

A CULTURAL ECOFEMINISM PERSPECTIVE OF KEATS' LA BELLE DAME SANS MARCI

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the interrelation between womanhood and nature. For this purpose, the present study has adopted Ortner's (1972) cultural eco-feminism as a theoretical framework to interpret John Keats' poetical stance used in his poem La Belle Dame Sans Merci. The theory states that the subjugation of women and the operation of nature are closely or identically interrelated. However, the similar status of women and nature sufferings due to the mindset of the people towards patriarchal setup has been highlighted by certain eco-cultural feminists. This textual analysis study is qualitative in nature. This has been revealed through analysis of the text with the help of literary devices: metaphors, personification and symbolism are used in Keats' poem La Belle Dame Sans Merci to show the equivalent position shared by nature and women. It also highlights that Keats observed critically the patriarchal, hierarchical and dualistic culture on one hand by taking into account the conventional mindset towards the oppression of the women and subjugation of nature for a long time while on the other Keats' representation of women being suppressed as living in the same cultural manner as nature has been portrayed in his poetry. Thus, the connection of nature to the past serves the purpose to explain how the surroundings, art, animals, birds along with women have been demoralized and subjugated.

Keyword: Keats, Nature, Cultural Eco-Feminism, Sufferings

INTRODUCTION

Nature which is for all time, measured and rise above in culture,

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however, nature considers women as one of its important parts, so the culture is revealed “natural” to weakness. Such an outcrop of nature depicts the affiliation of women with mother earth and nature. Like many poets, Keats was one who is a great lover and admirer of beautiful nature and seems to be very close to it, hence in a very special manner poet has offered the location or position of women in his poem. His close consciousness, keen observation and consideration towards its surroundings in which men lived are the predominant elements found in his poetry. Further, he has also highlighted sensitivity regarding certain issues by perceiving his strong skills in his poem (Weisman, 1980). Keats is one of the wise and extremely responsive members of the patriarchal culture who had been addressing and listening carefully to the issues that cause the heart to ache or bleed which he focused on in his poetry where women are demoralized and nature is being subjugated. The strong feelings that had come to him regarding the sufferings that both nature and women are facing are that for the sake of the stability of the society to live in they have to fight to get and secure their rights.

Keats is also been known for an important element of poetry that is his eventual vision of escapism. He was encouraged by his marvelous thoughts for involvement and participation that he decided to join and blend him into the night which was bounded by aromatic and shady dark trees through the sight lens of a nightingale. While hearing the most beautiful and melodious songs of nature filled with feelings help Keats to visit his past through accessible former period and into the mystical land of fairies. Moreover, the denouement of the thought, Keats created the world of its own with the power of effective imagination and this arrival brings Keats a lot of suffering in a heart-wrenching way. For Keats, who is one of the remarkable poets of romanticism, imagination is nothing but a pure synonym to the mind's eye (Kumari, 2015). Like other poets, Keats also participated in declaring that escapism must be acknowledged in English as the movement of Romanticism.

During the earlier age, the thoughts that the world possessed related to men were very firm. Further, the significant factor of Keats' poetry i.e. Escapism is determined by the crowd or unlike forces which include convictions and contributions that vary from each poet's nature and existence (Kumari, 2015).

Keats occupied a very notable position in the poetic world for being a well-known poet of nature senses who also has a close association with kindness and nature which is so pure and admiring. Keats, being the poet among the most sensitive poets has depicted the glory and hardships of life and its essential constituents in such a way that deeply influenced the inner system of every living existence. Keats has created a renowned name as the writer in British English Literature and is counted as the well-known and greatest English poet of Romantic poetry (Kumar, 2014).

