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Faculty of Education
English Department

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A Guiding Model Answer for
Fourth Grade
Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Poetry Exam

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Faculty of Education

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NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURY POETRY EXAM

DIRECTIONS: BE ORGANIZED; FOCUS ONLY ON THE ADDRESSED ISSUES AND WRITE YOUR ANSWERS ONLY IN THE FORM OF WELL-ORGANIZED ESSAYS, WHICH ADOPT THE FORM OF A THESIS STATEMENT, A BODY, AND A CONCLUSION. TIME LENGTH FOR EACH QUESTION IS 30 MINUTES AND THE GRADE FOR EACH IS 30 MARKS.

Answer the following questions:

1. Discuss "Annabel Lee" in light of Edgar Allan Poe's statement, in "The Philosophy of Composition," that "the death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world—and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover"?
2. In their affirmation of connecting with others, Browning's "Meeting at Night" and Whitman's "I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing" are similar. Given our discussion in class, however, we would expect the worldviews and assumptions which underlie this affirmation to be quite different for each poet. How?
3. Write an analysis of W. B. Yeats "Sailing to Byzantium" that shows the individual integrity of its four parts and the means Yeats uses to effect transitions between them?
4. Compare an early nineteenth-century poem (such as Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott") with an early twentieth-century poem (Frost's "The Road Not Taken"). Discuss the way both poems reflect dramatic radical shifts in paradigm or perspective in their time?

**Good Luck
Mohammad Al-Hussini Arab**

Answers

Question # 1

Discuss "Annabel Lee" in light of Edgar Allan Poe's statement, in "The Philosophy of Composition," that "the death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world—and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover"?

Answer:

Though Poe argues in "The Philosophy of Composition" that the death of a beautiful woman is the most poetic topic, he makes a slightly different claim in the article "The Poetic Principle." In "The Poetic Principle," Poe declares that though beauty is the goal of poetry, its proper topic is love: "Love [...] love—the true, the divine Eros—the Uranian, as distinguished from the Dionaeon Venus—is unquestionably the purest and truest of all poetic themes." "Uranian Venus" refers to love that is spiritual, pure, and eternal. It is a rare love that transcends the physical world, as opposed to a "Dionaeon," or earthly, common, and finite, type of love.

In "Annabel Lee," the poet celebrates this true Uranian love: "we loved with a love that was more than love." Poe repeats the word "love" three times, as if to demonstrate the inadequacy of that human word for a condition that is divine. Even though Annabel and her lover were young, the speaker contends that their feelings surpassed those of all others: "our love it was stronger by far than the love / Of those who were older than we— / Of many far wiser than we [...]." The poet argues that wisdom and age do not determine one's power to love deeply and honestly, and he then goes on to proclaim that "neither the angels in Heaven above / Nor the demons down under the sea / Can ever dissever my soul from the soul / Of the beautiful Annabel Lee."

Even though the speaker claims to possess an everlasting love that transcends all physical boundaries, he feels compelled to visit Annabel's grave again and again. The poet tells us that not only does he visit the gravesite, but he enters her tomb in order to lie down next to her corpse. What is more, it is clear from the present verb tense that this is a repeated action: "all the night-tide, I lie down by the side / Of my darling, my darling, my life and my bride / In her sepulchre there by the sea— / In her tomb by the side of the sea." The poem ends by emphasizing the material location of their union: the final two lines are nearly identical as they point us to the "sepulchre" or "tomb" in which the lovers lie. Given these circumstances, the poet has boasted of the strength and significance of his spiritual bond with Annabel Lee. Yet, in his need to be near the body of his beloved, he seems to contradict his own assertions and indicate that a physical connection is just as important as a non-physical one.

