

How Does He Develop His Themes? A Sensuous Analysis of John Keats' Selected Poems

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Abstract

The current study analyzes the sensuous elements in the poetry of English romantic poet, John Keats. Keats is a renowned poet of Romanticism who was influenced by Greek culture, art and literature. His poetry is generally marked with sensuousness. He develops his theme through sensuous elements. Sensuousness is a poetic technique through which poets create the senses of meanings by words. It comprises human senses. Poetry generally consists of such elements but, sensuousness in the poetry of John Keats is hallmark.

However, this research analyzes sensuous elements and develops the idea of generating themes through such elements. It is qualitative descriptive research which consists of Textual Analysis Method of research. It follows the theoretical framework of Sensuousness to comprehend a systematic conclusion of research problem. The framework is developed after reviewing related previous literature. The data are generated from two sources, primary and secondary. The primary data include eight poems of John Keats. The poems are analyzed through the lens of sensuousness to reach sensuous elements. The findings of this research manifest that Keats has marvelously utilized all human senses to develop his theme of nature, pain, escape, Hellenism, allusion and romanticism. This study helps the readers to understand how sensuous elements work in poetry, and to understand Keats as a great sensuous poet of romantic era.

Keywords: Keats; Poetry; Romanticism; Sensuous Elements

Introduction

John Keats was an English Romantic poet who lived from October 31, 1795, to February 23, 1821. Regardless of having been published for four years until he passed away at the age of 25. He belongs to the most important members of the literary giants of romantic literature of second generation, including the figures like Byron and Shelley. Despite the fact that his poems were not well regarded by critics throughout his life, his popularity expanded after his demise, and then by the late nineteenth century, he had established himself as one of the most popular of all English

poets. He left a big literary impact on a lot of different figures of his era. His initial meeting with Keats' writings, according to Jorge Luis Borges, was the most crucial intellectual revelation of entire lifetime (Bough, 2021).

However, Keats comes as a sensational poetic genius. The poetic mind of Keats is engulfed in sensuality. He is more like a sensual poet than a contemplative poet. Sensuousness is at the heart of Keats' poems. Keats' senses of impressions are rapid and acute, although he has a special knack for expressing them through solid auditory imagery. Keats expressed the glory of objects, the majesty of the cosmos from the heavens to the wildflowers of the forests, through these sense impressions. Keats' graphic sense is full of beautiful detail as well as being provocative. Every word and verse are brimming with sensual beauty. No other poet, with the exception of Shakespeare, could display such linguistic expertise and aural harmony (Kumar, 2016). Additionally, according to Arnold poetry shall be simple, sensual, passionate,' as per Milton's renowned dictum. None can dispute that the characteristic of sensuousness is eminent in Keats' poems (Humphry, 2013).

Therefore, this study aims at investigating elements of sensuousness in Keats' poetry. It analyzes the elements of sensuousness and manifests how they assist Keats to develop his themes. The study follows qualitative method of Textual Analysis. The theoretical framework of sensuousness is applied on this study to reach the comprehensive conclusion. The data are gathered from primary and secondary sources. Eight poems of Keats are primary data, and secondary data such as articles, reviews, and critical comments through research articles are generated from the internet.

Previous Studies on Keats

Akhtar (2017) has investigated the specific poem ode on a Grecian urn from the perspective of critical reading. He has evaluated the poem in the themes of philosophy, art, eternity, beauty along with aesthetic and romantic components of the poem. His qualitative analysis of textual analysis applying the model of critical analysis has reached a conclusion that it is, in reality, a poem about acknowledging, appreciating, and accepting the magnificence of art and nature. The brilliance of Keats' work lies in the precise descriptions of passion for art and nature. His viewpoint is that there is no such thing that nothing and everything around the same period. Despite the fact that Keats' poem appears to be about insignificant matters, his method is profoundly intellectual. The scholar attempts to concentrate on all poem's intellectual themes.

However, Aryan, Nawab, and Iqbal (2020) have looked at Keats' poetry from such an unusual and unconventional point of view, that of a rebellious poet battling for the sake of political and morals affairs. His poetry reflecting such themes was chosen for the study. His works show not just features of Romantic age, but also elements of revolt. In a productive irony of the uprisings

via intention, the majority of his poetry urge for reformation. Caught up in the revolutionary and sanguine currents, he laments the present dissatisfaction and immobility on only one side, but he is enthusiastic about tomorrow, wherein transformation and unification are certain.

Moreover, Keats' odes depict a journey more toward the purpose of being that includes both real-life human experience and the extensive experience discovered in art. One sees a conversation amid impermanence and immortality in such poetry, which climaxes not even in the gorgeousness formula, but in the atmosphere of tolerance. He passes forward from romantic pain to what Arnold called the capacity to see things for its whole, which would be a hallmark of Hellenism. As a result, the Odes document the poet's continuous progression through the labyrinths of despair, agonized comprehension of human existence's dualities, and a matured perspective of living and art. Keats enters life's gloomy hallways, constantly attempting to wrestle with truth and often excelling in depicting the strain, intense asking, and beliefs with sufficient imagery which are both sensual and cerebral, all leading out to ever-widening panoramas of feelings and thoughts (Mukherjee, 2021).

