



Topic: The Critical Analysis of the Poem —Ode to a Nightingale by John Keats.

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Abstract:

This study begins with critically accepted interpretations of the poem “Ode to a nightingale”, taken from established critical positions regarding Keats. It shall then move onto peruse Keats in a novel manner, adopting The Act of Reading theory of Wolfgang Iser as a working basis. Iser (1978:958) states “the fact that completely different readers can be differently affected by the „reality “of a particular text is ample evidence of the degree to which literary texts transform reading into a creative process that is far above mere perception of what is written”. “Ode to a nightingale “is a personal poem that describes Keats” journey into the state of Negative Capability. The tone of the poem rejects the optimistic pursuit of pleasure found within Keats” earlier poems and, rather, explores the theme of nature, transience and mortality, the latter being particularly personal of Keats. As with other Romantic poets, Keats focused his writerly attention on understanding and exploring beauty. For Keats, all things possessed potential beauty, and it was his job as a poet to find this beauty and capture it in his poetry. For him, identifying and understanding that which is beautiful allows one to become more acquainted with truth. Unlike some of his contemporary Romantic poets, Keats focused on common and familiar things in his poetic attempts to understand beauty.

Keywords: act of reading, text, negative capability, beauty and truth.

1.Introduction

Iser ‘s The Act of Reading theory entails four major concepts: repertoire’, strategies ‘, gestalt ‘and —wandering pointl, which will be scrutinized with regard to the poem in the following. To illustrate, the repertoire consists of all the familiar territory within the text. This may be in the form of references to earlier works, or to social and historical norms, or to the whole culture from which the text has emerged Through the repertoire, the literary text reorganizes social and cultural norms as well as literary traditions so that reader may reassess their function in real life. A text should be understood as a reaction to the thought systems which it has chosen and incorporated in its own repertoire. The repertoire assumes a dual function in Iser ‘s model: it reshapes familiar schemata to form a background for the process of communication, and it provides a general framework within which the message or meaning of the text can be organized. The repertoire includes mostly elements that have been traditionally considered content. As such, it needs a form or structure to organize its presentation, and Iser adopts the term —strategies to designate this function. Strategies are not mere structural features, rather, they entail both the ordering of materials and the conditions under which those materials are communicated. In Iser ‘s words, they encompass the immanent structure of the text and the acts of comp total organization, nor be viewed as traditional narrative techniques or rhetorical devices, they are instead

the structures that underlie such superficial techniques and allow them to have an effect. After all, the ultimate function of the strategies is to DE familiarize the familiar. Considering Iser 's concept of gestalt, as readers we cannot achieve the true meaning of this poem but a configurative meaning of it as it is the interpretation of the individual words and verses of the poem that make up a complete literary work. Taking this poem 's particular history experience, consciousness, outlook, the individual mind of the reader and the written text lead readers to gestalt theory. On the other hand, wandering viewpoint is a means of describing the way in which the reader is present in the text. This presence is at a point where memory and expectation converge, and the resultant dialectic movement brings about a continual modification of memory and an increasing complexity of expectation. The reader 's travelling through the book is a continuous process of adjustments. We have in our mind some expectations, based on our memory of characters and events, but these expectations and imaginations are continually modified, and these memories are also transformed when we go through the whole text. What we get when we read is not something fixed and completely meaningful at every point, but only a series of continuously changing views. ehension thereby triggered off in the reader. These strategies should not be understood as a total organization, nor be viewed as traditional narrative techniques or rhetorical devices, they are instead the structures that underlie such superficial techniques and allow them to have an effect. After all, the ultimate function of the strategies is to DE familiarize the familiar.

Considering Iser 's concept of gestalt, as readers we cannot achieve the true meaning of this poem but a configurative meaning of it as it is the interpretation of the individual words and verses of the poem that make up a complete literary work. Taking this poem 's particular history experience, consciousness, outlook, the individual mind of the reader and the written text lead readers to gestalt theory.