The terms 'poet of sensuousness' and 'escapist' is well connected with Keats who in his poetry has represented it very well. However, his poetry is enriched with other aspects as well that in the past did not get much attention. The present study has explored the poetry by Keats from a totally different dimension and has traced certain elements of cultural eco-feminism that were not focused or tinted previously. To analyze the elements of Ortner's (1972) theory of Cultural Eco-feminism in Keats, *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* (1819) is the main meeting point of this study. The depiction of women, the bond involving women and nature, the requirement of female persona and nature, that aims to establish the sense of beauty and consolation in Keats' poetry is spotlighting points of the present research. To attain the desired objective, Cultural Ecofeminism played an essential role as to study the different attributes of Keats' poetical piece by considering symbolism, metaphors and personification, symbolism and metaphors in the backdrop of nature and women.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural Eco-feminism

In cultural feminism individual nature is found to be incorporated in human natural science. To focus on the ecological activation, the conditions of natural reproduction and women and their connection were the topics of discussion for women empowerment that was somehow considered distinguished from its real meaning and conveys the concept of supremacy of (Mellor, 2018). When looking into this fact there occur certain phases that help us to accept the relationship shared by women and men. Additionally, a number of cultures and societies are pleased with the ideas of women and men's equal opportunity, imprecise behaviors and roles need by the figure for their existence from multiple facets with reference to the similar or alike attitude towards nature and women, contrasting with the male dominating social order where the treatment with women is ruthless and are believed to be weak, however, males have implied the power they have over women and have dominated them that have basically internalized their patriarchal psyche devoid of granting any type of attention to the affirmative part that the women played in care, reproduction and nourishment (Laksmitarukmi, 2017).

To have a close look at Weissman's view regarding Keats's poetical view "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" in 1980 where he talked about the dissimilarity, a feature that makes it different from other idealistic poems that persistently and so intimately discussed the magical world and stories of the fairies along with the actions of nature, clearly eluding the principles of morality that the poet should consider. Similar to "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" other simple lyrical ballad also holds something that confirms the poets' moral grounds that is the part of their discussion especially related to aggressive tyranny, they emphasize that children's temper to enjoy such distant or imaginative piece of arts is far more than the adults who rely mostly on perceptions actively.

La Belle Dame Sans Marci is a piece of poetic work which has been found to hold the alluring essence that not even the fine pieces like *We Are Seven* or *The Tables Turned* could have, this is acknowledged by the one who has read them open-mindedly and those who were given the clear directions of the concept didacticism which when practiced made the poetical piece futile, unreasonable and weird. On the other hand, *La Belle Dame Sans Marci* upholds a great position with simple themes and beauty along with magnificent transparency in the plot in English Romanticism as it is enriched with dialogues that are wise and intellectual. It presents a stance in form of dialogue that the communicative approach is owned by the nature. However, unluckily the lines, that must be paid great attention, have been overlooked critically. Nevertheless, it is considered highly significant the perspective of cultural ecofeministic relation that focuses on the immense statistics in the poetical works of Keats beneath the supervision of certain recently familiar criticism on the ambiguity concerning sexual affairs that appear in the works of Keats. While some scholars recognize that sexual identity is nothing but structured and poetically self-reflecting that was an important aspect of the society was perfectly elaborated in the verses by Keats.

Additionally, it is also viewed that Keats portrays women as negative and grasping. Since the main character of the woman creates a temptation for the man in the poem with her mesmerizing qualities that *La Belle* is gifted with. Poet thinks that the woman emits the rays of fearfulness and fright along with being the creature that is available to no one, his opinions were based on the associations he had with them. Infrequently, all the responses and perceptions regarding women are found to be visibly confusing, stupefying and somewhat inconsistent. Besides, *La Belle Dame Sans Marci* comprehensively ignores the thought processes of the women as it only revolves around the notions of men. This school of thought forced the researcher to think about Keats' vigorously scorning habit of having the courage to condemn the patriarchal system that has

brought Dameage. Keats developed typical stereotypes based on gender by selecting feta figures of women who were sexually awakened and are nothing but a threat to the established rules, values, or principles that the society has set in accordance with the beliefs of the patriarchal system.

At the same time, critics commenting on Keats' *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* explained whether the poem contains the story of his life or not. However, the poem is prejudiced to be abounding with a clarification of a concise criticism. Moreover, the hidden meaning which needs to be distinguished or withdrawn from it is utterly unseen and I not been elucidated. Keeping in view the factual details regarding ballad that it is traditionally or normally a distinguishing free verse style of poetry where lyrics are known to be as a comprehensive work of art emitting the pour belief and feelings of the writer. Keats being the critical thinker by means of valid attitude or facial appearance of the regular ballad which sensitively contains any written piece of art standing apart or non-discriminatory would reject the analysis that is ground on words and memoirs. Even so (Al-Abbood, 2017) when went through the poem thoroughly on reading next to the granule remarked that the equipment of conformist ballad fields does not close the eyes to or eliminate the autobiographical understandings but is widely maintained.

