

TOPIC: ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE

STANZA-I

1. Written in May 1819. Published in July 1819 in *ANNALS OF THE FINE ARTS*.
2. The poem was written either in the garden of **Spaniards Inn**, Hampstead, London or in the garden of Keats' friend Charles Armitage Brown under a plum tree at Wentworth in Hampstead. Inspired by the nightingale's song, the poem was composed in ONE day.
3. RHYME SCHEME- ABAB CDE CDE
4. A Horatian ode. Horatian ode has a consistent stanza length and meter. Horace was a Roman poet.
5. Keats died of tuberculosis. His mother died of tuberculosis. His brother Tom Keats died of consumption. His father died after fall from horse. He was jilted by his beloved Fanny Brawne for his ill health and abject poverty.
6. 'My heart aches'- Keats feels an intense vicarious pleasure on hearing the song of the nightingale. The excess of joy transforms into an aching pain in his heart.
7. Drowsy numbness pains: Keats feels as if his sensation is getting deactivated and he feels sleepy. Reason same as above.
8. 'My sense as though of hemlock I had drunk' – Hemlock is a poisonous plant the juice of which produces sleep and inertia. On hearing the song of the nightingale Keats feels unbounded joy and the excess of joy makes him oblivious of his oblivious being and he feels as if his sense is getting deactivated. Keats equates his this condition with the effect of the intake of juice of hemlock. *** **This alludes to the Greek philosopher Socrates who was forced to drink juice of hemlock and as a result of this he died.
9. 'or emptied some dull opiate to the drains: Opium is a narcotic which produces sleep and inertia. Interpretation same as question no. 5.
10. 'one minute past and Lethe – wards had sunk'- According to Greek mythology, Lethe, a river in Hades, is the river of forgetfulness. The Greeks believe that after death the souls of the dead are submerged in the water of the river Lethe and as a result they forget all about their past life. Keats also feels as if he has submerged in the of the

river of Hades because he feels an ecstatic pleasure on hearing the song of the nightingale. The excess of joy makes him forgetful of his physical being.

11. 'Tisnot though envy of thy happy lot/ but being too happy in thine happiness"- By 'thine happiness' Keats speaks of the happiness of the nightingale. In this line Keats means that he feels an aching pain in his heart or he feels as if has drunk hemlock/ opium or as if he has submerged in the water of Lethe not because he feels envious of the happiness of the nightingale but because of excessive joy he feels on hearing the song of the nightingale.
12. 'that thou light winged Dryad.'-According to Greek mythology, Dryad is a wood nymph living in the trees. The nightingale has been imagined a wood nymph. Its wings are light because they are not burdened by the sad realities of life.
ALLITERATION
13. Melodious plot: it refers to the abode of the nightingale. The plot resounds with the music of the nightingale. Transferred epithet.
14. 'beecheen green'- The garden is full of beech trees.
15. 'Singest of summer in full throated ease.'- The bird is singing in praise of summer. The phrase 'full throated ease' refers to two dominant qualities of the nightingale's song- its effortlessnes and spontaneity.

STANZA-II

16. 'o for a draught of vintage'- In order transport himself to the romantic idealistic world of the nightingale Keats wants to drink strong wine of grapes produced in the southern part of France. His is the belief that such a wine can inspire him to imagine a beautiful world.
17. Tasting of Flora and the country green- Roman goddess of flowers. Keats means the wine must have the flavour of the teeming life of Nature in her grass and flowers.
18. Provençal song- Keats means the ground beneath which the wine will be processed must have witnessed Songs of Provence in Southern France, a district famous for producing wine from ripe grapes.
19. Sunburnt mirth- Merriment in warm sunny weather. Keats wants to mix the energy of one enjoying sunburnt mirth in the wine only to make it a potent means of escape.
20. Warm south- Keats means the wine must be distilled out of the sunny warmth of the climate of Southern France and Italy.

21. 'Full of the true, blushful Hippocrene.'- Full of the true means the wine must be genuine- an unadulterated one.*** *** According to Greek mythology, Hippocrene is a fountain of mount Helicon of the muses, a group of eight women. The fountain bubbles up out of the earth where Pegasus , the famous flying horse, is supposed to have dug his hoof into the ground. Those who drink sacred water of this cascade gain inspiration for poetic creation.*** *** *** It is called blushful because redness of the wine suffuses the water as blushing suffuses the cheek. *** Metaphor.*** The Greeks used to dilute wine with water. Keats wants to dilute wine with the water of Hippocrene so that it could serve as a potent means of escape. The idea is that Keats wants to be divinely inspired.
22. 'With beaded bubbles winking at the brim'- The wine poured in a glass will produce bubbling. Bead-like shape will float and twinkle about the rim of the glass. They give the impression of winking at the world outside the glass. Personification, alliteration.

