

Try to incorporate these observations in your note on “Ode to a Nightingale”

The odes of John Keats explore the problems of life, art, love, and mutability through various avenues. In “Ode to a Nightingale”, Keats is oppressed by thoughts of transience and mutability and is in search of something by which he can transcend time. In this richly meditative ode, the thought of the contrast between the joy and beauty and apparent permanence of the song of the nightingale and the sorrow and transience of beauty and joy in human life makes the poet restless. The ode displays Keats’s power as a master of poetic language at its highest. The ode explores the nature of visionary imagination of which the bird becomes the central symbol of permanence and man becomes the symbol of flux. In *Keats: From Theory to Poetry*, S.C. Sengupta has complimented “Ode On a Grecian Urn” and “Ode to a Nightingale” as a “Quest for Permanence”. The critic says, “The Nightingale Ode, which sways from one note to another, from mood to mood, from sensation to thought, and then alternates between thought and sensation, is full of ambivalence, inconsistencies, contradictions, and yet in spite of this “embarrassment” between sleeping and waking, the poem produces a harmony which is truly orchestral. In *John Keats: His Mind and Art* Bhabatosh Chatterjee observes: “The identity of the bird, whose song causes the pain, near numb-numbness and partial oblivion, underlines the unearthly character of the music.” (p 379). Keats’ aspiration to share the bird’s ecstasy leads him inevitably along the dark, mysterious journey that alone can ensure his accession to the joyous arcadia. The poet seeks an escape into an eternal present, a release from flux, from the world of process, According to Bhabatosh Chatterjee, “In the “soul-making parable”, the release from suffering was sought through participation in and assimilation of experience. But here transcendence is sought through the dissolution of the conscious self (note the verbs ‘Fade’, ‘dissolve’, ‘forget’) into the bird’s deathless world” (p.382). In Ode On Melancholy, the poet muses on the transience of beauty and joy:

She dwells with Beauty – Beauty that must die;

And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips

Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh,

Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips:

Ay, in the very temple of Delight

Veil’d Melancholy has her Sovran shrine, (21-26).

Miriam Allott says in *Keats: The Complete Poems*: “The poem traces the inception, nature and decline of the creative mood, and expresses K.’s attempt to understand his feelings about the contrast between the ideal and actual and the close association of pain and pleasure” (P. 524).