

Banha University
Faculty of Education
English Department

A Guiding Model Answer for

Fourth Grade

لائحه قديمه

19th and 20th Centuries Poetry Exam

نموذج الإجابة الخاص

بمادة الشعر (لائحة قديمه)

الفرقة الرابعه - قسم اللغة الإنجليزية

كلية التربية

January 15 (Year 2013)

Faculty of Education

Prepared by

Mohammad Badr AlDin Al-Hussini Hassan Mansour, Ph.D.

University of Nevada, Reno (USA)



First Term
Faculty of Education
English Department
Fourth Grade



Banha University
Year (2012-2013)
Time: 3 hours
First Term Exam

Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Poetry (لائحه قديمه)

Respond to the following questions:

1. Trace the ironic mode in Robert Browning's poem "My Last Duchess"?
(Time length is **20** minutes)
2. Discuss the relationship between form and imagery in Sylvia Plath's poem "Mirror"?
(Time length is **30** minutes)
3. In their affirmation of connecting with others, Browning's "Meeting at Night" and Whitman's "I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing" are similar. Given our discussion in class, however, we would expect the worldviews and assumptions which underlie this affirmation to be quite different for each poet. How?
(Time length is **40** minutes)
4. The literary and the visual arts are very similar. Each strives to capture a moment, tell a story or pin down something that would otherwise be lost in the flow of time. When a writer composes a piece of written work about a piece of visual art, neither of the original pieces remain unchanged: the written work affects how one views the visual and the visual work informs the way a reader approaches the written. Understanding this relationship is essential to understanding some of 19th and 20th centuries' poems and their issues. In your answer, refer to Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "The Blessed Damozel," Ted Hughes' "Perfect Light," and W. H. Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts"? (Time length is **60** minutes)
5. Analyze the persona of the speaker in T. S. Eliot's poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" by examining the way he sees the world? (Time length is **30** minutes)

Good Luck

Mohammad Al-Hussini Arab

ANSWERS

Question # One:

Trace the ironic mode in Robert Browning's poem "My Last Duchess"?

Answer:

Robert Browning's poem "My Last Duchess" is a splendid example of the irony that a poet can achieve within the format of the dramatic monologue, a poetic form in which there is only one speaker. When there is only one speaker, we necessarily have to weigh carefully what he or she is telling us, and we often have to "read between the lines" in keeping an objective perspective on the story or incidents that the speaker describes to us. We can gather from this poem's setting, "Ferrara," a town in Italy, as well as from the speaker's reference to his "last Duchess," that the speaker in this poem is the Duke of Ferrara.

First of all, it is evident that the Duke is speaking to someone, and that he is showing his auditor a painting. "That's my last Duchess painted on the wall," he says, and then explains that the painter, Fra Pandolf, "worked busily a day, and there she stands." The Duke then describes the usual reaction that people have to viewing this painting—a reaction specifically to the Duchess' "earnest glance." He says that strangers often turn to him as if to ask "How such a glance came there," and then tells his auditor, "so, not the first / Are you to turn and ask thus." But has his auditor actually asked the Duke a question, or is the Duke simply making an assumption, based upon a look on his guest's face, that he is reacting to the painting as every other viewer has reacted to it? If he is jumping to a conclusion in the case of this latest viewer, then how do we know that he is right about other people's reactions to the painting? Perhaps he sees in other people's looks what he wants to see. We will need to remember this possible aspect of the Duke's character as we continue to listen to his story.

Next the Duke elaborates on his last Duchess' glance in the portrait, and calls it a "spot of joy." But it was not his presence only that caused her to smile in such a way, he says. The painter, Fra Pandolf, may have said anything from the simple "Her mantle laps / Over my lady's wrist too much," to the much more flattering "Paint / Must never hope to reproduce the faint / Half-flush that dies along her throat," and the lady's reaction would be this same, blushing "spot of joy." The Duke then tells us more about his lady's likes. She had a heart "too soon made glad," he says, and she was too easily pleased by everything she looked on. "Sir, 'twas all one!" he says to his listener, listing the things that pleased her: the Duke's own favor, a beautiful sunset in the west, a bough of ripe cherries from the orchard, a white mule she loved to ride—each of these things she enjoyed to the same degree, and each brought the same blush of pleasure to her cheek.

Finally we get to the heart of the Duke's problem with his former wife. She thanked people who pleased her, which was all well and good in theory, but she thanked them all with equal affection, "as if she ranked / My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name / With anybody's gift." The Duke seems to have been offended that she did not single him out among the others who pleased her, and underrated his gift of a well-established name and proud family heritage. She smiled, he says, whenever he passed her, "but who passed without / Much the same smile?" And how did the Duke react to this? "Who'd stoop to blame / This sort of trifling?" he asks his auditor. The whole business is beneath him. Even if he had "skill / In speech," it would be stooping to address such a situation, and he tells his listener that he indeed does not have skill in speech. This statement is ironic, for the Duke actually seems to be quite a polished speaker, although he may be telling us a great deal about his personality and history that he may not have intended to reveal. So what became of this seemingly kind and happy lady, who evidently enjoyed whatever she experienced? "I gave commands," the Duke says, "Then all smiles stopped together." He

says for a second time, "There she stands / As if alive," suggesting that the lady is no more. And yet, strangely, he shows no compunction for his actions.

