



AP[®] English Literature and Composition 2001 Sample Student Responses

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Subject matter

Looking strictly at the ~~total meanings~~ and structures of the poems by Wordsworth and Dunbar, one would imagine they were carbon copies of each other. Both start with calls to visionaries of the past, describe the present scenes of trouble, and then end with memories of the great qualities of the two leaders. However, while the subject matter and even some of the imagery, the ocean for example, link the two, the tone and style, and thus the meanings, of the two ~~poem~~ poems are completely different.

In Wordsworth's poem, there is a sense of urgency and energy that is apparent from the beginning. "Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour: England hath need of thee" It is a call, even a cry for assistance. This continues throughout the rest of the poem as he uses short phrases and series of words to emphasize the direness of the situation and need for help. "Oh! raise up, return to us again; And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power." This creates a passionate appeal, as if it were a telegram - short, to the point, but poignant.

This contrast sharply with Dunbar's ~~poem~~ poem, which is also signaled from the very beginning. "Ah, Douglass, we have fall'n on evil days" Dunbar even notes the sigh; regret, wistfulness, reminiscent. In this poem, Dunbar ~~uses~~ uses imagery and almost lyrical form, so that ^{while} Wordsworth poem was an appeal for help, Dunbar's seems more like a resignation to the "lonely dark." For example, in



describing the conditions in the U.S., Dunbar says, "Not ended then, the passionate ebb and flow, The awful tide that battled to and fro; We ride amid a tempest of dispraise." We can imagine the metaphor clearly - a lone ship being cast ~~to~~ back and forth in the tumultuous, frothy waters underneath a grey sky. He leaves us with a lingering image and sense of hopelessness ~~there~~ on the other hand, Wordsworth's description "she is a fen of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen, fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower have forfeited their English dower" is almost a list. He pointedly says that there are problems with the church, war, literature, home, and we feel like there are things to be done. This sense of activity is especially ironic because while Wordsworth's description is of a "stagnant waters," Dunbar's more sedate and wistful description is of a "tempest of dispraise."

Thus, in using different techniques the two poems come off with ~~very different~~ contrasting tones despite being on the same subject. While Wordsworth's poem seems to be demand that Milton return and with his god like powers put England to right, Dunbar's poem seems more like a longing for Douglass and his guidance to return but also a resignation that he will not

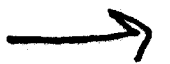
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Dunbar and Wordsworth, through these poems, cry out for the guidance and protection needed in the dark days of their respective countries. Both men look longingly to great men of the past ~~to~~ to serve as eternal examples of ~~what~~ the progress that must still be made. However, while Wordsworth calls ~~for~~ for a return of London to "virtue, freedom, and power", Dunbar seeks those things for a community of Americans who have never completely owned them.

These two works use similar devices and techniques to get their points across, which are also similar. For one, both works use rhyme throughout the poem. We see this in "London 1802" in lines one through four. We also see this in "Douglass" lines 1-4; this device serves to dramatize and emphasize the dire nature of the times in each country. Secondly, both works focus on the virtues of one man from the past. In Douglass, Dunbar references abolitionist Frederick Douglass, while William Wordsworth refers to English poet and political writer John Milton. These men are referred to, and really idolized, in these works because of their virtues and their well-known work in fighting causes. Indeed, these two poems share obvious commonalities but, we must look deeper to see their contrasts.

In these two pieces, contrasts can be drawn between the times of London in 1802 and America in 1902 and how the goals of these two poems differ. For one, ~~to~~ while William Wordsworth calls for a return to virtues and freedom, saying that England has become a "swamp of stagnant waters." We must ~~then~~ make the inference that in the time of John Milton, Londoners ^{came} were coming into an age of liberty and power in the public. However, this inference can't



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be made for the African American community in the time of Frederick Douglass. Dunbar, instead of calling for a return to virtue, ~~to get~~ calls for leadership, a guiding light through the dark fight for freedom ~~and~~ equality in the Black American community. We see this when he says he longs for the "Blast defying power of thy form, To give us comfort through the lonely dark." Indeed Wordsworth and Dunbar clearly differ when it comes to the intent with which they call for the great Milton and Frederick Douglass.

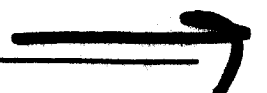
Throughout their commonalities and differences, we see that London in 1802 and the United States 100 years later were lands of bleakness ~~and~~ where the ~~necessary~~ relevant, poignant voices of Wordsworth and Dunbar called longingly for men of courage and virtue to guide and protect.

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When a father dies, he leaves a void in the lives of his children. Where there was previously a guiding voice, there is nothing. In their poems, William Wordsworth and Paul Laurence Dunbar both mourn the loss of their philosophical fathers, Milton and Douglass. The poems are similar in their structure and their begging tone, but they ~~address~~ address different men and different causes.

Both poems are sonnets. Sonnets are strictly structured, so both poets are suggesting that the only ~~the~~ proper way to address Milton or Douglass is in a formal tone. ~~Wordsworth's~~ Wordsworth's is a Shakespearian sonnet and Dunbar's is an Italian sonnet. ~~The~~ The use of a sonnet also implies a admiration towards Milton and Douglass, since sonnets are usually used with ~~a great deal of~~ passion and love towards the subjects.

"Douglass" and "London, 1802" beg for the return of the great men whom they address. They both describe the current world as "a fen" and "evil" (Wordsworth 2, Dunbar 1). After describing how hopeless the situation is, both poems plead for their hero's return.



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The poems address different men and so they describe different causes. Because Milton was a champion of free speech and liberty, Wordsworth's grievance that "England hath need of [Milton]" can be assumed to say, "the state of free speech in England hath need of thee." Likewise, Dunbar's appeal to Douglass specifies that Dunbar sees a problem in the black civil rights movement. Both poets mourn the loss of the leaders of their causes.

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