

2003 AP[®] ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION
FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

Question 2

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

The following passage is an excerpt from “The Other Paris,” a short story by the Canadian writer Mavis Gallant. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, explain how the author uses narrative voice and characterization to provide social commentary.

Line
5 If anyone had asked Carol at what precise moment she fell in love, or where Howard Mitchell proposed to her, she would have imagined, quite sincerely, a scene that involved all at once the Seine, moonlight, barrows of violets, acacias in flower, and a confused, misty background of the Eiffel tower and little crooked streets. This was what everyone expected, and she had nearly come to believe it herself.

10 Actually, he had proposed at lunch, over a tuna-fish salad. He and Carol had known each other less than three weeks, and their conversation, until then, had been limited to their office—an American government agency—and the people in it. Carol was twenty-two; no one had proposed to her before, except an

15 unsuitable medical student with no money and eight years’ training still to go. She was under the illusion that in a short time she would be so old no one would ask her again. She accepted at once, and Howard celebrated by ordering an extra bottle of wine. Both

20 would have liked champagne, as a more emphatic symbol of the unusual, but each was too diffident to suggest it.

25 The fact that Carol was not in love with Howard Mitchell did not dismay her in the least. From a series of helpful college lectures on marriage she had learned that a common interest, such as a liking for Irish setters, was the true basis for happiness, and that the illusion of love was a blight imposed by the film industry, and almost entirely responsible for the high

30 rate of divorce. Similar economic backgrounds, financial security, belonging to the same church—these were the pillars of the married union. By an astonishing coincidence, the fathers of Carol and Howard were both attorneys and both had been

35 defeated in their one attempt to get elected a judge. Carol and Howard were both vaguely Protestant, although a serious discussion of religious beliefs would have gravely embarrassed them. And Howard, best of all, was sober, old enough to know his own mind, and absolutely reliable. He was an economist

40 who had sense enough to attach himself to a corporation that continued to pay his salary during his loan to the government. There was no reason for the engagement or the marriage to fail.

45 Carol, with great efficiency, nearly at once set about the business of falling in love. Love required only the right conditions, like a geranium. It would wither exposed to bad weather or in dismal surroundings; indeed, Carol rated the chances of love in a cottage or a furnished room at zero. Given a good

50 climate, enough money, and a pair of good-natured, *intelligent* (her college lectures had stressed this) people, one had only to sit back and watch it grow. All winter, then, she looked for these right conditions in Paris. When, at first, nothing happened, she blamed

55 it on the weather. She was often convinced she would fall deeply in love with Howard if only it would stop raining. Undaunted, she waited for better times.

60 Howard had no notion of any of this. His sudden proposal to Carol had been quite out of character—he was uncommonly cautious—and he alternated between a state of numbness and a state of self-congratulation. Before his engagement he had sometimes been lonely, a malaise he put down to

65 overwork, and he was discontented with his bachelor households, for he did not enjoy collecting old pottery or making little casserole dishes. Unless he stumbled on a competent housemaid, nothing ever got done. This in itself would not have spurred him into

70 marriage had he not been seriously unsettled by the visit of one of his sisters, who advised him to marry some nice girl before it was too late. “Soon,” she told him, “you’ll just be a person who fills in at dinner.”

75 Howard saw the picture at once, and was deeply moved by it.

(1953)