

2001 AP® ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION  
FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION  
SECTION II

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

The letter below was written in 1866 by the English novelist Marian Evans Lewes (who used the pen name George Eliot) in response to a letter from an American woman, Melusina Fay Peirce.

Read the letter carefully. Then write an essay in which you analyze the rhetorical strategies Lewes uses to establish her position about the development of a writer.

My dear Madam

Line I do not usually answer letters unless they demand  
an answer, finding the days too short for much corre-  
spondence; but I am so deeply touched by your words  
5 of tenderness and by the details you tell me about  
yourself, that I cannot keep total silence towards you.

My consciousness is not of the triumphant kind  
your generous joy on my behalf leads you to imagine.  
Exultation is a dream before achievement, and rarely  
comes after. What comes after, is rather the sense  
10 that the work has been produced within one, like  
offspring, developing and growing by some force  
of which one's own life has only served as a vehicle,  
and that what is left of oneself is only a poor husk.  
Besides, the vision of something that life might be  
15 and that one's own ignorance and incompleteness  
have hindered it from being, presses more and more  
as time advances. The only problem for us, the only  
hope, is to try and unite the utmost activity with the  
utmost resignation. Does this seem melancholy?  
20 I think it is less melancholy than any sort of self-  
flattery.

I want to tell you not to fancy yourself old because  
you are thirty, or to regret that you have not yet  
written anything. It is a misfortune to many that they  
25 begin to write when they are young and give out all  
that is genuine and peculiar in them when it can be  
no better than trashy, unripe fruit. There is nothing  
more dreary than the life of a writer who has early  
exhausted himself. I enter into those young struggles  
30 of yours to get knowledge, into the longing you feel  
to do something more than domestic duties while yet  
you are held fast by womanly necessities for neatness  
and household perfection as well as by the lack of  
bodily strength. Something of all that I have gone  
35 through myself. I have never known perfect health,  
and I have known what it was to have close ties

making me feel the wants of others as my own and to  
have very little money by which these wants could be  
met. Before that, I was too proud and ambitious to  
40 write: I did not believe that I could do anything fine,  
and I did not choose to do anything of that mediocre  
sort which I despised when it was done by others.  
I began, however, by a sort of writing which had no  
great glory belonging to it, but which I felt certain  
45 I could do faithfully and well. This resolve to work  
at what did not gratify my ambition, and to care only  
that I worked faithfully, was equivalent to the old  
phrase—"using the means of grace." Not long after  
that, I wrote fiction which has been thought a great  
50 deal of—but the satisfaction I have got out of it has  
not been exactly that of ambition. When we are young  
we say, "I should be proud if I could do that." Having  
done it, one finds oneself the reverse of proud.

I will say no more about myself except that you  
55 must not imagine my position to be at all like  
Romola's.<sup>1</sup> I have the best of husbands, the most  
sympathetic of companions; indeed, I have more than  
my share of love in a world where so many are pining  
for it. Mr. Lewes,<sup>2</sup> who cares supremely for science,  
60 is interested in what you say of your husband's  
labours; and he is so delighted when anything good or  
pretty comes to me that I think he is more grateful to  
you than I am for your generous, affectionate words.  
Yet I too am not insensible, but shall remain always

Yours in grateful memory  
M. E. Lewes.

<sup>1</sup> Romola: the isolated, unhappily married main character in one of Eliot's novels

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Lewes: Eliot's common-law husband, a prominent philosopher