

THE LABURNUM TREE

SUMMARY

- **Setting and Atmosphere:** The poem begins with a quiet and still image of a laburnum tree in the yellow September sunlight. The tree is almost lifeless, with yellowing leaves and no seeds left.
- **Arrival of the Goldfinch:** The silence is suddenly broken by the arrival of a goldfinch. The bird's movement and sound are sudden and startling, bringing the scene to life.
- **Goldfinch's Movements:** The goldfinch is described as sleek and alert, moving like a lizard as it enters the dense foliage of the tree.
- **Transformation of the Tree:** As the goldfinch enters the tree, it transforms into a hub of activity. The tree becomes animated with the sounds of chirping, fluttering wings, and trilling.
- **The Tree as a Machine:** The poet likens the tree to a machine, with the goldfinch acting as its engine, bringing it to life with her energy and feeding her young.
- **Feeding the Family:** The goldfinch stokes the "engine" of the tree, feeding her young ones and filling the tree with life and movement.
- **Departure of the Goldfinch:** After feeding her young, the goldfinch emerges, showing her distinct face markings, and then flies away.
- **Return to Silence:** With the departure of the goldfinch, the tree returns to its previous state of stillness and emptiness.
- **Symbolism of the Goldfinch:** The goldfinch symbolizes vitality and the cycle of life, bringing energy and movement to the otherwise dormant tree.
- **The Poem's Reflection on Life:** The poem reflects on the transient nature of life and vitality, as the lively scene created by the goldfinch is temporary, returning to silence once she leaves.

ANALYSIS

Ted Hughes' poem "The Laburnum Top" is a rich and layered text that can be analyzed through various lenses, including the use of the color yellow, the theme of the cycle of life and death, and even a metaphorical connection to the Industrial Revolution.

Dominant Color Yellow:

Symbol of Decay and Death: The color yellow is prominent throughout the poem, starting with the description of the "yellow September sunlight" and the "yellowing" leaves of the laburnum tree. Yellow here can be seen as a symbol of decay and the passage of time, marking the onset of autumn when life in nature begins to wane. The tree itself, with its yellowing leaves and fallen seeds, suggests a phase of life where vibrancy has faded, and the tree is approaching dormancy or death.

Hope and Vitality: However, yellow is also the color of the goldfinch, a bird that brings life and energy to the otherwise quiet and still tree. This duality of yellow—representing both decline and vitality—creates a tension in the poem. The goldfinch's arrival temporarily reverses the decay, infusing the tree with movement and sound, symbolizing a fleeting return to life.

Cycle of Life and Death:

Dormancy and Revival: The poem can be seen as a meditation on the cycle of life and death. The laburnum tree, initially silent and still, represents a state of dormancy, akin to death. The goldfinch, with its sudden arrival, represents life and renewal. Her actions—feeding her young, filling the tree with the sounds of life—suggest the nurturing aspect of life, the continuation of the species.

Transient Nature of Life: The departure of the goldfinch, leaving the tree empty and silent again, symbolizes the transient nature of life. The poem captures a moment in this ongoing cycle, emphasizing that life is brief and often followed by periods of stillness or death. This reflects the natural order where life is not permanent but part of a continuous cycle of birth, growth, decay, and renewal.

Industrial Revolution:

The Tree as a Machine: Hughes uses an industrial metaphor when he describes the tree coming to life like a machine. The goldfinch is the "engine" that starts up the "machine" of the tree, with its movements generating activity. This could be interpreted as a reference to the Industrial Revolution, where machines began to dominate and drive life and activity in society. The laburnum tree, initially lifeless, springs into action when the "engine" (the goldfinch) is activated, mirroring how machinery brought energy and transformation to industrial society.

Artificial vs. Natural Life: The contrast between the stillness of the tree and the machine-like activity once the goldfinch arrives might also comment on the artificiality of the industrial age. The tree, a natural entity, only becomes "alive" in a mechanical way when the bird activates it. This could be seen as a critique of how industrialization imposes artificial structures on natural life, suggesting a disconnect or tension between the organic world and industrial society.

