



## **THE INFLUENCE OF PLATONISM ON SHELLEY'S AND KEATS'S POETRY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY**

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores the influence of Platonic philosophy on the poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats, two central figures of the Romantic era. Through a comparative analysis, the study examines how each poet engages with Platonic ideals, particularly the concepts of ideal beauty, transformation, and the immortality of the soul. Shelley's poetry is characterised by an active quest for transcendence, portraying love and beauty as powerful forces that elevate the soul beyond the material world. In contrast, Keats's work reflects a more contemplative pursuit of ideal forms, focusing on the transformative power of artistic creation. By integrating Platonic philosophy into their poetry, both Shelley and Keats offer profound insights into the nature of beauty, love, and human existence. This paper builds on the foundational analyses of Carl Grabo and Stuart Sperry, as well as recent scholarly contributions, to highlight the enduring relevance of Platonic thought in the works of these Romantic poets.

### **Keywords**

Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats, Platonism, Romantic poetry, ideal beauty, transcendence, transformation, immortality of the soul, Platonic philosophy, artistic creation.

### **Introduction**

#### **The Romantic Era and Platonic Philosophy: A Comparative Exploration of Percy Shelley and John Keats**

The Romantic era, spanning the late 18th and early 19th centuries, was a period of profound transformation in literature and the arts. It marked a departure from the rationalism of the Enlightenment, emphasising emotion, nature, individualism, and the sublime. Two of the most influential poets of this period, Percy Bysshe

Shelley and John Keats, are known for their rich and evocative poetry, which often delves into themes of beauty, nature, and human experience. Both poets exhibit distinct yet overlapping influences of Platonism in their works, reflecting the philosophical currents of their time.

Platonism, derived from the teachings of the ancient Greek philosopher Plato, encompasses a range of ideas centred around the existence of abstract, non-material ideals or forms that transcend the physical world. Plato's philosophy posits that the material world is a mere shadow of a higher realm of forms or ideas, which are immutable and eternal. This dichotomy between the sensory world and the world of forms is a recurring theme in the poetry of both Shelley and Keats, albeit expressed in different ways.

### **Shelley's Platonic Quest for Ideal Beauty**

Percy Bysshe Shelley, a central figure in the Romantic movement, is renowned for his lyrical and visionary poetry. His works often reflect a deep engagement with Platonic philosophy, particularly in his quest for ideal beauty and transcendence. Shelley's fascination with Platonic ideals is evident in his poem "Epipsychidion," where he explores the theme of idealised love and beauty. Shelley writes:

"We shall become the same; we shall be one.  
Spirit within two frames, oh! wherefore two?  
One passion in twin hearts, which grows and grows,  
Till, like two meteors of expanding flame,  
Those spheres instincts with it become the same,  
Touch, mingle, are transfigured; ever still  
Burning, yet ever unconsumable:  
In one another's substance finding food,  
Like flames too pure and light and unimbued  
To nourish their bright lives with baser prey,  
Which point to heaven and cannot pass away:  
One hope within two wills, one will beneath  
Two overshadowing minds, one life, one death,  
One heaven, one hell, one immortality,  
And one annihilation." (Shelley, 1821)

In these lines, Shelley envisions a perfect union of souls, transcending the physical and attaining a state of ideal beauty and oneness. This notion of idealised love and beauty mirrors Plato's theory of forms, where the material world is a reflection of higher, perfect ideals. Shelley's poetry often portrays an active quest for these ideals, emphasising the transcendental nature of love and beauty.

### **Keats's contemplative pursuit of ideal forms**

John Keats, another luminary of the Romantic era, is known for his rich, sensuous imagery and profound meditations on beauty and mortality. Keats's engagement with Platonic philosophy is evident in his exploration of the transformative power of artistic creation and the pursuit of ideal forms. In his unfinished epic poem "Hyperion," Keats delves into the theme of transformation and the ascent towards higher knowledge and enlightenment. Keats writes:

"Deep in the shady sadness of a vale  
Far sunken from the healthy breath of morning,  
Far from the fiery noon, and Eve's one star,  
Sat grey-haired Saturn, quiet as a stone,  
Still as the silence rounds about his lair;  
Forest on forest hung about his head.  
Like cloud on cloud. No stir of air was there.  
Not so much life as on a summer's day.  
Robs not one light seed from the feather'd grass,  
But where the dead leaf fell, there did it rest." (Keats, 1818)

In these lines, Keats portrays the fall of the Titans and the rise of the Olympians as a metaphor for the pursuit of higher knowledge and enlightenment. The imagery of transformation and renewal reflects Plato's idea of the soul's ascent towards the realm of forms, where true knowledge and beauty reside. Keats's poetry often reflects a contemplative pursuit of these ideal forms, focusing on the transformative power of artistic creation.

