

# PSYCHOANALYSIS CRITICISM ON JOHN KEATS POEM: WHEN I HAVE FEARS THAT I MAY CEASE TO BE

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## Abstract

This study was considered library research. This study was focused on analyzing a poem entitled “When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be” written by John Keats using psychoanalysis criticism theory that was proposed by Sigmund Freud in 1952. The limitation of this study was about the author’s life including psychological aspect, experience, and author’s feeling that affected the poetry. The qualitative method was used in order to present the result of the analysis. The result of the analysis showed the three aspects, such as psychological aspect, author’s experience, and also the feelings are link together and affected the beauty of the poem. John Keats not only entertaining the reader but also educated the reader, through the theme that Keats brings to this poem, invite the reader to always being grateful and always do the best to improve our life to be better.

**Keywords:** *Psychoanalysis criticism, John Keats, Poem.*

## Introduction

Literature always has its own magic to attract readers and art lovers. To assess the beauty of a literary work not only can be done from one point of view. Thus, because everyone has a different style and interpretation to enjoying the literary work. The beauty of the words that are written in each line of prose or poetry is still not enough to attract the readers to enjoy a literary work. There are still many other elements that can support the literary work such as theme, setting, plot, characters, and also imagery.

Poetry is one of the literary works that are close to mankind. Like a painting, the beauty of a poem can not only be enjoyed from a visual perspective. If examined more deeply, the vibration of the sentence in line a poem can show any information about the author, who created that poem, it could be his/ her deep emotion, experience, or perhaps his/ her hopes.

This study was focused on the psychoanalysis field. Psychoanalysis criticism is a study that focused on the author's biography/ life that affects his literary works. According to Barry (2002:96), psychoanalytic criticism is a type of literary criticism that employs certain techniques to interpret literary works; it was developed by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). Psychoanalysis is a kind of therapy that focused on the dealing with conscious and unconscious human's mind in order to treat mental disorders (Freud, 1952: 342). Many studies talked about psychoanalysis criticism, that's means that this kind of research is interesting to research.

Zaidi (2016) done her study entitled “The Psychoanalytical Reading of Some Selected Poems of Robert Browning” using Freud’s theory about psychoanalytical theories to give a complexity interpretation regarding to certain poems of Robert Browning, The aim of her study lie on characters within the poetry in order to explain the concealed meaning and insightful interpretation of characters behavior in the poetry. The differences between this study with my current study lie in the scope of discussion. This study was focused on the characters in the poetry while this current study was focused on the author’s life (John Keats) that affects his writing on poetry entitled *When I Have Fears That I May Cease to be*, the other difference is, this study used more than one poem as the data source, whereas my current study was more focused only analyzed one poetry.

The study entitled “A Psychoanalytic Reading of Tanure Ojaide’s Poetry written by Awuzie (2017). His study emphasizes Jungian psychoanalysis, by analyzing Ojaide’s poetry, a poet from Africa. The analysis result shows that Ojaide’s poetry that the dominant nature of the archetype of the “wounded healer” is a result of the poet’s experience which is the center of the author’s poetic expression. The difference between this study with this current study was lie in the theory that used. This theory used Jungian psychoanalysis theory while my current study used Freud’s theory.

Regarding the background of the study, the problem of this study is to know how the author’s life affected his works of poetry. Following the problem of the study, the study aims to

explain the author's life affected his works of poetry, particularly his psychology, experience, and also the author's feelings depicted in the poetry. This type of study is interesting to research because by knowing the author's life, people will know the background of how the poetry that people read was made. This research is also important to research because by knowing and understanding the author's life who created the poem, the reader will get easier to get the meaning of the poetry in a whole with the result can minimize the misinterpretation of the poetry, besides can adding the new insight about the poem. Thus, make the reader not only can learn about the language, or the intrinsic of the poem but also how the culture and experience support the poetry to be better.

## **Method**

This research was a kind of library research, the data source was taken from the text of poetry by John Keats entitled "When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be". Documentation method-observation method and assisted by note-taking techniques were used to collect the data. The first step of the research was downloading the text of the poetry from the internet, then searching John Keats's biography, observing the text by reading it carefully repeatedly. At last, noting down the line which consisted of Keats's feeling.

Laptop, paper, and pen were used as the instrument for this research. The Qualitative method by informal technique was used to present the result of analysis in order to give a more

detailed explanation in a descriptive way through word, rather than in number.

## **Discussion**

In this section was present the result of the analysis, which was divided into four parts. The first section was talked about general information about the poem, the second part talked about the author's psychology, then the next part talked about the author's experience, and the last talked about the author's feelings.

### **1. General Information of the Poem**

The poem was written by English Romantic poet named John Keats was published in the Romantic era (England) in 1848 in *Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of John Keats* by Richard Monckton Milnes. This typed poem was a sonnet which has fourteen lines, with four stanzas which has three quatrains and one couplet. The theme of this poetry was about the fear of death, it may seem clearly from the title of the poem 'When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be' means that the writer is afraid of can't do anything in his life anymore. It talked about humanity and the possibility that death may come before the author (Keats) has realized all that he hopes in this world.

### **2. John Keats's Psychology**

There is only little who known of Keat's childhood. But he appears to have been happy with his family, until an incident happened on 15 April 1804. At that day, his father was fall from

the horse, because his horse stumbled. It makes his father seriously injured, and then he died the next day. The family was astonished not only emotionally but also financially. After that accident, Keats's mother decided to marry again, however, in 1808, her mother returned home in unwell condition. In March 1809, Keats's mother passed away caused by tuberculosis (as the same as her brother just a few months before). John Keats turns into the oldest male in his family. Until the end of his life, he always giving his love and protective his sister, named Fanny Keats.