Symbolism of the Laburnum Tree:

Inertia and Isolation: The laburnum tree at the poem's beginning is depicted as silent and still, symbolizing inertia, isolation, and the inevitable decline that comes with time. This stillness can be seen as a metaphor for periods in life when nothing seems to happen, when vitality is drained, and a kind of waiting ensues—waiting for something or someone to bring back energy and purpose.

Aging and Mortality: The laburnum tree can also symbolize aging. The yellowing leaves and the fallen seeds suggest the passing of time and the tree's progression towards the end of its life cycle. This imagery can be paralleled with the human experience of aging, where the vibrancy of youth fades, and one becomes more aware of mortality.

The Goldfinch as a Catalyst:

Bringer of Life and Activity: The goldfinch acts as a catalyst that awakens the tree from its dormant state. This momentary burst of life highlights the power of small, seemingly insignificant events or beings to bring profound change. The bird's arrival is sudden, emphasizing how life can be unpredictable and how moments of vitality can arrive unexpectedly, revitalizing what appears lifeless.

Transience and Ephemerality: The goldfinch's role is also a reminder of the ephemeral nature of life. Just as quickly as she arrives and brings life, she leaves, returning the tree to its prior state of stillness. This fleeting encounter suggests that life's moments of vibrancy are temporary, highlighting the inevitability of decline.

Metaphor of the Machine and Industrial Revolution:

The Mechanization of Nature: Hughes' comparison of the tree's transformation to the starting of a machine may symbolize the mechanization of life during the Industrial Revolution. The natural world, represented by the laburnum tree, is only animated when it is likened to a machine, suggesting how industrialization imposed a mechanical rhythm on natural processes, potentially disrupting the organic flow of life.

Alienation of Natural Processes: The metaphor may also suggest the alienation of natural processes in an industrialized world. The tree's natural stillness is interrupted by a machine-like operation, indicating how

industrial forces might disrupt natural rhythms and cycles. This can be read as a critique of how industrialization estranges people from the natural world, reducing life to mechanical functions.

The Poem's Structure and Rhythm:

Mirroring the Cycle of Life: The poem's structure, with its quiet beginning, sudden burst of activity, and return to stillness, mirrors the natural cycle of life, death, and rebirth. This cyclical structure reflects the poem's themes of life's transience and the constant ebb and flow of energy and decay.

Contrasting Tones: The shift in tone from calm and stillness to sudden energy and back to calmness reflects the unpredictable nature of life. The poet's use of enjambment and varied line lengths contributes to the sense of suddenness and fluidity, enhancing the contrast between stillness and movement, life and dormancy.

Psychological Interpretation:

The Goldfinch as a Symbol of the Subconscious: From a psychological perspective, the goldfinch might symbolize the awakening of the subconscious or the inner life. The tree's stillness could represent a state of repression or dormancy, and the goldfinch's arrival could be interpreted as the emergence of repressed thoughts, emotions, or creative impulses that briefly animate the conscious mind.

Impermanence of Inner Life: The goldfinch's departure and the tree's return to stillness could suggest the impermanence of these inner awakenings. Just as moments of insight or creativity can be fleeting, so too does the tree return to its original state, highlighting the transient nature of human consciousness and experience.

Environmental and Ecological Reading:

Nature's Resilience and Fragility: The poem might also be read as an ecological allegory. The laburnum tree, representing the natural world, appears fragile and lifeless without the goldfinch. This could reflect the fragility of ecosystems that depend on the presence of certain species to maintain their vitality. The goldfinch's role highlights the interconnectedness of life, where the absence of one element can lead to the dormancy or decline of the whole.

Human Impact on Nature: The temporary nature of the goldfinch's visit could be seen as a metaphor for the way human activity disrupts natural cycles. The return to silence after the goldfinch leaves might symbolize the long-term consequences of environmental degradation, where once-thriving ecosystems are reduced to lifelessness.

Existential Themes:

The Absurdity of Life: The poem can also be interpreted through an existential lens, where the laburnum tree represents the absurdity and meaninglessness that life sometimes presents. The goldfinch's brief and almost mechanical animation of the tree could be seen as a metaphor for the temporary distractions or meanings we create to give life purpose, only for them to disappear, leaving us in silence and contemplation once more.

Life's Momentary Meaning: The poem suggests that while life may seem absurd or meaningless at times, there are moments—like the arrival of the goldfinch—where life feels full of purpose and vitality. However, these moments are brief, and we are left with the question of what remains once they pass.

