

**Banha University
Faculty of Education
English Department**

**A Guiding Model Answer for
Third Grade
Neo-Classical and Romantic Poetry Exam**

**January 5 (Year 2013)
Faculty of Arts**

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Banha University
Faculty of Education
English Department
Third Grade



First Term
Year (2012-2013)
Time: 2 hours
First Term Exam

Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries Poetry Exam

Respond to the following questions:

Note: (Time length for each question is 40 minutes; Grade for each is 40)

1. The eighteenth century was the golden age of satire. Satirists such as Jonathan Swift and Pope attacked the frivolity of polite society, the corruption of politics, and false values in all the arts. The aim of satire, as Pope explained it, was not wanton destruction: satire "heals with Morals what it hurts with Wit." Satirists, he claimed, nourished the state, promoting its virtue and providing it everlasting fame. Discuss and comment on this statement with regards to Jonathan Swift's two poems "A Description of the Morning" and "A Description of a City Shower"?
2. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's major poems turn on problems of self-esteem and identity. Exploring states of isolation and ineffectuality, they test strategies to overcome weakness without asserting its antithesis—that is a powerful self, secure in its own thoughts and utterances. This is evident in his best verse such as "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" and "Frost at Midnight." Explicate the structural pattern in the two poems and comment on?
3. William Wordsworth's "The Tables Turned" and "Strange Fits of Passion Have I Known" examine his own attitudes about the value of life and the importance of nature in shaping life, its prominent place as a counter to the evils of civilization, and its role in forming the human spirit and giving readers a glimpse into a kind of simple but sincere passions that characterize the life of rustics. Write an essay to trace these ideas in the three poems?

Good Luck
Mohammad Al-Hussini Arab

Answers

Question # 1

The eighteenth century was the golden age of satire. Satirists such as Jonathan Swift and Pope attacked the frivolity of polite society, the corruption of politics, and false values in all the arts. The aim of satire, as Pope explained it, was not wanton destruction: satire "heals with Morals what it hurts with Wit." Satirists, he claimed, nourished the state, promoting its virtue and providing it everlasting fame. Discuss and comment on this statement with regards to Jonathan Swift's two poems "A Description of the Morning" and "A Description of a City Shower"?

Answer:

The eighteenth century was the golden age of satire. Satirists attacked the frivolity of polite society, the corruption of politics, and false values in all the arts. The aim of satire, as Pope explained it, was not wanton destruction: satire "heals with Morals what it hurts with Wit." Satirists, he claimed, nourished the state, promoting its virtue and providing it everlasting fame. Jonathan Swift's two poems "A Description of the Morning" and "A Description of a City Shower" best describe that attitude.

"A Description of the Morning" has as its governing principle the interplay of order and disorder. Whether lowly or exalted, the figures who appear in the poem have duties that should contribute to the ordering of their world. Betty, who flies from her master's bed like Aurora from the bed of Tithonus, is presumably a servant girl with responsibilities for keeping the household in order. The apprentice is supposed to be cleaning the dirt from around his master's door. Moll is caught with her mop in midair, just prepared to scrub. The youth should be using his broom to sweep, not merely to find old nails. Turnkeys and bailiffs have the job of seeing that society—like houses, stairs, streets, and chimneys—is kept clean. His Lordship, at the apex of his world, has the broadest duties of all.

Most of these figures charged with preserving order are actively engaged in disrupting it. The apprentice scatters the dirt as fast as he pares it away. The turnkey, a modern shepherd with a convict flock, promotes crime for his own profit. His Lordship, who should be supervising the work of social sanitation, is hiding from his creditors. Even the bailiffs do no more than stand in silence. But at the same time, with the breaking of dawn, as real order appears in its death throes, a false impression of order is coming alive. Betty is returning to her own bed, and the convicts are returning to prison. Swift's irony reaches the highest level of complexity in the case of the servant girl. Participating in an illicit relationship that reflects the general disorder, Betty preserves the illusion of order by disordering her bed to give the impression she has slept there.