As we make this discovery about the fate of his last wife, the Duke changes the direction of his speech to his auditor. "Will't please you rise?" he asks, and suggests that they go below to meet other guests, dismissing the difference in his and his guest's ranks by stating generously, "Nay, we'll go / Together down, sir." The Duke then provides us with a hint as to the identity of his auditor. He speaks to the man of "the Count your master," and hints that this Count's reputed wealth will surely provide the Duke with an ample dowry, a sum of money given by a bride's father to her new husband. These details indicate, ironically, that the Duke's guest is a messenger from a Count, and that his mission is to arrange a marriage between the Duke and the Count's daughter. At this point, do we believe the Duke when he assures us that it is not the money, but the Count's "fair daughter's self" that is his "object?" Or perhaps it is both, for the word "object" seems to be an important one in making a final assessment of the Duke's character. He is a collector of art objects, after all, and he seems to enjoy showing off his rich collection. After all, the whole occasion of his speech has been an explanation of the origin of a portrait of his former wife. Moreover, on the way out of his art gallery, he takes the time to point out one final art object to his guest: "Notice Neptune, though / Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity, / Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!" Once again the Duke takes the opportunity to show off a piece of art that he is proud of and to drop the name of the artist, hoping to impress his guest. The subject of the sculpture adds to our reaction to the Duke's story; here a powerful god subdues a wild sea-horse, much as the Duke has subdued his former Duchess. And as Claus of Innsbruck has caught this image for him in bronze, he has had Fra Pandolf catch his wife's "spot of joy" in a painting which can handily be hidden behind a curtain, at last giving the Duke complete control over whom his wife smiles at ("since none puts by / The curtain I have drawn for you, but I"). The final two words seem to say it all in summing up what the Duke values: after all, the sculpture of Neptune was cast "for me!"

Ironically, despite the fact that the Duke simply tells us the story of his first wife and how her portrait came to be painted, he manages to tell us a great deal more about his own personality. We can judge that he is a vain man who is quite proud of his heritage and his "nine-hundred-years-old name," and that he is quite proud of his art collection. As Neptune tames the sea-horse, he has tamed a former wife, transforming her uncontrollable spirit into an object of art and preserving her loveliness—"as if she were alive"—into a medium over which he can exert complete control. He is no longer subject to the "trifling" situation of her constant smiling, and he can now control whom she smiles at and who is exposed to her beauty. Much of the dramatic irony in the poem, however, lies in the identity of the auditor. The Duke has given all of this information about his personality and the history of his former marriage to an envoy who has been sent to arrange a new marriage. Some critics have even suggested that in this speech made to the man sent to negotiate his second marriage, the Duke is cleverly indicating what kind of behavior he will expect in his new wife. Nevertheless, knowing what we now know about this Duke, who would lead another unsuspecting young girl into such a situation?

Despite his wish to impress us with himself and to detract from his last Duchess' qualities, Browning's self-satisfied Duke ironically manages instead to paint her as a gentle and lovely person and himself as somewhat of a monster. He is truly a paradoxical, yet not entirely unappealing, character despite one's reaction to his morality by the end of the poem. It is hard not to be drawn into his skillful speech, which is carefully designed to impress his guest with his name and possessions and flatter the envoy into representing him favorably with his potential father-in-law. His pride in his painting, his willingness to dwell on the loveliness and virtues of his earlier wife despite his feelings about her, his generosity toward his guest, and his enthusiasm for his collection—stopping to comment on one last object before going down to "collect" one more wife—keep the reader guessing throughout the poem and constantly caught off guard by the revelation of one surprising personality trait after another.

Question #Two:

Discuss the relationship between form and imagery in Sylvia Plath's poem "Mirror"?

Answer:

In "Mirror," Sylvia Plath uses the technique of personification to give an inanimate object—in this case a glass mirror—the human capacity for speech. Although it is personified, the mirror claims for itself a kind of nonjudgmental and unemotional character that human beings lack. It announces in the first line of the poem, "I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions." Thus the mirror possesses both human and non-human attributes. It has no hidden motives and it does not delay in reflecting whoever faces it: "Whatever I see I swallow immediately / Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike." The poet plays on the word "unmisted" to show that the mirror's reflection is visually clear to one who looks into it, and also to reiterate that it offers a reflection that is truthful, even if the truth is painful. The looking-glass is not affected by feelings that might cloud (or "mist") its judgment and compel it to change, for better or for worse, the view it provides.