MIND MAP



POETIC DEVICES:

Imagery

Example: "Yellow September sunlight"

Explanation: The phrase creates a vivid picture of the autumn sunlight, evoking the warm, golden tones of the scene and setting a specific time and atmosphere in the reader's mind.

Simile

Example: "Sleek as a lizard"

Explanation: The goldfinch's movement is compared to that of a lizard, emphasizing its smooth, quick, and alert nature, which adds to the visual imagery of the poem.

Metaphor

Example: "It is the engine of her family"

Explanation: The goldfinch's presence is metaphorically described as an engine, which powers the tree, bringing it to life. This comparison highlights the bird's role in animating the otherwise dormant tree.

Personification

Example: "The whole tree trembles and thrills"

Explanation: The tree is given human-like qualities, suggesting that it reacts with excitement to the goldfinch's arrival, as if it has emotions and sensations.

Alliteration

Example: "Tree trembles"

Explanation: The repetition of the "t" sound in "tree" and "trembles" creates a musical rhythm, drawing attention to the action and adding emphasis to the line.

Enjambment

Example: "A suddenness, a startlement, at a branch end. / Then sleek as a lizard,"

Explanation: The line flows into the next without a pause, creating a sense of continuity and smooth movement, mirroring the swift actions of the goldfinch.

Onomatopoeia

Example: "Chitterings"

Explanation: The word imitates the actual sound made by the goldfinch, enhancing the auditory imagery and making the reader hear the lively sounds within the tree.

Contrast

Example: "The laburnum top is silent, quite still...The whole tree trembles and thrills."

Explanation: There is a contrast between the stillness of the tree before the goldfinch's arrival and the vibrant activity after. This highlights the transformative impact of the bird on the tree.

Symbolism

Example: "Goldfinch"

Explanation: The goldfinch symbolizes life, energy, and nurturing, while the laburnum tree represents dormancy or death. The interaction between the two reflects the cyclical nature of life and vitality.

Polysyndeton

Example: "And a tremor of wings, and trillings"

Explanation: The repeated use of "and" links multiple actions and sounds, creating a sense of continuous, overlapping activity. This emphasizes the liveliness brought by the goldfinch to the tree.

LINE BY LINE EXPLANATION

Lines 1-3:

"The Laburnum top is silent, quite still / In the afternoon yellow September sunlight, / A few leaves yellowing, all its seeds fallen."

- **Explanation:** The poem begins with a description of a laburnum tree that is completely silent and motionless. It is bathed in the yellow light of a September afternoon, suggesting the onset of autumn. The tree is in a state of decay, with its leaves turning yellow and its seeds having already fallen to the ground. This imagery creates a sense of stillness and dormancy, as if the tree is in a state of quiet waiting.

Line 4:

"Till the goldfinch comes, with a twitching chirrup"

- **Explanation:** The silence is suddenly broken by the arrival of a goldfinch. The bird's presence is announced by a "twitching chirrup," a sound that is both quick and sharp, indicating the bird's lively energy. The goldfinch's arrival brings a sudden change to the scene, introducing movement and sound.

Lines 5-6:

"A suddenness, a startlement, at a branch end. / Then sleek as a lizard, and alert, and abrupt,"

- **Explanation:** The appearance of the goldfinch is sudden and startling, as it lands on a branch of the tree. The bird's movements are described as "sleek as a lizard," highlighting its quick, smooth, and agile nature. The words "alert" and "abrupt" further emphasize the bird's quick reflexes and readiness, adding to the sense of sudden activity.

Line 7:

"She enters the thickness, and a machine starts up"

- **Explanation:** The goldfinch enters the dense foliage of the tree, and immediately, the tree becomes alive with activity. The tree is metaphorically described as a machine that "starts up," suggesting that the bird's presence brings the tree to life, much like turning on a machine activates its functions. This line marks a transition from stillness to dynamic energy.

Lines 8-9:

"Of chitterings, and a tremor of wings, and trillings — / The whole tree trembles and thrills."

- **Explanation:** The tree is now filled with the sounds of "chitterings" (the bird's rapid, high-pitched calls), the "tremor of wings," and "trillings" (a series of musical notes). These sounds and movements cause the entire tree to "tremble and thrill," as if the tree itself is responding to the bird's vitality. The once silent and still tree is now vibrating with life and excitement.

