

**ENGLISH HL 16 March 2024**

**GRADE 12 POETRY NOTES ON: IT IS A BEAUTEOUS EVENING, CALM AND FREE**

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| **IT IS A BEAUTEOUS EVENING, CALM AND FREE – WILLIAM WORDSWORTH**  |

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| **IT IS A BEAUTEOUS EVENING, CALM AND FREE –** **WILLIAM WORDSWORTH**  1. It is a beauteous evening, calm and free,
2. The holy time is quiet as a Nun
3. Breathless with adoration; the broad sun
4. Is sinking down in its tranquility;
5. The gentleness of heaven broods o'er the Sea;
6. Listen! the mighty Being is awake,
7. And doth with his eternal motion make
8. A sound like thunder—everlastingly.
9. Dear child! dear Girl! that walkest with me here
10. If thou appear untouched by solemn thought,
11. Thy nature is not therefore less divine:
12. Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year;
13. And worshipp'st at the Temple's inner shrine,
14. God being with thee when we know it not.

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**POET - WORDSWORTH**

William Wordsworth was born in the United Kingdom in 1770. He died in 1850. He was one of the founders of the Romantic Movement in poetry. He had a great love for Nature.

As many of Wordsworth’s other poems, this poem is a reflection on Nature and a (sort of) conversation with (presumably) his daughter. It is suffused with religious overtones.

**DICTION**

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| **Word** | **Meaning** |
| Adoration | Deep love and respect |
| Tranquillity | Calmness and peace |
| Doth | Does |
| Eternal | Forever |
| Solemn | Serious |
| Thy | Your |
| Abraham’s Bosom | Place of Comfort with God |
| Shrine | Place of Worship |

**SUMMARY:**

The speaker in this poem is awestruck by the beauty of Nature, specifically the evening time. He expresses his appreciation for the feeling of tranquillity he experiences in Nature. He views the scene through a (Christian) religious lens and assures his companion (presumably his young daughter) that God’s presence is omnipotent. He states that even if/when she does not express devotion to God, or spend time in a physical place of worship, God is always present. (This reaction stems from her being seemingly unaffected by the incredible scene in front of them.) He ultimately praises God for the creation of Nature.

**FORM/STRUCTURE:**

This is a Petrarchan (or Italian) sonnet consisting of 14 lines. The **octave** (first 8 lines) describes **the breath-taking beauty of the scene**. The **sestet** (last 6 lines) serves as the speaker’s **comment on the beauty and spirituality of the scene**. He addresses **his companion (presumably his daughter)** directly in the sestet and acts as a commentary of the speaker’s understanding of the spirituality of life in general.

**ANALYSIS**

**THE TITLE**

The speaker is struck by the physical beauty of the evening and the mood it creates. The speaker views the scene through a spiritual lens and assures his young companion (believed to be his daughter, Caroline) that God’s presence is everywhere, even if we are not fully conscious of it.

**LINE 1**

***It is a beauteous evening, calm and free,***

*beauteous* – beautiful

The atmosphere is very peaceful and tranquil. A person is completely at ease; no worries or stress.

*evenin*g – is often the most gentle and quiet time of day.

*calm* – suggests a mood that is peaceful, tranquil and utterly quiet.

*free* – implies free of stress/worries/pain.

**LINE 2**

***The holy time is quiet as a Nun***

**Personification** and **simile** add a **religious element** to the poem.: “holy time” (the **evening**) is **compared** to a **Nun** that is quiet as she is **in prayer**. She is close to God. She loves God.

