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| <p>College of Education</p> <p>Department of English</p> <p>Third Stage (Morning)</p> <p>Lecture 13</p> |  | <p>Instructor: Dr.Mugdad</p> <p>Subject: Poetry</p> |
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John Keats Ode to a Nightingale

Summary

The speaker opens with a declaration of his own heartache. He feels numb, as though he had taken a drug only a moment ago. He is addressing a nightingale he hears singing somewhere in the forest and says that his “drowsy numbness” is not from envy of the nightingale’s happiness, but rather from sharing it too completely; he is “too happy” that the nightingale sings the music of summer from amid some unseen plot of green trees and shadows.

In the second stanza, the speaker longs for the oblivion of alcohol, expressing his wish for wine, “a draught of vintage,” that would taste like the country and like peasant dances, and let him “leave the world unseen” and disappear into the dim forest with the nightingale. In the third stanza, he explains his desire to fade away, saying he would like to forget the troubles the nightingale has never known: “the weariness, the fever, and the fret” of human life, with its consciousness that everything is mortal and nothing lasts. Youth “grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies,” and “beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes.”

In the fourth stanza, the speaker tells the nightingale to fly away, and he will follow, not through alcohol (“Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards”), but through poetry, which will give him “viewless wings.” He says he is already with the nightingale and describes the forest glade, where even the moonlight is hidden by the trees, except the light that breaks through when the breezes blow the branches. In the fifth stanza,

the speaker says that he cannot see the flowers in the glade, but can guess them “in embalmed darkness”: white hawthorne, eglantine, violets, and the musk-rose, “the murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.” In the sixth stanza, the speaker listens in the dark to the nightingale, saying that he has often been “half in love” with the idea of dying and called Death soft names in many rhymes. Surrounded by the nightingale’s song, the speaker thinks that the idea of death seems richer than ever, and he longs to “cease upon the midnight with no pain” while the nightingale pours its soul ecstatically forth. If he were to die, the nightingale would continue to sing, he says, but he would “have ears in vain” and be no longer able to hear.

In the seventh stanza, the speaker tells the nightingale that it is immortal, that it was not “born for death.” He says that the voice he hears singing has always been heard, by ancient emperors and clowns, by homesick Ruth; he even says the song has often charmed open magic windows looking out over “the foam / Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.” In the eighth stanza, the word forlorn tolls like a bell to restore the speaker from his preoccupation with the nightingale and back into himself. As the nightingale flies farther away from him, he laments that his imagination has failed him and says that he can no longer recall whether the nightingale’s music was “a vision, or a waking dream.” Now that the music is gone, the speaker cannot recall whether he himself is awake or asleep.

Form

Like most of the other odes, “Ode to a Nightingale” is written in ten-line stanzas. However, unlike most of the other poems, it is metrically variable—though not so much as “Ode to Psyche.” The first seven and last two lines of each stanza are written in iambic pentameter; the eighth line of each stanza is written in trimeter, with only three accented syllables instead of five. “Nightingale” also differs from the other odes in that its rhyme scheme is the same in every stanza (every other ode varies the order of rhyme in the final three or four lines except “To Psyche,” which has the loosest structure of all the odes). Each stanza in “Nightingale” is

rhymed ABABCDECDE, Keats's most basic scheme throughout the odes.

Ode 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,
Singing 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 Provençal 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;

- **Popularity:** Written by John Keats, a popular romantic poet, “[Ode to Nightingale](#) “is a phenomenal [poem](#) that relates life's sufferings to the briefness of the bird's song. It was first published in 1819. The poem explores the wonder of life and death. It comprises the experience of the poet, his miseries and poetic imagination. Its popularity lies in the fact that it represents things related to life, art, literature, and nature and seeks a common relationship among them.
- **As a Representative of life and Death:** The poem explores two main issues: the first is the connection between agony and joy and the second is the connection between life and death. The poet very artistically draws a [comparison](#) between natural and imaginative

world, the world of a nightingale. Saddened, he tries to seek comfort and harmony in his imaginative world, but the pull of his consciousness brings him back to confront the heart-wrenching realities of life. Ultimately, he realizes that only death can offer a permanent escape from pain. Disturbed by the misfortune of his life, he wants the finest wine and his poetic imagination to throw away the horrific realities of life. His desire to be drunk or unconscious shows that he does not to [remember](#) his hardships and sufferings. However, what enchants the reader is his flight of imagination that temporarily takes him away from the odds of life.

