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SEMESTER - IV

SUBJECT- COMPOLSORY ENGLISH

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Topic- poetry

Sub Unit- On Another's Sorrow by William Blake

'On Another's Sorrow' by William Blake

'On Another's Sorrow' by William Blake is a nine stanza poem that is separated into sets of four lines, or quatrains. Each of these stanzas follows a consistent rhyme scheme. It conforms to the pattern of AABB CCDD, and so on, changing end rhymes as Blake saw fit. The poem was first published in Blake's poetry collection, Songs of Innocence and of Experience.

The most important theme of this piece is God's love. Due to the ever-present use of anaphora, (repetition of the first word or phrase in a line) these lines, in particular, are quite impactful. They come together into a list of all the ways and all the beings that God loves and understands. He is able to take the position of an infant and feel a man's sorrow. By the end of the poem, Blake's speaker has stopped questioning and is instead only asserting what he knows to be true about God. He is always there, always sitting next to one as they suffer. One should not feel like they need to shed a tear for the absence of their "maker" because he's never truly gone. He can be seen through the compassion and steadfastness of others who one loves and is loved by.

Analysis of 'On another's Sorrow'

Stanza One

Can I see another's woe,

And not be in sorrow too?

Can I see another's grief,

And not seek for kind relief?

In the first stanza of this piece, as well as the second, Blake presents the reader with two questions. He is wondering in these first lines if he is able to "see another's woe" and then not experience those same emotions. It is impossible for him, someone who believes deeply in God's love and a common empathy amongst humankind, to not feel as the sufferer does.

The same sentiment is presented in the second question. He rhetorically asks the reader if it would be possible for him to not “seek for kind relief” when he sees that someone is in pain. The answer to this question is obviously no. There is no way for him to allow suffering to go on, especially if he can find a balm for it.

Stanza Two

Can I see a falling tear,

And not feel my sorrow’s share?

Can a father see his child

Weep, nor be with sorrow filled?

In the next set of four lines, the same emotions come up again. The speaker is expressing his own ability to empathize with the world through two different examples. First, he presents a “falling tear” without [context](#). It doesn’t matter who is crying, it is impossible for him to not feel the same sorrow.

The second line gives a little more detail. He is like a father who is unable to prevent his own tears when he sees “his child / Weep.”

Stanza Three

Can a mother sit and hear

An infant groan, an infant fear?

No, no! never can it be!

Never, never can it be!

The first two lines of this stanza follow the same form as the eight which came before them. Blake's speaker relates his own inability to contain his emotions to a "mother" who has to groan when she sees an infant in fear.

Even the idea of not caring for the suffering masses of the world is unthinkable to the speaker. He uses the phrase, "never can it be!" twice in these lines in order to emphasize how strongly he feels about it.

Stanza Four

And can He who smiles on all
Hear the wren with sorrows small,
Hear the small bird's grief and care,
Hear the woes that infants bear —

It is in the fourth stanza that God and his love for the world enter into the poem. The first line begins with "And" as if everything which came before it was only one half of a sentence, the next lines are an addition. Rather than referring to himself, he is speaking on God. There is an inescapable comparison being made here between the speaker and God. He sees himself as having the same kind of love that God does for all of his creation.

The love is seen through the repeated structure and build-up to the repeated two lines "never can it be!" which appear again in stanza six. The speaker lists out all the creatures and situations God cares about in the form of an extended question.

He appears to wonder over God's ability to hear and see grief. The emotion presents itself in the smallest of creatures, infants and wrens, but of course, the answer is yes. God can hear, see, and empathize with everything and everyone.

Stanza Five

And not sit beside the next,
Pouring pity in their breast,
And not sit the cradle near,
Weeping tear on infant's tear?

Just as the speaker is unable to sit beside someone suffering and not comfort them, so too is God. He is unable to "sit the cradle near" and not care for an infant who is weeping. God's pity comes to all those who suffer.

Stanza Six

And not sit both night and day,
Wiping all our tears away?
Oh no! never can it be!
Never, never can it be!

The speaker emphasizes God's boundary-less love in the sixth stanza by stating that he loves everyone night and day. And there are never any moments where everything just stated in the previous two stanzas does not happen. His care is omnipresent and inexhaustible.

Stanza Seven

He doth give his joy to all:
He becomes an infant small,
He becomes a man of woe,

He doth feel the sorrow too.

In the seventh stanza, the speaker stops questioning. He now turns to a number of statements explaining how God interacts with the world. He is able to become those who suffer. This means that his understanding of pain is so deep he “doth feel the sorrow too” and he “becomes a man of woe.” His “joy” is available to all those who want it, and even to those who don’t.

Stanza Eight

Think not thou canst sigh a sigh,

And thy Maker is not by:

Think not thou canst weep a tear,

And thy Maker is not year.

In the eighth stanza, the speaker turns to the reader and addresses them directly. He says that they are unable to “sigh a sigh” without “thy Maker...by.” One should never feel deep despair about anything, at least not for long. The knowledge that God is always there should soothe any sufferer.

Stanza Nine

Oh He gives to us his joy,

That our grief He may destroy:

Till our grief is fled an gone

He doth sit by us and moan.

The ninth stanza wraps up everything Blake's speaker has described so passionately in the previous quatrains. He states that God gives humankind joy so that it might take the grief away. This is his way of destroying pain.

The relief might not come immediately though, some grief is stronger than others. In the meantime, he will "sit" with humankind and "moan" just as they do.

MCQ

- 1) On Another's sorrow is written by....
a) John Masefield. b) William Shakespeare. **C) William Blake.** d) William Henry.
- 2) On Another's sorrow has..... stanzas.
a) 7. b) 8. **c) 9** d) 10
- 3) On Another's sorrow has Rhyming scheme.
a) ABCD ABCD b) ABCC ABCC. **c) AABB CCDD** d) ABCD EFGH
- 4) In which poetry collections the poem 'On Another's Sorrow' was Published?
a) Songs of experience. **b) Songs of innocence.** c) Gitanjali. d) The Forest
- 5) Songs of innocence was published in.....
a) 1786. b) 1787. c) 1788. **d) 1789.**
- 6) Who is the 'He' being referred to in the poem?
a) Poet. **b) God.** c) Nature d) Human being.
- 7) Why does God give us his joy?
a) to live in sorrow. b) to do fun c) to enjoy life. **d) to destroy grief.**
- 8) The words 'Thy maker' used for.....
a) God. b) Man c) Animals. d) Earth.
- 9) Wren is refers to
a) Small girl. **b) Small bird.** c) Small plant. d) Small animal.
- 10) God does feel the Of all living creatures.
a) Joy. **b) Sorrow.** c) Happiness. d) Pleasure.