It has been observed that the poem carries lyrical and private nature for Keats who has used the techniques of conventional ballads written before. The goal was to switch the attention from the autobiographical elements of the poetical piece. He had placed *La Belle Dame sans Merci* in the three most descriptive points of his piece of writing. *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, one of the literary ballads, has an important link with other works and the poems of Keats giving out indistinguishable facial appearance together on personal and poetic components of fatal accident and concern waiting for that echo choir in Keats *Ode on Melancholy* too. According to Weisman (1980), no evidence is available that asserts the faith that the Keats have on

nature and creational sphere that is full of dishonesty which from men owning religious marks has got to get themselves out by lending a hand of thoughts.

It has been an environment that has been deceived as one of his impressive subjects and philosophy away from the blossoms, one has to be familiar with the fact, what is the reason that Keats has selected only a single persona i.e. knight in his poem that has possession of frightening imminent of nature as hell, opposing this, the reason to be found for women who are considered as the spellbinder soul in form of a fairy, commencing nature as a source that temp, captivate and inflames if only Keats and Blake are on one raised area.

Apart from more than a few poems rotating upon sexual category and surroundings, the purpose of the current study is to determine the individuality that has categorized the work as a poetical piece revolving around the stance of cultural-eco feminism. It has been observed that equally women and nature are demoralized in a comparable approach in the strong intensifying progress of patriarchal structure. These societies bring desolation along with the conflicts since they have most of the time portrayed nature as women by giving weak feminine characteristics to it, as to indicate exception or a break out from the community of women. Besides, women along with nature reflect in this specified piece of Keats' poetry, that our society not only includes the disorders of patriarchy but also men's rage, their gazes, and assaults or sexual shots of which the women are victims mainly. Initially, the term gaze was impeded by Laura in 1970, who was one of the critics from the genre of film. He had portrayed an inspiration or conception that the motivational perceptions of males to produce genres like literature and art by approaching women should be created in bits and pieces.

Keats' strange language of women fairies in *La Belle Dame Sans*

merci does not rank itself as the tale's qualities that continue answerable as a positive feature for the poet; additionally, in spite of a fact, that has been not acknowledged or studied by several critics and scholars of literature that how highly structured the work is in its approach. For sure that certain men and the knight expected the language of the poem to be strange since it is voiced by an exploited lady living in an environment accompanied by nature that is extensively distant from male supremacy who believed that the lady needs protection in terms of mental, physical, emotional tranquility that results from the male's assault. Generally, cultural eco-feminist works including poems represent the gazes of men as a sign of subsistence of the patriarchal order which is so overbearing that even nature predisposes to refuse it in all forms.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study has taken into account the models of qualitative and interpretive analysis of research and nature correspondingly. Hence, the present study, exclusively, stands upon the aforementioned paradigm.

Qualitative Research

The qualitative research method most of the time is intended to be adopted in social sciences, therefore the researcher selected a qualitative mode of inquiry so as to ensure the social and cultural occurrences used in the poetical work of Keats by embracing theoretical underpinning of cultural eco-feminism. Such a research paradigm is used to measure different examples as suggested by numerous researches, ethnography and case studies. The data collection for the qualitative mode of inquiry encompasses the following sources i.e. observation, sense, and understanding that is then further carried out by the researcher's action and reaction along with the text that is under analysis (Creswell, 2005).

The main concern of the current study is to highlight those prime

constituents which Ortner (1972) has discussed. According to him the most important issue of the peaceful world is the universal degradation of women. To achieve the purpose of the aforementioned research objectives, textual analysis is the direction that helps to fulfill the requirements.

