poems on workers, capitalism, freedom, and women's agency. Majaz is often called the "Keats of Urdu" as Sami Rafiq notes that there is an uncanny resemblance between the two poets. She writes, "Like Keats he was passionately devoted to beauty, wrote with romantic intensity, suffered unrequited love and the hostility of a world in which he was born before his time and tragically enough died before he could give full expression to his poetic genius"(38). Existing scholarship often discusses Keats as a second-generation English Romantic along with Shelley

and Byron. Critics have placed Keats in the Shakespearean tradition. M.H.Abrams placed Keats in the Longinian, Shakespearean, and Spenserian heritage(136). Martin Aske has also placed Keats in the tradition of Shakespeare when he says, “The poet is more reticent about Homer than about Shakespeare. After all, Shakespeare is present as a material and visible text, an object to which Keats has access and which he can possess”(3). Caroline Spurgeon’s work, “Keats’s Shakespeare”, suggests that Keats developed an intimate connection with Shakespeare that was far deeper than any attachment he could form with classical antiquity. Spurgeon observes that Shakespeare profoundly shaped Keats’s intellect: the Bard’s works absorbed his focus, lingered in his mind, and infused his thoughts. Ultimately, the cadence and beauty of Shakespeare’s verse provided Keats with creative inspiration, endurance, and profound joy (Aske 3-4). In contrast, critics have different opinions regarding Majaz’s poetry. He is viewed as a love poet whose work is steeped in the pain and suffering of unrequited love. From his early poem “Jashn e Salgira” to his later work “Ek Ghamgeen Yaad,” the woman Majaz deeply loved and worshipped reappeared in his life. However, by that time, it was too late; the heartbreak and pursuit of her had completely destroyed him, transforming the once vibrant and life-filled poet into a broken, ruined man. Majaz’s poetry frequently features women, focusing remarkably on their purity and beauty rather than their sexuality. For him, womanhood served as both a central source of inspiration and a symbol of emotional longing (Rafiq 41). Apart from his love theme, Majaz is placed in the Urdu progressive movement. The present study contributes by bringing the two into a sustained thematic and formal comparison without reducing Majaz to a poet who left romanticism or treating Keats as politically empty.

Romanticism across Two Literary Traditions

Romanticism in this comparison is not a fixed European formula transported unchanged into Urdu. It is better understood as a broad poetic orientation that values imagination, subjectivity, beauty, emotional freedom, and resistance to a world experienced as restrictive. Keats writes at a moment when industrial and political change unsettled established ideas of nature and culture. His lyric speakers repeatedly seek a form of freedom through imagination, but the poems test that freedom and expose its limits. Majaz writes under colonial rule and amid the rise of organised progressive politics. His romantic self is therefore surrounded not only by mortality and disappointed love but also by the dynamic metropolis, economic inequality, and anti-colonial urgency.

The two poets share an attraction to heightened moments. Keats's poems often pause before a bird's song, a classical urn, a season, or a sudden fit of melancholy. Majaz pauses before the neon haze, a lonely road, a woman's veil, a musician's melody, or the sight of social injustice. In both poets, the world enters the poem as an emotional event. The difference lies in the next movement. Keats deepens the moment until it reveals a paradox: joy contains loss, beauty contains death, and imagination cannot permanently escape reality. Majaz deepens the moment until private feeling discovers a social cause and a public direction. His lonely wanderer becomes a critic of the glittering city; his lover becomes a rebel; his song becomes a flag.

Sensuous Beauty and the Education of Feeling

Keats's sensuousness is not simply an enjoyment of pleasant objects. It is an education of feeling. In “Ode to a Nightingale,” the speaker responds to the bird's “full-throated ease” with a physical ache and a desire to leave the human world (Keats line 10). Wine, flowers, darkness, fragrance,

and song create an imagined movement away from “the weariness, the fever, and the fret” of ordinary life (23). In the line “where men sit and hear each other groan”, Keats describes the painful realities of human life, contrasted with the carefree world of the nightingale. The line is often cited as Keats’s memory of his brother Tom’s death from tuberculosis. Nevertheless, the poem does not remain in escape. The sensuous vision becomes a way of measuring human vulnerability. The bird's song appears immortal because it exceeds the life of any single listener, while the speaker must return to uncertainty. The final question, “Do I wake or sleep?” leaves imagination suspended between revelation and illusion (80).

