

1994 ENGLISH LITERATURE

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 Nicean 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
To the glory that was Greece, (10)
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.

•The 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
where she stands,
(5) and the white hands.

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

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

—H.D.

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