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"As to the poetical Character itself (I mean that sort of which, if I am anything, I am a member;......) it is not itself - it has no self - it is everything and nothing. - ...... It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen."¹

Keats was confidently aware of the true nature of his poetical genius. He was aware also of his dramatic temper. The mind that feels equally delighted in conceiving the good and the evil, without being a party to either, is a mind endowed with a dramatic temper. It is objective. It is Shakespearean. John Keats had such a mind and genius, which always remain behind the creation of a great drama. It is a rare quality of Keats's poetical self - a quality, which Keats elsewhere called "Negative Capability," and which we find in no other poet of the Romantic period save in Sir Walter Scott. Allardyce Nicoll thinks that the

¹Keats's Letters. (To Richard Woodhouse, Oct.27, 1818.)
Romantic poets lacked humour on which depends the dramatic mood; they also lacked the power of seeing beyond themselves; and they were incapable of transforming their "petty loves and woes" into the universal. Nicoll's findings are not wholly correct, especially, in so far as Keats and Scott are concerned. Bernice Slote also does not agree with Nicoll on this point. "If the Romantic poet," she says, "lacks this quality, then Keats is not a Romantic poet. He had the dramatic temper pre-eminently." It is, therefore, not surprising, that Keats's dramatic temper naturally led him to drama and all that is dramatic. His poetic life seems to have been in search of a form which may give him the necessary scope for natural development of his poetical character. The journey from the dreamy world of Endymion to the concrete world of Otho and King Stephen is a journey of Keats's poetic life, which has passed in its course different milestones in his Odes, and also in his narrative poems - The Eve of St. Agnes, Isabella, Lamia and Hyperion, before it has reached the dramatic. We can notice a distinct evolution of his poetical character, moving intensely towards drama. To turn from Otho The Great to King Stephen fragment is again to notice another unmistakable phase of this evolution. Middleton Murry says -

"Keats' purpose was not to write odes, or even odes, but to write plays; all the poems he wrote from

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Endymion onwards were but a step towards his 'chief attempt in the drama'......"^4

Keats's progress through the gradual but improving forms of dramatic qualities has captivated the critic's mind so much so that he has looked upon the poet primarily as a dramatist, which is not a fact. When Hurry maintains, that Keats's main purpose was "to write plays," he has, one may think, exacorated that which is only potential. We should not forget, for instance, what Keats himself says in a letter to Bailey:

"One of my ambitions is to make as great a revolution in modern dramatic writing as Kean has done in acting."^5

The letter shows that the writing of drama was one of Keats's many ambitions, though it was his "greatest ambition."^6 All the Romantic poets had dramatic ambition which, in some cases, was obvious, in other, implied. Keats had dramatic temper, we agree, but we do not think that play-writing was his only aim. His dramatic temper shows itself in increasing degree and in improving forms as his poetic experience grows, and as he moves towards his poetic maturity. But "his ambition was to become," says Bradley, "poet pure and simple,"^7 and not primarily to be

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^5Keats's Letters, (To Benjamin Bailey, Aug.14, 1819).

^6Op. cit. (To John Taylor, November 17 [1819]).

a dramatist. Had it been so, we would have most probably found him experimenting with drama right from the beginning. Is it not extra-ordinarily peculiar for a would-be dramatist to learn the lesson of dramatic composition through the medium of poetical exercises?

"I wish to diffuse," writes Keats, "the colouring of St. Agnes Eve throughout a poem in which Character and Sentiment would be the figures to such drapery. Two or three such poems, if God should spare me, written in the course of the next six years, would be a famous Gradus ad Parnassum altissimum. I mean they would serve me up to the writing of a few fine Plays - my greatest ambition - when I do feel ambitious."

A Shakespeare would never, perhaps, take to this road. The composition of The Rape of Lucrece and Venus And Adonis was certainly not undertaken by Shakespeare with the same end in view.

The term - dramatic temper should not be confused with the dramatic talent. A man with a dramatic temper is not necessarily a dramatic genius. The term indicates a particular mental attitude without which one can also write drama, but without which one cannot be a good and great dramatist. It indicates Keats's objective attitude to the subject he treated. Chaucer had, in this sense, dramatic temper, but Chaucer is a narrative poet; Browning had that temper, and Browning remains

---8Keats's Letters. (To Taylor, Nov.17 [1819]).---
famous not for his dramas, but for his dramatic monologues. Keats's dramatic temper shows itself in his Odes, and in his narrative poems. There are concrete and precise imagery, tensions and conflicts in Odes; the verse is controlled, and though lyric in form, the Odes of Keats are generally objective in character. In the narrative poems he is nearer to drama than he is in his Odes. In them, there are actions, dramatic suspense and surprise, dramatic turn of events, even some dramatic dialogues as much as they are permissible within the limits of the narrative poetry. The poetic exercises of this sort have certainly helped Keats to equip himself with certain pre-requisites for dramatic composition, but these do not make an indispensable part of the preparatory programme of a would-be dramatist. Had play-writing been Keats's primary aim, it would rather be natural to find him learning dramatic technique and acquiring knowledge of the stage in the practical world of the theatre. That would have been really a propitious and logical step which all practical and successful playwrights usually take. Practical world of the theatre is the only training ground for a would-be dramatist, but Keats, like most of his contemporary poet-dramatists, remained almost indifferent to this aspect of playwriting.

Researches on Keats, particularly, by Bernice Slote and Harry R. Beaudry in recent years have made some definite contribution to the study of Keats's interest in drama and theatre. They have thrown light on a much-neglected side of Keats's life - a side that has vital connection with his dramatic ambition
and dramatic effort. But the studies by these scholars cannot convince us that Keats had the training for a dramatic career. Slote writes -

"... there is sufficient evidence to show that for at least three or four years of his creative life he was familiar with the theatre, the plays, the actors, and the whole atmosphere of the London stage. Certainly his own dramatic temperament as a poet led him to the theatre;.....

...... His choice of friends, for instance, may be either cause or effect. Of his intimate circle, at least four were connected with the theatre. Leigh Hunt wrote dramatic criticism. So did John Hamilton Reynolds and Dilke. Reynolds was also a playwright,...... Charles Armitage Brown, with whom Keats lived for some time, had had a play (Narensky) produced and was the owner of a life ticket to Drury Lane theatre. ...... These friends and their interest in the play certainly reinforced Keats's own dramatic bent, and it is not improbable that his role as theatre-goer had some relation to his writing."

Keats, we know, witnessed many a Shakespearean production with Edmund Kean appearing in the chief role; he also attended performances of the contemporary plays. He also read widely the dramatic literature both ancient and modern. Besides, Keats attempted theatrical criticism for a brief period from December

9Slote, op. cit. p.43.
1817 to January 1818. As a theatrical reviewer, Keats had, moreover, ample scope to have free access to quite a good number of stage productions of his time. Keats also attended dramatic lectures of William Hazlitt. All these activities had, no doubt, their direct and indirect effects on Keats, and these may be regarded as providing him with necessary impetus for writing plays. But this does not necessarily indicate any intimate inside knowledge of the theatre. It is indicative of Keats's dramatic interest; it might have also added intensity to his dramatic ambition, and keenness to his critical sense, but it does not yet convince us that Keats had thorough preparation essential for dramatic success. Had it been so, then all the theatre-reviewers and play-goers could have necessarily been successful playwrights. We still think that Keats, in spite of all these activities, did not acquire really practical training in dramatic art; he had not learnt his art from inside. Keats was never an actor. He was never connected with the practical affairs of the theatrical production. As reviewer or play-goer, Keats only looked from the auditorium. It was, however, not entirely ineffective. It gave keenness to his dramatic inspiration, and pushed him on towards practical exercises in drama.

