

HSC English Common Module: Texts and Human Experiences – Sample Unseen Text, Question and Response

Poem:

The Tyger – William Blake

**Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?**

**In what distant deeps or skies.
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?**

**And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?**

**What the hammer? what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!**

**When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?**

**Tyger Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?**

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Explore how the paradoxes of the human experience have been developed in Blake's poem *The Tyger*. (7 marks)

Blake's poem *The Tyger*, deals with a key paradox of the human experience, that of attempting to reconcile the seemingly contradictory qualities of a creator God. Within *The Tyger*, Blake beholds the form of the tiger - a powerful yet terrifying creature, with wonder and awe but also dread and fear. Blake describes the tiger with the metaphorical image of "burning bright", and suggesting its sheer majestic form and "fearful symmetry". These descriptions display the poet's wonder at its physical being and clear power and strength. Blake then goes on to describe its heart, its hands and its feet, continually reminding the reader of the power and ferocity that lay within the creature.

But, within this description, a paradoxical and quizzical view of the tiger is explored. Blake recognizes that logically, a creator of this terrifying beast must be even more terrifying. This creator in Blake's experience and context is the Christian God, a God who is often described as a loving and merciful being, a gentle shepherd caring for his sheep. Therefore Blake is attempting to reconcile this view of God with the being who created and sustained the dreadful and powerful beast he is now observing.

Blake is at a deep level, wrestling with the paradox of this worldview. Within the late 18th Century, the majority of thinkers and writers did claim at least a nominal allegiance to Christianity. Within this poem, Blake is questioning, if not the existence, at least the notion that this Christian God is all-loving and all-good, as the belief of the day suggested. Blake, displaying his humanity within this poem, is questioning the contradictory views of religion, suggesting that a God who is capable of love and peace, should not be easily associated with the creation of a terrifying, dreadful animal such as a tiger.