

## Ode to a Nightingale by John Keats:

Keats's Ode to a Nightingale is considered one of the finest odes in English Literature. It reveals the highest imaginative powers of the poet. The poem was inspired by the song of a nightingale, which the poet heard in the gardens of his friend Charles Brown. The sweet music of the nightingale sent the poet in rapture and one morning he took his chair from the breakfast table, put it on the grass-plot under the plum tree and composed the poem. After he had finished the poem he came back with scraps of paper in his hand. Brown rescued the papers and found them to be the poem on the nightingale.

The poem presents the picture of the tragedy of human life. It brings out an expression of Keats's pessimism and dejection. He composed this poem at the time when his heart was full of sorrow. His youngest brother Tom had died, the second one had gone abroad and the poet himself was under the suspense and agony by the passionate love for Fanny Brawne. All these happenings had induced in the poet a mood of sorrow. He could not suppress it. Thus the poet enjoys the pleasure in sadness/ pain and feasts upon the very sadness/ pain into joy. This complex emotion gives the poem a unique charm.

Thus the poem is an expression of Keats's feelings rising in his heart at the hearing of the melodious song of the bird. When he hears the nightingale's song, he is entrenched by its sweetness and his joy becomes so espiritve that it changes into a kind of pleasant pain. .It is also about hard life's experiences of the poet. It is a journey from real world to the world of imagination. The poet escapes to the world of nightingale. He finds imaginative world more peaceful and harmonious than real world. However, he is alone there too. Ultimately, he returns with a lesson that escape is possible only with death.

John Keats, in "Ode to Nightingale" makes a comparison between several things. Some of them are:

Art and life

Mortality and immortality.

Imagination and reality.

Natural beauty and artificiality.

Pleasure and pain

Life and death

Poem starts with sense of dullness. Mood of the poet is gloomy. He sleeps while hearing the song of nightingale. Sleep overpowers him and he starts his journey to the world of nightingale. In the beginning, Keats seems to be an immature youth with a melancholic heart urging to find a means of oblivion and escape. It is one of the most important ingredients of romantic poetry that it promotes escapism. Like every romantic poet, John Keats is

also an escapist. In fact, he is the most escapist poet among them. Romantic poetry is the poetry of dreams and imagination. "Ode to Nightingale" is also a dream.

On catching the sight of a nightingale and hearing its music, which he assumes to be an immortal voice of happiness, Keats feels that his body is getting benumbed. But, he also feels an acute pain because he is conscious of his mortality and suffering. He fantasizes of having drunk hemlock or 'some dull opiate':

"My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains,  
my sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk."

After describing his plight, Keats acknowledges, rather than envy the bird's 'happy lot' and participates in its permanent happiness. He identifies the bird with dryad, the Greek Goddess of the tree. He contrasts the mortality and suffering of human being with the immortality and perfect happiness of the nightingale. Of course, Keats immortalizes the bird by thinking of the race of it as the symbol of universal and undying musical voice, which is the voice of nature, and also of ideal romantic poetry, of the world of art and spirit. The poet is in fancy world. He expresses his different desires. Firstly, he wants high quality red wine. He remembers difficulties of life and wants to forget them but his sensitiveness does not allow him. Life is tough and painful. It is much difficult to face harsh realities of life. No one can know these facts better than John Keats. Misfortunes of life disturb him. He wants to "fade far away" and "quite forget" the "weariness, the fever, and the fret". Hence, he wants red wine. It would help him in this regard. He wants wine from Provence. It is a region in southeastern France and is famous for landscapes, fun, jollity and wine.

In this stanza, the poet sketches the world of reality. In real world, "men sit and hear each other groan." It is full of sadness. People born, spend a "sad" life; "Palsy" paralysis some of them, whereas remaining grow old and ultimately "die(s)". Furthermore, beauty, in this world does not last longer. In short, this world is "full of sorrow[s]". Keats does not talk only about his own anxieties. He also talks about the people and their worries. It gives this poem a universal appeal. Nevertheless, objectivity is still therein. We can't deny that men in this world grow pale and finally die. Death is certain for everyone. It is a bitter truth. Even lovers' passion of love cannot save a person from death. Death makes the poet sad.

