

Mystical Yearning and Poetic Ecstasy: A Sufi Hermeneutic Reading of John Keats' Poem "Ode to a Nightingale"

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Abstract: This study examines the poetic articulation of spiritual longing, beauty, and transcendence in John Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale* through a Sufi-oriented interpretive framework. Focusing exclusively on the poem as the primary object of analysis, the research explores how metaphorical expressions and poetic imagery function not merely as aesthetic devices but as vehicles of spiritual experience. Drawing on a qualitative, interpretive methodology, the study identifies structural parallels between the poem's imaginative movement and key Sufi concepts such as *mahabbah* (divine love), *jamāl* (beauty), and *fanā* (annihilation of the self). The findings reveal that the nightingale operates as a symbolic mediator between the temporal and the eternal, enabling the poetic speaker to momentarily transcend the limitations of mortal existence. This transcendence is not achieved through rational cognition but through an intensification of imaginative consciousness, reflecting a mode of knowing comparable to Sufi intuitive insight. The poem's rich metaphoric network constructs a trajectory of inward journeying that culminates in a fragile experience of unity, followed by a return to fragmented self-awareness. Moreover, the study argues that Keats's notion of negative capability resonates with the Sufi practice of self-emptying, wherein the dissolution of ego becomes a prerequisite for encountering a higher reality. Ultimately, this research demonstrates that *Ode to a Nightingale* embodies a form of poetic spirituality that transcends cultural boundaries, offering a nuanced vision of human longing for the infinite. It contributes to interdisciplinary scholarship by highlighting the convergence between Romantic poetics and mystical epistemologies.

Keywords: mystical yearning, sufistic spirituality, poetic ecstasy, John Keats.

Introduction

Humans are both rational and intuitive beings. On the one hand, humans can develop knowledge, evaluate everything, sort, choose, and consider many things logically, clearly, and objectively because they possess reason. Through logical and rational thinking, humans develop themselves responsibly through networks of knowledge and technology, thereby creating advanced civilizations on this earth. However, on the other hand, humans can also recognize themselves, assess their own development and that of their society, and reflectively justify and/or reject everything in life through intuition or the heart. It is through the movement of intuition or the heart that humans can position themselves as truly human beings; evaluating and considering the diverse attitudes and abstract emotional values of their humanity, such as happiness, pleasure, sadness, wisdom, and so on.

The view above forms the basis for understanding the dualism in epistemology rooted in reason and the heart, namely rational knowledge and intuitive knowledge, or sensory knowledge and inner knowledge. In the realm of epistemology, rational (rational) knowledge and sensory (empirical) knowledge are often combined under the term 'rational-empirical knowledge' (Sumarna, 2005: 66). This is because what humans know rationally sometimes requires validation from the sensory realm, and vice versa. Someone who knows that seawater tastes salty from a text can easily verify that knowledge when they swim at the beach and accidentally taste the seawater. In this context, rational reality is empirically proven, albeit unintentionally. However, when someone goes to the beach and then says that sitting by the shore calms them, what we have is not rational-empirical knowledge, but knowledge based on the heart, based on intuition.

In the epistemology of Islamic studies, this intuitive knowledge is also called *Irfani*, which is a method of acquiring knowledge that relies on the instrument of inner experience or intuition. In its application, *Irfani* employs the *kasyfi* method (also known as the *ma'rifah irfaniyah* method, which does not rely on the senses or reason but on revelation through spiritual exercises and spiritual struggle) and the *iktisyafi* method (also known as analogy/*al-mumatalah*, which is a method for uncovering and discovering the secrets of knowledge through analogies (al-Jabiri, 2011: 340). This intuitive knowledge, in turn, intersects with the realm of human spirituality, which seeks to translate the realm of exoteric knowledge and experience into the realm of esoteric knowledge and experience. In Islam, the polarization between exotericism and esotericism is very pronounced. When a Muslim performs *salat*, for example, human knowledge and experience of the movements of *salat*—as part of exoteric religious knowledge—must be translated and interpreted intuitively so that the experience of *salat* is not merely the fulfillment of a Muslim's obligation but also becomes an experience rich in spiritual value.

According to al-Ghazālī, the science of the heart is a logical consequence of human sciences, because there are two realms: the outer realm and the inner realm (Rahmatullah, 2016). If the sciences (knowledge) master the outer realm through analysis and explanation, then there must be a specific science to explain the inner realm

(Rahmatullah, 2016). In the Qur'an itself, God reveals Himself as the Manifest (*al-Zahir*) and at the same time as the Hidden (*al-Batin*). These seemingly contradictory names of God must be reconciled by all Muslims during their spiritual quest, and this is certainly not achieved through reason or intellect, but rather through a source of knowledge derived from feeling, the heart, or intuition. It is this kind of knowledge and experience that subsequently forms the foundation of Sufism (the teachings of tasawwuf) within Islam.

The term 'Sufism,' as explained by Geoffroy (2010: 4), which first appeared in the 19th century, is a translation of the Arabic word *tasawwuf*, which refers to the act of becoming a *sūfi*, or, more precisely, striving for *tasawwuf*. According to most authors on spirituality, the essence of the term *sūfi* is too subtle to have a definite and clear etymology. Among the meanings they propose, there are two that are linguistically plausible and also complementary: that the word "sufi" derives from the Arabic verb *sufiya*, meaning "to be purified" (Geoffroy, 2010: 4). From this, the derived meaning is that "one who is purified by love is merely 'pure' (*safi*), but 'one who is purified by the Beloved' is a *sūfi*." According to the second etymology, the word *sūfi* derives from the word *sūf*, meaning 'wool.' Like the prophets who preceded him, the Prophet Muhammad wore woolen garments, and his companions followed his example with the same concern for humility (Geoffroy, 2010: 5). Early Sufis in Iraq were criticized for wearing woolen garments, as well as for their tendency toward self-mortification, presumably because Christian monks in that time and place also practiced this (Geoffroy, 2010: 5). It is possible that the term *sūfi* was in use in the Arab world even before the advent of Islam. From Kufa and Basra, the home of the first Iraqi Sufis, the term *sūfi* spread to the Abbasid capital, Baghdad, where in the ninth century a spiritual movement known as *tasawwuf* emerged—a fact underscored by the Sufis' practice of wearing woolen garments. "Summarizing the close connection linking these two meanings, a scholar of *tasawwuf* defined a *sufi* as "one who conceals his purity with wool" (al-Kalabadhi, 1976: 9; see also Geoffroy, 2010: 5).

