

# Discussion of "bright star", "ode to a nightingale" and "to autumn"



Like much of the poetry of Keats, these three poems explore life's contrasts of pleasure and pain, happiness and sorrow, permanence and impermanence. The mortal pleasures of Beauty and Love are longed for, but proven to be all too often tempered by pain and sorrow as a result of their fleeting nature. Woven amongst these poems is an implicit sense of anguish at humanity's mortality - a mortality contrasted with, and yet also reflected by Nature. Bright Star begins with a wish for permanence, for the steadfastness that humanity, due to its mortality, lacks. While the poet aspires to a star, it is not its 'lone splendor' he envies, nor the fact it is an 'Eremitic' or hermit. Rather than being eternally alone, the poet desires an eternal love - to remain with his lover 'for ever'. The repetition of 'for ever', 'ever' and 'still' reiterate the poet's deep desire for things to remain the same, to be 'unchangeable'. But alas, it cannot be. The reason he desires a permanent love so deeply is because love is by nature transitory and fleeting - a point mournfully expounded in Ode to a Nightingale. The poet's longing for the permanence of the stars is as unreachable as their distance, and his realisation of this sad reality is the cause of his aching heart and 'numbness' in Ode to a Nightingale. The poet falls 'Lethewards', or into numb oblivion, as he hears the 'too happy' melody of the nightingale. It seems overly joyous to him because of the unhappiness often associated with life and its mortality. He longs for 'a beaker full' of wine in order to escape into the 'happy lot' of this simple creature, for his own mortal life is full of 'weariness', 'fever' and 'fret'. Downcast is the poet because human life is beset by 'sorrow' and 'leaden-eyed despair'. Both beauty and love, those pleasures that he wished would remain forever, fail to last 'beyond tomorrow', causing him to flee the anguish of mortality for the 'dim forest' <https://assignbuster.com/discussion-of-bright-star-ode-to-a-nightingale-and-to-autumn/>

of the unmindfully bliss nightingale. In true Romantic style, the poet rejects the scientific reasoning and logic of 'the dull brain', for to think is to remember and 'be full of sorrow'. The poet would rather 'dissolve, and quite forget'. Amongst the 'dim forest', devoid of the painful illumination of reason, the poet attempts to pursue the immortal nightingale, but fails. Thus, he comes to the same conclusion of Bright Star – he decides that if permanence cannot be attained, then 'seems it rich to die' an 'easeful Death'. The song of the nightingale, just like the Star, reminds the poet of humanity's transience. Unlike the bird's 'immortal' melody, both 'emperor and clown' – powerful and poor – all meet the same fate of death, and thus it is better to 'swoon to death' in order to ease life's sorrow, rather than endure the 'few, sad, last grey hairs' of old age. In To Autumn, the poet explores nature once again. His object of contemplation is the season of Autumn – the 'close bosom-friend of the maturing sun.' While this poem is essentially a celebration of the season, it also uncovers nature's true transience and state of flux, thus contradicting the previously asserted immortality of nature, as embodied by the Star and Nightingale. Just as the sun matures, so also the seasons change. In Autumn-time, the poet observes the ripening fruit and flowers, representing the 'youth' mentioned in Ode to a Nightingale. Just as youth is often mistakenly convinced of its invincibility, so too the bees of Autumn falsely assume 'warm days will never cease.' Likewise, Autumn is personified as 'careless' and 'sound asleep' – taking its ease as a result of the affluence of harvest time, symbolic of the peak condition of youth. But just as a peak implies a valley, the 'last ooziings' indicate a coming time of want, or a ceasing of affluence and its associated pleasures. These pleasures will soon fade, like the 'fume of poppies' will

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grow faint, for the days are 'soft-dying'. The pain and death symbolised by winter is softly creeping up unawares on Autumn, but its icy clutches will soon replace Autumn's 'mellow fruitfulness'. Already, nature senses its approach, with the 'small gnats' mourning in a 'wailful choir'. Symbolising life's fleeting pleasures, Autumn is blissfully unaware. But the repeated imagery of change throughout this poem, such as 'sinking' and 'grown lambs' make it clear that nothing, not even nature, can remain 'unchangeable' – as much as the poet of Bright Star might wish. The repeated allusions to death and impermanence throughout these three poems reflect Keats' own constant reminders of mortality. They imply a disenchantment with life born of hardship, sorrow and disappointment. These poems share an inclination towards escaping reality and finding solace in 'wine', the 'wings of poesy' and even death, as a result of life's fleeting pleasures and inevitable pain. Life, beauty and love are celebrated, only to be revealed as fleeting and out of reach. And even the poet's comparison – Nature – is also portrayed as impermanent. In a world of heartache and 'weariness', the poet seeks stability and constancy in Nature, but even the natural world is proven to be without solace. Just as the poet asks, 'Where are the songs of Spring?', so Love and Beauty soon fade and are forgotten, for such is the nature of life. To the poet's regret, the truth must be accepted – nothing is constant.