

Class - 9, Beehive

POEM - RAIN ON THE ROOF

By Coates Kinney

About the Poet

Coates Kinney (November 24, 1826 – January 25, 1904) was an American lawyer, politician, journalist and poet who wrote *Rain On The Roof*.

Coates Kinney was born in 1826 near Penn Yan, New York. He was partly educated at Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio, and studied law with Thomas Corwin. He was admitted to the bar in Cincinnati in 1856. He became a journalist, and worked on papers in Cincinnati, Ohio, Xenia, and Springfield, Illinois.

From June 1861 until November 1865, he was a paymaster in the United States Army and was mustered out with the commission of brevet lieutenant-colonel of volunteers. He was a delegate to the convention that nominated Ulysses S. Grant for the presidency in 1868 and its Ohio secretary. He was the senator from the 5th district in the Ohio legislature 1882-1883, and delivered a speech against "The Official Rail Road Pass".

He wrote poetry, and his verses were collected in *Keuka and Other Poems* (Cincinnati, 1855) and *Lyrics of the Ideal and the Real* (1888). Of his verses, "The Rain on the Roof", which was set to music, was the most popular. He died in Ohio in 1904.

Introduction to the Poem

From the title of the Poem-‘Rain on the Roof’, we can make out that the poem is about the rain. The poet is telling us about the memories he has of the rain. The sound of the raindrops falling on the roof of his house brings back sweet memories of the past.

Rain on the Roof - Summary - 1

In this poem, the poet says that when the humid shadows drift (here, ‘humid shadows’ means dark clouds full of water). He says that when the sky is full of dark clouds which have moisture, and are full of water and are about to bring rain. Further, when these clouds float around the sky over the starry spheres (refers to the sky at night time that is full of stars).

Then, huge clouds that are full of moisture move around in the sky. And the raindrops that seem like a tear falling from the sky wipe the sad darkness of the night. Moreover, the poet is comparing

the raindrops to tears as to him the dark sky seems very sad. Also, it appears as if it is weeping and the raindrops are the tears shed by it. He further adds that it is like a blessing to lie on the bed in his room. And listen to the sound made by raindrops falling on the roof.

In the next part, the poet expresses his feelings when he hears the raindrops falling on the roof of his house. Poet says that every tinkle on the shingles has an echo in the heart. Whenever he hears raindrops falling on the rooftop its sound repeats in his heart and in his dreams. Further, he has many different and fantastic imaginations. Also, the falling drops of rain on the rooftops creates many new different dreams in his mind. For instance, he recollects many memories of the past which come back into his mind as dreams. Hence, he listens to the patter of the rain upon the roof, he has many new dreams in his mind. And his memories of the past come back in the form of dreams.

In the last paragraph, the poet introduces his mother and says that he is dreaming of his mother. As in the previous stanza that rain brings memories of the past. They were the memory of his mother who is no longer alive. Long ago, his mother used to love him a lot and she used to consider him a darling. Also, she would let him sleep until daybreak and have sweet dreams. As he listens to the song made by the raindrops falling on the rooftop of his room he feels that his mother is looking at him. Moreover, the sound of rain makes him correlate his past with his present. That's the reason he was so moved by the sound of the raindrops on the shingles of his room. Every time he hears this sound it brings back memories of the past as he reminds of his mother.

Poem and Explanation

Stanza 1

When the humid shadows hover
Over all the starry spheres
And the melancholy darkness
Gently weeps in rainy tears,
What a bliss to press the pillow
Of a cottage-chamber bed
And lie listening to the patter
Of the soft rain overhead!

Humid: something which is full of moisture.

'shadows' refers to the moisture laden clouds which cast a shadow on the earth.

hover: Move around something

melancholy: sad

bliss: Happiness

patter: sound of raindrops falling on the roof.

Cottage chamber means the bedroom.

The poet is saying that when the humid shadows hover (here, 'humid shadows' refers to dark clouds which are full of water). The poet is saying that when the sky is full of these clouds which are moisture-laden, are full of water and are about to bring rain, when such clouds hover around in the sky, over all the starry spheres ('starry spheres' refers to the sky at night time which is full of stars). At that time, huge clouds which are full of moisture, move around in the sky and the sad darkness of the night is wiped off by the raindrops which seem like tears falling from the sky. The poet is comparing rain drops to tears and he says that the dark sky which seems to be very sad, it appears as if it is crying and the raindrops are the tears shed by it. He adds that it is a like a blessing to lie on the bed in his room (Cottage chamber means bedroom) and listen to the sound made by raindrops falling on the roof.

