Banha University
Faculty of Education
English Department

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A Guiding Model Answer for

Third Grade

Neo-Classical and Romantic Poetry Exam

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Faculty of Education

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BANHA UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF EDUCATION
ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
THIRD GRADE

FIRST TERM
YEAR (2013-2014)
TIME: 2 HOURS
FIRST TERM EXAM

NEO-CLASSICAL AND ROMANTIC POETRY

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 Alexander 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 explore this statement with regards to Alexander Pope's "Epistle to a Lady" and Jonathan Swift's "A Description of the Morning" and "A Description of a City Shower"?

2. London is the subject of William Blake's poem "London" and Samuel Johnson's poem "London." What kind of vision of London do the poems give you?

3. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Eolian Harp" and "Frost at Midnight" possess a circular structural pattern. Explain?

Good Luck
Mohammad Al-Hussini Arab

Answers

Question # 1

The eighteenth century was the golden age of satire. Satirists such as Jonathan Swift and Alexander 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 explore this statement with regards to Alexander Pope's "Epistle to a Lady" and Jonathan Swift's "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. Alexander Pope's *Epistle II To a Lady* and Jonathan Swift's two poems "A Description of the Morning" and "A Description of a City Shower" best describe that attitude.

Alexander Pope's *Epistle II. To a Lady* is a satire against women. It is especially directed at female readers: for their moral instruction, to prevent their destruction, and to promote their well-being. Thus, it is a poem about the need for women to cultivate a rounded and rational perspective on life in order to overcome the contradictory shortcomings of their nature that, unrestrained by reason, true love, and common sense, can lead to emotional and immoral excesses. As a satire modeled on the casual Horatian verse letter, or epistle, the poem inculcates this theme through ridicule of excessive female types and through closing praise of female norms of right conduct for the edification of female readers.

The imaginary setting for part of the poem is an art gallery, with the speaker a cicerone who conducts the reader past portraits of various female characters exemplifying the notion that, "good as well as ill, / Woman's at best a Contradiction still." There is the flirtatious Rufa (a redhead), who studies the philosopher John Locke; the timid Silia (snub-nosed?), who flies into a rage over a pimple; Papillia (butterfly), who longs for a country estate but cannot stand the "odious, odious Trees"; and Narcissa—"A very Heathen in the carnal Part, / Yet still a sad, good Christian at her heart." Five or six more portraits are also designed to enforce Pope's thesis that women in general, and in contrast to men, are governed by only two "Ruling Passions": the "Love of Pleasure, and the Love of Sway." The poem's conclusion, in contrast to the unflattering female characterizations and the highly suspect maxim just quoted, offers a tender, affectionate, admiring portrayal of Blount (never mentioned in the poem by name), to whom Phoebus Apollo, the god of poetry, has given "good Sense, Good-Humour, and a Poet."

The greatest artists share an underlying vision of reality as a contradiction and a paradox. Such a process of internal transformation causes the harmonizing of human paradox and the transmutation of human ills into goodness and meaning. If one submits to the process and the divine scheme of things, Pope insists, then, the contradictory chaos of reality is only an appearance, whereas the serene oneness of reality asserts itself to prove "Whatever IS is RIGHT."

These assumptions buttress the theme of the poem. All foolish beauties, from Rufa to Cloe, are creatures of contradiction misled by pride, weak in reason, and, therefore, unrestrained in their self-love or their female ruling passion for pleasure and domination. By the same token, even good women such as Martha Blount are "at best a Contradiction"; however, they find integration through reason and common sense ("Sense, Good-humour"), generating useful and selfless service to others and becoming models of an ideal humanity ("a softer Man") to be admired by all.

"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 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 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.

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.

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.

Swift then gives a series of images of the 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 people who try to avoid that pain, such as those, in the coffee house, who complain about the weather; and those, doing laundry, who hurry 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

London is the subject of William Blake's poem "London" and Samuel Johnson's poem "London." What kind of vision of London do the poems give you?

Answer:

As the world's first great capitalist metropolis, London in the revolutionary period presented itself as offering some privileged access to the future, to the way that the Western world in general might develop. Samuel Johnson's Juvenalian satire *London* rails against the alleged crimes, vices, and follies of his adopted city. It operates on various levels of seriousness. Some lines seem to be written in a typically Augustan high-spiritedness of denunciation, and are, one assumes, not meant to be taken literally—"Prepare for Death, if here at Night you roam, / And sign your Will before you sup from Home—while others appear as deeply felt, and as thoroughly grounded in the author's personal experience, as anything.

