

To an Army Wife, in Sardis

S A P P H O

Although nine books of Sappho's poetry existed in ancient times, only about five percent of her poetry has survived. What remains is in the form of fragments written on pieces of papyrus and found in Egypt. Scholars think that the following poem may be one of only two complete poems that still exist.

Some say a cavalry corps,
some infantry, some, again,
will maintain that the swift oars

of our fleet are the finest
sight on dark earth; but I say
that whatever one loves, is.

5

This is easily proved: did
not Helen—she who had scanned
the flower of the world's manhood—

choose as first among men one
who laid Troy's honor in ruin?¹
warped to his will, forgetting

10

love due her own blood, her own
child, she wandered far with him.
So Anactoria, although you

15

being far away forget us,
the dear sound of your footstep
and light glancing in your eyes

would move me more than glitter
of Lydian horse or armored
tread of mainland infantry.

20

¹*Helen . . . Troy's honor in ruin:* In Greek mythology, Helen, queen of Sparta and wife of Menelaus, eloped with Paris, son of King Priam of Troy. This event ignited the Trojan War.

To me he seems like a god
as he sits facing you and
hears you near as you speak
softly and laugh

in a sweet echo that jolts
the heart in my ribs. For now
as I look at you my voice
is empty and

can say nothing as my tongue
cracks and slender fire is quick
under my skin. My eyes are dead
to light, my ears

pound, and sweat pours over me.
I convulse, paler than grass,
and feel my mind slip as I
go close to death

[but must suffer all, being poor.]

~~~~~  
Come, holy tortoise shell,  
my lyre, and become a poem.

~~~~~  
My mother always said
that in her youth she was
exceedingly in fashion

wearing a purple ribbon
looped in her hair. But
the girl whose hair is yellower

than torchlight need wear no
colorful ribbons from Sardis—
but a garland of fresh flowers.

~~~~~  
Like a mountain whirlwind  
punishing the oak trees,  
love shattered my heart.

~~~~~  
I could not hope
to touch the sky
with my two arms.

~~~~~  
The glow and beauty of the stars  
are nothing near the splendid moon  
when in her roundness she burns silver  
about the world.

~~~~~  
In gold sandals
dawn like a thief
fell upon me.

Question 2

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

The following two poems are about Helen of Troy. Renowned in the ancient world for her beauty, Helen was the wife of Menelaus, a Greek king. She was carried off to Troy by the Trojan prince Paris, and her abduction was the immediate cause of the Trojan War.

Read the two poems carefully. Considering such elements as speaker, diction, imagery, form, and tone, write a well-organized essay in which you contrast the speakers' views of Helen.

To Helen

Helen, thy beauty is to me
Like those Nicéan barks of yore,
That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,
Line The weary, way-worn wanderer bore
(5) To his own native shore.

On desperate seas long wont to roam,
Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,
Thy Naiad¹ airs have brought me home
(10) To the glory that was Greece,
And the grandeur that was Rome.

Lo! in yon brilliant window-niche
How statue-like I see thee stand,
The agate lamp within thy hand!
Ah, Psyche,² from the regions which
Are Holy-Land!

—Edgar Allan Poe

¹In Greek mythology, Naiads are water nymphs who live in lakes, rivers, springs, and fountains.

²The personification of the human soul who married Cupid, the god of love.

Helen

All Greece hates
the still eyes in the white face,
the lustre as of olives
Line where she stands,
(5) and the white hands.

All Greece reviles
the wan face when she smiles,
hating it deeper still
(10) when it grows wan and white,
remembering past enchantments
and past ills.

Greece sees, unmoved,
God's daughter, born of love,
the beauty of cool feet
(15) and slenderest knees,
could love indeed the maid,
only if she were laid,
white ash amid funereal cypresses.

—H.D.

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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 5 down into pieces, kneaded them in my two strong hands
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.'

...
20 So they sent their ravishing voices out across the air
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" by Margaret Atwood.
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*In Greek mythology, Sirens are often represented as birds
with the heads of women.

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For the Union Dead

"Relinquant Omnia Servare Rem Publicam"¹

The old South Boston Aquarium stands
in a Sahara of snow now. Its broken windows are boarded.
The bronze weathervane cod has lost half its scales.
The airy tanks are dry.

- 5 Once my nose crawled like a snail on the glass;
 my hand tingled
 to burst the bubbles
 drifting from the noses of the cowed, compliant fish.
 My hand draws back. I often sigh still
- 10 for the dark downward and vegetating kingdom
 of the fish and reptile. One morning last March,
 I pressed against the new barbed and galvanized
 fence on the Boston Common . Behind their cage,
 yellow dinosaur steamshovels were grunting
- 15 at the cropped up tons of mush and grass
 to gouge their underworld garage .
 Parking spaces luxuriate like civic
 sandpiles in the heart of Boston.
 A girdle of orange, Puritan-pumpkin colored girders
- 20 braces the tingling Statehouse,
 shaking over the excavations, as it faces Colonel Shaw
 and his bell-cheeked Negro infantry
 on St. Gaudens' shaking Civil War relief ,
 propped by a plank splint against the garage's earthquake.
- 25 Two months after marching through Boston,
 half the regiment was dead;
 at the dedication ,
 William James could almost hear the bronze Negroes breathe.
 Their monument sticks like a fishbone
- 30 in the city's throat.
 Its Colonel is as lean
 as a compass-needle.
 He has an angry wrenlike vigilance,
 a greyhound's gentle tautness;
- 35 he seems to wince at pleasure,
 and suffocate for privacy.
 He is out of bounds now. He rejoices in man's lovely,
 peculiar power to choose life and die-
 when he leads his black soldiers to death,

¹ "They gave up everything to preserve the republic."

40 he cannot bend his back.
On a thousand small town New England greens,
the old white churches hold their air
of sparse, sincere rebellion; frayed flags
quilt the graveyards of the Grand Army of the Republic

45 The stone statues of the abstract Union Soldier
grow slimmer and younger each year-
wasp-waisted, the doze over muskets
and muse through their sideburns...
Shaw's father wanted no monument

50 except the ditch,
where his son's body was thrown
and lost with his "niggers."
The ditch is nearer.
There are no statues for the last war here;

55 on Boylston Street, a commercial photograph
shows Hiroshima boiling
over a Mosler Safe, the "Rock of Ages"
that survived the blast. Space is nearer.
When I crouch to my television set,

60 the drained faces of Negro school-children rise like balloons.
Colonel Shaw
is riding on his bubble,
he waits
for the blessed break.

65 The Aquarium is gone. Everywhere,
giant finned cars nose forward like fish;
a savage servility
slides by on grease.

-- Robert Lowell

Augustus Saint-Gaudens' memorial to
Robert Gould Shaw and the Massachusetts
54th Regiment is considered one of America's
greatest public monuments, installed at the
top of Boston Common across from the
State House, the larger-than-life bronze
relief is often laid with flowers and sometimes
a bouquet is slipped through the arm of Colonel
Robert Gould Shaw, the troop's commanding officer.



William James ^{pioneer, psychologist}
^{philosopher}
(brother of Henry James) ^{physician}

1897 built & dedicated

Robert_Gould_Shaw_Memorial.jpeg (500 x 424 pixel, file size: 102 KB,
MIME type: image/jpeg)

Robert Gould Shaw Memorial, by Augustus Saint-Gaudens

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