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Faculty of Arts
English Department

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أستاذ المادة: أ.د.م/ محمد بدر الدين الحسينى حسن منصور

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A Guiding Model Answer for

Second Grade

Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries Poetry Exam

Faculty of Arts

Prepared by

Mohammad Badr AlDin Al-Hussini Hassan Mansour, Ph.D.
University of Nevada, Reno (USA)



BANHA UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF ARTS
ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
SECOND GRADE



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

SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES POETRY EXAM (JANUARY 2, 2014)

Answer the following questions:

DIRECTIONS: BE ORGANIZED; FOCUS ONLY ON THE ADDRESSED ISSUES AND WRITE YOUR ANSWERS ONLY IN THE FORM OF WELL-ORGANIZED ESSAYS, WHICH ADOPT THE FORM OF A THESIS STATEMENT, A BODY, AND A CONCLUSION. TIME LENGTH FOR EACH QUESTION IS ONE HOUR AND THE GRADE FOR EACH IS 7.5 MARKS.

1. Sixteenth century poets sought new ways to use and revitalize old literary traditions and conventions such as those popularized in Petrarchan and Platonic love poetry. Petrarchan love sonnets featured aristocratic and courtly lovers who complimented and manipulated an idealized mistress with extravagantly flattering metaphors. Platonic love originally described an aristocratic code of chivalrous devotion to a married lady or to one of superior social rank. Through time, the chaste nature of this old bond was sometimes abused. Pay attention to the treatment of love in the poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt's "They Flee From Me That Sometime Did Me Seek," Sir Philip Sidney's "Ring Out Your Bells," William Shakespeare's "Let me not to the marriage of true minds," and Thomas Campion's "There Is a Garden in Her Face." Which poems are direct adaptations of Petrarchan originals and which are not? What is conventional in the various treatments of love, and what is more striking? Does the type of love being celebrated in these poems vary?
2. In *Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries Poetry*, Mohammad A. AbuArab writes, "Metaphysical verse has great intellectual dexterity. It is characterized by wordplay often involving paradoxes, puns, quick turns of thought, and witty and unusual similes and metaphors known as conceits (page 63)." Discuss the functional use of these poetic devices in the poems of John Milton's "When I consider how my light is spent," Henry Vaughan's "Childhood," and Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress"?

GOOD LUCK
MOHAMMAD AL-HUSSINI ARAB

ANSWERS

Question # 1:

Sixteenth century poets sought new ways to use and revitalize old literary traditions and conventions such as those popularized in Petrarchan and Platonic love poetry. Petrarchan love sonnets featured aristocratic and courtly lovers who complimented and manipulated an idealized mistress with extravagantly flattering metaphors. Platonic love originally described an aristocratic code of chivalrous devotion to a married lady or to one of superior social rank. Through time, the chaste nature of this old bond was sometimes abused. Pay attention to the treatment of love in the poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt's "They Flee From Me That Sometime Did Me Seek," Sir Philip Sidney's "Ring Out Your Bells," William Shakespeare's "Let me not to the marriage of true minds," and Thomas Campion's "There Is a Garden in Her Face." Which poems are direct adaptations of Petrarchan originals and which are not? What is conventional in the various treatments of love, and what is more striking? Does the type of love being celebrated in these poems vary?

Answer:

Love poetry was the personal and passionate side project of sixteenth century poets. In their perfection of the love sonnet, the poets have retained their power to express longing and desire exceptionally well. They wrote beautiful verse sequences to imaginary or actual lovers.

The Italian influence, mainly of Petrarch, whose poems to Laura, filled with religious imagery and praise of the mistress for her spiritual superiority as well as her beauty, exercised an enormous influence on sixteenth century poetry. Petrarch's example about the theme of romantic love, addressed to the poet's imaginary cruel lady, was commonly followed by most poets.

