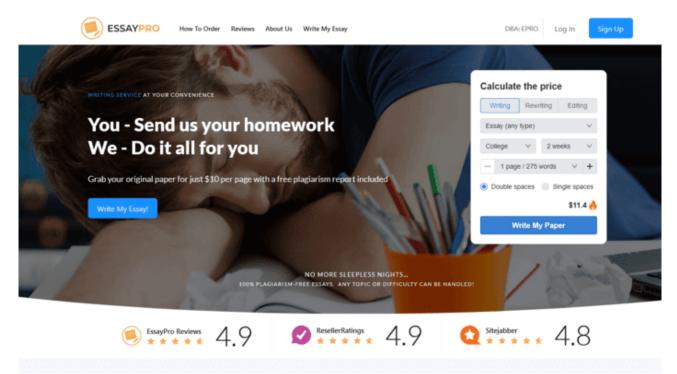
John Keats' Ode to a Nightingale



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As a poem, distinguished by a beauty that contrasts "real melancholy" with "imaginary relief" (Wullschlager, 4, quoting Leigh Hunt), Ode to a Nightingale was written at a time in his life when Keats found himself caught at the junction between two worlds. Published in the spring of 1819 (May, 1819), Keats' poem is written soon after a previous December that marked both the death of his brother Thomas Keats and an engagement to Fanny Browne. Struggling between "imaginative escape" and "human limitation" (Sperry, 264), Ode to a Nightingale pits tensions echoed in Keats' personal life. These are tensions that reflect a universal dichotomy of human experience in mortality and the sublime. Similarly, Keats' love for Fanny Browne is interrupted by the death of his much beloved brother, a tragedy that inevitably influences his later Odes. In conclusion, for all its struggles as a poem, Ode to a Nightingale experienced a relatively easy and smooth publication history, released only one month (July 1819) after its original transcription. In its effortless publication, the poem may truly be the full expression of human experience (Wullshlager, 4) that it professes to be.

In a journal-letter written to his brother and sister in America dated 1818-1819, Keats

writes, "The last days of poor Tom were of the most distressing nature; but his last moment were not so painful, and his very last was without a pang", he continues later on to say, "I have a firm belief in immortality, and so had Tom." (Milnes, 164-65) Obviously distraught and heart-broken by the passing of his brother, Keats ironically later writes in his Ode to a Nightingale, "That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,/ And with thee fade ...

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