

A Symphony of Senses: The Poetic Art of Keats and Rabindranath



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ABSTRACT: This research article intricately explores the sensuousness in the selected works of two literary giants, John Keats (1795-1821) and Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) in a nutshell. Keats, renowned for his extraordinary ability to evoke sensual experiences, is widely regarded as a masterful exponent of sensuousness. His poetry is distinguished by vivid and evocative descriptions of nature, which underscore the profound connection between the human senses and the natural world. Through a nuanced analysis of Keats' poetic oeuvre, this study reveals the ways in which the poet skillfully employs sensuous language to transcend the boundaries of the physical world, creating a rich and immersive experience for the readers. Rabindranath, drawing inspiration from Keats' poetic legacy, also employs sensuous language in his poetry, deliberately appealing to the readers' senses in order to evoke a deeper, more visceral response. While Rabindranath's efforts to deploy sensuous language are notable, this study argues that Keats' mastery of sensuousness remains unparalleled, William Shakespeare (1564-1616) being the only other poet to demonstrate a comparable level of skill in this regard. By examining the sensuousness in the selected works of Keats and Rabindranath, this research article provides a deeper understanding of the role of sensory experience in poetry and the ways in which poets can harness the power of sensuous language on account of creating rich and immersive literary experiences. Ultimately, this scholarly endeavour presents a nuanced exploration of the poets' works, highlighting their unique contributions to the global literary landscape.

KEYWORDS: Sensuousness, Sensory language, Imagery, Theory, Aesthetic, Emotional resonance, Nature, Landscape, Poetic oeuvre, Nature

Proposed Methodology: This paper conducts its analysis using the framework of Reader Response Theory. The theory traces its roots to Louise Rosenblatt (1904-2005), an American literary theorist. Later, German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) expanded upon it, contributing phenomenological insights. Building on Husserl's work, Polish philosopher Roman Ingarden (1893-1970) and German scholar Wolfgang Iser (1926-2007) further developed the framework and its ideas. American literary theorist Stanley Fish (1938) subsequently broadened the scope of the theory and institutionalised it in his work 'Interpreting the Variorum' (1976). The theory focuses on the reader's interpretation and response to texts. This critical framework facilitates a nuanced understanding of how the sensuous elements engage the reader's senses, imagination, and emotions in the poetic oeuvre of Keats and Rabindranath, ultimately enriching the overall reading experience.

Keats is a poet renowned for his profound emphasis on sensation. His poetry is characterised by a vivid and evocative sensuousness, which invites readers to immerse themselves in distinct and tangible sense impressions. Keats' masterful use of language and imagery enables readers to comprehend and feel the intensity of his emotions as if experiencing them firsthand. Since Keats seeks to convey the intricate complexities of human emotions and experiences through a vibrant array of sensory details, his thoughts are inextricably linked with sensuousness. Like Keats, Rabindranath has also been lauded for his poetic exploration of sensuality. Both poets indeed skillfully weave together sensory details and emotional depth, crafting intimate, evocative, and unforgettable reading experiences. Rabindranath is a poet enamored with beauty, presenting readers with exquisite and sensual word images of nature and human beauty- a rarity in both Bengali and Indian literature. Since Rabindranath skillfully employs the five elements of sensation to evoke a profound sense of wonder, his poetry is replete with sensuousness. The innermost beauty of nature is vividly captured in Rabindranath's poetry, illuminating the subtle patterns that underlie the

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natural world. Rabindranath's sensuous aesthetic bears a striking affinity with Keats' poetic sensibility. Both visionaries converge in their profound reverence for the sensory dimensions of human existence, masterfully intertwining lush depictions of nature and the human emotion in order to create a sumptuous and immersive literary masterpiece. Sensuousness is the multifaceted quality that derives from the harmonious interplay of the senses- sense of sight, sense of hearing, sense of touch, sense of taste, and sense of smell. Both Keats and Rabindranath are ardent admirers of beauty, and their poetry reflects a deep reverence for the natural world in every way. Through their works, they demonstrate an extraordinary ability to discern and appreciate the sublime beauty of nature, engaging all five senses to craft immersive and captivating poetic experiences. As their works are replete with vivid descriptions of the natural world, readers enter into a world of sensory delight.

Now, the five sensations are to be discussed with respect to the poetry of Keats and Rabindranath to convey their unique artistic vision accordingly. The senses of sight and sound have been prominent in the poetry of Keats and Rabindranath. They employ vivid visual and auditory imagery in order to evoke powerful emotional responses. The beauty of nature springs to life through rich sensory details, transporting readers into a realm of awe and wonder.

Sense of Sight: Keats is a skilled artist in using words to create vivid images. With just a few words, he paints a clear and beautiful picture of sensuous beauty. For example, in his poem "La Belle Dame Sans Merci", Keats draws a fascinating picture in a way that awakens readers' vision. His words make readers feel as if they can see the beauty he is describing.

