PREFACE:

The aesthetic movement gained impetus in Europe only in 1980’s although the roots of the movement had been there in earlier decades of the nineteenth century. Baudelaire was born in 1821, the year Keats died. One aesthete dies; another enters the scene. No two aesthetes are exactly alike, as we have seen later in the 1880s in writers like Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater. Romantics to a degree, Keats and Baudelaire were two different types as aesthetes.

Keats’ art was a unique case at least in the nineteenth century. He was a natural aesthete and a natural philosopher. He is often referred to as a pure poet. I believe critics mean by that Keats spontaneity or naturalness. He picked up some basics of the Greek myth, a little of Milton, and the idea of evolution in general, which he used in Hyperion. He learnt from Shakespeare- as he indicates in his letters- the art of ‘negative capability’ and concealed the intensity of his personal suffering in his poetry. He just yearned for one thing, vaguely sometimes, Beauty. His concept of Beauty is not static; it originates from the senses and moves upward towards finer planes of imaginative, intellectual, and ideal Beauty.

For Baudelaire, art is certainly for Beauty’s sake. But he wishes to see ‘Beauty’ by exploring the dark zones of human consciousness. He wishes to transform the ‘ugly’ into the ‘beautiful’ with a sombre seriousness. More acutely than Keats, Dante is a living reality for Baudelaire. He lacks the refined aestheticism of Keats, although beauty is also his ultimate choice. He knows more deeply than Keats that non can reach the province of beauty, which has not passed through hell. His definition of the beautiful
indicates the relationship between the ‘hell’ and the ‘beautiful’. Mystery and regret are also characteristics of the Baudelaire’s Beautiful. His poetry is the best guide to his concept of Beauty which lies mixed up with his hellish experience. Beauty in Baudelaire is like a total experience, and integral sight. There are times when a Keatsian longing possesses the spirit of Baudelaire as in Le Voyage, when ‘the glory of the sunlight on the violent sea, the glory of cities in the setting sun kindled an unquiet longing in our hearts, to plunge into the sky’s reflections’. This instantly reminds us of young Keats, whom we see a restless being in Endymion in a search for the ‘great key/ To Golden places’. And yet Keats lacks the intensity of Baudelaire’s intuitive awareness of the mystery of the world.

So in this thesis I am going to make a comparative study between John Keats and Charles Baudelaire aesthetes. This study is going to look into how the two poets handled the theme of beauty. Keeping in mind the temporal, spatial, biographical and literary backgrounds of the two poets, I shall look into their distinct and different kinds of approach on the theme of beauty. For the purpose I will take up Keats’ Hyperion, and his major Odes as they are considered to be the products of his matured period. On the other hand I shall be taking into consideration Baudelaire’s Les Fleurs du Mal, and Les Epaves in English translations. My approach to the study is going to be a deductive one. In each chapter I shall be discussing the various works of the two poets separately and then at the end of each chapter discuss on the points of differences.