Sir Thomas Wyatt's love poems, like most sixteenth century love poetry, express the laments of the unrequited or deserted lover rather than the joys of mutuality. Influenced by and commenting on the poems of Petrarch, the love-poem tradition in sixteenth century English poetry often presents a conflict between Neoplatonic ideas of beauty—the idea that outward beauty is a reflection of inner goodness and virtue that moves others to be virtuous—and the fact that physical attractiveness stimulates carnal desires that move men and women to cast off the virtues of chastity and sexual restraint. Yet Wyatt, although he often borrows freely from Petrarch, translating and imitating his poems more or less loosely, seems unconcerned with presenting the drama of these contradictory drives. Rather, he uses the language of Petrarch to represent a society in which promiscuous sexual pursuits are a given and virtue is largely a matter of social manners, affectations, and pretensions.

"They flee from me" certainly moves away from the idealized beloved of Petrarchan convention. It expresses Wyatt's attitude toward courtly love: it is a game that can cause real pain, and one in which the players are only half-aware of their own complicity. Unlike the idealized woman/deer in Petrarch's poetry, a woman whose ideal virtue and chastity make her an unattainable object of sexual desire, Wyatt's woman seems very sexual indeed. The reader sees in the second stanza that the speaker himself is the one being "lured."

If Petrarchan love sonnets featured aristocratic and courtly lovers who complimented and manipulated an idealized mistress with extravagantly flattering metaphors, platonic love would

describe an aristocratic code of chivalrous devotion to a married lady or to one of superior social rank. However, through time, the chaste nature of this old bond was sometimes abused. In courtships in which lovers were not given favors or awards, the discontented petitioner agonized, complained, and pled repeatedly to the untouchable lady who refused him.

The flattering compliments of Petrarchan love sonnets aimed at courting a lady's favors arise from the same ambitious urges of desire as the hyperboles used to court a queen or a noble. There is little difference between practices. Furthermore, when the Platonic lover suffers and rages about his mistress's scorn and rejection of his worth and faithfulness, his misery underlines the desire behind his egoistic self-love. Feelings of worth, honor, and personal identity grow from the self-validation gained from recognition or reward for deeds accomplished. Human courtiers such as Sir Philip Sidney felt frustrated when their valiant efforts were rejected. In Sidney's poem "Ring Out Your Bells," the speaker's catalog of grievances typifies him as a Platonic lover whose courtship has been soundly rebuffed. In rebellion, his thoughts turn dark when his virtues or lofty aims are not rewarded in some way. Sidney works within the traditions and conventions of love poetry. However, he rejuvenates them by showing what a few changes can do to hackneyed concepts and images. His double vision, the extended metaphoric comparison of love's trivialities with the solemnity of death, transforms the Petrarchan/Platonic single-vision lyric into a brief model of a mock-heroic romance. This second point of view indirectly points out the comical exaggerations, trivialities, stupidities, and abuses. Ironically, the final prayer might well express the poet's own desire: "Good lord, deliver us" from poets who abuse poetry.

However, "Sonnet 116" shows William Shakespeare's faith in the ideal of constancy in love. Shakespeare invokes man's noblest aspirations in the name of love: constancy, commitment to another, purity of heart, and perseverance which defies all life's storms. This sonnet gives the impression that Shakespeare is innocent of the inconstancy he condemns. Rather than showing love's constancy and endurance in strictly positive terms, he defines these qualities through metaphors depicting their opposites, inconstancy and death. In short, he says as much about what love is not as what love is, as if negative definitions are more within his understanding. Drawing on his awareness of contradiction and impermanence in nature and society, he employs dramatic irony to point out his own particular flaws and contradictions. The resulting paradox reveals his recurring doubts about the subject. Nevertheless, as the sonnet progresses, Shakespeare convinces himself to believe in his ideal. The development of his conviction is worth noting.

"Sonnet 116" develops the theme of the eternity of true love through an elaborate and intricate cascade of images. Shakespeare first states that love is essentially a mental relationship; the central property of love is truth—that is, fidelity—and fidelity proceeds from and is anchored in the mind. The objective tone and impersonal language of the opening reinforce this theme. This kind of love is as far removed from the level of mere sensation as any human activity could be. Like all ideal forms, it operates on the level of abstract intellect, or of soul. Hence it is immune to the physical, emotional, or behavioral "impediments" that threaten lesser loves. It is a love that fuses spirits intuitively related to each other.

