

JOHN KEATS' LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI: AN ECOCRITICAL READING

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ABSTRACT

Ecocriticism has an important role in the modern world. It is the study of literature with the viewpoint of nature. The term ecocriticism was possibly first coined in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism". By ecocriticism, Rueckert meant "the application of ecology and ecological concept to the study of literature." Cheryll Glotfelty defines "Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and physical environment." Literature has played an important role in world history. It has influenced all the social, religious, political movements of the world. It has resolved all the major issues of the world. Nature has been an important part of our literature. Landscape, scenery, Natural beauty and Flora and fauna have been described in all our greatest works. All our greatest poets and writers were concerned about the environment and its problem. In the present era, Environmental problems like global warming, ozone depletion ecological dis-balanced, etc. are major issues regarding our environment. Unlike all other matters, every work of our literature has been connected with the environment but it's our present need to study it with the view of Ecocriticism so that we may resolve the problems of the present and upcoming environmental crisis.

KEYWORDS: *Ecocriticism, Literature and Physical Environment, Natural Beauty and Flora*

INTRODUCTION

I have selected John Keats' one of the most famous poems La Belle Dame Sans Merci to study the eco-critical elements. This short poem has been written in 1819 but published in 1820. T. Hall Caine's 1882 assessment of the poem as the "loveliest [Keats] gave us". He writes that the ballad is "wholly Simple and direct, and informed throughout by a reposeful strength. In all the qualities that rule and shape poetry into the unity of form, this little work strides perhaps, leagues in advance of 'Endymion,' [enotes 2011]. Many critics considered this poem as an autobiographical romantic poem. But the landscape and its relation with hero clarify its ecological impacts. Keats belonged to the Romantic Age of literature. It was time to Return to Nature. He admired Nature for its beauty and was concerned about it. His poetry represents his concern about environment Ode to Autumn, On a Grecian Urn, On Death, Lamia and most of his work tell us about the upcoming environmental crisis.

The first two stanzas of the poem La Belle Dame Sans Merci clearly express his concern about environmental crisis and its impact on human beings.

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,

Alone and palely loitering?

The sedge has withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,

So haggard and so woe-begone?

The squirrel's granary is full,

And the harvest's done. [Lines 1 to 8]

These stanzas clearly express the relationship between the environment and human. The landscape of the poetry has been taken from a cold hillside. It was winter and nature was not in a good mood so the knight was. The climatic condition of that area was not good at the time so the knight was also wandering wretched. Withered grass and absence of birds deal with an ecological dis-balance environment which influenced the knight and his physical and mental position. Sufferings of the knight were parallel to the changes in climate. These lines convey the message whenever there is an ecological dis-balance in nature, human beings will have to suffer.

I met a lady in the meads,

Full beautiful—a faery's child,

Her hair was long, her foot was light,

And her eyes were wild.[Lines 13 to 16]

Just in contrast to the first two stanzas, in these lines nature seems happy and glad because of mentioning the meadows. The greenery of meadows fills us with happiness as it shows the true beauty of nature. So the fairy (heroine of the poem) has been described having charm and beauty. She has not been only compared to a beautiful fairy but to the child of a fairy as all of us know that a child appears more beautiful than the adult.

These three stanzas describe a bond between the condition of nature and mood of human beings and warn us about the future. We can learn that we must change ourselves if we want to live in harmony with nature. Nature has a direct impact on our lives.

I made a garland for her head,

And bracelets too, and fragrant zone;

She looked at me as she did love,

And made sweet moan [Lines 17 to 20]

The first two lines of the stanza warn human beings to give up the materialistic life. These lines convey a message to mankind that once again it is the time to return the nature the way adopted by romantic poets. The modern men must cease themselves to be a materialist. Due to our greed, we continuously mining the land, this action will be a threat to mankind. Like our ancestors we should also use the ornaments made of natural vegetation by giving up the costly metal like gold, silver, platinum, etc. because of greed having more and more gold, we are getting the earth damaged. The last two lines symbolize that natural beauty increases the beauty of human beings. We can express our love only and only in

pleasant surroundings. Keats wrote that we can express our love with more affection by offering natural things. These things convey the real meaning of our love.

She found me roots of relish sweet,
And honey wild, and manna-dew,
And sure in language strange, she said—
'I love thee true'. [Lines 25 to 28]

Food is one of the basic needs of human beings and he has been depended on nature for it. The first two lines of this stanza justify this fact. The fairy offered the knight food brought from the forest. It tastes like the divine food. These lines clearly show the dependency of human beings on the environment for their lives. In ancient time, we get pure food items from nature but now-a-days we depend on fertilizers for the productivity it proves the causes of many new diseases. It is the result of our manipulation with the environment.

I saw their starved lips in the gloam,
With horrid warning gapèd wide,
And I awoke and found me here,
On the cold hill's side. [Lines 41 to 44]

In this stanza, the knight dreamt of dying princes and kings who warned him for upcoming problems when he woke up he found himself on a cold hill while he slept in fairy's cave. Fairy made him sleep in the beautiful surrounding of nature [lines 29-32] with love. The knight felt happy in pleasant condition but when he was warned, he was in unfavorable climatic conditions.

And this is why I sojourn here,
Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is withered from the lake,
And no birds sing. [Lines 45 to 48]

In the last stanza, the knight tells the reason why he had stayed there in such bad conditions. And it is clear when the climate became worse; the knight would have suffered much. He has no option either left the place or adopt himself according to this condition. He himself was responsible for it because of his attraction to physical beauty and charm.

An overall study of this poem suggests us this poem is full of ecological concerns. Keats has successfully represented a relation between human and environment. He conveys the message that no one can live happily if nature is frown at us. Just like the "Ode to a Nightingale" In good and healthy climatic conditions relief the poet while bad climate adds his sufferings. Keats was aware of environmental issues. He raised these issues through his poetry. At present, we are in the period of fatal environmental crisis. As music removes our sadness, Poetry will play an important role to resolve the environmental problems. None but literature can make people aware and tell the way how to protect our environment. So literature should be studied again through the viewpoint of ecocriticism.

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