

# THE RELATION BETWEEN HUMAN AND NATURE IN JOHN KEATS' ODES: AN EXPRESSIVE STUDY

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## ABSTRACT

This study attempts to discuss the relation between human and nature in John Keats' Odes as the representation of Keats' awareness in nature and the changing of nature in the era of industrialization, especially in England. This study will discuss three odes, "Ode to a Nightingale", "Ode to Psyche", and "To Autumn" released during the English Romantic Period. The main concern of this study is to analyze Keats' awareness of nature and the relation between human and nature which presented in these three odes written by John Keats. To analyze the topic of discussion, this study applies Expressive theory suggested by Abrams. This study finds out that Keats expresses nature as the source and the core of this world. He emphasizes that the nature must be protected and conserved to sustain human's life and also the world. This relation between human and nature affects Keats in writing his odes as the portrayal of his feeling toward nature and social condition in his period.

**Keywords:** Awareness; Industrialization; Nature; Ode; Environment; World

### 1. Introduction

The beauty of nature is a very special theme in English Romantic period, when nature was neglected by people because of industrialization. John Keats brought different perspective about beauty in his odes. It is assumed that this study portrays the condition of human and nature that is affected by industrialization and disappearance of the nature as the important part of life in this world. John Keats brings his odes to the reader and society to remind that the environment is very important for human being. Environment must be conserved and protected. Keats' imagination and nature awareness empower the movement to save environment from the destruction that can ruin the world. This study is very interesting, there are issues discussed in this study, such as social and environmental condition reflected in the poems. This study will analyze human's awareness of nature. In this study, the writer will take "Ode to a Nightingale", "Ode to Psyche", and "To Autumn" as objects to analyze. This study will analyze the relationship between human and nature which drives John Keats in writing those poems. John Keats believes in sensation rather than thought and later he is also known as a sensuous poet. He is sensuous because he makes use of that poetic image, which directly affects the sense organs. Keats finds truth and beauty as two aspects which are inseparable. Beauty, for him, is the source of knowledge which is beyond the consecutive reasoning. His idea of nature derived from his ecological consciousness plays a central role in the understanding of aesthetics, philosophical, and imagination (Ngiewih 1). His odes contain figurative language expressing the beauty of nature, such as in "To Autumn" and "Ode to a Nightingale". "Ode to Psyche" describes the oppressive nature of Psyche, the depression and its onset. Psyche's existence proves fatal for Beauty, Joy, and Pleasure. "To Autumn" is a special ode, it presenting his ideas about his previous odes that is combined into one ode. It is one of the best poems of John Keats, that tells about his experience with nature and the beauty of the seasons. He identifies how the weather is very comfortable at all, the beauty of plants, and how the atmosphere when autumn. This poem is very beautiful that was expressed in symbols and imageries. "To Autumn" is actually the last poem written by John Keats before he died in February, 1821 (Abhilash 64).

His poems represent the social condition which people forget those beauties from their senses. Many people forget the beauty of nature such as seasons, sunshine, wind, and joy of nature. Actually, John Keats describes the relationship and the interaction among human, nature, and animal which happened in the autumn and portrays the condition when nature met human. John Keats was simply describing the main characteristics of autumn, and the human and animal activities related to it, a deeper reading could suggest that Keats talks about the process of life (Bloom 24). Autumn symbolises maturity in human and animal lives. The aim of this study is to analyze the social condition which affects the poet's psychological state and in this study the writer tries to explain how imagination could create objectives that are expected.

The following objectives will be intended to answer every question proposed in the statements of the problem are, to find out how Keats expresses nature in his “Ode to Nightingale”, “Ode to Psyche”, and “To Autumn” and to find out how the relation of human and nature affects John Keats in writing these three odes.