Line 10:

"It is the engine of her family."

- **Explanation:** The goldfinch is described as the "engine" that powers the tree, metaphorically linking the bird to the source of energy for her family (likely her chicks hidden in the tree). This line reinforces the idea that the bird's presence is essential to the tree's animation, as she brings it to life by feeding and nurturing her young.

Lines 11-12:

"She stokes it full, then flirts out to a branch-end / Showing her barred face identity mask"

- **Explanation:** The goldfinch "stokes" the tree like one would stoke a fire, meaning she feeds her young, filling the tree with life and energy. After completing her task, she "flirts out" to a branch, a phrase that suggests playful and light movement. As she prepares to leave, she briefly reveals her "barred face identity mask," referring to the distinctive markings on her face, which serve as her unique identifier.

Lines 13-14:

"Then with eerie delicate whistle-chirrup whisperings / She launches away, towards the infinite"

- **Explanation:** The goldfinch makes a final, delicate sound—a combination of whistles and chirrups that seem almost like a whisper—before she takes flight. The phrase "towards the infinite" suggests that she flies away into the vast sky, symbolizing freedom and the boundless nature of life. Her departure marks the end of the tree's brief period of activity.

SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. **Question:** What is the setting of the poem?

Answer: The poem is set in the yellow September sunlight of an autumn afternoon, focusing on a silent and still laburnum tree, with its leaves yellowing and seeds fallen.

2. **Question:** How does the poet describe the laburnum tree at the beginning of the poem?

Answer: The poet describes the laburnum tree as silent and still, with yellowing leaves and fallen seeds, evoking a sense of dormancy and decay.

3. **Question:** What breaks the silence of the laburnum tree?

Answer: The arrival of a goldfinch breaks the tree's silence. The bird's sudden, lively presence introduces sound and movement, transforming the stillness into vibrant activity.

4. **Question:** How does the poet describe the goldfinch's movements?

Answer: The poet describes the goldfinch's movements as "sleek as a lizard," emphasizing its agility, quickness, and alertness as it enters the thick foliage of the tree.

5. **Question:** What is meant by "a machine starts up" in the poem?

Answer: "A machine starts up" metaphorically describes how the tree comes to life with the goldfinch's arrival, likening the sudden activity to the activation of a machine.

6. **Question:** What effect does the goldfinch have on the laburnum tree?

Answer: The goldfinch fills the tree with energy and sound, making the entire tree "tremble and thrill," transforming it from a state of stillness to one of vibrant life.

7. **Question:** What is the "engine of her family" in the poem?

Answer: The "engine of her family" refers to the goldfinch, who brings life to the tree by nurturing her young, likened to an engine powering the tree's activity.

8. **Question:** How does the goldfinch interact with the tree?

Answer: The goldfinch enters the tree, feeds her young, and fills the tree with activity. After completing her task, she perches briefly before flying away.

9. **Question:** What is the significance of the goldfinch's "barred face identity mask"?

Answer: The "barred face identity mask" refers to the distinctive markings on the goldfinch's face, which serve as her unique identifier, symbolizing her individuality and role in the poem.

10. **Question:** How does the poem end, and what does it signify?

Answer: The poem ends with the goldfinch flying away "towards the infinite," symbolizing the transient nature of life and the return of the tree to stillness and silence.

11. **Question:** What role does the color yellow play in the poem?

Answer: Yellow symbolizes both decay (as seen in the yellowing leaves) and vitality (as represented by the goldfinch), highlighting the duality of life and death in the poem.

12. **Question:** How does the poet use contrast in the poem?

Answer: The poet contrasts the tree's initial stillness with the sudden activity brought by the goldfinch, emphasizing the transformative impact of the bird's presence on the tree.

13. **Question:** What is the significance of the goldfinch's arrival in the poem?

Answer: The goldfinch's arrival signifies the revival of life and energy in the dormant laburnum tree, symbolizing the fleeting moments of vitality in an otherwise lifeless environment.

14. **Question:** What does the phrase "a suddenness, a startlement" suggest?

Answer: The phrase "a suddenness, a startlement" suggests the abrupt and surprising nature of the goldfinch's arrival, which brings an unexpected burst of life to the silent tree.