This contradiction may better be understood if we recall that the poet loses not only love but beauty. In the third stanza, Poe writes: "A wind blew out of a cloud by night / Chilling my Annabel Lee." Poe infuses the event with the mysterious and potentially sinister characteristics of night-time. Furthermore, the effect of the presence of the two syllables ("by night") in the third line and the shift of "Chilling" to the fourth line, and the delay of the word "beautiful" to describe Annabel, who has died at which point, to the fifth stanza, is significant because one of Poe's main projects in this poem is to explore the link between beauty and death.

Through the first two-and-a-half stanzas, the speaker never explicitly reveals that his beloved has died. In the first four lines of the third stanza, he refers to a time at which Annabel was still alive: when she experienced a fatal chill. The action of death is so abrupt that the poet appears not to have the time to name it: "A wind blew out of a cloud by night / Chilling my Annabel Lee; / So that her high-born kinsmen came / And bore her away from me, / To shut her up in a sepulchre / In this kingdom by the sea." One moment Annabel Lee is hypothermic, and the next moment she is being buried by her relatives. Only a semi-colon signals the change from life to death, and the sentence recreates the swift and sorrowful transformation that occurs in the lovers' history. In the fourth stanza, the poet is able to slow his recollections somewhat, and there he speaks directly of that moment which is so painful to him: "the wind came out of the cloud, chilling / And killing my Annabel Lee." The poet has explicitly acknowledged her death, and in the final stanzas he can now refer to her beauty. Between the fifth and sixth stanzas, the speaker repeats the phrase "Of the beautiful Annabel Lee" three times. The poem is full of repetition—this is a favorite technique of Poe's—but this triple refrain is unique because it occurs in such rapid succession, and the poet thus calls attention to this line.

Why does the poet want to underscore at this point in the piece that Annabel Lee was beautiful? Surely we are led to believe that she was attractive in life, but there is a particular kind of beauty that comes with her death. In the fifth and sixth stanzas the poem shifts from narrative to memorial. That is to say, in the first part of the poem, the speaker has told the story of his relationship with his beloved and of her death. In the latter part, he tells us what his life is like now and the way that he tries to honor her memory. As the poem turns from story to commemoration, the vocabulary also changes. There is in the sixth stanza a notable emphasis on visual imagery that is not present in the rest of the poem. For instance, the poet mentions the moon and the stars in which he observes "the bright eyes" of his dear Annabel. His love becomes not just something to feel or imagine but to touch and to see. In fact, the beauty that he conjures comes to replace the "love" about which the poet has spoken earlier in the poem: he uses "love" eight times in the first five stanzas, but this word disappears in the sixth. The theoretical idea of "love" gives way to a more concrete notion of loveliness, and the absence of the former term in this last stanza suggests that, though we may want to value the ethereal qualities of true love, its tangible elements are what we ultimately cherish most.

Question # 2

In their affirmation of connecting with others, Browning's "Meeting at Night" and Whitman's "I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing" are similar. Given our discussion in class, however, we would expect the worldviews and assumptions which underlie this affirmation to be quite different for each poet. How?

Answer:

In their affirmation of connecting with others, Browning's "Meeting at Night" and Whitman's "I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing" are similar. Browning's "Meeting at Night" presents a certain sentiment, desire, or wish fulfillment perhaps, rather than the actual course of events. The situation presented in "Meeting at Night" is too beautiful to be true. It functions as an

imaginary fulfillment of the poet's longing for human contact. Human details of the whole story are very carefully withheld—we know nothing of the speaker and nothing, consequently, of his mistress. What we receive instead is the multitude of physical details about the landscape—the "fiery ringlets," the "slushy sand," the number of fields, etc. Although the occasion for the poem is a romantic one, the encounter is presented in a very matter-of-fact fashion.

The poem both asserts and questions the idea that passionate emotion, especially love, is not only powerful but also enduring and vital. The speaker argues for the power of love by insisting upon his ability to conquer all that separates him from his lover. Time, distance, and even the lovers' "joys and fears" cannot stand in his way and are not important once the two are together. Displaying characteristic Victorian optimism, the speaker believes firmly in his ability to achieve his goals and ends the poem at the precise moment when he has done so.

