

1. In Colleen McElroy’s poem “Monologue for Saint Louis,” published in 1980, the speaker returns to her childhood home in St. Louis, Missouri, after an extended absence and contemplates how she has changed. Read the poem carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how McElroy uses literary elements and techniques to convey the speaker’s complex experience of returning home.

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation.
- Select and use evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

### **Monologue for Saint Louis**

home again and the heart barely there  
when choked by clusters of words  
thick as the clumps of blue-black  
grapes we snatched every summer  
*Line 5* from the neighbor’s arbor<sup>1</sup>  
succulent pockets of flesh laced  
with green staining our lips and fingers  
  
it is summer again and I am home  
vowing penance<sup>2</sup> for all my disappearances  
*10* since that first summer  
when the arbor was clotted  
with pockets of grapes latticed on each  
interlocking vine  
  
now earthworms have trellised the arbor  
*15* and that crumbling heap of rotting black  
sticks cannot shield us from wind or words  
we are the women we whispered about each summer  
familiar houses and schoolyards have disappeared  
childhood streets are blocked with singular black

20 one-way signs aligned like a lacework  
of warnings or accusing fingers  
I am home again  
and my cousins sit in their cloaks of black  
skin dragging me through twisted vines  
25 of genetic maps thick with childhood vows

they remember each summer  
how each year I vowed to return home  
forever but I am lost in a riddle of words  
home is a vacant lot its back yard clotted  
30 with a stainless-steel arch<sup>3</sup> and clusters  
of tiny parks sprouting like trelliswork

enclosing some strange summer  
resort my cousins have disappeared  
into like the shadows of beasts and bad air  
35 that infect this flat country and I am home  
a stranger in love with words  
with tart sweet clusters of poems

“Monologue for Saint Louis” from *Queen of the Ebony Isles* ©1984 by Colleen J. McElroy. Published by Wesleyan University Press.  
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**1:** vining plants trained to grow over a lattice, framework, or trellis

**2:** an act that demonstrates regret and offers amends through self-sacrifice

**3:** the Gateway Arch, a 630-foot-tall arch located in a national park

2. The following excerpt is from Rachel Cusk’s novel *The Bradshaw Variations*, published in 2008. This passage describes Thomas Bradshaw’s morning interactions with members of his household. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Cusk uses literary elements and techniques to develop a complex portrayal of Thomas.

In your response you should do the following:

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- Select and use evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

Par.

- 1 What is art? Thomas Bradshaw asks himself this question frequently. He does not yet know the answer. He used to believe art was a kind of pretending, but he doesn’t think that any more. He uses the word *authenticity* to describe what he thinks now. Some things are artificial and some are authentic. It is easy to tell when something is artificial. The other is harder.
- 2 In the mornings he listens to music, to Bach or Schubert. He stands in the kitchen in his dressing gown. He waits for his wife and daughter to come downstairs. He is forty-one, the age when a life comes out of its own past like something out of a mould; and either it is solid, all of a piece, or it fails to hold its shape and disintegrates. The disintegration is not difficult to imagine. It is the solidity, the concrete form, that is mystifying. Disintegration does not involve questions of authenticity, but of a solid form the questions must be asked.
- 3 Mostly, in fact, it is the lodger<sup>1</sup> Olga who comes down first. He hears her tread on the stairs and doesn’t recognise it: that is how, every day, he identifies her, by hearing her quiet, slightly plodding step and wondering who on earth it belongs to. She ducks her peroxided head at him, flashes her uncertain train-track smile. For six months now Olga has been embroiled in protracted dentistry. Beneath the metal braces her teeth are grey and disorderly. As a child her mother apparently never took her to the dentist. This was not out of neglect, Olga has told him. It was because Olga was frightened of going, and her mother couldn’t bear her to be frightened, or to feel pain. She has told Thomas that she is saving up for a bridge and a set of caps. She has three different jobs and all the money goes on her teeth. She complains of the expense: in Poland the cost of dentistry is much lower. There, she could have all the work done—‘All!’ Olga repeats, making a chopping motion with her hand—for what she pays here for just one monthly visit.
- 4 These conversations do not entirely engage Thomas. When he talks to Olga he is both there and not there. He is waiting for Tonie<sup>2</sup> to come down, as the platform guard waits for the London train to come through. Tonie’s appearances in the kitchen are brief. Like the train she stops, disgorging<sup>3</sup> activity, and then departs again. It is a matter of minutes, but he needs to be ready. He hears Olga—in some ways he even identifies himself with her, both of them platform dwellers—but when she speaks he cannot reciprocate. He is as though sealed behind glass. He wonders if she realises this, realises that she can see but not touch him. She drinks tea from a giant Garfield<sup>4</sup> mug and eats cereal, topping up the milk frequently from the plastic container that stands beside her bowl. He glimpses her bare, mushroom-coloured legs beneath the table, her feet clad in large soft slippers. He turns the music up a little: it is an offering, a form of explanation. He wants her to know that he is aware of his own limitations, of his failure to