We do not find Keats's dramatic genius in any sense extra-ordinary, not to be found in the other Romantics. What is not common with the other Romantics in general is his dramatic temper - his power of maintaining dramatic detachment. Only in this respect, Keats and Scott differ from others. As to the dramatic talent, Keats is, more or less, like them. Keats's
dramatic temper seems to have confused some critics who are inclined to place Keats by Shakespeare. The major aspect of Keats's dramatic temper may be found in his power of loving the "principle of beauty in all things," and not probably anything beyond this. One may say, that by virtue of that power, Keats stands by Shakespeare only as a poet; he does not stand by him as dramatist. Because, it is not only this power of seeing the beauty in Iago, as well as, in Imogen, for which Shakespeare is a great dramatist, but for his superb dramatic talent and many more things both acquired and inherent which Keats lacked. Hence, it is necessary to approach the study of Keats's dramatic talent with this distinction in mind, only then it may be possible to assess the real worth of Keats as a playwright.

Keats's dramatic ambition was different from that of Lord Byron. Byron's ambition was to reform the English theatre; Byron was convinced from his practical connection with the theatre, that a new life and form should be the things necessary for the revitalization of the contemporary drama; revival of the Elizabethan dramatic tradition would not do; attempt at mere stage-success could not serve the real interest of the drama which was crying for fresh energy and new approach - in a word, reform. Keats had actually no idea of bringing about dramatic revolution in a way Lord Byron tried. He, as a matter of fact,

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10 Following the remark of Matthew Arnold that Keats is with Shakespeare, the critics, like A.C. Bradley, John Middleton Murry, and so on, place Keats by Shakespeare.
did not think of dramatic innovations to be made. Yet, Keats says, one of his "ambitions is to make as great a revolution in modern dramatic writing as Kean has done in acting.\textsuperscript{11}

Keats's letter to Bailey written on August 14, 1819 is one which is likely to create some confusion and misunderstanding on this point. Let us try to find out the exact nature of Keatsian revolution in dramatic composition. The word - "revolution" apparently implies Keats's innovative project (if any) in dramatic composition; it further implies his deep dissatisfaction with the existing drama and a clear vision of what should be done to change this degenerated dramatic condition. But as far as we know from the available records, Keats never had such things in mind. Yet he has used the word, "revolution," and perhaps, on the strength of this letter, some critics and scholars, like Harry R. Beaudry, John Middleton Murry and others have tried to prove that Keats would have immortalized himself not only as a poet, but also as a dramatist, if he had a longer span of life. To us, the word is rather emotionally used. When the poet says, that he wants to make a revolution in drama-writing, he, perhaps, means, that he is able to write fine dramas which will be astonishing to his friends and others holding the opinion, that he "should never be able to write a Scene."\textsuperscript{12} While working on \textit{Otho} Keats seems to have been convinced about his own ability as a playwright of no inferior sort. He, perhaps, means to say that

\textsuperscript{11}Keats's Letters, (To Bailey, Aug.14,1819).

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid.
his dramatic writings will force his friends and others to revise their notion about his dramatic power. He wrote this letter to Bailey when he had been working on Otho, and had already completed four acts of this tragedy. The line in which he writes about his intention to revolutionize dramatic composition, relates to what he has written earlier in the same letter, and we believe, if read together, the letter will no longer mislead us into a meaning not meant by Keats. We feel tempted to reproduce these lines:

"I have also been writing parts of my Hyperion, and completed four acts of a tragedy. It was the opinion of most of my friends that I should never be able to write a Scene. I will endeavour to wipe away the prejudice. I sincerely hope you will be pleased when my labours, since we last saw each other, shall reach you. One of my ambitions is to make as great a revolution in modern dramatic writing as Kean has done in acting."

All that Keats wanted to do as a playwright was very different from what Lord Byron aimed to do; Keats means revolution in dramatic writing - not a reformation of the English theatre. The composition of Otho created in Keats an awareness of a power hitherto latent, that might enable him, he realized, to write finer works in future. This realization was quite different from what he had had earlier. It seems, Keats himself was astonished at this discovery, and thought how wrong were his friends to consider him undramatic.
Though Keats was not as serious a dramatist as Lord Byron, yet it cannot, however, be said that his dramatic efforts lacked the sincerity of purpose. The contemporary plays which he read, and witnessed on the stage were, perhaps, far from satisfactory to him. One who was deeply conscious of the beauties of Shakespeare's dramas, was certainly disappointed at the dramatic standard of the time. Keats, therefore, thought to provide the age with better dramatic works. His self-confidence was so great at that time, that he considered himself capable of instilling, if not a new life, at least a new power, poetry, and freshness into drama which was conspicuous by the absence of these qualities in the contemporary dramatic writings. In other words, he thought, he would be able to revive Elizabethan dramatic tradition in a far better way. This is, perhaps, the most important side of his dramatic ambition. By writing "a few fine plays" (obviously, with Shakespeare in mind), Keats seems to have wanted to serve a double-purpose: to wise away his friends' prejudice about him, and to provide the age with some dramatic works of good taste and artistic beauty. How far he has been able to succeed is a question which may be answered by the actual study and examination of his dramas both complete and fragmentary. To this we shall turn now.

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13Keats's Letters, (To Taylor, Nov.17, [1819]).
Keats's dramatic writings are quite limited. Otho The Great is the only completed tragedy in five acts, written during the months of July and August of 1819. Besides, Keats left behind two other dramatic fragments - King Stephen, and Griosus. Keats also contemplated to write another drama on the Earl of Leicester's history, which he could not write.

Otho was written in collaboration with his friend - Charles Armitage Brown, while he had been living with the latter at Shanklin, in the Isle of Wight. "Mr. Brown sketched out the incidents of each scene, Keats translated them into his rich and ready language:" Brown gave the plot, characters, and dramatic conduct, Keats, by giving diction and verse, added flesh and blood to the skeleton supplied by Brown. Keats, as he himself says, acted as "midwife to his (Brown's) plot." But the poet's biographers attribute the dramatic conduct and the verse of the entire fifth act of Otho The Great to Keats's authorship, and we are told, as the writing advanced, Keats took more and more interest in Ludoloh and the entire affairs of the last act into his own hand. However, the way in which this drama was composed is a positive handicap to all dramatic authors, especially, when the

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14 Griosus was first published by Amy Lowell from the Woodhouse Transcript, in 1924, and included later by the editor, H.W. Garrod in the poet's Poetical Works, cited hereafter as Keats's Works.

15 Keats's Letters, (To Taylor, Nov.17. \(1819\)).

16 Houghton, Lord, Life And Letters of John Keats, (Everyman's Library) 1969, p.171

17 Keats's Letters, (To Taylor, Sept.5. \(1819\)).
two persons of unequal merit and mental make-up are engaged in the task. To this handicap was added another - Keats wrote it for a particular star-actor, Edmund Kean who was his hero in the world of the then London theatre. Naturally, Keats, it may be supposed, had to work under certain self-imposed restrictions threatening at every step (as they usually do) to blur his independent artistic judgment and poetic vision. This is the reason for which Otho The Great should not be taken very seriously to pass judgment on Keats as a dramatist. The actual Keats the dramatist can be found, not in Otho, but in his next independent work (in fragment), King Stephen, and also in Grippus. Still Otho should not pass unnoticed.

