

# *Landscape, Mimesis and Morality*

*-John Ruskin*



**Prepared by**

V.L.Vijay Krishna,

Assistant Professor,



Dept. of English,

S.T. Hindu College, Nagercoil.



# The Pathetic Fallacy


- ▶ Pathetic fallacy is the attribution of human emotion to inanimate objects, nature, or animals.
- ▶ Coined by English cultural critic John Ruskin in the third volume of his work “Modern Painters”.

- 
- 
- Difference between ordinary, **true appearances** of things and extraordinary, **false appearances**.
  - False appearances- under influence of emotion, contemplative fancy
  - False appearances- without any power or character, imputed by us.




“The spendthrift crocus, bursting through the mould  
Naked and shivering, with his cup of gold.” (O.W. Holmes, *Astraea*)



- 
- **The Crocus:** Not a spendthrift, but a hardy plant; Not gold, but saffron.
  - We enjoy this idea more than imagining a plain crocus.
  - Even though this is untrue, it is pleasurable.
  - Our favourite poems are full of this kind of fallacy, and we like it for being so





## Pathetic fallacy– two principle kinds

➤ **Wilful fancy**- no real expectation that it will be believed.

Or else

➤ Fallacy caused by an excited state of feeling, making us irrational




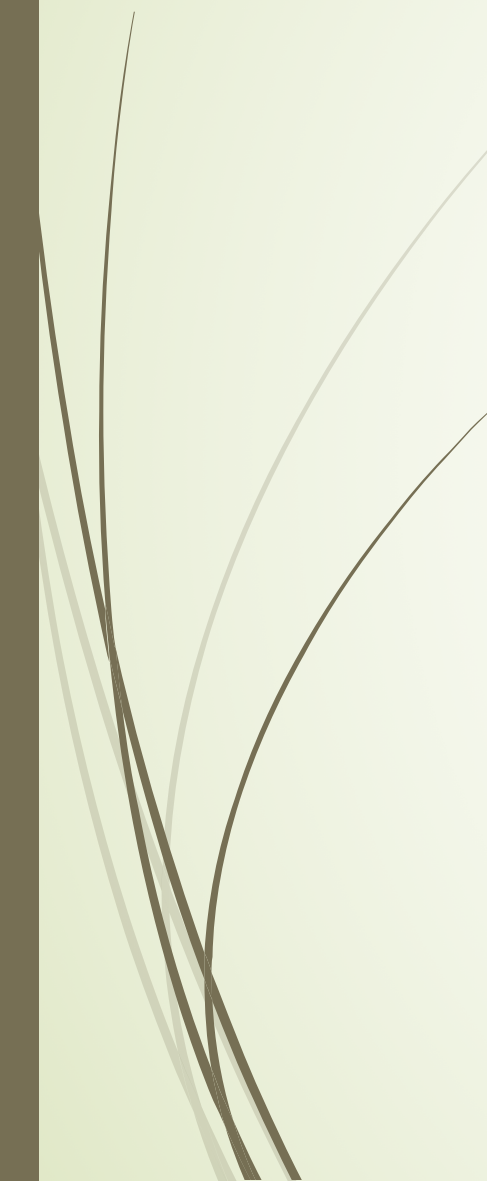
**“They rowed her in across the rolling foam-  
The cruel, crawling foam”**

The foam – Neither cruel, nor crawling


Only an irrational mind, distressed by grief, would attribute this to foam.

This false impression is called as ‘Pathetic Fallacy’

We praise these kind of fallacies as highly poetic.

- 
- 
- According to Ruskin, only second order of poets cherish these fallacies, than eminent poets.
  - Dante describes the spirits falling from the bank of Acheron ,  
“as dead leaves flutter from a bough” (*Inferno*, III, 112)
  - This imagery describes the lightness, feebleness, passiveness and scattering agony of the souls
  - He also creates a clear distinction between leaves and souls





*“The one red leaf, the last of its clan,  
That dances as often as dance it can”* (Christabel, Pt 1)



- Coleridge creates a false idea about the leaf.
- He describes it as a living being
- Confuses its powerlessness with choice, fading death with merriment, wind with music
- But there is some beauty in this morbid passage