Bacha (2010) has studied Keats with comparison to Ghani Khan, who is a Pashto poet of Pakistan. he compared some literary elements of both poets to reach an apprehensible conclusion of knowing both poets from a literary comparative perspective. However, both poets, Keats from England, and Khan from Pakistan resemble with each other while treating the themes of politics. Both are inclined towards natural scenarios and beauty of things. They have also dealt the politics-based regard of chaos and turmoil through their poetry, with natural and aesthetic appeal. The most common thing, the researcher found, in both poets' poetry is escapism. It is their way to disorient themselves from the severe, heart-felting realities of life. They seek their refugee in the imaginative world of poetry, and console themselves there away from any sort of turmoil in life. Lastly, although both poets hailed from different geographical and social cultures, and different time, they are devoted to the similar concerns of poetry, technique, themes and issues of their respective time.

Research Methodology

The research follows Textual Analysis Method to analyze the data descriptively. The researcher has selected some thematic texts which include sensuous elements in the poetry of Keats. The selected excerpts are collected from eight poems of John Keats. The researcher has gathered the poems from the internet sources. The presentation and analysis of the data is taken into account with an organized structure. The researcher has put forward the separate headings of each poem.

Theoretical Framework

The current study follows the theoretical framework of sensuousness. The theoretical framework is generated after reviewing related literature. The researcher has discussed the theory as below.

Sensuousness is defined as the ability to influence or connect towards body sensations instead of the brain or intellect. The characteristic of such a verse which is governed by this or affects the sensations of sight, sound, feel, fragrance, and flavor is known as sensuousness within poems. Through "sensual" poem, poets imply poetry committed to magic of either the faculty rather than a concept or intellectual theory (see Cambridge English Dictionary).

An unrivalled feature of Keats' lyrical creativity is sensuality. Keats is widely regarded as the most sensual of English poets. Sensuality, however, is a literary and poetic characteristic that influences the senses of reader's: hearing, vision, feel, scent, and tasting. Moreover, sensuous poetry rarely includes philosophical topics. It engages senses by providing bright and unique word visuals, it thrills to ears by providing rhymed melody and melodic noises, and excites human nose through stimulating sense of smell, among other things (Kumar, 2016).

Relatively, romantic John Keats has also been a magnificence worshipper who seeks it out indiscriminately, even though these are sensibilities which first disclose the grandeur of everything to himself. He just creates poems based around which Keats senses in his heartbeat. As a result, it was his sensory sensations which sparked his imaginations, leading the poet to understand important truths of life.

Analysis of Poems

Keats, an English romantic poet, revels in the pleasures of the senses. The Poet's odes, that are his finest poetic accomplishment, are rich in sensual imagery. None can deny that his poems have a sensuous element, as it clearly encourages to experience, to appreciate intense and precise sense of perceptions. The Researcher has brought some excerpts from the poems of Keats which display the sensuous elements. The researcher has analyzed them to locate specific sense, and also the researcher has interpreted the poems to manifest that how a specific sense helps him to develop the theme. The following poetic chunks inculcate the sensuous elements.

Ode to Nightingale

“I cannot see what flowers are at my feet
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the
boughs’

.....
.....

The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.” (Keats, 1819)

The lines above are taken from his famous poem, Ode to a Nightingale. One can obtain the sense of vision, sensation, and scent in such words. The sensations of tasting and auditory are also included even in the end of the line, also with the evocation. The poet looks to be offering a direct knowledge for public acknowledgment inside ode. Keats is capable of considering his ideas with tranquility while under the enchantment of nightingale and using floral images. The gustatory feeling of getting drunk is described in the second verse of this poem. There are also ties to the sensations of sight and hearing. He presents his natural theme and escape through the covering factor of senses of sight and touch, which help him to inculcate his ideas and generate a proper commodification of themes. His use of senses of different nature marks his poetry marvelously wonderful. It fills into the senses of audience. The readers feel their heart dwelling in the heart of the verses.

“With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stained mouth” (Keats, 1819)

Additional instances of sensual imagery inside the ode include Sense of hearing. The author's heart aches as he listens to the nightingale's melodies. Sense of hearing here presents Keats' theme of aching heart which includes the poet's pain, suffering and clipping nature. Moreover, by hearing the voice of Nightingale, and presenting the bird's image as a visual image in the mind of reader's marks greatness of his poetry. He installs the verses into the heart of the readers. This sensuous element of imagery is a hallmark of his poetic genius which also helps to develop his theme in an imaginative way, in the mind of his readers.

“The voice I hear this passing night was
heard in ancient days, by emperor and clown.” (Keats, 1819)

Keats in the above-mentioned line attempts at developing his theme of historical history. As he was a poet who was much influenced from Greek culture, art and literature. Greek influence ruled his poetry, and in the above line he develops the theme of Hellenism through the sense of hearing. The sensuous element of auditory keeps his line dominant in the theme. He is saying that he could listen to voice of the Greeks through the voice of nightingale. For Keats, hearing imagery is at its peak where he could translate himself to the version of Greeks. His allusion of Greek kings and clowns is also developed through the sense of hearing.