Swift seems to be suggesting that radical disorder is the state of this world, and the best that can ever be attained is a frail and unstable impression of order. He emphasizes the sense of disorderly flux by catching all his characters at a transitional moment, when the reality is just coming into contact with the respectable illusion. The moment comes at dawn--the transition between night and day. Betty is between beds. The apprentice has hardly started on his real work. Moll is merely prepared to scrub; and interestingly enough, she is prepared only for the entry and the stairs--the most visible and public parts, the avenues into disorderly houses. The youth is just beginning to trace the kennel edge. Duns are beginning to gather at his Lordship's door. Moll has

screamed through only half a street. The turnkeys, the bailiffs, and the schoolboys have as yet no idea of what the night has brought or the day will bring.

Why this interest in the beginnings of things--in the dynamics of a situation rather than in static pictures? Why this interest in a particular moment? In introducing Swift's poem in his *Tatler* (1709-1711), Steele said that the author was concerned with "incidents just as they really appear," not with fantastical descriptions cranked out by poets and steeped in classical clichés. Perhaps things as they are appear in their truest light when shown in contrast with what they are not. And they are not orderly, complete, static, or even necessarily moral. Yet the lines themselves contain no notes of rancor or censure. The primary clue to the proper reception of this poem is simply the absence of any disparaging comment from Swift. The poem contains no focused objects of blame. Whom is one to accuse: Betty, or her master? The turnkey, or the prisoners? The whole city? For what? In speaking nostalgically of the lagging schoolboys, in a line reminiscent of Shakespeare's "Ages of Man" speech, Swift mixes the clearly innocent with the dubious. The whole listing procedure implies equality: screaming Moll is no more disgusting than a reluctant schoolboy. As for the screaming, it might well have been music to Swift's ears. London street cries interested him so much that he wrote half a dozen delightful imitations of them. The cries of Brickdust Moll, the cadence of the Smallcoal-Man, and the shriller notes of the Chimney-Sweep make up the kind of urban symphony that Swift could find charming. Details like these, realized so vividly, work with the other evidence to prove this poem is not about hating London. One must assume that a man who listened so carefully and saw so clearly rather enjoyed things as they really were. Instead of invoking Virgil's *Georgics* (first century B.C.) in order to censure the city, Swift has adapted them to modern life.

Although Swift preferred "A Description of a City Shower," his mock-eclogue, to "A Description of the Morning," the later poem is the less coherent. Unless one assumes, like Brendan O Hehir, that the poem is a premonition of doom for a damned city, "A Description of a City Shower" appears a compilation of urban sights and sounds freshly perceived by a writer who has been tucked away for too long in the Irish countryside. As if conscious of his audience in Ireland, Swift flaunts his familiarity with the small drawbacks of London life. "Look what *we* Londoners have to put up with," he seems to say; and to emphasize the point, he includes a portrait of a bedraggled poet fleeing from the rain. A famous triplet ends the poem: "Sweepings from Butchers Stalls, Dung, Guts, and Blood, / Drown'd Puppies, stinking Sprats, all drench'd in Mud, / Dead Cats and Turnip-Tops come tumbling down the Flood." The final lines are indeed repulsive. They are meant in part to parody Dryden's triplets. But more than anything else, they reveal Swift's gruff sense of belonging among the eminent Englishmen he had come to know.

In "A Description of a City Shower," Swift uses a common form from his period, the lyric that eulogizes everyday life, and "whitewashes" its negative aspects. Swift gives it a satirical twist, to comment both upon what he sees in the city, and on the dishonesty that his fellow poets practice. Swift begins this process by establishing his authority. He does so by referring to common knowledge, the idea that animals can foretell the weather, and that cats in particular are often thought to have magical powers. This cat can tell that it is going to rain, and cuts its play short. However, what it does next signals the reader that the poem will be dark. When the cat's owner comes home, he is greeted with "double stink" from the sink, suggesting both that the cat's owner

doesn't keep a very clean house—and that cat relieved itself on the dirty dishes, rather than going outside to go to the bathroom. Swift also pulls the reader in by addressing us directly, telling us that "you'll find" these things, and suggesting that "If you be wise, then" we'll go not far to dine. This too shifts the poem into the realm of satire. We won't be able to read it and pretend we don't leave the dishes in the sink when we go off to work. We're part of the mess. Swift knows it, and lets us know he knows it.