At the same time, the speaker's own words amply demonstrate the difficulty of attaining the kind of experience that he exalts. Most of the poem's few lines are devoted to recounting the distance that the speaker must travel and the obstacles he must overcome. The fact that the speaker must travel a considerable distance to reach his lover's farm is especially important. The speaker says nothing about his day-to-day life, but he obviously lives far from the rural setting that his lover inhabits. The physical distance between the lovers points to other ways in which they, as a man and a woman, are different and irrevocably separate. Both before and after marriage, Victorian men and women lived within separate social spheres; men were increasingly called upon to identify themselves with work and with the world outside the home, while women were encouraged to participate primarily in domestic activities and to nurture the emotional and spiritual life of the family. It is therefore significant that the meeting takes place within the female lover's home, because the experience itself belongs within the domestic and private women's sphere.

The speaker must eventually leave the farm, along with the realm of female experience and emotion, to return to the male world. The journey depicted in the poem is thus in part a journey from the male world to the female; this accounts for the long distance that the speaker must travel and for his need to separate himself from the passivity he associates with nature and the female realm. Although the speaker's intense emotion causes him to represent the moment of reunion as all-powerful, the distance between the speaker and his lover remains, like the distance between the social worlds of men and women, and this distance marks the reunion as a rare and transitory event.

On the other hand, Whitman's "I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing" seems to be a reflection on the relation of the natural and human, with a special bearing on the artistic. While the tree utters its leaves regardless of the absence of companions, the human consciousness requires human companionship to inspire it to creativity. Readers who are familiar with *Leaves of Grass*, however, will be aware of the love between men and women. Readers are increasingly inclined to read it as an expression of the poet's homoerotic inclinations. If one attempts to read these poems as one of Whitman's contemporaries might have, the emphasis on relationships between men is not necessarily homosexual. For these readers, relationships between men are simply not sexual. Thus, these poems are about the spiritual dimensions of human experience, taking the reader

beyond the physical and implying the judgment that the spiritual is "higher" than the physical. For more recent readers, the poems of "Calamus" derive much of their emotional energy from the sexual longings of the poet, which seem to have been toward members of his own sex.

The "manly love" of "I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing" is thus the love (including, even if not limited to, the sexual) of man for man. No reading that denies that is likely to be accepted today by sophisticated readers. Does this mean that the poem affirms that poetry is based on homosexual love? It seems, rather, to suggest that poetry is inspired by the poet's deepest and most authentic feelings, whatever value the surrounding society may place on those feelings. For Whitman, these are the feelings of a homosexual man, and it is not difficult to see a symbol of male sexuality in the twig around which a little moss is twined. Yet the poem is not, in any reductive sense, about sex; the longing that drives the poem is linked to the artistic creativity of which the poem is an emblem. Further, the authentic feelings of a heterosexual man or of a heterosexual or homosexual woman are equally powerful sources of inspiration. What kills creativity, the poem suggests, is inauthenticity, the denial of oneself and of one's feelings. This, rather than mere physical separation from other people—there is no lover present as the poet speaks—is perhaps, at the deepest level, what would prevent the poet from uttering his leaves.

Question # 3

Write an analysis of W. B. Yeats "Sailing to Byzantium" that shows the individual integrity of its four parts and the means Yeats uses to effect transitions between them?

Answer:

Each of the four numbered stanzas of William Butler Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" mark one stage in this condensed odyssey from the land of "the young / In one another's arms" to the narrator's eternal resting, or singing place. Stanza one marks the departure; two, the journey by boat; three, "sightseeing" in Byzantium; and four, singing upon a "golden bough" in the living / dead art space of Byzantium. In the first stanza, the "country" of line one is a land of birth, death, change, and sensuality—in a word, nature, in the older sense of inexhaustibility. This nature is teeming with people and fish, plants, and birds. Of especial note is that the birds, an evolving motif throughout the poem, make up "Those dying generations" of nature. This is nature at the level of the individual organism's more or less brief life, not the nature of ageless patterns, billion-year-old elements, thousand-year-old trees, and undetectable change.