Stanza 2

Every tinkle on the shingles
Has an echo in the heart;
And a thousand dreamy fancies
Into busy being start,
And a thousand recollections
Weave their air-threads into woof,
As I listen to the patter
Of the rain upon the roof.

tinkle: short, light ringing sound

shingles: rectangular wooden tiles used on roofs

echo: repeated sound

woof: weft, i.e. the thread woven across the loom

patter: sound of raindrops falling on the roof

'busy being' refers to human beings and here, the poet is referring to himself

The poet is expressing his feelings when he hears the raindrops falling on the roof top of his house. He says that every tinkle on the shingles has an echo in the heart. Whenever he hears rain falling on the roof top, the sound repeats in his heart and in his dreams, he has many different, fanciful imaginations. He adds that this sound of the rain falling on the roof top creates many new different dreams in his mind. He recollects many memories of the past which come back into his mind as dreams. So, he says that as he listens to the patter of the rain upon the roof, he has many new dreams in his mind and the memories of the past come back in the form of dreams.

Stanza 3

Now in memory comes my mother,
As she used in years ago,
To regard the darling dreamers
Ere she left them till the dawn:
O! I feel her fond look on me
As I list to this refrain
Which is played upon the shingles
By the patter of the rain.

ere: old poetic word for 'before'

dawn: day break

list: old poetic word for 'listen'

refrain: a repeated part of a song or a poem; here, the sound of the rain

Here, the poet introduces his mother. He says that he is dreaming of his mother. As he had told in the previous stanza that rain brings memories of the past – it is the memory of his mother who is no longer alive. In the past, she used to love him a lot, she used to consider him a darling and she would let him sleep till day break and have sweet dreams. The poet can still feel that his mother is looking at him as he listens to the song made by the rain drops falling on the roof top of his room. The sound of the rain makes him correlate his past with his present. That is why the poet is moved by the sound of the rain drops on the shingles of his room. Whenever he hears this sound it brings back memories of the past and he is reminded of his mother.

Literary Devices in the poem

Rhyme scheme of the poem: abcbdefe

Stanza 1

1. Alliteration: The repetition of a consonant sound in two or more consecutive words.

'Humid Hover' - 'h' sound is repeating.

'starry spheres' - 's' sound is repeating.

'press pillow' - 'p' sound is repeating.

'lie listening' - 'l' sound is repeating.

- ii. Onomatopoeia: The use of sound words to create a dramatic effect and auditory imagery. 'Patter' is the use of sound word. It is the sound made by the rain drops falling on the roof top.
- iii. Personification: Treating a non – living thing as a living being. darkness has been personified when he says that it is sad.
- iv. Transferred Epithet: The use of an adjective with a noun when it refers to another noun. In 'melancholy darkness', the darkness is not melancholy, but it refers to the sad people.

Stanza 2

1. Alliteration: The repetition of a consonant sound in two or more consecutive words.

'busy being' - 'b' sound is repeating
'their thread' - 'th' sound is repeating
'rain roof' - 'r' sound is repeating

- ii. Onomatopoeia: The use of sound words to create a dramatic effect and auditory imagery.
'tinkle', 'patter' – sounds made by the raindrops
- iii. Personification: Treating a non – living thing as a living being.
recollection is personified when he says that they weave dreams.
- iv. Transferred Epithet: The use of an adjective with a noun when it refers to another noun.
'dreamy fancies' – it does not mean that the fancies are dreamy but refers to the people who have dreams.

Stanza 3

- i. Alliteration: The repetition of a consonant sound in two or more consecutive words.
'memory my mother' - 'm' sound is repeating
'Darling dreamers' - 'd' sound is repeating
- ii. Onomatopoeia: The use of sound words to create a dramatic effect and auditory imagery.
'patter' – sound of raindrops falling on the shingles of the roof.

Question and Answers

(All the Answers given are just for idea. Students can develop their own answers.)

1. What do the following phrases mean to you? Discuss in class.

- (i) humid shadows
- (ii) starry spheres
- (iii) what a bliss
- (iv) a thousand dreamy fancies into busy being start
- (v) a thousand recollections weave their air-threads into woof

A.

- (i) 'humid shadows' refers to the dark clouds which are full of water.
- (ii) 'starry spheres' refers to the sky at night time which is full of stars.
- (iii) 'bliss' means a blessing.
- (iv) 'a thousand dreamy fancies into busy being start' means that people start having varied sweet dreams.
- (v) 'a thousand recollections weave their air-threads into woof' means that when people are asleep, the memories of the past come back into their mind in the form of dreams.

