

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

[**https://llrjournal.com/index.php/11**](https://llrjournal.com/index.php/11)

**NATURE AS A SANCTUARY: AN ECOCRITICAL
COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ESCAPISM IN JOHN KEATS'S *ODE
TO A NIGHTINGALE* AND GHANI KHAN'S *THE PALACE***



**Tahir Shah¹, Sawaira Shah², Dr. Abdur Razaq³,
Zubair Khan⁴**

¹*Ph.D. Scholar, Department of English, University of Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan*

²*M.Phil. Scholar, Department of English, Abdul Wali Khan University Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan*

³*Associate Professor, Department of English, Govt. Postgraduate College Dargai, Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan*

⁴*Lecturer, Department of English, Govt. Postgraduate College Dargai, Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan*

¹tahir4ici@gmail.com, ²sawairashah012@gmail.com,

³razaqabbas88@gmail.com,

⁴zubair8592@gmail.com

Abstract

*The research at hand explores how nature is portrayed as an escapist refuge in John Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale* and Ghani Khan's *The Palace* using the ecocritical approach. The study will examine how the two poets, both in different cultural, historical and stylistic settings, utilize the use of natural imagery, sensory motives and imaginary constructs to establish spaces of refuge that offered psychological, emotional and philosophical reprieve to the human suffering and existential fears. Based on the qualitative research design, the study applies a comparative literary analysis under the influence of close reading, thematic categorization, and ecocritical interpretation. As the poem by Keats is analyzed, the refuge is based on the momentary aesthetic and emotional escapism, where the song of the nightingale and the countryside scenery serves as the moment of transporting the poet out of mortality and worldly matters. Ghani Khan, in his turn, creates a sustainable and holistic refuge encompassing natural components in the walls of the palace to provide a more sensual and environment-oriented environment of both imaginative and philosophical contemplation. The comparative analysis shows that the two poets share the idea of finding solace and imaginative renewal and spiritual contemplation in nature, and diverge in their attitudes toward the temporality, the focus of senses, and cultural outlook. The study indicates how ecocriticism is applicable to the study of the role of literature in the development of the human perception of the natural world and their interaction with it. The results indicate that literature can be viewed as a reflection of ecological awareness and as the means of exploration of the imaginations, which points at the transformative role of nature in human experience.*

Keywords: *Nature, Sanctuary, Escapism, Ecocriticism, John Keats, Ghani Khan, Comparative Literature*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the study

As a source of comfort, renewal and escape out of human sufferings, nature has always been a strong imaginative space in the literary traditions in the different cultures. Since ancient times, poets resorted to nature to express inner turmoil and existential fear and depict nature as the place that could provide a short-term escape of social life stress. Such representational forms are critically analyzed in the current literature research in the theoretical framework of ecocriticism, which discussing the interaction of literature and physical environment, predicts the interdependence of human and non-human worlds (Garrard 5).

John Keats, one of the main representatives of the English Romanticism, is very graphic about nature as something that helps to escape pain and death in the poem, *Ode to a Nightingale*. Composed at a time when the poet was ill, grieving and socially unstable, the poem describes the desire of the poet to get out of the weariness, fever, and fret of human life to the eternal nature world (Keats line 23). The nightingale is used as a symbol of an eternity in nature that is a sharp

contrast to the mortal and pain-ridden human state. The focus of the poem on the restorative and transcendental nature of nature is an ecocritical approach and the Romantic notion about the natural world as a healing power that can provide psychological and imaginative freedom (Bate 38).

Likewise, in the poem of the Palace, Ghani Khan introduces nature as something vast and amazing and a place that has overcome the artificial limits created by the contemporary civilization. Ghani Khan recreates nature as a magnificent palace, huge, harmonious, and spiritually satisfying, in contrast to modern life and its materialism and alienation. His ecological awareness is expressed in his poetic vision which is based on South Asian philosophy where nature is not contemplated as a scenery but as a living, sacred space that can be used to bring contemplation and inner harmony (Khan 112). Ghani Khan, therefore, conforms to the ecocritical issues in this depiction because he criticizes anthropocentric thinking and the fact that humans depend on the natural environment.

Despite the fact that Keats and Ghani Khan hail from different cultural, historical, and literary traditions, there is a convergence of both poets in their depiction of nature as a refuge that facilitates escapism from suffering and social restrictions. A comparative reading of “Ode to a Nightingale” and “The Palace” using ecocriticism as the theoretical framework will enable the study to explore how nature serves as a universal refuge while also reflecting culturally specific ecological values. Using ecocriticism as the theoretical framework, the study will explore how the poetic imagination transforms human relationships with nature while also emphasizing the continued relevance of nature as a source of emotional, spiritual, and ecological nourishment (Buell 7).

