

Reading Material

A Thing of Beauty

(Poem)

The Poet John Keats was born in Moorgate, London, on 31 October 1795 to Thomas Keats and his wife, Frances Jennings. Though Keats was a trained doctor, his priority was poetry which earned him great fame. He is one of the leading figures among the most famous poets of Romantic period of English literature and the most important feature of this genre is their ardent admiration of nature and unabashed celebration of beauty. John Keats died in Rome on 23 February 1821 at the tender age of 26.

“A Thing of Beauty” by John Keats, taken from a larger poem, 'Endymion: A Poetic Romance,' is written in the Romantic style of writing. 'A Thing of Beauty' romanticizes beauty as something that has the ability to transform lives. Romanticising is about investing objects with a larger than life attributes, it is about extolling the virtues of an object - it could be any object, nature, beauty (in the case of this extract) - anything that has impacted the mind of the poet.

Some of the important aspects of the poem

1.Genre/Style of Writing:

A Thing of Beauty belongs to the **Romantic Genre**. First *published in 1818*, the poem, A Thing of Beauty is written in **rhyming couplets** and the **rhyme scheme employed is aa, bb**.

2. Theme:

a) **The central theme** of the poem revolves around beauty in all its forms - Earthly beauty and Spiritual beauty. The poet talks about how important beauty is for all of us. He highlights the transformational, therapeutic and spiritual impact of beauty on our lives. The poet describes how beauty can be found everywhere.

b) **The poet's message** is that Beauty has the ability to transform lives, it can dispel negativism and dark thoughts. Beauty has a positive impact on one's health, it can help steady the breathing, and can give one a sound sleep. Beauty can also remove the sting of dejection, it can help one survive even when there is a 'dearth of noble natures' or when one is surrounded by hostile conditions and malicious people. John Keats suggests that beauty can be found everywhere in life; as such he draws a list of beautiful things which include: the sun, the moon, trees, daffodils, beautiful rills, musk rose blooming among mid forest brake, mythical abode of Elysium. Lovely tales etc expresses the idea of beauty being spiritual in nature and that the ultimate goal of appreciating beauty should be to appreciate God who created beautiful things for us. Keats suggests that beauty has a spiritual source when he implies that it flows from 'An endless fountain' in heaven, beauty thus, is a spiritual drink, an 'immortal drink' made especially for all mankind.

3. Important Figures of Speech and images metaphors

a) **Metaphors and Symbols:** The poet has made liberal use of metaphors and symbols in the poem. The fountain in heaven is a metaphor for the source of spiritual beauty. The 'flowery band' is a metaphor for earthly beauty which is soothing and invigorating.

b) **Imagery:** The poem contains a powerful image of earthly beauty in the lines, 'are we wreathing A flowery band to bind us to the earth'. A Thing of Beauty is full of sensory images, and one can almost feel and smell them. these include, 'shady boon' which creates a sense of comfort

and respite of a hot summer afternoon, and so does the description of the 'clear rills' that 'a cooling covert make'. The description of the 'sprinkling of fair musk rose blooms' in the middle of a fern in the forest provides a rich feast of colours for the eyes!. The beautiful things altogether is compared to a fountain of immortal drink over flowing from heaven, is the most beautiful and meaningful imagery appearing in the poem.

To Keats, all the things of beauty lead us to immortality. The poet speaks of how lovely things grow more beautiful by the passing years, and how nature, and its beauty, keeps human beings happy and satisfied on this earth .Life, although full of problems, provides us with nature to lose ourselves in when we need it.

The Poem

This poem 'A thing of Beauty' is an extract, or the opening lines from his poem 'Endymion: A Poetic Romance.' It is based on a Greek legend in which **Endymion**, a handsome young shepherd and poet who lived on Mount Latmos , has a vision of Cynthia, the moon goddess. The long depicts his quest for the beautiful moon Goddess. Actually it is an allegory of Man's (Endymion) search for eternal beauty (Cynthia)

Explanation of some concepts

'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.....nothingness'

Poet clearly states that a beautiful thing is of deeper importance. The joy it gives is everlasting because it is not just materialistic, but spiritual and so eternal. Read it with the last two lines where he compares them to immortal drink'

'But will keep a bower quiet for us'

Bower is a shady , beautiful place. It is a favourite imagery in Keats' poetry. He compares beautiful things to a bower which is a refuge against hot sun and has a soothing effect on a distressed traveller.

'and a sleep.....quiet breathing'

Poet lists out the benefits of beautiful things in a man's life. Only a peaceful mind can have a sleep full of sweet dreams and quiet breathing, as the person is in every way healthy and not stressed or in troubles.

'There fore on every morrowus to the earth'

Poet says, people are cherishing the beautiful things around , because they alone give him strength to hold on to his life on earth. We attach ourselves with beauty around so that we cling on to our lives however miserable it is.

'Spite of.....made for our searching'

Here poet lists out four factors that can make human life troublesome and even painful.

a. spite of despondence stands for Injuries caused by disappointments

b. dearth of noble natures is the absence of virtues like love , kindness, sharing caring etc. Instead of these he finds vice in people around.

c. gloomy days are when we experience a loss of spirit due to known or unknown reasons

d. unhealthy ways are those unethical or even illegal means we adopt for a successful life. Ultimately we become guilt stricken even if we achieve certain gains by unbecoming measures. Over darkened ways are the difficult terrain we walk on in our life, (The hardships and difficulties we face in everyday life) which make us sad and exhausted.

‘Some shape of.....dark spirits’

This is the theme of the poem, despite the presence of all the factors that cause suffering and depression, the cloud of darkness will be removed from our spirit by the advent of a beautiful thing.

The list of beautiful things against which its presence is soothing.....

Sun and moon are universally accepted beautiful things

Other ones on some particular situations.

Trees providing a bower for sheep in hot summer

The yellow flowers of Daffodils against the monotony of green background

The rill (small stream) makes a cool covering of greenery for themselves with the bushes growing on its banks

The mid forest brake is thick mass of fern, normally without flowers and musk rose grows among them giving it beauty of colours and fragrance.

‘And such too.....mighty dead’ is an allusion to the Greek mythological belief; **The great heroes never have an ordinary mundane afterlife. They believed that those departed virtuous souls travel to a beautiful island beyond, and live there in bliss eternally. This concept helped the admirers of those dead heroes to control grief over their icon’s departure.**

‘All lovely tales.....read’ refers to all those beautiful and time tested stories we have either heard or read which filled positivity, hope and virtues in us.

'An endless fountain.....brink' is the obvious reference of the spiritual element of the poem. Poet compares all those things of beauty to a fountain of immortal drink which is pouring down from the edges of heaven. Immortal drink or elixir keeps Gods immortal. Same way beautiful things are sent from heaven as part of *Divine Plan* of making people spirited and happy and make them hopeful of better tomorrows in spite of setbacks and failures. The last two lines sum up what the poet wants to convey, that a thing of beauty never passes into nothingness, but its loveliness increases and it raises man to eternal bliss.