

Student Name: ID: Section:

(20 points, 10 minutes for planning and 70 minutes for writing)

Part I: Unseen Poem (5 points; 15 minutes)

Read the following poem carefully and answer the questions below in the space provided.

Sea-Fever

I must down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by,
And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white sail's shaking,
And a grey mist on the sea's face, and a grey dawn breaking.

I must down to the seas again, for the call of the running tide 5
Is a wild call and a clear call that may not be denied;
And all I ask is a windy day with the white clouds flying,
And the flung spray and the blown spume, and the sea-gulls crying.

I must down to the seas again, to the vagrant gypsy life,
To the gull's way and the whale's way where the wind's like a whetted knife; 10
And all I ask is a merry yarn from a laughing fellow-rover,
And quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long trick's over.

—John Masefield (1878–1967)

trick: a continuous stretch of some activity as 1) a sailor's turn of duty at the helm usually lasting for two hours
2) shift 3) a trip taken as part of one's employment

1. a) (0.5 point) Write the rhyme scheme of the poem.

aabb ccdd eeff
.....

b) (0.5 point) Scan the line below. (Indicate the stressed and unstressed syllables above the line, mark the foot divisions and name the prevailing foot and meter.)

And all | I ask | is a | tall ship | and a star | to steer | her by,

iambic heptameter
.....

2. (0.5 point) Name one poetic element that is especially significant in “Sea-Fever.”
Provide examples to illustrate your choice.

[Some possibilities:]

simile

- “the wind’s like a whetted knife” (l. 10)

metaphor

- “a tall ship and a star to steer her by” (l. 2)
(The speaker does not actually need the literal/real ship and star but he asks for someone or something to help him and guide him through his life.)

understatement

- “All I ask” (l. 2, 7, 11)

synecdoche

- “the white sail’s shaking” (l. 3)
- “a grey dawn breaking” (l. 4)
- “a windy day” (l. 7)
- “a merry yarn” (l. 11)
- “a laughing fellow-rover” (l. 11)

visual imagery

- “the seas” (l. 1)
- “the sky” (l. 1)
- “a tall ship” (l. 2)
- “a star” (l. 2)
- “the wheel’s kick” (l. 3)
- “the white sail’s shaking” (l. 3)
- “a grey mist on the sea’s face and a grey dawn breaking” (l. 4)
- “the white clouds flying” (l. 7)
- “the flung spray” (l. 8)
- “the blown spume” (l. 8)
- “the sea-gulls crying” (l. 8)

auditory imagery

- “the wind’s song” (l. 3)
- “the flung spray” (l. 8)
- “the blown spume” (l. 8)
- “the sea-gulls crying” (l. 8)
- “a laughing fellow-rover” (l. 11)
- ~“the call of the running tide” (l. 5)

tactile imagery

- “a windy day” (l. 7)
- “the flung spray” (l. 8)
- “the blown spume” (l. 8)
- “the wind’s like a whetted knife” (l. 10)

alliteration

- star, steer (l. 2)
- wheel, wind, white (l. 3)

rhyme

- sky, by (l. 1, 2) [and so on]

repetition

- “I must down to the seas again” (l. 1, 5, 9)
- grey, grey (l. 4)
- and
- call, call (l. 6)
- way, whale, where, wind, whetted (l. 10) These are alliteration: repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of a word or stressed initial syllable

symbol

- long trick (l. 12)
- sea(s)
- star
- sleep

3. (0.5 point) Choose a symbol that Masfield uses and explain its function in the poem.

[Some possibilities:]

Student A The sea symbolizes a way of life that the speaker yearns for. It functions as a set of imagery that ties the poem together and sets the feverish mood of the poem both through the thrice repeated “I must down to the seas again” and through visual and auditory motifs that mimic the rising and falling rhythm of the waves: “To the gull’s way and the whale’s way” where the narrator can re-experience “the wheel’s kick and the wind’s song and the white sail’s shaking.”

Student B Masefield uses the sea as a symbol. It functions in the poem as the main word of the entire poem. Everything from the title (“Sea-Fever”) to the last words of the poem (“when the long trick’s over”) is related to the sea, for example “tall ship” or “yarn.” It can consequently be said that this symbol functions as the theme of this poem.

Student C The sea is a symbol that almost functions as another character in the poem. It is alive with colors, movement, and sound, and with other life (gulls, whales, humans); it has a face (l. 4); it has feelings (l. 1). Apart from its role in terms of narrative as the object of desire for the narrator, and its role in terms of the mechanics of the poem as a unifying theme for its different aspects (subject matter, tone, trope, meter, tempo), the symbol serves to combine two vital worlds, the physical and the mental, in joining the concrete “sea” with an emotional “fever.” Therefore, the sea is not only the water, but also the gulls that cry there, the clouds that fly above, the wind that creates its waves, the whales that live in it, and the feelings that it evokes—representing an elemental way of living. It provides the vision in the poem, the sounds in the poem, and the life of the poem.

Student D The wind is the symbolic agent in the poem. It gives action to all the things it touches: the sails, the ship, the clouds, the waves, the spray, the spume. It can sing (l. 3) and it can cut (“like a whetted knife” l. 10). It appears in all the stanzas as if without it not only would there be no movement of the elements mentioned above, but the poem itself will come to halt. Like poetic inspiration, this windy agent (nature’s breath, so to speak) is the driving force in Masefield’s poem but invisible. It can only be seen in the results of its actions and through other vehicles. When the narrator asks for “the wind’s song” and “a windy day,” the wind is, more than ever, motivation symbolized.