From the highly technical terminology above, the author then derives the core idea that, whatever its definition, *tasawwuf* is always oriented toward the inner/esoteric aspect of knowledge. Because this inner aspect is invisible, and in certain contexts contains an unrevealed mystery, Sufism is also commonly referred to as "Muslim mysticism" (Geoffroy, 2010: 2). This expression does indeed hold a certain relevance when understood as knowledge of the divine "mystery" that can only be revealed through intuition and contemplation. Simply put, mysticism can be defined as "a practice aimed at reaching the pinnacle of religious experience by alternating between conscious and unconscious elements" (Merkur, 2024). The "pinnacle of religious experience" refers to how one can truly sense the element of mystery inherent within every religious practice itself. The Quran itself very clearly distinguishes the "world of Testimony" (*alam al-shahada*)—the visible world—from the "world of Mystery" (*alam al-ghaib*). God calls upon Muslims to believe in this mystery—the unseen realm—which is invisible yet can certainly be sensed by those who engage in transcendental interpretation through intuition and contemplation. Specifically, one of the goals of Sufism is to penetrate the obscurity of this world to contemplate the spiritual reality that lies beyond simple belief (Geoffroy, 2010: 2).

Within the Sufi tradition, a Sufi does not fundamentally seek to withdraw from the world; rather, they aim to achieve that spiritual realization wherever and whenever possible—even "in the midst of a crowd" (Geoffroy, 2010: 2). A Sufi must cultivate their spiritual qualities within the environment in which God has placed them. Nevertheless, Sufism does exhibit authentic "mystical" characteristics. First and foremost, Sufis believe that it is God who takes the initiative in leading them on a journey toward Him, and their progress depends on His grace. The following Hadith Qudsi (cited in Usman, Dahlan, and Dahlan, 1987: 87–88) expresses this:

"I am as My servant thinks of Me, and I am with him when he remembers Me. If he remembers Me in his heart, I too remember him in My heart. And if he remembers Me in the midst of a crowd, surely I too remember him in a better crowd. If he draws near to Me by a handspan, I will draw near to him by a cubit. If he draws near to Me by a cubit, I will draw near to him by a fathom. And if he comes to Me walking, I will hasten to him running." (HQR Syaikhani and Turmudzi from Abu Hurairah, may Allah be pleased with him)

From the above Hadith Qudsi, it is evident that this mystical dimension is initiated or actively pursued directly by God as an expression of His absolute will as the Creator (*Khaliq*) to always be with humanity as His creation (*Makhluq*). However, from the explanation of this Qudsi hadith, there are also stations or *maqam* (a span, a cubit, a fathom, walking) that must also be strived for by humans as *makhluq* to always be with the *Khaliq* in every step and in every breath of their lives.

Of course, there are many ways in which Sufis seek to uncover spiritual reality, but the key point remains the same: Sufi practice prioritizes sensation, the soul, the heart, and intuition—which are, by nature, more imaginative than analytical. It is here that we find the intersection between Sufism and art, or between Sufism and literature. Art is an imaginative act—that is, the act of the artist's imagination in selecting, arranging, and interpreting life experiences and existence (Taylor, 1981: 55). Art is also a philosophical expression of various phenomena of beauty, since beauty itself emerges and becomes one of the phenomena of human life (Cassirer in Adams, 2004: 1018). In a more philosophical context, art is categorized as a form of knowledge derived from

intuitive knowledge (the heart) alongside logical knowledge (reason). The artistic and aesthetic facts of a work of art are a good example of intuitive knowledge, and it is there that the characteristics of intuition (inner experience) are attributed (applied) (Croce in Adams, 1991: 696). According to Croce (in Adams, 1991: 698), the claim that art is not knowledge, that it does not reveal truth, that it does not belong to the world of theory but rather to the world of feeling, and so on, arises from humanity's failure to recognize the theoretical character of intuition.

The purpose of art is the ennoblement of human character and purification from passion; in this endeavor, the enjoyment of art is a means, not an end (Luxemburg, et al., 1987: 158). It is this classical line of thought that was later justified by the Latin poet Horace in his concept of art as *dulce et utile* (benefit and pleasure). In *The Art of Poetry*, Horace (in Adams, 1991: 68) states that it is not enough for poetry to possess formal beauty; it must also possess charm and be capable of evoking the emotions people wish to experience. This artistic tradition has endured for a long time, perhaps even to the present day, evaluating works of art based on their ability to teach, educate, and entertain people; in other words, according to the degree of utility and pleasure they provide.

Art thus serves the purpose of helping us understand life more intimately; how we can connect deeply with nature, with fellow human beings, or even with the Almighty Creator, alongside, of course, an inner satisfaction that cannot be described in words. Reflection on art ultimately aligns with religious reflection, particularly within the Sufi tradition, which directs human gaze toward the revelation of God's reality. Through the beauty of what is true and noble, art portrays the beauty of humanity and reality while heeding the revelation of the Creator of Beauty's presence. As a psychological experience, beauty can arise from joy or, conversely, emerge from sorrow. Poems, dances, music, and films that are oriented toward joy/happiness, just as those oriented toward sorrow, always move us emotionally. This is likely why Kahlil Gibran titled one of his works *The Book of Tears and Laughter*; that beauty is found in the combination of tears and smiles. According to Gibran, as quoted by Ghougassian (1973: 78), "beauty is the harmony between joy and sorrow that begins in our holiest sanctity and ends beyond the realm of our imagination."

Given the close resemblance between the mystical experiences of Sufis and the aesthetic experiences of artists or artistic activities, it is not surprising that from the very beginning, many Sufis have engaged in artistic activities, particularly literary arts and especially poetry (Faisal, 2016: 11). Although the goals of poetic expression and mystical experience appear vastly different (self-expression and self-affirmation versus self-annihilation in the divine mystery, or silent contemplation of God versus the creative verbalization of personal sentiments), under certain conditions they may appear to complement one another, or even be identical. Their closeness arises, among other things, from the use of the same symbols as a means of conveying subtle experiences that elude conceptualization within rational discourse, which fundamentally requires clarity and rigid, unchanging relationships between signifier and signified (Knysh, 2000: 150).