The plot of Otho The Great is simple. Otho, the German Emperor has a son named Ludolph, and a niece, Erminia whom the Emperor intends to marry with his son. But Conrad, a shrewd Duke under Otho plots against this marriage. He has a sister, named Auranthe who is in love with a young knight, Albert. Conrad thinks within himself that if Auranthe marries Ludolph, he will be more fortunate in being closer to the throne. This thought leads Conrad to work out his plot. He, at first, brings Ludolph into his confidence, and subornes him and the nobles to an open revolt against the Emperor. Then, with his sister he slights Erminia by a crooked plot, spreading the rumour that

............. a midnight gallant, seen to climb
A window to her chamber neighbour'd near,

(III.ii.141-42.)
and prevails upon Otho, that Erminia is unchaste. By virtue of his shrewdness Conrad soon proves himself to be indispensable to the Emperor. He then places the proposal of marriage between Ludoloh and Auranthe to which Otho readily consents. When Ludoloh and his father meet, the latter forgives his "wayward boy" who joined hands with the revolting nobles. What is more, he acquaints his repentant son with his decision of marriage between him (Ludoloh) and Auranthe. Ludolph is exceedingly happy at this. The marriage is also performed. But on the very day of marriage when all are happy and gay, the Abbot - Ethelbert appears with the wronged Erminia before the Emperor. He gives out the secret of the heinous plot of Conrad and Auranthe against Erminia. The Abbot also tells the Emperor that only Albert knows it all. But when summoned, Albert denies having any knowledge of it. As a result, Ethelbert and Erminia are put into prison for bringing a false charge against the newly married bride and her brother.

But Conrad and his sister become worried about Albert who may at any moment give out the proof of their misdeed. Conrad now begins to think as to how Albert can be thrown out of harm's way. In the meantime, Albert meets Auranthe in her chamber and aporises her of his changed mind. But he has still something to offer which Auranthe may accept if she chooses. Albert asks her to flee with him, and tells her that only by that she may escape the awkward situation which will arise out of the disclosure of the secret. Auranthe agrees to the proposal. When Albert is waiting in the wood with horses for Auranthe at night, Conrad manages to stab him mortally, but he himself is also killed by his
victim. Ludolph comes to realize that his fair Auranthe is false and guilty. Shell-shocked, Ludolph runs mad and dies of heart-break. Auranthe kills herself. And the old Otho lives to mourn the loss.

The story of *Otho The Great* is not very interesting, or rather, it could not be made interesting. A number of defects are noticed in construction and dramatic conduct. Organization of the material proves the dramatist's actual power of plot-construction; and it may be said that *Otho* cannot claim to have shown that power. In the entire first act, neither Otho, nor Ludolph is able to claim our attention to the extent to which Conrad does. From Act II Ludolph begins to come into our notice, and in the last Act, he is the centre of attention. And throughout the drama Otho remains no better than any of the sub-ordinate characters. The readers' attention, therefore, gets painfully divided. It concentrates first on Conrad, then on Otho for a very short while, and finally on Ludolph. when the drama ends with the death of the prince Ludolph, we are, so to say, in the state of a confusion as to who is the tragic hero. The drama seems to have opened with Otho as the hero, but as it moves towards the close, it happens that Otho transfers his role to his son. The poet shifts his emphasis from the Emperor to the prince. The title of the drama shows that Keats conceived of the old Emperor as the hero for whose tragedy Ludolph's death, and disruption of Otho's future dream and desire were devised. It is not also improbable that the poet might have King Lear in mind when he originally conceived of the tragedy of Otho. If it is actually so, where is
Otho's tragic suffering? Where is also the tragic conflict in him? Proper psychological conflict is absent in the drama. If Otho has committed any tragic blunder, it is his having trusted Conrad too much and his subsequent consent to the proposal of Ludoloh's marriage with Auranthe. There is no other tragic error committed by Otho which has its bearing upon the catastrophe. Ludoloh's madness and death are the ultimate outcome of this mistake, but Otho is ignorant of this, so to say. The stage of anagnorisis is too weak to solit the personality of the hero. Otho maintains his wholeness unlike a tragic hero. When everything runs (though not quite naturally) towards a tragic resolution, Otho is found standing like a child ignorant of his action. He stands like a figure not sufficiently important for the play. This is very unbecoming of a tragic hero. On the other hand, Ludoloh cannot be the hero of Otho The Great, though Keats designed this character with Edmund Kean in mind, and has obviously called Ludoloh "the principal Character." Kean was at his best when the character gave scope for emotional acting; and Ludoloh satisfied this condition, not Otho. Again, an actor of Kean's calibre and standing cannot be supposed to appear in a sub-ordinate role. These two conditions go to support the view, that by "principal Character," Keats means Ludoloh. If so, what tragic blunder do we attribute to him? A hero, at least, in the Aristotelean sense cannot be imagined to suffer tragedy and agony for other's fault, or error. Ludoloh is at the centre of the stage,

18Keats's Letters, (To Fanny Keats, December 20, 1819).
especially in the last two acts; there is something of Hero's sufferings in him, yet he cannot be called the hero of Otho The Great. Bernice Slote writes -

"Ludolph is prominent, of course, in the two most important scenes of the play - Act III, scene 2, and Act V, scene 5 ....... Still the play had to be somebody's tragedy, if it were to escape the most obvious kind of melodramatic claoutrao. Probably Keats's instinct was right, as he drew more and more into the being of Ludolph; yet the catastrophe had not been fully prepared for or focused in the early acts......."19

Slote also notices the lack of coherence in the plot, but we cannot agree with her when she thinks, that "Keats's instinct was right." Rather we are forced to believe that the poet was carried away more by his thought of adapting this character to the natural gift of Kean's emotional acting than by any dramatic consideration.

The central figure being weak, the drama suffers from a serious defect in plot-construction, as well as in conception. The tragic potentialities of the plot, if properly utilized, and the materials, skilfully organized, Otho could have been a tragic hero like Lear.

The ending of the drama is faulty as the beginning is vague. Walter Jackson Bate is certainly right when he says -

19Slote, op. cit. p.110.
"Before the action of the play ever begins, a bewildering array of incidents have taken place, none of which is very interesting but all of which have to be revealed early in the play in order for the action that follows to have any meaning."20

Aileen Ward has also noticed the structural defects of Otho and rightly says that "in the last the dramatic machinery breaks down completely."21 Keats seems to have given all attention to Ludolph, and in the last act his sole aim was it seems, to display Ludolph's emotional outburst, a sort of hysteria caused by the innermost injury received from Auranthe. Other characters stand quite helplessly by, nothing to say, or to do, but to witness Ludolph's agony and hear his violent ravings. Aileen Ward goes further to trace in such a dramatic defect Keats's own state of mind at that time. "All Keats's poetry," she says, "could not redeem the hysteria of this ending, which provides an alarming clue to his own state of mind at that time."22 Even the recognition of some personal element of this type cannot justify this blemish in the play. Perhaps, this was not the actual cause. It is more probable, rather, to assign the cause to Keats's special way of thinking, as to how Kean might be pleased to find the "principal character" suitable for his art and temper.