15. **Question:** How does the poet use imagery in the poem?

Answer: The poet uses vivid visual and auditory imagery, such as "yellow September sunlight" and "chitterings," to create a dynamic picture of the tree's transformation from stillness to life.

16. **Question:** What does the goldfinch symbolize in the poem?

Answer: The goldfinch symbolizes life, vitality, and nurturing energy. Her presence brings temporary animation to the dormant tree, reflecting the transient nature of life.

17. **Question:** What message does the poem convey about the cycle of life and death?

Answer: The poem conveys that life and death are cyclical and intertwined. The goldfinch's arrival and departure represent the brief moments of life within a cycle of decay.

18. **Question:** How does the poet create a sense of movement in the poem?

Answer: The poet creates movement through the goldfinch's actions—her sudden arrival, quick movements, and departure—contrasting with the tree's earlier stillness, bringing the scene to life.

19. **Question:** What is the effect of the poem's structure on its meaning?

Answer: The poem's structure, moving from stillness to activity and back to stillness, mirrors the transient nature of life, emphasizing the fleeting moments of vitality within a cycle of dormancy.

20. **Question:** How does the poem reflect Ted Hughes' broader themes in his work?

Answer: The poem reflects Hughes' themes of nature, life, and death, exploring how natural elements undergo cycles of vitality and dormancy, and the interplay between stillness and movement.

LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. How does Ted Hughes use the goldfinch as a symbol to explore the themes of life, death, and renewal in "*The Laburnum Top*"?

In "*The Laburnum Top*," Ted Hughes uses the goldfinch as a powerful symbol of life, vitality, and renewal. The poem begins with the laburnum tree in a state of dormancy, silent and still, symbolizing death or the end of a life cycle. The arrival of the goldfinch brings a sudden burst of energy, transforming the tree into a hub of activity. The bird's movements and sounds animate the tree, suggesting that life is fleeting but powerful. However, this life force is temporary, as the goldfinch eventually flies away, leaving the tree in silence once again. This cyclical pattern reflects the natural cycle of life and death, where moments of renewal and energy are brief and inevitably followed by a return to stillness. Hughes uses the goldfinch to highlight the transient nature of life and the inevitable decline that follows, reinforcing the theme of impermanence.

2. Discuss the significance of the color yellow in the poem and how it contributes to the overall meaning of "*The Laburnum Top*."

The color yellow plays a significant role in "*The Laburnum Top*," symbolizing both decay and vitality, thereby enhancing the poem's exploration of life and death. At the poem's start, the "yellow September sunlight" and the "yellowing" leaves of the laburnum tree evoke a sense of autumnal decay, signaling the end of a life cycle and the approach of dormancy. However, yellow also characterizes the goldfinch, a vibrant and lively bird that brings energy and movement to the tree. This dual symbolism of yellow reflects the poem's central theme of transience, where life and death coexist. The tree's yellowing leaves indicate decline, but the goldfinch's yellow feathers symbolize the fleeting moments of life and renewal that interrupt this decline. Through the use of yellow, Hughes emphasizes the cyclical nature of existence, where life's vibrancy is temporary and always on the cusp of returning to stillness.

3. Question: How does Ted Hughes use imagery and metaphor in "*The Laburnum Top*" to convey the transformation of the tree?

Ted Hughes masterfully uses imagery and metaphor in "*The Laburnum Top*" to depict the transformation of the laburnum tree from stillness to vitality. The poem opens with visual imagery of the tree in a state of decay—silent, still, and bathed in yellow September sunlight. This imagery sets a tone of dormancy and lifelessness. However, when the goldfinch arrives, Hughes shifts to auditory imagery, describing "chitterings," "tremor of wings," and "trillings," which fill the tree with sound and movement. The metaphor of the tree as a "machine" that "starts up" when the goldfinch arrives emphasizes the sudden burst of life and activity. The bird is described as the "engine" of her family, powering the tree's transformation. Through these devices, Hughes illustrates the temporary but profound impact of the goldfinch's presence, highlighting the cyclical nature of life and the fleeting moments of renewal within a larger pattern of decay.

4. Question: Examine the role of contrast in the poem and its effect on the reader's understanding of the themes in "*The Laburnum Top*."

