

To a Nightingale by John Keats

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains

My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,

Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains

One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:

'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,

But being too happy in thine happiness,—

That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,

In some melodious plot

Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,

Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been

Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,

Tasting of Flora and the country green,

Dance, and Provencal song, and sunburnt mirth!

O for a beaker full of the warm South,

Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,

With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,

And purple-stained mouth;

That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,

And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget

What thou among the leaves hast never known,

The weariness, the fever, and the fret

Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;

Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,

Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;

Where but to think is to be full of sorrow

And leaden-eyed despairs,

Principle stress is a struggle between the ideal and actual: inclusive terms, which, however, contain more particular antitheses of pleasure and pain, of imagination and common sense reason, of nature and of the human, of art and life, freedom and bondage, waking and dream.

Ambiguous pronoun "Tis" to refer to the nightingale. He is oppressed by the song's beauty and joy. Rather than jealousy/ "envy," he is delighted because of the bird's joy. His "drowsy numbness" is not resulted out of any wine or drug, rather it is the extreme delight that he feels after listening to the bird's song.

Keats cannot see the nightingale. It is only a voice within the poem in the figurative representation "light-winged Dryad of the trees" evades its image. It compels the narrator to join with in and forget the sorrows of the world.

Keats associates drinking with a dulling of perceptions ("leav[ing] the world unseen," link between intoxication and comfort. Romantic association of the origin country of wine "warm South," "Sunburnt mirth!" "Provencal song." Sensuousness of taste, colour, smell, sound. Essential natural product of the Earth. Dionysian joy. Richness of beauty

The "forest dim" suggests a place to disappear with the nightingale into the deep dark of the forest. There is a tension in that the narrator holds Keat's guilt regarding the death of Tom Keats, his brother. Result of trying to escape into the realm of fantasy.

Keats rejects the traditional depiction of the nightingale as related to the tragedy of Philomela. This songbird is only happy, that "hast never known" melancholy or despair. As such, the song of the nightingale is an enchanting presence directly connected to nature. The song is for beauty and lacks a message of truth. Nightingale is a liberating emblem, of being freed from pain and suffering. Keats desires the same freedom that the nightingale sings

Dream image emphasises the shadowiness and elusiveness of the poem. These elements make it impossible for there to be a complete self-identification with the nightingale, but it also allows for self-awareness to permeate throughout the poem, albeit in an altered state. The soft /m/, /n/, /s/, and /l/ consonance and /d/ alliteration give the opening its "drunk" and "drowsy" atmosphere. Numbness. Underworld

Hellenism — references to classical myths and legend, like "light-winged Dryad of the trees." Classification of the nightingale as a female. Promotes the bird to the status of a naturally sensual and mythic creature. The happiness of the nightingale is exemplified by that it "singest of Summer in full-throated ease." It is a happy bird that lacks the melancholic feel of earlier depictions.

Pleasure for any form of free reverie, be that alcohol or drunken intoxication. This is conveyed through the eponym exclamation "O, for a draught of vintage!" as a forceful expression of joy.

Between this stanza and the former, Keats wants to escape in the bird's world. He expresses a yearning to run away from the world of human suffering ("my heart aches" and "leave the world unseen"). Natural imagery. Ends with trying to fade/begin with nature — reversal

Keats seeks to disappear, forget, and abandon his sense of vision in order to embrace the sound in an attempt to share in the darkness with the bird. Trance caused by the nightingale is broken and the narrator

Elaborate diacope on 'fade away' and 'fade faraway' emphasis on distance, proximity. Moving onwards and escaping, rather than merely dying. Keats does not seek death, but escape from "dull opiates" and "lethe-ward." "Dissolve" fragmentary entity to fall away; painless

Listing of examples of
Suffering in human life:

- Weariness
- Fever
- Fret
- Palsy
- Grey hairs/ youth

This stanza is a reflection of Keats witnessing his younger brother's death at an early age in 1818 and was well acquainted with his own ill health

He no longer wants to be "charioted by Baccus (God of Wine) and his pards" by indulging in Dionysian frivolity in drinking away his sorrows. He gives up the idea of getting inspiration from wine.