22Ibid.
The plot of *Otho The Great* also indicates, that Keats has not yet acquired a clear idea as to where narrative poetry differs from dramatic composition. For we find, that the important stages of the story which could give fair scope to demonstrate actions on the stage, have not been exploited in the interest of the drama. Conrad's plot and Auranthe's collaboration with her brother, Otho's taking Conrad into confidence and his tragic blunder in submitting himself to the clandestine motive of the latter, for example, are some of the vital dramatic actions which are not shown on the stage; they are either narrated, or suggested to the detriment of the proper dramatic effect.

The stage at which the drama opens is actually ill-chosen. What does remain hereafter for the dramatist to show on the stage but Ludoloh's madness, wild ravings, and death?

Besides, *Otho* cannot convince us that Keats, by this time, has already acquired sufficient knowledge about human life and nature. The discovery of Auranthe's faithlessness is, no doubt, a shock to Ludoloh; but in conceiving the effect of the shock, Keats has certainly out-stepped the limits of natural human behaviour and probability. For this cannot normally be the cause of Ludoloh's death in the way as shown. What has he lost that the shock of loss should be heart-rending, maddening, and killing? He has practically lost before he has been able to gain.

Ludoloh. Auranthe! My Life!

Long have I lov'd thee, yet till now not lov'd:

(IV.ii, 19-20)
Ludoloh's situation is different from Othello's. Othello has loved, though not too wisely, but too well, and been loved. His behaviour is justified, and his tragedy is inevitable; for Othello has lost something which he had as his own. Ludoloh has nothing to lose; and the loss of nothing cannot have any such effect. Keats has overlooked this side of Ludoloh's story, and shown actions (in the Act V) which are out of character. Otho, as a result, has a melodramatic ending. The tragic resolution is forced.

Harry R. Beaudry has lost sight of this point. He has rather found reason to praise the last act especially with an unqualified comment. "These scenes of the final act of Otho," writes Beaudry, "were all the work of Keats, and the excitement, the variety of incident and the hastening toward the catastrophe make this the most dramatic and the most 'Shakespearian' part of the play." We are unable, for the reasons given above, to agree with him on this point. Sidney Colvin, we think, is partially right when he says -

"Keats, it is recorded, had in his eye the special gift of Edmund Kean for enacting frantic extremes and long-drawn agonies of passion; and it is possible that as played by him the last act, of which Keats took the conduct as well as the writing into his own hands might have proved effective on the stage."24

24Colvin, Sidney, John Keats, (1918) p.442.
Colvin's remark hints at the conditional success of the play; Kean's acting, he thinks, can only cover up the defect. It is like covering the ugly ulcerous soot with a thick glossy bandage concealing the ugliness from the public view, though the ulcer remains beneath the bandage. Colvin finds artistic lapses in Otho, calls the plot "ultra-romantically extravagant," and hence suggests only the conditional success of the play on the stage.

As regards Keats's skill in characterization we may take up the character of Otho first. Otho, like most of the tragic heroes is credulous; but his credulity is suggested more through the speeches of other characters than through actions.

Conrad, ................................

I should have perish'd in our empire's wreck,
But, calling interest loyalty, swore faith
To most believing Otho; and so help'd
His blood-stain'd ensigns to the victory
In yesterday's hard fight, that it has turn'd
The edge of his sharp wrath to eager kindness.

(I.i.48-53.)

Otho is noble; he is kind and forgiving. His nobility and the Christian quality of forgiveness are all shown through his dealings with his enemy, Gersa. He forgives him and makes his enemy blush for his harsh tongue and bloody action against the Emperor. Otho has in him a noble transforming power, by virtue of which he can transform a foe into a friend. Gersa is completely changed when

25Ibid.
he is brought before the Emperor.

Gersa. ............... Otho! emperor!

You rob me of myself; my dignity
Is now your infant; I am a weak child.

Otho. Give me your hand, and let this kindly grasp
Live in our memories.

(I.ii.118-22.)

He is warm in his filial affection. His dealings with rebellious son - Ludolph show this side of his character. Ludolph knows the essential nature of Otho.

Ludolph. Yes, yes, I know he hath a noble nature
That cannot tramole on the fallen.......

(I.iii.55-6.)

Otho had a high hope of the likely outcome that would follow the marriage between his son and Auranthe. He expected that Auranthe would be able to serve as an anchor to his "wayward" son. Otho says to Auranthe -

Otho. What need of this? Enough, if you will be
A potent tutoress to my wayward boy,
And teach him, what it seems his nurse could not,

(I.ii.31-3.)

Otho's solicitude for his "wayward boy" and his eagerness to see Ludolph's welfare through his marriage with Auranthe are promoted by his affection for Ludolph. It is something like mother's affection. This filial part of his mind is the only prominent side
that displays itself through all his actions that concern him and the state. Old as he is, he wants to make, possibly keeping Ludoloh's interest in mind, the future of the throne secure. This prompts him to consent to the proposal of marriage between his son and Conrad's sister. He considers an alliance with Conrad a very wise step towards this ultimate end.

Otho. ........................

And thus a marble column do I build
To prop my empire's dome. Conrad, in thee
I have another steadfast one, to uphold
The portals of my state; and, for my own
Pre-eminence and safety, I will strive
To keep thy strength upon its pedestal.

(I.ii.160-65.)

But Keats has miserably failed to show the tragic development of the character of Otho. It seems, he had no integrated poetic vision behind the conception and creation of the tragic world of Otho The Great. This is, perhaps, the reason for which the incoherent stress has been laid on the characters of the play; and Otho has failed to govern the affairs and develop as a tragic hero even though he stands at the centre of the play.

Ludoloh appears in this drama as a "wayward" young prince, a victim of Conrad, a passionate lover, and a disillusioned husband. To Conrad, Ludoloh is no better than a ladder for reaching the height of his ambition. Ludoloh is not a man of strong masculine character; he is amenable to influences. He is extremely sentimental and emotional.
When Otho forgives him and acquaints him with his decision of marriage with Auranthe (II.i.), Ludolph is beside himself with a feeling mixed with extreme joy and stiffening surprise.

Ludolph

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The fair Auranthe mine!
Too great a boon! I pray thee let me ask
What more than I know of could so have changed
Your purpose touching her?

(II.i.139-42.)

To win Auranthe for his wife is a great victory for Ludolph. His emotional nature at once responds to the proposal of his father. Ludolph is essentially a romantic queen-worshipper. Immediately after his marriage he is completely bewitched by his "fair Auranthe." He feels an ecstasy of fulfilment which finds expression in his emotional utterances.

Ludolph. Soft beauty! by to-morrow I should die,
Wert thou not mine.

(III.ii.13-14.)

His emotional utterances and romantic effusions indicate how infatuated he has been by his bride. Even the ladies present begin to talk apart -

First Lady. How deep she has bewitch'd him!

(III.ii.14.)

Ludolph soars on the wings of imagination, and we notice an out-burst of emotion in his speeches.
Ludolph. Though heaven's choir
Should in a vast circumstance descend
And sing for my delight, I'd stop my ears!
Though bright Apollo's car stood burning here,
And he put out an arm to bid me mount,
His touch an immortality, not I!
This earth, this palace, this room, Auranthe!

(III.ii.38-44.)

Even Otho has to interfere with such effusive utterances of Ludolph in order to win the infatuated lover back to himself.

Otho. This is a little painful; just too much.

Conrad, if he flames longer in this wise,
I shall believe in wizard-woven loves
And old romances; but I'll break the spell.

(III.ii.45-8.)

