



AP[®] English Literature 2003 Scoring Commentary Form B

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AP[®] ENGLISH LITERATURE
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Question 1

George Meredith's *Modern Love*

Sample U (Score 9): This well-developed, persuasive essay begins with a sharply-focused introductory paragraph that relates technique and theme, emphasizing from the start Meredith's idea that modern love is "akin to living death." Each paragraph extends and develops that theme, in a remarkably eloquent style that manages to be very specific, replete with brief citations from the poem, and yet broadly inclusive. The writer skillfully identifies techniques like "indirect characterization" and the "external" vs. "internal reality" of both figures and pays careful attention to the controlling effect of the speaker's rhetorical strategies — figurative language, imagery, and personification. The essay is not without flaw, notably when it claims that personification lends "human characteristics to the wife's 'waking eyes,'" but that hardly matters when the writing is so interesting as this. The perception about the way the poem's imagery "serves to *dehumanize* the characters" is particularly fine, and the exceptional power and elegance of the entire last paragraph — with its climactic cadence ("a miserable series of 'dead black years' . . . full of sorrow, misery, and regret") — is perhaps even more impressive.

Sample F (Score 6): This essay begins well by contextualizing the marriage in the poem ("when marriage was forever" and "both partners suffered") and going on to argue that in modern love "all this could have been prevented." While it is debatable that Meredith in 1862 viewed "modern love" as "a love without regrets and poison," this essay still makes a cogent case for such a contrast and remains well focused on it. The essay aptly summarizes the marital impasse in the poem, noting well how the "gaping snakes" effect for the man is caused by the woman's tears, in a style that is well-controlled despite some mistakes ("brake," "eached"). Nevertheless, the essay's attention to detail is limited: the idea that the couple lacked "the sword that severs all" (i.e., divorce) is not persuasive, and little else in the essay offers closer or deeper analysis. The conclusion of this five paragraph essay merely repeats, less effectively, the good argument made at the start, that Meredith's view of modern love is a "silent rebellion to eternal matrimony."

Sample K (Score 5): This essay demonstrates a correct but generalized understanding of the marital relationship in the poem, emphasizing the husband's inability "to share in his wife's sorrow," his perception of "little gaping snakes" as his "wife's evil sorrows," and her role as one who "keeps on looking to her past." Clearly responding to the prompt, the essay mentions the poem's use of simile, imagery, and personification, and concludes simply that "modern love is empty and full of regrets." The essay remains superficial in its failure to develop detailed, fully accurate, and insightful interpretations of either character in the poem, in its inability to connect the craft of the poem with its meaning, and in its failure to discuss with any depth the poem's view of modern love.

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Question 2

Joyce Carol Oates's *We Were the Mulvaney*s

Sample VV (Score 9): This exceptionally well-focused and unified essay develops the idea that Oates's use of the first person requires the reader to infer Judd's character, which the essay then proceeds to do in a richly-detailed manner. Drawing on one detail after another, Judd is shown to be "very observant," "practical," "responsible," knowledgeable ("about arboreal cycles"), careful (about the passing truck), and "down to earth" like his father. Skillfully, this description leads to the transitional recognition of the third paragraph, "It is this maturity that allows him to come to a realization of his own mortality." As the analysis of Judd's state of mind deepens and darkens, the essay calls attention to all of Oates's devices — hyphens, "interjectory expressions," capitalization, rhythm, repetition and variation — used to generate Judd's state of mind. Each paragraph enlarges and deepens the analysis. Returning to a point mentioned in the introduction (that Judd reflects on his own character), the essay argues that "Judd judges himself" and — an even better point — uses the third person as a distancing device, an "abstraction of the self" which he then must destroy in confronting his own mortality. These are adept insights, consistently well controlled, so that flaws like assuming the author to be "he" or misspelling "allows" or connecting the leaden sky with "his dad's roofing business" are barely noticeable.