- **Major [Themes](#):** Death, immortality, mortality and poetic imaginations are some of the major themes of this ode. Keats says that death is an unavoidable phenomenon. He paints it in both negative and positive ways. On the one hand, its presence sucks the human spirit, while on the other hand, it offers the realm of free eternity. The poet also presents the life and melodious song of the nightingale in [juxtaposition](#). To him, life is mortal, but the song of the nightingale is immortal. It has been a source of enjoyment for centuries and will stay so even after his demise. Though he keeps himself engaged in the beautiful and charming world of imaginations, he cannot stay there for good. Therefore, he accepts that imagination is just a short source of peace.

Analysis of Literary Devices in “Ode to Nightingale”

[literary devices](#) are tools used by writers and poets to convey emotions, ideas, and beliefs. With the help of these devices, they make their texts appealing to the reader. Keats has also used some [literary devices](#) in this poem to make it unique and appealing. The analysis of some of the literary devices used in this poem has been given below.

1. **[Alliteration](#):** [Alliteration](#) is the [repetition](#) of consonant sounds in the same line such as the sound of /th/ in “That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees”.

2. **Simile:** A simile is a figure of speech used to compare something with something else to make its meaning clear. Keats has used simile in the second stanza, “*Forlorn! the very word is like a bell. Here the poet is comparing forlorn to a bell.*”
3. **Enjambment:** Enjambment refers to the continuation of a sentence without a pause after the end of a line in a couplet or stanza. For example:

*“My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains.”*

1. **Imagery:** The use of imagery makes the readers visualize the writer’s feelings, emotions or ideas. Keats has used images to present a clear and vivid picture of his miserable plight such as, “though of hemlock I had drunk,” “Past the near meadows,” “Fast fading violets cover’d up in leaves.”
2. **Assonance:** Assonance is the repetition of same vowel sounds in the same lines of poetry such as the sound of /o/ in “In some melodious plot” and /i/ sound in “The voice I hear this passing night was heard.”
3. **Metaphor:** There are two metaphors in this poem. The first one is used in line eleven, “for a beaker full of the warm south”. Here he compares liquid with the southern country weather.
4. **Personification:** Personification is to give human qualities to non-human things. Keats has used personification in line twenty-nine, “where beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes” as if the beauty is human and can see. The second example is in line thirty-six, “The Queen moon is on her throne.”
5. **Anaphora:** It refers to the repetition initial words of sentences in sequence or in the whole stanza or even the poem. Keats has repeated the word “where” in the following lines to emphasize the existence of his imaginative world. For example:

*“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,
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes.”

6. **Apostrophe:** An apostrophe is a device used to call somebody from afar. The poet has used this device in line sixty-one, “Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird.”

The literary analysis shows that this poem successfully describes Keat’s deep meditations about death under cover of these literary devices.

Analysis of Poetic Devices in “Ode to Nightingale”

Poetic and literary devices are the same, but a few are used only in poetry. Here is the analysis of some of the poetic devices used in this poem.

1. **Stanza:** Stanza is a poetic form of some lines. There are eight stanzas in this poem with ten lines in each stanza.
2. **Rhyme Scheme:** The poem follows ABABCDECDE throughout the poem with iambic pentameter.
3. **End Rhyme:** End Rhyme is used to make the stanza melodious such as in the first stanza the rhyming words are, “pains”, “drains”, “drunk”, “sunk.”
4. **Internal Rhyme:** Internal Rhyme is rhyme within a line such as in the line, “To toll me back from thee to my sole self” two words “me” and “thee” rhyme with each other.
5. **Iambic Pentameter:** It is a type of meter consisting of five iambs. The poem comprises iambic pentameter such as, “My **Heart** aches, **and** a **drowsy numbness pains.**”

Quotes to be Used

These lines can be used in a speech when discussing the power and pull of the imaginative world that offers a peaceful escape from the heavy odds of life.

“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 Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!”