

ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION

SECTION II

Total time—2 hours

Question 1

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

The story of Odysseus' encounter with the Sirens and their enchanting but deadly song appears in Greek epic poetry in Homer's *Odyssey*. An English translation of the episode is reprinted in the left column below. Margaret Atwood's poem in the right column is a modern commentary on the classical story. Read both texts carefully. Then write an essay in which you compare the portrayals of the Sirens. Your analysis should include discussion of tone, point of view, and whatever poetic devices (diction, imagery, etc.) seem most important.

... our trim ship was speeding toward
the Sirens' island, driven by the brisk wind.

Now with a sharp sword I sliced an ample wheel of beeswax
Line down into pieces, kneaded them in my two strong hands
5 and the wax soon grew soft, worked by my strength
and Helios' burning rays, the sun at high noon,
and I stopped the ears of my comrades one by one.
They bound me hand and foot in the tight ship—
erect at the mast-block, lashed by ropes to the mast—
10 and rowed and churned the whitecaps stroke on stroke.
We were just offshore as far as a man's shout can carry,
scudding close, when the Sirens sensed at once a ship
was racing past and burst into their high, thrilling song:
'Come closer, famous Odysseus—Achaea's pride and glory—
15 moor your ship on our coast so you can hear our song!
Never has any sailor passed our shores in his black craft
until he has heard the honeyed voices pouring from our lips,
and once he hears to his heart's content sails on, a wiser man.'

...
So they sent their ravishing voices out across the air
20 and the heart inside me throbbed to listen longer.

I signaled the crew with frowns to set me free—
they flung themselves at the oars and rowed on harder,
Perimedes and Eurylochus springing up at once
to bind me faster with rope on chafing rope.
25 But once we'd left the Sirens fading in our wake,
once we could hear their song no more, their urgent call—
my steadfast crew was quick to remove the wax I'd used
to seal their ears and loosed the bonds that lashed me.

SIREN SONG

This is the one song everyone
would like to learn: the song
that is irresistible:

- Line* the song that forces men
5 to leap overboard in squadrons
even though they see the beached skull
the song nobody knows
because anyone who has heard it
is dead, and the others can't remember
10 Shall I tell you the secret
and if I do, will you get me
out of this bird suit?*
- I don't enjoy it here
squatting on this island
15 looking picturesque and mythical
with these two feathery maniacs
I don't enjoy singing
this trio, fatal and valuable.
I will tell the secret to you,
20 to you, only to you.
Come closer. This song
is a cry for help: Help me!
Only you, only you can,
you are unique
25 at last. Alas
it is a boring song
but it works every time.

"Siren Song" from You Are Happy, SELECTED POEMS 1965-1975. Copyright © 1976 by Margaret Atwood. Reprinted by permission of Houghton Mifflin Co. (www.hmco.com). All rights reserved. Also from the Canadian collection SELECTED POEMS 1966-1984 © 1974, 1990 Margaret Atwood, published by Oxford University Press. First appeared in POETRY, February 1974.

*In Greek mythology, Sirens are often represented as birds with the heads of women.

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2000 AP® ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

Question 2

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

In the following passage from *The Spectator* (March 4, 1712), the English satirist Joseph Addison creates a character who keeps a diary. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-organized essay, analyze how the language of the passage characterizes the diarist and his society and how the characterization serves Addison's satiric purpose. You may wish to consider such elements as selection of detail, repetition, and tone.

MONDAY, *eight o'clock*.—I put on my clothes and walked into the parlour.

Nine o'clock, ditto.—Tied my knee-strings and washed my hands.

5 *Hours ten, eleven, and twelve*.—Smoked three pipes of Virginia. Read the *Supplement* and *Daily Courant*. Things go ill in the North. Mr. Nisby's opinion thereupon.

10 *One o'clock in the afternoon*.—Chid Ralph for mislaying my tobacco-box.

Two o'clock.—Sat down to dinner. *Mem:* Too many plums and no suet.

From three to four.—Took my afternoon's nap.

From four to six.—Walked into the fields.

15 Wind S.S.E.

From six to ten.—At the club. Mr. Nisby's opinion about the peace.

Ten o'clock.—Went to bed, slept sound.

20 *TUESDAY (being holiday), eight o'clock*.—Rose as usual.

Nine o'clock.—Washed hands and face, shaved, put on my double-soled shoes.

Ten, eleven, twelve.—Took a walk to Islington.

One.—Took a pot of Mother Cob's mild.

25 *Between two and three*.—Returned; dined on a knuckle of veal and bacon. *Mem.:* Sprouts wanting.

Three.—Nap as usual.

From four to six.—Coffee-house. Read the news. A dish of twist.¹ Grand Vizier² strangled.

30 *From six to ten*.—At the club. Mr. Nisby's account of the great Turk.

Ten.—Dream of the Grand Vizier. Broken sleep.

WEDNESDAY, eight o'clock.—Tongue of my shoe-buckle broke. Hands, but not face.

