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Analyzing Hellenistic Elements in Keats's Poetry- with Special Reference to His Tales in Verse

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Abstract: *This study incorporates elements of myths and feministic beauty in inter-contextual structure in John Keats' poetry. This research is majorly concerned with the use of ancient Greek mythology and the elements of feminine beauty in Keats' mythological poetry. The study investigates Keats' search for truthfulness and beauty, his identification of love for poetry and his creation of his poetic genius with special reference to feminine beauty in his poetic works. The research is descriptive and qualitative in nature the framework is established by reviewing related poems and previous literature. Thus the data is generated from two main sources, the primary source which includes the selected poetry of John Keats and the secondary source which includes reviews of previous literary work. The Textual Analysis Method of Research is followed as the theoretical framework of Hellenism that comprehends a certificate for the conclusion of research problems.*

Key Words: Hellenistic Elements, Keats Poetry, Medieval Themes, National Characteristics of the Greeks

Introduction

The study place of interest is the Hellenistic elements in John Keats' poetry by studying and analyzing his literary works. For this purpose, the research work is comprised of different poems, articles and critical views/reviews. Keats's poetry is rich in meaning and infused with a genuine Greek appreciation, devotion and worship beauty. Most of them create an intellect of amalgamation factors of Greek philosophy and elements of romantic dreamy poetry. After conducting research in analyzing data, it has been clarified that Hellenism is the reliability

of the spirit or national individualities of the Greeks. The important features of that period are the individual and freedom of the individual, which are found in the works of Keats. Though he was most influenced by medieval themes, it was ancient Greek that plagued his mind the most.

The term "Hellenism" comes from the word "Hellene," which means "Greek." As a result, "Hellenism" stances for Greek philosophy and spirit. Traditionalism to dedication or imitation of ancient Greek culture can be described as "Hellenism." Hellenism is the term used to describe Greek

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customs, art, and culture, especially in terms of its influence.

After Alexander the Great, Hellenism was practised to describe the influence of Grecian culture, customs, ideas, ideals, art and language. The Hellenistic period was ancient Greece's golden age of philosophy, literature, and art. The Hellenistic period began with Alexander the Great's death (323 B.C) and ended with the Roman conquest of Egypt [30 B.C]. During the Hellenistic period, the Greeks ruled over a huge region that included the Eastern Mediterranean and territories in the Middle East. The phrase comes from the Greek word "Ellinismos" which means "those of Greek ancestry" or "a system of standards for living".

Keats, like the Greeks, was a lover of beauty. The manifestation of beauty is the goal of all art for him, as it is for the Greeks, and beauty for Keats and the Greeks is not solely physical, intellectual, or spiritual, but reflects the expansion of all that makes for human precision. Keats was fascinated by the perfection of beauty in Greek art, and it was the beauty and presentation of the figures on the Grecian Urn that sparked the mental urge that led to the creation of the famous ode, *Ode on a Grecian Urn*. A great masterpiece composed of artistic pictures and intellectual depths at the same time.

Keats poetry is a combination of art that exists in the beautiful world of imagination and suffering which is the true picture of real life. The impassioned search for beauty, which is the very spirit of Keats's poetry, is the source of his inherent Hellenism or Greekness. It's a mood of unadulterated pleasure, of intense sensual delight in beauty. An object of beauty is a source of eternal joy for him. In his Ode to Psyche, he expresses his love of beauty in concrete terms. This poem might be established in two dimensions. In this poem, Keats's exploration of his classical inclination about love, romantic imagination, nature and art is vividly portrayed.

His "Ode to Psyche" is an admiration of the "psyche" that is not posted as a goddess although she surpasses all the merits of any goddess could possess. She is much fairer and prettier than any goddess could ever be. Despite all these merits, she is not

granted the status of a goddess. That's why John Keats offers her his services to be her choir and priest.

"Yes, I will be thy priest"

The poem is one of Keats's most significant poems. The subject matter and themes of the poem are also reflected the true spirit of the Renaissance. The Greeks did not include any philosophy or spiritual dispatch in their poetry. Their poetry was a manifestation of beauty that fulfilled the purpose of their own relaxation. Keats, likewise, was a genuine poet. He found untainted enjoyment in nature, which had no rational or spiritual significance for him rather its purpose, is universal.