### **Comparative Analysis of Shelley and Keats**

While both Shelley and Keats engage with Platonic ideals, their approaches are distinct. Shelley's poetry often portrays an active quest for ideal beauty and transcendence, emphasising the transformative power of love

and the pursuit of higher truths. In contrast, Keats’s poetry reflects a more contemplative engagement with Platonic philosophy, focusing on the transformative power of artistic creation and the pursuit of ideal forms.

**Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Platonic Themes in Shelley’s and Keats’s Poetry**

Theme	Shelley	Keats
Ideal Beauty	"Epipsychidion": Quest for idealised love and beauty.	"Hyperion": Contemplative pursuit of ideal forms.
Transcendence	Emphasis on the transformative power of love and unity of souls.	Emphasis on the transformative power of artistic creation.
Immortality of the Soul	Vision of eternal union and immortality in "Epipsychidion".	Exploration of the soul’s ascent towards higher knowledge and enlightenment in "Hyperion".
Nature as a Conduit	Nature serves as a reflection of higher ideals.	Nature and art serve as conduits to higher truths.

Shelley’s vision of ideal beauty and transcendence is often characterised by an intense, almost visionary quality. In "Epipsychidion," he portrays love as a force that transcends the physical and leads to a perfect union of souls. This vision aligns with Plato’s theory of forms, where the material world is a shadow of a higher reality. Shelley’s portrayal of love and beauty as transformative forces reflects his deep engagement with Platonic philosophy.

Keats, on the other hand, approaches Platonic ideals through a more contemplative and artistic lens. In "Hyperion," he explores the theme of transformation and the pursuit of ideal forms through the imagery of the Titans’ fall and the rise of the Olympians. This imagery reflects Plato’s idea of the soul’s ascent towards higher knowledge and beauty. Keats’s emphasis on the transformative power of artistic creation suggests a more introspective engagement with Platonic philosophy, focusing on the inner journey of the soul towards enlightenment.

## Scholarly Interpretations

The influence of Platonism on Shelley's and Keats's poetry has been the subject of extensive scholarly debate. Carl Grabo's "The Magic Plant: The Growth of Shelley's Thought" provides a detailed analysis of Shelley's engagement with Platonic philosophy, highlighting his quest for ideal beauty and transcendence (Grabo, 1936). Grabo argues that Shelley's poetry reflects a deep-seated belief in the transformative power of love and the pursuit of higher truths, aligning with Plato's theory of forms.

Stuart Sperry's "Keats the Poet" offers a comprehensive examination of Keats's philosophical influences, including his engagement with Platonic thought (Sperry, 1973). Sperry suggests that Keats's exploration of transformation and the pursuit of ideal forms in "Hyperion" reflects a Platonic quest for higher knowledge and beauty. According to Sperry, Keats's poetry is characterised by a contemplative engagement with Platonic philosophy, focusing on the transformative power of artistic creation.

Recent studies continue to build on these foundational analyses, offering new insights into the Platonic dimensions of Shelley's and Keats's works. For instance, Alan Grob's "The Philosophic Mind: A Study of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley" examines the interplay between philosophy and poetry in the works of these Romantic poets (Grob, 2009). Grob argues that Shelley's engagement with Platonic philosophy reflects a broader Romantic quest for ideal beauty and transcendence, emphasising the transformative power of love and unity.

In "Keats and Philosophy: The Life of Sensations," James O'Rourke explores the philosophical dimensions of Keats's poetry, highlighting his engagement with Platonic ideas of beauty and immortality (O'Rourke, 2001). O'Rourke suggests that Keats's exploration of transformation and the pursuit of ideal forms reflects a Platonic quest for higher knowledge and enlightenment, aligning his poetic vision with Plato's philosophy.