Contrast is a key element in "*The Laburnum Top*," effectively highlighting the themes of transience and the cycle of life and death. The poem begins with the laburnum tree in a state of silence and stillness, evoking an atmosphere of dormancy and decay. This is contrasted sharply with the sudden arrival of the goldfinch, which brings a flurry of activity and sound, transforming the tree into a vibrant, living entity. The contrast between the tree's initial stillness and the lively commotion created by the goldfinch emphasizes the impact of life on an otherwise inert object. Additionally, the contrast between the

goldfinch's brief presence and her eventual departure highlights the fleeting nature of life and vitality. This use of contrast not only creates a dynamic shift in the poem's mood but also deepens the reader's understanding of the impermanence of life and the inevitable return to stillness and silence.

5. Question: Analyze how the poem's structure reflects the central themes of "The Laburnum Top."

The structure of "The Laburnum Top" mirrors its central themes of transience and the cycle of life and death. The poem is divided into two distinct parts: the first describes the laburnum tree in a state of stillness and dormancy, while the second comes alive with the arrival of the goldfinch. This structural shift from silence to activity and back to silence reflects the cyclical nature of life, where moments of vitality are brief and temporary. The poem's use of enjambment, where one line flows into the next without a pause, adds to the sense of continuous movement, particularly during the goldfinch's presence. This flow mimics the fleeting nature of life's vitality, which, like the poem's structure, is fluid and transient. By returning to stillness at the end, the structure reinforces the idea that life's bursts of energy are momentary, with the natural order eventually restoring silence and calm.

COMPETENCY-BASED QUESTIONS

A. Extract:

*Till the goldfinch comes, with a twitching chirrup
A suddenness, a startlement, at a branch end.
Then sleek as a lizard, and alert, and abrupt,
She enters the thickness, and a machine starts up
Of chitterings, and a tremor of wings, and trillings —
The whole tree trembles and thrills.*

i. The poet uses the phrase "a machine starts up" to _____

- a) describe the mechanical nature of the goldfinch's actions.
- b) compare the tree's transformation to the activation of machinery.
- c) emphasize the natural, organic sounds of the goldfinch.
- d) indicate that the tree has always been alive and active.

ii. "Poetry is where language speaks to us in many layers at once." – Margaret Atwood

Choose the option that correctly connects the relationship between the statement above and the line from the above extract — "Then sleek as a lizard, and alert, and abrupt."

- a) Atwood suggests that poetry often creates complex, layered images as seen in the comparison of the goldfinch to a lizard.
- b) Atwood undermines the poet's use of simple language to describe the goldfinch.
- c) Atwood supports the idea that poetry should use familiar and straightforward comparisons.
- d) Atwood argues that poetry should avoid layered imagery like the lizard comparison.

iii. Why do you think the poet employs the words "twitching" and "startlement"?

- a) To convey the sudden and lively movements of the goldfinch.
- b) To show the bird's nervousness and unease in its environment.
- c) To highlight the bird's gentle and calm nature.
- d) To suggest that the goldfinch is hesitant and unsure.

iv. Choose the option that correctly matches the idioms given in Column A with their meanings in Column B.

Column A

Column B

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| 1. Starts up | (i) To be sharp, sudden, or curt |
| 2. Sleek as a lizard | (ii) To feel or show excitement and anticipation |
| 3. Trembles and thrills | (iii) To move smoothly and quickly |
| 4. Abrupt as a lizard | (iv) To initiate or begin suddenly |

- a) 1 – (i); 2 – (ii); 3 – (iii); 4 – (iv)
b) 1 – (ii); 2 – (iv); 3 – (i); 4 – (iii)
c) 1 – (iii); 2 – (i); 3 – (iv); 4 – (ii)
d) 1 – (iv); 2 – (iii); 3 – (ii); 4 – (i)

ANSWER KEY

i. The poet uses the phrase “a machine starts up” to _____

Answer: b) compare the tree’s transformation to the activation of machinery.

Explanation: The phrase “a machine starts up” is a metaphor comparing the sudden burst of life and activity in the tree, triggered by the goldfinch’s arrival, to the activation of a machine. This comparison emphasizes how the previously still and silent tree suddenly becomes alive with movement and sound, much like how a machine suddenly comes to life when switched on.

ii. “Poetry is where language speaks to us in many layers at once.”

