



Publisher homepage: [www.universepg.com](http://www.universepg.com), ISSN: 2663-7782 (Online) & 2663-7774 (Print)

<https://doi.org/10.34104/bjah.0220970106>

## British Journal of Arts and Humanities

Journal homepage: [www.universepg.com/journal/bjah](http://www.universepg.com/journal/bjah)



# Keats' Sufi Speaker Jumps Back to Reality: An Evaluation of "Ode to Nightingale"

Fairooz Saiyara<sup>1\*</sup> and Ashik Istiak<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1&2</sup>Department of English, Green University of Bangladesh, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

\*Correspondence: [fairoozshaolee19@gmail.com](mailto:fairoozshaolee19@gmail.com) (Fairooz Saiyara, Department of English, Green University of Bangladesh Dhaka, Bangladesh).

### ABSTRACT

Sufism that predates Romanticism over 900 years has an arresting similarity with British Romanticism and American transcendentalism. The faith in immortal afterlife, the consideration of death as a gateway to eternity, and the belief in the unity of the creator and the creation make the two philosophical genres very close to each other. John Keats, being one of the greatest British romantic poets, has shown numerous occasions where he puts death in a hierarchic position over life, and also describes elements that have eternal nature. Sufism too searches for a greater mystic regardless of the pain and pleasure of the material world. Keats' "Ode to Nightingale" presents the poet himself having an obsession regarding the spiritual world of the nightingale but his wish is countered by the sudden return to reality. Hence, through a Sufi evaluation of the ode, the hasty transformation of the poet may be explored. First of all, the definition, origin, and the overall practices in Sufism are briefly discussed. Also, how Sufism concurs with other philosophical developments especially in Europe is also highlighted. Finally, a close observation of the poem is made through which the dilemma between Keats' Sufi and realistic double consciousness is explored.

**Keywords:** Sufism, Romanticism, Spirituality, Physical reality, and Transformation.

### INTRODUCTION:

The term 'Sufism' also known as "Tasawouf" refers to "a path and a journey of the heart towards a destination" (Stoddart, 1998). A Sufi takes an inner journey to attain the knowledge of self which leads them towards understanding the Divine" (Angha). Etymologically, 'Sufi' comes from "Safa" (in Arabic) meaning "Purity" or "Saff" (rank), and the Sufis seek the purest soul and closest rank to God (Stoddart, 1998). As a matter of fact, they are called "Sufi" because of the 'Suf' or "the woolen garments" worn by medieval Sufis (Stoddart, 1998). Since the earliest days of Islam, Sufism has been exercised as an "individual inner practice" (Baadiyow, 2017). However, it is known that "from about 800 to 1400 A.D.", Sufi schools flouri-

shed under "the guidance of master teachers such as Rumi and Ibn Arabi" (Mindlin, 1999). Since then, Sufism has often been referred to as the "knowledge of the spiritual states" (Geoffroy, 2016). A Sufi seeks the knowledge of the self (*Akailm-Al-Batin*) which "proposes an alternative and paradoxical explanation of the world" (Geoffroy, 2016). Sufism believes in human beings' "undifferentiated unity" that is "interrupted by material creation which resulted in the separation of humanity (as lover) from God (as Beloved)" (Debashi, 2002). For that reason, the separated spirit "longs" to unite or re-unite with the Divine Spirit, i.e. God (Kirschner, 1996). A Sufi is a mystique who pursues an intimate knowledge or unity with God via "cognition, meditation, and imagination" (Ezzeldin, 2018). This

spiritual voyage begins when they pass from the “perceived image (*Al-mithal*)” to the spiritual “reality” (*al haqiqah*) into the eternal “world of dominion” (*Alam-al-malakut*)” (Tamer, 2016). Eminent Sufi Al-Ghazali has imputed “imagination a mediator role between sensual perception & knowledge of truth” (Tamer, 2016). The flight of the spirit to its origin “necessitates a sort of oneness, a negation of self, and aims at uni-ting this self with God; that is, extinguishing himself in Him” (Alsaeed, 2022; Geoffroy, 2016).

This mode of communication is denoted as ‘fanna’ or annihilation. This transmission refers to the loss of consciousness regarding the physical reality of a person. In this state of mind, a Sufi experiences a paradoxical condition-being in the world in a human body, yet aloof from anything related to the material world. This negation “guarantees redemption from miseries of life, the knowledge as a redeemer is identified with God” (Sharda, 1998). This ‘redemption’ is an established concept in noted religions (Hinduism and Buddhism) as ‘Nirvana’, which is “achieved by means of cognitive process, namely a realistic appreciation of the pleasures and miseries of human existence and the way out” (Johansson, 1969). “Vision” and “knowledge” are the most prioritized attainments of Nirvana (Johansson, 1969). A mystique “always seeks to understand the essence of truth, reality, and his origin and he is well aware that he will find an explanation for all his questions within, not without” (Ezzeldin, 2018).