On the other hand, wandering viewpoint is a means of describing the way in which the reader is present in the text. This presence is at a point where memory and expectation converge, and the resultant dialectic movement brings about a continual modification of memory and an increasing complexity of expectation. The reader 's travelling through the book is a continuous process of adjustments. We have in our mind some expectations, based on our memory of characters and events, but these expectations and imaginations are continually modified, and these memories are also transformed when we go through the whole text. What we get when we read is not something fixed and completely meaningful at every point, but only a series of continuously changing views .

The poem is an expression of Keats 'feelings rising in his heart at the hearing of the melodious song of the bird. The song of the nightingale moves from the poet to the depth of his heart and creates in him a heartache and numbness as is created by the drinking of hemlock. He thinks that the bird lives in a place of beauty. When he hears the nightingale's song, he is entrenched by its sweetness and his joy becomes so excessive that it changes into a kind of pleasant pain. He is filled with a desire to escape from the world of cares to the world of beautiful place of the bird. Moreover, Keats puts forward several concepts including life, death, disappointment, failure, sorrow, grief, time, brevity, activities, eating, drinking, nature, animals, landscapes, pastorals, trees, flowers, religion, Christianity, art, sciences, and music.

What is more, this poem highlights the blissful music of the nightingale, but it also has a bleak side. The speaker is desperate to escape the world because it is full of people getting old and dying. Life is just a long parade of miseries, and he thinks it would be better to just go out quietly in the middle of the night. The nightingale's world seems so enchanting that it makes our own world seem like a real drag.

Last but not least, the use of Negative Capability in literature is a concept promoted by poet John Keats, who was of the opinion that literary achievers, especially poets, should be able to come to terms with the fact that some matters might have to be left unsolved and uncertain. Keats was of the opinion that some certainties were best left open to imagination and that the element of doubt and ambiguity added romanticism and specialty to a concept. The best references of the use of negative capability in literature would be of Keats 'own works, especially poems such as Ode on a Grecian Urn and Ode to a Nightingale.

Objectives:

- 1)To demonstrate how rhetorical devices can reveal the poetic beauty.
- 2)To scrutinize the unspoken elements in the poem so as to enrich its elegance.

3) To affirm the assumption that there is a close connection between semantic and syntactic beauty.

Questions:

- 1) How can stylistic elements lead to a better poetic comprehension?
- 2) How would the unsaid unwrap the structural and versicolor beauty?
- 3) Is there any relationship between poetic elegance and rhetorical devices?

2. Methodology

The poem includes a wide variety of the poet's unspoken motives in terms of stylistic devices. Moreover, rhetorical elements, prolific sensuous imagery, diverse phonological features, romantic attention as well as the whole poetic construction turn this poem into an artistic work worthy of analysis. Having considered the above mentioned points, I am going to analyze both the spoken and unspoken characteristics of the poem. Additionally, the poem is a decent amalgamation of both emotive and syntactic features; therefore, a stylistic method will be applied in order to explore the poem.

3. Discussion:

Regarding the unsaid, one of the major concepts in *The Reading Process* by Iser in the title, the reader realizes that the nightingale is a symbol of beauty, immortality, and freedom from the world's troubles. Nightingales are known for singing in the nighttime. In Greek and Roman myth, the nightingale also alludes to the Philomel (Philomela), whose tongue was cut out to prevent her from telling about her rape, and who was later turned into a nightingale by the gods to help her escape from death at the hands of her rapist.

To begin with, the only place that the word nightingale even appears is in the title, but the nightingale and its rich, intoxicating nighttime world are at the center of the poem. As Keats imagines it, this bird lives in its own reality within the enchanting forest. In poetic terms, the nightingale has important connections to mythology. Nonetheless, the most important thing to keep in mind is that it represents a kind of carefree existence that is free from the burdens of time, death, and human concerns. The importance of the nightingale stems from its appearance in Greek myth. Since this is a poem inspired by a Greek form, it is fitting that there are several other allusions to the mythology and culture of ancient Greece in this poem.

