

On the Grasshopper and the Cricket: Summary & Analysis

By John Keats

An Introduction to the poem

“On the grasshopper and the Cricket” by John Keats is a fine piece of sonnet written in December 1816. The poem was inspired by the beauty of nature, the most common theme among the Romantic poets. To be precise, the poet here celebrates the ‘poetry of earth’ – the music of nature which is omnipresent. The two opening lines of the octave and the sestet “The poetry of earth is never dead” and “The poetry of earth is ceasing never” say it all.

Keats has introduced two little creatures – the grasshopper and the cricket, as the title of the poem suggests – to represent the vitality and joyous mood of nature even in the scorching hot of summer and in bleak and bitter cold of winter. The sonnet is all about how the grasshopper and the cricket carry on with the endless song of the earth.

In its form, Keats’ poem is a Petrarchan / Italian sonnet with the rhyme scheme ABBAABBA CDECDE. Iambic Pentameter lines run through the entire poem. While the octet concentrates on the grasshopper’s voice in summer, the sestet deals with the cricket’s song in winter.

On the Grasshopper and the Cricket: Explanation

The sonnet opens with the poet asserting that the ‘poetry of earth’, the ‘voice of nature’ is always live. Even when all the singing birds are tired in the hot summer and take shelter under the shady branches of trees, the nature’s song can still be heard. A voice which runs then from hedge to hedge and around the freshly-cut grasslands (mead) is the Grasshopper’s.

The Grasshopper has the luxury of taking over the duty of carrying on with the everlasting song of earth in summer, as he is ‘never done with his delights’. The Grasshopper is fun-loving and cheerful in summer. He takes rest under the pleasant weeds only when he is ‘tired out with fun’.

The poet repeats the main theme of the sonnet that the voice of earth never comes to an end. In an isolated winter evening, when frost has put everyone and everything to silent mode, you can

still hear the song of Cricket coming from the stove. So, the chilly atmosphere forces the cricket to seek warmth indoors but cannot stop his music. Rather, his music gets louder with time (in warmth increasing ever).

To a man who is feeling sleepy (in drowsiness half-lost) the Cricket's song sounds like the Grasshopper's voice among some grassy hills. The poet means that people like to feel the warmth of summer even in bleak winter by mistaking the Cricket's song for the Grasshopper's.

Summing it up

So, the Grasshopper and the Cricket carry on with the nature's persistent music, no matter what the season is or how the atmosphere remains. Though they are two very little insects, they take the big responsibility. That is why the poet has used personification on them by capitalizing their names and using personal pronouns like 'he' and 'his'.

The poem is symbolic where the Grasshopper and the Cricket both symbolize the constant joyous mood of nature irrespective of season. In the lucidity of language, in its spontaneous rhythm and theme of nature, the sonnet has been a fine example of a romantic poem.

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