

Stylistic Study of Keats' Ode to Nightingale

Iftikhar Haider Malik¹ Usman Ahsan² Muhammad Nadil Ali³



Abstract: The study is about the stylistic analysis of the poem "Ode to a Nightingale" composed by John Keats, one of the best romantic poets. He is termed as the poet of beauty and beauty is his religion. He says that Beauty is truth and, Truth is beauty. He believes that A Thing of Beauty is a joy forever. He is also a good preacher of Negative Capability. For him, Negative capability is such a competent skill of one's mind which enables the man to reach the truth without being uncertain and irritated. This competent skill of the poetic mind enables a poet to enjoy all modes and moods of life as it is. All the possible stylistic devices like imagery, metaphors, similes, romantic references, and various sound patterns were employed to serve the purpose of the present study.

Key Words: Negative Capability, Modes and Moods, Imagery, Metaphors, Similes

Introduction

(Bloom 2007), explains that usage of Stylistics devices is one the most objective and comprehensive method of illustrating style than the imprecise generalities of outdated criticism". Turner (1973) illustrates that stylistics is a precise and divergent part of linguistics for the comprehension of actual as well as concealed motives of the author. Such a particular study of linguistics marks artistic pieces of writing as more poignant, connotative, and figurative. (Matthews, 2003) explains in his book that the ideal of Negative Capability is one of the striking features of Keats's poetry. For him, Negative capability is such a competent skill of one's mind which enables the man to reach the truth without being uncertain and irritated. This competent skill of poetic mind enables a poet to enjoy all modes and moods of life as it is. For writing poetry, Keats believes that every poet must possess both dramatic and moral sense for the composition of a fine piece of poetry. He believes that a poet must have a sense of charm and a sympathetic view of the objects of nature equally. (Raymond. C 1973) is of the opinion that A poet shouldn't be authoritative to dictate his will and choice on his art. He must be flexible in his mind and act to delineate his composition.

Ode to the Nightingale is the loveliest poem of Keats and has much beauty. Arnold E., opines illustrates that The Ode is the greatest so far as compassion is concerned--a poem of midnight sorrow and beauty. "My Heart Aches and Drowsy Numbness-Pains my Sense" is the poet's condition. He listens to the song in the dead of the night. Headache comes from the excess of happiness in participating in the bird's happiness, but drowsiness steals over him as if he had drunk death poison. The theme and bottom line of this ode is that Keats is an escapist by nature. He is unable to face the bare realities of life. He wants to live in a world that is free from all kinds of fever and fret. Such a world exists nowhere but in his own imagination, which suits him best. This is a world of immortal beauty, Keats perceives it only at the time when he listens sweet song of the nightingale.

¹ Associate Professor, Department of English, Mukabbir University (Proposed), Gujrat, Punjab, Pakistan.

✉ dr15ihmalik@yahoo.com

² Head QEC, Mukabbir University (Proposed), Gujrat, Punjab, Pakistan. ✉ Cvpost1@yahoo.com

³ PhD Scholar, Faculty of Education, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

✉ Mhamad.phd.edu201@iiu.edu.pk

• **Corresponding Author:** Iftikhar Haider Malik (✉ dr15ihmalik@yahoo.com)

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Objectives of the Study

1. To study the symbolic effect of linguistic devices.
2. To discover the emotional weight of figurative language.
3. To judge both the structural and artistic levels of the poem.

Research Questions

1. What is the symbolic effect of metaphorical discourse and language?
2. What is the emotional weight of literary techniques and devices?
3. How equally a poem be judged on structural and artistic level?

Methodology

The poem was analyzed while using different linguistic techniques and devices. Poet's perception with reference to the poem has been deeply analyzed by means of language choices. All the possible stylistic devices like imagery, metaphors, similes, romantic references, various sound patterns were employed to serve the purpose of the present study.

Literature Review

All the famous odes authored by John Keats in 1810 are well-knitted with frequent images, feelings, and thoughts (Kumar & Singh, 2012). At his tender age, Keats had experienced the death of most of his dear ones which taught him that death or tragedy was nothing else but a nightmare that is short-lived. The frequent visits of death in his family made him brave against the horrible effects of death. Such circumstances made him so brave that he felt happy and comfortable to welcome death if it visited his surroundings.