Having scrutinized the first stanza: —My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains...‖, readers can probably tell by the first few words (my heart aches) that this isn't going to be an especially cheery poem. As this stanza unfolds, the speaker compares his mental state to being intoxicated (or even poisoned, as suggested by hemlock), even going so far as to allude, to make reference to the river Lethe. In Greek mythology, the Lethe is a river in the underworld, whose waters will erase the memories of anyone who drinks them, which confirms the concept of Repertoire mentioned by Iser. As the stanza winds to its conclusion, we learn that the reason behind the speaker's trance-like state is the nightingale's song, which makes the speaker so happy that he can't focus on anything else.

Come to think of the first half of the first stanza, it consists of several comparisons of the speaker to someone who is essentially and totally wasted. Drunk. Here, according to Iser, the reader is forced to confront the alien which is the poem, in other words, to establish affinities with the unfamiliar that is the text. Moreover, in the extended simile of this stanza, opium causes the speaker to lose memory and consciousness, which altogether affect the reader's understanding and remind him of the second concept of Iser named Strategy. Lethe alludes to a river in the Greek afterworld, Hades. Those who drank from it lost their memory. Rhetorically speaking, this stanza alludes to Dryad, in Greek mythology, which is a female spirit attached to a tree.

Reading the second stanza, the reader comes across a Greek myth, —...the blushful Hippocrene...‖, which was the name of a spring that the winged horse Pegasus created by stamping its hoof into the ground. Drinking from it was supposed to give poetic inspiration. The drink is personified as blushing because of its red color. Furthermore, this stanza refers to images which zoom in on the glass of wine he wants to consume. The popping of bubbles at the top of the glass is compared to winking eyes. Wine stains the reader's mouth purple. To put it another way, we as readers are drawn into the poem to the point where we feel no distance between ourselves and the events depicted, which is

what Iser calls Wandering viewpoint since as if reader is present in the text. As well as, the speaker longs for the oblivion of alcohol, expressing his wish for wine, a draught of vintage that would taste like the country and like peasant dances, and let him leave the world unseen and disappear into the dim forest with the nightingale. Needless to say that this stanza is built upon the first stanza's theme of intoxication:

That might drink, and leave the world unseen, and with thee fade away into the forest dim...||

To put it simply, except for the last two lines, this stanza is made entirely of imagery. Imagery is language that stimulates any of the five senses (not just sight, as the word 'image' implies). In imagining the different varieties of wine he wishes to drink, the poem's speaker stimulates our senses of touch (by describing the coolness of the wine), taste ('tasting of Flora and the country green'), hearing (Provençal song), and sight (purple-stained mouth). The last two lines (—that I might drink, and leave the world unseen, and with thee fade away into the forest dim||), however, strike at the stanza's underlying theme: the urge to leave the physical world.

As a matter of fact, the third stanza depicts depressing images: —Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget...|. The speaker describes the earth as a place where old people suffering from paralysis (palsy) have seizures that shake their last hairs, and young people grow thin as ghosts and then die. Such alien associations, as Iser stipulated, force the reader to reconsider restrictions placed on the text's meanings. In this stanza, beauty and love are both personified. Beauty has nice eyes, but she gets old and the eyes lose their luster. Love, the chubby kid with the bow and arrow, is totally over beauty's eyes at that point. In addition, death is personified as a male – probably the man with the hood and sickle. However, the speaker isn't afraid of death; he actually tries to woo him. This stanza also implies that generations of people are metaphorically hungry because they consume their parents by taking their place. Moreover, lines 71 and 73 in stanza eight, have a parallel structure beginning with a two-syllable exclamation: Forlorn! And Adieu! Which is to say the speaker has been abandoned by the nightingale.