In a series of rhymed lines, Swift then gives a series of images of the less than glamorous warnings we'll have about the coming storm, and of the results. The "shooting corn" and "hollow tooth" with its "a-ches" indicate that this picturesque event will bring pain with it. The next people in the poem are trying to avoid that pain. Those in the coffee house complain about the weather; those doing laundry hurry to try to finish it. All the while, the clouds are gathering, until the rain lets loose. As he had brought us into the poem, Swift now enters the poem himself. Rather than being in any way poetic, he describes himself as the rain cementing the dust inside his coat, and leaving "a cloudy stain." There are proverbs in many languages about how the weather doesn't play favorites, and how it rains on everyone. Swift shows us that this is the case when it rains in the city, but also shows us that when the rain washes away social distinction, it also washes away dignity. The "daggled females" have to pretend to shop just so they don't get wet, and political enemies like the Tories and Whigs "forget their feuds." He then creates a skillful parallel, suggesting that those hiding from the rain are like the Greeks who took shelter in the Trojan Horse, which would make the rain a heroic assault upon everyone. This poetic conceit is attractive; it gives readers a chance to see their struggles as lofty. But Swift is merely teasing his readers, holding a bit of dignity out for them to drool over, then washing it away. He does this by conjuring up a powerful, terrible flood that runs through the whole city: Sweeping from butcher's stalls, dung, guts, and blood, Drown'd puppies, stinking sprats, all drench'd in mud, Dead cats, and turnip-tops, come tumbling down the flood. No one can be heroic or dignified when "drown'd puppies" and "turnip-tops" are bumping up against their soaked ankles. In painting this savagely accurate portrait of a city shower, what Swift is really exposing are the pretenses of his fellow citizens—and himself.

Question # 2

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's major poems turn on problems of self-esteem and identity. Exploring states of isolation and ineffectuality, they test strategies to overcome weakness without asserting its antithesis—that is a powerful self, secure in its own thoughts and utterances. This is evident in "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" and "Frost at Midnight." Explicate the structural pattern in the two poems and comment on?

Answer:

Coleridge's major poems turn on problems of self-esteem and identity. Exploring states of isolation and ineffectuality, they test strategies to overcome weakness without asserting its antithesis—a powerful self, secure in its own thoughts and utterances, the potency and independence of which Coleridge feared would only exacerbate his loneliness. His reluctance to assert his own abilities is evident in his habitual deprecation of his own poetry and hyperbolic praise of William Wordsworth's. It is evident as well in his best verse, which either is written in an unpretentious "conversational" tone or, when it is not, is carefully dissociated from his own voice and

identity. Yet by means of these strategies, he is often able to assert indirectly or vicariously the strong self he otherwise repressed.

The structure of the conversation poems can be summarized as follows: a state of isolation (the more isolated for the presence of an unresponsive companion) gives way to meditation, which leads to the possibility of a self powerful through its association with an all-powerful force. This state of mind gives place to the acknowledgment of a human relationship dependent on the poet's recognition of his own inadequacy, the reward for which is a poetic voice with the authority to close the poem. This pattern is obvious in "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison." The poem is addressed to Charles Lamb, but the "gentle-hearted Charles" of the text is really a surrogate for the figure of Wordsworth, whose loss Coleridge is unwilling to face head-on. Incapacitated by a burn—appropriately, his wife's fault—Coleridge is left alone seated in a clump of lime trees while his friends—Lamb and William and Dorothy Wordsworth—set off on a long walk through the countryside. They are there and yet not there: their presence in the poem intensifies Coleridge's sense of isolation. He follows them in his imagination, and the gesture itself becomes a means of connecting himself with them. Natural images of weakness, enclosure, and solitude give way to those of strength, expansion, and connection, and the tone of the poem shifts from speculation to assertion. In a climactic moment, he imagines his friends "gazing round / On the wide landscape," until it achieves the transcendence of "such hues / As veil the Almighty Spirit, when yet he makes / Spirits perceive his presence."

