

Answer ONE question on your chosen text. Begin your answer on page 25.

You must select a poem from the prescribed list for your studied collection.
The poems are listed in Section B of the source booklet on page 9.

The Romantics

Prescribed text

English Romantic Verse, editor David Wright

EITHER

- 11 Explore the ways in which human nature is presented in *Songs of Experience: Holy Thursday* ('Is this a holy thing to see...?') by Blake and in **one** other poem. You must relate your discussion to relevant contextual factors.

(Total for Question 11 = 30 marks)

OR

- 12 Explore the ways in which personal reflection is presented in *Sonnet on the Sea* by Keats and in **one** other poem. You must relate your discussion to relevant contextual factors.

(Total for Question 12 = 30 marks)

Indicate which question you are answering by marking a cross in the box ☒. If you change your mind, put a line through the box ☒ and then indicate your new question with a cross ☒.

Chosen question number: Question 3 ☒ Question 4 ☒ Question 5 ☒
 Question 6 ☒ Question 7 ☒ Question 8 ☒
 Question 9 ☒ Question 10 ☒ Question 11 ☒
 Question 12 ☒ Question 13 ☒ Question 14 ☒
 Question 15 ☒ Question 16 ☒ Question 17 ☒
 Question 18 ☒ Question 19 ☒ Question 20 ☒
 Question 21 ☒ Question 22 ☒ Question 23 ☒
 Question 24 ☒ Question 25 ☒ Question 26 ☒

~~Plan~~ DO NOT MARK, PLEASE

~~Human nature~~

~~HI~~

~~LIC~~

• Inequality

• Ruthlessness

• Human rejection of God

• Hopelessness

• Deposition

• Rejection of God

• Nihilism

• Live life to the fullest



The exploration of human nature was certainly a subject of significant interest during the Romantic period of literature, as it is fitting that Blake, in 'Holy Thursday' (from 'Songs of Experience'), and Lord Byron, in 'Lines Inscribed upon a Cup Formed from a Skull', both choose to make the presentation of human nature central to their respective poems. In 'Holy Thursday', Blake gives a rather bleak presentation of human nature, suggesting that for many the human experience consists of misery, poverty, and deprivation, inflicted upon them by a ~~greedy~~ ~~society~~ and greedy society. Blake perhaps gleaned such assertions from his experience as a long-time resident of London, which was, at the time, a poverty-stricken city in which huge inequalities of living standards existed; a state which likely influenced Blake in his more radical, liberal beliefs. On the other hand, Byron contrastingly paints a picture of the human experience and human nature which emphasises joy, hedonism, and a general attitude of 'carpe diem', ~~this one~~ perhaps as a result of his more privileged upbringing, far removed from the London slums. However, similarities ~~between~~ between the poems can also be found, with both poems emphasising the ability of human nature to reject God and embrace hedonism in the face of pain or death.

Blake firstly emphasises the ability of humanity to reject God and religion in favour of personal pursuits.



Blake writes, 'Is this a holy thing to see in a rich and fruitful land, babes reduc'd to misery, fed with cold and useless food?' The religious allusion with 'holy' in the context of this rhetorical question suggests that the lack of compassion for those 'babes reduc'd to misery' (children in poverty) is in fact unholy, and thus a rejection of God. This ~~crime~~ is a religious crime is further exacerbated by the adjectives 'rich' and 'fruitful', with these positively connoted words serving to emphasise how 'cold' and 'useless' society has become in its rejection of God by contrasting it with the ~~babes~~ 'misery' of the poor. Moreover, by using this as the first line of the poem, Blake places further meaning and stanza emphasis on this being the primary message of the poem. Blake perhaps chose to explore this aspect of human nature because of his religious beliefs. Experiencing religious visions throughout his life and following the teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg, who focused heavily upon the power of Christian redemption, Blake was certainly a faithful Christian. Living in such an era of ~~the~~ social inequality with his faith in Christian teachings likely left Blake with the impression that such injustice and inequity ~~was~~ stood against the teachings of Jesus and were thus unholy. This is perhaps why Blake chose to explore the human capacity for rejecting God, especially in the exercise of maintaining personal wealth and refusing to help the less-fortunate.