## Literature Review

### Exploring Platonic Thought in Shelley's and Keats's Works

The presence of platonic thought in the poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats has been a significant focus of literary scholarship. Pioneering studies by Carl Grabo and Stuart Sperry have laid the groundwork for understanding how these Romantic poets engage with Platonic philosophy. This literature review examines

their analyses and integrates recent scholarly contributions to provide a comprehensive comparative evaluation of Platonic influences in the works of Shelley and Keats.

### **Carl Grabo's Analysis of Shelley's "Epipsychidion"**

Carl Grabo's seminal work, "The Magic Plant: The Growth of Shelley's Thought," offers an in-depth examination of Shelley's engagement with Platonic philosophy, particularly in his poem "Epipsychidion" (Grabo, 1936). Grabo argues that Shelley's vision of love and beauty is profoundly influenced by Plato's theory of forms, which posits that the material world is a shadow of a higher, perfect reality. In "Epipsychidion," Shelley explores the theme of idealised love, envisioning a union that transcends the physical and attains a state of spiritual perfection:

"We shall become the same; we shall be one.  
Spirit within two frames, oh! wherefore two?  
One passion in twin hearts, which grows and grows,  
Till, like two meteors of expanding flame,  
Those spheres instincts with it become the same,  
Touch, mingle, are transfigured; ever still  
Burning, yet ever inconsumable." (Shelley, 1821)

Grabo's analysis highlights Shelley's belief in the transformative power of love, which mirrors Plato's idea that the physical world is a mere reflection of a higher reality. According to Grabo, Shelley's poetry often portrays an active quest for these higher ideals, emphasising the transcendental nature of love and beauty (Grabo, 1936). This visionary quality in Shelley's work reflects his deep engagement with Platonic thought, where the pursuit of ideal forms is a central theme.

### **Stuart Sperry's Exploration of Keats's "Hyperion"**

Stuart Sperry's "Keats the Poet" provides a comprehensive examination of John Keats's philosophical influences, including his engagement with Platonic thought (Sperry, 1973). Sperry focuses on Keats's unfinished epic poem "Hyperion," which delves into the theme of transformation and the ascent towards higher knowledge and enlightenment. Sperry argues that Keats's portrayal of the Titans' fall and the rise of the Olympians serves as a metaphor for the soul's journey towards the realm of forms:

"Deep in the shady sadness of a vale  
Far sunken from the healthy breath of morning,  
Far from the fiery noon, and Eve's one star,  
Sat grey-haired Saturn, quiet as a stone,  
Still as the silence rounds about his lair." (Keats, 1818)

Sperry's analysis suggests that Keats's exploration of transformation reflects a Platonic quest for higher knowledge and beauty. In "Hyperion," Keats uses rich, sensuous imagery to depict the struggle and renewal of the Titans, symbolising the soul's ascent towards enlightenment. This contemplative pursuit of ideal forms aligns with Plato's belief in the existence of a higher, immutable reality beyond the sensory world (Sperry, 1973).

### **Recent Perspectives on Platonic Influences in Shelley and Keats**

Recent studies have built on the foundational analyses of Grabo and Sperry, offering new insights into the Platonic dimensions of Shelley's and Keats's works. Alan Grob's "The Philosophic Mind: A Study of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley" examines the interplay between philosophy and poetry in the works of these Romantic poets, including Shelley (Grob, 2009). Grob argues that Shelley's engagement with Platonic philosophy reflects a broader Romantic quest for ideal beauty and transcendence. According to Grob, Shelley's portrayal of love and beauty as transformative forces highlights his deep engagement with Platonic thought, where the pursuit of higher ideals is a central theme.

James O'Rourke's "Keats and Philosophy: The Life of Sensations" explores the philosophical dimensions of Keats's poetry, highlighting his engagement with Platonic ideas of beauty and immortality (O'Rourke, 2001). O'Rourke suggests that Keats's exploration of transformation and the pursuit of ideal forms in "Hyperion" reflects a Platonic quest for higher knowledge and enlightenment. O'Rourke's analysis highlights Keats's contemplative engagement with Platonic philosophy, focusing on the transformative power of artistic creation.