This world and his existence are at one with the cosmic world ("cluster'd around by all her starry Fays") and with the natural world in the presence. After listening to the bird's song, with help of the romantic imagination, he tries to enter into the nightingale's world with "here there is no light" Celestial, mysticism. He wanted to fade away in the "forest dim" asks for oblivion, numbness; natural gloom creates fantasy escape

This and the previous stanza are connected by the preservation of the romantic imagination (see the pronoun "I") to enter the nightingale's world.

The poet wishes to be eased into death in peace. The "intolerable power of pure beauty makes him long for death." He can accept it in this beautiful and ecstatic world with the accompaniment of the nightingale's song. Peaceful death in sleep. Achievement of ding "in such ecstasy!"

Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,

Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,

Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,

But on the viewless wings of Poesy,

Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:

Already with thee! tender is the night,

And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,

Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;

But here there is no light,

Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown

Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,

Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,

But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet

Wherewith the seasonable month ends

The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;

White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;

Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;

And mid-May's eldest child,

The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,

The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time

I have been half in love with easeful Death,

Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,

The Elysian fields and the nightingale's song represent the pleasurable moments that overwhelm the individual like a drug. The experience is only temporary, and the body is left desiring it, until the narrator feels helpless without the pleasure. Rather than embracing the coming truth, the narrator clings to poetry to hide from the loss of pleasure. Poetry does not bring about the pleasure that the narrator originally demands, but it liberates him from his desire of pleasure.

Keats has experienced the sorrow and suffering in the human world. No longer can he be part of the burdens of life, no longer tolerate the misery, premature death, brevity of love and beauty. He retreats into the lap of nature to find solace. Escapist desire. Man will focus on the end-point of death.

The speaker wants to arrive in the nightingale's world with the phrase "viewless of Poesy." He needs the invisible assistance from poetic imagination. [First generation; obtain cosmic truths] "Already with thee!" realm of imagination and fantasy; union of the mind. Blindness

- Grass
- Thicket
- Wild fruits on the tree
- White hawthorn
- Eglantine/sweet briar — symbol for poetry
- Fading violets — mythical awareness, inspiration, modesty
- Musk rose — sexual receptiveness
- Flies

Although he cannot see the various types of flowers because of the darkness, he can sense their fragrance. He can feel the beauty of nature in stark contrast with the human world.; union with nature The last line is onomatopoeia in the repetition of /s/ sound to refer to the buzzing of flies, death lingers on the periphery of the poet's vision.

Even after his death, the bird will continue to sing in such a joyful manner.

Acceptance that pleasure is only temporary, and death is inevitable, owing to the deaths of most of his family members.

Contrast between the immortal nightingale and mortal man sitting in his garden. The tone rejects the optimistic pursuit of pleasure, exploring nature, transience, and mortality.

1. Beautiful voice has overjoyed the men and women of ancient times
2. Solace to the desolate heart of Ruth in the old testament
3. Siren song to open the windows of ships

With the abrupt word "forlorn!" the poet is reminded of the mortal world "as the very word is like a bell" to return him to his "soul self" full of miseries, sorrows, and sufferings, his desolate condition.

He says adieu to his escape, the song of the nightingale fading away in the distance and the poet returns to real life.

Impulse for imaginative escape that flies in the face of the knowledge of human limitation, expressed in "Away! Away! For I will fly to thee." Movement into an eternal realm of song and then return to actuality. Personal consciousness to awareness of suffering of humanity

To take into the air my quiet breath;

Now more than ever seems it rich to die,

To cease upon the midnight with no pain,

While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad

In such an ecstasy!

Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—

To thy high requiem become a sod.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!