Thus, according to Sufism, the human soul is capable of attaining answers to its queries by uniting with God via contemplation. Sufi teachings are not confined to oriental scholars only. By the time of the Romantic Movement in Europe, Sufism reached the scholars, philosophers, and writers of the west via translated poetry and Quranic verses. Shamsuddin-Muhammad Hafiz (c.1320-1389), one of the greatest and the most beloved Persian poets, used to be an apprentice of spirituality at a very young age and later on became a Sufi master. His collected poems (*Divan*) considered a classic of Sufi literature. Sufis esteem Hafiz’s poetry as a “perfect expression” of the “human experience of divine love” (Mindlin, 1999). Hafiz’s works have reached the scholars of the west in the 18th century through Goethe and his keen interest in Sufi poetry influenced transcendentalist writer Ralph Waldo

Emerson as well. Goethe has simply commented, “Hafiz has no peer” (Ladinsky, 1999). Emerson has translated the poetry of Hafiz in the nineteenth century and his literary works illustrate Sufi philosophy (Landisky, 1999). For instance, he says in his essay *The Over-Soul* that the soul entirely submits itself to the “Lonely, Original, and Pure” entity who “gladly inhabits, leads, and speaks through it” (277). Moreover, the ghazals of Hafiz are appreciated by Friedrich Nietzsche, Alexander Pushkin, Ivan Turgenev, Thomas Carlyle, and Garcia Lorca (Ladinsky, 1999). Even Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s (2003) Sherlock Holmes concludes “A Case of Identity” by referring to an old Persian saying that there is “as much sense in Hafiz as in Horace, and as much knowledge of the world”. Therefore, it can be said that, from the United States through Europe to Russia, Sufi literature spread across the globe and have influenced the scholars during the Romantic age exclusively via Hafiz’s poetry.

### **British Romanticism and Sufism**

Romanticism, (1760-1850c) is regarded as an intellectual movement (literary and artistic) in Europe (England, France, and Germany) primarily as a protest against the industrial exploitation of nature. English Romantic literature has often been described in terms of “an individual life journey in solitude and in search of ‘the unknown point of origin’, toward a revelatory reintegration and unified state” (Ciecko, 2010). British pre-Romantic and Romantic writers have taken a stand against the mechanization of human minds in the repercussion of the industrial revolution. Other than the features of Nature, Art, Individualism, Love, Childhood, and anti-Industrialization, Romantic literature also aims to expand spirituality by pursuing the divine soul and wondering about life after death. In *Romanticism and Anti-Self Consciousness*, Geoffrey Hartman (2004) talks about two types of self in Romanticism: “the self-conscious self” and “self within the self”. The ‘self-conscious’ self is tethered to the physical world and which the Sufis often deprecate (Hartman, 2004).

Contrarily, one’s self within the self urges to get untethered from materialism for communion with God. Hartman explains this as “a process of going beyond self-consciousness” through a “division in the self” to attain “a unity of being”. In an attempt to discover the self within the self, the Romantics seek a form of “self-

annihilation” to escape the former self (Lussier, 2011). This process of self-annihilation is identical to the Sufi ‘fanaa’ where the soul adjoins itself with the divine Being. Oueijan, (2007) mentions that “an attachment” to the “spiritual self” detaches one from their “material self” where the former self involves “pain and suffering”, and the latter “redemption and reconciliation” (“Sufism, Christian Mysticism, & Romanticism”). This tendency of the Romantics is often regarded as ‘escapism’, where one tends to escape the bitter reality by immersing in an imaginary world. In this aspect, the Sufis have influenced the Romantics because their teachings and practices “suited their aims and goals” (Ezzeldin, 2018). Their “common poetic concerns” becomes detectable through their “themes and forms” (Ezzeldin, 2018). Both Sufis and Romantics believe that separation from materialism helps a person focus on their inner self which is crucial to experience the joy of the soul and death is nothing but a gateway to reunite with the source of life. Some examples from the Romantic and Mystic poets may be observed. William Blake says in *Milton* (italics added):

I will go down to *self annihilation* and eternal death,  
Lest the Last Judgement come & find me *un-annihilate*  
And I be seiz’d & giv’n into the hands of my own  
Self hood (qtd. in Lussier, 2011).