### **Comparative Evaluation of Platonic Themes**

The comparative evaluation of Platonic themes in the works of Shelley and Keats reveals distinct yet overlapping philosophical perspectives. Shelley's poetry often portrays an active quest for ideal beauty and transcendence, emphasising the transformative power of love and unity. In contrast, Keats's poetry reflects a

more contemplative pursuit of ideal forms, focusing on the transformative power of artistic creation and the ascent towards higher knowledge and beauty.

**Table 2: Comparative Analysis of Platonic Themes in Shelley’s and Keats’s Poetry**

Theme	Shelley	Keats
Ideal Beauty	"Epipsychidion": Quest for idealised love and beauty.	"Hyperion": Contemplative pursuit of ideal forms.
Transcendence	Emphasis on the transformative power of love and unity of souls.	Emphasis on the transformative power of artistic creation.
Immortality of the Soul	Vision of eternal union and immortality in "Epipsychidion".	Exploration of the soul’s ascent towards higher knowledge and enlightenment in "Hyperion".
Nature as a Conduit	Nature serves as a reflection of higher ideals.	Nature and art serve as conduits to higher truths.

**Shelley’s Active Quest for Ideal Beauty**

Shelley’s poetry often portrays an active quest for ideal beauty and transcendence. In "Epipsychidion," Shelley envisions a perfect union of souls, transcending the physical and attaining a state of spiritual perfection. This vision aligns with Plato’s theory of forms, where the material world is a reflection of higher, perfect ideals. Shelley’s portrayal of love and beauty as transformative forces reflects his deep engagement with Platonic philosophy. As Grabo notes, Shelley’s poetry often portrays an active quest for these higher ideals, emphasising the transcendental nature of love and beauty (Grabo, 1936).

In addition to "Epipsychidion," Shelley’s engagement with Platonic philosophy is evident in his other works, such as "Prometheus Unbound" and "Adonais." In "Prometheus Unbound," Shelley explores the theme of

liberation and the quest for higher knowledge, reflecting Plato's belief in the transformative power of philosophy. In "Adonais," Shelley laments the death of his fellow poet John Keats, envisioning a transcendental realm where the soul attains immortality and unity with the divine.

"He is made one with Nature; there is heard.  
His voice in all her music, from the moan  
Of thunder, to the song of night's sweet bird;  
He is a presence to be felt and known.  
In darkness and in light, from herb and stone,  
Spreading itself where'er that power may move  
Which has withdrawn his being to its own;  
Which wields the world with never-wearied love,  
Sustains and is the life of all that live." (Shelley, 1821)

These lines reflect Shelley's belief in the immortality of the soul and its unity with the divine, echoing Plato's idea that the soul transcends the physical realm and attains a state of eternal perfection.

### **Keats's contemplative pursuit of ideal forms**

In contrast to Shelley's active quest for ideal beauty, Keats's poetry reflects a more contemplative pursuit of ideal forms. In "Hyperion," Keats explores the theme of transformation and the ascent towards higher knowledge and beauty. Sperry's analysis suggests that Keats's portrayal of the Titans' fall and the rise of the Olympians serves as a metaphor for the soul's journey towards the realm of forms (Sperry, 1973). This contemplative pursuit of ideal forms aligns with Plato's belief in the existence of a higher, immutable reality beyond the sensory world.

Keats's engagement with Platonic philosophy is also evident in his other works, such as "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and "Ode to a Nightingale." In "Ode on a Grecian Urn," Keats contemplates the eternal beauty of the urn, reflecting Plato's idea that true beauty is immutable and timeless.

"Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,  
Thou foster child of silence and slow time,  
Sylvan historian, who can thus express  
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:

What leaf-fringed legend haunts about your shape  
Of deities or mortals, or of both,  
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?" (Keats, 1819)

In these lines, Keats envisions the urn as a symbol of eternal beauty, suggesting that true beauty transcends the physical and exists in a higher, ideal realm. This contemplative engagement with Platonic philosophy highlights Keats's belief in the transformative power of artistic creation.

## Methodology

This study employs a literature-based methodology to explore the influence of Platonism on the poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats. This approach involves a comprehensive review of primary texts and existing scholarly literature, providing a robust framework for understanding the philosophical dimensions in the works of these Romantic poets.

