



Carolyn P. Henly
Meadowbrook High School
IB English 12 2008-2009

"The Black Lace Fan My Mother Gave Me"—Discussion Preparation

Directions: In order to prepare for the class discussion over this poem, do all of the following.

1. Read the whole poem through once—out loud is best, even if you feel a bit silly doing it!
2. On a separate piece of paper, make a list of all the words you don't know AND any words that you think you know but that you think might have some additional meanings you don't know. (Example: "overcast" has a meaning that you probably don't know, and which, in this poem, matters.) I generally err on the side of caution and look up any words that seem to carry the meat of the meaning in a given sentence, just in case I discover a meaning I was unaware of. I often do!
3. Look those words up in a GOOD dictionary (like <http://www.oed.com>, which you can access for free at school. If not that one is not available, try the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (4th Edition), which is available through the school database subscriptions. (See additional handout for instructions.) Write down the definitions in a second column. (One advantage to this dictionary is that it has audio recordings of the pronunciation of words, so you can learn to pronounce the words while you learn what they mean.)
4. Read the whole poem through at least one more time.
5. Highlight all the words or phrases that you think warrant further close consideration.
6. Make notes in the margins about what those words and phrases make you think of. (Like we did in class the other day with the word "truth" in the opening sentence from *Pride and Prejudice*. If you need a refresher, you can find the PPT from that lesson on EdLine in the Class Notes folder.)
7. Read the whole poem through at least one more time.
8. Write down *at least* five questions expressing what YOU would like to know about this poem. Clearly, since you have looked up all the words you didn't know, none of the questions should be about definitions of words. You might, however, have a specific question about the usage of a particular word; for example, one might have written a question about the first line of *Pride and Prejudice* that said: "Although the word 'possession' in this sentence applies to the actual wealth of the young men in question, could it also be referring to their potential wives?"
9. Bring all your notes to class with you; I will be checking for homework COMPLETION.

The Black Lace Fan my Mother Gave me

It was the first gift he ever gave her,
buying it for five francs in the Galleries
in pre-war Paris. It was stifling.
A starless drought made the nights stormy.

5 They stayed in the city for the summer.
They met in cafes. She was always early.
He was late. That evening he was later.
They wrapped the fan. He looked at his watch.

10 She looked down the Boulevard des Capucines.
She ordered more coffee. She stood up.
The streets were emptying. The heat was killing.
She thought the distance smelled of rain and lightning.

15 These are wild roses, appliquéd on silk by hand,
darkly picked, stitched boldly, quickly.
The rest is tortoiseshell and has the reticent,
clear patience of its element. It is

20 a worn-out, underwater bullion and it keeps,
even now, an inference of its violation.
The lace is overcast as if the weather
it opened for and offset had entered it.

25 The past is an empty cafe terrace.
An airless dusk before thunder. A man running.
And no way now to know what happened then -
none at all - unless, of course, you improvise:

The blackbird on this first sultry morning,
in summer, finding buds, worms, fruit,
feels the heat. Suddenly she puts out her wing -
the whole flirtatious span of it.

Eavan Boland *Outside History* (1990)