STANZA-III

23. 'Fade, far away, dissolve and quite forget/ What thou among the leaves hast never known'- Keats wants to forget the affairs of the world of the bird nightingale is completely ignorant. Actually Keats wants to share the joy and happiness of the bird.
24. 'the weariness, the fever and the fret.'- By fever and fret Keats means constant haste and anxiety . The bird is completely ignorant of these . Its is a blessed life and, as such, it never feels tired of its life.
25. 'here where men sit and hear each-other groan'- Keats here draws a dismal picture of the world we inhabit. Here suffering is all pervasive.
26. 'where palsy shakes a few sad, last grey hairs.'- Grey hair is rhetorically an example of synecdoche. Stands for old people. Palsy(=paralysis) has been personified here as a feeble old man.*** Here Keats portrays the transience of life and the tragedy of old age. It here is set against the eternal renewal of the nightingale's song('Thou was not born for death, immortal bird.)
27. 'Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies.'- Once again Keats portrays the transience of man's life. Here young people die a premature death. Before their death they live a death-in-life existence. Spectre thin means reduced to a fleshless skeleton. Here there is an autobiographical reference to Tom Keats who because of consumption was reduced to a fleshless skeleton and died a premature death. Climax, polysyndaton.
28. 'Where palsy...lustrous eyes.'- ANAPHORA. Repetition of initial words of sentences in the whole stanza or even the poem.

29. 'Leaden eyed despair'- Keats here offers a concrete image of personified despair with lead-like eye balls. Two layers of interpretation are there. Incidentally lead is a heavy metal. The suggestion is that eyes are bent down on being burdened by sorrow. Again lead is white in colour. The suggestion is that the eyes look pale because of the burdened life.
30. 'Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes.' – Beauty has been personified here. Transience of everything, of say beauty, here on earth is suggested here.
31. 'or new Love pine at them beyond tomorrow' – Love has been personified here. Love in this imperfect world is transitory. Today's love turns into a tale of despair tomorrow. Here there is an autobiographical reference of Keats' unhappy love with Fanny Brawne.

STANZA-IV

32. 'Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards.'- In classical/Greek mythology Bacchus is the god of wine and revelry. He is presented as riding a chariot drawn by leopards. *** Keats rejects the idea of wine because drinking leads to sensuality and never poetic fulfillment.
33. 'Viewless wings of poesy'- Keats wants to fly into the world of the nightingale through POETIC IMAGINATION.
34. 'though the dull brain perplexes and retards'- Keats acknowledges that without being intoxicated by wine, his oppressed brain is not working and he feels puzzled and unable to move forward to the utopian world of the nightingale.
35. 'Already with thee'- The supersonic speed of imagination is noticeable here. The moment the poet takes the help of imagination after rejecting the of intoxication, the moment the poet finds himself in the world of the nightingale.
36. 'haply the Queen Moon is on her throne/ Clustered around by all her starry fays.'- A beautiful mythical image in which Diana, moon goddess, is imagined as the queen of heaven, sits on the throne of white cloud and is surrounded by fairy-like small stars. The poet uses the word haply because he cannot view them because of verduous gloom.
37. 'But here there is no light.'- Despite all the sources of light in the sky, there is no light in the world of the nightingale because verduous gloom prevails there.
38. 'save what from heaven is with breezes blown/ Through verduous glooms and winding mossy ways.'- Though there is no light, some light peeps in the world of the nightingale when breezes blow through the branches of the trees. *** VERDUOUS GLOOM means darkness caused by innumerable trees and their leaves. ***The paths there go in a zigzag manner and they are full of mosses.

STANZA-V

39. 'I cannot see what flowers are at my feet...guess each sweet.'- Keats is a hypersensitive poet- known for his sensuousness. He cannot view the flowers in the world of the nightingale because of verduous gloom. Yet he can identify them because of their smell. An example of synaesthesia which is a neurological condition that causes blending of senses. It is a perceptual phenomenon in which stimulation of one sensory or cognitive pathway leads to involuntary experiences in a second sensory or cognitive pathway.
40. Soft incense- Scented flowers.
41. Embalmed darkness- Darkness spread like a soothing balm that comes from the sweet scent of flowers.
42. 'Wherein the seasonable month endows'- Here the seasonable month is May.
43. In the abode of the nightingale the poet views the presence of grass, thicket(bush), fruit tree, four different flowers like WHITE HAWTHORN(a tree of the rose family), PASTORAL EGLANTINE(A variety of rose), FAST FADING VIOLET(COVERED UP IN LEAVES), MUSK ROSE, and insect like FLIES.
44. 'Mid may's eldest child'- Refers to musk rose. It is called mid May's eldest child because it blooms in the middle of May. Personification, Alliteration.
45. 'The murmurous haunt of blees'- Another example of synaesthesia. The poet cannot view the the flies but identifies on the basis of sound. Onomatopoeia.

