

## Original Paper

# Capitalism, Colonialism, Morality Renovation in John Keats's

## Isabella or The Pot of Basil

Zhiting Shen<sup>1\*</sup> & Dan Cui<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Undergraduate student of School of English, Jilin International Studies University, Changchun, China

<sup>2</sup> Postdoc of Literature of School of English, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing, China; Doc of British and American Literature, School of Foreign Languages of Northeast Normal University, Changchun, Jilin, China; Professor, Dean of Institute of International Language and Culture, Leader of Comparative Literature and Cross-culture Discipline, Jilin International Studies University, Changchun, China; Doc of Literature, College of Foreign Languages, Yanbian University, Yanji, Jilin, China

\* Dan Cui, Corresponding Author, E-mail: 492439188@qq.com

\* Zhiting, Shen, E-mail: 1561942954@qq.com

Received: April 4, 2022

Accepted: April 14, 2022

Online Published: April 24, 2022

doi:10.22158/csm.v5n1p1

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/csm.v5n1p1>

### **Abstract**

*This paper aims to interpret the capitalist economy and class polarization in John Keats's narrative Isabella. The authors analyzed primitive accumulation of capitalism and the capitalist mode of production, the division of social status and consciousness between bourgeoisie and proletariat, bourgeois ideological crisis, namely the bourgeoisie. Meanwhile, the authors endeavor to interpret the aesthetic poetic solutions that Keats tentatively found to realize the bonding of Lorenzo and Isabella and the salvation of the transcendental soul, in order to reveal the inhuman exploitation of the capitalist mode of production and Keats's criticism of the moral decay of the bourgeoisie. Instead of complaining and lamenting about the misery and degradation, John Keats pinned high expectation onto the salvation power of Greek civilization and British poetry.*

### **Keywords**

*John Keats, capitalism, colonialism, morality, salvation*

### **1. Introduction**

John Keats is one of outstanding romantic poets in 19<sup>th</sup> Century, although his literary peak career only spanned over four years, he complemented the excellency in the history of English Romanticism with his long classic narratives, sonnets and odes. *Isabella* (1818) as one of the five long narratives, together

with *Endymion* (1818), *The Eve of St. Agnes* (1819) *Hyperion* (1819) and *Lamia* (1820) demonstrates Keats's remarkable poetic achievement. A friend of Keats, Richard Woodhouse, once spoke highly of Keats after *Endymion* being published in 1818 with his critic sensitivity by asserting that such a genius had not appeared since Shakespeare and Milton and pinpointed Keats's poems contained more beautiful things and more beautiful verses, fewer whims and bad tastes. In short, he deemed readers would find more beautiful hopes than Shakespeare's works (Colvin, 1917). Actually, either in lyrics or narratives, Keats endeavored to create a particular aesthetic sense and such trait is so remarkable that carves him as the representative figure of aesthetics obsessed solely in the imaginative shelter while leaving alone the responsibilities for society full of turmoil and upheavals, which have been long supposed to be taken by literature in general and poetry in particular.

With the researches conducting in-depth, his non-political gesture or even apolitical escapist image has been partially abandoned, though not every critic has unanimously contended that Keats illustrated partially political involvement in writing or was inclined to apply his poetic works to exert comments on the real social issues or practical policy debates as the other major Romantic poets were or as Yeats among Victorian poets. Conclusively, Keats's political thinking has been handled diffidently by scholars (Heinzelman, 1988, p. 160). Luckily, the trend of transcending over the text in development of literary theories, there emerged a number of thoughts, perspectives and theories containing the gender studies, cultural studies and post-colonialism (Orientalist outlook) etc., which offers new angles for the researchers to reexamine Keats's political involvement and they have sensed the political tone in Keats's poetry writing. Some of Keats's critical autobiographers including Amy Lowell, Walter Jackson Bate, Andrew Motion, Finney and Roe, just name a few, have attempted to explore his embedded political-critical stands in certain poetic circumstances, and even such disclosure has not been only confined to his early poems and but transcends them over to parts and patches in other of his typical narratives. Nigel Leask asserted the imperial anxiety existing in Keats's writing, though without in-depth explanation since it was not his focus for analysis (Leask, 1992).