The perception of an omnipotent force pervading the universe returns Coleridge to his present state, but with a new sense of his own being and his relationship with the friends to whom he addresses the poem. His own isolation is now seen as an end in itself. "Sometimes / 'Tis well to be bereft of promised good," Coleridge argues, "That we may lift the soul, and contemplate / With lively joy the joys we cannot share."

"Frost at Midnight," the finest of the conversation poems, replaces the silent wife or absent friends with a sleeping child (Hartley—although he is not named in the text). Summer is replaced by winter; isolation is now a function of seasonal change itself. In this zero-world, "The Frost performs its secret ministry, / Unhelped by any wind." The force that moved the eolian harp into sound is gone. The natural surroundings of the poem drift into nonexistence: "Sea, and hill, and wood, / With all the numberless goings-on of life, / Inaudible as dreams!" This is the nadir of self from which the poet reconstructs his being—first by perception of "dim sympathies" with the "low-burnt fire" before him; then by a process of recollection and predication. The "film" on the grate reminds Coleridge of his childhood at Christ's Hospital, where a similar image conveyed hopes of seeing someone from home and therefore a renewal of the conditions of his earlier life in Ottery St. Mary. Yet even in recollection, the bells of his "sweet birth-place" are most expressive not as a voice of the present moment, but as "articulate sounds of things to come!" The spell of the past was, in fact, a spell of the imagined future. The visitor the longed for turns out to be a version of the self of the poet, his "sister more beloved / My play-mate when we both were clothed alike." The condition of loss that opens the poem cannot be filled by the presence of another human being; it is a fundamental emptiness in the self, which, Coleridge suggests, can never be filled, but only recognized as a necessary condition of adulthood. Yet this recognition of incompleteness is the poet's means of experiencing a sense of identity missing in the opening lines of the poem.

"Frost at Midnight" locates this sense of identity in Coleridge's own life. It is not a matter of metaphysical or religious belief, as it is in "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," but a function of the self that recognizes its own coherence in time. This recognition enables him to speak to the "Dear Babe" who had been there all along, but had remained a piece of the setting and not a living human being. Like the friends of "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," who are projected exploring a landscape, the boy Hartley is imagined wandering "like a breeze / By lakes and sandy shores." The static existence of the poet in the present moment is contrasted with the movement of a surrogate. This movement, however, is itself subordinated to the voice of the poet who can promise his son a happiness he himself has not known.

In the two poems, Coleridge achieves a voice that entails the recognition of his own loss—in losing himself in the empathic construction of the experience of friend or son. The act entails a defeat of the self, but also a vicarious participation in powerful forces that reveal themselves in the working of the universe, and through this participation a partial triumph of the self over its own sense of inadequacy. In "Frost at Midnight," the surrogate figure of his son not only embodies a locomotor power denied the static speaker; but he is also, in his capacity to read the "language" uttered by God in the form of landscape, associated with absolute power itself.

Question # 3

William Wordsworth's "The Tables Turned" and "Strange Fits of Passion Have I Known" examine his own attitudes about the value of life and the importance of nature in shaping life, its prominent place as a counter to the evils of civilization, and its role in forming the human spirit and giving readers a glimpse into a kind of simple but sincere passions that characterize the life of rustics. Write an essay to trace these ideas in the three poems?

Answer:

William Wordsworth's "The Tables Turned" and "Strange Fits of Passion Have I Known" examine his own attitudes about the value of life and the importance of nature in shaping life, its prominent place as a counter to the evils of civilization, and its role in forming the human spirit and giving readers a glimpse into a kind of simple but sincere passions that characterize the life of rustics.

As he does with many of his early compositions, Wordsworth uses the ballad stanza form in "The Tables Turned" and "Strange Fits of Passion Have I Known" to achieve a note of rustic simplicity. His technique is deliberate and has a historical explanation: In the eighteenth century, most poets relied on elevated language and formal devices that reflected the influence of classical literature. Wordsworth and Coleridge made a conscious effort to transform poetry into something more simple and direct, in which human emotions could be expressed directly in language that all people would understand. Wordsworth states these principles in his famous Preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads, with other poems* (1800); there, he describes poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings [...] recollected in tranquillity." A poet is not some seer invested with special divine powers; rather, Wordsworth says, he is "a man speaking to men."

