

“An Ancient Gesture” by Edna St. Vincent Millay
“Siren Song” by Margaret Atwood
“Prologue” and “Epilogue” from *The Odyssey* by Derek Walcott
“Ithaca” by Constantine Cavafy

Literary Analysis: Contemporary Interpretations

In her poem “Siren Song,” Margaret Atwood takes material from the *Odyssey* and reinterprets it, placing emphasis on feminine psychology and the nature of women. She alters Homer’s description of the Sirens as grasping, evil temptresses by painting them as more complex than people think. In “Ithaca,” Constantine Cavafy takes the basic patterns and elements of Homer’s epic and interprets them in a way that speaks to him and to many modern readers. The poem raises questions about life and the goals that people set for themselves.

DIRECTIONS: Circle the letter of the answer that best completes the sentence.

1. In “Siren Song,” the poet’s interpretation of the sirens suggests that
 - a. women are much more complex than they may have been given credit for.
 - b. the poet herself is not very clever.
 - c. men are more clever than they think they are.
 - d. women enjoy the roles they play.

2. In “Siren Song,” the phrase “. . . will you get me out of this bird suit?” implies that
 - a. being referred to as a bird is not very flattering.
 - b. women may be tired of certain costumes and appearances and of putting on an act.
 - c. women are very fond of changes in fashion.
 - d. women want the freedom to wear whatever they choose.

3. In “Siren Song,” the use of the siren as the speaker in the poem indicates that
 - a. women have their own ideas about Homer.
 - b. some women can serve as leaders of groups.
 - c. women do not want more control of their fate.
 - d. women are more than pretty faces or pretty voices.

4. In “Ithaca” the poet sees the wanderings of Odysseus as representing
- a. a grand vacation to exotic places.
 - b. the journey through life itself.
 - c. a voyage of discovery made possible by such modern things as a credit card.
 - d. a trip without a real purpose.
5. In “Ithaca,” the lines “Always keep Ithaca fixed in your mind,/ . . . /But do not hurry the voyage at all” suggest that
- a. the journey is more important than the destination.
 - b. we need to know where we are going in life.
 - c. everyone should have a home.
 - d. some places always remain the same, no matter how other places may change.