Of all the stuff that forms this character, impulse and emotion are the strongest. This emotion and this sentimentality result in his madness when his happy dream is broken by the cruel blow of odious reality. He dies of heart-break. Though there is a touch of improbability about this character, Ludolph is an interesting character capable of covering the minor artistic defects up by his violence, passion, and wild ravings. Keats has been able to create a character that may have satisfied crude dramatic taste of the audience of his time.

A number of critics and biographers of Keats have tried to prove Keats's personal connection with the character of
Ludolph. Slote says, that Keats "did somehow identify himself with Kean, and perhaps Ludolph as much as any character in Keats's writing is a magnified projection of himself." But she does not find direct personal connection between the two — the author and his creation, Ludolph. "Ludolph," she says, "is not Keats, but an explosion timed by Keats." Aileen Ward thinks that Keats, as he proceeds towards the close of his drama, has "poured more and more of himself into the character of Ludolph."

"Many of Ludolph's speeches echo phrases of letters describing his own feelings that summer." Ward goes further with this assumption. "In view of the extraordinary satisfaction he found in writing the last act of Otho," Ward continues, "one wonders how much he unconsciously felt the killing of Auranthe as a symbolic revenge on Fanny Brawne." The matter, as raised by these critics and biographers, is not, of course, within the scope of this study, but it may be said, that Ludolph's actions and speeches may not be regarded with direct reference to Keats's private and personal life and thought. There are reasons to differ on this point. Firstly, Keats is pre-eminently or generally an objective writer; secondly, the extreme estrangement between the poet and his mistress — Fanny Brawne took place

26 Slote, op. cit. p.108.
27 Ibid.
28 Ward, op. cit. p.300.
29 Ibid.
afterwards as it appears from Keats's letters to Fanny. Keats, it may be thought, was still in his paradise of Fanny's love. The age at which Keats composed his Odes, *Eve of St. Agnes*, *Otho*, and other fine pieces was the spring of his life. Naturally, Keats the youth, like all youths, might have found himself at home with the story of the love-sick Ludolph; the lover in Keats might have projected himself into the lover in Ludolph, but the poet was likely to remain above total identification. It is not unlikely that Keats, on the other hand, might have meant to show through the character of Ludolph how a youth of extremely emotional nature might behave, especially, if his love were unrequited and finally betrayed. We do not think there is anything more than the poet's intention of showing a mere general case. How far he has been able to universalize or generalize it, is a matter of ability. As to Keats's use of phrases and expression of feeling of his letters, all that can be said is that a writer may use the same phrases and idioms in his literary works, as well as in his private and personal correspondence. Moreover, to express the same sentiment and feeling, a particular author often uses the same or similar verbal equivalent; he is often fond of certain idioms of expression to which he feels tempted to have recourse as and when he finds an opportunity. The verbal correspondence, as Aileen Ward has been able to trace, does not necessarily indicate Keats's self-identification with the character of Ludolph.

Ludolph is a warm-blooded character, full of youthful vitality. He is the only character of *Otho* that contributes to
the entertainment value of the whole drama. He holds up the interest of the readers and the audience up to the last, though his tragedy and death cannot touch our heart and move us to pity and sympathy to the extent to which a tragic character is supposed to do so.

Of the important characters of Otho The Great, Conrad is one. Conrad is the villain of the piece. Like all villains, Conrad knows too well how to turn his victims to his purpose. He pursues his end of gaining power and position through the marriage of his sister - Auranthe with the Emperor's son - Ludolph. His path is crooked and shrewd. He is slow in his movement, but firm and steady in reaching his goal.

Conrad. ....................

A few days since, I was an open rebel
Against the Emperor, had suborn'd his son,
Drawn off his nobles to revolt, and shown
Contented fools causes for discontent
Fresh hatch'd in my ambition's eagle nest -
So thriv'd I as a rebel, and behold
Now I am Otho's favourite, his dear friend,
His right hand, his brave Conrad.

(I.i.35-42.)

As a step towards his ultimate aim, Conrad needs to create Otho's firm faith in his indispensability for the future safety and solidarity of the state; and this Conrad does to an effective degree. Otho has to admit it when he speaks to Conrad with a
mixed feeling of both joy and gratitude.

Otho. ..............................

............... Conrad, in thee
I have another steadfast one, to uphold
The portals of my state; and, for my own
Pre-eminence and safety, I will strive
To keep thy strength upon its pedestal.

(I.ii.161-65.)

Conrad knows how effective it will be to strike the iron while it is hot. But he has another hurdle to cross, and that is, Otho's inclination towards Erminia as the would-be bride for Ludolph. To cross this hurdle Conrad is to generate a strong prejudice in Otho and Ludolph against Erminia. He, therefore, plots against her and in collusion with his sister - Auranthe, he spreads slander against the moral character of the Emperor's choice and succeeds in his project by having his sister's competitor thrown out of Otho's favour. Now Conrad's path is clear of the obstacles; he now places the proposal of marriage between his sister and the Emperor's son. The "most believing Otho" (I.i.50) swallows the bait at once. Conrad thus succeeds in his mission.

Conrad is a Machiavellian villain whose end justifies the means. He is cool, calculating, and extremely selfish. He kills Albert when he learns that Albert's life is harmful to the interest of his sister and himself; for to kill Albert is a must to destroy all proof of their villainy. But in doing so Conrad
himself is killed by his victim. Keats in creating this character has displayed some skill. We stand watching with curiosity how Conrad executes his foul scheme. His death in the end brings in a sense of poetic justice.

The next is the character of Auranthe that deserves a few words. Auranthe has fascinating beauty without goodness. She is a sharp contrast to Erminia. She withdraws her love from Albert at once when Conrad apprises her of the Emperor's consent to her marriage with Ludolph. She tries to erase the very memory of her past association with her former lover.

Auranthe. Can it be, brother? For a golden crown

With a queen's awful lips I doubly thank you!

This is to wake in Paradise! Farewell
Thou clad of yesterday - 'twas not myself!

(I.i.86-9.)

It is not love that draws Auranthe to Ludolph, but her ambition of becoming the queen. This element of ambition basically common in character joins both the brother and the sister together to plot against Erminia. Keats's female characters are dim in comparison with their male counterparts. Auranthe, though vitally connected with the plot, is actually a half-drawn character; she is not fully brought out to view.

Keats's next work is King Stephen - a dramatic fragment of four short scenes, and though incomplete, is yet an independent work. Whatever Keats has done here is all by himself. King Stephen was started after the composition of Otho The Great
in November 1819, and was left in its present fragmentary form.

King Stephen of Bouloone (France) who declares his revolt against the Empress Maud of England, and fights heroically against the English army led by the Duke of Glocester is at last taken prisoner. Maud demands Glocester to present Stephen before her.

Maud. ............................
'Tis not for worldly pomp I wish to see
The rebel, but as dooming judge to give
A sentence something worthy of his guilt.
(I.iv.19-21.)

Glocester goes out to bring the prisoner king before her royal presence. This time the Empress wants to know from the Earl of Chester, if it is really a fact that Glocester has been treating the royal prisoner - Stephen with all sorts of friendly demeanour. Chester confirms the fact with further provocative details, and like a villain, tactfully reminds the Empress of what her duty ought to be.

Chester. ...........................
A queen's nod
Can make his June December.
(I.iv.57-8.)

This is the rudiment of the incidents we get in the King Stephen fragment. How these incidents and dramatic actions if it would have been related to the rest of the untold story is not exactly predictable. We can only to say that the incidents of these four
short scenes seen to have been designed to shape a tragic situation. Whether Keats would have followed Holinshed in toto for his material of the King Stephen's story, or whether he would have deviated and followed his own creative imagination is quite uncertain; it is a matter of speculation only. But the fragment, as it is, deserves a close study.

