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English Core

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A Thing of Beauty

-John Keats

About the poet

John Keats was born in London in the year 1795 and died in Rome in 1821 at the young age of 25 due to illness. He is a romantic poet and his poetry is characterized by sensual imagery in his most popular work which is a series of odes, (a lyrical poem which is meant for a particular subject). Today, his poems are one of the most sought after creations in English literature. The above given poetry is an excerpt from his poem, -Endymion: A poetic Romance-(1818), considered to be an epic poem

Background

The poem is based on a Greek legend in which Endymion a handsome young shepherd and poet that lived on Mount Latmos, had a vision of Cynthia, the moon goddess. The enchanted youth resolved to seek her out and so wandered away through the forest and down under the sea.

Summary

A Thing of Beauty is a poem written by the famous romantic poet, John Keats. The poem tells about how nature and its wonder mesmerize us and take away all the sorrow that surrounds us from time to time. The following explanation might aid you in understanding this exceptional piece of work in poetry.

A beautiful thing is a source of eternal joy, its attractiveness grows with the passage of time and its impact never fades away. It is as pleasant as a cool quiet bower or sound sleep with sweet dreams; or robust health and mental peace. It provides the beholder with a haven of tranquility and solace.

It is the beauty of nature that keeps us attached to this earth. Every morning we collect fresh lovely flowers and prepare garlands. The fascination for flowers is our bonding with the earth. It helps us steer clear of despondency and disappointments. We forget all our despair, of acute shortage of noble souls, of misfortunes that overtake us to test our forbearance. Life is full of trials and tribulations and we often find ourselves in the midst of gloom. It is at such depressing moments that a sight full of beauty dispels the pall of sadness from our spirits making room for hope and optimism.

The objects of beauty are countless. These include heavenly bodies like the sun and the moon, the old and young trees that provide cool shelter to sleep, the daffodil flowers encased in green leaves, the streams that flow through a shady passage which they make themselves with plants, and the bushes that bear fragrant flowers. These simple and even commonplace things lift the human spirit filling it with joy and delight. In addition to these objects of nature, there are wonderful tales of our legendary heroes, who lived and died heroically, which inspire us with their matchless beauty. These beautiful things are metaphorically an endless source of nectar that pours down to us from heaven bringing eternal joy for the soul's grandeur. They are like an elixir of life, a never diminishing source of pleasure and delight, an endless fountain of joy that seems to be a precious gift from Heaven.

Main points

1. The beautiful things of nature are permanent source of joy and make our lives sweet.
2. A thing of beauty is a joy forever.
3. It does not pass into nothingness but its beauty keeps on increasing.
4. It gives us sound sleep and good health;
5. This world is full of frustrations, disappointments and dearth of noble people.
6. These make our life gloomy and sad.
7. But things of beauty remove the pall and sadness from our spirits.
8. Nature is a constant source of happiness for human beings.
9. The beautiful things are – sheep, daffodils, clear streams, musk roses and forest thickets.
10. These things soothe and make us happy.
11. Stories of heroes who have died in peace of war are also things of beauty and have a stimulating effect.
12. But the beauties of nature are lovelier than all the lovely tales and are like the immortal drink from heaven.

Central Idea

Beauty is a heavenly tonic/drink – an endless fountain of nectar. This beauty comes in different forms– a tale, a poem, a play, a lovely object of nature or the heavenly bodies. It soothes our spirits and gives us good health, sound sleep and mental peace. It removes sadness from our lives and gives an everlasting joy.

Theme

A thing of beauty is a source of constant joy. Beauty can be found everywhere. It is something that has the ability to transform lives. It also highlights the fact that beauty has a therapeutic quality, i.e. the ability to remove negativity. It can be any object, nature, tales or even noble deeds of our ancestors. The poet believes that beauty is intransient and gives us the same pleasure again and again. It provides us with eternal joy and never fades away. Beauty plays a very important role in our lives and helps us to remain happy and joyful in this sad, mundane world.

This poem, in many ways signifies a romantic finale of Keats's firm belief in the non-destruction of beauty, and of its claim to legitimacy with reference to its permanence, and its ability to call up, or contextualize the truth. This forms the main theme of the poem. The poet's artistic view of beauty as an obstinate source of pleasure and joy comes in the face of a knowledge of the sharp problems of life, to which the essential thing of beauty offer their own mode of struggle. Unlike the commonplace objects of everyday certainty, the objects of beauty are resistant to the perishability of time, and indeed of mortality. This interlaces the melancholic note characteristic to many of the poet's odes with a classical, fleeting form of beauty. Their power rises with time. They are the signifiers of a continuity that is reflected as historical truth, of a story that exceeds the limitations of specific insight, but includes and decides the collective flow. The sun, the moon, the flora and the fauna in Nature are protectors of an infinity that can never be equated with the temporariness and incontinency of human schemes.

Tone of the Poem

In this poem, Endymion, the mythical character, has a tone of a desire for a romantic self-transcendence that aims at fusing his own self with the embarrassment of cosmic creations. It is the perception of the viewing subject, of the critical mind which is responsible for his own well-being, and which should ideally aim at a balanced synthesis of his own egotistic feelings with the donated borrowings and emotional provisions of beauty. This is a personal unity which is more complicated than the Wordsworthian notion of Pantheism. The stimulated state of mind that turns its own prejudice onto the gaze of nature demonstrates the idea of negative capability as proposed by the scholar-poet.

Read the stanzas given below and answer the questions that follow each:

1."A thing of beauty is a joy forever
Its loveliness increases, it will never
Pass into nothingness; but will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing."