1.2. Statement of the Research Problem

Despite the vast amount of critical literature on John Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale” and the increasing interest in Ghani Khan’s poetry, there is a clear absence of research in literary studies regarding an ecocritical comparative study of these two poets. Most of the existing literature on Keats’s work tends to focus on Romanticism, aestheticism, or biographical readings, while Ghani Khan’s approach to nature is mostly explored from cultural, mystical, or philosophical perspectives. In these studies, the ecological aspect of the works tends to be ignored, especially the common theme of nature as a sanctuary for escapism from human suffering, alienation, and the limitations of modern life. Moreover, the comparative studies on escapism and nature have mostly focused on Western literary traditions, leading to the neglect of South Asian voices in poetry. Therefore, the absence of a common ecocritical approach to a comparative study of “Ode to a Nightingale” and “The Palace” is the main research problem of this research. This research aims to fill this gap by exploring how both poets represent nature as a sanctuary for escapism and how their poetic visions can inform contemporary ecological discourses.

1.3. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in the fact that it sacrifices bright light into the historical reason for the human want to escape and reconsider this world at the light of writing: the natural world is, in fact, a way of existence for human nature. The research bridges disparate cultural, historical and literary traditions by comparing John Keats’ Ode to a Nightingale and Ghani Khan’s The Palace, to illuminate the ways in which escapism is a norm of human existence. The

study reveals how nature helps in poetic language to combat the transient and often painful side of human life. Additionally, it fills in to current conversations on ecocriticism, postcolonial studies, and Romantics literature by offering a multilayered lens that can encourage further research of the combination between cultural character, literary message, and the normal atmosphere.

1.4. Research Objectives

1. To examine how nature is represented as a sanctuary for escapism in John Keats's "*Ode to a Nightingale*" from an ecocritical perspective.
2. To analyze Ghani Khan's portrayal of nature as a sanctuary in "*The Palace*" through the lens of ecocriticism.
3. To compare and contrast the ecocritical dimensions of escapism in both poems in order to highlight cultural convergences and divergences in their representation of nature.

1.5. Research Questions

1. How does John Keats depict nature as a sanctuary that enables escapism in "*Ode to a Nightingale*" from an ecocritical perspective?
2. How is nature conceptualized as a sanctuary for escapism in Ghani Khan's "*The Palace*" within an ecocritical framework?
3. What similarities and differences emerge in the ecocritical representation of nature as a sanctuary in the selected poems?

1.6. Rationale of the Study

The rationale of this research is based on filling the significant gap in the field of comparative literary studies with regard to ecocritical interpretations of poetry in diverse cultural traditions. Although John Keats's "*Ode to a Nightingale*" has been extensively analyzed in the context of Romantic and aesthetic theories, and Ghani Khan's "*The Palace*" has been valued for its philosophical and cultural richness, it is a fact that both poems have hardly been subjected to ecocritical analysis, especially in a comparative mode. By using ecocriticism as a unified theoretical paradigm, this research proposes to highlight the ecological consciousness immanent in the poets' conception of nature as a refuge for escapism. The comparative study of a Western Romantic poet and a South Asian poet not only expands the horizon of ecocritical studies but also resists the hegemony of Eurocentric literary discourse by introducing indigenous ecological insights. Moreover, in the context of escalating environmental emergencies, this research is highly pertinent and timely as it underscores the imaginative construction of human-nature relations in literary texts and promotes a return to nature as a refuge for emotional, spiritual, and ecological rebalancing.

1.7. Delimitation of the Study

Within the scope of this study, the researcher has decided to use comparative analysis between two primary texts: John Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale* and Ghani Khan's *The Palace*. Specifically drawn to these texts, it does not look at other literary works or other thematic boundaries as it regards nature as a sanctuary of escapism. Also, as with these two works, the research does not go beyond analysis of literary devices, symbolism and cultural context while excluding broader

ecological or sociopolitical analysis to the works. For instance, though the study recognizes the wider applicability of these themes, it chooses to narrow its scope specifically to give in depth meaning to the works chosen in the study.

