

**ENGLISH HL 3 August 2024**

**GRADE 12 POETRY NOTES ON: The Morning Sun Is Shining**

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| **THE MORNING SUN IS SHINING OLIVE SCREINER** |

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| **THE MORNING SUN IS SHINING – OLIVE SCHREINER**     1. The morning sun is shining on 2. The green, green willow tree, 3. And sends a golden sunbeam 4. To dance upon my knee. 5. The fountain bubbles merrily, 6. The yellow locusts spring, 7. Of life and light and sunshine 8. The happy brown birds sing. 9. The earth is clothed with beauty, 10. The air is filled with song, 11. The yellow thorn trees load the wind 12. With odours sweet and strong.      1. There is a hand I never touch 2. And a face I never see; 3. Now what is sunshine, what is song, 4. Now what is light to me? |

**BACKGROUND**

Olive Schreiner (1855-1920) was born at a mission station called Wittebergen near Herschel in the Eastern Cape. She is best known for her critically acclaimed novel ***The Story of an African Farm***, initially published under the pseudonym Ralph Iron because of a contemporary prejudice against women authors. After achieving recognition as a writer, Schreiner wrote extensively on a range of political and social issues as an opponent of racism and an early feminist. Her book ***Women and Labour***, written in 1911, was considered the bible of the women's emancipation movement in England and America. She was also a pacifist and did not agree with British imperialism in South Africa or with the South African (Anglo-Boer) War that was fought to achieve it.

This poem conveys a strong sense of place and the natural environment, as often found in Schreiner’s works.

**THE TITLE**

The title introduces a positive image – we associate a bright, sunny morning with warmth and happiness. However, there is a figurative irony: Her sun (child) is no longer shining (has died). The title and the first 12 lines of ‘The Morning Sun is Shining’ invite the reader to see the beauty of Olive Schreiner’s Karoo, blessed with green willow trees, golden sunshine, bubbling fountains, springing locusts, birdsong and the scent of the thorn trees’ yellow flowers.

We realise in line 13, however, that the speaker is mourning someone’s death: ‘There is a hand I never touch/And a face I never see’. Because of this, she writes, ‘Now what is sunshine, what is song, /Now what is light to me’. What begins as a lyrical celebration of nature ends up as a lament for the loss of a loved one.

**SUMMARY**

The speaker praises the beauty of Nature around her. She describes various aspects and uses many auditory ‘images’ to engage the reader. The last four lines step away from the natural scene. The sadness in these lines (to do with loss) are surprising, given the tone and content of the preceding lines.

Happiness is real when shared”. The poet comments on the beauty of a morning in which the sun is shining. She highlights the various elements that make the morning so beautiful, but then she changes track/ direction and asks, rhetorically, what is the purpose of a beautiful morning if it cannot be shared with anyone. A nature poem that shows the beauty of nature, but highlights her loneliness as she has no one with whom to share it.

Olive Schreiner’s only child, a daughter, died within a day of being born. The juxtaposition between the beauty and abundance of Nature, and the immense loss suffered by the speaker, is poignant and incredibly sad.

**FORM/STRUCTURE**

A 16-line poem made up of 4 distinct parts. In line 1-4 she discusses the sense of sight, 5-8 hearing and 9-12 smell. All these senses enjoy the morning with the sun shining. There is a regular rhyme scheme and rhythm throughout lines 1-12. The last four lines deviate from this pattern. This ‘break’ in pattern increases the impact of the unexpected contents of the last four lines.

**LINES 1-2**

*The morning sun is shining on / The green, green willow tree,*

Lines 1-2 set the scene: it’s a beautiful morning and the speaker reflects on the beauty of the morning.

The repetition of *‘green’* reinforces the beauty of nature, emphasising the intensity of the colour of the willow tree. Green is a colour that is associated with life, synonymous to freshness, lush vegetation and health. The sun is also symbolic of life.

**LINES 3-4**

*And sends a golden sunbeam / To dance upon my knee.*

The personification of how the sun blesses the earth and provides joy and entertainment reinforces the beauty of the morning and helps create a mood of joy / enjoyment / happiness/ cheerfulness.

