**‘The Starry Night’ by Anne Sexton**

*That does not keep me from having a terrible need of — shall I say the word — religion. Then I go out at night to paint the stars. –Vincent Van Gogh in a letter to his brother*

*The town does not exist  
except where one black-haired tree slips  
up like a drowned woman into the hot sky.  
The town is silent. The night boils with eleven stars.  
Oh starry starry night! This is how  
I want to die.*

*It moves. They are all alive.  
Even the moon bulges in its orange irons  
to push children, like a god, from its eye.  
The old unseen serpent swallows up the stars.  
Oh starry starry night! This is how  
I want to die:*

*into that rushing beast of the night,  
sucked up by that great dragon, to split  
from my life with no flag,  
no belly,  
no cry.*

**Build Vocabulary: Prefixes post-, dys-, em- (en-)**

**A prefix is a group of letters added at the beginning of a root or base word to produce a derivative. A prefix may have one or more meanings; for example, the prefix pro- can mean “forward” (proactive) or “favoring” (pro-American). Read the following meanings for three prefixes and study the examples. Try to add at least one example for each meaning. Use a dictionary to help you.**

**Prefix Meanings Examples**

**dys-**

“abnormal” dysplasia, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

“difficult” dysphagia, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

“impaired” dysfunction, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

“bad” dyspepsia, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**em-, en-**

“put into or onto” enthrone, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

“cover with” enrobe, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

cause to be” enslave, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

“provide with” empower, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

“within” empathy, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**post-**

“after, later” postdate, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

“behind, following after” postlude, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

“subsequent to” postpartum, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

“posterior to” postorbital, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Part 2: Analyze Diction and Mood: Answer the following questions analyzing the diction and mood of “The Starry Night.”**

1. What feeling do verbs and verbals create in the poem? Why do you think Sexton chose action words such as boils, bulges, and swallows? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

2. What adjectives suggest feelings? What emotional tone do they create? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

3. Which adjectives show the poet projects herself into the picture? Why? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

4. How would you characterize Sexton’s choice of nouns? How does she balance concrete nouns for actual objects with concrete nouns for imaginary ones? Why? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

5. What do the words night, god, and cry add to the poem, in your opinion? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

6. Describe Sexton’s diction in “The Starry Night” and explain its effects. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

7. What mood does Sexton create by her use of language and her imagery? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Fill in the Blank: Fill in the blank with the word from the list below that best completes each sentence.**

**moon painting serpent town woman**

1. In the poem “The Starry Night,” the poet is observing a(n) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

2. She compares a tall tree to a(n) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

3. Stars appear to her to be swallowed by a(n) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

4. The \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ seems to be giving birth.

5. The \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ seems lifeless.

**Multiple Choice: Write the letter of the correct answer on the line.**

**\_\_\_\_\_ 6.** In a simile, Sexton compares the moon to a one-eyed god, suggesting

A. a Chinese myth about dragons that bring good luck.

B. Adam’s fall from grace and the loss of the Garden of Eden.

C. a bizarre but robust sense of humor.

D. a strong brute such as the Cyclops in The Odyssey.

**\_\_\_\_\_ 7**. The reference to a “black-haired tree” and its comparison to “a drowned woman” suggests

A. that it is very dark and a heavy rain is falling.

B. that Sexton identifies herself with the tree.

C. that the tree has died and no longer has leaves.

D. that the tree’s leaves are very soft and shiny.

**\_\_\_\_\_ 8.** “The night boils with eleven stars” is intended to show

A. the sky as a cauldron of energy.

B. that the poet is very hot and tired.

C. that few stars can be seen in the sky.

D. the importance of numbers to the poem.