No hungry generations tread thee down;

The voice I hear this passing night was heard

In ancient days by emperor and clown:

Perhaps the self-same song that found a path

Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,

She stood in tears amid the alien corn;

The same that oft-times hath

Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam

Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell

To toll me back from thee to my sole self!

Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well

As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.

Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades

Past the near meadows, over the still stream,

Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep

In the next valley-glades:

Was it a vision, or a waking dream?

Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?

Split between the two actions of the poem:

1. First attempts to identify with the nightingale and its song
2. Convergence of the past with the future while experiencing the present; Keats's view of human progression in how man develops from experiencing and wanting only pleasure.

Experiencing and understanding truth as a mixture of both pleasure and pain.

Song gives desolate to the lonely heart of Ruth. This stanza is also highly romantic in Keats's romantic delight in widows; see his letter to Fanny Keats in 1819.

Venture into the fantastical, mythic of "faery lands forlorn." Inadequacy of the romantic escape from the world of reality to the world of ideal beauty.

The prepositions mark the loss of the world of imagination ("past," "over," "up" "next") replaced by the painful real world.

We are left with a stream of rhetorical questions (ekphrasis). We remain asking: how can the poet immortalise the bird as the nightingale is also only a mortal creation?

Poet does not only immortalise the bird, but the bird's song. The bird is a "wandering voice." Although the individual voice may die, the species will continue to live and thus the sweet song of the bird will continue.

STRUCTURE

ODE STRUCTURE: "Ode to a Nightingale" was probably the first of the middle set of four odes that Keats wrote following "Ode to Psyche", according to Brown. This is further evidenced by the poems' structures. Keats experimentally combines two different types of lyrical poetry: the odal hymn and the lyric of questioning voice that responds to the odal hymn. The dual form creates a dramatic element within the text. The stanza form of the poem is a combination of elements from Petrarchan sonnets and Shakespearean sonnets. Ode written in reference to something; identification. Odes often address an intense emotion at the onset of a personal crisis or celebrate an object or image that leads to revelation.

SHORT AND LONG VOWELS: Keats incorporates a pattern of alternating historically "short" and "long" vowel sounds in his ode. In particular, line 18 ("And purple-stained mouth") has the historical pattern of "short" followed by "long" followed by "short" and followed by "long". This alternation is continued in longer lines, including line 31 ("Away! away! for I will fly to thee") which contains five pairs of alternations. However, other lines, such as line 3 ("Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains") rely on a pattern of five "short" vowels followed by "long" and "short" vowel pairings until they end with a "long" vowel.

ASSONANCE: The poem incorporates a complex reliance on assonance—the repetition of vowel sounds—in a conscious pattern, as found in many of his poems. Such a reliance on assonance is found in very few English poems. Within "Ode to a Nightingale", an example of this pattern can be found in line 35 ("Already with thee! tender is the night"), where the "ea" of "Already" connects with the "e" of "tender" and the "i" of "with" connects with the "i" of "is". This same pattern is found again in line 41 ("I cannot see what flowers are at my feet") with the "a" of "cannot" linking with the "a" of "at" and the "ee" of "see" linking with the "ee" of "feet".

CAESURAE: Within line 45 ("The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild") as the pauses after the commas are a "masculine" pause. Furthermore, Keats began to reduce the amount of Latin-based words and syntax that he relied on in his poetry, which in turn shortened the length of the words that dominate the poem. There is also an emphasis on words beginning with consonants, especially those that begin with "b", "p" or "v". The first stanza relies heavily on these three consonants, and they are used as a syzygy to add a musical tone within the poem.

USE OF SPONDEES: use of spondees in lines 31–34 creates a feeling of slow flight, and "in the final stanza . . . the distinctive use of scattered spondees, together with initial inversion, lend[s] an approximate phonetic suggestion of the peculiar spring and bounce of the bird in its flight.

