



Ode to a Nightingale

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc. or its Licensors. Please see [copyright information](#) at the end of this document.

One of Keats's six great odes, this poem is a lyric meditation narrated by a poet who is tempted to forsake the real world of human suffering for the ideal world of art. As he listens to a bird's song, the speaker becomes more and more enraptured by it, and increasingly disgruntled with the mortal world of pain and death.

The poet begins by describing his current listless mental state, contrasting it with the beautiful and carefree song of the nightingale. He wishes for freedom from earthly cares and longs for the fairyland of art, represented in the poem by the nightingale. Life on earth is too full of sorrow, despair, and disappointment, and the only escape from it is through poetry.

Death, says the poet, has long been a temptation for him, and the bird's song temporarily strengthens his death wish. He admits that the quiet of the grave seems preferable to life on earth. But just as he is about to abandon himself to the nightingale's song, the poet realizes that in death he would be unable to hear the bird's song.

The ode's concern with death is often attributed to the death of Keats's brother in 1818, but the poem, like so many of this great Romantic poet's works, is really an affirmation of human life. The poem was written in 1819, a year that witnessed the composition of some of Keats's greatest poems (among them five more odes and "THE EVE OF ST. AGNES"). He died less than two years later at the age of 25.

Copyright Notice

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems without the written permission of the publisher.

For complete copyright information, please see the online version of this work:
<http://www.enotes.com/ode-nightingale-salem>