Keats is called the monarch of odes as John Donne is called the monarch of wit. Among the famous odes of Keats, the Ode to Nightingale is regarded as the longest one. Keats composed this ode in 1819 along with other odes namely Ode to Melancholy, ode to Indolence, and Ode on the Grecian Urn. The poet has also made it matchless on thematic and technical grounds. It reflects different shades of Keats' life. On one hand, it deals with the temporary joys and sorrows of his life while on the other hand, it echoes Keats' sensuousness and his fanciful nature. A famous literary figure, (M.de Paul) considers this ode one of the finest and richest ode among the array of Keats odes. Although it's not flawless and without technical hitches we must not look over it while looking at the bright side of this masterpiece. One of such snags has to do with the deep link between joys and sorrows; another, between life and death."

Scott (2002) says that Keats was sensuous in nature and disposition. Like Wordsworth, he was a great fan of scenic beauty. Beauty was his religion and his love for nature was purely for its own sake. He pictured nature not for any rhyme and reason but for fancies; he did not consider it on an intellectual and spiritual basis but rather expressed it through his senses. He is a graphical poet, and a man of passion and imagination Sikka (1998), considers Keats as a poet of beauty. Beauty is truth, truth beauty is his catchword. He finds all his satisfaction, loss, conflict, tragedy, and death in the lap of beauty. If we consider this viewpoint of Keats in a serious way we can call him a religious man with a Divine message. The same concept of beauty and truth has been pointed out in the current paper.

The strength of the poetry and imagination is held in doubt at the end of the poem where John Keats gloomily recognizes that his imagination will desert him with the departure of the nightingale. (Ali 2016) found the truth that appealing imaginations which moved him by the melodious song of the bird were nothing but a hoodwink for him. The concluding lines reveal not disenchantment but doubt. This emerging doubt is not resolved but rather arises in the form of a question at the end.

John Keats was a great romantic poet with a pure sense of beauty and imagination. (Kumar, 2014). His sense of beauty is never one-sided and lop-sided rather he has pure and strong beliefs for it. He does not entangle this concept into complex theories of his time. His notion of negative capability strengthens the ability of perception. Keats has different views regarding beauty. He, like Coleridge does not seek knowledge over beauty rather beauty is appreciated in itself. (Khan, 2002), finds a sharp nature of conflict reflected in Keats' poetry between life and death, fate and actions, pain and pleasure which are juxtaposed



in the world of Keats' world, i.e., the loving world of beauty. Forman (1907) reveals that Keats's poetry written in the form of odes reveals ultimate conflicts, clashes, and tensions. The meanings of a word for him, are not as important as its impacts on others. Impression of words rather than their meanings is more meaningful for Keats.

(Tso, 2011) is of the point that Odes written by Keats holds a great healing power that can be effectively perceived by its readers. In his odes, Keats, through imagery and romantic illusions casts a dreamy curtain over his poetic edifice. He weaves his dreams into the Arcadian pastoral landscape with the help of powerful imagery, a sense of romanticism, figurative language, and sensuous beauty. According to him, poetry has healing and soothing effects on the minds of poets and readers as well.

Use of Stylistic Devices

Bate (1964) proclaims for this ode in a way that I found no one as complete and masterpiece of art as this ode of Keats," (Khan 2002) is the view that Keats's odes are the reflection of Keats' poetic heights. Among his contemporaries, Keats holds first rank due to his rich vivacious images scattered in his poetic composition. Keats has used a unique combination of stylistic devices in his famous ode namely "Ode to a Nightingale" which imparts emotional as well as vivid pictures to his poetic art. The nightingale has customarily been associated with love and life.

Stanza 1

The first stanza of his ode starts with the poet's description of his melancholic mood caused by the song of the nightingale. - "My heart aches..." This melancholic expression reveals that the song chanted by the nightingale causes immense pleasure which ultimately turns into sweet pain and sorrow that numbs his senses. Poet compares such feeling with the intoxicated effect of a poisonous herb, known as Hemlock. The descriptions of the opium as well as the hemlock are tagged with the reference of "LETHE WARDS SUNK." Lethe is a reference used by Keats. It is an allusion to the five rivers of the Ancient Greek felonious Hells and Hades. Repetition of 's' in a drowsy numbness pains my sense,' joint with the long 'o' and 'a' sounds, sonically reveals the hypnotic state of the poet. Keats speaks with the bird to ensure that his grief is not the cause of jealousy but rather the melodious song and unbounded joys of the bird.