The mirror not only passively reflects an image but actively sees with "The eye of a little god, four-cornered." Its "eye" differs from a human eye in that it is god-like and square or rectangular. The glass also does not require the presence of a person in order to act. It tells us, "I meditate on the opposite wall" and furthermore that "I have looked at it so long / I think it is a part of my heart." It appears that, for the moment, the mirror is no longer an unfeeling instrument of reflection, but a being with the capacity to "meditate" and one that possesses a vital organ, a heart. However, we should note that behind the word "meditate" is a pun on "reflect." We would ordinarily associate a mirror with the word "reflect" in the sense of a visual phenomenon: a mirror's reflection is something we see with our eyes. In order to have the looking-glass assert that it "meditates" on the opposite wall, the poet subtly calls up the sense of "reflect" as an intellectual activity or mental reflectiveness. A play on words makes it unclear whether or not we are to believe the mirror meditates as a human mind would.

These ambiguous associations between the mirror and human emotions prepares us for the transition to the second section, in which the mirror interacts with a specific person. The poem is divided into two sections, or stanzas, of nine lines each. A line break separates the two stanzas. To reinforce the distinction between them and to signal a new beginning, the second stanza begins with the word "Now." The voice of the mirror announces that "Now I am a lake." The change is important because it creates a metaphor or symbol for the mirror. A lake resembles a mirror in so far as they can both reflect images before them, but there are real differences between these two objects. A lake, unlike a mirror, has depth, and because its material is literally fluid, a lake's reflection is potentially less stable than that of an immobile looking-glass. Also, a body of water, unlike a piece of glass, is penetrable. Furthermore, the reflective surface of a lake lies horizontally, while a mirror, generally speaking, hangs vertically. Finally, a lake is a natural object, while a mirror is not. These distinctions complicate our understanding of what the poet says about the mirror, but the poet emphasizes the similarities rather than differences between a mirror and a lake. By use of a metaphor, she can speak about these two things simultaneously.

The change from one kind of reflector to another parallels an even greater change in tone from one stanza to the next. In contrast with the mirror's precise dispassion in the first stanza, the woman who appears in the second stanza displays a great deal of emotion. When the woman sees her reflection, the mirror ironically states that "She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands." The mirror reports that she acts with intensity, "Searching my reaches for what she really is." The woman is not simply looking into the mirror to check her appearance: she is pursuing more profound information about her basic identity. She is particularly concerned with growing older, studying her face for evidence of aging. Her agitated responses show that, to her, a deteriorating physical appearance takes away from her sense of

self-worth. Given that the woman seeks an affirmation of her fundamental selfhood in her reflection, the mirror understates the case when it declares that "I am important to her."

Though the woman is dissatisfied with what she sees, it is clear that she returns again and again to peer into the mirror. When she turns away from her reflection, the mirror says "I see her back, and reflect it faithfully." She momentarily appeals instead to "those liars, the candles or the moon." The candles and moon are "liars" because the partial light they provide may obscure some of the woman's signs of aging. By contrast, the mirror is fully "truthful" and its view well-lit. Yet, the woman repeatedly approaches the mirror as if its truth might change.

Given the attitude of the woman, it makes sense to imagine the mirror as a lake, since it seems she hopes it holds deeper knowledge than it actually does. The tears that she cries over the mirror also provide the water to fill this "lake." This metaphor allows the poet to offer two rather startling images in the last two lines. The mirror concludes, "In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman / Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish." The young girl and old woman represent the woman in the poem at different stages of her life. Over the course of her life, she has watched her face change from youth to her present middle age, and she foresees her face as it will be when she is an older woman. The poet's use of the word "drowned" suggests that the woman has not passively observed herself aging, but instead that she is responsible for having killed off a part of herself. Perhaps the woman's concern with aging prevented her from enjoying her youth. Her tears of lament for what she sees in the mirror have "drowned" the person she once was. Those tears are also threatening to submerge her present self and to give way to the "terrible fish" of old age that is steadily nearing the surface.

The lake really stands for a mirror, and we have already proposed that the mirror, in part, stands for poetry. The mirror is "The eye of a little god," just as poetry can provide the privileged view of the poet. This looking-glass is "four-cornered" like the nearly square shape of the poem we see on the page. (We might also say that the poem has two corners in each stanza, one at the top on the left end, and one at the bottom left, for a total of four corners.) The poem is even constructed so that each of the two, nine-line stanzas is a kind of mirror image of the other. We encounter this self-reflection visually, as we see the lines on the page separated into equal parts. Thus, the poem presents itself not only as the voice of a mirror but also as the imaginative shape of a mirror into which we, as readers, peer. Most important, in understanding this mirror, we must take into account both its literal significance and its figurative or metaphorical meanings. Reading a poem requires this same attentiveness.