The second stanza is likely a meditation aboard ship on growing old. The only way, thinks the narrator, that the withering or tattered body—which Yeats understands as the "clothing" of the soul—can be counteracted is by singing or, specifically, by writing poems that are spoken songs, which in turn are sung poems. As there is no school to teach such singing, one must study the monumental "songs," the magnificent artworks that inspire—apparently more than nature—the soul to sing and dance. Stanza three finds the narrator in the physical Istanbul-as-historic-Byzantium, gazing at a mosaic of "sages standing in God's holy fire." The mosaic is probably based on the frieze of the holy martyrs in the church of the San Apollinaire Nuovo, Ravenna, which Yeats visited in 1907. The holy fire associated with the gold mosaic is potent, a concatenation of related images. Fire burns and does not burn: the martyrs are consumed by

earthly fire; but pure and eternal, golden and heavenly fire does not consume. Gold-as-fire relates back to the "golden" sun, thought to be the dynamo behind all heat—again, heat that does and does not burn—and light. Gold is also the emperor of metals because it is so durable, uncommon, and "radiant." Earth-bound gold once was thought to embody the sun within the earth, just as the heart—the seat of life—is within the body. These sages or martyrs in gold fire, then, died by fire but were reborn both in eternal heavenly fire and the eternal gold tiles of 1500-year-old mosaics. The narrator asks these "living" sages to be his soul's singing teacher while his body dies like the body of any dying animal. "Perne" and "gyre," favorite terms of Yeats, refer to a spool or bobbin (perne) wound with life's thread (gyre). In the case of these sages, the thread is most likely golden. The narrator, who is likely to be a poet like the author, wants these sages to teach his intellect or his soul to sing in perpetuity and to take his impermanent heart away in exchange. In Yeats's poem, the impermanent dying heart or body is sacrificed for the permanence of singing intellect, golden art, the "artifice of eternity."

By stanza four, the journey becomes fully imaginative, a reverie of life after death. Yeats characterizes death as "out of nature," perhaps because he, at least for the sake of this poem, understands nature/life as change and death as eternal. Granting that the narrator has enlisted the sages from stanza three to be his soul's singing teachers, he decides how he will be reborn: as either a golden object from ancient "Grecian" Byzantium or as an object, probably a bird, placed on a "golden bough" in the emperor's palace at Constantinople. We may assume the place is the emperor's palace not only because the emperor is mentioned but because of the reference to "lords and ladies" in the penultimate line.

In a poem likely based on a real trip from Ireland to Istanbul and Ravenna, a host of other trips are figured: youth to age, body to mind, nature to seemingly ageless culture/art, present to past, commonality to aristocracy, life to death, mortality to immortality, and change to everlasting stability. And in the image of an artificial bird "upon a golden bough" is figured the indestructible soul singing everlastingly of eternal change. But how are we or our souls to be reborn into this imaginary "artifice of eternity"? Can all those traveling and admiring the "monuments of unaging intellect" end up there? Perhaps the space of artifice is best understood as metaphorical, as standing for something else; in this case, existence as an artwork replaces or literalizes the rather mundane notion that an artist "lives on" in his/her artwork. Furthermore, it is most likely that only the best artists—those learning from the sages of the past—become known through or by their work which outlasts them. The artist-become-artwork is a metaphor for the artistic soul, and in this poem, not just any artistic soul, but the one singing like a bird, composing verse which is read long after it was written. Seventy years after this poem appeared, Yeats has realized this dream. If we are not to cast ourselves as the "drowsy," bored Emperor who has everything and can only be awakened by the singing artwork (the poem), then perhaps we may see ourselves as "lords and ladies," the educated or cultured still listening to Yeats singing about "what is past, passing, or to come," still keeping *him* alive by stopping to listen.