In analyzing John Keats’ odes, the writer would try to apply the expressive theory. The expressive theory was born in English Romantic period which reacted against classicism and place individual at the center of art. The theory defines the Romantic temperament. Actually, in general term, the central tendency of the expressive theory may be summarized in this way, a central work of art is essentially the internal made external, resulting from a creative process operating under the impulse of feeling and embodying the combined product of the poet’s perceptions, thoughts, and feeling (Abrams 22). Poet’s feeling and imagination, actually, is the main source in analyzing a poem based on expressive theory. According to Abrams, Poetry is the overflow, utterance, or projection of the thought and feeling of the poet ( 21). John Keats with his imaginative thought can be described by the expressive theory which emphasizes on the background of the poet, social condition, and psychological state which actually determined the feeling and imagination in his work. The use of expressive theory in this study will be maximized by analyzing the background of the poet and environment around him, because in some ways, the background of the poet and environmental condition are very important and should not be left behind.

## 2. Analysis

### 2.1 Biographical Sketch of the Poet

Using Expressive as the approach, there are certain elements that must be considered. Background of the poet is an important element in analyzing the works. Thus, this part is going to depict the background of the poet which represents the poet’s feeling and world view portrayed in his odes. Keats as an English Romantic Poet, lives in industrialization period, when nature is neglected and dying. People in that period concerned on wealthy and social status which make them careless toward his environment. Chaos, over populated, dirty, and disease harms urban areas because a mass migration of people from rural area caused many troubles in social and environment. They are portrayed in Keats’ odes, especially “To Autumn”, which depicts natural and human condition in some places and times. In this following line, *Until they think warm days will never cease* (“To Autumn”, 10) portrays social condition that people always relied on nature as source of life.

There are many important historical events that happen in Keats’ life. Those are the death of his family, his mother’s marriage, and his illness. Those events affect Keats’ feeling and his interpretation of life. The death of his family makes sorrowful episode in his life. Keats’ theme and style in writing his odes were influenced by memory of his family’s death. That trauma of his past experience drives him to fear death and life as well. Repetitions and emphasizes of word death was applied in his odes. For example is “Ode to a Nightingale”, I have been half in love with easeful death (“Ode to a Nightingale” 52). Keats was obsessed with an easeful death. Keats’ desperation toward his illness and miserable drive him to die and leave this world. His despair portrayed his mental condition and past memory which was miserable.

The trauma of his mother’s marriage also gives effects in Keats’ feeling and his interpretation of love. Keats’ mother leaves him and his brothers and sister alone with his grandparent when Keats was eight years old. His mother married again with another man twice after Keats’ father died. According to Abhilash, his mother influenced him not only in the matter of death but also his relationship with women (01). It portrays his interpretation of woman that is awful and terrifying. It is because his bad memory of his mother who leaves him alone affects Keats feeling about woman and about love in general.

### 2.2 “Ode to a Nightingale”

#### 2.2.1 Fantasy World and Reality World

Keats creates fantasy world through poetry for fulfilling his desire and expressing his imagination and his emotion. As we know, Keats often writes his poem autonomously without any plans. He just wrote everything which came to his mind. Keats is a spontaneous writer that writes everything around him. “Ode to a Nightingale” can be called his spontaneous ode, because when he wrote this ode when he was sat below the tree in summer. He sees a bird flying in his head and singing freely, so Keats has an

inspiration to write "Ode to a Nightingale" with his poetic genius and inspiration from nightingale, and also environment surround him added with Keats feeling, so "Ode to Nightingale" has been made in very short time. In this ode, Keats portrays his own fantasy which stands in green country. just like the following.

of for a draught of vintage ! that hath been  
cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth  
tasting of flora and the country green  
(*"Ode to a Nightingale"* 11 – 13)

In these lines, Keats imagines a place that is green and there are many plants that grow beautifully. He imagined medieval period when the area of England is overgrown with variety of plants and there is some natural forest. Keats misses this condition, so he creates this condition in his ode. England in which he lives now is extremely different from England in medieval era. England in Keats era has a lot of changes.