Similarly, Byron also chooses to include a rejection of God and traditional Christianity in his poem. Byron writes, 'Better to hold the sparkling grape, than nurse the earth-worm's slimy brood'. Byron's use of grotesque imagery in 'earth-worm' and 'slimy' certainly has negative connotations. We can tell this is a reference to traditional, Anglo-Christian burials as 'earth-worm' suggests that a body will be in the ground. By using such grotesque imagery, Byron ~~attacks~~ ~~with~~ defies typical Christian beliefs of ^{the} sanctity of life and death, as this effectively devalues the corpse and corrupts the peaceful Christian view of death. Furthermore, in the skull 'holding the sparkling grape', Byron is suggesting that it is 'better' for the skull to be used as a way of drinking alcohol than to be buried in the traditional Christian way. Not only is this a rejection of Christianity in it again violating ideas of ^{the} sanctity of life and death, it is further a rejection of the religion as ~~the~~ imagery relating to alcohol ('sparkling grape' refers to wine) is used, with drunkenness being seen as a sin in Biblical terms. Byron perhaps chose to choose such a message for his poem as a result of his own dislike for organised religion. Although supposedly being a deist (perhaps as a result of his nanny that raised him, who was fervently Christian), Byron was known to reject the traditional structures and traditions of the Church. Generally being



a rebellious, anti-establishment figure in addition to this, it is fairly clear that Byron's beliefs are reflected in his work. Where both Blake and Byron do emphasise such a rejection of religion in their poems, it is only Byron that portrays this as a fairly good, liberating experience, while Blake is shown to be heavily against it; not likely a result of their contrasting religious beliefs.

Blake is also shown to display a certain level of hopelessness as present within human nature. Blake writes, 'And their sun does never shine, and their fields are black and bare, and their ways are fill'd with thorns'. This polysyndetic listing creates a sense that the poverty and misery of England's poor is monotonous and never-ending, implying a degree of hopelessness in their situations. Blake also uses natural metaphors, such as 'sun does never shine', 'fields are black', and 'their ways are fill'd with thorns'. The darknesses inferred with 'never shine', and 'black' and 'thorns' all carry with them negative connotations, once again suggesting a hopelessness that is reinforced with 'never' and, at the end of the stanza, 'eternal winter'; such techniques further implying that there is no hope in their infinite struggle. Blake perhaps chose to emphasise this sense of hopelessness due to his radical liberal beliefs. In a time in which conservatism dominated the sphere of political thinking, Blake was defiant



in his membership of underground political circles that included thinkers like William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, who followed a doctrine of equality and liberty. ~~His~~ Such thinking perhaps inspired Blake to focus on the plight of the 18th Century English poor in his poem, doing so by emphasising the hopelessness of their situation and ~~thereby~~ thus perhaps advocating for political reform.

Byron's poem can also be likened to 'Holy Thursday' in its slightly hopeless tone, although it is more of an advocacy for nihilism than liberal political goals. Byron writes, 'Whae ever my wet, parchment, houth shore, is aid of others' let me shine, and when, alas! our brains are gae, what nobler substitute then wine?' This rhetorical question, in its 'substitute' of our brain for wine, creates ~~and not~~ a satirical and humorous tone. This lightens the tone of the poem in its exploration of such a grave topic (death), ~~suggesting~~ perhaps suggesting that we should not value life to such an extent that we take it seriously, which may be interpreted as again devaluing the human experience. Furthermore, the structure of the poem, with four quatrains and a regular, ABAB rhyme scheme, may suggest the constant and unmovable nature of life, further advocating for a sense of hopelessness and a reduction in meaning of human life. This aids the conveyance of the idea of 'momento mori'



(or 'remember you will die') ~~is~~ that is seemingly present throughout the whole poem, which can be interpreted as an argument used by Byron to advocate nihilism, ~~the~~ and as a result, justifying hedonism. Byron perhaps chose to convey such a message due to his own hedonistic tendencies. Byron was known to drink and party constantly, being ~~very~~ very open in his sexuality as well (which was especially accepted in the conservative, religious society in which he lived). Writing this poem at the age of 19, Byron was certainly living a ~~the~~ life of hedonism at this stage in his life. This can be reflected in his lack of traditional morals and his rejection of ~~traditional~~ Christian beliefs put forward in his poem, typical and can be used to explain the ideas of 'memento mori' and 'carpe diem' that his poem appears to suggest. This is of course different to the use of hopelessness put forward in 'Holy Thursday'. While Byron embraces hopelessness in life as ~~was~~ a joyful and relieving excuse for hedonistic behaviour, Blake uses it as a melancholy example for the plight of the oppressed poor in 18th Century England, politicising his message in a way that the 19 year-old Byron does not do to nearly such an extent.

the possibility of human nature in

There can be a number of similarities found in both 'Holy Thursday' and 'Lines Inscribed upon a Cup Formed from a Skull', with themes of hopelessness and a rejection of



the Christian God being present in both texts. However, it is the use and presentation of these themes that highlight the differences in these poems, with Blake using them in a subtle way to question the conservative values of 18th Century England and to advocate for a greater level of social equality, while Byron, although in his own way questioning societal values, uses the themes as a way of advocating the hedonism and 'care diem' attitude that he believes humanity is entitled to as a result of his rather nihilistic world view. Such differences can perhaps be attributed to the contrasting religious beliefs of the two writers, their differing social classes or ~~perhaps~~ merely due to Byron's relative youth. In any case, the differences are certainly clear throughout the entirety of both poems.

