
La Belle Dame Sans Merci By John Keats And The Lady Of Shalott By Alfred Lord Tennyson

Introduction

John Keats (born on 31st October 1795 and died when he was 25 years) was an English Poet. Keats lived only for 25 years but, his 'literary reams of gold have left mark on the sands of time. Keats was a multi-faceted craftsman, unaffected by the standard political issues of his times. A constant experimenter, known for his moral, spiritual, emotional, and soul sensitivities. His works were published before four years of his death at the age of 25.

'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', a Romantic poem by Keats is written in as a Ballad. The phrase was taken from the poem 'La Belle Dame Sans Mercy' by Alain Chartier. It was first published in the issue, 'Indicator' on May 10, 1820.

The narrator spot's a knight maundering along the hillside and asks him for what reason he seemed pale, sick, and dismal. The knight said that he met a lovely fairy woman in the valley. He fell in love with her. He made laurels with flowers for her, let her ride on his horse. Finally, she welcomed him to the fairy cave and calmed him to sleep. He had a nightmare about Kings and princes who looked demise pale. They revealed that the lovely girl without mercy made him a slave. The kings and princes were previously enticed by her and they are all dead. At the point when he woke up, he lay alone on the side of the hill.

La Belle Dame Sans Merci by John Keats

Major Themes

The Supernatural

The poem deals with supernatural elements. The lady that the Knight falls in love with is depicted as a child of fairy. A fairy is a supernatural figure, thus Keats brings out the theme of supernatural forces in this poem, by portraying the lady as the child of fairy. In addition to it, she sings a fairy song and takes him to the Elfin cave. She feeds him strange food. In the end, the knight lies on the cold hillside along with others who were enthralled in the lady's spell. Through this Keats in this poem brings out the supernatural element.

Abandonment

Another important theme in the poem is about being abandoned by the one we love. The Knight gets ditched on a cold hillside.

Obsession and Death

In the poem 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', the knight describes how he becomes obsessed with, and gets ditched by the Lady without Mercy. Though aware she is an illusion, the knight remains in his memory of the Lady, and it implies that he will remain in the memory of the Lady

till his death. Here the Knight's love turns from delight into an obsession.

The femme fatale

The femme fatale is an alluring, attractive lady who attracts and ensnares men, leading them to threatening circumstances. The poem portrays the theme of the femme fatale as the Lady makes the knight fall in love with her and later betrays him leading to his destruction. Also, at the end of the poem, it is disclosed that the Knight was not the only one who had been trapped by the women.

Other major themes in the poem:

Illusions vs. Reality and seduction are the other themes. The poem gives a message that beauty, love, and joy are temporary and physical beauty and seduction can deceive us.

Symbols and Motifs

Lily

Lily is associated with innocence and purity. By suggesting purity and innocence lily, the speaker tells us that the knight seems to hold his respect notwithstanding his poor state. It could likewise suggest honesty or obliviousness, which means the Knight may not completely accept that he was deceived by the lady, accepting he may run over her affection again sometime in the future. Lilies are also used for the funeral; the Lily may suggest the death-like state wherein the Knight meanders.

Dew and Water

Medieval Romances associate women with water. Keats takes from that convention in 'La Belle Dem Sans Merci'. It alludes that men who mess around with ladies end up getting wet and soggy. As per symbolic tradition, men are debilitated by their contact with women.

Paleness

All of the men who fall underneath the woman's spell are pale and weary, suggesting sickness or loss of vitality. The paleness of men in the dreams of Knight could likewise communicate fear: the absence of colour in their face mirrors the horror of being trapped upon the hillside by the woman's charms.

Flowers (Motifs)

Flowers are mentioned frequently throughout the poem. It symbolises goodness and sexuality. In the poem, Lily and fading rose are used to describe the Knight's skin, generating a tension between erotic love and pure. When the Knight met the lady in meads, he made bracelets and garlands to get her love. The different inferences connected to this symbolism compare to the poem's unpredictable mental underpinnings: the men who fall underneath the lady's spell are gotten between their valiant respect and their sexual want for the woman.

Literary Elements and Devices

Poetic Devices

Structure, Form and Rhyme Scheme

'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' is a Folk Ballad. The poem is divided into two parts. The poem has twelve stanza Ballad. Each quatrain has three lines of iambic tetrameter and the fourth line of dimeter. The rhyme scheme used in the poem is ABCB, the second line and the fourth line have the same rhyme scheme.

Metre

iambic Tetrameter is used in the first three lines in each stanza.

O what/ can ail/ thee, knight/ at arms, (8 syllables, 4 feet- iambic tetrameter)

Alone/ and pale/ ly loit/ erring?

The sedge has withered from the lake

And no/ birds sing! (4 syllables, 2 feet- iambic dimeter)

Literary Devices

Assonance

It is the repetition of vowel sounds in the same line.

"And there I shut her wild wild eyes." [1] {from the poem}

Consonance

It is the repetition of consonant sounds in the same line.

"Alone and palely loitering" [2] {from the poem}

Alliteration

It the repetition of constant sounds in the same link

"With Horrid warning gaped wide" [3] {from the poem}

Enjambment

Continuation of sentence without a breaking.