35 *Nine*.—Paid off the butcher's bill. *Mem.:* To be allowed for the last leg of mutton.

Ten, eleven.—At the Coffee-house. More work in the North. Stranger in a black wig asked me how stocks went.

40 *From twelve to one*.—Walked in the fields. Wind to the south.

From one to two.—Smoked a pipe and a half.

Two.—Dined as usual. Stomach good.

Three.—Nap broke by the falling of a pewter dish.

45 *Mem.:* Cookmaid in love, and grown careless.

From four to six.—At the coffee-house. Advice from Smyrna, that the Grand Vizier was first of all

strangled and afterwards beheaded.

Six o'clock in the evening.—Was half-an-hour in

50 the club before anybody else came. Mr. Nisby of opinion, that the Grand Vizier was not strangled the sixth instant.

Ten at night.—Went to bed. Slept without waking till nine next morning.

55 *THURSDAY, nine o'clock*.—Stayed within till two o'clock for Sir Timothy; who did not bring me my annuity according to his promise.

Two in the afternoon.—Sat down to dinner. Loss of appetite. Small-beer sour. Beef overcorned.

60 *Three*.—Could not take my nap.

Four and five.—Gave Ralph a box on the ear.

Turned off my cookmaid. Sent a message to Sir Timothy. *Mem.:* did not go to the club to-night. Went to bed at nine o'clock.

65 *FRIDAY*.—Passed the morning in meditation upon Sir Timothy, who was with me a quarter before twelve.

Twelve o'clock.—Bought a new head to my cane and tongue to my buckle. Drank a glass of purl³ to recover appetite.

Two and three.—Dined and slept well.

From four to six.—Went to the coffee-house. Met Mr. Nisby there. Smoked several pipes. Mr. Nisby of opinion that laced coffee⁴ is bad for the head.

75 *Six o'clock*.—At the club as steward. Sat late.

Twelve o'clock.—Went to bed, dreamt that I drank small-beer with the Grand Vizier.

SATURDAY.—Waked at eleven; walked in the fields; wind N.E.

80 *Twelve*.—Caught in a shower.

One in the afternoon.—Returned home, and dried myself.

Two.—Mr. Nisby dined with me. First course marrow-bones, second ox-cheek, with a bottle of Brooke's and Hellier.

Three o'clock.—Overslept myself.

Six.—Went to the club. Like to have fallen into a gutter. Grand Vizier certainly dead, &c.

¹ A beverage

² Chief administrative officer of the Ottoman Empire

³ A liquor

⁴ Coffee containing spirits

2000 English Literature Scoring Guidelines

Question 1

- 9-8: These essays are ordered by a persuasive interpretation that forms an effective basis for comparing the Sirens. They recognize variations in perspective and approach that differentiate Atwood's contemporary treatment of the Sirens from Homer's ancient version of the temptresses, and their analysis is insightful and provocative. Although the writers of these essays may offer a range of interpretations and/or choose different poetic elements for emphasis, these papers provide convincing readings of both poems and maintain consistent control over the elements of effective composition, including the language appropriate to the criticism of verse. Their textual references are apt and specific. Though they may not be error-free, they demonstrate the writers' ability to read poetry perceptively and to write with clarity and sophistication.
- 7-6: These essays convey a sound grasp of both poems. However, they may prove less adept than the best essays at shaping a thesis to define the distinctions and/or similarities that make the juxtaposition of these two treatments of the Sirens a telling exercise. The interpretations may falter in some particulars, or they may be less thorough or precise in their discussion of how the poems portray the Sirens. Nonetheless, their dependence on paraphrase, if any, will be in the service of analysis. These essays demonstrate the writer's ability to express ideas clearly, but they do not exhibit the same level of mastery, maturity, and/or control as the very best essays. These essays are likely to be briefer, less incisive, and less well-supported than the 9-8 papers.
- 5: These essays tend to over-simplify: they respond to the assigned task with a plausible reading of the texts, yet they perhaps say little beyond the most readily grasped observations. They often rely on paraphrase, but nonetheless paraphrase that contains some implicit analysis. Their discussion of how the portrayals of the Sirens compare may be vague, formulaic, or inadequately supported by references to the text. They may suffer from the cumulative force of many minor misinterpretations. Composition skills are at a level sufficient to convey the writer's thoughts, and surface errors do not constitute a distraction. However, these essays are not as well-conceived, organized, or developed as upper-half papers.
- 4-3: These lower-half essays reveal an incomplete understanding of either or both texts and perhaps an insufficient understanding of the prescribed task as well: they may not succeed in forging a basis for the comparison of the portrayals of the Sirens. One poem may be discussed to the exclusion of the other; the poetic analysis may be partial, unconvincing, or irrelevant. The essay may rely essentially on paraphrase. Evidence from the texts may be meager or misconstrued. The writing demonstrates uncertain control over the elements of composition, often exhibiting recurrent stylistic flaws and/or inadequate development of ideas. Essays scored 3 may contain significant misreadings and/or unusually inept writing.