The poem proceeds to catalog a number of specific impediments. The first involves reciprocation. True love endures even the absence of the beloved: not that the heart grows fonder in such a case, as in the cliché, but that it operates independently of physical reminders. Such love

stabilizes itself, as if possessing an instinctive self-righting mechanism. Like the navigational devices to which he alludes, true love serves as a standard for others, maintains its course under stress, and guarantees security against storm and turmoil.

This imagery duplicates the sequence of promises exchanged by true lovers in the marriage service that Shakespeare quotes in the opening of the poem. True love vows constancy regardless of all the vagaries of life and change. The simple series, however, seems to minimize the intensity of love necessary to do this. On the contrary, love is absolutely secure against external assault. In particular, it holds firm against the ravages of time. Since the poem begins by dissociating love from the limits of time, this should not be surprising, especially since the marriage service insists on the possibility of love surviving time and its consequence, change. So strong is the popular belief that love is rooted in physical attractiveness, however, that the poem is forced to repudiate this explicitly. It does it in the starkest way imaginable, by personifying time as the Grim Reaper and by bringing that specter directly before the eyes of the lover. This happens; the threat is real, but the true lover can face down even death.

Finally, Thomas Campion's "There Is a Garden in Her Face" does not run in the usual Elizabethan courtly poetry, but, however, it explains that the lady is so unapproachable not because she is innocent or too virtuous, but because she is holding out for the highest price. Thus, while ostensibly praising the lady, the poet is actually exposing her and, by extension, the society that has produced her.

The Petrarchan tradition states the gender clichés in this poem. The lady is perfection itself. She is superlatively beautiful, worthy of being worshiped by all the men around her. She is also as powerful as a goddess, capable of dealing a death blow with a mere frowning of displeasure, and, like a goddess, completely in command of her passions, fully in control of her future. By contrast, the Petrarchan lover presents himself as totally submissive to his lady, totally dependent upon her for his own happiness. He can only admire her, praise her, and await her pleasure. However, though Campion's persona assumes the manner and the mannerisms of a conventional Petrarchan lover, expressing himself in conventional Petrarchan conceits, the words and music of the refrain suggest a very different meaning.

All the Petrarchan elements in the song come from a world that is a construct of the human imagination, a world in which women are meant to be worshiped and, indeed, deserve no less. Campion reinforces this idea with references to his lady's goddess-like power and even with religious images, referring to his lady's face as a "heav'nly paradise," to her eyes as "like Angels," and to her lips as "sacred." Men are so in awe of these goddesses or saints that they are willing to adore them without making any demands upon them. The ladies who live in this imaginary world appear to be emotionless; it is only their lovers who burn, freeze, and sometimes die, perhaps of a broken heart, or perhaps, destroyed by the lady's frown.

With the repeated word "buy" and the cry of the cherry-seller, however, the poet tosses the reader into the real world. If someone will eventually "buy" those cherry-red lips, then the lady's distancing herself is not a matter of saint-like behavior but a commercial calculation. Like the street seller, the lady is marketing her merchandise. Like the cherries, she will be most valuable when she is at her prime, in other words, fully ripe. At that point, she will be sold to the

highest bidder. That is the way marriages are made in the real world, and everyone who reads Campion's words or hears his song is well aware of that fact.

Although Campion is willing to assume the role of a Petrarchan lover, he makes it clear that after an excursion into the world of pretense, one must return to reality. The reality is that the lady's behavior is just as artificial as the language in which she is described. Thus the poem becomes an ironic work, in which words and music collaborate to expose a society that pretends to be idealistic but in fact is coldly materialistic.

QUESTION 2

In *Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries Poetry*, Mohammad A. AbuArab writes, "Metaphysical verse has great intellectual dexterity. It is characterized by wordplay often involving paradoxes, puns, quick turns of thought, and witty and unusual similes and metaphors known as conceits (page 63)." Discuss the functional use of these poetic devices in the poems of John Milton's "When I consider how my light is spent," Henry Vaughan's "Childhood," and Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress"?

