

LEC NO 13

Summary of the poem *Ode to a Nightingale*

The song of the nightingale cast an enchantment on Keats. His heart begins to throb. A drowsy numbness overcomes his senses.. He feels like one who has drunk the juice of hemlock, or has taken a dose of some narcotics, causing sleep or forgetfulness. The poet is also a singer but he is not jealous of the sweet song of the nightingale. On the other hand the nightingale song has enchanted him. Its happiness has filled him with joy. He rejoices because the bird is singing in the sweet notes in the shades of the beeches.

The poet fully understands the contrast between his own sadness and the happiness of the nightingale. Can he also be happy like the bird and forget his sorrow. He thinks that can a draught of wine make him happy. Hence, he wants to taste some wine which could enable him to be happy and forget his sorrow. The must be delicious. It must have been cooled for ages under the earth. It must have the perfume of the forest and green countryside. He desires to drink a beaker full of the southern wine. He is sure that his wine would inspire poetic ardour in him just as the water of Hyppocrene gave poetic inspiration to those who drank of it. He longs for a cup of wine. By drinking it he would disappear with the bird leaving the world and its sorrow leaving behind him. He would join the nightingale in its sweet music and share its happiness.

Now the poet tells the reason why he wants to escape from the world. The nightingale spent its time happily it does not realise its horror and suffering. In the world men seem destined to little else for hear the heart breaking sorrow of each other. Old people dies in misery young people wasting under dreadful diseases grow thin and die.. Thought brings an inevitable train of sorrow along with it. Beauty fades away too soon. Love is transient. It is an ugly world. Hence the poet wants to escape from it.

The poet changes his mind he does not wants to escape from the world and its suffering with the help of wine..He prefers to fly way with the bird with means of poetic flight of imagination. Poetry is far sweeter and intoxicating than wine. With its help he imagines himself to be in the company of the bird in the tree. The night is soft and lovely the moon is enthroned as the queen of

the sky. The stars cluster around her. In the world down below is no light excepting what is seen now and then when the thick foliage is blown with the breeze.

The poet fancies himself to be in the company of the bird in the tree. Below him the foliage is so dense that there is darkness on the ground. Hence he cannot see the flower which grows there. But he inhales the perfumes of flowers. Thus he is able to know what flowers may be found in the season, in the grass, in the thicket and on the wild fruit trees. He can discover the scent of the hawthorn eglantine, violet and musk rose. The honey and dew of the musk rose attract bees, whose humming sound fills the whole atmosphere.

In the darkness the poet listens to the music of the nightingale.. The music begins to his mind the idea of death which he has often cherished. He confesses that he has been in love with death. In his sweet songs he welcomed death so that it might take him away from his miserable world. He realises that this is the best moment for death when he is enjoying supreme happiness. He can enjoy without any pain when the song of the bird ravishes his soul. The bird would continue to pour its music on the world. But after his death he would not be able to hear it any more.

The poet thinks that the nightingale is immortal. The cruel hand of death can never touch it. The song he hears now must have been heard in the past by the Emperors and the Clowns. The same song might have comforted Ruth in her misery when she stood alone in a cornfield in a foreign country. The same song should have encouraged some princesses imprisoned in an enchanted castle, the magic window of which opened on the wave of sea in the some fary lands now forlorn.

The world forlorn disturbs the poet rudely. It brings him back to the world of realities from the world of ideal beauty and enchantment. He feels miserable in his lonely condition. Even his imagination is not able to create a world of illusion. The song of the bird fades away. The poet wakes wondering whether it was all a dream and nothing more.