The poet makes the use of metaphor, where he compares the bird to a "Light-winged dryad" - a supernatural object that resides in woods, which indicates that the bird appears magical, dwelling in the imaginative farm beyond the material world. Similarly, pictorial and aural images such as "Sunburnt Mirth, Flora Shadows countless, Beechen Green, Melodious Plots native music with local ballet and dance" impeccably deliver graphic portrayal of the environment of Keats's beautiful bird, which is opposite to the sorrows of the poet which are revealed by repetition of the word 'happy'.

Stanza 2

In the second stanza, Keats is an aspirant of a distinctive type of wine that is a signifier of rustic imageries of "Dancing, Cheer and Singing". Picture, "Tasting of Flora," a Roman Deity of floras; "Provencal song" echoes the song of the region of France. The poet also aspires for a special kind of drink from the "Blushful Hippocrene" a fountain on Mount Helicon, where the goddess of poetry lived. The assonance of 'latter - "B" in "Beaded Bubbles Winking at the Brim" echoes "image of bubbles". He personifies bubbles as winking which is indeed a trait of mankind.

Stanza 3

The 3rd stanza is contrastive in nature as compare to the earlier 2 verses of the poem. Here a pack of rich imagery as "Groans, Palsy, Pale Youth, Grey Hair, and Spectra Thin, Leaden-eyed", Present a miserable life on this planet.

It shows the huge difference between the two worlds, the original world of Keats as well as artistic domain of Nightingale. Once more Keats uses personification to heighten the effect of love and beauty. In the inception of the stanza Keats personified the "Nightingale" similarly he personifies beauty and love of "Hemlock" in the last lines of the poem. "Beauty" holds no sight, likewise "Love" is destitute to "Pine" or 'Ache' to someone.

Stanza 4

Stanza no four projects the repetition of the word, "Away! Away!" which speaks the utmost aspiration of the poet to escape the hard realities of the real world to the world of imagination. Keats is ardent to follow the flying path of the bird. He does not yearn to travel in the company of Bacchus, the Roman god of wine. He prefers to fly upon the "viewless wings of Poesy." He also strikes a comparison of the "MOON" to a "QUEEN" as well as "SRARS" to her "FAYS" or "FAIRIES" on metaphorical grounds.

Stanza 5

The stanza 5 is replete with a rich treasure of images as "Embalmed Darkness and Soft Incense as well, The Grass, the Thicket, and the Fruit-tree Wild, Rustic Eglantine Violets, Musk Rose, Dewy wine, and Murmurs Haunt of Flies,..." All this spreads the fragrance of the flowers of diverse nature and form. He also indicates the fleeting nature of beauty with the symbolic description of "Fast fading violet"

Stanza 6

In this stanza. Keats personifies and addresses death and he has "Called him soft names." He finds 'Death' like a sincere and kind comrade and feels satisfaction in the company of death. Particularly, in such a time when he is totally aloof from the grim realities of real life and breathes in the world of imagination, an ideal world of Keats. In such moments he enjoys the melodious song of the bird. Anyhow in the last two lines, the poet feels sorry that the bird will enjoy his life and sing constantly for all the times to come but the poet will be no more to enjoy the melodious song of the immortal bird.

Stanza 7

We find the idea of immortality, which has also been presented in the 6th stanza. "Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!" Sweet music of the bird is of course a sign of satisfaction and a constant source of joy for the coming generation. It has been heard by emperors and clowns, and even by Ruth and fairytales. All these images stand for the immortality of the bird. Ruth is a biblical reference. Ruth came from Moab. Keats attaches this idea with that of the nightingale, an immortal bird who will sing forever and will also be the source of comfort for a widow named "Ruth", who after the death of her husband is living in "Judah" a place far from her native Moab. Hence the scriptural reference and the imagery employed in the verse indicate the deep effect of the sweet song sung by the nightingale.

Stanza 8

Keats personifies the nightingale in this stanza, he also speaks with him with the intention of saying him good-bye. Here he gives a symbolic impression and compares the word "Forlorn" to the "Bell". The word ultimately disturbs his imagination and gives the poet a sense of loneliness. "The Plaintive Anthem" of the poet's bird slowly dies away in the pastures, dells, and dales. Here the link of the poet's imagination also slowly dies down with the dying music of Nightingale. This song drives Keats back to the real world from the fanciful world to the world of reality. At this point poet says goodbye to his loving bird– "Adieu????? Adieu" John Keats concludes his ode with the alarming questions posed by the poet– was he actually relishing the song or was it just a deception for him? Did his poetic genius and imaginative power surely transport him to a place that is or is not an impeccable one? – should I awaken or not? Such bare questions and the indifferent condition of the poet impart a religious touch to his ode.