ANSWER

Metaphysical poetry is known for its intellectual complexity which is conveyed through striking (sometimes incongruous) imagery. In "When I consider how my light is spent," John Milton adapts the form of the sonnet by employing an enjambment technique to carry his thoughts through multiple lines while retaining the traditional rhyme scheme. Milton chooses to replace the verbal extravagance of the Elizabethan sonnet with classical precision and the Petrarchan, or Italian, form in crafting this tight poem. Besides, this sonnet is a verse paragraph. Also in typical Italian form, the octave presents a problem—how a man deprived of his sight can please God and obey God's warning to use his talents to the fullest—and the sestet offers a solution or a resolution: He can serve in other ways and still please God. Milton employs personification to provide for a response to the narrator's anguished question. Patience interrupts to put an end to his foolish question at the turn of the sestet.

Milton uses puns skillfully. In the opening line, he uses the word "spent," which evolved from "to spin," through "weigh," into "pensive," and "expend," "ponder," or "spend." All these meanings are relevant in the context of the poem. In the second line, Milton refers to his plight in "this dark world and wide." Darkness suggests his blindness; however, Milton was also a man with deep religious conviction, and he would have been aware that darkness was a cliché in much religious writing for sinfulness and ignorance.

One of the most obvious plays on words is the use of "talent." When the poet refers to "that one talent which is death to hide," he simultaneously associates the word both with Milton's great skill of writing and with the biblical passage commonly known as the parable of the talents in Matthew 25 to which the poem clearly refers. The "talent" was a type of coin used in biblical times. In line 4, the word "useless," familiarly used to indicate that something is not serving a valuable purpose, also is related to "usury" and is associated with money not earning any interest. In the same line, the word "bent" carries the idea of being determined to do something but also has the etymological background of being bonded or bound, in this case to Milton's feeling of divine-given vocation to writing. The words "light denied" in line 7, in addition to the obvious

suggestion of blindness, can also refer to spiritual light or to inspiration for the poet. The phrase in lines 11 and 12, "his state / Is kingly," can be associated with greatness, power, and stateliness as well as with territory.

Although he could write simple subject-verb-object clauses, Milton often preferred involved syntax. In this sonnet, he uses subordination, inversion, and a delayed subject and verb. The complexity of the opening adverbial clause ("When I consider...lest he returning chide") contributes to a building of intensity to a climax at which the speaker, feeling either angry, despondent, or impatient, speaks the direct object in the form of the question ("Doth God exact . . .? ") before qualifying it with the main clause ("I fondly ask").

In "Childe-hood," Henry Vaughan conveys the intellectual complexity of Metaphysical poetry in the references to, and often the reversal of, biblical imagery. In the second stanza, for example, men embrace thorns, not in altruistic suffering as Christ did, but because of the "ill" lessons that this world has taught them. That stanza concludes by comparing the lure of these lessons with the temptation of Christ, when Satan told Jesus to jump off a cliff so the angels could hold him up. Unlike Christ, people too often give in, their dedication to "the world" leading them to "gravely cast themselves away."

Vaughan uses imagery of light for childhood and darkness for the adult state. In the first stanza childhood is described as a bright light, "white designs" that "dazzle" the adult eye, no longer accustomed to such spiritual brilliance. In the final stanza the speaker studies "through a long night" wishing for the reward of being able to see God as clearly as the bright light of "mid-day." More subtly, the poet reinforces the unreachable nature of childhood's spiritual state by describing it in negative terms: It is "harmless," "love without lust" and "without self-ends" (that is, unselfish). Even the light is so bright as to make description impossible. Moreover, in the final stanza, all that the speaker can see and study is "Thy edges, and thy bordering light," while yearning to see "thy Center." The buried imagery is one of a book, of which the speaker can only perceive the white margins, unable to read the text in the center of the page. The speaker, despite his disdain of the world, is already too far gone to be able to understand or describe what he glimpses, unless he is reborn through Christ.

The poem also demonstrates metaphysical wordplay, such as that on "content" in the first stanza. Similarly, "gravely cast themselves away," in the third stanza, refers both to the perils of the (misguided) seriousness of adulthood and the literal grave to which the eternal life with Christ is the only alternative. In that same stanza, "Business and weighty action all / Checking the poor child for his play" refers to serious adults criticizing children (who are actually their spiritual betters); it also implies a metaphor of literal weight, a burden to children that inhibits their play and a contrast to the guardian flight of angels in the next stanza.