Likewise, Rumi, a Sufi, believes that “the best sort of existence is found only when a man ‘annihilates’ his self” (Lewisohn, 2008). In *Mathnawi*, Rumi asserts that “annihilation” or *fanaa* is a superior form of “being-in-God (*baqaa*)” (Lewisohn, 2008). According to Caroline Spurgeon’s (2011) *Mysticism in English Literature*, P. B. Shelly believes “in a Soul of the Universe, a Spirit in which all things live and move and have their being; which ... is unnamable, inconceivable even to man, for the deep truth is imageless” (p. 35). Shelley passionately desires “the mystical fusion of his own personality with this Spirit, this object of worship and adoration” (Spurgeon, 2011). He believes that death is not the end, rather it unveils the curtain between someone and his/her ideal spirit which is the true form of life. Shelley's writings bear strong evidence that uniting with the divine is one of the agendas of the Romantics. This sense of unity with the

Divine is most strongly apparent in “Adonais” as well as “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty” which is, in some way, “Shelley’s clearest and most obvious expression of his devotion to the Spirit of Ideal Beauty, its reality to him, and his vow of dedication to its service” (Spurgeon, 2011). Thomas Moore in *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron* mentions that at the age of 19 in 1807, the romantic poet Lord Byron accounted that he read the Quran and Shah Nameh by Ferdousi (qtd. in Ezzeldin, 2018). The list clearly depicts that Oriental literature (especially Sufi) have not only reached the scholars of the west by the 18<sup>th</sup> century but also influenced the younger generations, and plays a vital role in Lord Byron's philosophy and works. In “The Bride of Abydos”, Byron adores how Selim and Zuleikha’s pure passion breaks the chain of “physical reciprocity and embodies the highest form of spiritual love” (“Byron and Sufism: His Concept of Selfless Love”, 1999). Their detachment from sensuality and lust brings them closer to Sufism because selfless admiration is what a true Sufi needs to feel for the divine soul. Moreover, 19<sup>th</sup> century Transcendentalism also encourages knowing God for passionate love rather than obeying an unknown entity out of fear. According to this philosophy, discovering God's existence in nature should be prioritized over obeying the God unknown. Etymologically the word “transcend” derives from Latin *trans* (across) and *scandere* (climb) (Istiak, 2019). The Latin origin of *scandere* “expresses both a dissatisfaction with the current state and the thirst for knowing new things” (Istiak, 2019). Ralph Waldo Emerson, one of the most influential American transcendentalists believe, “the creator and the created- the source and the resource, the universe and the particles - do not exist separately; rather they remain in a continuous transcendental reality” (Istiak, 2019). The concept is identical to a particular doctrine of Sufism known as “Wadat al-Wujut”- unity of being (Sumbulah, 2016). This philosophy is associated with Ibn al Arabi’s (d.1240) works where he preaches that God is the only “reality” that exists and the creation is part of that reality (Sumbulah, 2016). Additionally, Christopher Murray (2014) mentions that Romantic Neo-Platonism is based on a principle that “all creation originally existed in a harmonious unity” (p. 1129). He further explains that every human carries some parts of the original being within themselves. These philoso-

phical similarities between Sufism, Transcendentalism, and Romanticism reflect that nineteenth-century romantic literature carries Sufi elements regarding the concept of God, Soul, and an ascetic approach towards life. Therefore, when someone studies or exercises Romanticism, they become a Sufi. This research posits John Keats as a poet in whom the two genres: Romanticism and Sufism got blended. On various occasions, Keats is seen to pursue the truth to unite with the divine spirit through poetry. Similarly, a Sufi also takes the assistance of 'Dhikr' (or remembrance) and Ghazals to praise the divine and explore one's spiritual existence. The philosophical attempt of experiencing eternity while existing in a mortal body creates a paradox that is present in both Ghazals and in some of the poems of Keats. Unlike Byron, Coleridge, or Wordsworth, Keats has never acknowledged reading Arabic or Persian works. However, a close observation of his odes might reveal that he has been influenced by Sufism. For this purpose, one of his most notable poems "Ode to Nightingale" has been observed afterward.

### "Ode to a Nightingale": A Paradoxical Experience

In the poem "Ode to Nightingale", the nightingale seems to be a 'spirit' free from earthly bindings and trivialities. In contrast, Keats presents his 'self' as the speaker who is going through enormous pain (perhaps because of his health problem) and frustration (over the contemporary political issue). The nightingale seems to be a spirit not from this world yet discovered by the poet in this world. Also, a wish to leave the world and to be united with the bird in another world is clearly expressed in the poem. All these hint at Sufi elements. In the beginning of the first stanza, the poet expresses "his senseless and painful" condition (Ezzeldin, 2018). Keats writes,

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains  
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,  
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains  
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk (Line 1-4).