I met a lady in the meads,
Full beautiful- a faery's child,
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild. (Keats 13-16).

In a few words, the beauty of a lady has been masterfully portrayed by Keats, transporting readers to a captivating dream world. His vivid description instantly conjures up a mental image of the lady's enchanting beauty, drawing readers into a realm of fantasy and wonder. The same picture has been noticed in Rabindranath's "*Meghdoot*" (The Meghduta) of '*Manasi*' (Woman of the Mind, 1890). The text portrays a vivid picture of a love-sick individual who is burdened by sorrow, lying down by the window of a secluded dwelling located in the remotest area of the locality:

Dur batayane jatha (Tagore 23-25).
To the distant window,
The sullen beloved lay wretchedly on the ground
With open hair, tattered clothes, and teary-eyed, [Translated by me]

Both poets indeed skillfully craft an intriguing depiction of a lady, evoking a vivid image in readers' minds.

Sense of Hearing: Keats demonstrates exceptional listening skills in his poetic oeuvre. In "On the Grasshopper and Cricket", the poet showcases his exceptional skill as a listener. The text is a serene and idyllic portrayal of a winter evening. Here, the poet has been enchanted by the song of the cricket. Keats listens to the song of the cricket when absolute silence prevails everywhere on a long winter evening. The phrase 'Frost has wrought a silence' masterfully evokes a sense of stillness and quietude, emphasising the absence of any sound except for the cricket's song. The emphasis on the cricket's song highlights Keats' message about the significance of listening and being attentive in the present moment. The poet's attentive listening allows him to appreciate the beauty of the cricket's melody, creating a sense of wonder and enchantment:

On a long winter evening, when the frost
Has wrought a silence, from the stove there shrills
The cricket's song, (Keats 10-12).

Indeed, on an evening in winter when the frost silences the other voices of the countryside, from behind the chirping of the cricket is heard. The use of the word 'Shrills' to describe the cricket's song creates a vivid auditory image, highlighting the attentive listening of the poet. The same citation of the sense of hearing has been found in Tagore's "*Mrityur Pare*" (After Death) of '*Chitra*' (The Many-Pictured One, 1896) as well:

Uthichhe jhillir gan, tarur marmartan, (Tagore 105-108).
The melody of cricket is rising, and the sound of dry leaves,
The river generates indistinct sounds,
As if the movement every three hours is heard
In the Sky, [Translated by me]

In the present text, the poet employs a rich tapestry of sensory details, particularly focusing on the sense of hearing. The text's sonic landscape is characterised by the gentle melody of crickets, the rusting of dry leaves, and the indistinct sounds emanating from the river. The phrase "As if the movement every three hours is heard/ in the sky." is particularly noteworthy. Here, Rabindranath masterfully uses personification, a figure of speech, attributing the sound of movement of every three hours to the

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sky. Through this text, he demonstrates his exceptional skill in crafting a rich sensory experience just like Keats. The accent on the sense of hearing in both texts illuminates their focus on the vital importance of attentive listening and harmonious alignment with the surrounding world.

The senses of touch, smell, and taste play an important role in the poetic vision of Keats and Rabindranath as well. The taste of ambrosia, the tactile qualities of nature, and the aroma of blooming flowers- all contribute to the rich sensory landscape of their poetry.

Sense of Touch: "Ode to Autumn" by Keats is a perfect image of solid sensuous experience. The text takes into account a vivid picture in details of the season with all its diversities, richness, and abundance:

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
To swell the gourd, plump the hazel shells

.....
For summer has o'er-brimmed their clammy cells. (Keats 1-10).

In this text, Keats uses tactile imagery in order to describe the ripeness of fruits, such as 'To swell the gourd', 'Mellow fruitfulness', and 'Plump the hazel shells'. These phrases are excellent examples of Keats' use of imagery. Here, vivid images of autumnal scenes conjure up a sense of abundance and fertility. The influence of the "Ode to Autumn" in respect of the sense of touch has been noted in Rabindranath's "*Utsarga*" (Dedication) of '*Chaitali*' (Poem of Late Spring, 1896). It is true that Tagore's "*Utsarga*" (Dedication) and Keats' "Ode to Autumn" are indeed two separate poems, but both are well-known for their rich sensory details. Both poems do share some similarities in terms of sensory language, particularly in evoking the sense of touch. Rabindranath's "*Utsarga*" (Dedication) of the said anthology is a perfect embodiment of concrete sensuous experience. In the present text, he employs sensory language in order to describe the natural world using imagery:

Aji mor drakshakunjabane (Tagore 1-4).
Today my vineyard
Is filled with bunches of fruit
With a sweetness that's almost too much to bear
As if they may burst at any touch. [Translated by me]

While reading the text, a sense of touch instinctively comes to the minds of readers, and they can envision a resplendent symphony of colours, filling their hearts with profound joy. However, the sense of touch makes the text a quintessential example of sensuous experience.