Rhyming Scheme and Metrical Devices

The eight stanzas of this ode have been composed in iambic pentameter excluding the eighth line which has been versified in trimeter. For example, in line Two: My Sense/ as though/ of Hem/ -Lock I/ had Drunk. We find unique usage of meter and rhyming scheme throughout the poem. Ababcdecde, reveals that the extemporal and the free manifestation of the music of the bird is a similarly impulsive manifestation of the thoughts of Johan Keats. Such emotions render a unique operational impact on this ode as a master literary and creative piece of poetry. In the same way, poets add syllables to various words for the sake of fine verse e.g.: - Line 44: but, in/ em-balm/ -ed dark/ -ness guess/ This is a very complex but unique metrical innovation of Keats which he has used in this ode.



Vowel Patterns

Keats has made excessive use of both short and long vowels to impart a musical effect to his ode. For instance, Line No. 18 "And Purple–Stained Mouth" produces a musical rhythm with the combination of both short and long vowels. Likewise 31 No Line "Away! Away! For I will fly to thee" produces 5 sets of repetitions. Again Line No-3 "Or Emptied Some Dull Opiate to the Drains" shows a musical combination of 5 "Short" Vowels shadowed by "Long" and "Short" vowels and hence are finished combined with a "Long" Vowel.

Use of Consonance and Assonance

Intricate and cognizant decoration of Consonance and Assonance obviously sounds a key characteristic of odes composed by John Keats. Such a style of composition is rarely found in the poetic form of English literature. Line No 35 of this ode which is "already with thee! Tender is the night", reveals the iteration and assonance scheme like the letters' EA' of "Already" is tracked by the letter "E" of "Tender" and the latter "I" of "with" joins with the latter "I" of "is". One more instance of assonance and consonance can be viewed inline No 41 which starts with "I cannot see what Flowers are at my Feet". In this line the latter "A" of "Cannot" joins the latter "A" of "At" and the letters "EE" of "See" link with the letters "EE" of "Feet". Here are many other examples of assonance and consonance that can be quoted in this ode. Words that start with consonants, particularly with "b", "p" or "v" are ample in number used by the poet in this ode. The practice of these three consonants can be undoubtedly viewed in the first stanza. Such practice of assonance scheme and consonance patterns lend musical beauty to the poem.

Spondee

A spondee is a metrical foot containing two long syllables implied in poetry. Keats implies spondee in only 8% of the lines within "Ode to a Nightingale. Line 11: / ~ / / ~ / / ~ / Cool'd a long age in the deep delve Ed earth And line 25: ~ / ~ / ~ / / / / / Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last, gray hairs The use of spondees in lines 31–34 makes a sense of slow and regular flight, and "in the last stanza . . . the noticeable use of dispersed spondees, composed with early overturn, not only reveal the specific rise and fall of the bird in its flight but also the spring and bounce of the emotions of the poet. Thus spondees create a dual influence on the poem. Moreover, it gives vent to free and unprompted expression of the poet's feelings linked with the melodious voice of the Nightingale

Conclusion

Keats most popular Ode i.e., "The Ode to a Nightingale" was composed by Keats in 1819. Every stanza of the ode has ten pentameter lines and an unchanging rhyming scheme. Such style reveals the nature of the poet's thoughts and emotions which are unbounded and unrestrained. We also find a thematic relation within the stanzas of the entire poem which enables the poet to share his feelings with the reader.

As the poem moves forward, the poet's mood springs forward and backward. We find the passive mood of the poem is due to the poet's excessive use of Hemlock or Opiate, moreover, in the second verse, the power of mood grows with the passion to move forward. Again in the 3rd stanza, the strength declines with the picture of the black and bleak portrait of the world. The poet's attitude is also changed according to the rise and fall of the flight of the bird. Thus the growth of the thought, metrical pattern, rhyming schemes, and the stylistic devices, used in the poem appeals the artistic beauty and structural coherence of the poem to the maximum. It also strengthens the pure concept of beauty found in Keats poetry.

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