It is a benevolent sun *“golden”* that causes happiness and has connotations of riches and wealth and beauty.

**LINES 5-8**

*The fountain bubbles merrily, / The yellow locusts spring, / Of life and light and sunshine / The happy brown birds sing.*

These lines expand on the beauty of nature on a sensory level.

The personification in line 5 gives the fountain the human quality of being joyful and reinforces the mood of happiness / cheerfulness. The personification succeeds in providing an idyllic view of the beautiful morning which emphasises the sense of well-being and happiness.

The various hues of the colour yellow continue with the *“yellow locust”,* just like the *“golden sun”* in line 3.

The word ’*spring’* relate to the energy inherent in and adds vibrancy to elements of nature. This idea is amplified by the description of ‘brown birds’ in line 8. The onomatopoeic word “bubbles” is a happy sound.

The repetition of *‘and’* (line 7) alludes to the spontaneous expression of emotions and reinforces the beauty of the speaker’s surroundings.

The alliteration in line 7 (The repetition of the “l” sound: *life and light*) gives a sense of freedom and unburdened life in the happy morning.

The singing of the bird is joyous “…happy brown bird sing…” The birds as singing about *‘life and light and sunshine’*. This contributes to the idea that the natural world is celebrating life. It is as if the plants, insects and birds are all rejoicing in the morning sunshine.

**LINES 9-12**

*The earth is clothed with beauty, / The air is filled with song / The yellow thorn trees load the wind / With odours sweet and strong.*

*clothed* – the earth is personified wearing the beautiful clothing. Every part of the world is covered *(clothed)* and “filled” with a beauty that makes the poet happy.

*load the wind with odours sweet and strong* – Schreiner was a South African poet, so her reference to the “thorn trees’ contextualizes the poem. The trees are also full of flowers and the sense of smell is used to show how their smell is pervasive. *sweet and strong* – the alliteration is used to reinforce the strength of the smell.

The sibilant ‘s’ in “song”, “sweet” and “strong” contribute to the lyrical quality of the poem. This poem celebrates the beauty and sounds and smells of Nature.

**LINES 13-16**

*There is a hand I never touch / And a face I never see; / Now what is sunshine, what is song, / Now what is light to me?*

The poet’s tone/attitude changes in these lines. This quatrain reflects a stark contrast in both tone and mood in comparison to the first three quatrains.

The word “never” indicates that there is absolutely no possibility of her being able to touch or see her child. The speaker changes to a tone of despondency / sadness /grief /dejection / hopelessness when reflecting on the loss that she has suffered.

The speaker is filled with despair because she has lost someone important to her. *‘Touch’* suggests a very close relationship with this person. It is someone she believes she will never see again, and this thought makes her so unhappy she cannot appreciate the natural beauty around her.

The use of the present tense implies that despite the passage of time, the speaker still grieves. This could possibly describe the extent of the speaker’s pain at the loss of a loved one.

She ends the poem with a rhetorical question, asking what is the point of experiencing a beautiful, natural morning if there is no one to share it with. The rhetorical question engages the reader to consider her situation; a beautiful day all alone, with no hope of company. She finds no solace in her beautiful surroundings.

It implies that the beauty of the morning / the beauty of nature cannot overshadow the pain / emotional trauma the speaker experiences.

**THEMES**

* “Happiness is real when shared”. The poet comments on the beauty of a morning in which the sun is shining. She highlights the various elements that make the morning so beautiful, but then she changes track / direction and asks, rhetorically, what is the purpose of a beautiful morning if it cannot be shared with anyone.
* A nature poem that shows the beauty of nature, but highlights her loneliness as she has no one to share it with.

**TONE**

* The tone of the first 12 lines is cheerful/happy/positive/joyful. Nature is beautiful and celebrated.
* The last 4 lines changes to a tone of despair, negativity, sadness, hopelessness. She is describing her sorrow and how the beautiful morning makes her sadness even greater, more poignant.