Sense of Taste: "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" by Keats is a masterpiece, replete with the suggestiveness of a sense of taste, making it one of the finest poems in English literature. The text portrays a sense of taste with excellence:

She found me roots of relish sweet,
And honey wild, and manna dew,
And sure in language strange she said-
I love thee true. (Keats 25-28).

The exemplary use of gustatory imagery in the text is evident in the aforementioned lines. The portrayals of these scrumptious delights inspire a feeling of enchantment and allure. The use of taste imagery adds depth and sensuality to the poem, which makes it a richer and more immersive experience for readers. Keats' mastery of sensory language, particularly in evoking the sense of taste, is a hallmark of his poetic genius. In "La Belle Dame Sans Merci", Keats indeed crafts a dreamlike atmosphere that envelops readers, drawing them into the poem's world for a deeply personal and captivating experience. "*Urboshi*" (Urvashi) of '*Chitra*' (The Many-Pictured One, 1896) by Rabindranath is also a masterpiece, replete with suggestiveness of a sense of taste just like Keats' "La Belle Dame Sans Merci". This poem stands out as a masterpiece in Indian literature with respect to the sense of taste. The text showcases a captivating description of the sense of taste, a hallmark of the poet's skillful storytelling as usual:

Dan hate sudhapatra, bishvanda loye bam kare- (Tagore 13-16).
Nectar-chalice in right hand, in your left hand poison:
The heaving ocean, like a spellbound serpent, lay
At your feet, its hundred thousand hoods their proud display
Now bending low. [Translated by Sukanta Chaudhuri]

The present text's use of gustatory imagery is both vivid and evocative, which draws the reader into a world of sensual delight. Here, Tagore skillfully applies sensory language in order to create a diverse fabric of taste and texture. The 'Nectar-chalice' evokes the idea of a sweet, divine drink, appealing to the reader's sense of taste. Rabindranath indeed masterfully incorporates the sense of taste into his poetry and creates a rich sensory experience for readers.

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Sense of Smell: "Ode to a Nightingale" by Keats is the finest example of the sensation of smell. The text excellently describes the sense of smell, where the poet's imagination fills in for the absence of visual cues in the darkness. However, there is a mingled perfume of many flowers in the darkness:

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet. (Keats 41-43).

The aforementioned lines emphasise the visual limitations of the poet. Nevertheless, these visual limitations have been countered by the poet's heightened sense of smell, as expressed in the aforementioned lines. The phrase 'Embalmed darkness' is noteworthy as it creates an image of being wrapped in a rich and scented atmosphere. Here, protection from decay and intensity has been conveyed by the word 'Embalmed', with the implication that the fragrance of the flowers has been infused into the darkness. The poet is able to identify and appreciate the different fragrances, even in the absence of visual cues. Overall, the text presents a captivating exploration of the sensation of smell. Like Keats, Rabindranath also delineates the image of the sense of smell in his verse "*Surdaser Prarthona*" (Prayer of Sur Das) of '*Manasi*' (Woman of the Mind, 1890). The sense of smell is beautifully woven into the fabric of the verse, creating a joyful and uplifting atmosphere. The following lines are particularly noteworthy in this regard:

Apon lalit raginee shuniya aponi abashman; (Tagore 57-59).
I am senseless by hearing my beautiful descant
The spring breeze overwhelms with the smell of flowers,
The sky catches me yearningly; and flowers surround me; [Translated by me]

The aforementioned lines are powerful triggers for the sense of smell. The use of the word 'Overwhelm' suggests a sense of abundance and profusion, emphasising the intensity of the floral scent. The sense of smell indeed plays a crucial role in evoking feelings of joy and wonder in the reader. Above all, it must be mentioned here that all images of sensations have been depicted in the realm of nature.

Judging by the overall aspects, it must be said that Keats excels in conveying sensuousness. Keats' poetry serves as a testament to the transformative power of sensuousness in literary art, demonstrating an unwavering commitment to explore the human experience through sensory details. Indeed, sensuousness forms the core of Keats' poetry as his life and works bear ample testimony to this. Although Rabindranath achieves notable success in harnessing the power of sensuousness, particularly in his successful application of the five senses, it is clear, nonetheless, that Keats reigns supreme in this realm. Truly, in the sphere of sensuousness, Keats is rare and exceptional in the annals of world literature. No other poet, except Shakespeare, demonstrates such mastery in world literature. Ultimately, Keats' poetry has become a treasure trove of sensory experiences that continue to enthrall and inspire generations of writers and artists around the globe to this day, cementing his mastery of sensuousness within the world literary canon. Hence, it must be stated unequivocally that Rabindranath's contribution to sensuous poetry is by no means insignificant in comparison to Keats.

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