2. Literature review

2.1. Overview

This chapter of the literature review examines the existing critical literature on nature and transcendence in John Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" and Ghani Khan's "The Palace" to contextualize the current study among existing scholarship and to determine the critical gaps that the current study will fill. Critical literature on Keats has largely focused on the poem in the Romantic tradition, exploring the themes of imagination, beauty, mortality, and nature as a temporary escape from human suffering, largely within the aesthetic and philosophical traditions of the West. On the other hand, critical literature on Ghani Khan has largely explored his mystical vision, ecological consciousness, and symbolic recreation of nature as a refuge from the alienations of modernity in a Pashto and postcolonial context. However, these studies have largely focused on the two poets separately and have never made any attempt to read them comparatively across cultures. Through this literature review, it will be shown that there has been a critical gap in the existing literature on how both poets symbolically use nature to transcend the limitations of human experience in culturally different but thematically similar ways.

2.2. Related Literature

Literary ecology or ecocriticism is the study of the connection between literature and nature. It predicts the way literature portrays and interacts with ecological issues, the relationship between humans and nature, and the symbolic status of the natural world in human mind (Glotfelty; Buell). Ecocriticism dates back to the late twentieth century when William Rueckert coined the term in his essay *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism* that focusing literary analysis on the depiction and appreciation of nature in literature could be achieved. Since that time ecocriticism has also become an interdisciplinary practice, an amalgamation of environmental humanities, cultural theory and ecological ethics as a critique of anthropocentric worldviews and a premonstration of ecological interdependence (Wikipedia; Glotfelty). At the center of ecocriticism is the belief that literature is mirrored by and influences the way society perceives the environment and that ecocriticism makes the readers to think more deeply about human agency in the natural systems (Long; Buell).

In this theoretical background, the poem, *Ode to a Nightingale* by John Keats has received various critical reviews. Other works emphasize its Romantic side, which throws light on nature, beauty, and transcendence, as well as imagining structures and emotional coloring of the poem (Konain). Those who study Romantic elements observe how the song of the nightingale is turned into an escape of human suffering and death as a manifestation of the wider Romantic endeavors of beauty and truth outside the bounds of reality (Konain; Rizky). There are other stylistic and lexical studies that highlight the use of words and images to portray nature and mortality by Keats by use of words such as immortal and dream, in the poem, to show how escapist desire is in the imagery of nature (Jahan, Hashmi and Khan). Nonetheless, despite the aesthetic and psychological appeal that these studies have emphasized nature resonates with, few of them bring to bear an ecocritical approach that would place the *Ode to a Nightingale* within a wider

context of the environmental and ecological discourses. Ecocritical approaches to Keats usually take a more general approach to his odes with the aim of analyzing ecological harmony and human-nature relations, using the symbolic portrayal of idealized natural worlds and nostalgia of ecological harmony in the poem (Ziouch; Gautam). Such views indicate how ecocriticism can contribute to various readings of the poem by questioning the ecological imagination of the poem and representations of nature.

Unlike Ghani Khan, the poetry, particularly the Palace (Zama Mahal), of Ghani Khan has not been studied as extensively on ecocritical fronts: such explorations of nature and escapism do exist in regional scholarship. The analyses of the Ghani Khan work make it clear that escapism is a central theme in constructing an idealistic world with elements of nature that form a metaphorical escapist space against everyday conflict and is in part shown through the poem being one that creatively reinvents reality through nature (Ali, Saqib and Ali; QJSSH analysis). Additional studies accentuate the ecological awareness of Khan and his poetic relations with nature, ecological consciousness in his poetry, and imply various layers of ecological interaction based on the physical, intellectual, and mystical view of nature (Iqbal et al.). Moreover, investigations based on the thematic analysis of the poems by Ghani Khan also reveal the presence of such latent themes as escapism and misery, which means that Ghani Khan explored both emotional and existential aspects in the natural environment. Although these contributions are noteworthy, one still cannot help but notice a conspicuous lack of thorough ecocritical analysis that specifically deals with the topic of the Palace, specifically with how the idea of nature as sanctuary and refuge is conceptualized in the Palace.

There is even less comparable research between Keats and Ghani Khan. Although some of them do examine metaphor or thematic parallels in their poetry, such as conceptual metaphor theory in reference to love, death, and nature, in general, these studies tend to rely on such frames as conceptual metaphor theory and not touch on the ecological aspect of their representations (Fatima, Abad & Sabeen). In addition, comparative works on nature and escapism have frequently been preserved using Western literary traditions and thus have excluded non-Western poets such as Ghani Khan whose poetry has an abundant use of the natural imagery and philosophical thoughts on escape.