The poet is hurt both inwardly and outwardly. His condition of painful dizziness could be because of some kind of drug intake as he mentions "hemlock", "opiate" etc. However, the phrase "as though" in the second line makes the statement obscure. It indicates

that the poet 'feels like' he has drunk those types of substances, not necessarily that he drank them for real. Nevertheless, it is clarified that the poet is not in the 'normal' sense of mind. The mythological allusion created through the mentioning of "Lethe" - the river of forgetfulness-adds another feature to the physical/mental condition of the poet. It intends that from the very moment, the poet no longer remembers anything in his external reality. His focus shifts from his world to the world of spirituality where the nightingale belongs. This state of mind matches the ancient sacred 'Sufi Whirling'.



**Fig. 1:** The spiritual journey: Sufi whirling dances in Turkey – VCG Photo, 16 December 2018. CGTN: Self the Difference.

<https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d514d3567544d34457a6333566d54/index.html> (Source: Qingrui, Jiang, 2019).

The Sufi dervishes remain in "a spiritual trance" while moving like a whirl (Bainbridge, 2019). While making this 360 degree move, their right hands point towards the sky-heaven-and their left hands point towards the earth indicating the floating "between the two worlds" (Bainbridge, 2019). The dancers embrace this floating physical/mental condition as a form of meditation forgetting the meanness of the physical world and its affairs. Keats is in a similar condition. He has discovered the nightingale as a heavenly creature just like the Sufi dancers who point towards the sky with their left hands in search of heavenly blessings. Also rather than being "envious", Keats is "too happy" in the "happy lot" of the nightingale (Line 5-6). Through the exertion of this positive attitude, Keats again reveals his Sufi nature. The Sufi dancers believe "they can abandon their per-

sonal desires and egos, get closer to God, and achieve spiritual perfection” (Qingrui, 2019). Keats’ being selflessly happy thus gives him a personality devoid of trivial ‘egotism’. Perhaps, this is the same reason for which Emerson being inspired by British Romanticism theorizes ‘the sublime’ through the publication of *Nature* in 1836, which is 15 years after the death of John Keats (pp. 5-7). Emerson, (1836) too has thought of a world much greater than the material world in the sublimity of nature where “all mean egotism vanishes” (p. 9). The further the poem advances, the more the positive notes on the nightingale appear. Keats describes the bird as a “light-winged Dryad of the trees” which possesses a melodious voice and sings “of summer in full-throated ease” (Line 7-10). The word “Dryad” again associates the bird with the world of myth. The recurring association of myth with the bird brings back the consideration of the bird being something ‘unknown’, a thing in the world of wonder. But this something unknown is not fearsome. It is rather a wonder for which Keats waits eagerly. The visual image of “summer” and the auditory image expressed through the phrase “full-throated ease” are also very suggestive. In England where it is mostly winter and the weather is not temperate, everybody waits for “summer” to come. The bird seems to sing of “summer” regardless of time, place, or weather bringing happiness to the mind of people even though they may not be in a smooth situation. A deeper observation may place the bird as someone who can replace the earthly pain and frustration of people with a tone of positivity. In reality, Keats is in pain probably because of intoxication. Keats tries to find a shelter in the spirit of the nightingale much like all the romantics who escape reality finding a place to hide in their imagination. The Sufi dervishes too as mentioned above believe something wondrous may appear in their tireless search for spirituality. They believe in ‘fanaa’ or annihilation which according to Geoffroy (2016) happens because of “the intoxication of immersion in the divine Presence, in an entire loss of self-consciousness” (p. 14). In the “Foreword” of *Essential Sufism*, it has been termed as “God-intoxication” (Smith, 1997). Keats’ intoxication at the beginning of the poem and the supreme interest in the spirit of the nightingale expressed later may be connected to the Sufi interest in divinity and at the same time rejection of materialism. Ezzeldin,

(2018) writes, “Sufism is spiritualism against materialism” (p. 122). Thus, Keats’ Sufi influence becomes more visible.

The second stanza finds Keats more desperate as he expresses his death wish. He wishes to “leave the world unseen” and “fade away into the forest dim” with the spiritual bird (Line 19-20). The death wish is articulated not once but several times:

Away! Away! For I will fly to thee,  
..... and, for many a time  
I have been half in love with easeful Death,  
Call’d him soft names in many a mused rhyme,  
To take into the air my quiet breath;  
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,  
To cease upon the midnight with no pain (Line 31-56).