Student E A day is used as a symbol of a man’s envisioned dawn and death. Masefield in the first stanza describes “a grey dawn breaking.” In the second stanza the gray dawn progresses into “a windy day.” The last stanza concludes with “quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long trick’s over” marking the end of this symbolic day. The temporal cycle of a day provides the structural framework of the poem that suggests a human analogy. Masefield’s poem encapsulates the narrator’s desired life with a day, from beginning to close.

4. (1 point) What elements, if any, does Masefield's poem share with the textbook definition of allegory: "A form of extended metaphor in which objects, persons, and actions in a narrative are equated with meanings/ideas that lie outside the narrative itself. Thus it represents one thing in the guise of another—an abstraction in that of a concrete image."? Where does he differ?

[Some possibilities:]

Student A Masefield's poem shares some elements with the definition of allegory in textbooks. The poem is a kind of narrative which has a surface meaning and an ulterior meaning as the traditional allegory does. But allegory is usually for didactic purposes and can be analyzed in a systematic manner with personification of abstract values or qualities as a predominant characteristic. Although there is suggestive personification as a literary device (such as "the lonely sea" or "the sea's face"), Masefield's poem seems to be for other purposes (i.e. a personal expression), not a didactic one.

Student B "Sea-Fever" is a mini-allegory (only three stanzas long), especially compared to medieval allegorical tales like Spenser's The Faerie Queene which consists of several books. While Masefield defies convention in terms of narrative length, he shares with tradition in terms of using extended metaphors that express abstract ideas through concrete objects in images like the sea, the wind, and the ship.

5. (2 points) The rover prefaces his wishes with "all I ask" as if his requests are very little. The lightness of that expression is contrasted by the weight of "must" in "I must down to the seas again" that begins each stanza. How serious is his want? Discuss how Masefield conveys the speaker's sea-fever. Refer to specific words and lines in the poem to illustrate your points.

[Some possibilities:]

Student A The narrator's longing for the sea is very serious. It is "a wild call and a clear call" like the "Siren Song" that is hard to deny. "All I ask" underscores a pattern of understating his need exemplified by the use of synecdoche that only serves to call attention to the hinted at entirety of elements and need. Singular items ("a sweet dream," "a merry yarn," "a windy day," "a grey dawn," and the lone "sail's shaking") are all synecdochic parts that signify multitudes or a whole. Ships run with more than one sail. Sailors navigate better with constellations of stars not just

one star (although the North Star is singularly essential). Accordingly, what the speaker asks for and needs is not literally one windy day, but many days of good wind in order to sail well. The incessant repetition of “and” accumulates both objects and need, building up tension. The rhythm of the poem, simulating the undulation of waves in the sea, is like a chant, the beating of the heart, one’s pulse. It’s an allegory of life’s journey, a matter of life and death. It is a big desire: a desire for a kind of life, an entire life, and a kind of death. He is asking not only for a fulfilling life, but also a pleasant and unpainful death (“quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long trick’s over”). He is asking not only for the wind and the stars, not only for the present but also the future, not requesting things in life, but demanding things for after life as well.

Student B The speaker is not entirely serious. Although each of the poem’s three stanzas begins with “I must down to the seas again,” it is not quite the demand of “I” to go to the sea, but rather “the call of the running tide” which is “a wild call and a clear call that may not be denied” (l. 5, 6; emphasis mine). The rover’s true wish, then, is not actually the “tall ship” (l. 2), “a windy day” (l. 7), or “a merry yarn” (l. 11). These elements are merely things that will make his true wish come more easily and allow him to pass the time, day by day, more pleasantly. His true wish is in the last line, not for the journey, but for the journey’s end: “quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long trick’s over.”

Student C The narrator’s need is not as serious as he thinks. The emphatic “I must” is undermined by the ironic “all I ask” which understates the number and enormity of things he is asking for. He will need not one but several merry yarns to last him the entire trip. Is he truly requesting light and guidance from one mere star? He also wants ships, mist, dawns, days, and clouds. Furthermore, the strength of the wild and clear call is undercut by the curious use of “may not” instead of “cannot be denied.” “May” weakens the heat of the phrase by several degrees. This vacillation is consistent with the misleading suggestiveness of the title “Sea-Fever” which at first glance seems very serious, but a fever, although burning and intense, is a temporary illness which will pass. Like the “vagrant gypsy life” that the rover desires, a fever is not permanent.

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On the other hand, unlike the irony and equivocation above, the narrator's list for pleasure is strong and unambiguous. He wants to be merry, to be entertained, to have a sweet dream, and laughing, fun, light-hearted company with which to while away the time. "Sea-Fever" is allegory for a phase of yearning, a spell of desire, a short-term weakness. When we say "Jigme fever" we mean an intense but temporary craze. The phrase to "go down to the seas again" (my emphasis) indicates that he has been there before. The fever is a temporary attack of missing the sea. The poem, then, is his memory or nostalgia for that past experience. These verses are paying tribute to a lifestyle that he no longer has or can have, and would like to enjoy but can't (yet).