The study integrates the elements of myth and loveliness in the inter-textual structure of J. Keats' poetry. The research majorly deals with the use of ancient mythological legends and the sets of feministic beauty in John Keats's mythical poetry. The study examines the poet's pursuit of certainty and beauty, his certification of love with poesy and the development of his poetic genius with reference to feminine beauty in poems.

Statement of the Problem

The research study will centre itself on the 'Hellenistic elements in Keats' poetry. Moreover, it will state how Keats treats Greek Art, Literature, Philosophy, and history. The study underlines how much Greek art and Greek literature inspired Keats's poetry, as well as Greek mythology, Homer's influence in poetry, Melancholy attitude, and combined romanticism with Greek. Although it is recorded that Keats didn't gain much recognition during his lifetime still he produced tremendous masterpieces. His love for nature was unconditional and thus with his poetic genius, he transformed all beauty into never-lasting truthfulness.

Objectives

- To find components of "Hellenism" in Keats's poetry.
- To explore the impact of Hellenism on Keats's poetry.

- To investigate the effects of the Hellenistic period on Keats's poetry and the use of images.
- To examine and explore Romantic and Greek literature.

Research Questions

- What are the elements of "Hellenism" in Keats's poetry?
- What are the impacts of Hellenism on Keats's poetry?
- Is the manifestation of beauty the goal of all art for Keats and Greek?
- How does Keats develop his themes?

Significance of the Study

The major goal of this study is to look into the effects of the Hellenistic period on Keats' poetry and the usage of visual elements. The goal of this study is to see if the findings of the Hellenistic method in Keats's poetry have enough potential relevance to warrant them. Moreover, the current research paper will pave for the other researchers to conduct research in the same domain.

The Rationale of the Study

A good deal of researchers has conducted different research on "Hellenism" in Keats's poetry, but the topic was not too much explored by the researchers. This study paper delves deeper into Keats' mythical studies, Greek culture, and art. His poetry, which is rich in meaning and infused with a genuine Greek appreciation, devotion, and worship of beauty, will always serve as a landmark for readers and newcomers alike.

Literature Review

The recent study focuses on the reality of life in the context of Keats's verses. Keats's approach towards arts is such that art and humanities can convey the main purpose of truth better than any other source of expression and communication. The study proves with special references from Keats' verses that nothing else but only the beauty of artistic genius can communicate the experiences of human

nature appropriately. For explaining this idea multiple references are selected from John Keats's verses in this study.

His contemporary P.B Shelly also acknowledged his talent and expressed his gratitude in the following lines. Shelley communicated the sentiment "Keats was a Greek Indeed, Keats was undeniably a delegate of Greek the idea, as it were in which Wordsworth and Coleridge and even Shelley were, not, The Greek soul came to Keats through writing, through the figure and through an inborn inclination, and it is under Hellenic impact a standard that he puts forth a valiant effort." (Shelley)

Keats unlike other poets does not address the merciless incidents and tales of Greek mythology; rather he depicts such material from Greek mythology that portrays Greek art as seemingly more ideal and appealing. His subject matters are love, truthfulness, contentment and beauty. His classic tales in verses narrate the stories of medieval love, wonders and meditative thoughts. Keats personifies his mythical characters as if they are living individuals.

Martin Aske argues in his Essay "Keats and Hellenism" "Keats sees classical antiquity as a supreme fiction, authoritative yet unsettling, and his poems are a struggle to come to grips with the fiction's power." (Martin, 2005)

William J. Long, 2019, states "Keats was not only the last but also the most perfect of the Romantics." Keats as a romantic poet had a different concept of beauty and it should not be the vehicle of Philosophy, religious teaching or social or political theories. So, the poet asks a question in his poem "Lamia" in the following words:

"Do not all charms fly"

One of Keats's exceptional geniuses is that he had the potential to expand the mere anecdotes and short stories from mediaeval romances into lengthy and rich tales with the help of his luxurious talent. Instances are *The Eve of St. Agnes* and *Lamia*.

Keats worshipped poetry as the sole subject of subjugation. For him, poetry is no less than the divine truth and he loved poetry with all its visionary fantasies and principles set for beauty in all

objects. That is the reason he presented dramatic situations, depicting the good and the evil simultaneously rather than coming to decisive judgments.