The lines exert that the death wish in Keats is an obsession. He wants to “fly” to the world of the nightingale which means that he has lost his consciousness in physical reality, a common phenomenon in romanticism as mentioned in the previous discussion. The preference of spiritual love is again a reminder of the refusal of the material life Keats had. However, Keats was only 24 years old when the poem was published in 1819. So, why is this hurry for death? The personal life of the poet has been through stark situations. Losing his father at the age of 8 and his mother at 14 certainly have impacted his financial as well as mental condition. His mother died of consumption which ran as a family disease involving the death of his brother Thomas Keats as well in 1818. It is widely believed that John Keats has got infected while nursing his ailing brother Thomas and died in the year 1821 of the same disease. So, when the poem “Ode to Nightingale” was published in 1819, Keats might have had symptoms and therefore, was going through a painful physical condition. It is not unexpected from a person going through such physical condition to wish for a quick death. Interestingly, the hurry to see what is beyond life is not really uncommon in literature even at the time of Keats or before. Around two centuries before Keats, George Herbert (2005) in one of his mystic shape poems “Easter Wings”, wishes to “further the flight” as he wants to “imp” himself with Jesus Christ (p. 368). Here, the word “flight” is a meta-phor for death. A more captivating fact is that both Herbert

and Keats have had a short and poor life (considering their physical condition) and died of consumption. It may imply that they both wanted to die quickly just to get relieved of their physical pain and hence, they took shelter in divinity-for Herbert it was Jesus Christ and for Keats it was the nightingale. That is why the figurative oxymoron “easeful Death” or the paradox “cease upon the midnight with no pain” may be taken literally for Keats. Besides, the physical pain, the discontinuation of the love affair with Frances Brawne due to his worsening financial condition, and his not being well-recognized among the critics in spite of vigorous writing may have affected his mental well-being. Thus, they all may have worked as practical reasons for his death wish which has been romanticized in his poems.

The Sufi dervishes too show an acute eagerness to die. In *Essential Sufism*, it is written that "death is not a transition" for Sufis rather it is "stepping across a threshold" and "another chance to reawaken" and life "offers a spectrum of opportunities" by allowing one to "recover awareness of one's full identity" (Smith, 1997, p. 251). The book also mentions that Huston Smith, (1997) addressed the Sufis as “the impatient ones” who desire to know what is beyond death so eagerly that they do not want to wait till death (p. 251). They “die before you die” (Smith, 1997). Keats’ being too much attracted to death while he is still alive, therefore, becomes a Sufi wish. However, there are many indications in the poem where Keats speaks of his frustration over his time and people who belong to the period which proves that the pain he was going through was both personal (because of his physical condition) and social (because of industrialization). Romantic poets have been strict critics of the period of industrialization. Keats describes his and his previous periods as “hungry generations” in the 7<sup>th</sup> stanza of the poem (Line 62). Also, he describes his time vigorously in the 3<sup>rd</sup> stanza:

What thou among the leaves hast never known,  
The weariness, the fever, and the fret  
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;  
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,  
Where youth grows pale, and spectrethin, and dies;  
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow  
And leaden-eyed despairs (Line 22-28).

What Keats describes, clearly enables the readers to understand how the period of industrialization agitated the romantics. Since the beginning of industrialization and the birth of John Keats are very close, Keats has lived in this period and experienced the situation. The world where Keats has lived in is sick (“weariness”, “fever”, “fret”). The selfishness of rugged individualism is also mentioned when Keats writes “men sit and hear each other groan”. Perhaps, Keats has indicated the bragging of personal materialistic achievements or the talk of un-fulfillment of the materialistic needs among people at his time. Since Keats used the word “groan”, clearly, he criticized the greed in humans for materialistic success. The word “palsy” stands for physically unable persons for whom “few” show sympathy. If this word is taken metaphorically, Keats may also indicate towards people who go through a mental tremor and are isolated from society where everybody is busy with themselves. The phrase “gray hairs” stands as a metonymy for old age. Keats says that people in old age remain “sad” throughout their life. The “youth”, on the contrary, “grows pale” and becomes “spectrethin” by the end of their time. “Spectre” means ghost and Keats wants to say that being too much involved in the materialistically driven society, their youth becomes invisible like ghosts and finally, “dies” along with all their possibilities. In this dire selfish situation, people like Keats who can “think”, they remain “full of sorrow” and in “despair”. All of these express the frustration of Keats over his generation and society. So, again it may be said that his personal struggle is tagged with the social struggle and made him wish for an escape in his imagination. Sufism is not interested in the physical world as well since “[a]s per Sufi teachings, finding one's way in this world is not to be realized via the external world, but in the inner landscape of the soul” (Ezzeldin, 2018, p. 122). The materialistic world along with its desires is considered as the ‘veils’ which keep an individual aloof from God. Therefore, like Keats Sufi dervishes take their shelter in divinity. The only difference is the dervishes attempt to reach to the world of spirituality through their ‘Sufi whirling’ and Keats wants to reach the world of the nightingale by “the viewless wings of Poesy” (Line 33). But this wish of Keats for a quick death, the preference of the spiritual world of the nightingale over the earthly life, and the Sufi-like intoxi-

cation of Keats are all halted when the last stanza is read. Keats writes:

Forlorn! The very word is like a bell  
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!  
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well  
As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf (Line 71-74).