In this stanza, he explains his desire to fade away, saying he would like to forget the troubles the nightingale has never known: —the weariness, the fever, and the fret||of human life, with its consciousness that everything is mortal and nothing lasts. —Youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies, and beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes||. To elucidate, the third stanza takes the Ode's dialectic pattern further by directly putting it in the larger context of the reality of human condition—the temporal world of sorrows and sufferings. The contrast between reality and transcendence, advance and withdrawal, is brought to focus by what Leavis calls the "prosaic matter-of-fact" tone of this "completely disintoxicated and disenchanting" stanza. Fogle considers the stanza as being "low-pitched, by itself unremarkable but functioning as an integral part of the poetic whole."

As can be seen, this stanza gives us a better sense of what the speaker of the poem wants to leave behind by following the nightingale's song. This stanza narrows the focus of theme brought up in the second stanza. The speaker's fundamental problem with the physical world is that nothing lasts forever particularly beauty and love. Indeed, the interpretation of the individual words of this stanza results in comprehending the meaning of love and beauty, which in turn upholds Iser's concept of gestalt.

In the fourth stanza, the speaker uses the metaphor of flight to describe his imaginative journey to join the nightingale. He will fly on the metaphorical wings of his own poetry. This stanza also alludes to Bacchus – the Greek god of wine and drunkenness. In this allusive metaphor, the speaker claims that his escape into the nightingale's world will not be due to drunkenness. Considering this stanza, Keats indulges in pure fantasy in this metaphor comparing the moon and the stars to a queen surrounded by her female attendants.

Moreover, in the fourth stanza, the speaker tells the nightingale to fly away, and he will follow, not through alcohol, —not charioted by Bacchus and his pards||, but through poetry, which will give him viewless wings.

He says he is already with the nightingale and describes the forest glade, where even the moonlight is hidden by the trees, except the light that breaks through when the breezes blow the branches. This stanza seems a little bit tougher than the ones before it. The reason for this is that Keats has brought in more allusions (like he did with the Lethe in the first stanza) to mythology. Bacchus is the Roman god of wine (called Dionysius by the Greeks), who was often depicted as riding in a chariot drawn by leopards (or pards, as Keats called them). The Queen-Moon and

Fays refer to the fairies in European legends. By alluding to these mythical figures, Keats emphasizes the difference between the gloomy physical world, —But here there is no light, and the dreamlike, spiritual world of the nightingale.

Fortunately, Keats also acknowledges that he can use the —viewless wings of Poesy (poetry) to experience an amount (however small) of the nightingale's world. Come to think of the fifth stanza, the plants in the dark forest are compared to incense, or a really fragrant substance. Putting aside our bad memories, Keats thinks this incense is a good smell. Additionally, exploring the fantastical forest, the speaker uses several images of plants and flowers. This stanza shifts our attention back to the physical world. Once more, in this stanza the reader comes across some rhetorical devices such as metaphor, allusion and symbol which back up the concept of—Strategies. Much like the second stanza, the fifth stanza exists mostly to stimulate the reader's senses (especially the sense of smell). The speaker admits that his vision is failing him (either due to his altered mental state or simply because it's dark), but this only makes his sense of smell stronger. Turning his attention to the scents of the embalmed darkness (which hints, once again, at the presence of death), the speaker practically bombards our noses with the smells of the forest (grass, fruit trees, and flowers).

The last line (—the murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves) however, appeals to our sense of hearing, drawing our attention to the murmuring of flies on summer evenings. What is more, Keats' intelligent description of senses here converges the memory and expectation of the reader and makes him present in the text via a continuous process of adjustment that underscores the concept of wandering viewpoint proposed by Iser.