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| **LINES 3-4** ***Breathless with adoration; the broad sun / Is sinking down in its tranquillity;*** Breathless – cannot even hear her breathe. This **emphasises the silence**. Just as the nun is ‘*breathless with adoration’* so does the feeling of this time and place take away the poet’s breath with awe at the beauty of God’s creation.  The speaker **links the beauty of Nature to God**, the creator of Earth and its beauty.  *the broad sun* – As the sun sets it seems to become a large orange-red ball and the **colours** of sunset stretch out across the horizon. This **adds to the serene, peaceful atmosphere.**  **LINE 5*****The gentleness of heaven broods o'er the Sea;***  **Personification** – **heaven is described as being gentle**. This adds to the peaceful atmosphere. *The gentleness of heaven –* The sea is reflecting the skies/Heaven. It is calm and gentle. It is beautiful and Godly.  *Broods* – Contemplates deeply: heaven seems to watch over the sea below. Figuratively God is watching over the world  **LINE 6** ***Listen! the mighty Being is awake,***  *Listen!* – is a **command** and the exclamation mark intensifies it and indicates the excitement of the speaker. A very quiet moment is broken by this **imperative order**. The poet wants his companion to be an active participant in the scene.  *mighty Being –* **Literally** refers to the **sea**. **Figuratively** refers to **God**. The capital letter in *Being* implies that although the speaker is referring to the sea, the **capital letter links the sea to God, the Almighty Being**. Both the sea and God are *‘awake’* and *‘eternal’* and **neither stop moving.** **LINE 7** ***And doth with his eternal motion make***  *doth* – does  *eternal motion –* God and the sea are eternal and will go on for ever  *motion make* – the alliteration emphasizes the thunderous sound of the sea**LINE 8*****A sound like thunder—everlastingly****.*  **Simile**: breaking waves sound like thunder. Indicates power of nature and God. The thunderous sound of waves contrasts with the calm and quiet of lines 1-3.  The dash creates a pause and emphasises the word which follows – *everlastingly*. Without the pause there would not be such a strong emphasis. It is the end of the octave but it indicates that God’s creation, and, by inference, God, is forever. **LINE 9** ***Dear child! dear Girl! that walkest with me here,*** *Dear child*! *dear Girl!* – is said in a **loving tone**. He expresses his love and adoration for his daughter. **LINES 10-11** ***If thou appear untouched by solemn thought, / Thy nature is not therefore less divine:*** ***untouched by solemn thought*** *–* She seems oblivious to the beauty around her.  Wordsworth tells his daughter that although she doesn’t seem to have been affected by the depth of feeling in the scene, he can assure her that it makes no difference to what is true. Even if she doesn’t know or understand it now, she is still made of the same *‘divine’* material as all creation. Even if she is not touched by the beauty of the scene, it does not mean she is removed from God or less spiritual.  **LINE 12** ***Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year;***  ***in Abraham's bosom*** – **Metaphor** – refers to heaven: Like a father holds a baby to protect it, the girl is unknowingly protected by God.  ***all the year*** – at all times. God is always present to protect her.  **LINE 13** ***And worshipp'st at the Temple's inner shrine*,**  *the Temple's inner shrine* – Reference to nature: even if she does not express devotion to God or spend time in a physical place of worship (like a church), God is always present in nature.  **LINE 14** ***God being with thee when we know it not.***  **Assonance** (**repetition of the ‘e’ sound in *being, thee, we****)* emphasises God’s presence. God is with you, even if you are not aware of it. **THEMES** * **The Holiness of Nature** – the speaker celebrates the majestic and holy beauty of Nature. He describes Nature in reverent terms. The poem urges an appreciation for the beauty and power of Nature and God. The poem ‘takes place’ during “holy time” – the time of evening prayers. The speaker’s language portrays the world as a divine creation capable of admiring its own handiwork. Human beings are a part of Nature and thus part of the Divine.
* **Childhood and Faith** – the speaker addresses his “Dear child” directly when she does not seem as awestruck as he is. He reasons that it is due to her age and innocence. Children are always close to God; they maintain a natural sense of faith and wonder at all times, so they do not react with the same solemn awe as adults do. So, he ultimately states that through her reaction, he rediscovers what children feel all the time. Her outward lack of reverence does not mean that she is any less holy or pious or capable of reverence. The speaker states categorically that children are the most holy and reverent of God’s creatures and we lose this as we grow/mature. Children are perpetually in “Abraham’s bosom” – in God’s presence. (Abraham is a central patriarch and prophet.)
* **The beauty of nature reveals God**. Wordsworth believes the sunset is so beautiful because heaven is present in the sky at this time.