His interest in academics and literature was a response to his seclusion after his parent death. Clarke (his friend) encouraged him to turn his energy and curiosity to the library and makes Keats's began to fall in love with of the power and romance of literature. He asked to read some novel and history classic and according to him, literature was more than a dreamy refuge for a lonely orphan: it was a "realms of gold"

Based on his journey of life that has changed drastically, from a complete and happy family, then the people he loves leaving this world one by one, makes John Keats sad for a long time. Poetry is a way for him to express what he feels. But, John Keats has a short time in this world, he had tuberculosis at a fairly young age, and because of his health problems, he wrote this poem as a reflection of what he feels. This poetry, actually reflects how he loves poetry so much, and he wants to write the poem until at the end of his life.

At first, glance, when we read this poem we might catch the big theme of this poem is the fear of death, but when looking at it more deeply, John Keats implies that he wants to continue working, he likes what he did now, and hopes to live for a long time to write all the beauty of nature, all the gifts of God into his poetry and want to achieve many more things in this life. In addition, John Keats' profession as a doctor, who related to many people, closely related with helping, and healing people, build a high sense of sympathy in John Keats' heart. As the same as the other doctor, he will feel sad when he cannot save his patient. The young John Keats, who lived without a father, and was left by her mother was might also be a trigger for the trauma that made him fear death. His father who died from falling from a horse became a painful memory stored in his mind, which means in his mind that death will make his life be lonely again.

### **3. John Keats's Experience**

In his spare time, as a teenager, Keats became passionately fond of poetry and when he was about 18 years old, he wrote his first poem. Keats was influenced by William Shakespeare. Indeed, "When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be" is written in a Shakespearean sonnet form, working as a doctor there were also experiences that he faced when he took his patient which deals with issues of time, death, and loss.

Biological and environmental factors may also influence his literary works. Keats's job in medication never sincerely took off. Keats' devotion to literature and the arts never ceased, even though he studied medicine. From his friend, Cowden Clarke,

whose father was the headmaster at Enfield, Keats was met by publisher, named Leigh Hunt of The Examiner. Through him, Keats was introduced to a politics that according to Keats, it was new to him and had significantly influenced his works. To respect of Hunt's kindness, Keats wrote the sonnet entitled, "Written on the Day that Mr. Leigh Hunt Left Prison." and from that meeting, John Keats became more and more interested in literature and was productive in making his works in romanticism era at England at that time. Before he died at the age of twenty-five, he has published fifty-four poems, in three slim volumes and a few magazines.

From his experience, may conclude that, Keats always interested in humanity, that proved by Keats learn medicine, and pouring his ideas about humanities into his works. Keats is a flexible person and always wants to learn something new and always respecting people around him who always supporting him to be better.

#### 4. John Keats's Feeling

This poetry correlates with psychoanalytical theory because it represented the author's unintended message which focuses on the author's background of life. With his sad tone of poetry, John Keats invites readers to think more deeply about death. That death will come to anyone, sooner or later, death will come to all people living in this world, in simple words, John Keats reminds the readers, that **'there is no eternal life for everything that exists in this world'**. Therefore, he reminds the reader to use his time with kindness and happiness and loves the people surrounding us. From this poetry, he also reminds us

to always be grateful for what we have, and keep working until the end of our life.

According to Freud (1952), language plays an important role to conveying hidden feelings, wishes, or desires. He argues that language and the unconscious are faithfully connected to each other.

When I have fears that I may cease to be  
Before my **pen** has gleaned my teeming brain,  
Before **high-piled books**, in character,  
Hold like rich garners the full ripened grain; (Stanza 1)

In this stanza one there was the imagery of pen and book which reflected Keats's life as a poet that spent his time with a writing activity. This stanza depicted Keats's feelings about death, the reader may visualize John Keats facing the pain, and suffering due to his tuberculosis fear about the death that getting closer to him. Another feeling was shown in stanza two, as follow

When I behold, **upon the night's starred face,**  
**Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,**  
And think that I may never live to trace  
Their shadows with the magic hand of chance; (Stanza 2)

In this stanza two his gratitude and his worries are at depicted the same time. When Keats looks at the sky at the night, he saw the night was full of the stars, which according to him it was beautiful and as his inspired to work. 'Huge cloudy as symbols of a high romance', which is always appear in human life relationship. In this stanza refers his hidden feeling that he couldn't be written in his poetry later because he knows death getting closer to his life.

And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,  
**That I shall never look upon thee more,**  
**Never have relish in the faery power**  
**Of unreflecting love—then on the shore** (Stanza 3)

In stanza three the author described his complicated emotion when he died, he thinks that he couldn't see someone that he loves, he will feel isolated and, far away from the mortal world that gives him comfort, warmth, feel alone, and there is no more love that he can feel as usual.

In the last stanza, he thinks that he will sink deep into loneliness likes standing all alone on a vast seashore, without any love, fame, and his achievement will do not matter, and it's impossible to deal with death.

**Of the wide world I stand alone, and think**  
**Till love and fame to nothingness do sink.**(Stanza 4)

## Conclusion

By using psychoanalysis approach we may know John Keats's feeling about death. Through this approached which focused on the author's life can be examined into three aspects, such as psychological aspect, author's experience, and also the feelings while making a works, which three of them link together and affected the result of the work. The result of the analysis may conclude that, through this poem, John Keats not only entertaining the reader but also remind the reader how important people should keep their healthy. The theme of death that Keats brings to this poem, invite the reader to always being

grateful with what we have now, is not only talked about the sadness however it also about Keats's spirit of working even though he knows that his life is not long.

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