As one of the typical Keats's narratives, *Isabella, or The Pot of Basil* embodies Keats's distinguished speculation over political issues, as for which, the Irish dramatist Bernard Shaw first noticed Keats's implied critical commentary writing of capitalism in Stanzas XIV-XVI of intensive reflection of certain issues ranging from the class segregation, the capital possession to capital exploitation that can be deeply elaborated in *Das Kapital* by Karl Marx (Heinzelman, 1988, p. 161). However, Shaw did not go further on this and thus left it potentially open for the latter related researches. Obviously, a great number of critical essays have come out demonstrating various studies on *Isabella*, including the aesthetic appreciation, gothic exploration (Smith, 1974, pp. 306-308), female symbolism (Lagory, 1995, pp. 321-342), female figure portraying, sexuality (Cui & Li, 2018) and national identity exploration (Cui & Li, 2019) etc., all of which involves the social-interrelated perspectives.

As a matter of fact, John Keats exposed a series of key aspects in this narrative: the segregation between two classes: Lorenzo as the lower working class and her two brothers representing the aristocratic-to-be-capitalist class, the lack of workingman's rights by exposing the severity working load and disgusting working environment, the exploitation of people and capture of wild beasts over other far-away lands, the capital accumulation through colonizing eastern countries implied by sending Lorenzo out for the so-called ambiguous errand. By such poetic composition, Keats illustrated his fury and indignation over the social evilness, social inequality, moral degradation, abandoning of the peak of human civilization represented by the Greek artistic achievements, for which Keats lamented most.

Thus this poetic and imaginative description echoed, reflected, responded and evidenced the concerns that Karl Marx expatiated in his *Das Kapital*, in which, he sharply criticized the cruelty and repressive impact of capitalism on human beings and social construction and penetrated in depth how the primitive capital had been accumulated illegally and immorally and indignantly commented that "Capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt" (Capital Vol. I—Chapter Thirty-One 828-829). Marxist fundamental thoughts on the relationship of economy can be summarized as follows by Raman Selden: "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, the point is to change it" (Selden, p. 88). His clearly statement fundamentally shows Marxist efforts put into the engagement of poem writing with the real world. That is, Marxist interpretation of class, society, consciousness etc., are handy for us to interpret the pertinent issues of bourgeois operative mechanism and to judge the moral degradation reflected in the social economic productive procedures.

## **2. Usurping: Primitive Accumulation of Capital and Lending and Borrowing System**

### *2.1 Hebrew's Usury*

Keats portrays their eagerness and enjoyment in occupying much material wealth and possession by describing their pride in the "marble founts", "orange-mounts" and "red-lined accounts".

Isabella's two brothers are very wealthy through possessing much financial belongings, and readers cannot help wondering where their possessions accumulated from. In fact, John Keats comes up with three possible modes: inheritance, trade and colonization. On the one hand, they probably inherited many possessions from their ancestors, which is depicted in the verse "enriched from ancestral merchandise" (Keats, p. 193). It reveals their identity as the descendants from the landlords of feudalism.

Also, Keats shapes them as exiled Hebrew Cain by God when they are found out to be the murderers of Lorenzo (Keats, p. 205). In fact, if it is interpreted together with the origin and character of Hebrews, it is reasonable to assume that their ancestors were originated from usurer figures of the ancient time

associated with the Jewish image represented by Shakespeare's Shylock featured by his greed and desire for money.

The wealth left by their ancestors can be inferred from the historical development that their ancestors accumulated their wealth through usury. First, before the emerging of the capitalist mode of production, usurer's and merchant's capital appeared in Medieval Western Europe. Usury capital derived from the loan system that was initiated by the ancient Hebrews. For Medieval Christians, usury was a sin, which is described from New Testament: "But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest" (Luke, p. 6, p. 35). Jesus himself exhibited a distinctly anti-usury attitude when he cast the money-lenders from the temple, while the Sermon on the Mount revealed strongly anti-wealth sentiments as well (Hassan & Lewis). It is extremely unjust and particularly unethical for the poor, and therefore Christian doctrine hindered the usury from developing nationwide. Naturally, the Jews had often been deputed for their Christian king usury, since it was a highly lucrative trade. Influenced by *Old Testament*, Jews shared a common and distinguished attitude towards money that in their mind was believed to be their earthly god. However, such pose has always been sharply criticized in the real life and literary works as well.

In Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, when the honest Antonio cannot afford to pay back his debts, he has to be cut off a pound of flesh to make up for Shylock as promised. Marx comments Shylock in the "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction" by saying "A Shylock, but a servile Shylock, it swears upon its bond, its historical, Christian-Germanic bond, for every pound of flesh cut from the heart of the people" (Cohen, 1982). Similarly, Keats cast strong criticism over the two brothers' Hebrew-like greed and desire.

## 2.2 Marx's Surplus Value

Thirdly, a significant way of capital accumulation-surplus value, deserves the attention, that is, the exploitation of working class by capitalists. Keats did not directly depict the surplus value, but he did delicately depict the blood and hollow eyes of the workers after the capitalist whipping (Keats, p. 193). The working environment is torched mines and noisy factories (Keats, p. 193). In Keats's criticized tone, the capitalists are portrayed "half-ignorant" (Keats, p. 193) and they only "turn an easy wheel" (Keats, p. 193) to torture the labor workers. Keats adopts a simple language to satirize capitalists that greedily absorb the blood and sweat of working-class. We can associate the wheel with the steam engine that represents the major commercial production tool of that time, thus echoing the industrial revolution in Britain in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century: the prosperity of good industrial development prospects behind untold cruelty and blood and tears under the steam engine. It is of great significance to explain workers' suffering and capitalists' inhumanity through Marx's surplus value ethics.

The "noisy factories" and "easy wheel" remind the readers of epoch changing and shaking movement: the Industrial Revolution represented by the machine invention and mass production. In 1776, James

Watt improved the original steam engine with his Watt steam engine, together with coal, iron and steel, is conceived as the four main factors contributing to the accelerated development of technology. The above four main natural resources belong to natural capital, which cannot bring profits to capitalists directly, but the products produced by natural capital can bring profits.

Further, Keats's description of "many all day" emphasizes the lengthy of working time. Capitalists own the means and products of production but do not possess the labor of the laborer. If a person sells labor and life indefinitely, it means that the person is owned by the capitalist, and as a result the society will return to slavery system, which contradicts against the capitalist democratic concept of "freedom" and "equality". Keats's description of capitalist exploitation is still "set sharp racks on workers" (Keats, p. 193). Since capitalists don't own the workers, however, their labors belong to the capitalist under the supervision of capitalism based on the claim laboring power is temporary dominated by capitalists (Marx, 1865). Therefore, capitalists can only combine workers with the means of production and obtain surplus value by purchasing the labor of workers. The process of creating surplus-value is the production process of surplus value, which is the main aspect of capitalist production process. The rate of surplus value is the rate of labor exploitation. In the Industrial Revolution, two ways are mainly adopted to produce surplus value. One is to extend the working hours. Since the necessary working hours of workers are unaltered, the longer the working day is, the longer the remaining working time will be and then the more surplus value the capitalist extracts from the workers, the higher the surplus value is gained.

In addition to lengthening working hours, capitalists also try to increase the laboring intensity of workers, so that workers consume more intellectual and physical energy to produce surplus value. Keats, by depicting the "hollow eyes" of the exploited workers, attempts to convey how much pressure those miserable workers had to bear. Karl Marx uses two formulas to express the rate of surplus value:  $m' = m/v$  and  $m' = s/v$ . Both of these formulas, in different forms, represent the extent to which capitalists exploit workers. The vision of workers' "hollow eyes" probably does not precisely indicate which specific operation adopted by two brothers to force them to work, but if combined with the industrial revolution in Keats's epoch, both of two ways were probably adopted for producing profits.