Arthur Compton Rickett states "With a rough second-hand knowledge of Greek art and culture, he grasped the secret of Hellenism in a way never attained by poets for richer than he in Hellenistic love. "Keats found the modern world cold, prosaic and full of hardship, so he often tried to escape from this insensitive world and took an imaginative flight to the land of the fairies and the nymphs and to the place where only Nature and Beauty ruled." (Rickett)

Louis Cazamian remarks "No one has ever garnered such a rich harvest of thinking from life's suggestions; via reading and a hunger for knowledge, he became acquainted with Greece, paganism, and ancient Art, or conjured up in his imagination all that these stood for; he became impregnated with Hellenism." (Cazamin)

Keats's Hellenism comes across many perspectives of his genius however this study delves into mythical topics, Greek culture, and Keats's Odes. His poetry, which is rich in meaning and infused with a genuine Greek appreciation, devotion, and worship of beauty, will always be a landmark for readers and future researchers alike.

The study is an Analysis of John Keats' selected poems. The recent study analyzes the intense feministic and/or Hellenistic elements in the poetry of John Keats. Keats is a well-known poet of the Romantic period who was greatly influenced by Greek culture, aesthetics, art and literature. His poetry is generally manifested with sensuousness and feminism. He develops his theme through such elements. Sensuousness is a poetic procedure through which poets create a sense of significance through words. It encompasses the human senses. Poetry generally consists of such elements but, sensuousness, as well as feminism in the poetry of John Keats, is an emblem and authentication mark.

Research Methodology

The research methodology employed in the study is exploratory, evaluative, and descriptively

qualitative. Various data collection tools have been sought which structured the research. Different sources have been consulted in the pursuit of factual knowledge regarding the topic. Different books, about the topic, have been read for gaining exact knowledge. The study research is mainly based on the following pattern.

Primary Sources

The primary source used for collecting data is primarily the analysis of the text of the Hellenistic theory and the poetry of Keats written from 1817 to 1821, and published by Famous product in 2013-2014.

Secondary Sources

The secondary sources which have been sought for help are articles, research papers, magazines, journals, websites and Keats's biography.

Data Collection

For conducting this research study, data has been collected through deep analysis and close reading of the text. Through critical thinking, the text has been analyzed from different angles which imparted the required information. Special focus was placed on the text for extracting pure knowledge. The research study is an output of exploring the text thoroughly. Meanwhile, the topic "Hellenism" and Keats's poetry were read very critically before conducting research on the same topic. Help has been taken from different sites which were added to the factual data used in the research. Moreover, every aspect of the topic was studied from different angles, only then it was made possible to select the topic which seemed to be carrying the core message of the text.

Discussion and Analysis

The Greek word "Hellene" is the source of the term "Hellenism." As a result, the term "Hellenism" refers to the quality, culture, demeanour, idioms, and spirits associated with Greece. Keats stands out among the Romantics for his "Hellenism," which is based on his love of Greek art, sculpture, values, and

mythology. Despite the fact that Keats was not a Greek poet, he was a prolific writer.

Although Keats was much inclined to mediaeval themes and what he perceived to be the ambience of the Middle Ages, it was the earliest Greece that plagued his mind the most. Only Lumiere's Classical Dictionary, the Elgin Marbles, and *Chapman's Homer* helped him understand it, but his instinctive understanding allowed him to make greater use of these ineffectual means. Many a better-educated poet might have made better use of his broader knowledge." (A Critical History of English Literature, Volume II, p. 921, David Daiches, [2011](#))

John Keats' sonnet "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles" describes his emotion and reaction to the wonderfully wrought "wonders" of ancient Greece.

A copy of Chapman's Homer translation is said to have been provided to him by one of his friends. The new word of awe and delight that Homer had conveyed to him had enchanted him. Keats expresses his feelings when he expressed his overjoy as he had found new horizons of an enchanting world.

"Then felt I like some watcher of the skies,"

However, the most crucial component in Keats's Hellenistic work was his Grecian mental temperament. To him, true beauty is the ultimate joy one can find in reality. One must acknowledge the truth which lies in beauty. The statement is also a paradoxical interrelation of worldly and idealism in real life. "*Ode to on a Grecian Urn*" is also a preserved masterpiece that carried the whole story from the past and will narrate it to countless generations in future.

When these lyrics from John Keats's "Ode on a Gracian Urn" are read aloud, the reader may sense the poet's passion for beauty; beauty is truth. Beauty became a very nuanced and encompassing idea for Keats. Keats, like the Greeks, was enamoured of beauty. He believed that truth and beauty were inseparably linked together. However, he did not strive to flee the adversity of human experience for a utopian bliss of beauty.