# Homer vs Alexander Pope

**“Elpenor? How camest thou under the shadowy darkness?**

**Hast thou come faster on foot than I in my black ship? (Homer, *Odyssey*, XII, 56)**


VS

**O, say, what angry power Elpenor led**

**To glide in shades, and wander with the dead?**

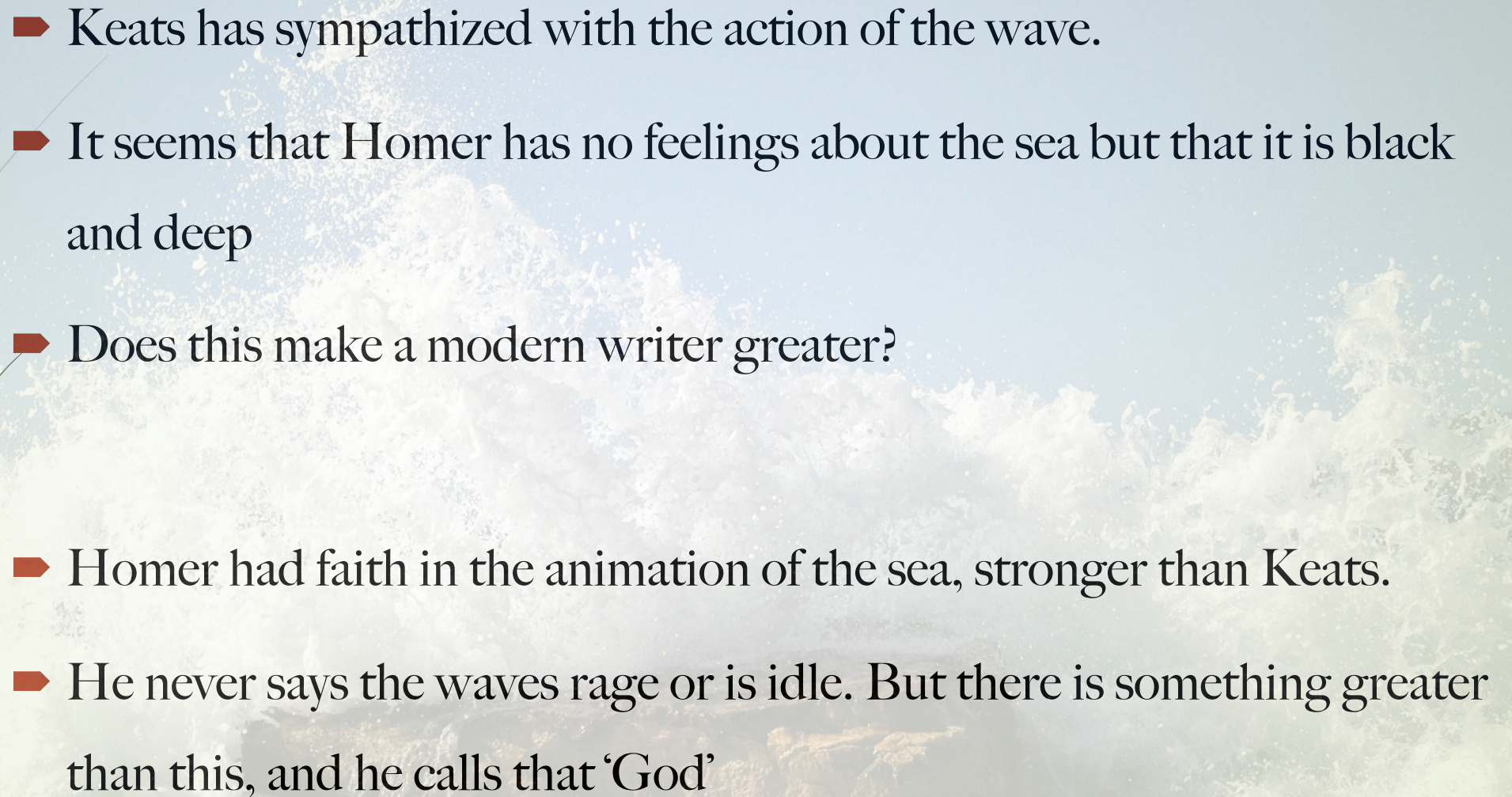
**How could thy soul, by realms and seas disjoined,**

**Outfly the nimble sail, and leave the lagging wind? (Pope’s translation of *Odyssey*)**

- 
- No pleasure in Pope's version
  - Still these conceits are painful, but **Homer's version seems to be pleasant**
  - Ruskin criticizes Alexander Pope as, "No poet of true imaginative power could possibly have written the passage"
  - In order to enjoy the fallacy, there must be some sort of truth.
  - "Coleridge's fallacy has no discord in it, but Pope's has set our teeth on edge"
  - Pathetic fallacy is a morbid state of a weak mind
  - Pathetic fallacy has become a prominent characteristic of modern mind.