Through the understanding of the process of borrowing and the role of capital, it is not difficult to find that money capitalists, like other capitalists, also gain surplus value. According to the third volume of "*Das Kapital*", in addition to currency possessing use value, money also possesses use value as capital to perform functions. Capital as a means of producing profit capital has become a commodity. Loan capital, as a commodity, is given by the money capitalist to the industrial capitalist to put into production. While the capital flows back to the borrower again, it is not only the capital itself, but also the balance generated by the capital over the value of the capital itself, which we call interest. Two factors are sufficient to illustrate the role of loadable capital in promoting the capitalist economy. On

the one hand, the money capitalist, like the industrial capitalist, needs to constantly acquire surplus value so that the borrower can continue to lend to the industrial capitalist. On the other hand, loan capitalists lend capital for the sole purpose of obtaining interest, which urges them to invest their capital in industries and enterprises with large profits, high income and large accumulation (Capital Volume III- Chapter XXI: Interest Bearing Capital, pp. 230-241). Marx claimed that the capital of the usurer existed long before the capitalist system itself and it is an early and primitive form of capital (Cohen, 1982). Early money capital, that is the capital of usury, promoted the development of primitive capitalism. It echoes that the brothers' Jewish ancestors' lending allowed them to acquire the wealth left by their ancestors, which they utilized to develop their industry.

### **3. Primitive Accumulation of Capitalism-Overseas Colonization**

#### *3.1 Lorenzo's Disappearance*

As a matter of fact, besides the internal way of wealth accumulation, another key way for the Britain to become an empire is due to the overseas colonization of British Empire, which also constitutes the key part of exposure. While the two brothers managed to convince their younger sister about reasonable absence of Lorenzo with excuse of sending on errands by taking "ship for foreign lands" and Isabella was seemingly assured and ceased enquiring directly about Lorenzo's trace though constantly expected him to come back, readers would wonder why she could accept such an absurd excuse for the moment. If the historical background is dragged into consideration, it becomes understandable because the colonization and overseas trade were coming into being and turned to be popular during the end of 18<sup>th</sup> and starting of 19<sup>th</sup> century, with which Keats could not be unconcerned or uninfluenced. While taking the sense of historical situation into consideration (T. S. Eliot's stand) when interpreting Keats's poems, readers tend to understand why Isabella's brothers could successfully deceive their younger sister temporarily.

For one thing, with the new discoveries of the New World and the shipping route to Asia, the world market had developed rapidly, so that capitalism needed more large-scale commodity production. Secondly, the emerging bourgeoisie conquered overseas colonies by force, massacred local residents, looted gold and silver and carried out commercial wars. All of the colonial operations and measures contributed greatly to the development of capitalism in Britain. The primitive accumulation of capital gives the evidence that the history of bourgeoisie evolution aims for and is driven by the overseas plunder. The fundamental reason is that the continuous development of the capitalist mode of production, which separates the means of production from labor, so that the labor of workers is transformed into labor employed by capitalists, and the means of production are transformed into capital of capitalists.

### 3.2 *The Evidence in Keats's Colonization*

Also Keats implies other benefit—the medicine and fear-epidemic the empire took through colonization besides capital accumulation. The colonized medicine and Cholera epidemic influenced the entire Britain as well.

Individually, Keats received medical knowledge and training in his early apprenticeship under the custody of Abbey. So it is natural for the poet to be more sensitive to this aspect and interweaves into his writing. However, broadly speaking, in view of his interest in the Orient and other romantic poets and novelists in general, it sounds reasonable for him to transplant some Indian contexts into his writing and as a result, he pinpoints the Indian medicine, say clove as a typical one to cure Indian infecting Cholera in 1817. So Keats would have been following the news of Indian Cholera in the early months of 1818, before he completed *Isabella*. After beheading Lorenzo and taking his head back chamber, Isabella kept his head under warm Indian clove (Keats, p. 193) in basil. When Isabella's brothers deceived her with the plot that Lorenzo had been sent to "foreign lands" to cater to their overseas business, their acknowledged connection with the subcontinent suggests that Lorenzo might have been sent into the centre of the epidemic. Isabella is right to worry about "dungeon climes" (Keats, p. 198) in this context, given the powerful association between the tropical climate and cholera in British imagination at this time (Hessell, 2018, p. 214).