Choose the option that correctly connects the relationship between the statement above and the line from the above extract — “Then sleek as a lizard, and alert, and abrupt.”

Answer: a) Atwood suggests that poetry often creates complex, layered images as seen in the comparison of the goldfinch to a lizard.

Explanation: Atwood’s statement refers to the multi-layered nature of poetic language. The line “Then sleek as a lizard, and alert, and abrupt” is an example of this, where the goldfinch is compared to a lizard, highlighting its smooth, quick, and cautious movements. This layered imagery adds depth to the description, conveying both the physical characteristics and the behavior of the bird.

iii. Why do you think the poet employs the words “twitching” and “startlement”?

Answer: a) To convey the sudden and lively movements of the goldfinch.

Explanation: The words “twitching” and “startlement” effectively capture the quick, sudden, and lively nature of the goldfinch’s movements. These terms suggest that the bird’s actions are sharp and immediate, bringing an unexpected burst of energy to the scene, which contrasts with the previous stillness of the tree.

iv. Choose the option that correctly matches the idioms given in Column A with their meanings in Column B.

Answer: d)

Explanation:

- **“Starts up”** corresponds to (iv) “To initiate or begin suddenly,” which reflects the sudden activity in the tree as the goldfinch arrives. **“Sleek as a lizard”** matches (iii) “To move smoothly and quickly,” capturing

the goldfinch's smooth and swift movements. **"Trembles and thrills"** aligns with (ii) "To feel or show excitement and anticipation," describing the tree's reaction to the bird's presence. **"Abrupt as a lizard"** fits (i) "To be sharp, sudden, or curt," reflecting the goldfinch's quick and sudden movements.

STAND-ALONE MCQS

i. Read the statements given below carefully. Choose the option that best describes these statements, with reference to the poem.

Statement I – The poem "The Laburnum Top" depicts the transformation of a lifeless tree into one filled with activity and energy.

Statement II – The goldfinch is used as a symbol of the machine that powers the tree's sudden vitality.

Statement III – The poem reflects the permanent, unchanging nature of life and death.

- a) Statement I is True, Statement II is False, and Statement III cannot be inferred.
- b) Statement II is True, Statement I and Statement III are False.
- c) Statement I and II are True, Statement III is False.
- d) Statement I is True, Statement II cannot be inferred, and Statement III is False.

ii. "Sleek as a lizard, and alert, and abrupt."

Choose the option that draws the most accurate parallel.

Comparing the goldfinch's movement: sleek as a lizard = _____ : _____

- a) graceful and slow
- b) nervous and hesitant
- c) quick and cautious
- d) strong and steady

iii. What statement does the poem make about the interaction between life and stillness?

- a) Life always dominates stillness, with activity being more powerful than silence.
- b) Stillness is only a temporary state, easily disrupted by life's sudden bursts of energy.
- c) Life and stillness exist independently without influencing each other.
- d) The poem suggests that stillness is more significant than life's transient moments.

iv. "The whole tree trembles and thrills." What does this line suggest?

- a) The tree is physically shaking due to the goldfinch's actions.
- b) The tree metaphorically comes alive, reacting with excitement to the bird's presence.
- c) The tree is trembling in fear because of the goldfinch.
- d) The tree is annoyed by the intrusion of the goldfinch.

v. "Then with eerie delicate whistle-chirrup whisperings / She launches away, towards the infinite." Why does the poet describe the goldfinch's departure in this way?

- a) To emphasize the mystery and otherworldliness of the bird.
- b) To suggest that the bird's actions are insignificant and easily forgotten.
- c) To indicate that the goldfinch is afraid of the open sky.
- d) To show that the bird's presence was overwhelming and chaotic.

ANSWER KEY

i. Read the statements given below carefully. Choose the option that best describes these statements, with reference to the poem.

Statement I – The poem "The Laburnum Top" depicts the transformation of a lifeless tree into one filled with activity and energy.

Statement II – The goldfinch is used as a symbol of the machine that powers the tree's sudden vitality.

Statement III – The poem reflects the permanent, unchanging nature of life and death.

Answer: c) Statement I and II are True, Statement III is False.