The green place has turned into urban area, factory, and houses. It is interpreted that Keats saw a projection of fantasy world, a world that is not in reality. In this fantasy, Keats sees a mysterious place and makes his curious. Keats imagined the forest, he portrays a forest because of the historical condition. He thinks that forest will be sick and destroyed, Forest soon will be lost because of time. In Keats era, rural village and green forest area have been transformed into urban and industrial area. This is a result of industrialization which occurred in Europe, especially in England.

### 2.2.2 Dream

The last stanza states that the person in this ode is dreaming. His imagination and his real life affects to his mind. When Keats wrote his ode, he freely used his imagination. But, reality decides to use limitations. In this ode, there are unfulfilled desires which cannot be done in this real world. He flies into certain place which is so natural and neglected. He portrayed natural place is so lively and so beautiful, because that environmental condition is so healthy. One with nature is only in his dream. It portrays in this following lines:

Was it a vision, or a waking dream?  
Fled is that music:—do I wake or sleep?  
(*"Ode to a Nightingale"* 45 – 46)

However, when he has a vision of a neglected place, he portrays chaos condition. People live and leave that place so often and they did not aware of nature. A balance of nature portrayed in his odes, because the basic and foundation of nature is to find a balance. Nature is sick and Keats so sad with that condition. Keats' texts are considered the work of a genius mind because of the way he intertwined opposing feelings. In "Ode to a Nightingale", he speaks how painful is a life. He states that his feeling drives him to die and feels sorrow and grief if he stays in this world as he seen environment slowly dying.

## 2.3 "Ode to Psyche"

### 2.3.1 Beauty is Natural and Original

In this ode, Keats portrays a beauty that is pure and natural. He tells that Psyche is very pretty and graceful, she underdoes some tests in this world. She should come down to the earth to find inspiration and true love. Beauty is anything that is natural and original. Psyche who descended to the earth saw a beautiful and wonderful world by visiting various places in the world, such as natural forest, green fields, beaches, and beautiful mountains.

Keats' representation of beauty is implied in the poem as it portrays in this following lines:

Upon the midnight hours;  
Thy voice, thy lute, thy pipe, thy incense sweet  
From swinged censer teeming;  
Thy shrine, thy grove, thy oracle, thy heat  
Of pale-mouthed prophet dreaming.

("Ode to Psyche" 45 – 49)

England at that time was experiencing a substantial transformation, where the forest and natural places been demolished and replaced with the advent of settlement and factories that directly caused a negative impact on environmental degradation.

Natural environment affects Keats' in his interpretation of beauty that is something natural and original. However, Keats' disease is also caused by bad environment and slumming places in which those are being the main reason the spread of epidemic diseases. This is why John Keats loved the natural places covered with variety of plants and cleaned air.

Keats admires Psyche as a beautiful and natural goddess. The interpretation of natural beauty is affected his interpretation of the beauty of woman. His admiration of natural environment directly drives him to love and admire someone who is lively, humble, and honest. Keats' imagination of beautiful Psyche was written in "Ode to Psyche" that actually is the representation of Fanny Brawne, his lover. Fanny Brawne is someone who took his heart and began to affect Keats to write several poems which concerned on the nature and life.

2.4 "To Autumn"

2.4.1 Desperation and Passion

Through this ode, Keats portrays his feeling about desperation which is listed in his ode. He describes life as hard and uncomfortable, he should struggle against all the obstacles that blocked his way. Keats was tormented by the circumstances which makes him desperate and eager to end it all with end up his life. It is portrayed in the following lines:

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?

Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find

( "To Autumn" 12 -13)

Keats' struggle against his illness and financial problems are obstacles that always weighed him wherever he is. In line 13, Keats expresses his feeling toward his problems and he makes self talk that creates justification for his condition. In sentence, whoever seeks aboard may find, indicates his reaction to his life that is so miserable and sorrow. Keats tries to overcome his miserable by using his ability to express his emotion through poem. He states that everyone who seeks abroad, may find everything they search. Through poetry Keats expresses his emotion and feeling to be more productive and positive things. Keats was often influenced by everything in this world, such as trees, skies, animals, plants, and so on. When he wrote this ode he was just a young poet who has a very sensitive with everything around him. His sensitivity toward nature was expressed in the following lines:

Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,

Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;

Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,

( "To Autumn" 14 – 15)

Keats' ability to feel the condition around him was written in the paper that was not initially appreciated at the first time. Critics criticize his style of writing and insult him as an untalented poet and criticize his physical condition.

Keats' desperation of his condition affects his writing and his interpretation of life and nature. Suffers and sorrows always be parts of John Keats' life. His illness makes him so painful and eager to end up by suicidal action. It is rather die than live in painful illness and sorrow. It is portrayed in his ode that he always mentions death, desperation, and sadness in his odes, especially Ode "To Autumn". His sorrowful interpretation of life portrayed in his writing is because of his lack of health and his bad condition. However, his miserable childhood affected his later life and also his trauma toward his mother who led him to miserable episodes of his love story. Actually, there are many factors that influence his writing skills, such as death of his brother and his mother marriage which gave him desperation toward life. He states that life is full of sorrow but he never gives up; he believes that in the peak of his desperation, there is a little hope for him. His hope returns to his Creator, that is peaceful death.

## 2.5 The Relation of Human and Nature that Affects John Keats in Writing His Odes

### 2.5.1 Life Circle within Human and Nature

Human and nature bond with nature. Nature gives sources to human and human protects and conserves nature. That relation just like a circle, we need nature to survive but nature needs our conservation to survive, too. Keats often personified nature as dying and sick which need treatment and if nature is neglected it will die. It assumes that Keats often portrays natural condition based on his interpretation, just like the following lines:

Among the river shallows, borne aloft  
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;  
(“To Autumn” 28 – 29)

In that above lines, we can assume that sallow’s river and borne aloft portrays environmental condition of nature. Pollution attacks river and endanger ecosystem which will harm our life. Keats always worries about environmental condition which everyday become worse, it happens because our omission. People did not care much about nature, they always focuses their desire which concern on wealth and social status. The light wind lives or dies actually portrays condition of human or social condition. Keats personifies social condition as light wind lives or dies, means that people did not care and neglected nature. Some people worried about this condition, but did not make any action. But many people did not care anymore about this condition, just like a dead wind. Moreover, careless is mark of people which Keats portrayed in his writings.

### 2.5.2 Despair and Hopes

All of these three odes, “Ode to a Nightingale”, “Ode to Psyche”, and “To Autumn” portrays a balance of hope and despair. As portrayed in “Ode to a Nightingale”, he desires to escape with nightingale, which reflects a freedom and happiness from real world and sorrows to the beautiful world, an ideal beauty of peace and restful world without any negative side of human’s greed and also life without lies. In his “To Autumn, Keats illustrates autumn as wonderful moment, just like these following lines:

With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;  
To bend with apples the moss’d cottage-trees,  
(Keats’ “To Autumn” lines 6 – 7)

In these lines we can conclude that Keats’ expression of beautiful nature is seen in “To Autumn”. He describes fruits and trees grow well added by beautiful season of joy which calming heart and making convenient to our heart. Keats praises the joy of autumn as happy hour and presents his feeling about nature in which nature never betrays, not like man. Liar and disturber are man’s possession that Keats wants to express through poetry. Human always makes use of natural sources without any limitation, forgets their responsibilities to conserve nature.