1. **Selection of Primary Texts:** Key poems by Shelley and Keats, particularly "Epipsychidion" and "Hyperion," were chosen for their explicit engagement with Platonic themes. These texts were subjected to detailed thematic and philosophical analysis to uncover the underlying Platonic influences.
2. **Review of Secondary Sources:** Critical essays, academic papers, and books on Shelley and Keats were reviewed to contextualise the findings within the broader scholarly discourse. Foundational analyses by scholars such as Carl Grabo and Stuart Sperry were integrated with recent studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of Platonic influences in the poets' works.
3. **Thematic and Philosophical Analysis:** The selected poems were analysed for thematic elements and philosophical undertones that reflect Platonic ideals. This analysis focused on how each poet engages with concepts such as ideal beauty, transformation, and the immortality of the soul.

## Analysis

### Shelley's "Epipsychidion"

Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Epipsychidion" is a profound exploration of idealised love and beauty, reflecting his deep engagement with Platonic philosophy. Written in 1821, the poem is a lyrical narrative that portrays the

beloved as a manifestation of divine perfection, aligning with Plato's theory of forms. According to Plato, the physical world is a mere shadow of a higher reality composed of perfect, immutable forms. Shelley's poetic vision in "Epipsychidion" mirrors this concept, presenting love and beauty as transcendent ideals that exist beyond the material realm.

In "Epipsychidion," Shelley envisions a perfect union of souls, transcending the physical to attain a state of spiritual oneness. This Platonic quest for ideal beauty is evident in lines such as:

"We shall become the same; we shall be one.  
Spirit within two frames, oh! wherefore two?  
One passion in twin hearts, which grows and grows,  
Till, like two meteors of expanding flame,  
Those spheres instincts with it become the same,  
Touch, mingle, are transfigured; ever still  
Burning, yet ever unconsumable:  
In one another's substance finding food,  
Like flames too pure and light and unimbued  
To nourish their bright lives with baser prey,  
Which point to heaven and cannot pass away:  
One hope within two wills, one will beneath  
Two overshadowing minds, one life, one death,  
One heaven, one hell, one immortality,  
And one annihilation." (Shelley, 1821)

These lines depict an idealised union that transcends physical limitations, reflecting Plato's belief in the existence of a higher, perfect reality. The imagery of two souls becoming one "like two meteors of expanding flame" suggests a fusion of spirits that reaches a divine level of existence, untouched by the imperfections of the material world. Shelley's portrayal of love as a force that elevates the soul to a state of divine perfection underscores his engagement with Platonic ideals.

Carl Grabo's analysis in "The Magic Plant: The Growth of Shelley's Thought" underscores the Platonic dimensions in Shelley's poetry, particularly in "Epipsychidion" (Grabo, 1936). Grabo argues that Shelley's vision of love and beauty is deeply influenced by Plato's theory of forms, which posits that the physical world

is a reflection of a higher, perfect reality. Shelley's portrayal of idealised love in "Epipsychidion" reflects his quest for these higher ideals, emphasising the transformative power of love to transcend the material world.

### Keats's "Hyperion"

John Keats's unfinished epic "Hyperion" is another significant exploration of Platonic themes, particularly the concepts of transformation and the pursuit of ideal beauty. Written between 1818 and 1819, "Hyperion" delves into the mythological story of the Titans' fall and the rise of the Olympians, serving as a metaphor for the soul's ascent towards higher knowledge and enlightenment.

Keats's engagement with Platonic philosophy is evident in his depiction of the transformation from the old order of the Titans to the new order of the Olympians. This theme of transformation reflects Plato's idea of the soul's ascent from the physical world to the realm of forms. In "Hyperion," Keats uses rich, sensuous imagery to portray this transformation:

"Deep in the shady sadness of a vale  
Far sunken from the healthy breath of morning,  
Far from the fiery noon, and Eve's one star,  
Sat grey-haired Saturn, quiet as a stone,  
Still as the silence rounds about his lair;  
Forest on forest hung about his head.  
Like cloud on cloud. No stir of air was there.  
Not so much life as on a summer's day.  
Robs not one light seed from the feather'd grass,  
But where the dead leaf fell, there did it rest." (Keats, 1818)

These lines depict Saturn, the fallen Titan, in a state of stasis and decay, symbolising the old order that must give way to the new. The imagery of transformation and renewal reflects Plato's belief in the soul's journey towards enlightenment and higher knowledge. Keats's portrayal of the rise of the Olympians as a process of renewal and ascension aligns with Plato's concept of anamnesis, where the soul recollects its divine origin and ascends towards the realm of forms.