“Ode on a Grecian Urn” also begins with beautiful form but turns beauty into a problem. The figures on the urn never grow old, the music remains unheard yet permanent, and desire never reaches completion. The lovers are preserved from loss, but they are also denied fulfilment. The famous statement “Beauty is truth, truth beauty” cannot be separated from this tension (Keats line 49). The urn's beauty is powerful because it survives change, but human readers encounter it through the lens of time. Keats therefore makes sensuous beauty intellectually demanding. It promises permanence while reminding the reader that living experience depends on change. However, the apparent timelessness and eternal beauty celebrated in the poem are treated by Daniel Watkins as ideological constructs that mask real historical conflicts, suppression, and social contradictions. By describing the urn through traditional family structures ("bride" and "foster-child") and associating it completely with silence, the speaker transforms the urn into an object of male desire and ownership. This enforced silence is not natural; rather, it mirrors how history has treated women as property. Ultimately, even if Keats uses the urn to romanticise a peaceful, preindustrial past, the imagery still relies on and reinforces male dominance over the feminine (Watkins 116).

Majaz is equally drawn to beauty, colour, music, and romantic address. Written in 1937 and translated by Carlo Coppola, *"Barbaṭ-I shikastah"* (Broken Lute), begins with a request for song and an atmosphere of desire, but every attempted melody releases despair:

She said to me: "please sing me a song;
My heart is cold; set it
On fire!"
How beautiful her manner; how delicate
Her tone:
Longing, desire,
command, prompting. (Majaz lines 1-4)

The instrument becomes an image of the lyric self, capable of music, yet damaged by experience:

Humming in my drunkenness, I picked up
the instrument
And struck the music of fidelity.
From every tired note arose the smoke of
despondency,
A sigh from the broken lute. (5-8)

This resembles Keats's habit of making pleasure and pain inseparable. However, Majaz's beauty often stands within a visible social setting. In *Avara* (Vagabond), written in 1937 and translated by Carlo Coppola, the illuminated city appears dazzling, but its glitter forms a string while the speaker carries a burning wound within: "A chain of glittering lights on the road, / A picture of day in night's hands; / But a heated sword in my chest" (Majaz lines 5-7). The contrast between

public brightness and private exclusion turns beauty into social irony. The city shines, yet it does not offer belonging:

Colour and beauty scatter at every side;
Pleasure yawns erotically at every step;
Disgrace rushes to me with open arms;
O heart's sorrow, what should I do? O my heart's solitude,
what to do? (21-24)

The comparison shows that both poets distrust beauty when it is treated as a simple escape. Keats's beauty educates the mind in transience; Majaz's beauty exposes the unequal distribution of pleasure. In Keats, the ripe fruit of "To Autumn" is beautiful partly because ripeness already contains the approach of ending. In Majaz, the lamps and ornaments of the city are beautiful but become unbearable when placed beside hunger, homelessness, and tyranny: "Before my eyes: begging, this scene,/ Hundreds of tyrants,/ Hundreds of Chenghiz khans and Nadir Shahs" (Vagabond 45-47). Sensuousness thus becomes ethical in both writers. It asks what it means to feel intensely in a world where feeling cannot stop time or remove injustice.

Melancholy, Mortality, and the Divided Self

Melancholy is the deepest connection between Keats and Majaz. Neither poet treats it as passive gloom. It is an active state in which the self becomes sharply aware of contradiction. In "Ode on Melancholy," Keats rejects numbness and urges the sufferer to remain awake to pain. When melancholy arrives, the speaker must "glut" sorrow on the rose, the rainbow, or the beloved's anger (lines 15-18). Beauty does not cure melancholy; beauty is where melancholy lives because beauty must fade. The poem's final image places melancholy within the very temple of delight.

This is one of Keats's most important insights: joy becomes precious because it is temporary, and the knowledge of loss intensifies rather than destroys perception.