The word “forlorn” brings back the self of the Keats from the world of the nightingale to the physical reality. It seems that Keats is on a threshold – both aware of the world of the nightingale and the world where Keats lives reluctantly. It seems that like a Sufi dervish who moves from door to door, Keats initially moved past the door of physical reality, and by the end of the poem the word “forlorn” made him return to the door of the physical reality passed earlier. But why does the sudden change take place? What specialty does the word “forlorn” possess? The word “forlorn” indicates a person who feels ‘abandoned’, ‘isolated’, and utterly ‘lonely’. Has Keats felt lonely in the world of the nightingale, then? But was it not the case that Keats felt the same in the physical reality where people “sit and hear each other groan”? (Line 24). Hence, the word “forlorn” becomes instrumental in the existence of Keats. Keats seems to be in a ‘no man’s land’ situation. This situation is also known as ‘diaspora’ in the language of postcolonial studies. In this situation, people who had to change their nationality (both by force and by choice) remain in an ambivalence regarding their identity since they are not fully accepted in the new place they chose and also they cannot return to their origin. However, in this poem rather than the dilemma of worldly existence, Keats expresses a greater dilemma.

He gets stuck in between the two worlds- the physical and the spiritual. In his physical reality, Keats is not happy as expressed in the third stanza. Also, he cannot reach the spiritual reality of the nightingale since it all seems to him “fancy” which “cannot cheat so well” & “deceive” Keats. The world of the nightingale seems no more special to Keats when he uses the word “fancy”. The word “forlorn” has ignited the conscience or the reality principle of Keats and thus, the beautiful and most cherished world of the nightingale loses all its attraction for Keats. In the language of psychoanalysis, it may be said that the “life instinct” or “Eros” has reawaken in Keats and the ego creates a defense against the “death instinct” or “Thanatos”

UniversePG | [www.universepg.com](http://www.universepg.com)

(Cherry, 2022). Another way to observe this is that the Sufi dervishes do not really commit suicide after their Sufi-whirling. They come back from their trance, eat, drink, and continue in their life as regular humans. Pir Inayat Khan advocates that “detachment” from physical experiences is not “the solution” to suffering, rather one can overcome suffering “by merging with all existence” (Smith, 2008, p. 3). He elaborates that a Sufi wayfarer develops the ability to “accept all things as part of the whole in life, and begins to embrace both the joy and the pain” (Khan, 1978). This argument clarifies that a Sufi or a Romantic is bound to take up the affairs of the material world. Their transcendentalism eventually shifts to realism. Keats too finally is a human being. In this poem, though there is a strong urge for escapism from the side of Keats in the beginning, he ultimately comes back to reality just like the Sufi dervishes. Despite Keats’ desire for mystique pursuit via “viewless wings of Poesy” he inevitably resides in his “sole self” and goes through the torments of tuberculosis in his life. The Sufi poet accepts that romantic “fancy” cannot “deceive” its way out of reality. Later in eminent 20<sup>th</sup> century poetry, the advocacy for realism over romanticism gets more vivid. For instance, Frost in “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” rationalizes realism (material affairs in life) despite being a Transcendentalist. The speaker’s Horse in the poem shakes its “harness bells” when he is mesmerized by nature in an unsecured surrounding that perhaps represents his conscience, which is equivalent to Keats’ realism when he laments “[f]orlorn! The very word is like a bell”. Both poets’ egos settle the authority of their id (necessity) over their super ego (delight). Apparently, Sufism, Romanticism, and Transcendentalism all mystique schools concur that impulsive faculty of humans collapse in front of their material imperatives.

Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades  
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,  
..... Was it a vision, or a waking dream?  
Fled is that music: - Do I wake or sleep? (Lines 75-80).

The repetition of the word “adieu” ensures the elopement of the nightingale along with its spiritual world as the sound of its song “fades” into nature. He describes the bird’s music as a “plaintive anthem” which

depicts his double consciousness. The melodious song of the bird sounds mournful to his ears because he cannot forget the melancholic reality. On one hand, Keats' Sufi "self-within the self" is accompanied by the eternal world of the nightingale. On the other hand, his "self-conscious" self is aware of the pain and suffering in the mortal world of materialism. Keats realizes that the nightingale is abandoning him and flying elsewhere. The bird's flight "over the still stream" denotes the doddering condition of the natural world because of industrialization. Keats uses this dichotomy "still stream" to emphasize the lethargy in society and in himself. The two rhetorical questions at the end of the poem clarify Keats' uncertainty regarding his flight 'within the self'. After the departure of the nightingale, Keats' 'self-conscious self suddenly wonders whether the meeting was a mere "vision, or a waking dream".