STANZA VI

46. 'Darkling I listen'- The poet listens the melody of the nightingale .
47. 'for many a time...easeful Death'- Death has been personified here. The line means the poet is as much in love with life as with death i.e., the other half of the poet's love is meant for life. The poet wants easeful death because his life is too full of suffering. Many a time he has expressed his death wish because he has lost his zest for life on being burdened by the sad realities of life.
48. 'called him soft names in many a mused rhyme'- on being burdened by the sad realities of life Keats requested death softly to take his life without pain. The phrse 'mused rhyme' means metrical composition.

49. 'Now more than ever seems it rich to die/ To cease upon the midnight with no pain'- Keats becomes completely of his physical, of the burdens of life while he listens to the song of the nightingale. As because he is at peak of poetic fulfilment, he feels it to be the richest time to court death because he would be able to die with a heart full of joy and satisfaction by being completely ignorant of the thorns of life.
50. 'while thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad/ In such an ecstasy.'- The nightingale is singing an ecstatic song because it is completely ignorant of the sad realities of life. The poet wants to court death while listening to the ecstatic melody of the nightingale.
51. 'Still wouldst thou sing and I have ears in vain'- Keats means when he would be dead, the nightingale would go on singing. The phrase 'ears in vain' means the physical ears would cease to function at his death.
52. 'To thy high requiem become a sod'- Requiem is a song of lamentation. Keats fancies that after his death the nightingale would go on singing as if to lament over his death. *** Sod means a lifeless lump of clay. Keats here shares the Biblical/Islamic belief according to which man is born of dust and shall turn to dust.

STANZA-VII

53. 'Thou was not born for death, immortal Bird!' Hyperbole. Three layers of interpretations are there. A) The poet calls song of the bird immortal and the actual bird singing to him.(It anticipates what Keats says in 'Endymion'-“ A thing of beauty is joy forever.” In that sense it is an example of transferred epithet/hypallage. B) Keats means not an individual nightingale, but nightingale as a species which will not die out. C) He means one particular nightingale who sings to him, had sung to many others in different ages and at different times. APOSTROPHE.
54. 'No hungry generations tread thee down'-By hungry generations' Keats speaks of human beings. Theirs is an insatiable materialistic appetite. They suffer from wants and, as such, they trample down what is glorious.
55. As the poet says, the bird's song was heard by all sorts of people in all ages, of say, by emperors, clowns, Ruth, princess in an enchanted castle in addition to himself.
56. 'Perhaps the self same song...'By this the poet means the nightingale's is a unique song and it is beyond comparison.
57. Ruth- The story of Ruth is found in Old Testament. Ruth was a Moabite woman married to a Jew. Shortly after her marriage her husband died. People offered her marriage proposal, but she preferred to stay with her mother-in-law. Together they went to Jerusalem(Palestine), earned livelihood by reaping corn.Keats fancies that

when Ruth suffered from homesickness while reaping corns in foreign land, she was soothed by the rapturous melody of the nightingale. Allusion

58. 'charmed magic casements ...fairy lands forlorn.' Keats here transports us to the Mediaeval age of mystery and romance. Keats here speaks of the story of a princess who has been imprisoned in an enchanted castle surrounded by water by a mischievous fairy. Keats fancies that the princess must have listened to the song of the nightingale. While listening to the song of the nightingale she becomes restless not to open the doors of the casements (windows that open like doors) and she sees her saviour approaching over the waves and ultimately she is rescued. *** in this stanza 'forlorn' means deserted.

STANZA-VII

59. 'Forlorn! The very word...self' - Simile. By 'sole self' Keats means his conscious self. The word forlorn like a alarm bell rouses the poet from his reverie and helps him in his return from the romantic world of glamour and grandeur to the real world.
60. 'Adieu! The fancy cannot cheat so well/ As she is famed to do deceiving elf.' – After his return to the real world Keats feels that he was cheated by imagination i.e., fancy because it created a fake utopian world and made him believe it to be a permanent reality for a short while. That is why he equates fancy with evil fairy that takes delight in teasing human beings.
61. 'Adieu! Adieu! Thy plaintive anthem fades...valley glades.' - Plaintive anthem refers to the song of the nightingale. When the escape is over, the once happy, joyous, ecstatic melody of the nightingale turns into a complaining, melancholic one.
62. 'Was it a vision...asleep' - When the escape is over, Keats feels torn between two worlds. For some moments the bird's song so inspired his imagination that he transcended reality and drowned his miseries into a contemplation of beauties. But now as the escape is over, it leaves the poet wondering. It is as if he is questioning the validity of his experience. Reverie means day dream.