Finally, Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" develops as a syllogism, a three-part argument with major premise, minor premise, and conclusion. In part 1 (lines 1-20), the speaker says in hypothetical conjecture that if he had enough time, he would praise his beloved mistress forever. In part 2 (lines 21-32), the tone abruptly shifts as the rapid movement of time rushes past, threatening to waste the speaker's passion and the mistress's glorious physical beauty. In part 3 (lines 33-46), the speaker urges—in violent, forceful language—that they should enjoy each other's company and defeat "Time" at his own game. If a syllogism is properly constructed, the

conclusion is irrefutable. However, the speaker's conclusion is illogical: the mistress's yielding cannot stop the progress of the sun and speed it away.

In addition to Marvell's use of the syllogistic form, his use of contrast, and the repetition of the monosyllabic "Now" to give the last section a feeling of urgency, much of the power of the poem is also achieved through Marvell's use of imagery. The exotic, distant, flowing Ganges is contrasted with the down-to-earth hometown, tidal Humber. The rich and majestic ruby, which is to gems what the sun is to the planets and the king to the rest of society, is contrasted with the lowly, pastoral love complaint. "Vegetable" love refers to the vegetative, or growing, capacity of the soul of plants or animals, which must take time to reach normal growth and would need much longer to grow "Vaster than empires." The most celebrate image of the poem, "Time's wingèd chariot," combines the image of speed with harassment and gains even more power by being contrasted with the sterility of "Deserts" and the stark stillness of "vast eternity." The propriety of the image of devouring worms in a love poem has been questioned, but the worms certainly work well in the creation of a sense of urgency in the poem. So also does the contrast in the images of eating: the eager appetite of the "amorous birds of prey" pitted against the slow, trapped, defeated helplessness of being devoured, slow bite by slow bite, in the lazy-but-powerful jaws of time.

There is a declaration of unity and even mutuality, should the hoped-for culmination of his pleading be reached, in the image of their sweetness and their strength (not her sweetness and his strength) being rolled up tightly into one ball. The image increases in vitality and strength (hinting at a more fitting end to virginity than a congregation of politic worms) as this ball tears through the gates of life. There is power in the oxymoronic mixing of toughness, strife, and iron with pleasures and the fertility of the gates of life. The final image of the sun standing still could possibly be an allusion to Joshua's commanding the sun to stand still so he could finish the day's slaughter in battle but is more likely an allusion to Zeus performing the same feat to extend by twenty-four hours his night with the lovely Alcmene in the pleas; task of engendering Hercules. Perhaps this final couplet, which some editors separate from the last section of the poem, merely suggests, "Time flies when you having fun."

Other technical felicities include Marvell's creation of sounds to fit the sense of the poem. The alliteration of "long love's day" combines with the use of long vowels and diphthongs to create the feeling of slow time in the first section of the poem, despite its quick succession of images. The repeated, aspirated *h* sounds and the *ch* sound in "chariot" almost make the reader feel the rushing of wind that accompanies the beating of wings. In the last section of the poem, the combination of liquid *l*'s and the long back-of-the-mouth vowels suggests the action of rolling something up: "Let us roll all our strength and all / Our sweetness up into one ball." The sudden shift to frontal vowels and the onomatopoeic "tear" provides an abrupt shift as the ball takes on the characteristics of a cannonball. The effective use of variations in the rhymed iambic tetrameter rhythm also adds to the experience of meaning by correlating sound with sense. Note the use of spondees in "Love you ten years," "last age," "roll all," "rough strife," and "Stand still." Another rhythmic effect that underscores the meaning of the words is the use of an occasional accented first syllable coming after an enjambment ending in a long vowel that crescendos into the accent. Especially effective are "I would/ Love you" (lines 7 and 8), "should growl Vaster" (lines 11 and 12), "I always hear/ Time's" (lines 21 and 22), and "before us lie! Deserts" (lines 23 and 24).