

# The Real and Ideal World in The Odes of John Keats

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## Abstract

The research paper depicts the movement of the speaker between the real and the ideal world. John Keats is one of the greatest poets of the romantic era. Keats often associated love and pain both in life and in his poetry. He repeatedly combines different senses in one image. The vital force behind his poetry was his power to apply imagination to every aspect of life. The series of odes written by John Keats are heavily loaded with sensualities. Most of his odes move between the two worlds; the real world and the ideal world. The real world is where the poet actually lives in and the ideal world is what he desires to be. The structure of his odes explains how he restores the friendly relationship between natural and material world, even in pain. The article depicts how John Keats moves from real world to the ideal world in his Odes. In *Ode to Psyche* the speaker moves to the ideal world of mind and imagination. In *Ode to a Nightingale* and *Ode on Grecian Urn* the speaker returns to the real world because he finds the ideal dissatisfying. Finally in his last Ode, *Ode to Melancholy* the speaker remains in the real world. He longed for the ideal world but at the end he embraced the natural, finite world.

**Key words:** Real and the Ideal world, sensuous appeal, friendly relationship, imagination.

## Introduction

John Keats was a great English poet and one of the youngest poets of the romantic moment. John Keats was born in London on 31 October 1795, the eldest of Thomas and Frances Jennings Keats's four children. Although he died at the age of twenty-five, Keats had perhaps the most remarkable career of any English poet. He published only fifty-four poems, in three slim volumes and a few magazines. But over his short development he took on the challenges of a wide range of poetic forms from the sonnet, to the Spenserian romance, to the Miltonic epic, defining anew their possibilities with his own distinctive fusion of earnest energy, control of conflicting perspectives and forces, poetic self-consciousness, and,

occasionally, dry ironic wit. At the age of eight Keats entered Enfield Academy. He was not a shy, bookish child; Clarke remembered an outgoing youth, who made friends easily and fought passionately in their defence. At school, Keats drew closer to the headmaster, John Clarke, and his son, Cowden. He became, in fact, one of Clarke's favourite pupils, reading voraciously and taking first prizes in essay contests his last two or three terms. In some part this new academic interest was a response to his loneliness after his mother's death. But he had by then already won an essay contest and begun translating Latin and French. Keats's love for literature, and his association of the life of imaginations with the politics of a liberal intelligentsia, really began in Clarke's school. It was modelled on the Dissenting academies that encouraged a broad range of reading in classical and modern languages, as well as history and modern science; discipline was light, and students were encouraged to pursue their own interests by a system of rewards and prizes.

Keats found comfort and refuge in literature and art. The themes of Keats' works were love, beauty, joy, nature, music and the mortality of human life. Keats' diction is highly connotative. His writing style is characterized by sensual imagery and contains many poetic devices such as alliteration, personification, assonance, metaphors and consonance. All of these devices work together to create rhythm and music in his poems. Today his poems and letter remain among the most popular and analysed in English literature. In 1819, Keats composed six odes which are among his most famous and well-regarded poems. His odes move between the two worlds; the real and the ideal world. Ideal world is one every person has in mind and want to become. They have dreams which may be fulfilled or not depending on the circumstances prevailing. The real world is an entirely different storey, and it is based on events that occur on the ground. Ideal world is designed by a person in a way of comfort but the real-world deviates from the ideal sense depending on the local consequences. The ideal world is our expectation and the real world is actual. Keats has left behind a number of beautiful odes. The most prominent of them are *Ode to Psyche*, *Ode to a Nightingale*, *Ode on Grecian Urn*, and *Ode on Melancholy*. Through these odes, the poet describes the romance of Psyche, melodious songs of the Nightingale, Grecian art and the changing human moods. This article depicts how Keats moves from the real world to the ideal world in his odes.

## Ode to Psyche

*Ode to Psyche* is a tribute to the Greek Goddess Psyche with which cupid fell in love. He claims to have had a dream about her and cupid, but he isn't sure if it was a dream or a fantasy. In any case, it was a view of reality that may properly be described as a peak of Keats creative intensity, in which the real and the ideal, the factual and the fantasy all came together. The poet proposes to become her priest, to construct her a shrine in the depths of his mind, to adorn her with flowers of verses, and to let his imagination be the gardener of that metaphorical garden of spiritual love, where the breeze and streams, birds and bees will soothe the dryads to sleep. The poet's fancy will produce an endless variety of flowers which means verses. His creative imagination is even more fertile than an ordinary garden. Such a garden which is the fountain of imagination will be left open for the deity forever. The goddess for whom this temple is being built is transported from her natural state of unreality into the realm of fantasy. The goddess, her temple, and her garden are all clear in the minds' eye but only exist in the imagination. Those who do not comprehend the myth's meaning may accuse it of anthropomorphism, but the significance rests in our realisation and experience of the ideal, spiritual, and imaginative phenomena.

His fancy will be the gardener and his verses will be the flowers in the garden. He has projected about his dreams and wishes while universalising the issue. He has worked his way through a theoretical acceptance of the value of vivid and imaginative experience. His intention is to glorify the imagination which is a means of approaching the immortal world by breaking through the bounds of the transient and the finite.