## 4. Class Segregation of Capitalism

### 4.1 *Tragedy of Class*

While reflecting over the segregation of two lovers by death, a series of factors are to be attributed and investigated, among which, the class segregation is depicted in view of space opposition and place dislocation. The thick depiction is given to Isabella and Lorenzo's hierarchical space separation. The beloved couple lived under the same roof, but they couldn't meet each other at will or enjoy meals at the same table. Lorenzo could only catch a sight of Isabella "from her chamber-window" (Keats, p. 190), so this window has become a noticeable symbol of class estrangement. Lillian Nayder once interpreted that window performs the most socially conservative function—the segregation of two classes, thus indicating that upper class is entitled to the privileges out of the reach of the lower class and the consolidation of the social order. It is the window that physically and metaphorically divides the public from private and male from female as well as upper class from the lower class (Lillian, 2006, p. 189).

Such a space description echoes the intention that Keats sets his tragic story in Florence, Italy, a state representing the freedom in view of social atmosphere, cultural atmosphere, etc in contrast against London, Britain, which in Keats's mind, is a state suppressing the free thoughts and artistic pursuits. Therefore, Keats reiterates the cruelty and brutality of such social inequality by portraying the

commonly existing phenomenon to illustrate his own indignation and desperation. While Isabella was born into a long-history, aristocratic-to-newly-rising bourgeois family, Lorenzo served the physical turmoil and errands as the family servant without possessing any financial fortune. In fact, Lorenzo was the hired worker under exploitation without any financial possession and was disguised and belittled by the bourgeois. Besides, the two elder brothers tried every possible means to marry their sister to the wealthy noble family for the sake of adding their wealth and influence instead of caring to her future happiness.

Fundamentally, such great distinction in class is rooted in different sources of income. On the basis of the formation of the capitalist mode of production, there emerged three classes in modern society: wage workers, capitalists and landowners (Marx, 1863-1883). Further, different sources of income are blamed on the growth of the capitalist mode of production, which separates the means of production from labor, so that the labor of workers is transformed into labor employed by capitalists, and the means of production are transformed into capital of capitalists. Capitalists extract surplus value from labor in terms of profits through capital, and workers obtain their disposable income in the form of wages or salary that is only necessary to reproduce their labor for further exploitation. Consequently, the occupiers of the financial possession tend to control the consciousness. By contrast, the lower-class workers live in deplorable conditions on meager wages, exhausting themselves and constantly producing products for capitalists, which makes the lower classes victims of the capitalist boom. People of underclass are “hands within the capitalist machinery, providing the grist for the mill of capital accumulation” (Clark & Foster, p. 382). Due to their low social status, they not only have no basic living security, but lack the necessary psychological security as well.

#### *4.2 Charles Dickens's Capitalist Society*

Therefore, Keats, by revealing the distinction between the exploiter and exploited, criticizes the capital-oriental social demoralizing trend and fulfill his responsibility as an intellectual. It is quite similar to some other typical poets and writers before and after him. William Blake laments over the tragic fate of the young chimney sweeper exploited by the rich. Also, Shelley proclaims the slaughtered rebelling workers in his massacre writing. Thomas Gray assaults the British power-holding politicians are busy with arguing for the luxury and controlling, while putting aside the welfare of those unknown primitive innocent peasants in his elegy writing. Charles Dickens truthfully reflects the misery of the lower working class, such as his description of a remote place in the centre of England: “Scrooge noticed another world in England. In a remote place, the ways were foul and narrow, the shops and houses wretched, the people half naked, drunken, slipshod, ugly. Alleys and archways, like so many cesspools, disgorged their offenses of smell, and dirt, and life, upon the stragglng streets; and the whole quarter reeked with crime, with filth and misery” (Carol, p. 94). In *Oliver Twist*, Dickens frequently takes time out from the plotline to ridicule the middle class's opinion of the poor. In the story,



the poor were thought to be in great need of workhouses, echoing what Marx writes in *Das Kapital* as an increase in “death by starvation” among the workers of the city in London (Stearns & Burns, 2011). Likewise, Keats conveys his concern and care for the poor and laments over the efforts that both innocent young lovers endeavored to take to transcend the class in vain.

### 5. Moral Decaying of the Bourgeoisie

Through inspecting the distinction between two classes, Keats aims to seek out the solutions instead of complaining about the current bizarre situation. He accused of the morality loss of the bourgeoisie, that is, Isabella’s brothers are “enriched from ancestral merchandise” (Keats, p. 193). Furthermore, they were more proud of their financial possessions reflected in Keats’ introspectively, rhetorically paralleling questions, “Why were they proud” of their “marble founts” , “orange-mounts”, “red-lined accounts?” (Keats, p. 194), which exposes their strong desire for occupying the materialized wealth.