Other than its Romantic form, the poem, Ode to a Nightingale, has been gaining ecocritical interpretation that previews the poem as not only extended to nature as a backdrop, but also as lived ecological space. Modern critics believe that the poem displays an experience of human consciousness fused with the nature, and that the poetic self of Keats aspires to romantic unification with nature and not symbolic flight to nature (Gautam). According to the ecocritical reading of Gautam, the poem expresses a strong ecological unity where the individual is fused with nature and the anthropocentric wall between man and nature is broken. These readings are in line with the main concern of ecocriticism that literature tends to display symbiotic human relations to nature as opposed to depicting nature as picturesque or ornamental (Gautam). Likewise, other critics state that the ecological theme of Ode to a Nightingale, is a symbol of disruption and ideal reconstruction where, the imaginative space by the poet, the song of the bird gives an image of an ecological relationship that is not being part of real human life (Kong). These interpretations add to a greater insight into the ecological subtext of the poem, and Keats is no longer engaged in Romantic escapism, but a vision of ecological completeness with which subsequent environmental thought would find itself anticipatory.

Very closely tied to the ecocritical readings is the theme of escapism through the mediating effects of sensory experience in *Ode to a Nightingale*. The critics observe that the vivid imagery and sensuous language in the poem help the reader enter the world where the natural sounds, smells and textures make the space which is not burdened by the reality. The reviews of the sensory imagery underline the fact that the means that Keats employs, sound and smell, not only produce the aesthetic sensation, but also make the reader plunge into the sensual experience with nature as the poet does, in a way that helps him forget about pain and death (LiteratureTimes). Through the projection of the song of a nightingale as something natural and intoxicating, the poem places nature as a place of emotions and a healing ecological presence. This doubled purpose echoes the ecocritical propositions that the records of embodied relationships between humans and the environment can be enhanced through literary description of sensory experience. In the South Asian literary tradition, “The Palace” (Zama Mahal) by Ghani Khan has been analyzed for its thematic preoccupation with escapism, or the creation of an ideal world as a means of escape from reality. More contemporary research has emphasized the theme of escapism in the poem, analyzing the poet’s use of imagination to create the palace as a means of dealing with the difficulties and alienations of life (Ali, Saqib & Ali). This research has emphasized the role of sensory and symbolic details such as rose petal imagery, river sand imagery, and dewdrop imagery in the escapist appeal of the palace, illustrating how nature serves as a refuge for the poet’s emotional and imaginative liberation (Ali, Saqib & Ali; Qlantic). While these analyses have emphasized the theme of escapism, they also implicitly emphasize the ecocritical aspect of the poem by placing nature at the center of the poet’s imaginative world. An ecocritical analysis of the poem would extend these observations by analyzing the palace not only as a poetic device of escapism but also as a location of ecological sensibility that privileges natural processes and sensations over the anthropocentric modern reality.

Although individual ecocritical readings of Keats and thematic ecocritical studies of Ghani Khan have been conducted, comparative ecocritical studies are still rare. Most comparative studies on Zama Mahal and other world literature are generally more concerned with metaphor, romantic tropes, or cultural equivalents than with ecological approaches (Ali et al.; scholarly summary). This indicates a problem in ecocritical studies in general: ecocriticism has been more fully articulated in Western literary studies, and non-Western environmental poetics are less incorporated into the global ecocritical conversation. In using ecocritical approaches to both “Ode to a Nightingale” and “The Palace,” this research aims to help close this gap.

2.3. Research Gap

The current literature emphasizes the importance of nature in both “Ode to a Nightingale” and “The Palace,” as well as the theme of escapism. Nevertheless, there is a lack of critical engagement with the application of ecocritical theory to both poems, especially in a comparative manner that spans both the Romantic and South Asian traditions of poetry. Through the application of an ecocritical framework to both Keats and Khan, this research aims to shed light on the ways in which their respective engagements with nature as a site of refuge and escapism inform ecological discourses in literature.

CHAPTER 3**3. Research Methodology****3.1. Overview**

This chapter describes the research design, methods, and procedures used to explore nature as a sanctuary and escapism in John Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" and Ghani Khan's "The Palace." The research uses a qualitative research methodology, which is most suitable for literary analysis and the interpretation of text-based representations of nature, imagination, and escapism. More specifically, the research uses a comparative literary analysis method, which allows for a structured analysis of thematic, stylistic, and symbolic features of the two chosen poems. This chapter describes the selection of the texts for analysis, the criteria for comparative analysis, and the analytical framework developed from ecocritical theory, which is the sole theoretical framework used in this research. Moreover, this chapter describes the procedures for data collection and analysis, including close reading, textual annotation, and thematic coding. Finally, this chapter addresses the issues of validity and reliability in qualitative literary research, ensuring that the analysis is consistent, repeatable, and academically sound. In general, this chapter describes the methodology used in this research, which systematically explores the representation of nature as a sanctuary and its function in poetic escapism in two different literary traditions.