2. What does the poet like to do when it rains?

A. When it rains, the poet likes to lay in bed and hear the rain falling on the roof of his room.

3. What is the single major memory that comes to the poet? Who are the “darling dreamers” he refers to?

A. The poet has memories of his beloved mother. When he was a child, she would put him and his siblings to bed and allowed them to sleep till late. They had sweet dreams in their sleep. “Darling Dreamers” refers to the poet and his siblings when they were children and had sweet dreams. They were loved by their mother and so, were her ‘darlings’.

4. Is the poet now a child? Is his mother still alive?

A. No, now the poet is not a child. He is an adult. His mother is not alive anymore.

Additional Questions

Short answer type questions

Question 1.

What is a ‘bliss’ for a poet in the poem?

Answer:

The poet loves rain because it carries him in old memories. He thinks it is bliss to hear the sound of the rain on the roof. He lies in his cozy bed and enjoys the music of nature. It is a bliss for him.

Question 2.

What shows that the poet loved his mother?

Answer:

The poet loved his mother. He remembered her when he lied on his cozy bed to enjoy the sound of rain. It appeared to him as if she was fondly looking at him.

Question 3.

When does the ‘thousand dream fancies’ begin to weave in the poet’s mind?

Answer:

When the poet is in his cottage and lies in his cozy bed listening to the soft music of rain on the roof, his mind is flooded with memories of his mother. He recalls his childhood.

Question 4.

How does the memory of his mother haunt the poet?

Answer:

During the pattering sound of the rain falling on the roof, the memory of his mother haunts the poet. This memory has been haunting him quite often like every darling dreamer. His mother is no more. But he still feels her fondness of looking on him. He remembers her while writing his song of rain.

Question 5.

How does the poet enjoy the patter of the soft rain lying in his cottage-chamber bed?

Answer:

The poet is lying in his cottage-chamber bed. He watches the humid shadows hovering the starry sky. He feels the melancholy darkness gently weeping in the form of rain drops. Pressing his pillow, he is listening to the patter of the soft raindrops falling on the roof of the cottage.

Question 6.

What finds an echo in the poet's heart and what starts weaving in his mind?

Answer:

When the drops of rain fall on shingles, they make a tinkling sound. The tinkling sound echoes his heart. A thousand old memories weave their air-threads into pattering sounds. Lying in his bed, the poet is listening to the pattering sound of the rain falling on the roof.

Long answer type question

Question 1.

How is the rain a bliss for the poet? Describe.

Answer:

The poet has developed a deep attachment with the rain. When it rains, he desires to lie on his cozy bed and enjoy the falling of rain drops on the roof. There is some specific reasons for it. When he hears the pattering of rain drops, the sweet memories of his childhood evaporate in his heart. He becomes nostalgic and remembers his mother. The picture of his mother reels over his eyes. He recalls how his mother had liking for sweet dreams. Besides, the poet forgets his worries and becomes filled with new hopes and aspirations. Hence, the rain is a bliss for the poet.

Question 2.

Describe the various sights and sounds of the falling rain and recollections it brings to the poet.

Answer:

Humid showers hover over all the starry sky. The melancholy darkness gently weeps in the form of rain drops. The rain creates an echo in his heart. It also brings thousand dreamy fancies alive to his mind. The poet listens to the patter caused by the sounds of the raindrops on the roof. At this moment the memory of his mother comes alive into his mind. His mother is no more but the memory is still alive. He still feels her fondness of looking on him. The memory is still fresh while he is writing this song of rain. He also listens to the sound of the rain falling upon the shingles.

Value based questions

Question 1.

What virtue do you find in the sound of rains?

Answer:

The sound of rain is pleasing to the ear. When we hear this sound, we forget everything. We find ourselves in the world of fancies. We remember the sweet memories of the past in a peaceful heart. Of course, we are unable to forget such moments of life. We must take this lesson from the rain and create peace in the mind of people by our behaviour.

Question 2.

How can the sweet moments of life help us?

Answer:

When we remember the sweet moments of life, we forget every pain. Riches have no meaning. We can feel pleasure even in a cottage. In fact, when there is no peace in our heart, we cannot lead a peaceful life. Sweet moments refresh our brain and fill us with new energy. So, the sweet moments of life are the treasure of energy for us.
