

Q. Bring out the conflict between dream and reality depicted in Keats's Ode to Nightingale.

① John Keats, ever sensitive to criticism and ever open to the influence of other poets, both living and dead, was extraordinarily able to explore the idea of contrast between the everyday world and eternity: the everyday world of suffering, death and decay, and the timeless beauty and lasting truth of poetry. According to Graham Hough, Keats's major odes are closely bound up with the theme of transience and permanency.

Ode to Nightingale progresses through a series of precisely delicate evocations of opposed moods. The poem is basically structured around the contrast between the poet who is earthbound and the bird, which is free. A related opposition is that between the mortal world - full of the weariness, the fever, and the fret, marked by transience and the world of the nightingale, marked by joy and immortality by saying this line:

Thou was not born for death, immortal bird! (Line-61)

The ode begins with the initial reaction of the rapt and meditative poet - My heart aches, a drowsy numbness pains which is contrast with the full-throated ease of the nightingale's singing. The poet also means that the opposed moods are strongly present when he finds melancholy in delight. His heart cannot bear excessive joy produced by the nightingale resulting in pain. In the words of Richard Fogle, the principal stress of the poem is a struggle between ideal and actual; inclusive terms which, however contain some particular antitheses of pleasure and pain, of imagination and common sense, reason, of permanence and change, of nature and human, of art and life, freedom and bondage, waking and dream.

The very opening lines are considered as paradoxical statements embodying a tension between reality and dreaminess.

The second stanza and the third one are but exploration of conflict between the world of dream and the world of reality. The persona follows the nightingale and comes to its world by means of draught of vintage which is an instrument encouraging the persona to imagine an escape from reality. The persona imagines being engrossed in the Country green, tasting of flora and hearing the provençal song surrounded by the Sunburnt mirth, all of which do not happen in the real world. He imagines that he embraces the ~~ima~~ world of the nightingale.

But his awareness of the real world depicted in the third stanza relentlessly pulls him back from the imaginative world. The nightingale can never understand his suffering world replete with the weariness, the fever and the fret.

Thus the third stanza serves as the antithesis of the nightingale's joyful world and the pleasant ideal which is free from depressions of every day life as illustrated in the second and fifth stanzas.

The ~~the~~ seventh and eight stanzas explore the theme of conflict between the dream world and the world of reality. The persona reaches his critical moment by directly referring to the nightingale as an immortal bird and realizes that, he, belonging to the hungry generations cannot achieve such immortality.

Keats's ode to nightingale ends with the contrast between imagination and reality, vision and daydream. Aber! is calling his return to reality. He does not belong to that fancy world but has to face an evitable destruction.

• He is left in confusion, between what might reality might be and what the fancy creates. A question closes the poem - was it a vision, or a waking dream?

Fled is that music; do I wake or sleep?

The melodious music experienced in the beginning is fleeting, and the immortal world now closes its door to him. Thus, the persona understands the close connection between the ideal and the real.