Additionally, analysis of the certain text involves a suitable track that has offered the right approach for commencing with the text for the sake of extracting from the surface meanings, the hidden meanings within the text (McKee, 2003). Moreover, a different number of approaches has been emerged within the textual mode for the analysis of the texts but the focus of the present study is to trace out cultural eco-feminism in Keats' poem *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* that has been critiqued further by especially focusing on the following figurative features i.e. symbolism, metaphor and personification.

Personification

Personification has been defined as a fictional tool in the text. It is the representation of human characteristics that have been explicitly associated with inanimate stuff, natural forces, idols and the natural world (Delbaere, McQuarrie, & Phillips, 2011).

Symbolism

The representation of thoughts and qualities in form of some signal is known as symbolism which is considered as one of the useful tools in the poetical piece (Whitehead, 1985). However, it depends upon some circumstances or the state of affairs in order to convey the desired meaning. For instance, the color red when symbolized for the red flower will represent the feeling of love and affection while the red color generally indicates some sort of danger. So, it is implied that the significance of the signs used for a particular substance like how, when and where it is occurring generally depends on the interpretation of that specific action upon readers.

Metaphor

A figure of speech that is used symbolically to indicate hidden, implicit or indirect contrast or comparison between two unrelated things sharing common/similar characteristics is regarded as a metaphor. Correspondingly, it is right to be said that the likeness is measured which linking two conflicting or unusual substance or matter is based on the characteristics possessed by them with the main focus on familiarity (Lakoff& Johnson, 2008).

The present study, therefore, revolves around making inquiries to investigate the following aspects i.e. the depiction of women, association that links women and nature, requirement of characters specifically females, and the role of nature in creating consolation and beauty in Keats' poetical work on the basis of aforementioned facets. This study also aims to explore Keats's poetical piece which the ordinary male individuals of distinct societies has merrily accepted in a numeral way but another fragile creature of the very same society women- its intense bonding with nature, its survival, its distress or hardships and the continuous exploitation and neglect faced by both the subjects due to the patriarchal psyche possessed by the authoritative men was not the topic of discussion before. This research indeed shows Keats's concern for both in his poems.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Cultural eco-feminism, a theory presented by Ortner (1972) is preferred for the current study. It reports the inferior position of women, the cultural values, activities and ideologies, and the patriarchal setup that are responsible for keeping the status of the women and nature fixed. The reliability for the present study is supported through the theoretical framework of Ortner (1972) i.e. Cultural eco-feminism. The doubt has been explained by the theorist within her traditional essay named "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?"(1972). The essay tried to explain the reason for giving

the secondary position to women in this globe, which indeed is a cultural reality. Females are well-thought-out at the secondary position similarly as it is done to nature by culture.

ANALYSIS

Personification

Keats has beautifully personified the image of supernatural beings like the little fairies in a dream as the women in his work *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. It has been seen that the poem is going ahead with the outward show of a powerful man that has symbolized the patriarchal social order. While the other subject of exploitation that is atmospheric nature is also being Dameaged and destroyed by none other than the Knight with armaments who is symbolically representing and radiating the power and control, is observed keenly by Keats. To keep the same reference in view, he examines and enquires about the knight "Alone and palely loitering" (Stanza-1, line-2).

The knight's presence has surprised and worried Keats to see him in a calmed place and urge him to enquire about the matter that what actually caused the surrounding such miserable condition and why on the land of sorrow and pain there is a presence of patriarchal authority. Additionally, another example of personification that is being discussed by Keats is in the stanza three the "Fast withered too" (Stanza-3, line-4) that worries him about the wastage of life which is at risk, and the sole reason for this cause is the authoritative power who for the sake of fulfilling emotional and physical needs or demands is wandering around. Moreover, Keats tries his level best in his efforts to manifest the concept of otherness as an allegory which is amazingly traced out in the poem through his sensitivity in thought transference that is why it is regarded as a great piece of art; which has been well-thought-out and stands as an exceptionally imperative fictitious example in the vast land of versification. Keats speaks of the patriarchal psyche of men in a magnificent manner

