

T. D. C - Part I (one)  
ENG 'Hons'

Ode to a Nightingale: A critical Appreciation

- The 'Ode to a Nightingale' is one of the most highly admired Odes in English literature. It reveals Keats' keen imaginative faculty, heightened sensibility and those aesthetic qualities for which Keats is so well-known. This poem is built on contrast. The poet attempts to understand his feelings about contrast between the ideal and actual, and the close association of pain with pleasure. The poem presents the tragic picture of human life, and, at the same time, it also gives expression to Keats' own melancholy and dejection. This poem is not the expression of a single mood, but of a succession of moods. One kind of mastery displayed by Keats in this Ode is the continuous shifting of view-point.

The poet is highly enraptured by the song of the nightingale. He is filled with sheer ecstasy which makes him oblivious of his surroundings. He feels as if he had taken some opiate which paralysed his senses.

Contrasting the glory and exultation of the bird with his own sadness and despondency, the poet craves for a draught of wine so that he may be transported beyond the world of sorrow. He would gladly leave this world of sorrow and perplexity, where man must suffer, and beauty must fade away. ~~He~~ Only if he could be as happy as the bird is, he would like to disappear in the forest and live where the bird lives. The aid of wine he will not have; poetry will transport him to a world of joy. With the help of poetic imagination, he would go where the nightingale dwells. The bird's melodious song stirs exquisite imagination in the poet. Sensuous images of beauty and fragrance of flowers delight him. He is now imaginatively in the company of the bird. Now, the poet wants to die in peace listening to the song of the ~~world~~ bird. The song will give repose to his soul.

In contrast with the thought of human mortality, the poet reflects upon the immortality of the nightingale's song — the same song heard today and here as it was long



centuries ago, in far off lands of history and romance. But the poetic vision fades, as the song of the departing bird becomes less and less audible. The word 'forlorn' suddenly breaks the spell of the poet's imagination and his association with the bird which brings him back to the world of reality. Imagination can help him to escape from blatant realities of life only for a short time.

The crowded felicities of the poem and its verbal beauty are not studiously inlaid, but they are the vital essence of the speech. This is what may be called the spontaneous or unpremeditated art. Every word of the poem vibrates with a genuine lyrical fervour. No poet save Shakespeare had the faculty of natural music more than Keats, and in this poem, it finds its fullest expression. The structure of the stanza in this Ode is of Keats' own invention. The rhymes are almost faultless and the remarkable harmonious results are obtained by the skilful use of alliteration and soft and liquid vowel sounds. Classical allusions abound in the poem.

The End