**English Romantic Verse** One-Page Guides

**Poet Keats**

Poem Ode to a Nightingale

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| Context (biographical, Romantic attitudes, social/historical etc)  | * Believed in the power of nature / imagination
* Keats wrote to Fanny Brawne, in the same month of writing in May 1819 about how happy he felt. A nightingale had made its nest near his house in Hampstead.
* Ackroyd sees the poem, however, as reflecting some of the pain and grief that Keats had experienced by this point night in his life
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| A poem about… (Interpretations, key Romantic themes, nature, mortality) | * Nature: an ‘immortal bird’, timeless, free (unlike Keats, who is earthbound); in a pastoral idyll of the mind…
* Emotion: ‘too happy in thine happiness’: but there is an implicit sadness in his inability to ‘fly to thee’
* Beauty: symbol of beauty
* Imagination: imagines the flowers that he can’t see, and the worlds the nightingale has sung in, over time, place, and in mythological settings as well as real. Whilst it is seductive, ultimately Keats cannot get to these imagined places – he must come back to reality
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| Speaker (who? talking to whom? attitude to subject- ironic, reverent etc) | * Apostrophe - Speaker is directly addressing the nightingale – “thou”, “thee” (archaic pronoun, used for equals or for those with whom you are close/intimate – family, lovers, close friends)
* The nightingale is the main focus of the poem
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| Form (sonnet, ballad, verse form, rhyme and rhythm) | * Like most of the other odes, "Ode to a Nightingale" is written in ten-line stanzas.
* The first seven and last two lines of each stanza are written in iambic pentameter; the eighth line of each stanza is written in an irregular trimeter or tetrameter with only three or four accented syllables instead of five.
* Its rhyme scheme is the same in every stanza
* Each stanza in "Nightingale" is rhymed ABABCDECDE, Keats's most basic scheme throughout the odes. Note ‘sod’ is rough half-rhyme
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| Overall structure (shifts, changes, climax of narrative etc) | * 8 stanzas
* An ode is an elaborately structured form praising or glorifying an object, event or individual
* Each stanza complete in itself: 1-happy/sad; 2-drink is the answer; 3-sad, death; 4-uplifting, wants to joing the bird; 5 – dreamy, imagined nature; 6 – maudlin; wants to die; 7 -
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| Language (vocabulary - heightened or demotic; rhetorical features etc) | * Religious and historical references
* Contrast between “dull” and “ease”, “brightness of summer” and “forest dim”
* Language has a rhythmic quality
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| Sound effects (harsh and soft, onomatopoeia etc) |  |
| Imagery (metaphor, simile, images etc) | * Stanza 4 - second half: “and haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne…” – imagery of nature
* Imagery of nature in stanza 5 – nature comforting us through all our senses
* Simile in stanza 1 – “My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains, My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk”
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| Patterns of language (semantic fields, repetitions, oppositions) | * Personification and alliteration – “with beaded bubbles winking at the brim” – lyrical quality, suggestive of bubbles popping (‘winking’)

Keats’ letter to Fanny Brawne 1st May: ‘Oh there is nothing like fine weather, and health, and Books, and a fine country, and a condensed Mind… and please heaven, a little claret-wine cool out of a cellar a mile deep’* Repetition of “forlorn“ – polysemic word – means lost, or long forgotten, so can be mystical or sad. Seems to be both. It is Keats persona in the final stanza who is ‘forlorn’, because he’s back on his own (not double stress on ‘sole self’)
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| Punctuation and grammar (sentence length, end-stopping, caesura, verb mood - imperative, declarative, interrogative, exclamatory) | * Away! Away!
* In such ecstasy!
* Ends on two questions – leaves us in a half-state, open ended, after the final mid-line caesura
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