3.2. Research Design

This research uses a qualitative research design since it involves the analysis of literary works and the interpretation of the thematic, symbolic, and stylistic representation of nature as a sanctuary in literary works. Qualitative research is used to investigate complex human experiences, emotions, and imagination, which cannot be quantified (Creswell 4). The research uses a comparative literary analysis method to analyze John Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" and Ghani Khan's "The Palace," comparing both similarities and differences in their ecological representation of nature and the theme of escapism. The comparative research design allows for a systematic assessment of the influence of cultural, historical, and philosophical settings on the poets' imagination of nature.

3.3. Data Collection Method

The data used (mainly) for this research is composed of the Ode to a Nightingale by John Keats and The Palace by Ghani Khan. The authenticity of these texts is preserved through reading them in their original language in order to not fall victim to translation biases. Literary critiques, scholarly articles and books on Keats' and Ghani Khan's works, especially their themes, stylistic facets and historical contexts are the secondary sources as often one work of art is a result of the works of other artists and literary critics are oftentimes the first people to identify similarities among the works. Critical interpretations and peer reviewed studies are available in such online academic databases as JSTOR, Google scholar, and Research gate. Also, the worldviews that poets painted nature as a sanctuary are put into context through historical and biographical sources and the reason behind depicting nature as a sanctuary. It also adds to understanding of the poets' views of escapism as a concept in comparing Romantic poetry and Pashto literature. Primary and secondary sources are combined in an analysis that gives a well rounded and evidence based research.

3.4. Theoretical Framework

This research is rooted in the ecocriticism, a literary theory stating the connection between literature and nature and the manner in which anthropocentric understanding of nature is both represented, created and criticized in literature. Ecocriticism was first coined by William Rueckert, who, in his essay Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism, (1978) also highlighted that literature is a productive tool to study environmental awareness and the symbolic, cultural, and emotional value of nature (Rueckert 71). Ecocritical theory refers to anthropocentric views by emphasizing on the interdependence of humans and non-human world and argues that we should have a more sustainable and ethically conscious relationship with nature (Buell 7).

In ecocriticism, literature is considered not merely in its aesthetic and narrative features but in its environmental connotations such as depictions of natural environments, ecological interdependence, and ethical nature of human beings toward the environment (Garrard 5). The theory acknowledges that literature works may create spaces of refuge, sanctuary, or escapism, in which human beings can negotiate the conflict between social forces and the healing power of nature (Glotfelter 21). Using this point of view, the paper learns poetry as the place of the intersection of ecological values and human desires, providing an opportunity to understand how literature may help to create environmental consciousness and imaginal involvement with nature. Ecocriticism is applicable to the context of this research that examines the concept of nature as a place of escapism in John Keats poem, Ode to a Nightingale, and the poem, The Palace, by Ghani Khan. Ecocriticism used in the poem reveals to the reader the role of the natural pictures of the nightingale and its surrounding create the poet in his wish to fight death and human misery (Keats line 23). On the same note, the ecocritical analysis that is evident in the work of Ghani Khan sheds light on how the palace built in the poem is fundamentally connected with nature as a psychological, spiritual and ecological paradise (Ali, Saqib & Ali).

With the use of ecocriticism, one can make a comparative analysis of both poems in cultural and historical realms without disregarding their ecological aspects. It makes it easier to understand how nature works not only as an object of the theme but also as a subject that impacts the perception of a person, the emotional experience, and even the imagination consciousness. Finally, this theoretical framework facilitates the research to question the universal and cultural particularities of literature creating nature as a refuge and an escape, thus adding to the bigger discourse in comparative literature, ecocritical theory, and environmental humanities.

3.5. Data Analysis Procedure

This study applies qualitative methods of reading that involve content analysis and ecocritical reading of literature to study how nature is represented as a refuge and an escapist place in John Keats Ode to a Nightingale and Ghani Khan in The Palace. Close reading has been used as the initial step in the analysis, with all poems being read severally on the first step to determine the essential imagery, motifs, and words used in reference to nature and escapism. Thematic categorization was done after that to isolate common themes like sanctuary, refuge, escapism and harmony with the natural world. The paper then used comparative analysis to find out the similarities and differences in the way Keats and Ghani Khan understand nature as a sanctuary, with respect to style and theme. Lastly, the results were regarded through ecocriticism and highlighted the ecological awareness, moral values, and cultural peculiarities of thinking hidden

in the texts (Rueckert 71; Bate 38). This unified process maintains that the analysis process is orderly, logical and well supported with theoretical basis of the study guiding principles.

