

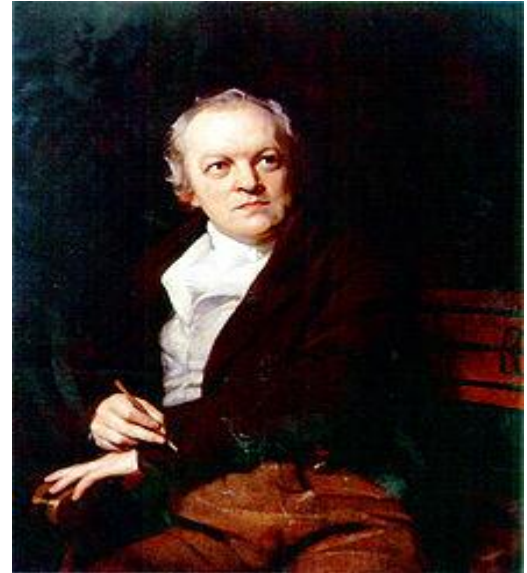
Grade 10 & 11

Appreciation of English Literary Texts



To the Evening Star
by William Blake

William Blake (28 November 1757 – 12 August 1827) was an English painter, poet and printmaker. Largely unrecognized during his lifetime, Blake is now considered a seminal figure in the history of the poetry and visual arts of the Romantic age. His prophetic poetry has been said to form "what is in proportion to its merits the least read body of poetry in the English language". His visual artistry led one contemporary art critic to proclaim him "far and away the greatest artist Britain has ever produced". In 2002, Blake was placed at number 38 in the BBC's poll of the 100 greatest Britons. Although he lived in London his entire life (except for three years spent in Feltham), he produced a diverse and symbolically rich poetry, which embraced the imagination as "the body of God" or "human existence itself".



The Poem

'To the evening star' by William Blake

Thou fair-hair'd angel of the evening,
Now, whilst the sun rests on the mountains, light
Thy bright torch of love; thy radiant crown
Put on, and smile upon our evening bed!
Smile on our loves, and while thou drawest the
Blue curtains of the sky, scatter thy silver dew

Continue

Continue.....

on every flower that shuts its sweet eyes
In timely sleep. Let thy west wind sleep on
The lake; speak silence with thy glimmering
eyes,
And wash the dusk with silver. Soon, full
soon,
Dost thou withdraw; then the wolf rages
wide,
And the lion glares thro' the dun forest:
The fleeces of our flocks are cover'd with
Thy sacred dew: protect them with thine
influence.

Glossary

Thou – this is an archaic word equivalent to “you” in modern English.

Thy - this is an archaic word equivalent to “your” in modern English.

Radiant- giving out light

Drawest- an archaic word equivalent to “draw” (pull)

Scatter- spread

Glimmering- shinning, glowing

Dusk- evening, twilight hours

Dost- an archaic word equivalent to “Do”

Withdraw- move back, move away

Rage- anger, making a roaring sound in anger.

Glare- look hard, fixedly looking at something.

Glossary

Dun- grayish brown color

Fleeces- tiny bloodsucking creatures found in the animal skin

Flock- a large number of animals found together.

Sacred- holy, highly respected

Dew- condensed water drops found in the environment in the early hours of the day

Thine- an archaic word equivalent to “your”

Influence- power, effect

Literary techniques used in the poem

Ode- poem written in the form of addressing something or someone

Fair-haired angel-

Thy bright torch of love

Thy radiant crown-

Our evening bed- metaphors

The blue curtains-

Sweet eyes-

Thy glimmering eyes-

} metaphors

Literary techniques used in the poem

Put on and smile-

Smile on our loves-

Thou drawest the blue curtain-

Wind sleep

Speak silence

Wash the dusk

Thou withdraw

Protect them

Thou fair-haired angle of the evening
assonance (repetition of the consonant)

personification

Note on the poem...

The poem is written in the form of an Ode, addressing the evening star that appears when the sun sets in the evening. The poet seems to be overwhelmed by the divine beauty of the evening star and he goes on to bestow encomia upon Venus addressing it as if she would bring good luck and benediction upon the poet and the rest of the earthlings. The overflowing of his passionate and emotionally charged language is full of metaphors “thou fair-haired angle” etc..... The poet seems to be ecstatic over her graceful appearance and it looks as if he has been longing for her emergence for long. The tired and battered souls of people during the day time are refreshed and rejuvenated by her divine power and mystic beauty. Replacing harsh and tormenting sun that beat the world during the daytime with the graceful balmy ambiance entailed with the emergence of the evening star seems to have brought a soothing effect upon the poet. But he realizes that it is very temporary and soon when the night falls she disappears into the darkness of the night leaving the poet and the others in danger “soon full soon dost thou withdraw”.

Note on the poem...

Though he seems to be overjoyed in seeing the evening star, his happiness is overtaken by trepidation and nervousness over the oncoming night which is invariably laced with danger and death “wolf rages wide” “lions glare through the dun forest”.

The poet seems to earnestly urge the evening star to protect him and his livestock from the hungry predators. He reckons that the overnight dew fallen on the animals blessed by her would have a protective shield safeguarding them from the blood hungry lions and the tigers.

The poet spares a good part of the poem in describing extremely enchanting and natural ambiance in a pictorial form . The poem is packed with number of visual images which bring a hypnotic effect upon the reader.

An assignment for you to work on

- 1) How does the poet address the evening star?
- 2) What does the poet mean by the blue curtains of the sky?
- 3) How does the poet say that the ambiance in the night is very calm and quiet?
- 4) What poetic technique does the poet use to highlight the change of darkness into silver?
- 5) How does the poet indicate that the evening star appears only for a short period of time?
- 6) What words indicate the poet's uncertainty and fear when the star disappears?

The probable answers for the questions

- 1) Thou fair-haired angle
- 2) The blue sky in the evening
- 3) The poet says about the gentle blowing of the west wind and the unruffled waters of the lake.
- 4) personification; wash the dark with the silver
- 5) Soon full soon dost thou withdraw
- 6) He tells about the sounds of the lions and the glares of the wolves

Further Reading

- <http://www.online-literature.com/forums/showthread.php?40761-quot-To-the-Evening-Star-quot>
- <http://www.gradesaver.com/the-complete-poems-of-william-blake/study-guide/summary-to-the-evening-star>