Stuart Sperry's "Keats the Poet" provides a comprehensive examination of Keats's philosophical influences, including his engagement with Platonic thought (Sperry, 1973). Sperry argues that Keats's exploration of

transformation in "Hyperion" reflects a Platonic quest for higher knowledge and beauty. According to Sperry, Keats's use of rich, sensuous imagery to depict the struggle and renewal of the Titans serves as a metaphor for the soul's ascent towards enlightenment, aligning his poetic vision with Plato's philosophy.

Recent scholarship has continued to build on Sperry's analysis, offering new insights into the Platonic dimensions of Keats's poetry. James O'Rourke's "Keats and Philosophy: The Life of Sensations" explores the philosophical dimensions of Keats's works, highlighting his engagement with Platonic ideas of beauty and immortality (O'Rourke, 2001). O'Rourke suggests that Keats's portrayal of transformation and the pursuit of ideal forms in "Hyperion" reflects a Platonic quest for higher knowledge and enlightenment. This contemplative engagement with Platonic philosophy underscores Keats's belief in the transformative power of artistic creation.

"Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,  
Thou foster child of silence and slow time,  
Sylvan historian, who can thus express  
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:  
What leaf-fringed legend haunts about your shape  
Of deities or mortals, or of both,  
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?" (Keats, 1819)

In these lines, Keats envisions the urn as a symbol of eternal beauty, suggesting that true beauty transcends the physical and exists in a higher, ideal realm. This contemplative engagement with Platonic philosophy highlights Keats's belief in the transformative power of artistic creation.

## Discussion

Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats, two seminal figures of the Romantic era, both reveal a profound engagement with Platonic ideals in their poetry. However, their approaches to these philosophical concepts are markedly different, reflecting their unique poetic sensibilities and philosophical inclinations.

### Shelley's Active Quest for the Ideal

Shelley's poetry is characterised by an active, almost fervent pursuit of Platonic ideals, particularly in relation to love and beauty. His works often depict a quest for transcendence, portraying love and beauty as powerful

forces that elevate the soul beyond the confines of the material world. In "Epipsychidion," Shelley's portrayal of the beloved as a manifestation of divine perfection encapsulates this Platonic vision. Shelley writes:

"We shall become the same; we shall be one.  
Spirit within two frames, oh! wherefore two?  
One passion in twin hearts, which grows and grows,  
Till, like two meteors of expanding flame,  
Those spheres instincts with it become the same,  
Touch, mingle, are transfigured; ever still  
Burning, yet ever inconsumable." (Shelley, 1821)

These lines reflect Shelley's belief in the transformative power of love, suggesting that through an idealised union, the lovers can transcend physical limitations and attain a state of spiritual oneness. This vision aligns with Plato's theory of forms, where the material world is seen as a reflection of higher, perfect realities. Shelley's active pursuit of these ideals is evident in his depiction of love and beauty as divine forces that guide the soul towards transcendence.

Carl Grabo, in "The Magic Plant: The Growth of Shelley's Thought," underscores the Platonic dimensions in Shelley's poetry, particularly in "Epipsychidion" (Grabo, 1936). Grabo argues that Shelley's vision of love and beauty is deeply influenced by Plato's theory of forms, which posits that the physical world is a shadow of a higher, perfect reality. Shelley's portrayal of idealised love reflects his quest for these higher ideals, emphasising the transcendental nature of love and beauty.

In "Prometheus Unbound," another of Shelley's significant works, the theme of liberation and the quest for higher knowledge further illustrate his engagement with Platonic philosophy. The play's protagonist, Prometheus, embodies the struggle for enlightenment and transcendence, reflecting Shelley's belief in the transformative power of intellectual and spiritual liberation. This theme is aligned with Plato's notion that the soul must strive to recall its divine origins and ascend to the realm of forms.