It is true that the poem is not very tightly organized; like much Augustan satire in heroic couplets, it moves from topic to topic without any strongly governing plan, and the poem as a whole is hardly more than the sum of its parts. If Johnson feels no need to impose any overall structure on his vision of the city, it is surely because he assumes that his experience of London is straightforward and shared in common with his readers. London, for Johnson, is still transparent; and, indeed, it is precisely this transparency that enables the poem's easy and absolute moral judgments, as the corruption of the modern city is sharply contrasted with the supposed moral purity that obtained in England under Alfred the Great or that still obtains among the rocks of Scotland and in other rustic regions. We might say that Johnson's London, whether in deadly earnest or somewhat affectedly, finds the city to be morally shocking—a cesspool of lies, snobbishness, cowardice, weakness, treason, and violence—but not productive of what Walter Benjamin, writing about another and later great urban center, would call epistemological shock.

The situation is radically different when we turn to William Blake's poem also entitled "London," which is crucially different from Johnson's. The distance that separates Blake from Johnson is highlighted by the formal parallels between the two poems. In both cases, the speakers wander through the city and issue thunderous moral condemnations from their respective sociopolitical positions of Johnson's Tory radicalism and Blake's revolutionary proto-Marxism. But for Blake London is epistemologically as well as morally shocking, at once estranged and estranging. Johnson's easy empiricist certitude—his ability to take and understand London as he finds it—is gone, and with it the adequacy of his straightforward poetry of statement. In order to make sense of what he sees throughout the city, Blake must instead construct an intricate metonymic and metaphoric figural structure. London, for Blake, no longer speaks for itself as it did for Johnson; rather the marked city must be elaborately deciphered. At first, the poet's scheme of decipherment relies mainly on metaphor: the fearful cries of the Londoners are understood to signify mental repression as powerful and despotic as manacles of actual steel. But in the course of the poem metonymy comes largely to supercede metaphor, as Blake's mode of understanding London relies less on mere similarity and more on actual systemic connection. It is slightly metaphorical to say that the chimney-sweeper's cry appalls the church building in the sense of making it whiter, since it is actually the sweeper's labor that does that; but it is metaphor at the very edge of metonymy, and it is a matter of full-fledged connection and causation to say that the cry appalls the church as an institution in the sense of startling and terrifying it, thereby directly, though synecdochically, suggesting the entire relationship between working class and ruling class. Somewhat similarly, there is a bit of metaphor in the role assigned to the harlot's curse in the final stanza. But the curse results from the woman's sexual and economic exploitation by the men of respectable society, and this exploitation quite directly turns the bridal carriage into a hearse blighted by venereal plagues; and it also infects the syphilitic infant, blind from birth. The nexus or oppression operates between the sexes and the generations as well as between the classes.

Blake's tightly structured quatrains as well as his self-consciously elaborate poetic figures are signs of just how much intense intellectual labor is required to comprehend the city, which presents itself as a quasi-science-fictional problem, an entity new and estranging. Moreover, the dominance of metonymy helps to render the estrangement a properly cognitive one, as Blake, in a mere sixteen lines of tetrameter, performs or at least strongly suggests a thoroughly materialist analysis—on a level of rigor not matched until Marx himself—of the capitalist metropolis.

It is once again useful to consider Johnson's London by way of contrast; for both poets find the sights of the city to be extraordinary. But these sights put no strain at all on Johnson's powers of observation and analysis as he follows his own famous critical prescription about "the grandeur of generality." The capitalized abstract nouns, "Malice," "Rapine," and "Accident," function almost as personifications, and the "fell Attorney" is expanded (or reduced) to a type by being imaged as an carnivorous animal, just as the members of the rabble are de-individualized through the comparison with the fire.

But Johnson is able to generalize because he is confident that he is unproblematically aware of the particulars on which the generalities are based; a falling house is a bad thing but not a mysterious thing. In contrast to Johnson, Blake employs metaphor lightly and provisionally, as a somewhat useful device that is decisively subordinated to the more fully cognitive figures of metonymy. But Blake's attempt to understand the systemic connections that define London, and thereby to achieve what later generations could recognize as a scientific analysis of British society, is based on a kind of radical materialism that was alien to Johnson's mind.

Question # 3

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Eolian Harp" and "Frost at Midnight" possess a circular structural pattern. Explain?

Answer:

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Eolian Harp" and "Frost at Midnight" possess a circular structural pattern. The structure of circular structural pattern 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.