Question # Three:

In their affirmation of connecting with others, Browning's "Meeting at Night" and Whitman's "I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing" are similar. Given our discussion in class, however, we would expect the worldviews and assumptions which underlie this affirmation to be quite different for each poet. How?

Answer:

In their affirmation of connecting with others, Browning's "Meeting at Night" and Whitman's "I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing" are similar. Browning's "Meeting at Night" presents a certain sentiment, desire, or wish fulfillment perhaps, rather than the actual course of events. The situation presented in "Meeting at Night" is too beautiful to be true. It functions as an imaginary fulfillment of the poet's longing for human contact. Human details of the whole story are very carefully withheld—we know nothing of the speaker and nothing, consequently, of his mistress. What we receive instead is the multitude of physical details about the landscape—the "fiery ringlets," the "slushy sand," the number of

fields, etc. Although the occasion for the poem is a romantic one, the encounter is presented in a very matter-of-fact fashion.

The poem both asserts and questions the idea that passionate emotion, especially love, is not only powerful but also enduring and vital. The speaker argues for the power of love by insisting upon his ability to conquer all that separates him from his lover. Time, distance, and even the lovers' "joys and fears" cannot stand in his way and are not important once the two are together. Displaying characteristic Victorian optimism, the speaker believes firmly in his ability to achieve his goals and ends the poem at the precise moment when he has done so.

At the same time, the speaker's own words amply demonstrate the difficulty of attaining the kind of experience that he exalts. Most of the poem's few lines are devoted to recounting the distance that the speaker must travel and the obstacles he must overcome. The fact that the speaker must travel a considerable distance to reach his lover's farm is especially important. The speaker says nothing about his day-to-day life, but he obviously lives far from the rural setting that his lover inhabits. The physical distance between the lovers points to other ways in which they, as a man and a woman, are different and irrevocably separate. Both before and after marriage, Victorian men and women lived within separate social spheres; men were increasingly called upon to identify themselves with work and with the world outside the home, while women were encouraged to participate primarily in domestic activities and to nurture the emotional and spiritual life of the family. It is therefore significant that the meeting takes place within the female lover's home, because the experience itself is nonrational and belongs within the domestic and private women's sphere.

The speaker must eventually leave the farm, along with the realm of female experience and emotion, to return to the male world. The journey depicted in the poem is thus in part a journey from the male world to the female; this accounts for the long distance that the speaker must travel and for his need to separate himself from the passivity he associates with nature and the female realm. Although the speaker's intense emotion causes him to represent the moment of reunion as all-powerful, the distance between the speaker and his lover remains, like the distance between the social worlds of men and women, and this distance marks the reunion as a rare and transitory event.

On the other hand, Whitman's "I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing" seems to be a reflection on the relation of the natural and human, with a special bearing on the artistic. While the tree utters its leaves regardless of the absence of companions, the human consciousness requires human companionship to inspire it to creativity. Readers who are familiar with *Leaves of Grass*, however, and specifically with "Calamus," the section (or "cluster") of the book in which the poem is found, will be aware of further implications. "Calamus" immediately follows "Children of Adam," a cluster dealing with what Whitman calls "amativeness" or the love between men and women. The organizing theme of "Calamus" is "adhesiveness" or male comradeship. Readers are increasingly inclined to read "Calamus" as an expression of the poet's homoerotic inclinations, but it seems that few of Whitman's contemporaries read it that way. To most of its nineteenth century readers, "Calamus" moved beyond the sexual concerns of "Children of Adam." In fact, some readers were scandalized by "Children of Adam," but "Calamus" seems to have raised scarcely an eyebrow during Whitman's lifetime. While later critics are prepared to ridicule the naiveté and bad faith of nineteenth century readers, those are the readers Whitman knew. If one attempts to read these poems as one of Whitman's contemporaries might have, the emphasis on relationships between men is not necessarily homosexual. For these readers, relationships between men are simply not sexual. Thus, these poems are about the spiritual dimensions of human experience, taking the reader beyond the physical and implying the judgment that the spiritual is "higher" than the physical.

Any interpretation of poetry reflects the worldview of the interpreter. More than a century has passed since Whitman's death, and in that time American culture has come to question hierarchies such as the one valuing the spiritual over the physical; it has also come to place the sexual much closer to the center of human experience than Whitman's contemporaries would have. Whether this has been, on the whole, for better or worse, it may have brought readers closer to the personal feelings and values of Whitman. For more recent readers, the poems of "Calamus" derive much of their emotional energy from the sexual longings of the poet, which seem to have been toward members of his own sex. The "manly love" of "I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing" is thus the love (including, even if not limited to, the sexual) of man for man. No reading that denies that is likely to be accepted today by sophisticated readers. Does this mean that the poem affirms that poetry is based on homosexual love? It seems, rather, to suggest that poetry is inspired by the poet's deepest and most authentic feelings, whatever value the surrounding society may place on those feelings. For Whitman, these are the feelings of a homosexual man, and it is not difficult to see a symbol of male sexuality in the twig around which a little moss is twined. Yet the poem is not, in any reductive sense, about sex; the longing that drives the poem is linked to the artistic creativity of which the poem is an emblem. Further, the authentic feelings of a heterosexual man or of a heterosexual or homosexual woman are equally powerful sources of inspiration. What kills creativity, the poem suggests, is inauthenticity, the denial of oneself and of one's feelings. This, rather than mere physical separation from other people—there is no lover present as the poet speaks—is perhaps, at the deepest level, what would prevent the poet from uttering his leaves.

