

## Notes on “Ode on the Death of a Favorite Cat”

This poem is what is called a “mock epic”. Grey is taking the death of a friend’s favorite cat and writing about it as if the cat was a legendary figure. In other words, this is kind of “Dark Humor”. Below I have given you the definitions for both epic and mock epic. The poem is about how the cat actually drowned in a very large garden vase. Garden vases adorned the gardens of England during Grey’s time period, the 1700’s. They were extremely large – the one in the poem actually contained gold fish. The poem is intended to be humorous and relates how the cat came to drown in the vase. It also has an underlying important message.

**epic** |'epik|

**noun**

**a long poem, typically one derived from ancient oral tradition, narrating the deeds and adventures of heroic or legendary figures or the history of a nation.**

**mock epic**, a poem employing the lofty style and the conventions of [epic](#) poetry to describe a trivial or undignified series of events; thus a kind of [satire](#) that mocks its subject by treating it in an inappropriately grandiose manner, usually at some length.

As follows below are some on-line comments that I found regarding this poem that may help you to better understand it.

Posted by Mrs. Miller on 1/31/2011

Dear Reader,

This is a wonderful poem! The trick here is to relax & enjoy-don't analyze- let the poem be the poem and please you!

As for meaning, it means just what it says: a beautiful and much-treasured family cat was sleeping beside a large garden vase, admiring itself in the goldfish pond. Then it noticed the fish themselves and leaned too far out- drowning.

There's a message there too: if you reach too far and for too much you will fail of it. Unbidden desire may drown you. 'All that glitters is not gold.'

The poem- forget all that: if you look for too much meaning you will lose the irony and the pathos of this wonderful verse! Again- enjoy!

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I have to study this poem as a part of my course , all the above posts helped me with my studies.Thank you all!

| Posted on 2011-01-09 | by a guest

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this is a mock-heroic poem and it basically just starts off with the same kind of structure but ends with a moral and a message.

| Posted on 2010-10-29 | by a guest

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We were studying this in my Romantic Literature class and guess what? The cat really is a cat. The poem was written for Grey's friend whose cat really did drown in a tub of goldfish. However, Thomas Grey was writing this in irony because odes were not generally written about average people and especially not cats at that time.

| Posted on 2010-09-28 | by a guest

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i agree with the comment posted on 2005-04-04 100% because i have just done an analysis on this poem and found that it totally refers to the human life because we as humans do think we are superior to other living things and we do have lusts for things just different people have different lusts just like the cat and the fish.

| Posted on 2010-02-19 | by a guest

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this seemed to me a very difficult poem initially but after reading everyone's comments i could understand it better and analyse it correctly -- adarsh

| Posted on 2010-01-17 | by a guest

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in this poem, the cat is just a metaphor for life. the poem explains that you have to think twice before you do something big with your life and you should not judge anything too quickly. My teacher taught us this today in class because we were all doing a presentation on it and all of us got it wrong.

| Posted on 2009-12-01 | by a guest

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I am analyzing this poem as part of my english project and the last person's post helped a lot. Thank you very much.

| Posted on 2009-06-07 | by a guest

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the poem contains elements which are Mock Heroic, thus making a matter which is realistically trivial, appear grand. Also, to add to this, i also find it remarkable how the quote, "all that glitters is not gold", is still true in today's society. Gray, or Shakespeare were clearly well ahead of their time when writing their poems.

| Posted on 2009-02-09 | by a guest

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Clearly the poem is comic. To suggest that the moral is to be taken seriously ignores the comic nature of the poem. To

compare the accidental drowning of the cat to any kind of moral for human endeavors misses the final joke on the reader. Namely, that the last stanza is intended as humorously as the rest of the poem.

| Posted on 2008-11-13 | by a guest

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Just to correct the above statement, The Merchant of Venice was written about 150 years prior to this poem, not 300.

| Posted on 2008-10-01 | by a guest

:: Ode ::

Written for friend Horace Wallace's cat, Ode is a humorous poem written in light verse with a simple rhyme scheme, A A B C C B. The moral of this poem is that all that glitters is not gold, a theme borrowed from Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice, written some three hundred years earlier.

The first stanza contains adjectives such as "lofty", "gay", and "demure", which convey a sense of superiority, that is ironically about to be reversed. Also, in the first stanza, the fish aquarium is referred to as a "lake", which allows the reader to appreciate the vastness of the territory that Selema, the cat, feels superiority over.

The second stanza describes Selema's feline qualities, her "velvet paws", "ears of jet" and "snowy beard". These aid in painting a picture of the cat, and her joy in the event to come, portrayed by her "conscious tail" that anyone who has ever seen a cat can relate to.

The third, fourth, fifth, and sixth stanzas complete the story of the unfortunate cat. Her lust for fish is compared with a woman's lust for gold. This is key for the last line, "nor all, that glitters, gold", because the cat thought it would be rewarding to catch the fish, but it led to her demise.

Thomas Gray's "Ode" humorously reminds the reader not to jump to conclusions based on appearances, but to research deeper into the subject then making an informed decision.

| Posted on 2005-04-04 | by Approved Guest