## Question 1: Poetry Analysis

6 points

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In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation.
- Select and use evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
<b>Row A</b> <b>Thesis</b> <b>(0–1 points)</b>	<b>0 points</b> For any of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is no defensible thesis.</li> <li>The intended thesis only restates the prompt.</li> <li>The intended thesis provides a summary of the issue with no apparent or coherent claim.</li> <li>There is a thesis, but it does not respond to the prompt.</li> </ul>	<b>1 point</b> Responds to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation of the poem.
	<b>Decision Rules and Scoring Notes</b>	
	<b>Responses that do not earn this point:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only restate the prompt.</li> <li>Make a generalized comment about the poem that doesn't respond to the prompt.</li> <li>Describe the poem or features of the poem rather than making a claim that requires a defense.</li> </ul>	<b>Responses that earn this point:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide a defensible interpretation of the speaker's complex experience of returning home.</li> </ul>
	<b>Examples that do not earn this point:</b> <b>Restate the prompt</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>"The poem 'Monologue for Saint Louis' depicts a speaker contemplating her return home and how she has changed."</i></li> </ul> <b>Do not relate to the prompt</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>"St. Louis has a large national monument, commonly known as the Arch."</i></li> </ul> <b>Describe the poem or features of the poem</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>"The intentional lack of capitalization is significant in conveying the poem's meaning."</i></li> </ul>	<b>Examples that earn this point:</b> <b>Provide a defensible interpretation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>"The speaker in McElroy's poem is filled with both nostalgia and regret upon returning home."</i></li> <li><i>"In the poem, the speaker's return home is full of paradoxes—her experience is sweet and rotten, familiar and strange, a return and a visit to a new place. It is through her love of words that she is able to reconcile her bittersweet experience."</i></li> <li><i>"Through repetition and the absence of punctuation, McElroy reveals that the speaker's visit home is marked by moments of recognition as well as disorientation."</i></li> </ul>
	<b>Additional Notes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The thesis may be more than one sentence, provided the sentences are in close proximity.</li> <li>The thesis may be anywhere within the response.</li> <li>For a thesis to be defensible, the poem must include at least minimal evidence that <i>could</i> be used to support that thesis; however, the student need not cite that evidence to earn the thesis point.</li> <li>The thesis <i>may</i> establish a line of reasoning that structures the essay, but it needn't do so to earn the thesis point.</li> <li>A thesis that meets the criteria can be awarded the point whether or not the rest of the response successfully supports that line of reasoning.</li> </ul>	