Majaz's melancholy also sharpens perception, but it has a more openly urban and historical character. The refrain of "Vagabond": O heart's sorrow, what should I do? O my heart's solitude, what to do? repeatedly asks what the sorrowful and solitary heart should do. It underscores a profound sense of existential despair and emotional immobility, capturing the speaker's isolation as he drifts through an indifferent city at midnight. According to Professor Carlo Coppola:

> The refrain of this poem reflects the sense of indecision and incertitude from which the narrator suffers. The question here is essentially one of accepting the role of a vagabond, as well as the myriad circumstances Political, social, economic-which would force him to assume this role or to fight back and attempt to alter these circumstances. This is the question the narrator is addressing to his heart's sorrow, to the solitude of his heart. . . . the narrator offers nothing beyond the destruction being considered. This is, from the point of view of socialist realist ideology, an aesthetic liability of the poem. (429-30)

At first, the question seems personal, shaped by disappointed love and emotional homelessness. As the poem continues, however, the speaker sees beggars, tyrants, palaces, and symbols of power. The wounded heart becomes a political eye. The desire to break an emotional promise develops into the desire to break shackles and confront domination: "I should step forward and set afire the ornaments of rich people's gatherings,/ set fire to this one's garden, that one's boudoir./ What's a king's throne? I should set the king's whole palace ablaze" (53-55). Melancholy therefore becomes the bridge between isolation and revolt.

The divided self in Keats often moves between the real and the imagined. The speaker of "Ode to a Nightingale" wants to dissolve into song, but the word "forlorn" recalls him to his separate self (71-72). Imagination can intensify life, but it cannot permanently abolish mortality. Majaz's divided self moves between lover and citizen, dreamer and revolutionary, pleasure and responsibility. In the poem *Inqilāb* (Revolution), written in 1933 and translated by Carlo Coppola, the speaker acknowledges the power of music to create ecstasy. Yet, he tells the musician that the time demands work and struggle:

O musician, for heaven's sake, leave me
alone!
It is time for work; let me do my
work!

What a tremendous effect you
have in your melody!

It is as if lightning falls on the
harvest of my understanding!

Time and again the thought
comes to my restless heart–

That I may not be swept away in the flood
of your melody". (Majaz lines 1-6)

The poem does not reject music; it redirects music toward history. In this sense, Majaz's revolutionary turn resembles Keats's return from imaginative flight. Both poets refuse permanent intoxication, though they return to different realities.

The comparison also prevents biographical reduction. Both poets had short and troubled lives, and their personal suffering can easily dominate interpretation. However, the poems do more than record private pain. Keats turns vulnerability into a general meditation on human time. Majaz turns loneliness into an inquiry about who is excluded from the city's promises. Melancholy is therefore not merely evidence of suffering; it is a method of knowledge. It teaches Keats how beauty and death coexist, and to Majaz how private despair may contain a demand for social change.

Nature, the City, and Forms of Alienation

Keats's most characteristic spaces are gardens, woods, imagined classical scenes, and seasonal landscapes. Nature is not presented as innocent scenery. It is a living process of growth, ripeness, fading, and renewal. “To Autumn” opens with abundance: mists, fruit, vines, apples, gourds, hazels, flowers, and bees (Keats lines 1-11). The second stanza slows into labour and rest, while the final stanza replaces visual fullness with sound. The poem does not ask autumn to imitate spring; it insists that autumn has its own music. This acceptance of seasonal difference creates a mature relation to mortality. Ending is neither denied nor made meaningless.

Majaz's defining landscape is often the modern metropolis at night. The city is active, sparkling, and crowded, yet the speaker remains radically alone. This is a modern form of alienation much like Eliot’s wasteland, where the individual is surrounded by movement but denied community.

In “Vagabond,” the moon rises behind a palace, and the speaker encounters both luxury and deprivation. Natural and romantic images survive, but they have been absorbed into an unequal social world. The moon is no longer only an object of beauty; it is compared to religious authority, commercial calculation, and exhausted social life (33-35). Majaz modernises romantic imagery by juxtaposing it with themes of class and institutional power.