Just as poetic ecstasy cannot be captured by structured rational discourse, mystical experience cannot be reduced to a set of concrete, non-contradictory propositions. Both poetry and mystical experience carry an emotional, rather than factual, charge; both rely, for the most part, on a subtle flow of associations to produce their effect. Therefore, it is not surprising that mystical experience is often closely associated with poetic expression. However, mystical poetry cannot be viewed as a simple recreation of mystical experience. Rather, both poetry and experience stem from a mystical relationship with the formative symbols of one's religious tradition and with the totality of one's personal worldview and intellectual environment. Therefore, erotic poetry should not be read as an allegory of pure mystical union with God; rather, its ambiguity must be understood as an expression of the poet's vision of mystical union and erotic climax—both grounded in the same foundation. The precious state of consciousness and unique perspective on life that a mystic often gains through mystical experience compels him to attempt to communicate it to others, whether orally or in writing. This may seem paradoxical: if the essence of mysticism—the trait that distinguishes it from other religious experiences—lies in the fact that mysticism cannot be mediated by words or rationalization, then any subsequent discussion of it contradicts its fundamental nature, which is often described by mystics as something that cannot be expressed in words or is too subtle to be conveyed to others. However, if a mystic values their experience so highly that they cannot let it die with them, they have a variety of means of expression at their disposal, ranging from theological and philosophical discourse to brief aphorisms and transcendental poems.

For a number of reasons, in certain religious traditions, including the Sufi tradition, poetry has become the medium of choice for mystical experience. Knysh (2000: 151) explains that the language of poetry is categorically distinct from the argumentative language of science and logic, as well as from everyday language. Poetic language, whatever its form, is characterized by its openness; it functions this way due to its elasticity—the ability of linguistic signs to refer to many things, even an unlimited number. Its aesthetic value rests on the creation of tension between various levels of meaning, a tension that is never resolved, for it is in this tension, not in resolution, that poetic language exerts its influence. The value of poetic language—and the reason why literary works written in ancient times can still be read and appreciated aesthetically today—lies in this elasticity, which allows every reader to create meaning and enjoy the interplay between symbols and potential interpretations. Given the above, the parallels between poetic language and the articulation of religious experience are clear; both employ symbols and the chains of association they generate. Finally, both convey emotional and intuitive—rather

than factual—content, and both rely heavily on association for their effect. Poetic expression shares the same indescribable essence as mysticism and a similar dependence on symbols and the eternal ambiguity of language. Prose, which is the natural vehicle for discursive reasoning, cannot capture a person's inner life, whereas poetry allows for the articulation of spiritual truths that cannot or should not be expressed explicitly (Geoffroy, 2010: 88).

Long before the English Romantic figures of the 18th and 19th centuries sought to combine mysticism with literature, particularly poetry, in the 12th century, mysticism or Sufism was intertwined with the development of Persian literature. The leading figures of this Persian Sufi literature include Fariduddin Attar, Jalaluddin Rumi, Fakhruddin Iraqi, Mahmoud al-Shabistari, Abdurrahman al-Jami, and Hakam Sana'i (Geoffroy, 2010: 88). The significance of poetry for the Sufis lies in its role as a means to achieve ecstasy—a form of lifting the veil of the world to reveal a deeper spiritual realm. These poems are recited within a tradition known as *Sama'*, which consists of spiritual musical sessions accompanied by bodily movements, both structured and spontaneous (Geoffroy, 2010: 89). In these gatherings, one listens to mystical poems recited with or without instrumental accompaniment, which transport the listeners into ecstasy. Through the melodies of the music and the recited poetry, their emotions surge, and through this, their religious experience is heightened (Faisal, 2016: 11). For Sufis, humans experience emotions more deeply through listening to poetry than through the verses of sacred scriptures; for emotions must be present because there is such a vast difference between the eternal Divine Word and the one who hears it (Geoffroy, 2010: 88). These surging emotions can lead a person to both knowledge (*ma'rifah*) and love (*mahabbah*) simultaneously. Indeed, through his poetry, Rumi, for example, acknowledges that God and the world, the created and the Creator, are one and the same. Belief in a God separate from the world is merely a dualism that contradicts *tawhid* (Divine Oneness). Multiplicity is merely an appearance, an illusion. The world, the macrocosm, is akin to humanity (the microcosm); the universal spirit is its soul, and the material world is its body" (Geoffroy, 2010: 88).

It is from this context of belief that the intersection between Sufism and the Romantic movement in 19th-century England can be traced. Throughout history, Sufism has at times preceded and at other times accompanied Islam in its expansion. Its universal character has driven it to adapt to new contexts and spread beyond the Islamic world. This undoubtedly influenced Jewish and Christian mystics during the medieval era and perhaps even writers like Dante and the Catalan mystic Raymond Lully (Geoffroy, 2010: 200). Islam has held a "distinguished" position within Orientalism since the nineteenth century, making it no longer foreign to certain intellectual or artistic elites in Europe. Colonialism and/or imperialism sparked an encounter between Islam and the West in an atmosphere oscillating between fascination and rejection. On the one hand, the West was weary of all things mechanistic and sought a renewal of values; on the other hand, the West continued to view the Eastern world, particularly Islam, as a society steeped in conservatism. It was during this colonial era that Westerners fleeing mechanistic civilization and the ideology of progress eventually became captivated by "desert mysticism." Those who lament the secularization of Christianity and its reduction to a religious morality that could easily adapt to European imperialism subsequently sought in Sufism a kind of metaphysical and spiritual renewal.

Romantic writers, like the ascetics and Sufis in Islam, tended to present themselves as prophetic voices crying out in the wilderness and cut off from the social hierarchy. The Romantic rebellion against rationalism and scientific empiricism was also driven by German idealism, particularly Immanuel Kant's concept of "transcendentalism." This new philosophical idealism supported the Romantics' view of the human mind as organically creative, and led many of them to regard nature as a living mirror of the soul, rather than as an inanimate object for scientific dissection. As a reaction to the spiritual void of the modern age, Romanticism fostered various forms of nostalgia—ranging from following the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau in contrasting the "natural" human (or child) with the hypocrisy and corruption of modern society, to, at its most extreme, glorifying the asceticism of the Sufis.