As in the case of Otho, so also here, Keats's intention was to make the main acting part suitable for Edmund Kean. Robert Gittings maintains that "Stephen is conceived in terms of Kean's greatest role - Richard III, in which Keats had seen him in December, 1817." He thinks that if completed, King Stephen might have been accepted by Kean. "If Keats had gone on with it," Gittings says, "he might have given the actor a part not to be lightly rejected." Gittings's assumption appears to be acceptable. For the fragment shows that Keats had already far advanced towards dramatic maturity. The defects as shown by Otho are no longer noticed in King Stephen; Keats's dramatic development is all the more conspicuous in it. "Without question," says Slote, "Keats learned his lesson well, and even if failing energy made him give up King Stephen, we know that he saw how a play was to be written."

Otho begins with an actionless scene; and what is more, the entire first act is static; the dramatic movement is slow in

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32 Ibid.
33 Slote, op. cit. p.115.
the first half of the play; sentimentalism gets the upper hand in the second half, and though the dramatic movement acquires momentum and rapidity towards the closing acts, Otho does not show, in general, the uniform briskness of action and sureness of dramatic sense and grip. But in King Stephen all these blemishes are carefully avoided. There is a touch of feminine softness and passivity in both the principal characters and actions of Otho The Great, but King Stephen is masculine in style, in action and in characterization. In a word, King Stephen fragment is very much different from what Keats has done in his maiden attempt at drama. The four short scenes "make a brilliant beginning, full of bold strokes of character and powerful verse;" they indicate a sturdiness of construction, sureness of conception, and a confident approach, not found in Otho. Even in style, it is different from the earlier play. Keats, we are persuaded to believe, has arrived at the maturity of his style. Walter Jackson Bate is certainly right when he maintains that "the idiom is more colloquially vigorous, and at the sametime is touched with an occasional mellowness of phrase that reminds us of some of the passages in the Fall of Hyperion." Let us give some examples.

Stephen. What weapons has the lion but himself?

Come not near me, De Kaims, for by the price
Of all the glory I have won this day,

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35 Bate, Walter Jackson, op. cit. op.621-22.
Being a king, I will not yield alive
To any but the second man of the realm
Robert of Glocester.

(I.iii.20-5.)

Or,

Stephen. If shame can on a soldier's vein-swoll'n front
Spread deeper crimson than the battle's toil,
Blush in your casing helmets!

(I.i.1-3.)

And again,

Stephen. No, not yet. I disclaim it, and demand
Death as a sovereign right unto a king
Who 's dains to yield to any but his peer,
If not in title, yet in noble deeds,
The Earl of Glocester.

(I.iii.40-4.)

Or,

Chester. A queens's nod
Can make his June December. Here he comes.

(I.iv.57-8.)

These examples show how nearer Keats has come to the pattern of conversational speech. Again, it is not bereft of fine poetic sense and beauty. The stylistic pattern of the fragment indicates an important truth that Keats wanted to get his play conform to the living theatre, and tried to achieve easy communicability between himself and the audience. Besides, King Stephen fragment
"teaches us one thing at any rate about Keats," as Sidney Colvin very correctly maintains, "that he could at will call away his imagination from matters luxurious or refreshing to the spirit, from themes broodingly meditative or tragically tender, to deal in a manner of fiery energy with the clash of war."  

King Stephen fragment is almost universally accepted as showing Keats's superior dramatic power, though H.W. Garrod does not think so. Garrod says, "Nothing in Otho, nor even in the fragment King Stephen - which has been thought to show some advance in power - nothing in either of these pieces persuades me that Keats possessed those robust talents which make drama."  

Professor Garrod may be right in so far as his observation is limited to Otho The Great, but King Stephen fragment does not justify his comment. It is also difficult to agree with him when he means that only "robust talents" can make drama. There are not too many English dramatists both ancient and modern who possessed, or are said to possess that robust talent. Plenty of examples may be cited to show that there are many dramatists who have made dramas without possessing, what Garrod calls, robust talents. King Stephen does not, of course, claim for Keats a place near those belonging to the first class of the English playwrights, but it also cannot place him among the pigmies. Harry R. Beaudry is somewhat right, when he comments on the piece -

36 Colvin, Sidney, op. cit. p.443.
"Yet the remarkable thing about the King Stephen fragment is that it shows the hand of an accomplished craftsman, ...... there is the same vigorous action and masculinity that is found in the plays of Shakespeare."38

Beaudry is right in so far as his recognition of Keats's superior dramatic power is concerned; but to equate the piece with the plays of Shakespeare, it seems, is unjustified.39 King Stephen shows quite unmistakably Keats's dramatic progress, without reaching the Shakespearean level. The important thing here is the remarkable progress he has made in his dramatic writing - not what he has finally achieved. And how can one either praise or blame a work which is incomplete?

But why had the poet abandoned this very promising play in the midst of the fourth scene? It is indeed very surprising. And to find some reasons for this is a speculative endeavour; for Keats, as far as we know, has left nothing on record as to why he left it unfinished. Some of the critics think that Keats abandoned this play when he had learnt that Edmund Kean for whom he was designing the main acting part would go on a winter tour to America.40 Middleton Murry thinks that

38Beaudry, op. cit. p. 204.

39Middleton Murry also holds the similar opinion like Beaudry's.

40Critics, like Sittinos and Aileen Ward hold this opinion. Ward also thinks that the rejection of Otho by the Drury Lane had some effect on the poet for which he laid it down with a feeling of disappointment.
Keats abandoned *King Stephen* not for the failing energy. He writes -

"Nevertheless, Keats abandoned *King Stephen*. It was not so much that his dramatic skill would have failed him, as that Keats in his own inward life had passed far beyond the phase at which Shakespeare was touching up historical plays."41

If he was to write a play at this stage, Murry maintains, it "would have needed to be plays of the order of *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *Lear*." And as Keats had not yet acquired the matching dramatic skill and style, he abandoned *King Stephen*.42

What we think in this regard is that it is not for the failing energy, nor for the lack of dramatic confidence, nor for his inward change towards higher dramas, as Murry has pointed out, that Keats withdrew his hand from it. The fragment itself shows an unflagging artist, bold and confident. The reason, therefore, might be personal, or psychological or domestic, or economic, not dramatic. Aileen Ward thinks that the rejection of *Otho* discouraged the poet, and from the shock of unsuccess he laid it down in the midst of the fourth scene. But this is not very typical of Keats - he did not give up writing poetry even after the damaging criticism of his earlier poems.

It is necessary to make it clear before we take up *Grious*, that while including this work in this study we acknowledge the authority of those who consider it a genuine work

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41Murry, op. cit. p.203.
42Ibid.
of John Keats, rather than follow our own reasons about its authorship. We have followed Keats's *Poetical Works*, edited by H.W. Garrod, (Oxford, 1970) in which *Grious* is included.

The date of composition of this dramatic work is not known. Miss Amy Lowell first printed the *Grious* fragment in 1925, and since then H.W. Garrod has continued to include it in Keats's *Poetical Works* edited by him. The critics have cleanly omitted *Grious* from their discussions. Recently, Harry R. Beaudry has discussed it in his illuminating study - *The English Theatre And John Keats*, though Beaudry has said little on its dramatic aspect. After the examination of *King Stephen* fragment, the study of *Grious* cannot pretend to add much of importance to the general assessment of Keats as dramatist. Still it deserves some notice.