Their consciousness of “class difference” and “desire for money” are not created in their mind, but influenced by the epoch spirit. It is essentially the advent of capitalism that shaped their thoughts and consciousness, which thus becomes the newly generated consciousness that permeating the whole society. In other words, such consciousness deriving from the dominant higher class will eventually evolve into the general social superstructure (with the economy as the basis) that administrates the social norms and standards, with the case of Isabella’s brothers as a typical example since their greed is embodied in the “red-lined accounts”, which is more sweet than the Greek arts and here thus stems out the contrast between the fulfillment of wealth and spiritual barrenness of the elites of upper class, for which Keats laments most. Such series of rhetorical questions are exclaimed by the fury Keats out of his anxious of declination of aristocratic morality level.

In analysis of literature and superstructure in “*A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*”, Marx compares the ancient Greeks who created civilization to normal children. The charm the art has doesn't conflict with the primitive character of the social order from which it had sprung (Marx, pp. 335-337). In other words, it is precisely because Greece is in a period of underdeveloped productivity, there is no excessive “division of labor” of capitalism, so there is no phenomenon of unlimited development of commodity production and productivity. And when the development of productivity exceeds the limit that society can accommodate, the society will collapse eventually. The limit that society can accommodate is brutally trampled by bourgeois society. So when the capitalist society emerged, people gradually reduced their enjoyment of art, and thus paid more attention to how to produce more commodities and how to increase consumption. Moreover, their closer attention to the content of “red-lined accounts” reflects the bourgeoisie’s fascination and worship of commodities and money. This is also the manifestation of the fetishism theory proposed by Karl Marx in *Das Kapital*.

## 6. Poetry to be the Salvation for Entire Capitalist Society

### 6.1 Salvation Conscience

Instead of blindly blaming them, Keats attaches the importance of poetry as the ultimate salvation. In the end, he weaves Isabella sentimentally seeking for the pot containing Lorenzo's head into the everlasting song that is spread for generations to review the narrative, shed tears for the beloved and blame the cursed.

Keats was influenced by Christianity and religion since he was young, and this influence ran through his poetry creation. Obviously, salvation is embodied in *Isabella*. The Christian doctrine of redemption is "the question of how Christ fulfilled the mission of saving the world", that is, the world was freed from the bondage of sin and regained freedom. The original sin itself must lead to the hope of salvation and a way out. Keats's salvation and way out are the remedy for Isabella and Lorenzo's love and murdering by his two brothers, namely the resurrection after death and the resurrection of the soul in faith and poetry writing. Furthermore, the Shakespearian manner is also reflected in his salvation. John Keats acknowledged Shakespeare not only as one of his greatest literary models but as his good genius "guiding him" in his own poetic enterprise (White, 1987, p. 7). Therefore, it is meaningful to study and discuss the religious redemption and Keats's "resurrection".

After Lorenzo was killed, Keats described such a soul out of the body: "Ah! when a soul doth thus its freedom win, It aches in loneliness—is ill at peace" (Keats, p. 197). The return of the soul after Lorenzo's death is one of Keats's redemption of conscience. After his death, he didn't retaliate against his master, but sought warmth from Isabella. When Lorenzo appears in front of Isabella, he "unthread the horrid woof/Of the late darken'd time" (Keats, p. 199). It reminds one of a similar metaphor in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adoni* when Venus "unweaves the web [retracts her indictment of Death] that she hath wrought" (Boyar, 1972/1973, p. 164). The significance of the return of the Lorenzo's dead spirit is worth exploring.

This is in line with Žežek's "Return of the Living Dead": The dead returns because they have not been properly buried. Isabella brought Lorenzo's head back, put it and nourished it in the basil flowers pot with selfless cultivation, highlighting the disappearance of the physical distance and physical time, the eternity of psychological distance and psychological time.