Questions

- (a) Name the poem and the poet of these lines.
- (b) How is a thing of beauty a joy forever?
- (c) What do you understand by a 'bower'?
- (d) What kind of sleep does it provide?

Answers:

- (a) The poem is A Thing of Beauty. The poet is John Keats.
- (b) A thing of beauty is the source of constant joy. Its beauty goes on increasing. It will never pass into nothingness.
- (c) A bower is a pleasant place in the shade under a tree. It protects persons/animals from the hot rays of the sun.
- (d) It provides us a sound sleep, full of sweet dreams, health and peaceful breathing.

2."And such too is the grandeur of the dooms
We have imagined for the mighty dead;
MI lovely tales that we have heard or read;
An endless fountain of immortal drink,
Pouring unto us from the heaven's brink Questions"

- (a) Name the poem and the poet of these lines.
- (b) Explain: 'the grandeur of the dooms'.

(c)What is the thing of beauty mentioned in these lines’?

(d)What image does the poet use in these lines?

Answers:

(a)The poem is A Thing of Beauty. The poet is John Keats.

(b)The magnificence that we imagine for our mighty dead forefathers on the dooms day.

(c)The lovely tales of mighty men are mentioned in these lines.

(d)The poet uses the image of ‘an endless fountain of immortal drink’ to describe the beautiful bounty of the earth. The earth has bestowed us with sun, moon, flowers, rivers, greenery etc.

Q3. List the things of beauty mentioned in the poem.

Ans: A Thing of Beauty is a poem penned down by John Keats. In this poem, he talks about nature and beauty associated with it. Everything of nature is a thing of beauty and a source of pleasure. Some of them are: the sun, the moon, old and young trees, daffodil flowers, small streams with clear water, mass of ferns and the blooming musk-roses. All of them are things of beauty. They are a constant source of joy and pleasure.

Q 4: Mention any two things which cause pain and suffering.

Answer: Things which cause pain and suffering are sadness, hopelessness, and a lack of noble qualities and an unhealthy and wicked style of living.

What does the line, ‘Therefore are we wreathing a flowery band to bind us to earth’ suggest to you?

Ans: Keats is a lover of beauty. He employs his senses to discover beauty. The link of man with nature is eternal. The things of beauty are like wreaths of beautiful flowers. We seem to weave a flowery band every day. It keeps us attached to the beauties of this earth. There is too much of pain and suffering in this world. It is due to the loss of physical beauty which fades away with the passage of time and finally dies out completely.

Q4. What makes human beings love life in spite of troubles and sufferings?

Ans: There are many things that bring us troubles and sufferings. They dampen our spirits. However, 'some shape of beauty' brings love and happiness in our lives in spite of such unpleasant things. A thing of beauty removes the pall of sadness and sufferings. It makes us love life.

Q5. Why is 'grandeur' associated with the 'mighty dead'?

Ans: Grandeur is associated with the mighty dead because of their heroic deeds. The mighty dead were very powerful and dominating persons during their own times. Their achievements made them 'mighty' and great. Their noble works dazzle our eyes. We imagine that such mighty dead forefathers will attain more grandeur on the doomsday. Hence 'grandeur' is associated with the 'mighty dead'.

Q6. How is a thing of beauty a joy forever?

Ans: According to John Keats a thing of beauty is a joy of forever. It is a constant source of happiness and pleasure. Its loveliness increases every moment. It will never pass into nothingness. In other words, a thing of beauty is never devalued.

Q7. How does a thing of beauty provide us shelter and comfort?

Ans: John Keats is a great Romantic poet. He is rich in sensuous imagery. Nature provides us things of rare beauty. It keeps a bower quiet for us. A bower is a pleasant place in the shade under a tree. A thing of beauty also provides us peace and security. We enjoy a sound sleep which is full of sweet dreams, health and peaceful breathing.

Q8. How do 'us' bind our self to the earth every morning?

Ans: All the Romantic poets stress upon the relationship between man and nature. Keats believes that there is an unbreakable bond which binds man with nature and the earth. The beauties of the earth fascinate man. Every object of nature is a source of beauty and happiness. Every day we are weaving a wreath of flowers. This flowery band binds us to the beauties of this earth.

Q9. Name the beauties of nature that are constant source of joy and happiness to man.

Ans: Nature is a store house of beauty. The beauties of nature are endless. The sun, the moon, old and young trees, beautiful daffodil flowers and green surroundings are some of such beautiful things. Small streams with clear water, thick mass of

ferns, thickets of forest and musk-rose are some other things of beauty. All such things of beauty are a constant source of joy and happiness to man.

Q10. Why and how is 'grandeur associated with the 'mighty dead'?

Ans: The dooms day is considered the Day of Judgment, when the dead will receive what is due to them. Our mighty dead forefathers earned name and fame with their noble deeds. It is hoped that they will be rewarded with rare magnificence and grandeur.

Q11. How is a thing of beauty lovelier than all the lovely tales we have heard and read?

Ans: All beautiful things of nature are a boon for humanity. The magnificence and beauty of objects of nature surpasses the grandeur of dooms that we have imagined for our mighty dead forefathers. It is lovelier than all the lovely tales that we have heard or read.

Q12. What is the message for the theme) of the poem 'A Thing of Beauty'?

Ans: The very first line contains the message that John Keats, the great Romantic poet, wants to convey. Keats was a worshipper of beauty. For him beauty was truth and truth, beauty. Hence, for him a thing of beauty is a joy forever. Beauty never fades. Nor is it ever devalued. It never passes into nothingness. When we are full of sorrows and sufferings, some form of beauty comes to our rescue. It removes the pall of sadness and sorrows and gives us joy and pleasure. Thus, beauty is a boon for human beings.