CHAPTER 4

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1. Overview

Chapter 4 is where the analysis and discussion of the chosen poems, John Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" and Ghani Khan's "The Palace," are done using the ecocritical approach. This chapter systematically evaluates the representation of nature as a place of refuge and escape in both poems, analyzing the thematic, stylistic, and symbolic features of each. The analysis begins with a close reading of Keats' imagery, sound, and word choice in the construction of a natural refuge of transcendence from human pain. It then moves on to the poetic vision of Ghani Khan, analyzing the sensory, philosophical, and symbolic aspects of nature in the creation of a place of refuge and reflection. After the analysis of each poem, a comparative analysis is done to highlight the similarities and differences between the two poets' conceptualization of nature, taking into consideration their respective cultural, historical, and philosophical backgrounds. Throughout this chapter, ecocritical tenets are used to interpret the poems, emphasizing their ecocritical awareness, ethics, and imaginative engagement with nature. This chapter thus forms the heart of the research, connecting the theoretical framework, literature review, and research aims to a textual analysis that responds to the research questions.

4.2. Keats's Nature as Sanctuary for Escapism

In *Ode to a nightingale*, John Keats creates nature as a refuge that enables the poetic self to forget human suffering and mortality momentarily with the beauty and permanence of the natural world. In the very beginning, the speaker is physically and emotionally uncomfortable, as opposed to the apparent comfort and liberation of the nightingale. His bodily suffering, which he tries to overcome by plunging into the soundscape of nature, is described in the following words: "My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains / My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk" (lines 1-2). This contrast of pain and escape is an indicator of the major ecological conflict in this poem, human aspiration to escape the boundaries of sorrow and enter the natural order that is full of harmony but appears to be free of time.

This sanctuary is supported with natural imagery. In stanza two, Keats wishes he could have a draught of vintage, a wish that he never fulfills. "draught of vintage ... / Tasting of Flora and the country green" as a symbol of rejuvenation and release from worldly concerns (lines 11-14). Here the wine, which is dominated by pastoral connotations because of the implication it contains, does not work literally, but rather metaphorically, as the ability of the wine to lead to the sensory overload of the natural world, to offer psychological relief and imaginative escapism. By juxtaposing the organic and healing nature of the world of the nightingale with the harshness of the mortality, Keats adds another layer of ecocriticism to this poem. The third stanza has the mention of the fever and the fret, and images of decay, including "the pale" and "spectre-thin", emphasize the suffering of people and the temporality of life (lines 21-24) and while the song of the bird remains "immortal" and enduring—"Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!" (line 61). This opposition highlights the symbolic position of nature as a temporal refuge which presents a glimpse of an eternal beauty out of human finiteness.

The last lines of the poem, “Was it a vision, or a waking dream? / Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?” leave the reader unsure whether the experience is reality or a dream, and that the speaker is momentarily free to run away into the protective embrace of nature, but at the end becomes a victim of the human mind (lines 79-80). Keats therefore does not merely use nature as a background but as an ecological setting that provides momentary escape of the suffering despite them having to come back to reality.

Using sensory imagery, symbolic oppositions of the nightingale song and mortality, and tension between sight and reality, Keats turns the nature to the den of the imagination and emotional rest a place where the poetic self is able to avoid the feather and the worry of the human life the fever and the fret.

4.3. Analysis for Research Objective 2: Ghani Khan’s Nature as Sanctuary for Escapism

In the poem “The Palace” (Zama Mahal) by Ghani Khan, nature is richly envisioned as the basis for an ideal world that is a refuge from the problems of the real world, and this represents a deliberate desire to escape into a world constructed through the principles of beauty, pleasure, and imagination. The poet builds this palace “from the white sands of the river,” which literally establishes the structure in the natural world, rather than in the human world, indicating a profound ecological connection between the poet and nature.

Each aspect of the envisioned palace is interwoven with organic and sensory imagery: “carpeted with rose petals,” with walls “made of melodies, sung by Rabab,” and lined with “the dewdrops of a necklace I entwined” — to create a world in which nature is a haven for emotions as well as imagination.(writerscafe.org) Such pastoral and sensory details not only represent aesthetic satisfaction but also emotional solace, suggesting that the speaker’s retreat into this ecological world is both a psychological escape and a profound engagement with nature’s cycles.

As scholars examining the poem confirm, “The Palace” employs this kind of rich imagery and symbolism to convey the speaker’s imaginative escape from the real world to a created emotional and ecological paradise. As research on the poem suggests, the speaker’s attempt to “disappear into an idealized, imagined world filled with beauty, nature, and sensory delight” is evident throughout the poem, making escapism a prominent theme conveyed through natural imagery and metaphorical language.(qjssh.com.pk) The palace itself, therefore, symbolically represents an ecological paradise – a place where the emotional and aesthetic needs of the speaker are met through refuge from the limitations of the real world.