The plot of *Grious* is very simple. *Grious* in his advanced age feels inclined to marry his maid servant, Bridget. He communicates his desire to her.

*Grious.* .........................

............... Thou knows't, for twenty years
Together we have liv'd as man and wife,
But never hath the sanction of the Church
Stamp'd its legality upon our union.

(11.45-8.)

*Grious.* .........................

And thus have I determin'd in my heart
To make amends - in other words to marry.

(11.56-7.)
Overjoyed at this, Bridget readily consents to the proposal. But before Grious names the day of their marriage, a knock is heard at the door. He at once goes out to meet the person who has come. Bridget is left alone in her fanciful dream of the future. She dreams herself to be lady Grious with all her finery and jewelleries.

Bridget............................

O how will people whisper, as I pass,
'There goes my lady' - 'what a handsome gown,
All scarlet silk embroidered with gold!'
Or green & gold will perhaps become me better -
How vastly fine, how handsome I shall be
In green & gold - besides, a lady too!

Thus Bridget muses on the happy change she will very soon have, when she will be "another woman quite." Grious's servant - Slim who is in love with Bridget now comes, and finds her in her romantic soarings. Bridget is now cold in her attitude to Slim. Slim knows nothing of Bridget's sudden change of mind. In his emotional ecstasy when he steps forward to kiss her, Bridget stops him and rebuffs his advance; for "times are alter'd, Fortune's wheel is turn'd." This time Grious returns with a changed mind.

Grious. ............................

For as a change in my domestic government
Will make thy place in future but a sinecure,
It grieves me much that I must warn you thus -
To seek and get a situation elsewhere.

Bridget. O dear! O lord! O what a shock! O lord!

(11.148-52.)

Bridget faints. She calls her master "cruell man" when she comes back to herself.

Bridget. .........................

I will convict you of a breach of marriage!

(1.179.)

Gripus. .........................

What, marry one as oor as a church mouse,
And equally devoid of rank and Beauty!

(11.183-84.)

The plot of Gripus is interesting and dramatic. It contains in its limited length much dramatic elements. There are dramatic actions, though not quite physical; there are a number of examples of dramatic surprise and irony. When Gripus apprises Bridget of his changed decision, the latter faces a dramatic irony. Slim faces a dramatic irony when he is recoulsed by Bridget in his intimacy. Slim is shocked and painfully surprised.

Slim. Why, Bridget, once you did not treat me thus.

(1.126.)

While Bridget is busy building a castle in the air, her master's sudden change of mind creates a situation which is as cruel as it is awfully surprising. This is an interesting dramatic turn of
event having great dramatic value. Bridget might question in the end, as Keats does in his *Ode To A Nightingale* -

"Was it a vision, or a waking dream?"

Fled is that music: - *Do I wake or sleep*?"

She stands disillusioned when her would-be husband strikes a different note. She feels too weak to bear the shock. She faints.

We do not think *Grious* to be a comedy as Beaudry thinks, although we agree with him when he says that it looks like a complete work resembling a one-act play. Though written in a lighter vein, *Grious* is more a tragedy than a comedy. Bridget, we see, not only fails to be "lady Grious" (l.80.), she also loses her job and is asked to find a situation elsewhere. She stands nowhere. This sudden turn of the wheel of Fortune crushes Bridget mentally as well as materially, and we feel pity and sympathy for her. This sort of ending of the play cannot be conceived as a "one-act comedy."*

As drama *Grious* is a perfectly stageworthy piece. It is better to regard it as a One-Act tragedy complete in itself. Within the limits of this art-form, *Grious* has characters, plot and actions and other dramatic elements, not to be lightly passed by. The idiom approximates to the colloquialism of the everyday speech, and thus, the work tends to solve the problem of communicability between the author and his theatrical public -

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43 Beaudry, op. cit. p.228.

44 Ibid.
a problem which could not fully be solved by the Romantics in general.

III

In this section we attempt a general estimate of Keats's dramas, and Keats as a dramatist. "Otho the Great was not a remarkable play," writes Bernice Slote, "but it was no worse than the other things that went on in Drury Lane and Covent Garden." Yet, this play of Keats could not make its way on to the stage during the nineteenth century. It is only on the 26th of November, 1950, that Otho The Great was staged at St. Martin's Theatre in London; the performance, as Dorothy Hewlett tells us, was successful. She not only describes the performance of the play, but maintains that "the world lost a potential dramatist as well as a major poet." The world certainly lost a major poet when John Keats passed away; there was also a potential dramatist in Keats, and the world lost him too; but Otho is certainly not the work that may drive home this sense of loss. This may be done by the King Stephen fragment, not by Otho, or Grueus. This does not mean that they are not dramas at all; Otho and Grueus are, no doubt, dramas which can be presented on the stage with some alterations. But the question is of rank. G. Wilson Knight thinks Otho "slightly below the plays of Keats's contemporaries." Professor Knight justifies

43 Slote, op. cit. p.115.
his remark by saying that "It lacks, as a whole subtlety of conception, metaphysical weight, and symbolic counter-checks. However, the story is overlaid with magnificent passages and rises to a remarkable projection of erotic anguish."\textsuperscript{48} Knight is correct. Otho's magnificence lies not so much in its story, nor in its characterization or tragic conception, but in its verbal part; in other words, in its poetry. Keats, while writing it, seems to have been more emotionally inspired than dramatically conscious, and as such, in the play the verbal magnificence and poetic imagination gain over-all sway over the dramatic aspect of the work.

"Otho is," as Slote writes, "in the combined tradition of the Gothic melodrama and the Elizabethan tragedy."\textsuperscript{49} Its actual debt is more to the Gothic melodramatic tradition than to the other. In verbal part, and also in character Otho only shows, to some extent, the influence of Shakespeare. Otho has something of Lear and Prospero in him. His joy of satiety with the marriage of Ludolph and Auranthe (III.i.i) is something like the joy of fulfilment Prospero feels over the union of Naples and Milan through the marriage of Miranda and Ferdinand. To Otho, Ludolph and Auranthe are "fair children, stars of a new age" (III.i.i.22). Otho's description of his newly wedded son and daughter-in-law reminds us at once of the young lovers of

\textsuperscript{48}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{49}Slote, op. cit. p.109.
Shakespeare's last plays. Otho is even, in spirit nearer to
Prospero when the latter tells Ariel -

Though with their high wrongs I am struck to the quick,
Yet with my nobler reason against my fury
Do I take part: the rarer action is
In virtue than in vengeance: they being penitent,
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend
Not a frown further.

(The Tempest, V.i.25-30.)

He shows this spirit in his dealings with his enemy - Gersa
and his rebellious son - Ludolof. The feature of Lear that is
in him could not have been drawn distinctly by Keats; even though
our impression is that Otho could have done and said and died
of heart-break at the death of Ludolof, as Lear does at the
death of Cordelia. A tragic propensity of the kind is certainly
there in Otho. G. Wilson Knight finds a similarity between the
tragic experience of Ludolof and that of Lycius of Keats's Lamia,
and Troilus of Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida. "Ludolof has
experienced, like Lycius and Troilus," says Knight, "the falsity
of his love-paradise." We find rather something more in
Ludolof. There is something of Othello in him too. Othello in
his exasperation kills Desdemona whom he wrongly thinks false;
he also feels the falsity of his love-paradise, though quite

50Knight, G. Wilson, op. cit. p.292.
51Knight, op. cit. p.293.
wrongly. Ludolph too is in a violent mood like Othello, and wants to kill Auranthe.