#### Mood

* The joyous/cheerful tone (lines 1-12) creates a celebratory mood as the speaker admires the bustling beauty of nature in the morning.
* In lines 13-16, the mood changes to a sombre one as the speaker expresses the loss associated with human experiences.

**QUESTION 1 – ESSAY QUESTION**

*In a carefully planned essay, discuss how the poet uses form, imagery and tone to convey the message of the poem.* Your response should be in the form of a well-constructed essayof 250-300 words (about ONE page)  **[10]**

### **Suggested Answer for Question A: Essay**

In your response, you may include some/ all the following points:

* Line structure and its effects
* The use of anaphora and its overall impact on the poem
* The two stanzas and the manner they are structured
* The rhyme scheme and its effect on the poem
* For the various forms of imagery, state clearly the effect of each one of them on our senses
* The effects of alliteration on the overall message
* The cheerful tone in the first 12 lines and the change in the last 4

lines

* The reasons for the change in tone.

### **QUESTION 2 – CONTEXTUAL QUESTIONS**

### **The Morning Sun is Shining Olive Schreiner**

1. Describe the mood of the first four lines of the poem. Pay attention to imagery and diction in your answer. (3) ***(A bright, sunny, idyllic morning has a positive connotation. It creates a positive/happy/joyful mood. The image the sunbeam “dancing” on the speaker’s knee creates happiness and joy. The word ‘golden’ has a connotation of riches and beauty. The repetition of the word ‘green’ implies vitality and youth. There is an almost tactile sense of happiness.)***
2. Identify the tone in the first 12 lines. Now state the tone in the last 4 lines. Why does it change? (3) ***(The tone of the first 12 lines is cheerful/happy/positive/joyful. Nature is beautiful and celebrated. The last 4 lines changes to a tone of despair, negativity, sadness, hopelessness. She is describing her sorrow and how the beautiful morning makes her sadness even greater, more poignant.)***

1. How does the poet use colour to create the mood of the first stanza? (2)

***(The mood is cheerful, happy, optimistic, celebratory. “green” has connotations of youth and vitality. “Golden” has connotations of riches and wealth and beauty.)***

1. What figure of speech is used in “And sends a golden sunbeam / To dance upon my knee”? Explain the effectiveness of this figure of speech. (3)

***(Personification – the sunbeam is moving freely, perhaps through the leaves and trees. This evokes a joyful and playful mood and atmosphere.)***

1. Discuss the effectiveness of the personification in lines 5-8.

***(The fountain bubbles “merrily” and the birds are “happy”. This creates a sense of cheerfulness and happiness. The natural world is celebrating beauty and joy. Life is celebrated. All rejoice in the beauty of the morning.)***

1. Comment on how the poet’s use of sound contributes to the impact of the poem. (3)

***(‘Bubbles’ is an example of onomatopoeia – a happy/active/’alive’ connotation. The alliteration in “green, green” and “golden” – connotations of youth and wealth. Assonance and alliteration in “life and light” connect these words – life is good! The sibilant ‘s’ in “song”, “sweet” and “strong” contribute to the lyrical quality of the poem. This poem celebrates the beauty and sounds and smells of Nature.)***

1. Lines 13-14 bring forth a change in tone and mood. Discuss this change. (3)

***(The tone and mood change from joyful and celebratory to one of grief and sorrow. Although the speaker states that Nature is beautiful and to be celebrated, her grief is larger than that. She does not find solace in the beauty.)***

1. Discuss the effectiveness of the poem’s final question as a conclusion to the poem. (3)

***(The speaker points out that all the beauty in nature is of no value in this situation. She finds no solace in her beautiful surroundings. In fact, the beauty of the scene is so jarring, as it is at odds with her depressed state. There is someone whom she has lost and this loss induces a depression that no lovely day can lessen.)***

1. What, do you think, was the poet’s intention in the writing of this poem? (2)

***(The poet praises Nature but also expresses her sorrow at her very personal loss. She is unable to find happiness. Even the beautiful morning does not comfort her in her grief. The abundance******of life makes her even sadder. She is very sad and inconsolable.)***