**“Down whose green back the short-lived foam, all, hoar,  
Bursts gradual, with a wayward indolence.”** (Keats, *Endymion*, II, 350)


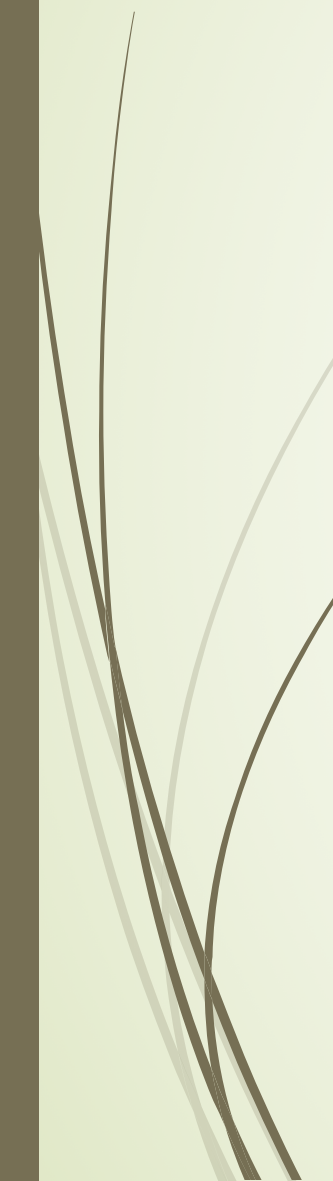
- ▶ Perfect example of the modern manner
- ▶ Homer would have never thought of these kind of words like “wayward indolence”
- ▶ Homer would have used descriptive epithets about its physical nature.
- ▶ He would call the waves ‘over-roofed’, ‘full-charged’, ‘monstrous’, ‘compact-black’, ‘dark-clear’, ‘violet-coloured’, ‘wine-coloured’, etc.
- ▶ Homer is clear in one point that, the wave, from beginning to the end, is nothing but salt water.


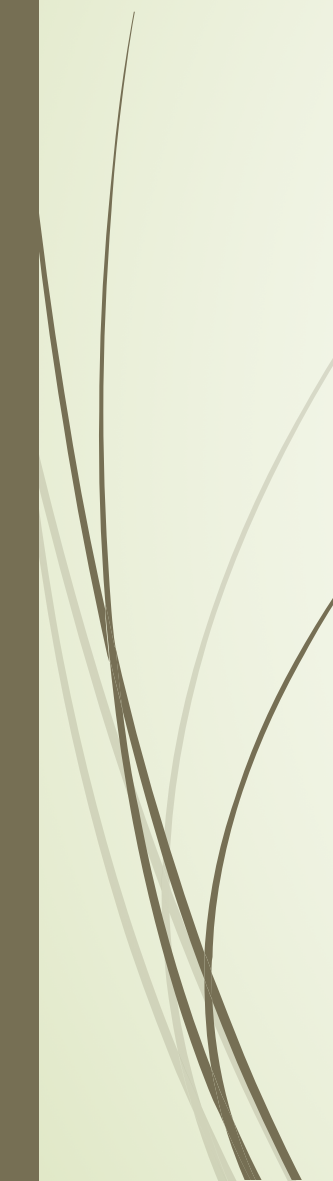
- 
- Keats has sympathized with the action of the wave.
  - It seems that Homer has no feelings about the sea but that it is black and deep
  - Does this make a modern writer greater?
  
  - Homer had faith in the animation of the sea, stronger than Keats.
  - He never says the waves rage or is idle. But there is something greater than this, and he calls that 'God'