Question # Four:

The literary and the visual arts are very similar. Each strives to capture a moment, tell a story or pin down something that would otherwise be lost in the flow of time. When a writer composes a piece of written work about a piece of visual art, neither of the original pieces remain unchanged: the written work affects how one views the visual and the visual work informs the way a reader approaches the written. Understanding this relationship is essential to understanding some of 19th and 20th centuries' poems and their issues. In your answer, refer to Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "The Blessed Damozel," Ted Hughes' "Perfect Light," and W. H. Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts"?

Answer:

The literary and the visual arts are very similar. Each strives to capture a moment, tell a story or pin down something that would otherwise be lost in the flow of time. When a writer composes a piece of written work about a piece of visual art, neither of the original pieces remain unchanged: the written work affects how one views the visual and the visual work informs the way a reader approaches the written. Thus, when a famous painting is summarized in a poem, it gets to be called an example of ekphrasis, the embedding of one kind of art form inside another. Understanding this relationship is key to understanding both poems.

Both a poet and a painter, in 1848 Rossetti, along with Holman Hunt and John Everett Millais, reacted against the neoclassic tendencies and low standards of the art of their day, and sought to express a new moral seriousness and sincerity in their works. Their adoption of the name Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood expressed their admiration for what they saw as the direct and uncomplicated depiction of nature in Italian painting before the High Renaissance. In general, both their painting and their literature are characterized by an interest in the medieval and the supernatural, simplicity of style, love of sensuous beauty, exactness of detail, and much symbolism. "The Blessed Damozel" epitomizes the Pre-Raphaelite school. Rossetti used the medieval form of damsel, "damozel"—a young, unmarried woman of noble birth—in the title to emphasize the medieval setting and visionary aspects of the poem. He was commissioned in 1871 to do a painting of the poem and by 1879 had given it a *predella* showing an

earthly lover (wearing a cloak and a sword) lying under a tree in the forest looking up at his beloved. The poem is presented as his reverie.

Thus, an important aspect of Gabriel Rossetti's poetry is his "painterly" style. It is often said that reading one of his poems is almost like looking at a painting. Rossetti himself said that the supreme perfection in art is achieved when the picture and the poem are identical—that is, when they produce the same effect. Rossetti achieves this effect by paying meticulous attention to detail and by using concrete images in his poem "The Blessed Damozel." The damozel's eyes are as deep as waters "stilled at even" (at twilight); she wears seven stars in her hair, which is yellow like corn; holds three lilies in her hand (seven and three are mystical numbers); and wears a white rose on her robe. The earth spins in the void "like a fretful midge"; the "curled moon" is a "little feather" in the gulf—all of these are concrete images that present a portrait of the damozel, the earth, and the moon.

The reader can see in "The Blessed Damozel" the expression of an ancient and well-known theme: the desire of an isolated, separated lover to achieve unity with the beloved. Rossetti has framed this vision as a reverie, a daydream, a wish-fulfilling dream in the mind of a lover. The heart of the poem is the ironic conflict between the earthly bodily desire and the tradition that heaven is a place of disembodied souls, comforted and joyful in the presence of God. This irony is emphasized by the poem's religious framework. The earthly, fleshly dimension of the lover in heaven is unconsciously revealed in several places in the poem: Her bosom "warms" the bar of heaven; she imagines taking her lover's hand, lying together in the shadow of the mystic tree, laying her cheek against his, and, finally, living in heaven "as once on earth."

These are all images of touching in the earthly sense. Yet, by the standards of medieval theology which the whole framework of the poem implies—she ought to be contemplating the joy of God and exhorting her lover to lay aside grief and remember that she now enjoys the real reward of life: eternal life with God. The Christian imagery, which is largely derived from Dante and other medieval Italian poets, is used decoratively and in this context does not support the sensuous desires of the lover. As much as Rossetti tried to emulate the austere spiritual idealization of Dante, his own sensuousness prevented him from achieving it. The heavenly lover yearns passionately, intensely, for her earthly companion. In her yearning, she moves from a vision of their reunion, to hope of everlasting unity, and finally to doubt and despair. The void between heaven and earth is immense. What is emphasized is the separateness of the lovers: The wish is not the thing itself; the traditional Christian sops about being in heaven hold no comfort for the bereaved lover, for without the beloved, the heaven becomes a hell.

