



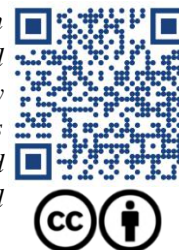
The Subaltern in “La Belle Dame sans Merci: A Ballad”

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Abstract— The poem “La Belle Dame sans Merci: A Ballad” is a 1819 ballad by second generation English Romantic poet, John Keats. The title was derived from the title of 15th-century poem by Alain Chartier called La Belle Deme sans mercy. considered as one of the classics ,the poem beclouds the thin line between reality and imagination. The poem is denied as autobiographical by many critics and writers but the impact of his life incidents is undeniable. The poem Fennyencompasses around the themes like passion, obsession, and enchantment. There is Femme fetal iconography present in the poem. There is a great impact of Brawne and the success and criticism of his rival Lord Byron on the poetry and life of Keats.



Keywords— Brawne, Keats ,la belle dame sans merci, Lord Byron, feminism , Subaltern, patriarchy

I. INTRODUCTION

The poem "La Belle Dame sans Merci" is a tale of love in iambs in which we come across the dialogue between a medieval Knight and an anonymous speaker. The poem commences with the speaker questioning the Knight

" O what can ail thee knight-at-arms,
alone and palely loitering?"

The above lines represent anguish and ail of the Medieval knight and the expression of deep mental and romantic suffering which compels him to loiter palely. The question of the speaker is answered by the chivalrous knight by the description of barren season where he says,

"The sedge has withered from the lake,
and no bird sing."

The barren description depicts more his own heart than the season and his surrounding environment. The anguish of the poet is highlighted in first three quatrains where the lines 1 and 3 are in iambic tetrameter and line 2 and 4 are in iambic trimeter forming a rhyming scheme of ABCB.

The actual plot of the marks itself from the the fourth quatrain where we are introduced to the lady who is " Full beautiful-feary's child". Then the poet beautifies the poem with a caesura and praises her more, concentrating on her morphology. The knight has created a special corner in his

heart of the "feary's child" that he weaves a garland and a bracelet for enhancement of her features.

The lady was so full of beauty that the man could not take his eyes off her for hours enchanted in and enthralled by her "Full beautiful" spells. She was also loving to him as she lulled him a song which the recipient refers to as " A feary's song". This song arouses hopes in the mind of the knight whose feelings for the lady becomes more robust.

The lady hesitates not to express her "true" love to the chivalrous knight in his imagination after she feeds him to survival. The knight uses the word "manna-dew" and creates an allusion to the nutritious manna dropped by God from Heaven for the survival of the people. The help which the lady provides for the Knight's life compels the Knight to think that She in a "strange language" must have said

"I love thee true"

The Knight also leaves no chance to express his emotions and proves his love with "kisses four". The love making of the two was now near to its denouement when the knight is taken to an "elfin grot" where he is lulled to sleep by the "Feary child". The waking up for the Knight brought a tragic Heart ache , the recovery from which is just death. He was now the victim as the other "Pale Warriors" who cried

"La Belle Dame sans Merci

Thee hath in thrall !"

Now what was left in the side of Knight was just life long lamentation.

II. THE SUBALTERN OR FEMINIST VOICE IN THE POEM

The ballad " La Belle Dame sans Merci" is written in form of dialogue between the Anonymous speaker and the chivalrous Knight in which we are introduced to an extremely beautiful lady whom we can never hear. The lady is referred to as "Full beautiful-feary's child" by the knight in love. Both the speakers of the poem are patriarchal and are speaking the male perspective whereas the voice of the female is entirely missing in the poem. The reader can find no traces of what the "Full beautiful" lady wants to say except when she expresses her love saying

"I love thee true"

Even this expression of love is pointing towards the silenced voice of the female as in the whole of the ballad the only words the female says are the ones desired by the Knight. The fact that the expression of love is mere an assumption by the lover Knight shows his desire to exercise his supremacy. The knight does not know the language "Feary child" speaks and calls it strange but he is sure that his desired words are said. The words assumed to be said by the lady point towards three of the serious issues:

1) The creation of femme fetal image of the lady: The Knight has very successfully created the Vamp image of the lady. According to the hegemonized view created by the knight the poem has a simple plot that there was a lady who first helped the Knight, expressed her love ,and then left him to die. This creates a typical brutal lady figure in the minds of the reader and creates a view that the "feary child" cheated on the Knight and he is innocent and gullible.

2) Suppressing the female perspective: The Knight's assumption of the words

"I love thee true"

clearly suppresses the perspective of the female voice which remains unheard. This is the assumption which leads to the Femme fetal iconography of the lady in the poem. The language as accepted by the Knight was "strange"which clearly shows that it was out of the knowledge of his intellect. The act of assumption intended to hide the fact that the lady helped the man to survival(as the knight alludes to manna dew).

3) Hiding the lady's help to man's survival: The Knight very cleverly beclouded the lady's help in his survival. Even the presentation of the fact that the lady has provided the knight "manna dew" was an intentional act to show that the

female voice is not hidden but the deep study of the poem through the lens of feminism shows how the Goddess figure or the saviour figure is converted into femme fetal or vamp figures. All of the plot of the poem is therefore creating a hegemony of males and destroy the saviour figure of the lady.

III. CONCLUSION

As the poem is written by a male , narrated by a male and , represents male hegemony or patriarchal view the reader on shallow reading might find an innocent Knight who is cheated by a "Full beautiful " lady whom he loved fondly. Whereas on reading deep one might come to know the labyrinth of male dominance which leads to the femme fetal image or the madwoman figure of the lady. The depiction of the relationship of the knight and the lady in some way shows his own relationship with Fanny Brawne whom he was deeply in love in and had to suffer rejection.

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