The poem starts out with a lovely depiction of the weather. One acquires a sensory impression of quiet and accomplished fulfilment as one hears the very foremost lyric. The mind of audience is filled with a sense of feel, they may visualize a concerto of different colors. The Ode to Autumn is a perfect example of Keats' sensual poetry.

Ode on a Grecian Urn

Moreover, Ode on a Grecian Urn, the greatest famous and eternal poetry, seems to be another instance of the sensuous approach.

“Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our
rhyme:

.....
.....

Heard melodies are sweet, but those
unheard
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play
on;” (Keats, 1820)

Keats' this renowned poem is characterized as a 'sylvan historian', with a 'floral' story as well as a 'leaf fring'd' mythology. The very first lines alone conjure up thoughts of woods, romance, and singing. The visual imagery has attained a much more complete depiction of life experiences combining the melancholy of morals with the majesty of a timeless in the phrases, "heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter" (Keats, 1820). The renowned words just at the end of such ode, “Beauty is truth, truth beauty....,” are frequently seen as a declaration of the poet's philosophy of life.

Almost as much as the sensory impression in these words, there is an emotive connection as well as a mix of ideologies that collectively transmit the piece's absolute reality. Eros and Ophelia are shown in the Ode to Psyche laying in lush grass surrounded by blossoms of multiple colors in an engagement. Anybody who reads the words will experience sight sense:

“Mid hush'd, cool-rooted flowers fragranteyed,
Blue, silver-white, and budded Tyrian” (Keats, 1820)

Ode on Melancholy

Ode on Melancholy is a lyrical dialogue amidst the writer as well as the audience that explains the author's perspective of melancholy. This poem begins with images of things of death and sorrow, as well as an exposition to ancient Greek heroes and values.

“Though you should build a bark of dead
men's bones,
.....
To fill it out, blood-stained and aghast;
Although your rudder be a dragon's tail” (Keats, 1820)

Ode on Indolence

The speaker of Ode on Indolence relates a sight he had one morning of three unusual creatures dressed in white robes and donning "placid sandals." These figurines appeared in front, and indeed the narrator compares these to figurines etched through into top of a stone urn or vase as they went by. The language has a sensual feel to it.

“One morn before me were three figures
seen,
With bowed necks, and joined hands, sidefaced;
And one behind the other stepp'd serene,
In placid sandals, and in white robes
graced;
They pass'd, like figures on a marble urn
When shifted round to see the other side;” (Keats, 1820)

The Eve of St. Agnes

Keats' utilization of sensual description may be found not just in his odes, but also in his lengthy poetry. For instance, in his famous poem, The Eve of St. Agnes, there is the depiction for the delicious morsels inside the church. People have a sensation of touch throughout. The terrible coldness described in some of these sentences can be felt by the audience as well.

“St. Agnes' Eve—Ah, bitter chill it was! The
owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;
The hare limp'd trembling through the
frozen grass,
And silent was the flock in woolly fold:” (Keats, 1820)

As a result, Keats is a sensational poet. His ideas are encased in sensuality, which is connected to the high graphic beauty of his lyrical art, wherein he matches Spencer's greatness. Keats is a sensory mystical. He was interested in revealing the absolute reality of the globe by artistic sensations rather than intellectual understanding. Once he matured as a poet, Keats learnt to interpret life not merely for their elegance, but also for inherent truthfulness. Keats' lyrical word's sensuality is indeed a valiant endeavor to stabilize and embrace an inevitably unachievable truth. Its why, for any and all eras, Keats' literary creativity has been unrivalled.

Conclusion

The researcher here concludes the whole study. This studied is conducted on investigation and analysis of elements of sensuous in the poetry of John Keats. The researcher has utilized the primary data of five poems to reach the aimed conclusion. The data are analyzed with qualitative approach of research methods, and textual analysis method of research. The collected data are analyzed descriptively. The analysis displays that Keats unlike other romantic poets has utilized human senses in his poetry at a large number. He has used senses of vision, hearing, smell, touch and auditory to develop his themes like, escapism, Hellenism, allusion, pain, beauty and art. He touches the mind of readers through utilizing such senses. The words generate imagery, sound and other senses in the ears and minds of the audience. His utilization of senses has marked him as one of the distinguished poets of romantic time period. Moreover, Keats' greatness also lies in other themes like escapism, art and beauty, but he has developed all the themes through developing senses in his poetry. Marking sensuous elements in his poems like Ode to Nightingale and Ode on Melancholy have earned Keats as a sensitive poet. Also, he was during his time criticized by his contemporary literary giants. This made him weak to face the world of criticism against his poetry. He played his senses in the ground of poetry and caught the attention of his reader after his demise in Italy. However, this research may not be final and ultimate in its analysis, findings, and conclusion. The upcoming researchers and readers can provide valid criticism and conduct a more aptly analysis to reach a more comprehensive findings and conclusions.

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