Romantic poems can be characterized by several features, some of which intersect with Sufi literature. These characteristics include a love of nature, a reverence for the common person (rather than the elite) or the outcast, an interest in the strange and supernatural, the importance of individualism, boundless struggle, an emphasis on imagination as the most crucial mental capacity for the production and appreciation of poetry, and the primacy of emotion over rational thought in evoking feelings within the reader (Attar, 2014: 6). For Romantic poets, poetry is more than just rhymed language. Poetry is the 'expression of the imagination' of all that is infinite, and thus the poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the One, and strives to reveal the order and beauty he perceives (Shelley in Adams, 2004: 538). Poets in a more limited sense use language as their medium, while Romantic poets, on the other hand, view poetry as a depiction of life expressed in its eternal truth. Poetry is the creation of action according to the unchangeable forms of human nature, as they exist in the mind of the Creator; this is what distinguishes 'poetry' from the 'dialogue of separate facts' that constitutes a 'story.' A 'story about certain facts' obscures and distorts what ought to be beautiful: poetry makes what is distorted beautiful.

The affinity between Romanticism and Sufism lies not merely in their shared concern with emotion or transcendence, but in their profound commitment to unveiling realities hidden beneath ordinary perception. Romantic poetry emerged in Europe as a response to the mechanistic rationalism of the Enlightenment, privileging

intuition, imagination, and spiritual inwardness over empirical certainty. Sufi literature, though rooted in Islamic metaphysics and devotional praxis, similarly seeks to transcend the confines of rational intellect through mystical experience, symbolic language, and ecstatic union with the Divine. Romantic poets perceived the imagination not simply as a creative faculty but as a transformative spiritual power capable of apprehending truths inaccessible to reason alone. Samuel Taylor Coleridge famously distinguished imagination from mere fancy, describing it as “the living power and prime agent of all human perception”. This conception resonates strongly with Sufi epistemology, in which intuitive knowledge (*ma'rifah*) surpasses discursive reasoning and allows the seeker to approach divine reality through inner illumination. In both traditions, therefore, poetry becomes an instrument of revelation rather than ornamentation. The poet assumes the role of visionary, mediating between the visible and invisible worlds.

John Keats occupies a distinctive place among the English Romantics because of his intense preoccupation with beauty, mortality, and transcendence. Unlike William Wordsworth, whose poetry often emphasizes moral communion with nature, or Percy Bysshe Shelley, whose idealism frequently aspires toward political and metaphysical liberation, Keats directs his poetic energy toward the sensuous apprehension of beauty as an avenue to eternity. His celebrated assertion in “Ode on a Grecian Urn” that “Beauty is truth, truth beauty” (Keats, 2003: 296) reflects a metaphysical understanding of aesthetic experience that bears remarkable similarity to Sufi notions of divine beauty (*jamal*). Within Islamic mysticism, beauty is not merely physical attractiveness but a manifestation of God’s attributes in creation. For Sufis, beauty acts as a bridge leading the soul from the material to the spiritual realm. Schimmel (1975: 290) explains, “The mystic who is completely absorbed in his love contemplates in the human beloved only the perfect manifestation of divine beauty, which is as distant from him as God Himself”. Keats’s poetic pursuit of ideal beauty may therefore be interpreted not simply as aestheticism, but as a form of mystical yearning analogous to the Sufi longing for union with the Beloved. Consequently, the convergence of Romantic and Sufi sensibilities provides a fertile interpretive framework for understanding the poetic vision of John Keats, particularly in *Ode to a Nightingale*, where mystical yearning and poetic ecstasy intersect in profound ways through its metaphorical expressions.

Method

This study is grounded in a scientific paradigm within the field of religious studies. Through this paradigm, the study employs a qualitative research with a hermeneutic literary criticism design. This choice is based on the nature of the subject matter—literary texts rich in symbolic, metaphorical, and spiritual meaning—which cannot be analyzed through quantitative approaches or statistical measurements. Northrop Frye argues in his essay titled “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time” (1949; 1994) that literary criticism is akin to qualitative research because it deals with “the human mind.” Frye (1994: 38) states, “If literary criticism is a science, then it is clearly a social science that would be rendered futile if its methods were combined with those of the natural sciences.” Like psychology, literary criticism is directly concerned with the human mind and would be undermined by statistical methodology (Frye, 1994: 38). The hermeneutic literary criticism design used here derived from Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutics on metaphor as well as triple mimesis of prefiguration, configuration, and transfiguration. This hermeneutics positions the understanding of literary texts as a holistic process of interpretation of language and the inner world it produces. This method is particularly relevant for interpreting John Keats’s poems, which are rich in spiritual metaphors and inner experiences, because Romanticism inherently places subjectivity and imagination at the center of poetic expression, which aligns with Ricoeur’s concept of how metaphor redescribes reality as well as the triple mimesis of prefiguration, configuration, and transfiguration.

Results and Discussion

In *The Rule of Metaphor*, Ricoeur explains that a metaphor is not merely a linguistic ornament but a creative process that generates new meaning through semantic tension (Ricoeur, 2004). Metaphors allow reality to be understood more deeply because they “redescribe reality” (Ricoeur, 2004). Within this framework, the nightingale in Keats’s poem is not merely understood as a literal bird but as a spiritual symbol that evokes the possibility of a transcendent experience. Meanwhile, in *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur develops the concept of triple mimesis: prefiguration, configuration, and refiguration—or the transformation of the reader’s experience through narrative (Ricoeur, 2004). These three stages are highly relevant for interpreting the spiritual journey in Keats’s poetry. Before coming to the analysis and discussion, let us first cite the text of the poem as a whole to give a priority context in our discussion of this paper.

Ode to a Nightingale

By John Keats

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:
 'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
 But being too happy in thine happiness,—
 That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees
 In some melodious plot
 Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
 Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been
 Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,
 Tasting of Flora and the country green,
 Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!
 O for a beaker full of the warm South,
 Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
 With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
 And purple-stained mouth;
 That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
 And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
 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 spectre-thin, and dies;
 Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
 And leaden-eyed despairs,
 Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
 Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
 Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
 But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
 Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:
 Already with thee! tender is the night,
 And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
 Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;
 But here there is no light,
 Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
 Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
 Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
 But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
 Wherewith the seasonable month endows
 The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
 White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
 Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
 And mid-May's eldest child,
 The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
 The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

Darkling I listen; 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,
 While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad

In such an ecstasy!
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
To thy high requiem become a sod.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft-times hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

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.
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?