Sample UU (Score 7): Responding well to the passage's melancholy tones, this essay interestingly connects Judd's state of mind with his natural surroundings, characterizing his attitude as "helplessly dreary" and suggesting that all the "dark imagery" — "sky the color of lead," "mud-colored Ford" — conveys his "uneasy" concern with death. The very effective first paragraph is followed by attentive, well-written paraphrase in the second and third paragraphs, suggesting that the argument is not growing in complexity or specificity. Some excellent sentences in fact repeat what was said at the beginning, e.g., "The dreary imagery of rotting wood, black birches, a light, gritty film of snow on the ground, and cold chills surround us in the boy's unpleasant environment." The conclusion offers persuasive insights into Judd's maturity and loneliness; and again the writing is skillful, but the essay as a whole lacks the amplitude and specificity of a fully developed argument.

Sample CC (Score 5): This essay offers a limited but still plausible account of the characterization; it pays some attention to Oates's literary techniques as well by noticing the difference between "the speaker" and his younger self and by emphasizing the "simple and childlike diction" used to convey his "excitement" and "playfulness." Neither of these ideas is developed, however: no darker or more complex view of the speaker emerges, and no technique other than diction is well exemplified. The idea of the speaker's secret is effectively paraphrased, but the whole essay offers no sustained argument or unifying theme; its opening and closing sentences are simplistic formulas, and its understanding of literary terms ("interjection," "word choice and the diction") is not impressive.

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Question 3
Cultural Collisions

Sample UUU (Score 8): This persuasive essay succeeds largely because of its skillful description of Marlow’s experiences and its ability to infer from them the novel’s issues of cultural collision. What emerges at once is a “domineering, imperialistic” European culture in violent conflict with Africa and Africans, and in some conflict with itself — notions of “civilization” and “the greater good” in conflict with “hypocritical, self-serving” Europeans who degrade and exploit the natives. Using long, complex sentences with interesting subordinations and amplifications, the essay parallels Marlow and Kurtz, showing the idealistic visions that each of them had and lost. Limiting the analysis is a conception of Africa that falls into unfortunate cliché. It is characterized as a realm of exoticism, unfamiliarity, and danger. “The wildness and lawlessness of the African Congo has driven Kurtz mad,” the writer argues, failing to recognize what Marlow knows, that African culture only *seems* lawless to ignorant European eyes. But the writer swerves back again to say (rightly) that the “horror” is really in Kurtz himself, “falling prey to the hypocrisy and darkness within himself.” Despite this confusion and a tendency to summarize the story instead of asserting its own design, the essay still offers innumerable persuasive and well-developed insights.

Sample MMM (Score 6): Benefiting from its appropriate choice of *A Room with a View*, this essay offers a sufficient response to the question almost by means of plot summary alone. The first paragraph promisingly suggests too that Lucy’s encounters with foreign cultures — Italian and American — not only change her identity but dramatize the essential issues of the novel, Victorian “delicacy” and “suppression” vs. Italian “passion” and partly American “freedom.” Unfortunately what follows remains generalized and repetitious. Two encounters are mentioned repeatedly, one in the churchyard and one in the square, but detailed analysis of either is missing (what happens in “the incident in the square”? what role does “the small Italian child” play? do any of the Italian characters have names?). The essay displays some skill in defining issues, but in the end the writer seems more interested in generalizations about Lucy’s “empowering herself” and “self-actualization” than in paying closer attention to the novel.

Sample KKK (Score 4): This essay ignores the question’s emphasis on a character caught *between* conflicting cultures and addresses instead Huck Finn’s response to “southern traditional values” as found in “Miss Watson’s God” and “the rigidity of civilization.” It attempts to argue that Huck is “free of doctrines” and without “moral obligations to his parents,” but then argues that he is caught between not wanting “to hurt Jim *or* Miss Watson.” Confusingly, the writer then claims “Huck is *not* pressured by the values of the southern culture he grows up in.” Subsequent examples convey the idea that Huck’s identity remains essentially independent: “Through his journey, Huck is often faced with colliding views [whose?] of the ‘appropriate’ choice.” Failure to grasp the question and failure to recognize any of the cultural collisions that exist in the novel, quite apart from Huck Finn’s response to them, dooms this essay to a low score.