## Ode to a Nightingale

*Ode to a Nightingale* reveals the highest imaginative powers of the poet. The song of the nightingale moves from the Poet to the depth of his heart and creates numbness. When he hears the song, he is embraced by the sweetness of his joy and becomes so excessive that it changes into a kind of pleasant pain. He is filled with a desire to escape from world of caring to the world of beautiful place of the world. Keats immortalizes the bird by thinking of the race of it as the symbol of universal and undying musical voice. This universal and eternal voice has comforted human beings embittered by life and tragedies by opening the casement of the remote, magical, spiritual, eternal and ideal.

The poet is longing for the imaginative experience of an imaginatively perfect world. He is trying to escape from the reality and experience the ideal rather than complement one with the other. Keats develops a dialectic by partaking both the states- the fretful here of man and the happy there of the nightingale and serves as a mediator between two. He makes imaginative flight into the ideal world but accept the realities of life despite its fury. Keats soars high with his wings of poesy into the world of ideas and perfect happiness. But the next moment consciousness makes him land on the grounds of reality and he bids farewell to the ideal bird. In fact, no one can escape into the ideal world forever. Imaginative minds can have a momentary flight into the fanciful world. But ultimately one has to return to the real world and must accept the reality.

### **Ode on a Grecian Urn**

*Ode on Grecian urn* is an ode in which the speaker addresses his feelings and ideas about the experience of an imagined world of art, in contrast to the reality of life, change and sufferings. This is a romantic poem mainly because of its dominant imaginative quality. The ode of Grecian urn expresses Keats' desire to belong to the realm of the eternal, the permanent perfect and the pleasurable, by establishing the means to approach that world of his wish with the help of imagination. This ode is based on the tension between the ideal and the real. Keats here idealizes a work of art as symbolizing the world of art which represents the ideal world of his wish at an even deeper level. Then he experiences that world is created through imagination. Keats' fascination with the immortality of art is duly counterbalanced with his awareness that it is lifeless. The world of reality and of imagination are explicitly contrasted in this ode. Keats indicates a contrast between the unchanging 'Urn' and temporal life in the very beginning of the poem but shifting to the other side from where he seems to prefer warm life against the 'cold pastoral' where he finally resolves the duality in his doctrine of beauty and truth. The permanently ideal world that is presented in the urn is lifeless thing when seen from the viewpoint of real life. The real life is complemented and enriched by their ideal.

The poet is seeking for the reality of life to be like that of the ideal world. He is trying to establish the world of his wish with the help of imagination. The poem begins with an address to the Grecian Urn and with almost envious amazement but it ends with the realization that beauty or ideal is also a dimension of the truth of the real.

## Ode on melancholy

One of Keats' greatest insights into the nature of human experience is his *Ode on melancholy*. In this poem, the two conflicting domains of experience manifest as joy and melancholy. The poem has an abrupt beginning which reads like a conclusion after a long mental conflict of the speaker. The conflict has brought the speaker to face a resolution where he begins by declaring his understanding of the dialectics. The general idea of the poem is that sadness is to be found not in the ugly and painful things of life but in the beauty and pleasures of the world. Logically true happiness would also be found in contemplating the ugly and the painful things. Keats seems to be preoccupied with the idea of seeking a heavy dose melancholy but he finds both problem and remedy in the same object. The remedy for the melancholy for common people would be something that makes them unconscious of sadness and pain. To experience true melancholy, one must stimulate all senses and only more consciousness can make us experience true melancholy and tragedies of life. In this way he has suggested the reader to seek sensuous stimulants of joy to realise how objects of pleasure lead us naturally into the anguish of the 'soul' through the tragic consciousness of their transience. The originality in Keats conception lies in the simultaneity of perception.

Keats finds the solution in his own principle of binaries and propounds the idea of simultaneous understanding and experience that completes the whole of reality. Keats believes that the natural world is the only one, mortals can access and there is no escape from melancholy.

## Conclusion

Keats came to learn that the kind of imagination he pursued was a false lure, inadequate to the needs of the problem and in the end; he traded the visionary for the naturalized imagination and embracing experience. Keats imagination is a means to understand life, a means of quest for the truth and beauty and the most reliable mode of experience and insight. *Ode to Psyche* suggests that Keats longs for the ideal and rejects the natural world. In *Ode to a Nightingale* the poet joins the nightingale and thereby escapes from the suffering and the pain of the world. But later he drives away the nightingale in order to prolong his sympathetic grip on the natural world. In *Ode on a Grecian Urn* the everlasting world of the urn is full of desirable life and passion without any suffering and aging. But the speaker has returned to the more sufficient, finite world, resigned now to embrace the natural beauties. In *Ode on Melancholy*, he urges the reader not to search after the idealistic world but rather to seize and experience the beauty of the transient

natural and human world. Keats attitude towards the world is reflected in this article that he no longer desires to escape to the perfect world but desires to live fully in the natural one.

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