1. *Mahabbah* in “Ode to a Nightingale”

From a Sufi perspective, love for worldly objects is often understood not as an end in itself, but as a symbolic path toward transcendental love for God. This concept is known as *Mahabbah*, that is, divine love that guides the human soul to transcend the material world toward a higher spiritual experience. In the Sufi tradition, as explained by Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah and later developed by Ibn Arabi, worldly love can serve as a metaphor for the soul's longing for the Absolute. In the lines of her own poem, Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah (in Upton, 1988:22) states: “Don't blame me if I am in love with His beauty,/ Because, by God, my ears cannot hear your slander”. In this context, John Keats' poem titled “Ode to a Nightingale” can be read as a metaphorical representation of the spiritual journey toward *Mahabbah*. Through Paul Ricoeur's theory of metaphor in *The Rule of Metaphor* and the concept of triple mimesis in *Time and Narrative*, Keats' metaphorical expressions reveal a transformation from existential experience toward transcendental spiritual experience.

The first stage, prefiguration, pertains to the human existential condition prior to the poetic experience unfolding. In the opening lines of the poem, the lyrical “I” is in a state of suffering and alienation:

“My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk”

The opening lines of *Ode to a Nightingale* plunges the reader immediately into a condition of profound interior suffering. Keats writes not merely of physical fatigue but of a soul hollowed out by its own awareness, a consciousness that feels the weight of existence as a kind of slow poison. The hemlock simile is telling: hemlock does not destroy violently but numbs, severs sensation from source, and dims the light of perception. This is precisely the phenomenology of *ghaflah* as understood in Sufi metaphysics, that is a spiritual anesthesia in which the soul, submerged in the forgetfulness of worldly attachment, loses its living thread to the Divine. For the Sufi masters, *ghaflah* is not mere distraction; it is an ontological wound. Al Ghazali (2000: 48) stated “You must surely see that it is bound to end in filth, corruption, ruination, evanescence and waste, but it is a cadaver that is anointed with perfume and wrapped in adornment, so the heedless are deceived by its exterior, while the intelligent abstain from it”. It means that Al-Ghazali described the heedless heart as a mirror turned to face the wall; present in form, absent in function. The soul still exists, but its capacity for divine reflection is obscured. Keats embodies this condition with aching precision: his “sense” is pained, dulled, and confused, not because the world has become too little, but because he has become too estranged from its transcendent ground. He feels, but cannot locate the source of what he feels. He aches, but cannot name what has been lost. This nameless ache is, from a Sufi standpoint, the soul's involuntary testimony to its own exile. The soul, even in *ghaflah*, retains a residual memory of union; what the Sufis call *fitra*, the primordial covenant between the human spirit and its Creator. It is this

buried memory that makes separation so insufferable. The numbness Keats describes is not emptiness; it is the pain of a presence that has been forgotten but never truly left. The ache, paradoxically, is proof of the soul's original intimacy with the Divine and its tragedy is that it cannot, in this darkened state, recognise what it is mourning. In the next lines, Keats portrays the world as a realm of suffering:

“Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies”

Awareness of this transience serves as the starting point for spiritual seeking. In Sufism, awareness of the world's limitations is a crucial stage before one experiences a longing for God. Therefore, the foreshadowing in this poem presents the existential experience of a human being thirsting for transcendental meaning.

The second stage, configuration, occurs when these experiences are shaped through poetic metaphors into a spiritual narrative. In this poem, the nightingale becomes a metaphorical center connecting the mortal world and the spiritual world. Keats writes:

“Thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.”

The nightingale is represented not merely as a natural creature, but as a spiritual entity that transcends human suffering. The metaphor “light-winged Dryad” connects the nightingale to a mythological being that is eternal and close to the spiritual realm. In a Sufi reading, the nightingale's song can be understood as a symbol of cosmic remembrance (*dzikr*) or eternal praise of God. As in the Sufi poems of Jalaluddin Rumi, music and song often serve as metaphors for spiritual ecstasy and the inner union with the Divine. The lyrical “I”'s desire to “merge” with the nightingale reflects a mystical longing for transcendence:

“That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim:”

The expression “fade away” carries a highly significant metaphorical meaning. From the perspective of *Mahabbah*, this dissolution of the self resembles the concept of *fana'* in Sufism—the dissolution of the individual ego in pursuit of closeness to God. Ricoeur states that metaphors function by creating a “split reference,” that is, a dual reference that opens up new possibilities of meaning (Ricoeur, 1984). Thus, the “dim forest” is not merely a literal forest, but a spiritual space where the human ego is dissolved. Keats then reinforces this spiritual journey through the metaphor of flight:

“Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy”

These lines indicate that the path to transcendence is not through material pleasure (“Bacchus”), but through poetic imagination. In Ricoeur's hermeneutics, poetry possesses a productive power to open up a new world (world-disclosure). Poetic imagination enables the subject to transcend empirical reality toward a deeper symbolic reality. In a Sufi context, poetry becomes a spiritual medium for experiencing *Mahabbah*. The experience of spiritual ecstasy reaches its peak when the lyrical “I” approaches death:

“I have been half in love with easeful Death”

Death here is not merely biological death, but a metaphor for spiritual transformation. In Sufism, the symbolic death of the ego is the path to true spiritual life. Therefore, the expression “easeful Death” represents a mystical longing to leave behind worldly attachments and attain divine closeness.

The third stage, refiguration or transformation, occurs when the poetic experience alters the subject's consciousness. In the poem's final section, the lyrical “I” realizes the limitations of his transcendent experience:

“Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!”

The word “Forlorn” marks a moment of disconnection from spiritual ecstasy. The speaker returns to the “sole self,” that is, human individual consciousness. However, this experience has transformed their perspective on reality. In Ricoeur's concept, refiguration means the textual world reshapes the reader's and the narrative

subject's understanding of themselves. The lyrical "I" no longer views the world in the same way after experiencing a "spiritual journey" with the nightingale's song. The poem's conclusion reveals the ambiguity between mystical experience and empirical reality:

"Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?"