In 1555, Pieter Brueghel painted "The Fall of Icarus," a work depicting the mythological character who flew too close to the sun on his man-made wings. The painting shows Icarus plummeting into the sea—but doing so far in the background. The foreground features scenes from the daily grind of peasant life: plowing and shepherding are given much more space on the canvas than Icarus, who is a mere speck near the horizon. Almost four-hundred years later, Auden published "Musée de Beaux Arts," a poetic appreciation of Brueghel's painting and an insight into the vanity of human literal (and figurative) attempts at flight. The lines in which Auden praises the old masters (like Brueghel) because they "never forgot" that "dreadful martyrdom must run its course" in a "corner" or "some untidy spot" offer a critical commentary on the painting; they also, however, affect the way that any viewer of the painting will re-examine it. Opening with generalizations and moving to specifics, the poem argues that the image presented by the "Old Masters" of the Renaissance period, that individual human suffering is viewed with apathy by others, is an accurate one. Juxtaposing images of suffering and tragedy with the banal actions of everyday life suggests that individual tragedies are individual burdens as humankind responds with indifference. Auden's poem seeks to deromanticize death, martyrdom and suffering and achieves this through the juxtaposition of "ordinary" events with universally recognized "extraordinary" ones.

Reading Auden's poem affects the way a viewer sees Brueghel's painting and, of course, looking at Brueghel's painting will affect the way a reader understands Auden's poem. "The Fall of Icarus" and "Musée de Beaux Arts" exist independently from each other, yet they are welded together in a kind of artistic Gestalt. If art, as traditionally conceived, is the deliberate, labored product of human attentiveness to detail, "Musée des Beaux Arts" is centrally concerned with the temptations of artlessness. It is itself artful in its own guise of criminal artlessness. Brueghel's *The Fall of Icarus* captures the final moment of an elaborate and portentous Greek myth. Icarus was imprisoned with his father Daedalus in the labyrinth that the latter had constructed on the island of Crete. In order to escape, Daedalus devises wax wings that will enable father and son to fly free of the island. He cautions Icarus not to soar too close to the sun, lest it melt the wings' wax. With the arrogance of youth, Icarus ignores his father's warning and, after his wings melt, plummets into the sea and drowns. In Brueghel's rendition, as though the event were indeed marginal to the course of human affairs, Icarus' leg is the only part of him still—barely—visible above the water, in the lower right-hand corner of the canvas. The disappearance of the imprudent boy is not the center of the viewer's attention, just as it passes unnoticed by everyone else within the frame. Like Brueghel, Auden would force one to take notice of universal disregard.

All this has to do with the motif in the poem of the relation between art and human response to suffering. This motif involves the allusion, through the Brueghel painting, to the myth of Icarus, who flies by means of the craft of Daedalus. The poem questions the ability of art to matter in a world of intractable apathy. Not only is Daedalus rendered powerless, but the horrendous death of his son Icarus passes unheeded and unmourned. Even the sun, which, by melting the wax wings, is most directly responsible for the catastrophe, shines without pause or compunction.

In response to suffering, art has an anesthetic effect. When made the content of art, suffering ceases to be existential in its meaning and becomes aesthetic. It is subsumed by beauty if the art is successful, by ugliness if it is not. In either case, sympathy or horror elicited by suffering gives way to aesthetic response. In this sense, art displaces suffering and generates apathy. This effect has its symbol in the flight of Icarus, which tries to do in time what art does psychologically. The wings Daedalus made for himself and his son both postpone the inevitable, and, for Icarus, inadvertently help bring it to pass. As antidotes to suffering and death, art and the art of Daedalus are limited in effect. This is true in time for Daedalean utilitarian art. It is hue in scope for fine art, which anesthetizes us to the suffering of others but not our own.

Ted Hughes's "Perfect Light" works in much the same way as Auden's poem: it is the speaker's reaction to a work of visual art (in this case, a photograph) that changes the way the reader looks at and understands the work being described. The poem works by evoking this sense of "double time," the sense that there are, in a way, two "versions" of the photograph. First, there is a kind of prelapsarian one in which Plath and her children seem posed "as in a picture" titled "Innocence," and a kind of postlapsarian version in which the viewer's knowledge of good and evil (and suicide) make Plath's smile more enigmatic. Knowledge is power, but it also pulls one out of paradise, in this case, the paradise of innocence where there is no suicide or torrent of emotions that need to be sorted out in verse.

The poem begins by addressing Plath directly. To an innocent observer who had never heard of Sylvia Plath, Hughes's description would seem an apt one, but those who know her fate cannot be so comfortable. Plath *seems* posed "as in a picture" titled "Innocence," but she is not. Instead, she is posed for a picture with a much different and unspoken title, a title that would (if one could) encapsulate all of the contrary emotions felt by Hughes while viewing this photograph. The only way in which the photograph could be titled "Innocence" would be if the person bestowing the title were wholly unaware of its subject's tragic end. Yet, Plath's own innocence of what would be her fate can still be perceived by Hughes and it is his perception of this innocence that he tries to convey to the reader.