Ludolph. ......................

........ Methinks I have her in my fist,
To crush her with my heel!

(V.v.107-108.)

Again,

Ludolph. ......................

Not so! She is in tempe-stall
Being garnish'd for the sacrifice, and I,
The Priest of justice, will immolate her
Upon the altar of wrath! She stings me through!

(V.v.152-55.)

Othello also speaks in his violent mood before he kills Desdemona, and the speech is somewhat similar.

Oth. ......................

O perjur'd woman! thou dost stone my heart,
And mak'st me call what I intend to do
A murder, which I thought a sacrifice:

(Othello, V.ii.)

Auranthe is Cleopatra and Lady Macbeth combined. Cleopatra's captivating charm and beauty have found some expression in Auranthe. She has the power to fascinate Ludolph as Cleopatra fascinates Antony. Both Ludolph and Antony have completely lost themselves in Auranthe and Cleopatra respectively, so to say;
Auranthe has the power of bewitching her husband.
First Lady. How deep she has bewitch'd him!

(Antony and Cleopatra, I.ii.)

Auranthe has her bewitching beauty, and like Cleopatra, is not without cunning. Antony says to Enobarbus about Cleopatra -

Ant. She is cunning past man's thought.

(Antony and Cleopatra, I.ii.)

The effect of this bewitching beauty is also more or less the same on Ludoloh and Antony. Bewitched Ludoloh after his marriage speaks the same sentiment and feeling as Antony in Act I, scene i of Antony and Cleopatra. Let us compare their speeches.

Ludoloh. Though heaven's choir
Should in a vast circumference descend
And sing for my delight, I'd stop my ears!
Though bright Apollo's car stood burning here,
And he put out an arm to bid me mount,
His touch an immortality, not I!
This earth, this palace, this room, Auranthe!

(Antony and Cleopatra, I.ii.38-44.)

Ant. Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
Of the rang'd empire fall! Here is my space.
Kingdoms are clay: our dunny earth alike
Feeds beast as man: the nobleness of life
Is to do thus;

(I.i.)
In cunning and ambition, Auranthe is Lady Macbeth. She has
the ambition to become an Empress. She is happy to marry Ludoloh,
not because she loves him, but because she wants to be the queen
some day. King Stephen, may remind one of Shakespeare's
Richard III. Stephen is conceived as a character combining, as
Aileen Ward says, "the energy of Richard III with the eloquence
of Richard II." In the verbal part of his plays, Keats has not
only pressed to his service the blank-verse of the Elizabethan
dramatic tradition, he has also displayed, on occasions, in
Otho and King Stephen his love for Shakespearean verse and
imagery. Walter Jackson Bate is quite right when he says, that
"there are numerous Shakespearean echoes, and sometimes the
verse itself attains a Shakespearean cadence and metaphor."53

In King Stephen, Keats displays his command over the
dramatic poetry more uniformly than in Otho. Keats's dramatic
poetry, on occasions, acquires the Shakespearean style, and even
Shakespearean diction. And, there is no reason to doubt that his
deep reading and witnessing of the performances of Shakespeare's
dramas had none to the formation of his style and conception and
delineation of his dramatic character.

As to the influence of the Gothic melodramatic tradition
on his dramatic works, it may be said that Otho is the only
drama that obviously shows it. The melodramatic sensationalism,


53Bate, op. cit. p.565.
especially of the last two acts is unquestionable. The madness of Ludoloh, the shrieks of Auranthe (V.i.), her enchanting of Ludoloh, the rescued lady Erminia, banquet, and the offstage murder and bloodshed (V.i.) - are essentially related to the Gothic tradition which exerted its influence on the Romantic theatre of Keats's time. Otho, truly speaking, is more akin to that tradition than to the Elizabethan. It seems, the influence of Shakespeare which is evident in King Stephen fragment was not so marked when Otho was composed. Of course, the joint-authorship of the work should be given due importance in making any judgment on the work.

Otho The Great has certain scenes of no less stage-effect than the popular stage-plays of the time. The meeting of Otho and Gersa (I.ii.), the reconciliation-scene between Ludoloh and his father (II.i.), the romantic scene between Ludoloh and Auranthe (III.ii) followed by the unexpected disclosure of the latter's villainy by the Abbot - Æthelbert, the scene between Albert and Auranthe in latter's chamber (IV.i.), the forest-scenes (V.i & ii) - are dramatically important. The scene in which the Abbot appears with the wronged Erminia (III.ii.) is very important for its stage-effect. This is set in opposition to the highly romantic scene, and offers a dramatically interesting contrast to the spirit and atmosphere of joy, love and romance following the marriage of Ludoloh and Auranthe. The fainting of Auranthe in this scene is highly significant, and adds to the effect of contrast. The scene is very striking in the sense that the readers or the spectators are awakened to
the fact that the day of Auranthe's victory through marriage is also the day of her crushing defeat. She faces a most shattering dramatic irony, for which she falls into a swoon. The unexpected turn of the event has great dramatic value, and is very likely to produce great stage-effect. But even then, Otho does not bear the stamp of fine workmanship. King Stephen's beginning, on the other hand, is dramatically very effective. There is a rapidity in the dramatic movement from the very first scene. It is a work of power and art. The scenes in Cribus are also dramatically interesting, and if well represented, can prove successful on the stage.

The critical opinions are divided on the question of Keats's dramatic potentiality. Some of the critics hold the view, that Keats would have been a great dramatist, if he had lived a longer life; that his hope of dramatic success is well founded;\(^{54}\) that "greater works Keats might have written had he lived."\(^{55}\) Robert Sittings certainly belongs to this group when he maintains - "The dream of making a revolution in the drama was over almost before it had begun, with only the fragment to show for it."\(^{56}\) There are a few others like H.W. Garrod, who consider Keats's attempt at drama the sheer "misdirection of talent."\(^{57}\)

\(^{54}\)Bradley, A.C., op. cit. p.219.

\(^{55}\)Knight, G. Wilson, op. cit. p.294.

\(^{56}\)Sittings, Robert, op. cit. p.167.

\(^{57}\)Garrod, H.W., op. cit. p.54.
F.R. Leavis also holds somewhat the same opinion. He writes -

"Keats, as has been so generally agreed, was beyond any doubt gifted to become a very great poet - though no sufficient reason appears to have been given for supposing that he might have written great poetic plays."\(^{58}\)

These critics, it seems, find Keats's talent quite undramatic. With this latter group of critics we cannot agree, while with the former we feel inclined to go with some reservation. On this point, our view is that Keats had dramatic talent which is evident from his works both complete and fragmentary, that he would have been able to write plays on the Elizabethan model, and though a follower of Shakespeare, Keats very likely, could not have been a Shakespeare of the Romantic Age. As to his idea of dramatic revolution we like to maintain that it should not be over-stressed; it should not be made to embrace the broad meaning of the term, which is applicable only to Lord Byron - not to any other of the Romantics. We have already said that Keats is with Shakespeare the poet; but Shakespeare the dramatist is far greater in his natural endowment and acquired skill and experience than what Keats might have been had he lived longer. Keats's evolution from Otho to King Stephen is a hopeful promise of finer works no doubt, but if completed at all, they would have been still Keatsian, not exactly Shakespearean. But in the act of imitating Shakespeare, Keats might have proved himself better than all other Romantic poets.