# *The Moral of Landscape*

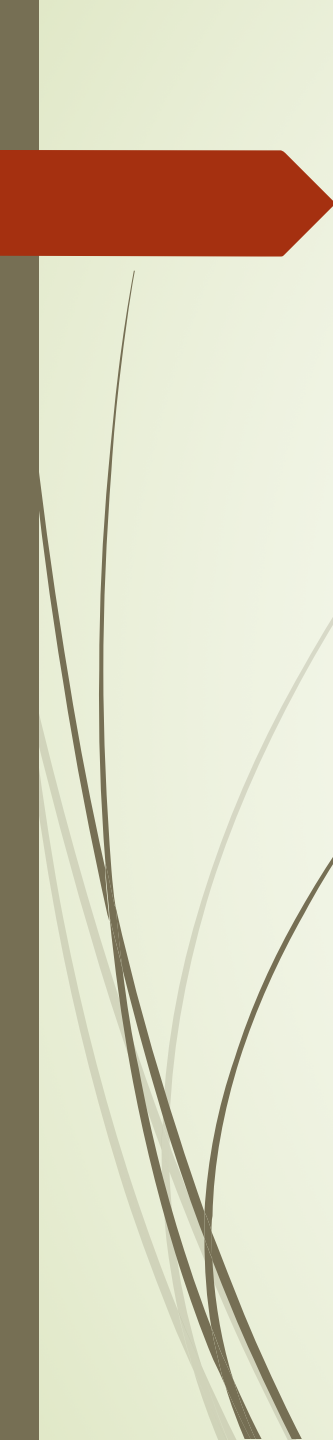
- The love of nature is a sign of goodness of heart and justness of moral perception
- The degree of nobleness and beauty of character is felt in proportion to the degree of the love of nature.

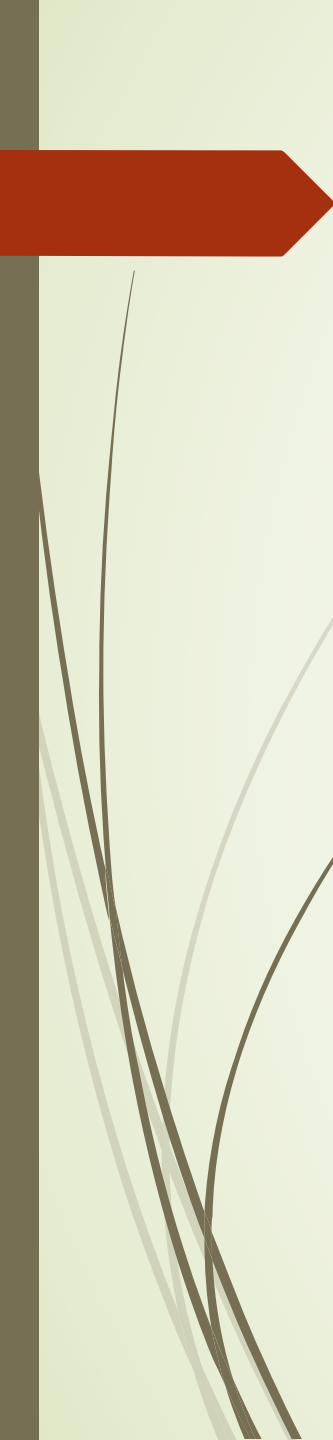
- 
- 
- By the accident of education, Love of nature – associated with willfulness
  - By the accident of time, associated with faithlessness
  - Faithlessness is an invariable concomitant of love
  - Love of nature has always been a faithful and sacred element of human feeling
  - Person who loves nature will have more faith in God than the other.
  - Nature-Worship would bring with it a sense of presence and power of a great spirit.
  - Nature-Worship : channel of sacred truths

- 
- 
- The mechanical impulses of the age: merely a passing fever, half speculative.
  - Two classes of precious things in world:
    - That God gives us for nothing (sun, air, life)
    - Things that God gives us for a price (wine milk, etc. bought for money)- They can never be cheapened.



- 
- 
- Do we want to be strong? – We must work
  - To be hungry? – We must starve
  - To be happy? – We must be kind
  - To be wise? – We must look and think

- 
- All the technological and scientific inventions will not make us stronger, happier, or wiser.
  - The grand inventions of humankind for conquering space and time, in reality, could conquer nothing.
  - Space and time are unconquerable
  - They never wanted to be conquered; they wanted to be used.
  - A fool wants to shorten space and time. A wise man lengthens both
  - A fool wants to kill space and time. A wise man tries to gain them.
  - True glory of a man is not at all in going, but in being.

- 
- To watch the corn grow, and the blossoms set; to draw hard breath over ploughshare or spade; to read, to think, to love, to hope, to pray, – these are the things that make men happy;
  - They have always had the power of doing these, they never will have power to do more.
  - Our prosperity and adversity depends upon our knowing and teaching these things