### 6.2 Cultural Redemption

The ultimate inquiry and concern will eventually meet with faith, since life is endless suffering, faith may have an extraordinary direction. The basil flowers pot was finally stolen by two brothers, they realize their guilt and thus exile. This means that Lorenzo's murder has been vindicated, and the exile is the "redress" for their murder. This plot echoes the first murder in the Bible, Cain's murder of his brother. He was punished by God and sent to another land. But punishment is not considered as the way of giving up. Instead, it is but holding on to some hope, that is, sort of repentance. Keats's inquiry

into human sins was conducted under the guidance of God. Moreover, this is also the embodiment of “murdering crime” in Western philosophy.

When the basil flowerpot was stolen, Isabella, instead of seeking revenge onto her two brothers, kept asking for the whereabouts of the flowerpot until she died. After death, the soul did not give up love with Lorenzo, their love story was heard throughout the city in bleak songs: “O cruelty, To steal my Basil pot away from me!” (Keats, p. 205). Keats leaves her at the conclusion of the poem singing a “sad ditty” (Keats, p. 205). Similarly, after Adonis’ death, Venus sings a “woeful ditty” (Boyar, 1972/1973, p. 164). Isabella’s song is similar to that of returning of Lorenzo’s spirit and even their physical death, and both are seeking for their love for eternity. Therefore, it illustrates Keats’s pinning high expectation onto the salvation power of poetry, thus embodying the inheritance from Greek peak of civilization as the salvation for human beings as a whole.

## 7. Conclusion

Nothing is absolutely fair or beautiful, which is why Keats devoted the social inequality and vaunted pride in such a tragic love affair, and also tried to extricate oppression through the salvation of transcendence and exile. *Isabella* as well as his other collections *Lamia*, *The Eve of St. Agnes* were published in the same year. These late poems were more mature in writing than the poems created in the earlier period, and can better demonstrate Keats’s unique creation style.

## Acknowledgement

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my sincere gratitude towards my supervisor Dan Cui, the Dean of Institute of International Language and Culture at Jilin International Studies University, for her academic rigor, inspiring instruction, penetrative guidance and patient tolerance, which has benefited me tremendously. I would also like to express my gratitude to my senior student, Jiayu Peng, for her academic assistance and certainly my parents for their everlasting supporting and encouraging me in my academic pursuing.

## References

- Boyar, B. T. (1972). Keats’s “Isabella”: Shakespeare’s “Venus and Adonis” and the Venus-Adonis Myth. *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 21, 160-169.
- Cohen, W. (1982). The Merchant of Venice and the Possibilities of Historical Criticism. *ELH*, 49(4), 772.
- Cui, D. (2019) “Anxiety and Transcendence: A Study of John Keats’s Writing of Identities”, Ph. D Dissertation.
- Dickens, C. (1962). *A Christmas Carol*. New York: Scholastics Book Services.

- Forman, M. B. (2010). *The Letters of John Keats*. Watson Press.
- Hessell, N. (2018). *Romantic Literature and the Colonized World: Lessons from Indigenous Translations*. Springer.
- Lagory, M. (1995). "Wormy Circumstance: Symbolism in Keats's 'Isabella'". *Studies in Romanticism*, 321-342.
- Leask, N. (1992). *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lillian, N. (2006). The Threshold of an Open Window's Transparency, Opacity, and Social Boundaries in Aurora Floyd. In K. Harrison, & R. Fantina (Eds.), *Victorian Sensations: Essays on a Scandalous Genre* (p. 189). Columbus: The Ohio State University Press.
- Marx, K. (1968). *Selected Works [of] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels* (Vol. 1). Progress.
- Marx, K. (1969). *Wage-Labor and Capital and Value Price and Profit* (1865). New York: International Co.
- Marx, K. (1859). Translated by Nahum Isaac Stone *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 335-337.
- Marx, K., & Fredrick, E. (Ed.). (1887). S. Moore, & Ed. Aveling (Trans.), *Capital, Volume I*. Progress Publishers, Moscow, USSR.
- Marx, K. E., & Friedrich (Eds.). (1894). *Capital Volume III* (p. 52). International Publishers, NY.
- Selden, R., Widdowson, P., & Brooker, P. (2013). *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. Routledge.
- Sidney, C. (1917). *John Keats: His Life and Poetry, his friends, Critics, and after-Fame* (Chapter V, pp. 130-135). Retrieved June 8, 2011, from <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/36356/pg36356-images.html#page164>
- Smith, L. Z. (1974). The Material Sublime: Keats and "Isabella". *Studies in Romanticism*, 299-311.
- Stearns, A. E., & Burns, T. J. (2011). About the human condition in the works of Dickens and Marx (p. 5). CLCWeb: *Comparative Literature and Culture*, 13(4), 10.
- White, R. S. (1987). *Keats as a Reader of Shakespeare*. A&C Black. Retrieved from [https://search.ecnu.cf/extdomains/books.google.com/books/about/Keats\\_as\\_a\\_Reader\\_of\\_Shakespeare.html?id=KD2tAwAAQBAJ](https://search.ecnu.cf/extdomains/books.google.com/books/about/Keats_as_a_Reader_of_Shakespeare.html?id=KD2tAwAAQBAJ)