This question highlights the nature of mystical experience, which is difficult to explain rationally. In the Sufi tradition, the experience of Mahabbah often resides in the realm between consciousness and ecstasy. Therefore, metaphor becomes the sole medium capable of approaching such a spiritual experience. Ricoeur asserts that metaphor possesses the capacity to express something that cannot be conveyed literally. Thus, Keats's poem presents the nightingale as a spiritual symbol that opens the path to the experience of divine love.

2. *Jamal* in "Ode to a Nightingale"

John Keats's poem "Ode to a Nightingale" is one of the most complex representations of the aesthetic experience in the English Romantic tradition. In this poem, the experience of beauty does not stop at the sensual or emotional level, but moves toward a transcendental experience that approaches the Sufi concepts of *Jamal* (Divine beauty) and *Fana* (the dissolution of the ego toward spiritual unity). The nightingale in the poem is not merely present as a natural object, but as a metaphor for the voice of eternity and absolute beauty that transcends the material world. From Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic perspective on metaphor, particularly as articulated in *The Rule of Metaphor* and *Time and Narrative*, metaphor is not merely a linguistic ornament but a medium of meaning transformation that enables humans to experience reality anew. Therefore, Keats's poem can be read as a spiritual journey from worldly consciousness toward transcendental ecstasy through Ricoeur's mimetic process: prefiguration, configuration, and transfiguration.

In *The Rule of Metaphor*, Ricoeur (2004: 7) states that "metaphor is the rhetorical process by which discourse unleashes the power that certain fictions have to redescribe reality". This statement indicates that metaphor possesses the power to "redescribe" reality so that the reader no longer perceives the world literally, but rather symbolically and existentially. The nightingale in Keats's poem is a concrete example of the metaphor's redescriptive function. The bird is not merely a biological creature but a symbol of the voice of eternity that connects the poet to a spiritual dimension beyond human suffering. The poem opens with an existential state of profound suffering:

"My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk"

This line represents the condition of prefiguration within Ricoeur's concept of triple mimesis. Prefiguration is the state of human experience prior to its construction into narrative or symbol. In *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur (1984: 57) explains that "action is always already articulated by signs, rules, and norms". Thus, the poet's experience of pain, transience, and alienation constitutes the initial existential horizon that shapes the possibility of poetic experience. Keats begins his poem in the temporal world: a weary body, a pain-ridden consciousness, and a fleeting life. This world is synonymous with the state of the human ego bound to materiality. Yet this suffering transforms when the poet hears the nightingale's song:

"Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thine happiness"

Here, the bird's happiness transcends ordinary emotion. The poet experiences ecstasy through participation in another creature's happiness. From a Sufi perspective, such an experience can be understood as an experience of *Jamal*—the manifestation of Divine beauty that stirs spiritual longing. The nightingale's beauty is not merely an aesthetic sound, but a radiant cosmic harmony that compels the poet to transcend the limitations of his own being.

The concept of *Jamal* in Sufism is often associated with aesthetic experiences that shatter the boundaries of the human ego. In the perspective of Sufism, worldly beauty is merely a reflection of God's absolute beauty. Humans are motivated to become virtuous by Revelation's promised reward in the afterlife but also by the idea that the virtues bring them closer to become *like* God. This statement is relevant to the way Keats presents the nightingale as a medium to a higher reality. The bird is not described realistically, but through a spiritual metaphor:

"That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,

Singest of summer in full-throated ease.”

The metaphor “Dryad of the trees” connects the bird to the spirits of nature in Greek mythology. The bird becomes a liminal being: situated between the physical and spiritual realms. Within Ricoeur’s framework, this metaphor creates a surplus of meaning—a condition where language opens up interpretive possibilities that transcend literal meaning. Ricoeur (2004: 79) asserts that “the metaphorical utterance creates meaning rather than merely decorating language”. Thus, the nightingale becomes a symbol of a metaphysical voice that evokes the experience of Jamal.

3. *Fana* in “Ode to a Nightingale”

Keats uses birds as a symbol of escape from the mortal world. In a Sufi reading, the movement toward the otherworld, the detachment from worldly consciousness, and the search for inner ecstasy can be understood as a form of internalization of ideas already established in the world of Eastern mysticism. Thus, Sufism provides not only a parallelism but also a symbolic framework that enriches Romantic poetics. In this poem, despair sets in when the fickle world dies to him, when it feels uninhabited, empty, and devoid of the magical presence he deems necessary. For Keats, therefore, this dissolution is inevitable, and he is driven back into darkness to his mortal body, his threatened soul, his isolated self. 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.
 Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
 Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
 Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
 In the next valley-glades:
 Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
 Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?

Paul Ricoeur's theory of metaphor, as elaborated in *The Rule of Metaphor* and *Time and Narrative*, argues that metaphorical language does not merely ornament pre-existing meaning but actively creates new meaning by producing a semantic tension between the literal and the figurative. For Ricoeur, the metaphor enacts a transfiguration of reality, that is a redescription of the world in which the imagination restructures experience into a richer, more truthful apprehension of being. This is precisely what occurs in the final stanza of Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale*, where the metaphorical language does not simply describe the poet's return to consciousness but performs it, staging the collapse of the visionary world and the agonizing reinstatement of the mortal self.

The most structurally remarkable moment in this stanza is the poet's arrest upon the word “forlorn”, a word that, having appeared at the close of the preceding stanza in reference to fairy lands, now ricochets back upon the speaker himself. Keats does not merely use a metaphor here; he stages the birth of a metaphor before the reader's eyes. The simile “the very word is like a bell” is, in Ricoeur's terms, a living metaphor, one that retains the productive tension between its literal and figurative poles. The word “forlorn” as a bell does not reduce to a simple comparison. Rather, it enacts what Ricoeur calls the “split reference” of metaphorical language: the bell belongs simultaneously to the sensory world of sound and weight, and to the metaphysical world of summons, mourning, and finitude. The tolling bell calls the dead to their resting place, and in this sense, the metaphor transfigures the act of linguistic cognition itself (the poet hearing his own word and being recalled by it) into a death-like awakening.