 **TONE** * Amazed / awe / tranquillity
* respect

 **MOOD:** * Meditative
* Calm/serene

**Question 1: Essay**  With close reference to diction, imagery and tone used in this poem, discuss how the speaker expresses his **appreciation for the beauty of God’s creation in the natural world.**  Your response should take the form of a well-constructed essay of 250 – 300 words (about ONE page). (10)**Suggested Answer for Question A: Essay**  Use the following points, among others, as a guideline to answering this question. * The speaker of the poem celebrates the majestic beauty of the natural world on a leisurely night while on a walk with a "Dear Child" who is his daughter.
* The speaker is entranced by the calm and beautiful evening comparing its peace and quiet to that of an awestruck "nun" and sensing the presence of "the mighty Being”, that is, God.
* The main technique of the sonnet is to combine imagery depicting the natural scene with explicitly religious imagery. The octave of the sonnet makes the first metaphorical comparisons, stating that the evening is a “holy time,” and “quiet as a nun / Breathless with adoration.” (DICTION)
* It’s as if the whole world is hushed with admiration for the beauty of nature, much as a nun is rendered breathless and speechless with her admiration for God. The speaker feels God’s presence all around him.  The speaker’s descriptions of nature are filled with religious imagery that links the beauty of the evening, and of nature more generally, to God (IMAGERY) the night is “beauteous” and “calm,” the sun “sinking down” over the horizon in utter “tranquillity” as the sky hangs gently over the ocean. (DICTION)
* The speaker compares this "holy time" of day (a reference to evening prayers) to "a nun /

Breathless with adoration." This implies that it’s so quiet, it’s as though the world itself is holding its breath out of respect for nature’s beauty, just as the nun is made breathless by her love for God. Wordsworth praises the beauty of the evening by suggesting that heaven has nested on the sea. It implies that heaven is hovering over the sea currently, thinking (IMAGERY) * The speaker’s descriptions of nature are filled with religious imagery that links the beauty of the evening, and of nature more generally, to God and thus presents this beauty as worthy of reverence (TONE). For example, the speaker calls the sky above the ocean the “gentleness of heaven," suggesting that it's the place where God calmly watches over the world.
* In the sestet, the speaker turns to the young girl, his daughter, walking with him, and observes that unlike him, she is not touched by “solemn thought” (DICTION)
* The girl doesn't seem awestruck by the majestic scenery. The speaker states that this is because, for children, feeling close to God is an everyday occurrence.
* The girl may not seem especially full of faith and wonder now, but that's only because she's full of faith and wonder all the time—including in moments when it's much harder for adults to feel these things.
* The child's innocence is inspirational: even though she is not actively considering the power of the nature that surrounds them, she is a part of it nevertheless.

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS****It is a beauteous evening… William Wordsworth** 1. Describe the mood in the opening line of the poem. Use your own words. (2)***(The mood is peaceful, tranquil and utterly quiet. The word “calm” suggests this. The word “free” implies free of stress/worries/pain/busyness. There is a slow pace to the line.)*** 2. Why is the simile “quiet as a nun” a particularly effective figure of speech? (2)***(This simile adds a religious element to the poem. A “quiet” nun is probably in prayers. She is close to God. The speaker links the beauty of Nature to God – the (Christian) creator of Earth and its beauty.)*** 1. How can the sea have “the gentleness of heaven” on it? (2)

***(The sea is reflecting the skies/Heaven. It is calm and gentle. It is beautiful and Godly.)***1. How and why does the beginning of line 6 change the atmosphere? (3)

***(Listen is a command and the exclamation point emphasises it. The otherwise quiet and peaceful atmosphere is broken by this interjection/order. The speaker wants his companion to be part of this moment with him.)***1. What is the purpose of the capital letter in “Being” (line 6)? (3)

*(****Although the speaker is referring to the sea, the capital letter links the sea to God, the almighty Being. Both the sea and God are ‘awake’ and ‘eternal’ and neither stop moving.)*** 1. What is the function of the dash in line 8? (2)

***(The dash creates a pause and emphasises the word which follows – ‘everlastingly’. This states again that God, like the ocean, is forever.)*** 1. How does the tone of “Dear child!” differ from “Listen!”? (2)

***(“Listen!” is an imperative, a command. It is forceful and has a commanding tone. “Dear child!” is said in a loving tone. He expresses his love and adoration for his daughter.)***1. Explain the comparison used in the metaphor “Abraham’s bosom”. (3)

***(Just as a father holds his precious child close to protect and cherish him/her, the girl is unknowingly protected and cherished by Abraham as one of God’s children.)*** 1. Discuss how the structure/form of the poem supports its contents. (3)

***(The octave of this Petrarchan sonnet describes the breath-taking beauty of the scene. The sestet acts as a commentary of the speaker’s understanding of the spirituality of life in general.)***  |