

"ode on melancholy":
sorrow dwells in the
temple of delight



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John Keats' "Ode on Melancholy" is a complex poetic investigation into the equally complex emotions of pain and sadness. Melancholy is defined as a gloomy state of mind, a dejection, depression, or despondency. Keats urges the reader to view melancholy in a much more positive light. He views melancholy as a necessary part of the human experience. It is an emotion deeply embedded in our lives and to ignore it would mean an attempt to deaden our senses. This is an ode dedicated to expelling the negative misunderstandings of an emotion that is significantly essential to the human experience. Similar to his other "Great Odes", Keats utilizes concrete imagery to add a sense of authenticity to his argument. He explores this emotion of sorrow in the realm of true life by theorizing on the state of melancholy and arguing for its necessity. His passionate argument for melancholy relies on a view of the emotion as being deeply embedded in the circle of life. Throughout his very dense and passionate expression, Keats explores the qualities of melancholy and its necessity to natural reality. The passion of Keats' ode is demonstrated outright in the first line: "No, no, go not". This immediately sets the tone and argument of the poem as being quite different from his other "Great Odes". Instead of focusing on an internal experience or reverie, Keats makes a call to action. This ode is written as a way to advise readers to explore their experiences rather than become lost within them. The first line begins as using both pleading and negative wording in an attempt to reinforce his outcry for the reader to not reject melancholy. He blends this negativity with many different images of forgetfulness, such as "Lethe", "Wolf's-bane", and "shade" implying that people are inclined to use such aides as a way to escape their melancholy. Keats implies that what we are hiding from—"sorrow's mysteries"—which <https://assignbuster.com/ode-on-melancholy-sorrow-dwells-in-the-temple-of-delight/>

are the factors inherent in melancholy, such as pain and death. The images such as " beetle" and " death-moth" serve as the subjects of disregard. Keats addresses them directly as a way to implore the reader to not allow pain or death to be put out of their mind. These images urge us not to forget sadness, give in to suicide (" poisonous wine"), nor become superstitious of death (" rosary of yew-berries"). Keats argues that the consequence of escaping the reality of pain is a " shade", or deadening, of our souls. Melancholy—an emotion which encompasses the reality of pain, death, and sorrow, is a " wakeful anguish" in that it allows us to remain alive and aware of our own senses. Keats uses some surprisingly unique descriptions throughout the second stanza as he attempts to alter common notions of sadness. These serve to strengthen his argument of melancholy as a necessary stage in the circle of life. He describes sensations of melancholy as a " fit", implying its nature of being unpredictable and inescapable. It is seen as being just as " sudden" as a rainfall. This comparison between the emotion and rain continues as Keats describes melancholy as being descended from " heaven" in a " weeping cloud". Despite the fact that the cloud is weeping, expressing a sorrow, its emotions help to " foster" the flowers. Here, we begin to see a sense of nurturing within the nature of melancholy. There is still a definitive expression of sadness in the " droop-headed" description of the flowers, hidden " green hill" and shrouded " April". Yet the inclusion of the flowers, greenness of the hill, and spring all imply a forthcoming sense of life and fertility. This rain of sadness is merely the nurturer of approaching life. Yet, just as melancholy leads into pleasure, so does joy back into sadness. Keats urges the reader to immerse themselves in these transient joys of life as he describes temporary images

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of a " morning rose", " rainbow", and " salt sand wave". These natural metaphors are the key to making Keats' argument effective. By understanding that joy and sorrow are continually in flux in the natural world, perhaps we will be able to understand how they are recurrent through our human experience as well. Keats makes this connection to humanity in comparing the emotional states of melancholy and joy to a mistress showing her anger. Here, she is experiencing a fleeting passion and we must learn to " feed deep, deep" upon these emotions as they will soon be gone.

Essentially, Keats is imploring the necessity to embrace the brevity of all human experience, both good and bad. The " she" in the first line of the final stanza contains a double reference to both melancholy and the mistress.

Through this, Keats is continuing his initial connection between the emotion and humanity. As " she dwells with beauty", the mistress conveys life and passion. Yet beauty dies, implying that just as beauty fades so will the mistress. Here we can see the connection between the mistress and melancholy. Because the beauty fades and leads into death and sorrow, it is apparent that melancholy " dwells" within beauty as well. This metaphor complexly expresses the transitory nature of both human existence and the emotional state of melancholy. Thus in exploring the sadness that follows from fading beauty, we are able to see that death and melancholy are inherent in the experience of joy. Extending this connection, Keats begins to personify the emotional states of joy and melancholy as nearly human figures themselves. Joy is characterized as being in a constant state of " bidding adieu", while Pleasure experiences a physical " aching". Keats describes melancholy personified as dwelling in the " temple of Delight",

indicating that joy and melancholy are essentially inseparable. It is clear that <https://assignbuster.com/ode-on-melancholy-sorrow-dwells-in-the-temple-of-delight/>

he is arguing not only for the idea that these emotions are fleeting, but also that they are deeply entwined within each other. Beauty leads into death, joy becomes sadness, and pleasure develops into pain. In order to experience any form of happiness, we must justly experience sorrow. Keats argues that the man who lives vigorously experiences both joy and pain and embraces the "wakeful anguish" of melancholy. Only when he has undergone the true breadth of natural emotions will he have the ability to truly enjoy delight. He urges us to utilize melancholy to our advantage. The more intensely we experience this emotional state of sorrow, pain, and death, the more we will be able to revel in the true beauty and joys of life. The reward for our pain, our "trophies", will be true appreciative delight. The three simple stanzas of Keats' "Ode on Melancholy" are representative of three very complex and passionate arguments regarding the emotional state of melancholy. The first urges the reader to not dismiss sorrow nor attempt to escape from it. For this, as the ode continues on to argue, will be the only way we can experience an awakening of our soul. The metaphorical imagery of the second stanza appeals to the transitory nature of life. We must learn to embrace the passing emotions of the human experience and begin to accept the duality of nature. Finally, in personifying the two contrary emotions, Keats definitively establishes joy and melancholy as being inseparable. The nature of life is to experience the joy that follows pain and justly the sorrow that often falls from happiness. Melancholy is thus characterized as a complex mingling of joy and sorrow necessary for one to fully experience life rather than simply exist.