who even for their wrong deeds inculcate no one but nature and women. Keats in the fifth stanza used figurative speech i.e. personification for supernatural beings who were known to be merciless and is called a woman by the knight "I met a lady in the meads,(Stanz-4, line 1) I made a garland for her head, She looked at me as she did love, and made sweet moan (Stanza-5, line 1- 3- 4); here Keats powerfully put in plain words the prospect of the society dominated and governed by males where men as a knight are unable to discern their conducts like what kind of actions they do and for what they are favored. Keats says the man in the respective society wants to perform actions in accordance with their wishes and demands. Keats as one of the very sensitive members of the society has become the mouthpiece for the rights of women by criticizing the patriarchal authority where men tend to forget their responsibilities and duties. Additionally, he focuses in the poem that the lands which are far away from the sight of men even their men hunt for nature and women.

Symbolism

La Belle Dame Sans Merci which has been well-thought-out as one of the final and very remarkable poems of John Keats, it has a tale of a knight that completely falls in the love of a spiritual creature. It is a story of complaints by the man, how he fell in love, enjoyed the love and physical closeness of an imaginary figure, and ultimately of the consequences, his story faced that how he went through a severe heartbreak as he opened his eyes. This complete work of art by Keats started with a light of passion and strong energy. Here Keats has also highlighted the cause of loneliness that the Knight experienced while roaming in the whole country. "Alone and palely loitering? The sedge has withered from the lake, no birds sing." (Stanza-1, line 2-3-4). The use of "sedge has withered no birds sing" here symbolically explains the unusual happening that something is obviously not usual as it is the result of some kind of tragedy that caused nature enormous harm.

Additionally, the very same knight has been found "loitering" as he was there near the boundary by the lake, with his face that seems to be yellowish or pale which notifies about his condition because of a long journey. This tiring traveling is clearly informing about the fact that the knight is in search of something. It seems that there no life exists as there are no birds that spread their sweet song of merriness and life and all the swamp plants that would enhance the beauty of nature are dead. Keats says that the birds have abundant that lake everlastingly, in a little while as little birds have sensed the knight's company which symbolizes some sort of threat for their existence. Keats has found the deceased plants in the region of the lake, nonappearance of the birds that were in performance but enforced to travel. This move of the innocent creatures symbolizes the cultural identity of powerful men in society. Keats's deep examination of nature in a place where there are no indications of existence at all makes the reader feel in the same way as Keats feels himself. He, however, has conveyed the analysis regarding his recognition in a symbolical manner which informs us about the grass that was could be lush green on the parts where nature was born and loved to enjoy was unfortunately absent. The birds were silent, all the other animals' noise long with the voice of birds for the collection of foods has been taken in notice nowhere in that critical time, it has been observed as if they have changed their place for always. "So haggard and so woe-begone? The squirrel's granary is full, and the harvest's done." (Stanza-2, line 2-3-4) are the lines from the second stanza of the poem where Keats has inquired by asking the very same question repeatedly. He asked the knight with armament for the reason that made his appearance so miserable and tired.

In the following very lines, the poet found out that the lively nature has abundant the area and there is no one around, which give him the indication of existence. Throughout the area, life has been nowhere to be found hence the entire environment symbolically represents the nature that is lifeless or has been perished.

Additionally, it has been clearly practical that the autumn season signifies the strong emotions of pain, grief, and solitude that most of the poets use in their versification as a poetical expression. However, factually it can be noticed that the entire atmosphere is none other than but is gloomy. The poet speculates about the sickness that nature has embraced in itself, this causes an urge in poet to inquire repeatedly from the only living soul knight, who was available at the time to tell about the frightening presence which has made the nature dead and he himself looks so exhausted and miserable. Keats inquires about the miserable happening to the beauty of nature, which has lost the sign of its existence. Keats gives the impression of being in a dreadful state triggered by patriarchal power. While, in stanza two 'woe-begone' and "harvest's done" is the pair of symbols that are used to mention the time that is accompanied with solitude, agony and cold. The 'knight-at-arms' presence has caused a sense of worry in Keats since it is him who refreshes our memory of being the symbol of encounter meadow, where the breathing souls like nature and particularly females' honor has been found at great danger to survive. At the same time, it is generally observed that at whatever time or wherever there is warfare or anarchy, the women's physical violence or abuse along with the destruction induced to nature is practiced commonly.