On top of that, he ponders whether he is awake or asleep at the moment. This doubtfulness of Keats is quite likely of him, as a Sufi never fully attends the physical reality, rather they constantly tend to explore their spiritual senses, which results in a diasporic condition (double consciousness). Perhaps Keats might have attempted spiritual flight in his living days over again, as he leaves "Ode to Nightingale" ambiguous.

### CONCLUSION:

Every Sufi aspires for spiritual gain though they live in the physical world they ignore. Every romantic escapes in their world of imagination for a certain period and returns to the very reality they hate. A transcendentalist considers that the world beyond the senses is of greater importance than the materialistic world. But, nobody (a Sufi/a romantic/a transcendentalist) can forfeit the physical world entirely. "Ode to Nightingale" exposes an abrupt transformation of a romantic escapist into a realistic Sufi. The love for spirituality, the wish for death to reach spirituality, and the deep desire to unite with the divinity all appear in the beginning only to lose ground by the end. However, the negativity expressed regarding the physical reality in the beginning of the poem ensures that the poet will never be able to be happy in his current circumstance. So, the poet gets entrapped in the middle of an unbearable physical reality and the eternal world of the nightingale. The poem ends not with any satisfaction or relief. Rather, it ends with a great confusion. Keats is

unsure of himself. The two rhetorical questions given through the last two lines are quite decisive for Keats. He drifts between waking and sleeping. He does not have an answer. Hence, it seems this problematic dichotomous existence will accompany him for the rest of his life.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

I thank my family members who never pushed me back when I was too much invested in this work with my co-author and Supervisor Mr. Ashik Istiak. Also, the authors acknowledge the insights shared by the Chairperson of the Department of English, Green University of Bangladesh, Prof. K. M. Wazed Kabir.

### CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:

The authors declare no conflict of interest connecting to this research.

### REFERENCES:

- 1) Alsaed NH. (2022). Interrogating the secret society of Robert Burns, *Br. J. Arts Humanit.*, 4(2), 45-51.  
<https://doi.org/10.34104/bjah.022045051>
- 2) Angha Nahid, (2022). "Practical Sufism and Philosophical Sufism." *International Association of Sufism*, Accessed 17 June 2022.  
<https://ias.org/sufism/practical-sufism-philosophical-sufism/>
- 3) Baadiyow, Abdur Rahman Abdullahi, (2017). *Ma-king Sense of Somali History*. London: Adonis & Abbey Publishers Ltd, 70.
- 4) Bainbridge, James, (2019). "Ancient Sufi Dance: Rumi's Whirling Dervishes." *Culture Trip*, Accessed 10 June 2022.  
<https://theculturetrip.com/europe/turkey/articles/ancient-sufi-dance-rumis-whirling-dervis>
- 5) Ciecko, Anne T, (2010). "Androgyny." *Encyclopedia of Romanticism: Culture in Britain, 1780s-1830s*. Edited by Laura Daburdo, Oxford: Routledge, 6.
- 6) Cherry, Kendra, (2022). "Freud's Theories of Life and Death Instincts." *Very well mind*, Accessed 30 June 2022.  
<https://www.verywellmind.com/life-and-death-instincts>
- 7) Dabashi, Hamid, (2002). "Ayn al Qudat Hama dani and the Intellectual Climate of his Times."