Explanation:

- **Statement I** is true because the poem describes how the goldfinch's arrival brings the dormant laburnum tree to life.
- **Statement II** is true as well, since the goldfinch is metaphorically described as an "engine" that powers the tree's activity.
- **Statement III** is false because the poem actually emphasizes the transient and cyclical nature of life and death, not their permanence.

ii. "Sleek as a lizard, and alert, and abrupt."

Choose the option that draws the most accurate parallel.

Comparing the goldfinch's movement: sleek as a lizard = _____ : _____

Answer: c) quick and cautious

Explanation: The comparison "sleek as a lizard" highlights the goldfinch's smooth, quick, and cautious movements, similar to how a lizard moves. The goldfinch is depicted as being alert and abrupt, which aligns with the idea of quick and cautious movements.

iii. What statement does the poem make about the interaction between life and stillness?

Answer: b) Stillness is only a temporary state, easily disrupted by life's sudden bursts of energy.

Explanation: In the poem, the stillness of the laburnum tree is temporary and is dramatically interrupted by the goldfinch's arrival, which brings life and energy. This shows that life can disrupt stillness, but only for a short period, highlighting the transient nature of vitality.

iv. "The whole tree trembles and thrills." What does this line suggest?

Answer: b) The tree metaphorically comes alive, reacting with excitement to the bird's presence.

Explanation: The line "The whole tree trembles and thrills" suggests that the tree is metaphorically reacting with excitement to the arrival of the goldfinch. The tree, which was previously still, now seems to come alive, illustrating the bird's transformative impact on its environment.

v. "Then with eerie delicate whistle-chirrup whisperings / She launches away, towards the infinite." Why does the poet describe the goldfinch's departure in this way?

Answer: a) To emphasize the mystery and otherworldliness of the bird.

Explanation: The description of the goldfinch's departure as "eerie delicate whistle-chirrup whisperings" and her flight "towards the infinite" emphasizes the bird's mysterious and almost ethereal nature. This choice of words creates an atmosphere of otherworldliness, suggesting that the goldfinch is a fleeting, almost magical presence in the natural world.

Competency-based questions:

Answer the following in 30-40 words

- 1. What impact does the poet's use of imagery in "Laburnum Top" have on the reader?**
- 2. Discuss the symbolic significance of the goldfinch in the poem "Laburnum Top". How does it contribute to the central theme?**
- 3. "The arrival of the goldfinch transforms the silent tree into a lively spectacle." Do you think change is always positive, or can it have negative implications as well? Justify your response.**

ANSWER KEY

What impact does the poet's use of imagery in "Laburnum Top" have on the reader?

The poet's vivid imagery in "Laburnum Top" brings the scene to life, evoking a sense of contrast between stillness and vitality, which engages the reader and highlights the transformative power of nature.

Discuss the symbolic significance of the goldfinch in the poem "Laburnum Top." How does it contribute to the central theme?

The goldfinch symbolizes life, energy, and transformation. Its arrival enlivens the lifeless laburnum tree, illustrating the interconnectedness of life and nature's ability to revive and bring joy even to the most desolate places.

"The arrival of the goldfinch transforms the silent tree into a lively spectacle." Do you think change is always positive, or can it have negative implications as well? Justify your response.

Change can be both positive and negative. While the goldfinch's arrival brings vitality to the tree, changes can also disrupt stability and bring unforeseen challenges. The impact of change depends on the context and the individual's perspective.

B. Answer in 100-120 words:

1. Imagine the laburnum tree in the poem "Laburnum Top" had the ability to think and reflect. Write a diary entry from the tree's perspective, describing its feelings before and after the goldfinch's arrival.

2. "The laburnum tree comes to life with the arrival of the goldfinch, symbolizing rejuvenation and interconnectedness." Evaluate how this theme reflects the importance of companionship and mutual support in our own lives.

Value points:

1. Diary Entry from the Laburnum Tree's Perspective:

- *Sense of Emptiness and Loneliness*
- *Transformation and Vibrancy*
- *Longing for Connection*

2. Theme of Rejuvenation and Interconnectedness Reflecting the Importance of Companionship and Mutual Support:

- *Purpose through Relationships*
- *Emotional and Psychological Rejuvenation*
- *Mutual Fulfilment*