



By John Keats

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#### Understanding the Poem

1. How does the nightingale's song plunge the poet into a state of ecstasy?

Answer: When Keats was sitting under a plum tree in the garden of his house, in Hampstead, he composed this poem. He was inspired by Nightingale's song and completed the poem within one day. The poet begins the poem in a melancholic mood and disparagingly expresses how his "heart aches" as if he is poisoned or is drugged. He felt as if he drank Lethe's water and was drowsy. Then it is revealed that actually it is the nearby bird, the Nightingale's song which is the reason of the poet's happiness. The poet addresses the Nightingale that he is happy in the bird's happiness.

2. What are the unpleasant aspects of the human condition that the poet wants to escape from?

Answer: While the poet is celebrating his new found happiness in the nightingale's song, he is thrown into much deeper thought. Keats commiserates with the human for the sorrow and all the unpleasantness that one has to go through in one's life. The poet wishes to escape from all these. He wishes to fly away to the bird and drown himself in the ecstasy of its humming. Keats realises the truth of human life. He renounces and learn that this world can serve nothing more than momentary pleasures to humans and rest all is sham and has pain. All the materialistic gains have pain rooted in them and he wants to break free from them. He lists out various such intricacies and obstacles. He tells the bird, who has never experienced fever, weariness, fret; who never sits like men and groans while palsy shakes a few, those sad folks with those last few gray hair. How youth fades and grows pale, thin and dies with time. He grieves for this world where nothing is permanent. The poet wishes to escape from all these aspects of our physical world and wants to see the other world where true happiness lies, where the spiritual bliss awaits him.

3. What quality of 'beauty' and 'love' does the poem highlight?

Answer: Romantics share a reverence for nature's beauty and find solace in her embrace. In his poem, Ode to a Nightingale, Keats realises the ultimate truth, which is death. To fight this inevitability, he celebrates the beauty of nature, in which he finds beauty through the bird's song. However, we all must die. The poet travels a journey from mortality to immortality. Keats relishes the song of the immortal nightingale and feels ecstatic. The realisation dawns upon the poet that the beauty is not what we see but it lies within. And the beauty that he dwells on is of the nature and it helps him to delay the ultimate, the death! However, he must die. This beauty of the bird's song, the nature shall always be there, though the speaker will grow old and die one day. It is to be realised that the true beauty and happiness lies in the spiritual awakening and not in this materialistic world. Nothing is permanent in this world full of momentary pleasures, neither beauty nor love.

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