This difference between nature and city should not become a rigid opposition. Keats's landscapes are touched by labour, hunger, history, and Politics. Poet and critic Tom Paulin, in his book *The Secret Life of Poems*, identifies several politically loaded words throughout the ode “To Autumn”. For instance, ‘Mists’: Paulin connects this back to John Milton, an author Keats studied intensely. Milton used the phrase “Mists and intricacies of state” and famously characterised Satan as a mist. Through this Paulin interprets ‘mists’ as a subtle nod to political deception or government secrecy, ‘Conspiring’: Paulin contends that the word serves as a direct allusion to the peaceful gathering at Peter’s Fields, which the Tory press branded the “Manchester Conspiracy” prior to the resulting massacre of Peterloo, ‘Poppies’: Keats describes the figure of Autumn as “drows’d with the fume of poppies.” Paulin links this harvest imagery to the British Army, noting that Keats deeply loathed the military and symbolically associated poppy blossoms with the redcoats who attacked the citizens at Peterloo, ‘Gleaner’: Paulin intentionally uses the word “gleaner” to highlight 19th-century class inequality and poverty. Since gleaning involved poor laborers desperately gathering leftover scraps of corn from fields, the term directly reflects historical and modern struggles with low wages and land exploitation. Furthermore, Tom Paulin interprets the “red-breast” bird whistling at the poem’s end as a hidden symbol for the British red-coated militia occupying the region. Keats wrote: “…The example of England, and the liberal writers of France and England sowed the seed of opposition to this

tyranny– and it was swelling in the ground till it burst out in the French revolution"(letter to his brother George, qtd. in Paulin 81). We can connect this historical perspective to our analysis of "To Autumn". The political phrase "Seed of opposition…Swelling in the ground" closely mirrors the imagery in the line "Swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells". Both natural cycles and historical changes shape this poem (81-86). Majaz's city is filled with moonlight, fragrance, and music. Rather, the two poets organise alienation through different environments. Keats's speaker is alienated by mortality: he cannot become the immortal song or the unchanging artwork. Majaz's speaker is alienated by social structure: he cannot belong to a town whose beauty is built beside exclusion. Keats seeks reconciliation with process; Majaz seeks transformation of structure.

From the Lyrical Self to Social Consciousness

The clearest distinction between the poets lies in the direction of their mature longing. Keats usually turns inward and philosophical. Even when the world of suffering enters "Ode to a Nightingale," the poem explores how consciousness responds to that suffering through imagination. Keats is renowned for his vivid, sensory poetry that deeply engages the senses through the sights, sounds, and tastes of the natural world. However, his work looks beyond mere surface aesthetics; for Keats, immersing oneself in physical pleasure automatically sparks a deeper contemplation on the transience of joy. This progression transitions from physical sensation to intellectual realisation. For instance, in "Ode on Melancholy", he argues that genuine sorrow does not dwell in darkness, but rather in moments of supreme beauty and happiness, such as a fading rose or a lover's gaze, precisely because they are destined to end. Through this internal reflection, Keats arrives at the philosophical insight that pleasure and pain

are fundamentally intertwined. One cannot look at Keats's philosophical side without mentioning his concept of "Negative Capability". Keats defined this in a letter to his brothers George and Thomas, on 22 December 1817, as a state where a person is "capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." It means that instead of trying to force a neat moral or scientific explanation onto the universe, a philosophical mind must learn to exist comfortably within the mysteries of life and death. When Keats turns inward, he does not provide easy answers. "Ode to a Nightingale" concludes with a famous lingering question: "Was it a vision, or a waking dream? / Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?" leaving the experience unresolved rather than neatly explained. He accepts that life is full of contradictions, that we must love deeply even though we will lose what we love. In contrast, Majaz shifts from individualistic, internal romanticism toward collective social reality and anti-imperialist resistance, marking a thematic transition in his poetry as he moves outward and becomes political. Sami Rafiq said, "…That Majaz's poetry, like Majaz's life and love, was reflective of turmoil and heartache. Nevertheless he never gave up on the sense of humanity and humility which pervaded his life and his poetry like a fragrance. It is this quality that will immortalise his poetry"(42). "The Traveller", written in 1937 and translated by Arjumand Ara, begins with the wandering singer and instructs him to continue singing for people: "Go on singing carefree, O traveller! Singing for people on your way, go on"(Majaz lines 1-2). The song carries both pain and delight, warmth and coolness, but it must keep moving. Most importantly, the traveller is told to destroy narrow-mindedness and carry the flag of revolt beyond the sky:

Narrow-mindedness will put restrictions,

Razing the bases of conservatism, go on.

I put you under oath of your passion, and restlessness
Singing new tunes all the while, go on.

