

To what extent is Keats' 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' a tragedy in the Bradleyan sense?

A.C Bradley depicts a to be a 'tale of suffering and calamity conducting to death', portrayed in Keats' 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' by the inevitable spiral of decline the main 'hero' entrails. Keats' use of a lexis of decay in the physiognomy of the 'haggard' knight evokes empathy from the reader, as it becomes evident the knight has succumbed to his wilting state. Key features of the Knight are the 'lily on thy brow' and the 'fading rose' on his cheek. The floral metaphors of 'lily' and 'rose' portrays a once beautiful state, accentuating his former glory. Keats, a romantic poet, portrays nature's beauty to be above science and logic, perhaps suggesting the knights former state to be above all else. He is shown as a man of 'high degree' – a Bradleyan tragic hero. This is directly juxtaposed by the crumbling state of nature, as the slow acting noun 'fading' describes the knight's glory as fleeting, comparable to someone's health being affected by suffering. The knights suffering began before the Dame but is more significant when she approaches him.

The knight meets his end 'on the cold hills side' as he envisions 'pale kings', 'pale warriors' all of whom were 'death-pale'. Keats' use of listing of three emphasises the ongoing suffering the knight will entrail. As the first two are simple repetitions of the cold adjective 'pale', they highlight the long, drawn out suffering the knight shall endure. Whereas Keats emphasises the tragedy of 'death-pale'. Our heroes spiral of suffering ends with his unfortunate death, completing the Bradleyan tragedy.

In a Bradleyan tragedy 'the omnipotence of fortune or fate' contrasts the 'powerlessness of man', which Keats conveys through his cyclical structure which cannot be reversed by our helpless hero, who is enticed by the siren-like dame. By repeating his opening stanza to finish his poem, Keats' emphasises the unavoidable future which waits for the knight due to his involvement with The Dame. Keats shows the power of man and his temptation towards love proves powerless to the supremacy of fate. The Dame, who Keats portrays as a supernatural being through his use of magical lexis, is conveyed to have an enticement over the knight as she 'lulled him' and 'took him' as she pleased. Through his use of guiding verbs, the narrator establishes a sense of hierarchy between the pair, unusually contradicting the archetype of 18th century patriarchy. Thus, enforcing a sense of helplessness surrounding the knight, as he is reigned over by a woman. Furthermore, the screams of kings emphasises the powerless of men as they cry that the dame 'hath thee in thrall!'. Through these pitiful cries, the reader is shown the possessive nature of The Dame. This juxtaposition in nature of men and women show men's real lack of control in his society, and therefore his lack of position in life. Thus the knight succumbs to the Bradleyan ideal of a tragic hero, showing 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' to be a tragedy.