The outpouring of joy in the magic realm of starry sky and moon-lit landscape indicates that the fourth and the fifth stanzas mark the climax of the poem. Keats' keen perception, penetrating to the essence of things, provides him with intimations of immortality and transcendence. The joy and happiness felt in an abstract way in the first and second stanzas seem to be "repeated in a finer tone," to use a phrase of Keats's, in the marvelously pictorial fifth stanza: I cannot see what flowers are at my feet, Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs, but, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet wherewith the seasonable month endows The grass,

The thicket, and the fruit-tree wild; White hawthorn and the pastoral eglantine; Fast-fading violets cover 'dupin leaves; —And mid-May 's eldest child, the coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine, The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves. As the poet points "not to dissolution and unconsciousness but to positive satisfactions, concretely realized in imagination," there occurs a "rich evocation of enchantment and delighted senses," with "the touch of the consummate artist; in the very piling up of luxuries a sure delicacy presides". When it comes to the sixth stanza, the speaker listens in the dark to the nightingale, saying that he has often been half in love with the idea of dying and called death soft names in many rhymes. Surrounded by the nightingale 's song, the speaker thinks that the idea of death seems richer than ever, and he longs to cease upon the midnight with no pain while the nightingale pours its soul ecstatically forth. If he were to die, the nightingale would continue to sing, he says, but he would have ears in vain and be no longer able to hear. This stanza offers readers a somewhat unsettling revelation. The speaker doesn't just want to transcend the limits of the physical world. He actually wants to die, —now more than ever seems it rich to die.

The reasons for this desire, however, are more complex than misery. Rather, as he hinted in the first stanza, the speaker feels so content and complete when he hears the nightingale's song that he wouldn't mind dying. Furthermore, the speaker notes that the nightingale's song would continue long after his death: still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain to thy high requiem become a sod, which means the speaker imagines his death, and uses musical composition called a "requiem," which is performed after someone's death. At this point, Keats refers to a social and cultural tradition of singing a eulogy song which is in line with Iser 's concept of Repertoire as it is a familiar schema to form a background for communicating with the reader.

Readers think the scene with the nightingale singing in the forest of night would have made the perfect backdrop for a love story; in other words, this poem seems kind of steamy for them. Instead, what they get is a guy whispering sweet nothings to death. Nobody ruins a potentially steamy moment like death.

To sum up, referring to Iser, at this point the gaps in this poem are partly bridged; the poem is rather connected and the blanks disappeared even though it would be still left inexhaustible in terms of various readers' realizations. Keats soars high with his wings of poesy into the world of ideas and perfect happiness. But the next moment, consciousness makes him land on the grounds of reality and he bids farewell to the ideal bird. At this moment, Keats must also have been conscious that the very bird, which he had idealized and immortalized, existed in the real world, mortal and vulnerable to change and suffering like himself. In addition, taking Iser's theory of The Act of Reading into consideration, this poem is inexhaustible and it is capable of different realizations. Furthermore, regarding Negative Capability proposed by Keats, there is no absolute and objective interpretation of the poem as it varies from one reader to another; therefore, some matters might have to be left unsolved and uncertain.

4. Conclusion

Having taken into account Iser's theory of The Act of Reading, it can be realized that the poem's genuine meaning can by no means be grasped via the subjective interpretation of the readers. In fact, any piece of literature is a hotchpotch of both syntactic and semantic constituents which altogether form the ultimate consistent comprehension of it. In addition, regarding the poem, Keats artistically depicts human emotion and perception through his metaphoric use of nightingale. Furthermore, the bird pictures a world which is so glamorous and real. According to Iser, perusing the poem gets the reader alienated and makes him DE familiarize the text each time s/he reads it; that is to say, the reader becomes enthusiastic to embrace the creative imagination. Last but not least, Keats has demonstrated the human ephemeral life against the perpetual music of the nightingale. Finally, as readers we cannot escape into the intended world of the author. Imaginative minds can have a momentary flight into the fanciful world, but ultimately one has to return to the real world and must accept the reality. John Keats is no exception to this. He makes imaginative flights into the ideal world, but accepts the realities of life despite its fever, fret and fury. As a matter of fact, referring to Iser, at this point the gaps in this poem are partly bridged, the poem is rather connected and the blanks disappeared even though it would best still left inexhaustible in terms of various readers' realizations. Moreover, readers' imagination was exercised upon those as yet unwritten, unsaid and indeterminate elements to mirror their disposition and interpretation.

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