Despair and hope for Keats are just a balance of the life. In desperation there must be a little hope behind. Keats believes that hope will reveals its presence in the peak of depression then clearly visible at the end of desperation. Keats makes his changing of his expression in his odes which changes from desperation into hopes, just like this following lines:

I have been half in love with easeful Death,  
Call’d him soft names in many a musèd rhyme,  
To take into the air my quiet breath;  
(“Ode to a Nightingale” 52 – 54)

These lines contain such a desperation and miserable condition. He cannot enjoy the life; this life is more painful when he tries to enjoy his life. Keats’ condition is not so well, his painful affects his writing and his interpretation of life. He argues that joyful death is the only way to ease his pain. But, there is a turn point of his feeling. At first is full of misery, then there is a little hope that Keats believed.

Life will find a balance, if we're imbalanced we will feel so desperate and moreover, we will be brave to take suicidal action or just imagine that dead is the only way to ease our pain. Keats gives us a lesson through his writings or his historical life, that every sorrow and every happiness in our life is just like beautiful scenery of the night, completed with glorious starry night and beautiful moon. Life is so wonderful with life and death, with sadness or happiness, that just like a rainbow in the sky. Through his writings, Keats gives portrayal of nature, human, and life. Life is like a beautiful voice of nightingale that flies away with beautiful goddess who brings colors and happiness to the world then flies together through the autumn to witness the beauty of the autumn and return to its creator. Life is wonderful with a sadness and happiness as a balance of this nature and life.

John Keats, as a Romantic poet, has a sensitive feeling toward his surroundings as the characteristic of Romanticism. Keats has an extra feeling in natural condition and magnificent ability to express his feeling through poetry. Industrialization in Europe, especially in London, brings a new environment and social problem. The rapid growth of industry and community in urban areas causes environmental problems such as pollution and deforestation. Those phenomena make Keats' world view is affected by his interpretation of life and nature. He believes that nature is honest, natural, and being vital source of the world. He also believes that the world is full of sorrowful, miserable, and painful. However, his interpretation toward nature and his world view made him write poems concerned with nature. His affection toward nature is presented in almost all of his poems and odes, such as "Ode to a Nightingale", "Ode to Psyche", and "To Autumn".

### 3. Conclusion

In Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale", *nightingale* portrays condition of this world that is neglected. People neglect and harm nature just to fulfill their desire to gain wealthy and social status. The industrialization leads mass migration to urban areas and also pollutes and deforests the environment. Beautiful places and scenery which Keats presented in his odes are affecting Keats to appreciate nature as the heart of the core in this world. If nature is dying, human being will suffer, too. His desire to be a bird that flies through the sky to admire nature is portraying his lost feeling about the natural environment that is changed into the modern one because Keats misses the natural one.

"Ode to Psyche" is actually the representation of Fanny Brawne. His love to Fanny is portrayed as humble and honest. Through this ode, Keats admires Fanny Brawne as a goddess who brings a peaceful life in this world and gives colors of true love to him. His feeling about past memories, experiences, and also his mental condition actually affects his interpretation of love. For Keats, love is not only desire to have, but love is all about giving without demanding any returns. Keats's possession to Fanny is drawn in his "Ode to Psyche" which reveals his interpretation of love and his feeling about nature, woman, and love itself.

In "To Autumn", Keats presents nature as natural and honesty, nature never betrays and never lies. Nature is just finding its balance and following a life cycle. Keats portrays nature as a source of life but human betrays it. Furthermore, Nature is presented as a victim of human's greed. However, Keats believes in a cycle of life and balance. If there is a beginning, so there is an ending. In "To Autumn", seasons are a cycle of life and balance, just like human. After being born, human being lives in the world and there is another stage to face, that is "death". Death for Keats is returning to his Creator, a Creator of this universe. So, human must conserve to protect nature and their own body as a gift from the Creator, the Almighty God.

Keats' world view is portrayed in all of his odes, his natural awareness drives him to illustrate and to describe nature as a source of life and the core of the world. People must protect and conserve nature to sustain their life in this world. John Keats also portrays the condition of human and nature in industrialization era. Keats believes, nature and human is in one condition. If human protects and conserves to nature, nature will give the source of life to the human and all living beings in this world.

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