Ricoeur argues in *The Rule of Metaphor* that the metaphor achieves its power not through resemblance alone, but through predicative impertinence: the placing of semantically distant terms in tension produces a new mode of seeing. The predication “the word is like a bell / To toll me back” accomplishes precisely this. The word “toll” carries within it the double burden of measurement and of mourning, and it is this semantic density that makes the metaphor transfigurative rather than merely decorative. The poet is not simply reminded of his mortality; he is summoned back into it, as if language itself, the very medium of his visionary flight, becomes the agent of his earthly reinstatement. In Ricoeurian terms, this is the moment where the narrative identity of the self is reconstituted: the self that had dissolved into the nightingale's song is violently reassembled by the self-reflexive shock of its own utterance. Within the Sufi-inflected reading that the poem invites, this moment of self-reflexive return can be understood as the rupture of *fana*, the annihilation of the self. The bell does not merely signal departure; it signals the impossibility of permanent dissolution. The Sufi aspirant who has approached the station of *fana* is here pulled back by the gravitational force of *baqaa* — the abiding self that persists even after the mystic experience. Ricoeur's notion of transfiguration illuminates this dynamic with particular precision: the

metaphorical bell does not simply describe the return but enacts the ontological reinstatement of the subject, making the stanza a linguistic performance of the very experience it narrates.

The dismissal of the fancy as a "deceiving elf" constitutes a second, equally significant metaphorical act. In Ricoeur's framework, metaphors do not merely describe; they configure and reconfigure the world through what he terms *mimesis* — a creative imitation that does not reproduce reality but rather projects new possibilities of being. The fancy, personified as an elf, is simultaneously enchanting and treacherous, a liminal figure who inhabits the boundary between the real and the imagined. To call it deceiving is to pass a moral judgment on the imagination's power of transportation, but the metaphor does far more than moralize. It transfigures the faculty of imagination into a trickster-figure, an autonomous agent whose deceptions are not malicious but constitutive of the human condition. Ricoeur, in his meditation on the productive imagination in *Lectures on Imagination* (2024), distinguishes between a reproductive imagination, which merely copies the given, and a productive or utopian imagination, which opens a space of difference, of the possible, of the not-yet-realized. In his own words, "For my part, I should put in the middle of this axis the so-called mental image, because it is in fact a point of balance or equilibrium between trace and fiction. This axis is the axis of reproductive and productive imagination. The reproductive tends toward the trace and the productive tends toward the fiction (Ricoeur, 2024). The fancy as deceiving elf occupies precisely this productive space: it has transported Keats beyond the given world of suffering and mortality into the timeless, sensuous world of the nightingale's song. The transfiguration enacted by the metaphor consists in this: to name the fancy an elf is to acknowledge that the imaginative journey was real as experience even if it was unreal as metaphysics. The elf deceives, but in deceiving, it also reveals; it shows the poet what the world could be, what he desires it to be, and in doing so, it performs the Ricoeurian function of the productive imagination: the redescription of reality in the light of what surpasses it. This maps meaningfully onto the poem's Sufi subtext, for the *tariqah* offered by the Nightingale is, in one sense, the path of productive imagination, that is, a journey through metaphor and song toward the apprehension of a higher reality, or *tajalli*. The "deceiving elf" is not, therefore, simply a figure of illusion; within the transfigurative logic of Ricoeur's metaphor theory, it is a figure of ontological disclosure, one that, even in its deceptions, mediates a genuine encounter with the transcendent.

The spatial progression by which the nightingale's song retreats like "past the near meadows", "over the still stream", "up the hill-side", and ultimately buried in the next valley-glades enacts what Ricoeur, in *Time and Narrative*, describes as the narrative emplotment of experience. These spatial metaphors are not merely descriptive; they constitute a temporal and ontological trajectory, a narrative arc of departure, ascent, and entombment. The movement follows the logic of elegy: the beautiful, once present, now recedes through a series of thresholds, each carrying the speaker further from the source of transcendence. In Ricoeur's terms, this spatial emplotment transfigures the sensory experience of hearing a bird's song fade into a philosophical drama of finitude and loss. The word "buried" is especially charged: it metaphorically equates the disappearance of music with death and interment, suggesting that the world the song inhabited — the eternal, timeless world of the nightingale — does not merely depart but is entombed in the natural landscape. This is a Ricoeurian transfiguration of the highest order: the living metaphor of burial redescribes the fading of music as a form of death, and in doing so, it implicates the poet's own mortality, his own inevitable burial in the vale of the real. The "still stream" functions as more than a juxtaposition that highlights the purity of nature against the lethargy of the mortal world; in Ricoeurian terms, it is a metaphorical configuration that holds two modes of being in productive tension — the eternal stillness of the natural world untouched by human time, and the arrested stillness of a self paralyzed between vision and wakefulness. The stream is still because nature is indifferent to human suffering, but it is also still because the poet himself is suspended, motionless, at the threshold between two worlds. The metaphor transfigures a landscape feature into an image of existential suspension.

From the above passage, we can observe as well that the repetition of the word "adieu" emphasizes the departure of the nightingale and its spiritual world as its song fades into nature. He describes the bird's music as a "sad song," reflecting his dual consciousness. The bird's melodious song is heartbreaking to him because he cannot forget the harsh reality. On the one hand, Keats can be considered a Sufi whose "self within" connects with the eternal world of the nightingale. On the other hand, his "self-conscious" self is aware of the pain and suffering of the materialistic, mortal world. Keats realizes that the nightingale is leaving him and flying away. The bird's flight "over the still stream" depicts the pristine state of nature, uncontaminated by destructive human activities such as industry. Keats uses this juxtaposition of "still stream" to highlight the lethargy within society and within himself.