#### Note(s)

Note 1. *Das Kapital*, also known as *Capital*. First edition in English of *Das Kapital* was overseen by Engels and translated by Samuel Moore and Marx's son-in-law Edward Aveling. This edition only contains book I. Although Engels had already published the German edition of Volume II in 1885, he

states in the preface, that a translation of it without volume III would be incomplete; the German edition of volume III did not appear until 1894.

Note 2. Benjamin Bailey met Keats in early March 1817, shortly after Keats's volume was came out. He introduced his friend Messrs Taylor to Keats in order to help Keats to publish his works. Messrs Taylor was the editor as well as publisher of the London magazine. He had an intimate friend Richard Woodhouse, who was a accomplished solicitor at a high position. Taylor then introduced the talented poet John Keats to Woodhouse. Keats's new friendships with Benjamin Bailey, John Taylor, and Richard Woodhouse were thus formed. Woodhouse started to collect Keatsiana, documenting as much as he could about the poetry.

Note 3. "*Marx/Engels Collected Works*" contains Marx's economic essay "Wage Labour and Capital", which was published in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* in April 1849. Frederick Engels edited and translated his article into English. In the article, Marx pointed out that when the labor of the laborer begins, the labor force no longer belongs to him. He could sell his future labor-that is, to undertake the obligation to complete a certain job within a certain period of time. He hires out or sells his labor power, but this labor power has grown up with this person and is inseparable from it. Labor-power is a very peculiar commodity in capitalist society. It has the characteristics of being a value creation force and a source of value. Moreover, if handled properly, its source of value will exceed its own value.

Note 4. When capitalist start to make a product, they initially put spend money on two inputs: constant capital and variable capital. Constant capital ( $c$ ) is the amount of capital invested in raw materials and labor materials. Variable capital ( $v$ ) is the amount of capital used to purchase labor. At first, the accumulation of capital ( $C$ ) is constant capital plus variable capital:  $C=c+v$ . Therefore, to determine the intensity of capitalist exploitation of workers is to calculate the rate of surplus value. The rate of surplus value ( $m'$ ) is a ratio of surplus value ( $m$ ) to necessary labor time ( $v$ ). The equation is :  $m' = m/v$ . Working day has two parts: one is necessary time( $s$ ), another one is surplus labor time( $v$ ) which produces value for capitalists. Besides, the rate of surplus value can also be expressed by the ratio of surplus labor to necessary labor, or the ratio of surplus labor time to necessary labor time:  $m' = s/v$ .

Note 5. This paper is the periodical research result of Project on "The Anxiety and Transcendence of John Keats's Individual Identity Construction" sponsored by National Social Science Foundation of China (21FWWB015); of Project on "A Study of the Construction of John Keats's National Identity" sponsored by the fellowship of China Postdoctoral Science Foundation (No: 2021M700496); of Project on "A Study of the John Keats's National Identity Writing" sponsored by Social Science Foundation of Jilin Province; of Project on "A Study of English Major Course System Construction With Value Shaping Based on 'Global Village' as the Foreign Language Lab" sponsored by the Academy of Foreign Language Teaching Attached to the Institute of Higher Education of China

(No:21WYJYZD08); of Project on “A Study of Routes Applied to Cultivate the Inter-cultural Competence of English Major Students” (No: GJJX20201130).