The daffodils and "perfect light" of the title are similarly viewed as both innocent and ironic. Plath is, in one sense, like the daffodils surrounding her: beautiful and positioned so as to catch the rays of the sun just so. The light illuminates Plath's face "like a daffodil" while Plath turns her face to her daughter in the posture of a daffodil. The thoughts of the natural death of the daffodils in the photograph serve as a reminder of the unnatural death of Plath.

As Hughes's eye scans the photograph, it finds other details that suggest a longed-for (yet impossible to attain) prelapsarian view. Her "new son" is "Like a teddy bear" and "only a few weeks into his innocence"; he and Plath seem the epitome of "Mother and infant, as in the Holy portrait." The infant Jesus is, of course, a symbol of innocence, yet one is also reminded of another time in which the Virgin Mary held her son: the Pieta. Any depiction of the infant Jesus brings with it the knowledge of his ultimate fate on the cross, just as any photograph of Sylvia Plath brings with it the knowledge of her suicide.

The stanza break signifies the moment in Hughes's apprehension of the photograph when he deals directly with the fact that he is looking at a soon-to-be suicide: the "knowledge" that she would kill herself is "Inside the hill" on which she is posed. The landscape itself seems pregnant with meaning. Hughes remarks that this knowledge "Failed to reach the picture," but this is only true in one sense. While Plath is innocent of the knowledge of what she will do to herself, Hughes (and, by extension, any informed viewer) is not. The hill is compared to a "moated fort hill" to make it seem like a bastion of innocence, a place protected from the knowledge that time will bring. This knowledge, however, is "Inside the hill"—in other words, the very thing against which this bastion of innocence is supposed to stand has already corrupted it. One cannot pretend that the knowledge of Plath's suicide is not there. Thus, Plath's "next moment," a moment that would both disrupt the "perfect light" and bring her closer to her suicide, was "coming towards" her "like an infantryman / Returning slowly out of no-man's-land"—but never "reached" her. In other words, the moment is static, frozen in time by the photograph, and in that frozen moment, the violence that the "infantryman" time would bring to her is no match for the power of her innocence. Therefore, it "Simply melted into the perfect light." The poet thus stands in awe of Plath's innocence while simultaneously struggling with the knowledge that longs to assault such innocence. One cannot avoid the knowledge brought about by time, nor can one pretend that such knowledge does not affect one's perceptions of the past. Before Plath's suicide, the "perfect light" is that of perfect innocence; today, the light seen in that photograph is painful and ironic.

Question # Five:

Analyze the persona of the speaker in T. S. Eliot's poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" by examining the way he sees the world?

Answer:

Throughout T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," a man's characterization explains why he hides his true self behind an impenetrable shell, unintentionally stunting his personality. This poem uses J. Alfred Prufrock, a nervous and obsessively introspective man, to show readers that only open vulnerability, not fantasy and dreams, can serve as a bridge to meet emotional needs and provide meaning to life.

Prufrock's characterization explains his fear that his true self will be revealed to the ladies at the tea party he is about to attend. No master of small talk, he repeatedly wonders how-and why-he should begin to talk about his unexciting life. He wants to sound important, but what will he say if a lady expects him to talk about himself? Any revelation about him could bring indifferent rejection. He is certain that the ladies will not care about "the butt-ends of my days and ways," fearing that when he shares part of himself with another, she will be uninterested in his life.

The introspective Prufrock is afraid of being exposed at the tea party because he does not see himself as a worthwhile individual. He fears that the ladies will mock his thin hair (symbolizing an unimpressive mind) and his thin arms and legs (symbolizing an unimpressive body). His self-focus is pathetically ironic because he is mostly unnoticed by the ladies at the tea party. He wonders if he will dare "disturb the universe" and show his true self, but twice a brisk couplet slices his monologues. The women "come and go/ Talking of Michelangelo," and miss Prufrock's moment of greatness, which was, sadly, only a "flicker." As he describes how he sees himself—and how he thinks others see him—he succinctly sums up his feelings towards self-revelation, "[a]nd in short, I was afraid."

Admittedly, Eliot's vivid imagery reveals that Prufrock's life is not a heroic epic. He recognizes that his "days and ways" are only "butt-ends," like wasted cigarettes. Prufrock admits that he has "measured out my life with coffee spoons," implying that in his small world, tea parties are his only sort of entertainment. He has "seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker." Prufrock implies that even Jesus, the Servant of man, finds his petty life without meaning. He choppily describes his life, revealing that he is an unimportant man, someone small. He will "[a]dvise the prince" because he is "an easy tool" to be used by others. He confesses that he is, "[a]lmost, at times, the Fool."