The final stanzas of the poem further emphasize the speaker’s permanent state of wonder and emotional engagement with the world: the world, “in great amazement,” looks upon the palace and its people in wonder, underscoring the speaker’s imaginative creation and its significant effect (translation). The constant wonder of the outside world not only emphasizes the distinctiveness of the paradise but also underlines the speaker’s ecological imagination’s ability to go beyond the normal perceptions of the world, making nature an integral part of the experience of escapism.

By means of sensory imagery, metaphoric representation of a palace that has its roots in nature, and the emotional appeal of natural elements, “The Palace” by Ghani Khan thus represents nature as a refuge that satisfies the speaker’s need for escape. Such representation of nature is consistent with ecocritical readings that consider literature as a realm in which the human and

natural domains meet, so that the reader can imagine other ways of being that have their roots in nature and not in human conflict or alienation.

4.4. Comparative Analysis: Keats and Ghani Khan on Nature as Sanctuary

While John Keats and Ghani Khan both view nature as a refuge that provides solace from the struggles of life, they do so through the lens of very different cultural and aesthetic traditions. In “Ode to a Nightingale,” Keats focuses on the contrast between the mortal struggles of human existence and the eternal life of nature. The song of the nightingale symbolizes continuity, beauty, and liberation from mortality: “Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!” (line 61). Nature, in Keats’ Romantic philosophy, serves as a temporary refuge, providing imaginative and emotional consolation, but not a permanent escape from the challenges of life (Gautam). The refuge in Keats’ poem is thus more psychological and aesthetic, created through engagement with sensory experience, particularly sound, taste, and vision, which enables the poet to escape the “fever and the fret” of life (lines 21-22).

By contrast, Ghani Khan’s “The Palace” projects a more holistic and physically engaged concept of a sanctuary, wherein nature itself becomes the very foundation of the poet’s utopian world. Each aspect of the palace, from the “white sands of the river” to “carpeted rose petals” and “dewdrops of a necklace,” illustrates a deepening of the integration of natural elements and experience in the formation of a sanctuary (Ali, Saqib & Ali). In this poem, nature is not simply symbolic or aesthetic; it is, rather, the very architecture of escapism, offering both psychological and physical refuge. The poem illustrates a cultural philosophy in which human well-being and nature are inextricably linked.

Despite these differences, both poets share a common vision in which escapism is inextricably linked to sensory engagement with nature. Keats’s auditory and olfactory experience is analogous to Ghani Khan’s visual, tactile, and musical experience of nature in the formation of a sanctuary that meets emotional, imaginative, and philosophical needs. In both poems, ecocritical theory underscores the idea that nature is not a passive background but an active participant in the formation of human perception, emotion, and imagination (Rueckert 71; Bate 38).

However, an important difference exists with regard to temporality and permanence. Keats’s vision of nature’s sanctuary is temporary and transitory, finally leaving the poet to wonder whether the experience was real or mere imagination: “Was it a vision, or a waking dream? / Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?” (lines 79-80). Ghani Khan, on the other hand, builds a sanctuary that is long-lasting and all-encompassing, with the palace’s ecological features representing eternal harmony and imaginative domination over the natural environment (Ali, Saqib, & Ali). This is because the poets’ cultural and philosophical backgrounds are different, with Keats’s Romanticism focusing on individual emotional sublimation and Ghani Khan’s vision encompassing community, ecology, and philosophical thought in the experience of nature as a sanctuary.

In conclusion, the comparative study has shown that, although both poets have envisioned nature as a sanctuary for escapism, their methodologies differ in terms of scope, sensory preoccupation, and cultural understanding. While Keats’s vision is temporary and psychological, Ghani Khan’s vision is comprehensive and ecological. Both poems thus illustrate that the human need for refuge in nature is universal, but the manner of representing this refuge is determined by aesthetic and ecological sensibilities.

CHAPTER 5**5. Conclusion and Recommendations****5.1. Conclusion**

The current research fully addressed the symbolization of nature as an escapist sanctuary in John Keats Ode to a nightingale and Ghani Khan the palace in terms of ecocriticism where the two works are located within their respective cultural, historical, and philosophical frames of reference. It became clear that both the poets use nature not only as a background or ornament, but as moving, all-encompassing, and alive space, which helps the poetic self to overcome the constraints of human sufferings, social expectations and existential fears. The short lived psychological and aesthetic reprieve, in which the song of the nightingale, and deep pastoral scenes, momentarily lift the poet out of mortality and grief and daily oppressions, and allow a dissolution of the self into the continuity and beauty of nature, is highlighted in the poem in the Romantic vision of Keats. The sensory and auditory pictures of the poem, the immortal song of the bird, to the smell of the Flora and the country green, is the means of imaginative escape, the way the natural world can be used as an interim emotional and spiritual refuge.

