



“The Fleshly School of Poetry” vis-à-vis Victorian Heteropatriarchy: A Queer Ecofeminist Reading of Select Pre-Raphaelite Poetry and Paintings

Koushik Mondal

Abstract

Women are symbolically and mythologically associated with nature in the Western tradition. Reinforcing the myth, Enlightenment philosophy celebrates human rationality and masculinity over nature and women. In contrast, though ecofeminism believes in this close contiguity of women with nature, it finds human beings, especially white male in the role of the plunderer. Thus, whether in the patriarchal tradition of the West or in the discourse of the ecofeminism, a hierarchical binary relation between human beings and nature, men and women is taken for granted. But moving beyond this duality, there are some ecofeminists like Plumwood who argues to view nature or women not as a relational opposite, but as a distinct unique autonomous entity. Here lies the germ of intersection between ecofeminism and queer theory. Queer ecofeminism not only does away with any kind of hierarchical binary construction of nature or anything ‘natural’ in contrast to everything cultural or rational but also explores nature as feminised, eroticised and queered. The paper seeks to explore how the Pre-Raphaelite poets and painters resist the grand narratives of Enlightenment and Victorian heteronormativity from a queer ecofeminist perspective. These poets and painters not only foreground the real nature in its simplicity and freshness instead of presenting nature as mere background or resource for the furthering on of human culture, but also voice for women’s autonomy and alternative sexuality, resisting the regimes of heteronormativity altogether. Without conforming to the dualistic principle of the erotophobic and homophobic Victorian heteropatriarchy, these poets and painters call for the celebration of nature’s autonomy, women’s vitality and sexual multiplicity.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Queer, Pre-Raphaelite, Heteropatriarchy.