### **Keats's contemplative pursuit of ideal forms**

In contrast to Shelley's active quest, John Keats's poetry reflects a more contemplative engagement with Platonic ideals, focusing on the transformative power of artistic creation and the pursuit of ideal forms. Keats's

work often explores the tension between the temporal and the eternal, suggesting that true beauty and knowledge reside in a higher, immutable realm.

In "Hyperion," Keats delves into the theme of transformation, using the mythological story of the Titans' fall and the rise of the Olympians as a metaphor for the soul's ascent towards higher knowledge and enlightenment. Keats writes:

"Deep in the shady sadness of a vale  
Far sunken from the healthy breath of morning,  
Far from the fiery noon, and Eve's one star,  
Sat grey-haired Saturn, quiet as a stone,  
Still as the silence rounds about his lair." (Keats, 1818)

These lines depict Saturn, the fallen Titan, in a state of stasis and decay, symbolising the old order that must give way to the new. The imagery of transformation and renewal reflects Plato's belief in the soul's journey towards enlightenment and higher knowledge. Keats's portrayal of the rise of the Olympians as a process of renewal and ascension aligns with Plato's concept of anamnesis, where the soul recollects its divine origin and ascends towards the realm of forms.

Stuart Sperry's "Keats the Poet" provides a comprehensive examination of Keats's philosophical influences, including his engagement with Platonic thought (Sperry, 1973). Sperry argues that Keats's exploration of transformation in "Hyperion" reflects a Platonic quest for higher knowledge and beauty. According to Sperry, Keats's use of rich, sensuous imagery to depict the struggle and renewal of the Titans serves as a metaphor for the soul's ascent towards enlightenment, aligning his poetic vision with Plato's philosophy.

Keats's engagement with Platonic philosophy is also evident in his odes, particularly "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and "Ode to a Nightingale." In "Ode on a Grecian Urn," Keats contemplates the eternal beauty of the urn, suggesting that true beauty is immutable and timeless. He writes:

"Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,  
Thou foster child of silence and slow time,  
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express  
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:  
What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape

Of deities or mortals, or of both,  
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?" (Keats, 1819)

These lines reflect Keats's belief that true beauty transcends the physical and exists in a higher, ideal realm. This contemplative engagement with Platonic philosophy highlights Keats's view of artistic creation as a means of accessing and expressing eternal truths.

James O'Rourke's "Keats and Philosophy: The Life of Sensations" explores the philosophical dimensions of Keats's works, highlighting his engagement with Platonic ideas of beauty and immortality (O'Rourke, 2001). O'Rourke suggests that Keats's portrayal of transformation and the pursuit of ideal forms reflects a Platonic quest for higher knowledge and enlightenment. This contemplative approach underscores Keats's belief in the transformative power of artistic creation and the soul's journey towards the divine.

### **Shared fascination with Platonic ideals**

Despite their different approaches, both Shelley and Keats share a profound fascination with Platonic ideals. Shelley's poetry is characterised by an active quest for transcendence, portraying love and beauty as powerful forces that elevate the soul. In contrast, Keats's poetry reflects a more contemplative pursuit of ideal forms, focusing on the transformative power of artistic creation.

Both poets use nature and mythological imagery to explore these Platonic themes. Shelley's portrayal of nature as a reflection of higher ideals aligns with Plato's theory of forms, where the material world is a shadow of a perfect reality. Similarly, Keats's use of rich, sensuous imagery to depict transformation and the pursuit of beauty reflects his engagement with Platonic philosophy.

Alan Grob's "The Philosophic Mind: A Study of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley" examines the interplay between philosophy and poetry in the works of these Romantic poets, highlighting Shelley's engagement with Platonic thought (Grob, 2009). Grob argues that Shelley's portrayal of love and beauty as transformative forces reflects his deep-seated belief in the existence of a higher, immutable reality. This philosophical engagement enriches Shelley's poetic vision, offering profound insights into the nature of love and beauty.

Similarly, recent studies have continued to build on Sperry's analysis of Keats's philosophical influences, offering new insights into the Platonic dimensions of Keats's poetry. O'Rourke's exploration of Keats's

engagement with Platonic ideas highlights his contemplative approach, focusing on the transformative power of artistic creation and the soul's ascent towards higher knowledge.

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