Metaphor

La Belle Dame Sans Merci, the poem by Keats from the beginning tries to pinpoint the "knight at arms" depression, anxiety, and infirmity that he faced. "O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms, Alone and palely loitering?". The poet, therefore, asks a question related to the expressions or achromatic signs that can be seen on the knight's forehead, which in turn is an indication that makes you distanced from his company. Knights' unnatural behavior for searching, alarms which his facial features displayed all can be compared to yellow lily. Such appearance is sketched to make people aware of the warning to avoid him as it can be noticed that he is not in a jovial

mood rather is in an offended frame of mind. His forehead sweats to show his annoyance but his figure even within "illness," is visibly suffering from the great hotness. The flame emitting from his soul and frame of the body is reflecting the state of a knight who is in anger. The overall condition of the knight is metaphorically shown by Keats that the man is searching for someone with an intention to ruin and suppress it. Moreover, certain metaphorical terms are used to explain the state of knight by Keats i.e. "I see a lily on thy brow With anguish moist and fever-dew. And on thy cheeks a fading rose"

(Stanza 3 lines 1- 2- 3) "Lily on thy brow "anguish moist" "cheeks a fading rose". Keats takes a close look at the face of a knight being out of any sort of colors that represent beauty but rather was as pale as the yellow lily. Further, the existence of sweat indicates an extensive voyage and a great struggle looking for someone that has tired him. The signs of exhaustion which has appeared on his forehead speak about his intentions. Keats described the desperate search of the knight for someone by using some metaphorical expressions that forced us to imagine the freshness that has been vanished from the forehead and cheeks of the knight swiftly. Additionally, the growing paleness of the knight contrasts with the glittering of the sweat on his face representing the men of patriarchal setup that barge out with the intentions not so pure which then will spread nothing but domination and oppression. Poet also highlights the innocent women or tough-less nature that even they have not rescued from the patriarchal authority as they have mercy for none. While if the common interests of them are regarded then satisfying their demands, carrying out their intentions and after achieving all this moving ahead is listed at the top. The consciousness which carries the mystery of the knight and the enfolded point of view that the man's nature does not collaborate but always live with the intention of becoming the ultimate supreme power over women as observed in the character of Knight. The figure of the knight is found to be in a constant state of the journey

which shows he is accustomed to the hardships of life. However, in the never-ending circle of the moon, he is found to be wandering or revolving both physically and mentally.

The knight who was losing his control on himself is been highlighted by Keats who pinpoints the swift fading color of the face of the knight-at-arms which he has compared with the rose that has been withered which resembles the beauty of the defenseless nature that has been snatched by them resulting in destruction. The following lines "Full beautiful – a faery's child," "And her eyes were wild." (Stanza-4, line 2-4) shows the use of the metaphors and deep words by Keats as "beautiful like a child" refers to the innocence, beauty, and purity that the living being possessed. The poet further uses imaginative and comparative language while talking about a child's beauty in order to enlighten us about the knight's thoughts. Hence, this is a proof of the society dominated and ruled by men who are very well aware of this natural truth that women are somehow like nature with having the resemblance of a child who is nothing but innocent, pure and dependent.

CONCLUSION

In the great poetical piece *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* by Keats, some of the cultural ecofeminism's elements have appeared in a dynamic way. It has the core theme where women's subjugation along with the oppression of nature is highlighted in an impressive manner by Keats. The present study came to the point that in past only a male viewpoint was enlightened while the standpoint of the females was neglected in the conventional patriarchal cultures with the belief that domination is only a right of men in respective societies. Keats personifies the blames of men as a woman on the verge of facing failure by themselves. The easy target for them is always a woman whom they can blame for all the mishaps that have occurred in their lives. Keats implicitly symbolizes the painful condition of women and nature in the selected poem and he has also criticized the

conventional forces that are responsible for setting up his patriarchal authority that has brought nothing positive to nature and women but only harm and desolation. Hence, the poet in his deep metaphorical words speaks about the anger of men who are searching for women in faraway valleys but on the other hand, a woman is somehow being the part of nature is not even saved along with it.

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