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria				
<b>Row B</b> <b>Evidence</b> <b>AND</b> <b>Commentary</b> <b>(0–4 points)</b>	<b>0 points</b> Simply restates thesis (if present), repeats provided information, or offers information irrelevant to the prompt.	<b>1 point</b> <b>EVIDENCE:</b> Provides evidence that is mostly general.  <b>AND</b> <b>COMMENTARY:</b> Summarizes the evidence but does not explain how the evidence supports the student’s argument.	<b>2 points</b> <b>EVIDENCE:</b> Provides some specific, relevant evidence.  <b>AND</b> <b>COMMENTARY:</b> Explains how some of the evidence relates to the student’s argument, but no line of reasoning is established, or the line of reasoning is faulty.	<b>3 points</b> <b>EVIDENCE:</b> Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning.  <b>AND</b> <b>COMMENTARY:</b> Explains how some of the evidence supports a line of reasoning.  <b>AND</b> Explains how at least one literary element or technique in the poem contributes to its meaning.	<b>4 points</b> <b>EVIDENCE:</b> Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning.  <b>AND</b> <b>COMMENTARY:</b> Consistently explains how the evidence supports a line of reasoning.  <b>AND</b> Explains how multiple literary elements or techniques in the poem contribute to its meaning.
	<b>Decision Rules and Scoring Notes</b>				
	<b>Typical responses that earn 0 points:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are incoherent or do not address the prompt.</li> <li>May be just opinion with no textual references or references that are irrelevant.</li> </ul>	<b>Typical responses that earn 1 point:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tend to focus on summary or description of a poem rather than specific details or techniques.</li> <li>Mention literary elements, devices, or techniques with little or no explanation.</li> </ul>	<b>Typical responses that earn 2 points:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consist of a mix of specific evidence and broad generalities.</li> <li>May contain some simplistic, inaccurate, or repetitive explanations that don’t strengthen the argument.</li> <li>May make one point well but either do not make multiple supporting claims or do not adequately support more than one claim.</li> <li>Do not explain the connections or progression between the student’s claims, so a line of reasoning is not clearly established.</li> </ul>	<b>Typical responses that earn 3 points:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uniformly offer evidence to support claims.</li> <li>Focus on the importance of specific words and details from the poem to build an interpretation.</li> <li>Organize an argument as a line of reasoning composed of multiple supporting claims.</li> <li>Commentary may fail to integrate some evidence or fail to support a key claim.</li> </ul>	<b>Typical responses that earn 4 points:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uniformly offer evidence to support claims.</li> <li>Focus on the importance of specific words and details from the poem to build an interpretation.</li> <li>Organize and support an argument as a line of reasoning composed of multiple supporting claims, each with adequate evidence that is clearly explained.</li> <li>Explain how the writer’s use of multiple literary techniques contributes to the student’s interpretation of the poem.</li> </ul>
<b>Additional Notes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Writing that suffers from grammatical and/or mechanical errors that interfere with communication cannot earn the fourth point in this row.</li> <li>To earn the fourth point in this row, the response may observe multiple instances of the same literary element or technique if each instance further contributes to the meaning of the poem.</li> </ul>					

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<b>Row C</b> <b>Sophistication</b> <b>(0–1 points)</b>	<b>0 points</b> Does not meet the criteria for one point.	<b>1 point</b> Demonstrates sophistication of thought and/or develops a complex literary argument.
	<b>Decision Rules and Scoring Notes</b>	
	<b>Responses that do not earn this point:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attempt to contextualize their interpretation, but such attempts consist predominantly of sweeping generalizations (“<i>Human experiences always include ...</i>” OR “<i>In a world where ...</i>” OR “<i>Since the beginning of time ...</i>”).</li> <li>• Only hint at or suggest other possible interpretations (“<i>While another reader may see ...</i>” OR “<i>Though the poem could be said to ...</i>”).</li> <li>• Make a single statement about how an interpretation of the poem comments on something thematic without consistently maintaining that thematic interpretation.</li> <li>• Oversimplify complexities in the poem.</li> <li>• Use complicated or complex sentences or language that is ineffective because it does not enhance the student’s argument.</li> </ul>	<b>Responses that earn this point may demonstrate a sophistication of thought or develop a complex literary argument by doing any of the following:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identifying and exploring complexities or tensions within the poem.</li> <li>2. Illuminating the student’s interpretation by situating it within a broader context.</li> <li>3. Accounting for alternative interpretations of the poem.</li> <li>4. Employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive.</li> </ol>
	<b>Additional Note:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This point should be awarded only if the sophistication of thought or complex understanding is part of the student’s argument, not merely a phrase or reference.</li> </ul>	

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