Once you have taken up the flag of revolt;
Hoisting it beyond the skies' limit go on". (13-18)

The lyric vocation becomes a public responsibility. Majaz's turning outward and political can be best summed up in his poem *Naujavān khātun se* (To the Young Lady), written in 1937 and translated by Arjumand Ara. Majaz urged women to step ahead and take part in the political struggle: "The scarf covering your head looks very pretty; / Better, you could make a flag out of this"(lines 19-20). As young, rebellious men rise against oppression, Majaz urges women to join the struggle. He calls on them to step forward alongside men, armed with compassion, awareness, and solidarity to confront injustice together: "The rebellious young fighters have drawn up their daggers; / Better, you could be ready to tend the wounded"(21-22).

In "Revolution," Majaz stages a direct argument between aesthetic pleasure and historical necessity. The musician's melody is acknowledged as beautiful enough to move landscapes, stars, devotees, and nightingales. Nevertheless, the speaker insists that the social world has changed: workers are advancing, hunger is crying out, and the capitalist order is unstable. The harp must be put aside because the melody of revolt is already beginning (lines 15-30). This moment is central to Majaz's originality. He does not destroy romantic music; he reassigns its energy. Rhythm, colour, spring, wine, stars, and flowers remain present, but they are transformed into images of mass struggle and freedom.

Keats's poetry can appear distant from such explicit social commitment, but the comparison makes visible his own resistance to simplified consolation. He refuses to claim that imagination solves suffering. The nightingale's song fades: “Was it a vision, or a waking dream? Fled is that music:– Do I wake or sleep?”; the urn remains enigmatic: “Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!”; melancholy sits inside delight: “Ay, in the very temple of Delight Veil’d Melancholy has her sovran shrine”; autumn includes both fullness and mourning: “Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness” and “Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn”. The nightingale’s song in Keats appears to travel across generations, and the unheard melodies of the Urn seem sweeter because they are not limited by physical performance. However, Keats repeatedly questions musical performance. The listener changes, the vision fades, and silence returns. Music creates a temporary enlargement of consciousness, not a final escape from existence. So Keats's ethical strength lies in his refusal to falsify experience, while Majaz's ethical strength lies in his refusal to let personal lyricism ignore material inequality. Both poets begin from the belief that feeling must be shaped, not merely expressed. Keats’s lyric form teaches the reader to remain within uncertainty without forcing an easy conclusion. Majaz’s refrain gathers emotional pressure until the solitary question becomes a revolutionary response. Their music does not hide contradiction; it gives contradiction a memorable form. One poet guards the truth of human limitation; the other demands the removal of avoidable social limitation. Both oppose comforting illusions.

This distinction also explains why the phrase “revolutionary romantic” remains appropriate for Majaz. Revolution does not arrive after romance as a separate phase. Romantic longing supplies its vocabulary and emotional force. The unattainable beloved becomes the unattained future; the restless lover becomes the restless citizen; the night journey becomes historical movement; the

song becomes collective awakening. Majaz opposes an art that becomes deaf to its moment. The proper song is one that preserves emotional beauty while learning to hear hunger, labour, and revolt. Majaz's poetry thus broadens the social possibilities of the romantic lyric without losing tenderness or musicality.

Beauty, Women, and Agency

The treatment of women offers another revealing comparison. Keats's poetry often represents the feminine through beauty, myth, desire, and mystery. Nandita Batra explains that Keats's odes are not just beautiful descriptions of nature or art; they are tense gendered battlegrounds:

> Each ode is built upon this principle of an evolving dialectic that rises from a feminine central symbol and its apparent appeal for the masculine speaker, forcing him into an unresolvable debate. Through this debate the ode scrutinizes its central symbol by posing unanswerable questions about the enigmas of human existence and identity- be this symbol a female bird (as in the Nightingale ode), a virgin urn (as in the Grecian Urn ode), a female goddess, or a mood personified as a female goddess (as in the Psyche and Melancholy odes, respectively), or a season personified as a women (as in the Autumn Ode). Each ode then, with different degrees of intensity, moves from empathy with its feminine symbol, to a withdrawal from this attraction, and then to its conclusion: whether this conclusion be qualification (as in Psyche, Melancholy, and Autumn) or skepticism (as in Grecian Urn and Nightingale). As a result each ode adopts different tropes for the possession of feminine power: the tropes of virginity and penetration, of personification, and of metamorphosis. (75)