Keats rightfully wrote in *Endymion*,

"A thing of beauty is a joy forever"

For a true poet beauty in a pure sense never ends. For a true worshipper of beauty as a poet beauty in its purest form is everlasting and immortal.

Keats was a great admirer of beauty. It is a form of joy or happiness for him that will grow and will not be in vain. In his first composed narrative romance, "*Endymion*," he captures the beauty of "*Endymion*" and the act of "*Selene*." The opening line of this epic poem is famous for striking everyone with immense beauty and a sense of peace. Beauty, he remarked, can be depicted or conveyed in a variety of ways. All art aims to communicate beauty, and beauty for Keats and the Greeks is defined as the development of all that makes for worldly excellence, not only physical or spiritual perfection. His passion for beauty, for example, is expressed in his famous poem "*Ode to Psyche*"

However, in '*Lamia*', Keats seeks to emphasise beauty even in the most obnoxious and dreadful creatures, such as serpents. In '*Lamia*,' he describes *Lamia* as a snake in the same way he portrays any human being.

Vermilion-spotted, golden, green, and blue;
(*Lamia*, stanza 03)

When depicting *Lamia*, the poem tackles the odd convention of bringing the supernatural to life by combining familiar and unexpected things. Another Gothic convention that Keats employs in "*Lamia*" is sexual temptation.

'The Eve of St. Agnes' like '*Endymion*' and '*Lamia*' talks of a lovely myth. The evening before St. Agnes's feast day is traditionally known as "The Eve of St. Agnes." She is known as the patron saint of virgins and was a fourth-century Roman martyr. The poem is grounded on the superstition that if a lady performed specific rites on the day before Eve of Saint Agnes, she would see her future spouse in her dreams. To see her dream, the girl must go to bed without eating her dinner and must be completely undressed. She should also lie down on her back with her hands under her head without looking behind her. Her future spouse would appear and share a feast with her if she did this. The poetry, like the myth, tells the story of *Madelin*, a young

woman who falls in love with Porphyro, a family nemesis. On the eve of St. Agnes Day, she was told about a ritual she could conduct to experience dreams of her beloved.

“She sigh’d for Agnes”

Madelin, who resembled a “white lily,” which denotes a virgin girl, hopes to meet her boyfriend in her dream on the enchanted night of “St. Agnes Eve.” Porphyro, on the other hand, enters the castle with a brave heart:

“Had come young Porphyro”

Porphyro counted on the backing of an elderly lady named Angela, who had formerly advised him to leave the citadel for his own protection. However, she later assists him in secretly visiting Madelin’s chamber. He examines his sweetheart before quietly preparing a feast for her:

“Of candied apple, quince, and plum”

After a while, he approaches her, and Madeline awakens to the identical vision she saw in her dream, and she has no idea that she is awake. Because she assumed she was still sleeping, she welcomed him into her bed. When Madeline is fully awake, Porphyro persuades her to accompany him, and their departure is described as “gliding, like phantoms, into the great hall.”

‘Ode to Psyche’, the next piece, is on the tale of Psyche and Cupid. “the flawless beauty of young Psyche made Venus envious of her and therefore sent Cupid to make her fall in love with an unattractive creature; however, Cupid himself became her lover. He imprisoned her in a palace and only visited her at night, forbidding her from attempting to see him. Jealousy drove her sisters to kill her. She lit a lamp and stared at cupid while he slept one night, but a droplet of scorching oil awoke him. God then left her, furious at her disobedience. Psyche, alone and sorrowful, searched the earth for her sweetheart, while Venus assigned her many superhuman duties. The first was to sort through a big pile of varied grains before nightfall. The ants, on the other hand, felt pity for Psyche and arrived in hordes to complete the chore for her. All of the duties were performed in one way or another, with the exception of the last, which was to descend to the Underworld and retrieve a beautiful coffin.

Psyche’s curiosity got the best of her, and she opened the coffin to find not beauty, but a terrible sleep, to which she surrendered. At Cupid’s urging, Jupiter finally agreed to their marriage, and Psyche was taken to heaven. This fable is frequently understood as an allegory of the soul’s journey through life and ultimate unification with the divine after suffering and death.” (Howatson, M. 2011)

In ‘Ode to Psyche’, the speaker starts the poem with an address to Psyche. He addresses the symbolic figure of the psyche in such a way:

“O GODDESS!”