"Strange Fits of Passion Have I Known," and all the Lucy poems, exemplify Wordsworth's premises about the nature of poetry. The language is direct and virtually

free of literary tropes. The only simile the poet uses is the rather cliché "Fresh as a rose in June" (line 6), which he says describes the way Lucy looks to him everyday. Even his use of adjectives and adverbs is limited. Only in characterizing the path of the moon in the night sky does Wordsworth attempt to suggest change and motion through choice of descriptors: that sphere is variously "sinking" (line 15), "descending" (line 20), and finally "bright" (line 24) as it drops out of sight behind Lucy's cottage. The result of such sparseness of verbal decoration, coupled with the sparseness of the ballad stanza itself (quatrains of alternating lines of four and three beats), focuses the reader's attention on the action in the poem. Much of that action is simple mental reverie, but the growing state of anxiety which the speaker feels as he approaches Lucy's cottage is made apparent to the reader through the simple language and rustic form of this ballad.

In "Strange Fits of Passion Have I Known," Wordsworth explores the experiences of solitude and loss. Personifying the idea of solitary beauty in the figure of his chief character, Lucy, the poet uses his reactions to the girl's growth in the country and her death to examine his own attitudes about the value of life and the importance of nature in shaping life. The very simplicity of Lucy's life-style has strong appeal for Wordsworth. Looking back over almost two centuries of poetry shaped by Romantic ideas about the importance of nature and its prominent place as a counter to the evils of civilization, it may be hard to imagine the significance of Wordsworth's achievements in this and the other Lucy poems.

The tenets of Romantic poetry, which include a recognition of the power of unadorned speech, have gained considerable ascendancy in literary criticism, and twentieth century readers are much more likely than Jeffrey was to sympathize with Wordsworth's intent in this poem. The direct statements concerning the speaker's idle reverie have an immediacy of impact that makes the poet's central ideas easily understandable. This poem is about the simple joys of love and the intensity of feeling that one person can have for another; it emphasizes the tremendous sense of attachment such a feeling provokes. At the same time, the poem serves to remind readers of the tremendous sense of loss that follows the death of a beloved. Wordsworth has carefully woven into his lover's reverie the possibility of such impending doom through his consistent references to the descending moon; its path through the night sky serves as a symbol for the fading lover whose death is foreseen at the end of the poem.

"The Tables Turned" also serves to give readers a glimpse into the kind of simple but sincere passions that characterize the life of rustics, a group of people Wordsworth greatly admired. By extension, these passions are ones that Wordsworth attributes to all people of genuine sensibility. These passions are, in his opinion, what define individuals as truly human and what make life worth living. It is precisely the kind of ideas about moral philosophy found in books that Wordsworth attacks in this poem. In the all-important sixth stanza, Wordsworth asserts that when a person is affected by a perception of beauty in the natural world in springtime ("an impulse from a vernal wood"—a bird song), that person is made immediately and intuitively sensitive to what is good and what is evil. This kind of moral intuition is more to be trusted than judgments made on the bases of philosophical systems.

The seventh stanza describes what such systems do. They reject what can be learned from the pleasing ("sweet") impulses of nature ("the lore which Nature brings"). Instead, these systems encourage the mind ("Our meddling intellect") to analyze

("dissect") the "beauteous forms of things." This last phrase is somewhat vague; presumably the mind attempts to analyze not only the beautiful impulses from nature but human actions as well. In either case, before the mind can analyze, it must kill: "We murder to dissect." The action of the logical mind destroys what it touches and defeats its own purpose of discovering moral principles.

Wordsworth criticizes how the logical mind operates upon moral questions. Some readers also take the powerful statements in stanza 7 to apply to the analytical mind in all of its operations. Although elsewhere he expresses different opinions, here Wordsworth seems to have much in common with other Romantic poets, who generally valued imaginative understanding much higher than logical and rational thought.