Eliot also utilizes different character allusions to contrast meaningful lives with the insignificant life of J. Alfred Prufrock. The women in the poem talk of Michelangelo, a genius whose varied masterpieces have earned him immortality. Ironically, these women do not notice Prufrock, although he is alive and present. Eliot alludes to John the Baptist when Prufrock mentions that "I have seen my head brought in upon a platter/ I am no prophet." John the Baptist was murdered because he had the courage to tell a king that he was living corruptly. He died because he spoke the truth, but Prufrock imagines that revealing his true self to others would kill him, so he will not. He is "no prophet" because he has not the courage. Prufrock also snaps, at the end of the poem, that "I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be." Prufrock is a tragedy of sorts, but he is no one great.

Prufrock's characterization shows that he is a shallow person, which is why he has developed a method to keep his true personality hidden from those around him. He shields himself within a protective shell that seems harmless to the casual reader and himself. His nervous response to the "overwhelming question" at the start of the poem is contrasted by the peaceful yellow smoke that in the next stanza acts like a cat in the "soft October night," surrounding the "house" (symbolizing Prufrock) and resting there. The tone of these twelve lines is rhythmic and peaceful, with soft sounds repeating. This smooth smoke seems out of place compared to the nervous, introspective tone of Prufrock's monologues. However, the yellow smoke is not harmless as it appears. Symbolizing how Prufrock engulfs his true self with a shell of pretense, his protective façade is deadly. It seems calm, but is more like a cloud of mustard gas that chokes life.

Ironically, Prufrock's protective shield that hides his flaws prevents any realization of his emotional needs, especially the need for love. His shell means that he cannot find love and acceptance at this tea party or anywhere else. In the past, he has unsuccessfully attempted to meet desires for intimacy by sexual excursions. He mentions "restless nights in one-night cheap hotels," implying time spent with prostitutes. His tone is fearful as he describes the women's eyes that pin him to the wall like a collector's butterfly, but his tone is dreamy as he desirously describes their arms. This shift in tone is because he has "known the arms already" and has seen them "in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair." "Knowing" their arms, and his sensual description of them, implies a sexual experience.

His mostly fearful fantasies, however, show that impersonal sex has not met his emotional needs. He needs to be able to share his true self with someone who will accept him as he is, but is afraid to do so, fearing that physical intimacy with a lady at the tea party will not bring emotional intimacy, and wondering if she will, as she is "settling a pillow by her head," causally reject him. He anticipates her

turning towards the window, away from him. Prufrock regretfully states, "I should have been a pair of ragged claws/ Scuttling across the floors of silent seas." This imagery shows Prufrock admitting that he should have been a lobster or a crab. Like a crustacean, he is trapped in a protective shell, and lives in a "silent," lonely world. But a crab does not recognize its loneliness. Prufrock does.

Prufrock's unmet desires for emotional acceptance are tied to the beginning and ending of the poem. The title claims to be a love song, yet Prufrock does not seem to be singing to anyone but himself, except at the end. This "love song," shares his life desire, emotional satisfaction derived from love that he cannot achieve because of his frightened aloofness towards others. At the end of the poem, Prufrock says that he has "heard the mermaids singing, each to each." After a pause, he wistfully states, in the only isolated line of the poem, "I do not think that they will sing to me," again explaining his legitimate fear that no one will notice him or care for him. Prufrock is an island to himself, and this isolation is the greatest factor making him an insignificant person.

Throughout "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," T. S. Eliot uncovers a man who will not embrace his greatest need. The irony of Prufrock refusing to share himself, stunting emotional growth, is especially bitter at the ending of the poem. Prufrock abruptly states his vision of himself and shows the reader the ultimate results of life in a shell. He wearily states, "I grow old. I grow old." and asks himself ludicrous, irrelevant questions, "Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?" He has become so concerned with anyone seeing a glimpse of the self behind his prepared face that he worries about trivialities.

The last three lines, in particular, show the reader the dangerous results of living in a safe fantasy world without ever sharing one's true person with others. Prufrock states that "[w]e have lingered in the chambers of the sea / By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown," implying that we, as humans, often live in fantasy worlds, in environments where we cannot properly exist. Eliot's diction in using "we" implies that the reader is being equated with Prufrock. Just as a human cannot live in the sea, we cannot truly live without revealing ourselves to others, even though it means others notice our faults and flaws. The "chambers of the sea" are no place for real people. When "human voices wake us" and shatter our fantasies, "we drown." When a life spent in a sterile fantasy world crashes into solid reality, only a shriveled carcass remains.

In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," Eliot exposes Prufrock's protected, pathetic life to show readers that they should embrace openness and vulnerability to meet their intimate emotional needs. An obsessive concern over appearances, and not reality, leads to a shrunken self. The character of Prufrock warns readers against the protection of a stifling shell holding no possibility of growth. Possible pains of open vulnerability far outweigh the cramped confines of a wasted life.