"The latest dream I ever dreamt [4] {from the poem}

On the cold hill's side"

Metaphor

The speaker compares the knight's brow with lilies. [5] {from the poem}

Anaphora

Repetition of words

"And there she lulled me asleep [6] {from the poem}

And there I dreamed- Ah! Woe betide"

The Lady of Shalott by Alfred Lord Tennyson

Alfred Lord Tennyson was an English poet and considered as the representative of the Victorian Era in poetry. He occupied a position like that of Alexander Pope. Tennyson was a quintessential beautiful craftsman, stabilizing and refining the customs passed on to him by his antecedents in the Romantic development- particularly Byron, Keats and Wordsworth. His poetry is astounding for its metrical assortment and rich descriptive imagery. Tennyson became the Poet Laureate of Britain and Ireland in 1850. Some of his famous works are Ulysses, In Memoriam, The Lady of Shalott, Idylls of the King, etc.

"The Lady of Shalott" is a Ballad. It is based on the novella 'La Damigella di Scot', the story tells about Elaine of Astolat, a woman incarcerated in a tower on an island close to Camelot. One of the best works of Tennyson, its vivid medieval romanticism, mysterious symbolism influenced many painters. Its setting is medieval, during the times of King Arthur. Close to Camelot is the Island of Shalott, where a noblewoman is detained. She is cursed and prohibited to look at Camelot, she watched the world through the magic mirror and spends times weaving the magical web. One day Sir Lancelot comes by the island. When his reflection appears in the mirror, the Lady is tempted to look outside and she infracts the rule and looks outside. When she looked outside, she catches the sight of Camelot, and the mirror cracks. Knowing that her life is in danger, she finds a boat and lies on it. She dies before reaching Camelot.

Form, structure, and Rhyming Scheme

The Lady of Shalott is a Ballad, it narrates a story of a woman cursed and imprisoned on the island of Shalott. The poem is divided into four parts, the first part and part have 4 stanzas, third part has 5 stanzas, and the fourth part has six stanzas. The lines are written in iambic tetrameter. The Rhyme scheme used in the poem is AAAABCCB.

Major themes

Man, and Natural world

The Lady of Shalott is filled with references to the natural world. Tennyson bounces back and forth to the fields, trees, flowers, that borders the Island. The natural movements especially the

interminable flowing of the river, are a major piece of the poem's cadence.

Art and culture

Even though she is alone and upset about it, the Lady of Shalott keeps herself busy. She weaves and sings. She is for sure an artist even if nobody sees her work. Many readers read this poem as a metaphor for the solitary life of the artist.

The supernatural

The mysterious curse on her is the main theme of the poem. The curse controls her life and it caused her death. It connects to the medieval fantasy world of spells and sorcerer.

Symbols and Motifs

Camelot and Shalott

These are opposing symbols. Camelot put together depictions of beautiful castles, kings, and people living in harmony and equity. It's a place of happiness and elegance. On other hand, Shalott is a quiet island that houses a solitary woman in a tower, obscure to all. Shalott depicts sadness, isolation, lack of freedom, and unhappiness.

The River

The River is a pervasive image in the poem, it represents the flow of life. The river runs nearby the tower at Shalott, shipping individuals to and from Camelot. At the point when the Lady at long leaves the island and re-enters the progression of life and time, an action which promptly brings about her death.

Literary Devices in the poem

Assonance

"The willowy hills and fields among". [7] {from the poem}

Parallelism

Sentences that are similar in construction, meaning, and sound.

"She left the web" [8] {from the poem}

"She left the loom"

Consonance

"Till her eyes were darken'd wholly" [9] {from the poem}

“His coal-black curls as on he rode.”

Alliteration

“They cross’d themselves, their stars they blest” [10] {from the poem}

“The pale yellow woods were warning”

Anaphora

“She saw the water-flower bloom, [11] {from the poem}

She saw the helmet and the plume”

Enjambment

“Like to some branch of stars we see [12] {from the poem}

Hung in the golden galaxy.”

Comparative Analysis of “The Lady of Shalott” And “La Belle Dame Sans Merci”

The two poems start with the isolated and alienated protagonists who are in distress and end with their grievous death. The poems are written in form of a Ballad. They both narrate a story. The two poems are ‘Romantic’. Both the poems make a mysterious and supernatural atmosphere, indicating a fantasy or dream world instead of the real world.

To start with, the language of the two poems is outdated English language from an earlier period than the artist’s own and is in the two cases expertly dealt with. For example, thee and meads in Keats’s poem and flitteth and hath in Tennyson’s poem. Yet, the structures of the poems differ. Keats narrates his story beginning with a frame then moving on to a flashback. But Tennyson narrates his story in sequential time order without any outline, although both the poem end with death.

The Ladies of both the poems are captivated and the two men, the Knight and Lancelot are mortal. The two poems have an inhumane antagonist. In Keats’s poem it is the fairy lady and in Tennyson’s it the human (man). Both these poems sing the same themes: don’t get attracted to the fairy appearance of beauty found in the meads nor the shining greatness of Valour as seen in fields, both are deceit in a cave or reflection in a mirror, both shroud cold demeanours and lead to death, whether physical or mental death.

Both the poems have a medieval setting and are concerned with unrequited love. Keats’s poem describes a pale Knight falls in love with a lady and gets abandoned and dejected by her in a cold hillside. In Tennyson’s poem, the woman leaves the shadowy world and wanted to enter the real world that Lancelot’s live in. But she dies before reaching Camelot.

The two poems have the theme of the supernatural. In Keats's poem the fairy is a supernatural figure. She ensnares men and abandons them in the cold hillside. In Tennyson's poem, the mysterious curse on the woman is the major plot. It controls her. This is also associated with the medieval fantasy world of spells and sorcerer.

Conclusion

Both poems are unique in their ways and are concerned with unrequited love. Unrequited love can have negative experiences for both the lover and the rejector. It can lead to threatening situations and even to death. This can be witnessed in both the poems. Both of these poems show us the adverse effect of unrequited love.