John Whale holds the view that instead of presenting Autumn as a simple, straightforward character, Keats layers his description with imagery drawn from classical mythology, traditional English poetry, and the visual arts. Because Keats blends so many different influences together, the character of Autumn becomes complex and enigmatic in terms of gender identity. Whale quotes Helen Vendler, who argues that Autumn is strictly a female figure. She views Autumn as a reimagining of Ceres, the Roman goddess of agriculture (112). In "La Belle Dame sans Merci," Keats describes a chilling nightmare where the merciless femme fatale traps the seduced knight. The knight realises his doom when he dreams, "And there she lulled me asleep,. . .Hath thee in thrall! "(lines 33-40). Desire is enchanting but dangerous. In the odes, feminine figures such as "Psyche" and "Melancholy" become forms through which the imagination thinks. In "Ode to Psyche", Psyche represents the human soul and creative mind claiming its own divinity without external pagan altars. By invoking her, the imagination conceives of itself as both worshiper and temple, turning inward to construct an autonomous cognitive sanctuary(lines 58-61). Such representations are aesthetically powerful, but the female figure may remain an object of male perception or an allegorical presence. Keats's central question is often what beauty does to the perceiving consciousness.

Sami Rafiq said :

> Majaz was unable to forget the subject of his unrequited love for a long time. He did not have any grudge against the woman who abandoned him midway and returned to her abode of arrogant beauty; instead he remembered her kindnesses. One finds different women making an appearance in Majaz's poetry and what is remarkable is that Majaz focused on the purity and beauty of woman rather than her sexuality. Woman was the source of his inspiration and deprivation in his poetry. (40-41)

Majaz begins with a romantic admiration of beauty but frequently pushes toward social agency. In “To the Young Lady,” he does not merely praise the veil, eyes, forehead, or scarf. He asks the woman to turn signs of conventional femininity into instruments of freedom. The scarf should become a flag, and awareness should replace passive modesty. The poem remains shaped by a male speaker and therefore does not escape every limitation of its period. Nevertheless, its movement is significant: beauty is asked to enter public life. Woman is imagined not only as beloved or muse but as participant in social change. Carlo Coppola is of the view that while the narrator’s call for women to join the revolution could be seen as placing them in positions subservient to men, the poem takes on a different meaning when viewed through the lens of the non-cooperation movement. Although prominent figures like Sarojini Naidu, Vijaylakshmi Pandit, Sucheta Kripalani, and Rashid Jahan actively participated in the fight for freedom, the vast majority of women, particularly Muslim women, remained excluded from nationalist activities. Rather than enforcing subordination, the poem serves, as a gentle encouragement for these women to break away from their traditional household roles and contribute to the broader nationalist cause (423).

This movement from admiration to agency reflects Majaz's broader transformation of romantic symbolism. Beauty has value, but it should not be imprisoned in display, seclusion, or fear. Keats's ideal figures often resist time through art as in “Ode on a Grecian Urn”(lines 17-20) ; Majaz's young woman is invited to enter time and alter history. The contrast reveals two forms of liberation. Keats frees beauty from decay within the imaginative artwork, though at the cost of completed life. Majaz seeks to free the beautiful human subject from restrictive custom so that beauty may become action.

Conclusion

A comparative reading of John Keats and Asrar-ul-Haq Majaz reveals a strong kinship in poetic temperament and an equally important difference in historical direction. Both poets are drawn to beauty, longing, imagination, and melancholy. Both understand that pleasure is unstable and that the lyrical self is divided between desire and reality.

The paper's central contribution lies in refusing two limiting descriptions: Keats as an escapist aesthete and Majaz as a political poet who simply leaves romance behind. Keats's poetry repeatedly returns from imaginative escape to the difficult truth of human life. Majaz's poetry carries romantic feeling into the street, the question of women's freedom, and the dream of social equality. Their difference can be expressed as a difference of destination. Keats transforms longing into aesthetic understanding; Majaz transforms longing into revolutionary possibility. Read together, they show that Romanticism is not a closed European period but a flexible poetic energy that can be renewed in another language, place, and political history.

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