

SAMPLE ANALYSIS (II) ON JOHN KEATS' 'ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE'

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THESIS AND KEY IDEA

Text: *Ode to a Nightingale (1918)*, John Keats

Question

Do you agree with the proposition that, “in Ode to a Nightingale, Keats holds the competence of human intellect to the highest esteem and hallows its ability to - without external aid - conceive of the absolute essence of nature.”

Thesis

Keats’ persistent debasing of the human intellect¹ in his Ode to a Nightingale (1918) is not only testimony to his position against the intellect’s vocation to comprehend nature in absolution² – but also subtly betrays the poet’s affirmation of intellectual materialism³.

¹*Keats’ continuous depictions of human intellect as helpless/ineffective*

² *is not only evidence that Keats thinks that the intellect is not fit for the role of comprehending the absolute essence of nature*

³ *Keats’ depictions of the weak human intellect also subtly hints that Keats thinks that the intellect is made of physical matter (materialism) rather than being an immaterially/spiritually constituted.*

Key Idea 1

Keats subordinates the human intellect to “Poesy”¹ in his depiction of the intellect’s inability to expound upon the Nightingale’s immortality – if not for an impotent reliance on poetry as a means to that end².

¹*Keats demonstrates that the human intellect is inferior to poetry*

² *Without expression through poetry, the human intellect alone would be unable to adequately explain the immortality of the Nightingale.*

ANALYSIS

Analysis

In the fourth stanza of his *Ode to a Nightingale*, Keats tarnishes the human intellect – in a manner that could not be more apt to the egress of 18th century rationalism – through a depiction of the “brain[‘s]” impotent reliance upon poetry as a means to expound upon “immortal Bird”. This is facilitated by Keats’ juxtaposition of the human intellect that “perplexes and retards” – upon venturing to conceive of the Nightingale’s absolute nature – with “Poesy” and its metaphorical “wings” that befit it to this task. Through this subordination of the human intellect to poetry, Keats encourages his reader to humbly reflect on the materiality of the human intellect and the manifold tools to which it outsources its attempts at conception of the absolute essence of nature.