Keats's phrases are full of metaphorical words that convey loneliness, sadness, and separation. The poet is gradually released from his internal reality, and through the *tariqah* offered by the Nightingale, he is in the process of obtaining an external reality that is tempting and self-annihilating, towards the peak of unity with the Almighty. The questions at the end of the poem offer a situation of that process; the poet seems to doubt the process of ecstasy of self-annihilation and unity with the Almighty (*fana*) that he is experiencing. The closing questions: "Was it a vision, or a waking dream? / Fled is that music: — Do I wake or sleep?" constitute what Ricoeur would recognize as the moment of hermeneutical self-reflection. Throughout *Oneself as Another* (1992), Ricoeur insists

that the self does not possess itself immediately and transparently; it comes to know itself only through the detour of signs, symbols, and texts — through the interpretation of the world it has experienced. Ricoeur (1992: 11) stated that the problematic of the self emerges magnified, in a sense, but at the price of the loss of its relation to the person who speaks, to the I-you of interlocution, to the identity of a historical person, to the self of responsibility. The poet's final questions are precisely this: an act of self-interpretation in the face of a world that has ceased to yield its meaning directly. The question "Was it a vision, or a waking dream?" is not merely an expression of confusion. It is a hermeneutical question in the Ricoeurian sense — a question about the mode of disclosure through which the transcendent reveals itself. In Ricoeur's phenomenology of religious imagination, a vision, or *tajalli* in the Sufi tradition, is a genuine apprehension of the real, a moment in which the subject is addressed by being itself; a waking dream, by contrast, is an autonomous production of the imagination, a fiction rather than a revelation. The poet cannot determine which category his experience belongs to, and this indeterminacy is not a failure of cognition but a structural feature of the metaphorical and visionary mode of experience. Ricoeur, in *The Symbolism of Evil* (1967: 10), argues, "If, then, we begin with the interpretation of living experience, we must not lose sight of the fact that that experience is abstract, in spite of its lifelike appearance; it is abstract because it is separated from the totality of meaning from which we detach it for didactic purposes". We must not forget, either, that this experience is never immediate; it can be expressed only by means of the primary symbolisms that prepare the way for its treatment in myths and speculation. The nightingale's song, as a living symbol, similarly resists reduction to either pure vision or pure dream; it inhabits the threshold between disclosure and imagination, and it is this threshold that constitutes the space of genuine religious and poetic experience.

The final line: "Fled is that music: — Do I wake or sleep?" brings the transfigurative process to its most concentrated point. The inversion "Fled is that music" enacts syntactically the very movement it describes: the music precedes the verb of its own disappearance, arriving before it departs, lingering in the grammar even as it vanishes from the world. This is what Ricoeur calls the iconic augmentation of metaphorical language: the poem does not merely report the fading of the song; it performs the fading at the level of language itself. The music has fled, but in the very act of declaring its flight, the poem preserves it transfigured, in Ricoeur's sense, into a new mode of being that is neither the original song nor its silence, but the metaphorical life that persists between them.

Ricoeur's theory of transfiguration ultimately allows us to see that Keats's final stanza is not simply a record of poetic disillusionment or mystical failure. It is, rather, a linguistic enactment of the ontological drama of selfhood: the tension between the self that dissolves into vision and the self that is recalled into finitude, between the world as it is given and the world as metaphor redescribes and transforms it. The metaphors of the bell, the deceiving elf, the buried music, and the unanswerable questions do not decorate this drama; they constitute it. They are the means by which Keats's language achieves what Ricoeur calls the redescription of reality, a transfiguration in which the mortal world, even in its pain and limitation, is seen anew through the luminous remainder of the vision that has fled. In this sense, the poem does not end in sleep or waking, but in the enduring metaphorical life of a question that cannot—and should not—be resolved.

Conclusion

This study has undertaken a close and sustained engagement with John Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale* through a Sufi-oriented interpretive lens, demonstrating that the poem's metaphorical and imaginative architecture bears a profound structural kinship with the spiritual epistemology of Sufi mysticism. By reading the poem not merely as an aesthetic artifact but as a vehicle of spiritual experience, the research has opened a productive dialogue between Romantic poetics and Islamic mystical thought, a dialogue that reveals the poem's capacity to speak across cultural and historical boundaries with remarkable depth and resonance. The analysis has shown that the nightingale, far from functioning as a simple figure of natural beauty, operates as a symbolic mediator between the temporal and the eternal. Its song constitutes a threshold space; a liminal zone in which the ordinary boundaries of mortal consciousness are momentarily dissolved, allowing the poetic speaker to approach the condition of *fanā*, the Sufi station of self-annihilation in which the ego surrenders itself to a higher reality. This surrender, however, is never total or permanent. The poem is equally attentive to the gravitational pull of *baqaa*, the persistence of selfhood that recalls the speaker from the brink of dissolution and returns him to the fragmented awareness of his mortal condition. It is precisely this oscillation between transcendence and return, between unity and fragmentation that gives the poem its distinctive spiritual texture and that aligns it so closely with the Sufi understanding of the mystical path as an ongoing, dynamic, and often agonizing process rather than a singular, resolved attainment.

Central to this dynamic is Keats's conception of negative capability, which the study has argued resonates deeply with the Sufi practice of self-emptying. The willingness to remain in uncertainty, to dwell in the space of unresolved questions without reaching for rational closure, is not a poetic weakness but a spiritual discipline — one that mirrors the Sufi aspirant's cultivation of *faqr*, the interior poverty or emptiness that prepares the self for the reception of divine presence. In this light, the poem's famous closing questions — "Was it a vision, or a waking dream? / Fled is that music: — Do I wake or sleep?" — are not expressions of failure but of a hard-won spiritual

openness, a refusal to domesticate the transcendent within the limits of ordinary cognition. The study also contributes to the broader field of interdisciplinary scholarship by demonstrating that the convergence between Romantic poetics and mystical epistemologies is neither incidental nor forced, but emerges organically from shared preoccupations with beauty, longing, finitude, and the hunger for the infinite. Keats, writing from within the secular and aesthetic traditions of English Romanticism, nevertheless arrives at a vision of human experience that finds its closest analogues not in Western philosophy alone but in the devotional and contemplative traditions of Sufism; traditions in which love, beauty, and self-transcendence are understood as the fundamental coordinates of the soul's journey toward God.

Ode to a Nightingale is now understood as a poem of remarkable spiritual complexity, one that encodes, within the sensuous and metaphorical density of its language, a complete arc of inward journeying from worldly consciousness through imaginative transport to fragile unity and reluctant return. Its enduring power lies not in any resolution it offers, but in the luminous fidelity with which it renders the human condition as one of perpetual longing; a longing that is, at its deepest, not merely aesthetic or emotional but ontological, directed toward a fullness of being that the mortal world can intimate but never finally contain.

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