- History of Islamic Philosophy. Edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman, *New York & London, Routledge*, 374-419.
- 8) Doyle, Arthur Conan, (2003). *Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Novels and Stories*. *New York: Bantam Dell*, 305.
  - 9) Emerson, Ralph Waldo, (1950). "Nature." *The Complete Essays and Other Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Edited and with Introduction by Brooks Atkinson, *New York: The Modern Library*, 5-7.  
<https://edwardbetts.com/monograph/Ralph>
  - 10) "The Over Soul." *The Complete Essays and Other Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*.
  - 11) Edited and with Introduction by Brooks Atkinson, *New York: The Modern Library*, 261-278.
  - 12) Ezzeldin, Hend Hamed, (2018). "A Flight Within: Keat's Nightingale in Light of the Sufis." *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 9(3), 121-127. <https://www.academia.edu/37076862/>
  - 13) Fadiman, James, and Frager, Robert, (eds.) (1997). *Essential Sufism*, *San Francisco: Harper San Francisco*, 251-256.
  - 14) Geoffroy, Eric, (2016). "Approaching Sufism." *Sufism: Love and Wisdom*. Edited by Jean-Louis Michon and Roger Gaetani, *World Wisdom*, 14.  
<http://uncpress.unc.edu/>
  - 15) Hartman, Geoffrey H, (2004). "Romanticism and Anti-Self Consciousness." *The Geoffrey Hartman Reader* *Edinburgh: Michigan State University Press*, 183-184.
  - 16) Herbert, George, (2005). "Easter Wings." *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, Edited by Margaret Ferguson *et al.*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, *New York: W. W. Norton & Company*, 368.  
<https://fr.b-ok.asia/book/1002217/6a6617?dsource=recommend>
  - 17) Istiak, Ashik, (2019). "Observing Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening as a Transition of America from Transcendentalism to Realism." *Harvest: Jahangirnagar University Studies in Language and Literature*, 34, 27-41.  
<https://scholar.google.com/citations?user>
  - 18) Johansson, Rune E. A. (1969). *The Psychology of Nirvana*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 21.
  - 19) Keats, John, (2005). "Ode to Nightingale." *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, Edited by Margaret Ferguson *et al.*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, *New York: W. W. Norton & Company*, 935-937.
  - 20) Khan, Pir Vilayat Inayat, (1978). *The Message in Our Time: The Life & Teaching of the Sufi Master*, Pir-O-Murshid Inayat Khan, *New York: Harper Collins*, 391.  
<https://www.amazon.com/Message-Our-Time-Pir-Murshid/dp/0060642378>
  - 21) Kirschner, Suzanne R, (1996). *The Religious and Romantic Origins of Psychoanalysis: Individuation and Integration in Post-Freudian Theory*. *Cambridge University Press*, 125.
  - 22) Ladinsky, Daniel, (ed.), (1999). "Preface." *The Gift: The Poems by Hafiz the Great Sufi Master*, *New York: Penguin*, 11.
  - 23) Lewisohn, Leonard, (2008). "Romantic Love is Islam." *Encyclopedia of Love in World Religion, California: ABC-CLIO*, 209.
  - 24) Lussier, Mark, (2011). "Selfhood and Self-Anihilation in Blake's Milton." *Romantic Dharma: The Emergence of Buddhism into Nineteenth Century Europe*, *New York: Palgrave Macmillan*, 113-145.
  - 25) Mindlin, Henry S., (1999). "Introduction." *The Gift: The Poems by Hafiz the Great Sufi Master*, Edited and Translated by Daniel Ladinsky, *New York: Penguin*, 18.
  - 26) Murray, Christopher John (ed.), (2014). *Encyclopedia of the Romantic Era 1760-1850*. *Routledge*, 1129.
  - 27) Oueijan, Naji B, (1999). "Byron and Sufism: His Concept of Selfless Love", *Proceedings of the 25<sup>th</sup> International Byron Conference and Tour*.  
<https://asels.org/byron-and-sufism/>
  - 28) "Sufism, Christian Mysticism, and Romanticism", (2007). *Live Journal*, Accessed 18 June 2022.  
<https://hojja-nusreddin.livejournal.com/1554161.html>
  - 29) Qingrui, Jiang, (2019). "The Spiritual Journey: Sufi Whirling Dance in Turkey." *CGTN: See the Difference*, Accessed 17 May 2022.  
<https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d514d3567544d34457a6333566d54/index.html>
  - 30) Sharda, S. R., (1998). *Sufi Thought: Its Development in Panjab and Its Impact on Panjabi Literature*

- ature from Baba Farid to AD 1850, *New Delhi: Murshiram Manoharal*, 23.
- 31) Smith, Elizabeth, (2008). "Sufism- on Joy and Pain." *The International Journal of Healing and Caring*, 8(1), 1-6.
- 32) Smith, Huston, (1997). "Foreword." *Essential Sufism*, Edited by *James Fadiman and Robert Frager*, San Francisco: *HarperSanFrancisco*, IX-XII.
- 33) Spurgeon, Caroline F. E., (2011). *Mysticism in English Literature*, Cambridge: *Cambridge University Press*, 35-36.
- 34) Stoddart, William and Nicholson, Reynold A, (1998). *The Mystical Doctrines and the Idea of Personality*. *Delhi: Adam Publishers*, 1.
- 35) Sumbulah, Umi, (2016). "Ibn 'Arabi's Thought on Wahdah Al-Wujud and its Relevance to Religious Diversity" *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 20(1), 53-73.
- 36) Tamer, Georges, (2016). *Islam and Rationality: The Impact of Al-Ghazali*. *Papers Collected on His 900<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*. 1, *BRILL*, 86-87.

**Citation:** Saiyara F., and Istiak A. (2022). Keats' sufi speaker jumps back to reality: an evaluation of "Ode to Nightingale", *Br. J. Arts Humanit.*, 4(4), 97-106. <https://doi.org/10.34104/bjah.0220970106> 