As he was singing to her, he urged her to listen to his words and asked for her merciful forgiveness. He further claims that on that particular day, he was strolling around the forest. They were together and enjoying each other’s presence in gratitude with their arms and wings wide open in affection. The author recognized the aerial creature that was the God of Love, named Cupid, but the female was not recognised. Later, he responds to his own question by saying, “His Psyche is true!” Psyche means soul therefore she can indicate both a beautiful princess who is Cupid’s favourite and Cupid’s soul. Then the speaker addresses the psyche, describing her as”

“O latest-born and loveliest.....”

He claims that, unlike other divinities, Psyche lacks all the trappings of devotion: temples, platforms, choirs to chant for her, lutes, pipes, shrines, groves, oracles, heat, and so on. As a result, the speaker traits Psyche’s deficiency to her youth, claiming that she was born too late for “ancient vows”. And he would pay respect to Psyche until the end of his days, becoming her choir, her song, and her oracle. He also promises to become Psyche’s priest and construct a temple for her. He assures Psyche of all the pleasant pleasures and pledges that her new home’s window would remain open at night so that her beloved winged boy, Cupid can get inside.

Apart from his belief in God’s presence in nature, his poetry also has a Greek influence in the form of his strong interest in Greek mythology. His short narratives, like his long ones, have a distinctly Greek flavour. “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” his poem, speaks for itself. To the poet Keats, of an old urn that

exhibits magnificent beauty. Keats's enthusiasm for the ancient Greek arts is straightforward when it comes to beauty, as he shows in his poem "Ode on a Grecian Urn." Keats's admiration for the ancient Greek Urn's beauty was expressed as;

"Heard melodies are sweet"

The words represent Keats' love for the ancient Greeks, their art, and their ingenuity, as well as his impending death. In short, Keats' ode indicates that art is better to experience and that men must recognize this and not undervalue the value of old art. In 'Hyperion,' he portrays the fight between the Greek gods once more. Keats is enthralled by the ancient Greek culture and the 'vales,' where he sees nymphs and trees raising their hands and dancing joyfully. He also finds the sea Goddess in water and in wine he finds God Bacchus.

In his poems, his observation, his imagination, his Paganism, his writings, and so on, Keats is a true Greek. He discovered the truth in beauty, and beauty in the once-glorious Greek ruins. As a result, he followed in the footsteps of the Greek masters of antiquity.

John Keats, on the other hand, read, admired, and owed much of his Hellenism to Chapman, as seen by his sonnet, "On First Looking into the Chapman's Homer." Keats' imagination was extraordinary, and he delved deep into the world of ancient Greeks, despite the poor sources.

Keats' poetry is a mash-up of references to Greek art, culture, and literature. In this regard, the poem "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is an exceptional sample. The images engraved on the Grecian Urn reveal Keats' admiration for Greek art, culture, and aspirations. For instance, the examples of picturing the green altar, the mysterious priest, the sacrificial ceremony and the deities all are specimens of Keats's poetic genius.

Conclusion

An article authored by David Ricks, [2014](#), states about Keats that "A Greek Poet's Tribute to Keats," in which he claimed that Lord Byron received greater attention in Greece than Keats. However, Angelos Sikelianos's poem "Giannes Keats," published in 1915, declared Keats a nominal Greek. Moreover, it is clear from reading Keats' writings and life in regard to Greek Hellenistic themes that Keats liked and loved Greek Hellenistic study. He discovered beauty in truth and truth in beauty. For him, true beauty lies in the purest forms of nature. Keats is eminently qualified to be described as a pure poet who is enamoured of truth and beauty. His poetry exists solely for the purpose of poetry. In his works, he makes excellent use of Greek Hellenistic concepts. Furthermore, Shelly's comment that "John Keats is a Greek" is true and correct on his part. It is unquestionably correct to state that "Keats is an English Greek."

Chief Characteristics of Keats's Hellenism May Thus be Summarized

- His affection for beauty and exquisiteness is a natural response to it in its true forms. His paganism seeks pleasure in the pure and natural existence of beauty and love. The chief characteristic of his poetic genius is his technique of personifying the spectacles of Nature in their purest form.
- The study focuses on Keats's captivation in the subject matter of the ancient Greek philosophers and Greek mythology.
- His sensation for original form, directness and truthfulness of expression.
- No abstract but original and concrete ideas.

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