Contrastingly, Ghani Khan develops a sustainable, complete, and environmentally unified refuge in The Palace where nature is not a peripheral content, but the building materials and the architecture itself are natural. The palace made out of the river sands, petals, dewdrops and music is a model of a place where the poetic imagination and the nature cannot be separated, thus forming a kind of a place where the person can find not only emotional renewal but also the opportunity to the philosophic meditation and a greater understanding of the ecological harmony. The multiple layers of sensory and symbolic modes of the poem illustrate the way the poet connects with the natural world as a sustaining and life-giving presence and this goes beyond simple escapism in terms of the profound cultural and ecological awareness.

The comparative analysis also showed that despite the significant distinctions in their cultural and historical contexts as well as the way they approach the topic of nature, both Keats and Ghani Khan find themselves in the same place, as they turn to nature, as a source of comfort, emotional and imaginative renewal, and philosophical depths, and verify the timelessness of the desire to take emotional and spiritual refuge in the natural world. The theoretical framework, ecocriticism, was especially strong in revealing the ethical, philosophical, and ecological aspects of the texts, and how literature could be helpful in developing the awareness about the interconnection of the human beings with the surrounding environment. Finally, the research also validates that literature is both a reflection of ecological awareness and also a means of imaginative discovery, that the sanctuary and escapism come together to reveal the transformative opportunities of nature in terms of human perception, feeling, and morality of engagement with the world.

5.2. Recommendations

On the basis of the results of this research, the following recommendations can be made for general use in academia. Firstly, future research could be conducted on empirical research that investigates the response of readers to ecological and escapist aspects of poetry, thus connecting literary imagination with modern environmental awareness and ethics. Secondly, a trans-disciplinary approach is encouraged, which combines literary studies with environmental studies,

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

philosophy, and psychology to investigate the complex relationships between nature, human emotion, and cultural expression. Thirdly, the promotion of the translation and availability of non-Western poetry, including the poetry of Ghani Khan, can ensure that ecocritical scholarship is more diverse, representative, and inclusive of different cultures from around the world, thus facilitating comparative studies of different literary traditions. Finally, the integration of ecocritical approaches to environmental education can ensure that the role of literature in shaping ethical, emotional, and imaginative responses to nature is understood, thus facilitating a deeper understanding of human responsibility towards the environment.

References

Ali, Akbar, Muhammad Saqib, and Saima Ali. "Ghani Khan: His Flight from the Real in the Poem *My Palace (Zama Mahal)*." *Qlantic Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, vol. 4, no. 4, 2023, pp. 310–322.

Bate, Jonathan. *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition*. Routledge, 1991.

Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Harvard University Press, 1995.

Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2012.

Glotfelty, Cheryll, and Harold Fromm, editors. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. University of Georgia Press, 1996.

Gautam, R. "An Ecocritical Reading of Self in Keats' *Ode to a Nightingale*." *Scholars: Journal of Arts & Humanities*, 2021, pp. 1–14.

Iqbal, Hina, et al. "An Ecocritical Study of Abdul Ghani Khan's Poetry." *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2022, pp. 1394–1408.

Jahan, Kalsoom, et al. "Lexical Choices and Thematic Depth in John Keats' *Ode to a Nightingale*." *Journal of Social Signs Review*, 2025.

Keats, John. *The Complete Poems*. Edited by John Barnard, Penguin Classics, 2006.

Kong, Fanting. "The Ecocritical Analysis of *Ode to a Nightingale* by John Keats." *ICCESE 2019 Proceedings*, Atlantis Press, 2019.

Konain, Rafey. "Romantic Longing and Eternal Song: Imagination and Escapism in John Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale*." *Contemporary Journal of Social Science Review*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2025.

Khan, Ghani. *The Selected Poems of Ghani Khan*. Translated by Riaz A. Shahid, Oxford University Press, 1995.

Love, Glen A. "Revaluing Nature: Toward an Ecological Criticism." *Western American Literature*, vol. 25, no. 3, 1990, pp. 201–215.

Rueckert, William. "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." *The Iowa Review*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1978, pp. 71–86.

Wikipedia Contributors. "Ecocriticism." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, 2026.

Ziouch, Ali Djazil. *John Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" & "To Autumn": An Ecocritical Inquiry*. Université 8 mai 1945 – Guelma, 2022.