



AP[®] English Literature 2003 Sample Student Responses Form B

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In the poetic sequence "Modern Love", George Meredith uses a wealth of figurative language and metaphors to portray a view of modern love as being akin to living death. This bleak, pessimistic view is communicated primarily through his use of personification and metaphor as means to characterise modern lovers.

The two characters of this piece, an unidentified "he" (line 1) and a similarly unidentified "she" (line 1), are round, tragic figures that serve to illustrate modern love at its worst. Their marriage bed, called only a "common bed" (line 3), appears to lack the fiery passion and love traditionally associated with marriage. The wife's internal reality, revealed to us through the poet's use of indirect characterization, becomes apparent as "she wept with waking eyes" (l. 1). Clearly, she is miserable in her matrimony, and openly demonstrates this discontent through, "the strange low sobs that shook their common bed" (l. 3). The wife's external reality, described as "stone-still" (line 7) in a morbid metaphor, also implies how unhappy she is.

Her husband appears to share a similar attitude toward their "marriage-furniture" (l. 15); he feels that his wife's weeping ~~is~~ is "dreadfully venomous to him" (l. 6), indicating the feelings of resentment and bitterness he harbours toward her. This gives the reader some insight into his internal reality and serves to illustrate how Meredith views "modern love". The lovers in this sequence, characterised with similes ~~the~~ comparing them to "sculptured effigies" (l. 4) devoid of life and passion, are only the primary means that the speaker
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utilises to convey his views on modern love. Their stony, passionless attitudes toward each other are painful to read ~~about~~, but they effectively communicate the nature of their love.

Another significant means by which the speaker communicates his ideas on modern love is figurative language and imagery. He employs personification particularly well in illustrating modern love, lending human characteristics to the wife's "waking eyes," (l. 1), the husband's "hand's light giver" (l. 2), the woman's sobs "that shook their common bed" (l. 3), and her "giant heart" (line 9) which is egged on to "drink the pale drug of silence" (line 10). Each of these examples serve to dehumanise the ~~characters~~ the characters; it is as if ~~they are~~ their individual eyes and hearts and hands must act independently of them because they are so paralysed, so "Stone-still" (l. 7) by their passionless love. The speaker also uses several effective metaphors and similes to portray modern love, in all its misery. He makes a comparison between the wife's sobs and "little gaping snakes" (l. 5), thereby communicating the attitude of revulsion and distaste in which she is held. The dear lack of affection for her is ~~clear~~ evident. It appears that her response to this is to ~~not~~ "lay / stone-still... / with muffled pulses" (l. 6-8); in this description, the speaker is employing a metaphor ~~that~~ likening her to a corpse. This morbid comparison serves to further emphasise the death-like qualities of

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Modern love.

The final, most powerful literary device present in this poem is a conceit comparing the husband and wife to "sculptured effigies... upon their marriage-tomb" (lines 14-15). This poignant comparison truly conveys Meredith's attitude toward modern lovers: through their marriage, they have effectively committed themselves to a lifetime of death. The passion, the joy, the exuberance that once characterized their relationship has been replaced by a single common metaphorical desire: "the sword that severs all" (line 16). The reader, realising that the modern lovers desire nothing but death, fully understand the tragedy of modern love as portrayed by G. Meredith. Not only does it steal the joie de vivre of young, beautiful couples, it leaves them with nothing but a miserable series of "dead black years" (l. 12) behind them, full of sorrow, misery, and regret.

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The phrase used frequently in weddings, "til death do us part" has lately ~~been~~ become void of meaning ^{when} modern couples take and brake this oath easily. This was not always the case. People used to endure such inconvient marriages to the point that both partners suffered. In a time when marriage was forever, the english writer George Meredith sounds his silent rebellion ^{to eternal matrimony} in his poem "Modern Love".

He begins his story by telling how ~~the~~ ^{a man} first discovered ^{that} his wife's ~~unhappy~~ ^{the} unhappy ~~state~~. He describes how ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~at~~ mere "hand's light quiver by her head," (line 2) ~~that~~ she begins to cry uncontrollably. Surly this is not the love that the man married. Meredith is portraying how after marriage the woman in love is changed to the extent that the touch of her lover, now husband's hand is repulsive. And yet inspite of her obvious uncomfot, the marriage continues and she remains sharing his bed.

The aparent unhappiness of the woman has a drastic affect on the man, and meredith ~~uses~~ ^{uses} images of venomous snakes and poison to portray these feelings. ~~With~~ With each tear the woman cries the man feels "gaping snakes" ~~that~~ ^{that} are "deeply venomous to him" (line 5-6). The man, like the woman, remains in this torturous marriage and feels the pain of its endurance everyday. Once again, it is pointed out that love is gone, and that only pressure

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from society is keeping the two together.

The passage continues to reveal the pains of an old fashioned marriage that is not held together by love. In the end all the couple really has left is ~~the~~ "vain regret" (line 13) that years of tear filled nights have provided. That is not love. All this could have been prevented if the couple had adhered to a view of modern love. This is a love without regrets and poison. If they had had the courage to end it, they could have each loved again rather than dying together, bitter and yet alone ~~although~~ the couple had a sword between them their entire life, but lacked the ~~the~~ "sword that severs all" (line 16) and as a result were unhappy and without love. Modern love is given freely and taken away just as easily. Modern love is also knowing ~~the~~ when to let go.

George Meredith had a modern view of love which can be seen through his poem "modern love". In it he shows a dead, old fashioned love which could have been saved. It shows that love between two people doesn't always last forever, and in a modern world, ~~this~~ ^{this} needs to be recognized.

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Question 1

The "modern love" concept is seen ~~in~~ in the couple's relationship that has been lost in the past through regret and sorrows.

Lines 1-6 depicts the ~~see~~ relationship between the husband and the wife. He knows her sorrows simply "at his hand's light quiver by her head" (1.2) but they are "dreadfully venomous to him." (1.6) Her sorrows are too big for her, she cannot escape them, and they poisons her husband. Her crying "shook their common bed" (1.3) but ~~this is the~~ their bed seems to be the only thing they share. The husband ~~can~~ ~~does not~~ ~~see~~ is not able to share in his wife's sorrow because they are constantly present, "like this is seen through the simile: "like little ~~venomous~~ gaping snakes," (1.5) where the snake, portrayed as ~~an~~ evil ~~animal~~ ^{regrets}, stares without rest, ready to strike, yet simply a presence. His wife's evil sorrows never go anywhere, they are constantly watching to strike ~~for~~ the husband.

The wife carries ~~the~~ ^{her} burdens throughout the night that never seems to end. The author personifies ~~more~~ memory and tears, they "Drink the pale drop of silence." (1.10) that keep sleep away, and ~~keep on~~ ^{addicted to} bringing up the past full of sorrows. They were "looking through their dead black years, / By vain regret scrawled over the blank wall." (12-13) The woman keeps on looking to her past, though this is futile because she cannot change it, and the past is gone, like a ~~to~~ "the blank wall." (1.13) ~~Even~~

Even until their death, do they carry the burden of the past, ~~is~~ that they have forgotten to look at what they do have. Both are stuck "wishing for the sword that severs all." (1.16) ~~is~~ because they have lost what they do have to the past. ~~The~~ Modern love is empty and full of regrets.