Stanza-IV Critical Appreciation of "Ode to Nightingale":

It starts with escapism. "Away! Away! for I will fly to thee". In start of the poem, the poet asks for sacred wine but in this stanza he gives up on this

idea. He needs no "charioted by Bacchus and his pards." Bacchus is the god of wine and "charioted" is his chariot. He splendidly rides it. The poet does not want it either. However, he wants to escape from this world. For this purpose, he chooses "viewless wings of Poesy". His poetic imagination can help him to start his journey to a new world, where he sees a shining moon regardless of darkness.

John Keats has created many wonderful **images** in this stanza. He also refers the god of wine. We can witness strong imagination of the poet. He is confident that neither wine nor chariot of Bacchus but his own imagination can take him to the fancy world. He rejects the idea of wine hence it is no more required. Perhaps, he has realized that the wine is a temporary solution. Although imagination is also not an everlasting solution yet it is better than the wine. Moreover, it is a beautiful sentiment.

#### Stanza-V Critical Appreciation of "Ode to Nightingale":

Keats' poetry appeals to the senses. Out of five human senses, three can be witnessed in this stanza which are:

Sight  
Smell  
touch

In the world of imagination, he has seen the **shining moon**. There is darkness everywhere, therefore, he can't see anything else. Nonetheless, he can feel and smell flowers when his feet touche them. He starts this stanza with following line.

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet.

Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs

But in embalmed darkness guess each sweet.

He guesses from the smell of flowers that they are "White hawthorn" and "Eglantine". He than talks about "Mid May's eldest child" called "musk rose". It is the first flower that grows in middle of May. There is also another image in this stanza which is of murmuring flies.

From the above lines, conclusion can be drawn that the poet is in deepest oblivion. Description of natural images is evident that John Keats is a true romantic poet. Flowers, bushes, moon, rays, flies and trees prove that poet has high imaginative powers.

#### Stanza-VI Critical Appreciation of "Ode to Nightingale":

The poet is still in imaginary world with nightingale. It is much pleasant and peaceful for him. As peaceful as death. He has no fear of death. He sees death as a freedom. "Easeful death" is a kind of consolation for him. Death

actually is the solution of Keats' problems. At this moment of life nothing can help him but death. He wants peace. Although he finds it in world of imagination yet it is temporary. He wants a permanent solution. He has found it. If death approaches him it would bring him greater happiness. However, the only loss which he observes is that he would not be able to hear the eternal song of nightingale. The bird will mourn on his death but he would have "become a sod."

#### Stanza-VII Critical Appreciation of "Ode to Nightingale":

Seventh stanza of the poem is also a comparison between mortality and immortality. Humans have limited time to live and that too is full of worries. On the other hand, song of nightingale is endless. He expresses his thoughts in following lines:

**Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!**

Nightingale has been singing song for many years. Many "emperor[s] and clown[s]" have heard this song. It was being listened before Keats' birth and even after his death it would be listened for many years. In this way, song of nightingale is immortal. He refers "Ruth" from the Bible. She was maiden. She was captivated by a cruel king. Keats is of the view that she had also listened the song of nightingale. In short, it has been heard by kings, by knights, by warriors and by maidens and will be listened in future. The poet proves that song of nightingale is immortal, whereas life, on the other hand is mortal.

#### Stanza-VIII Critical Appreciation of "Ode to Nightingale":

With the word, "forlorn", the poet returns from imagination. His mood is sad. Song, flowers, trees, moon, forest, roses and maiden inspired him but he had to come back in the real world. There is no other option for him. He cannot stay there forever. The poet knows that the world of imagination though gives peace yet it is a lie. He calls it a "deceiving elf". At the end, song of nightingale "fled" so as imagination of the poet. He ends the poem with a question. He writes:

Fled is that music: -Do I wake or sleep?

Conclusion

"Ode to Nightingale", in a nutshell, is the expression of feelings. It is a highly impressive poem of John Keats. The poem is evident that he is a true romantic and a pure poet. It reveals his strong imaginative powers. He has successfully managed making comparisons and demonstrating nature and its objects. He has proved that song of nightingale is immortal. It has also

been proved that imagination is pleasurable and the life is painful. Sidney Colvin's remarks are worth mentioning. He said:

It [Ode to Nightingale] is among the varied glories of the English poetry.

