

A Thing of Beauty

by John Keats

Class 12 Flamingo Poetry Chapter 9

About the poet

John Keats (1795 to 1821), English Romantic poet. Lived only 25 years yet wrote some of the finest odes and narrative poems in the language.

Friends - Shelley, Leigh Hunt, Hazlitt.

Trained as a ~~doctor~~ surgeon but left medicine for poetry. Died of tuberculosis in Rome.

Source of the extract

The poem is the opening passage of "Endymion: A Poetic Romance" (1818).

Book I, lines 1 to 24. Tells the myth of Endymion, the shepherd loved by the moon goddess Cynthia (Selene/Diana).

Famous opening:

"A thing of beauty is a joy for ever"

Form & Structure

24 lines, written in iambic pentameter.

Rhyme scheme : heroic couplets - AA BB

CC DD ... (rhymed pairs, 10 syllables).

No stanza breaks - one continuous verse paragraph. Frequent enjambment, so the thought flows past line endings.

Central thesis

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever

<- key line

Beauty does not fade with time. It grows in loveliness. It never passes into ~~oblivion~~ nothingness.

Instead it keeps for us :

- * a bower quiet
- * a sleep full of sweet dreams
- * health and quiet breathing

"Bower" = a leafy shaded shelter.

Symbol of mental refuge.

Why we need beauty

Keats lists the gloom of human life :
despondence, inhuman dearth of noble
natures, gloomy days, unhealthy and
o'er-darkened ways made for our
searching.

The wreath metaphor

"Therefore, on every morrow,
are we wreathing a flowery band
to bind us to the earth..."

Every morning we weave a band of
flowers (beautiful things). This
band ties us to the earth, gives us a
reason to live in spite of grief.

beauty --> bond with life <- core idea

So beauty acts as an antidote to the
darkness of existence. It ~~makes~~ moves
the pall from our dark spirits.

The Catalogue

Keats then lists the actual things of beauty - a catalogue device borrowed from epic poetry (Homer, Milton).

Things of beauty in the poem :

1. the sun

2. the moon

3. old and young trees, sprouting

a shady boon for simple sheep

4. daffodils with the green world

they live in

5. clear rills (small streams) that

make a cooling covert

'gainst the hot season

6. the mid-forest brake

rich with musk-rose blooms

7. the grandeur of the dooms

of the mighty dead

8. lovely tales we have heard or read

*

Notice : nature + literature + myth.

All sources of permanent joy.

The Fountain image

Final couplet :

"An endless fountain of immortal
drink, pouring unto us from the
heaven's brink."

Beauty is compared to a fountain of
nectar that flows ceaselessly to us
from heaven. It is immortal because
its source is divine.

beauty = endless fountain of nectar ← closing image

Two key images recap

(1) the flowery band - beauty

binds us to life on earth.

(2) the fountain - beauty is

an unending divine gift.

First binds, second pours. Together
they show beauty as both rooted and
transcendent.

Themes

(a) Permanence of beauty

Beauty does not die. Loveliness only increases. A joy for ever. *

(b) Beauty as consolation

Human life is full of suffering and dark moods. Beauty lifts the pall.

(c) Love of nature

Sun, moon, trees, daffodils, streams, musk-roses - nature crowds the lines. Typical Romantic preoccupation.

(d) Beauty in art and myth

Lovely tales of the mighty dead, the dooms of heroes - literature itself preserves beauty across time.

(e) Divine source

The fountain pours from heaven's brink. Beauty has a sacred origin, so it ~~ends~~ cannot run dry. *

Poetic Devices

1. Alliteration

"sweet dreams, and health"

"cooling covert" - hard c sound

"noble natures"

2. Metaphor

flowery band = beauty, life-tie

endless fountain = continuous beauty

the pall = depression

3. Imagery

visual : sun, moon, daffodils,

musk-rose, fountain. tactile :

cooling covert. olfactory : roses.

4. Personification

beauty is given the action of
binding, moving the pall, pouring.

5. Enjambment

lines run on without pause -

mirrors the unending nature of
beauty itself.

Quick Revision

Q. What is the message of the poem ?

A. Beautiful things give us lasting joy and the courage to bear life's sorrows.

Q. List 3 things of beauty Keats names.

A. Sun, moon, daffodils, clear rills, musk-roses, lovely tales (any 3).

Q. Explain - flowery band that binds us to the earth.

A. Each day we gather beautiful impressions ; they tie us to life despite despondence.

Q. Why is the fountain called immortal ?

A. It flows from heaven, so its source is divine and unending.

Memo :

Cite the line, then unpack it.

Examiners want close reading.