

Question 2

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

The following passage is from Charlotte Brontë's novel *Shirley* (1849). In the passage, the narrator describes the age of eighteen as an important threshold. In a well-organized essay, analyze how Brontë uses literary techniques to characterize the phases of life her protagonist is leaving and entering.

Line
5 Caroline Helstone was just eighteen years old;
and at eighteen the true narrative of life is yet to be
commenced. Before that time, we sit listening to a
tale, a marvellous fiction; delightful sometimes, and
5 sad sometimes; almost always unreal. Before that
time, our world is heroic; its inhabitants half-divine
or semi-demon; its scenes are dream-scenes: darker
woods and stranger hills; brighter skies, more
dangerous waters; sweeter flowers, more tempting
10 fruits: wider plains, drearier deserts, sunnier fields
than are found in nature, over-spread our enchanted
globe. What a moon we gaze on before that time!
How the trembling of our hearts at her aspect bears
witness to its unutterable beauty! As to our sun, it is
15 a burning heaven—the world of gods.
At that time—at eighteen, drawing near the
confines of illusive, void dreams, Elf-land lies behind
us, the shores of Reality rise in front. These shores are
yet distant: they look so blue, soft, gentle, we long to
20 reach them. In sunshine we see a greenness beneath
the azure, as of spring meadows; we catch glimpses
of silver lines, and imagine the roll of living waters.
Could we but reach this land, we think to hunger and
thirst no more: whereas many a wilderness, and often
25 the flood of Death, or some stream of sorrow as cold
and almost as black as Death, is to be crossed ere true
bliss can be tasted. Every joy that life gives must be
earned ere it is secured; and how hardly earned, those

30 only know who have wrestled for great prizes. The
heart's blood must gem with red beads the brow of
the combatant, before the wreath of victory rustles
over it.

At eighteen, we are not aware of this. Hope, when
she smiles on us, and promises happiness to-morrow,
35 is implicitly believed;—Love, when he comes
wandering like a lost angel to our door, is at once
admitted, welcomed, embraced: his quiver is not seen;
if his arrows penetrate, their wound is like a thrill of
new life: there are no fears of poison, none
40 of the barb which no leech's hand can extract: that
perilous passion—an agony ever in some of its
phases; with many, an agony throughout—is believed
to be an unqualified good: in short, at eighteen, the
school of Experience is to be entered, and her
45 humbling, crushing, grinding, but yet purifying
and invigorating lessons are yet to be learnt.

Alas, Experience! No other mentor has so wasted
and frozen a face as yours: none wears a robe so
black, none bears a rod so heavy, none with hand
50 so inexorable draws the novice so sternly to his task,
and forces him with authority so resistless to its
acquirement. It is by your instructions alone that man
or woman can ever find a safe track through life's
wilds; without it, how they stumble, how they stray!
55 On what forbidden grounds do they intrude, down
what dread declivities are they hurled!