

2009

YOU AND I

*I explain quietly. You
hear me shouting. You
try a new tack. I
feel old wounds reopen.*

*You see both sides. I
see your blinkers. I
am placatory. You
sense a new selfishness.*

*I am a dove. You
recognise the hawk. You
offer an olive branch. I
feel the thorns.*

*You bleed. I
see crocodile tears. I
withdraw. You
reel from the impact.*

- (a) What is the relationship between "You" and "I" in the poem?
- (b) What words and phrases suggest that the relationship is strained? What is at the bottom of the conflict?
- (c) What techniques are used to bring out the tension?
- (d) What light does the third stanza throw on the present state of the relationship?
- (e) How does the title of the poem illustrate the theme?

2010

The woman sits at her desk

*The woman sits at her desk
by the open window, Night,
and the moon a silver sliver
drifting in a lace of light.
She writes a poem. Her husband sleeps.*

*In her poem she speaks of what she thinks
is the distant future: children grown
who have left her, and she alone.
Clusters of delicately scented
white flowers on trees
that are still saplings. They will bloom in vain.
And how long the day is,
and how only the curtains move
in a silent house.*

- (a) What is the theme of the poem the woman writes?
- (b) How does the imagery reflect the theme of the poem?
- (c) Explain the line "She writes a poem. Her husband sleeps."
- (d) What is the tone of the poem?
- (e) Comment on the atmosphere created by the poem.

2011

Night Shift Workers

*They have come from a factory
Where fluorescent strips flared all night
And ears grew numb to machinery;
They are going home to working wives,
To cooling beds at breakfast time,
Undressing fatigue from their skin like clothes;
Later to wake at four and taste teeth
Soft as fur in their mouths.
They live in a dislocation of hours
Inside-out like socks pulled on in darkness
Waking when the day is over.
They are always at an ebb, unlike others
Going out to work in the morning
Where sun and moon shine in the sky together.*

- (1) Who does the poet refer to as 'They'? What have they been doing? (04 marks)
- (2) How are their lives different from those of other human beings? (04 marks)
- (3) Explain the lines "*They live in a dislocation of hours. Inside-out like socks pulled on in darkness.*" What would be the effect of such a life on these men? (04 marks)
- (4) Discuss how the imagery contributes to the theme of the poem. (04 marks)
- (5) What is the attitude of the poet towards these men? How is it reflected? (04 marks)

2012

The Owl

*Down hill I came, hungry, and yet not starved,
Cold, yet had heat within me that was proof
Against the North wind; tired, yet so that rest
Had seemed the sweetest thing under a roof.*

*Then at the inn I had food, fire and rest,
Knowing how hungry, cold, and tired was I,
All of the night was quite barred out except
An owl's cry, a most melancholy cry.*

*Shaken out long and clear upon the hill,
No merry note, nor cause of merriment,
But one telling me plain what I escaped
And others could not, that night, as in I went*

*And salted was my food, and my repose,
Salted and sobered, too, by the bird's voice
Speaking for all who lay under the stars,
Soldiers and poor, unable to rejoice.*

- (1) What is the situation described in this poem? (04 marks)
- (2) Explain the meaning of the phrase "All of the night was quite barred out." (04 marks)
- (3) What was the tone of the owl's cry? How does the poet interpret this? (04 marks)
- (4) What does the owl represent to the poet? How does he respond to it? (04 marks)
- (5) What are the different emotions felt by the poet? How does he convey these to the reader? (04 marks)

2013

Globalization

Fair and affluent

*Mr Shuttleworth from the land of then apartheid
Floats in simulated thrill of space shuttle
To learn how to float in space
When his two million dollar a day journey begins, and
He has to breathe borrowed breath
(one step for man but a great step for mankind)
On that day of global gloat in the sixties decade,
They said, in solemn-elated tones of glee.
Advances in Science and Technology will bless all,
Mankind, and womankind too, and enhance medical
Science and curing skills.*

But

*Science is so dear, that
Only Shuttleworth will shuttle, fly and float.*

*Gamage Gunapala of Hiripitiya who suffers from
Chronic but acute asthma (euphemistically dubbed 'papuwe mansiya' by his friends in the
village)*

Cannot breathe

*All because six hundred of poor lean Sri Lankan rupees a month
To purchase the imported inhaler
Is a fortune for
Earth bound Gunapala: paddy plot and chena
Are both barren this season.
'Respiratory' or 'cardiac arrest' are words alien in any tongue
To Kusumawathi, Gunapala's family.
For whom it is all 'our sin'.
Even the heap of 'wattaka' by the roadside they cannot sell
Or send to Colombo, is all fruit of 'Karma'.
She sighs.
She is not Shuttleworth, either.*

- (1) Describe the two scenes presented in the two verses.
- (2) How would you explain the difference of these scenes?
- (3) What is the theme of the poem? How is the theme brought out by the poet?
- (4) What is the poet's attitude to the situation?
- (5) What is the tone of the poem? Discuss briefly the techniques the poet uses to create this tone.

2014

First Day at School

*A millionbillionwillion miles from home
Waiting for the bell to go. (To go where?)
Why are they all so big, other children?
So noisy? So much at home they
Must have been born in uniform
Lived all their lives in playgrounds
Spent the years inventing games
That don't let me in. Games
That are rough, that swallow you up.*

*And the railings.
All around, the railings.
Are they to keep out wolves and monsters?
Things that carry off and eat children?
Things you don't take sweets from?
Perhaps they're to stop us getting out
Running away from the lessins. Lessin.
What does a lessin look like?
Sounds small and slimy.
They keep them in the glassrooms.
Whole rooms made out of glass. Imagine.*

*I wish I could remember my name
Mummy said it would come in useful.
Like wellies. When there's puddles
Yellowwellies. I wish she was here.
I think my name is sewn on somewhere
Perhaps the teacher will read it for me.
Tea-cher. The one who makes the tea.*

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| (1) Who is the narrator of this poem? Explain how you know this. | (03 marks) |
| (2) Describe the feelings of the narrator in relation to the situation described. | (04 marks) |
| (3) What do the railings in the second verse symbolize? | (03 marks) |
| (4) How do the following words contribute to the overall theme of the poem?
(i) millionbillionwillion (ii) lessin (iii) glassroom | (06 marks) |
| (5) What does this poem say about school as an institution? | (04 marks) |

2015

Poem at Thirty Nine

*How I miss my father.
I wish he had not been
so tired
when I was
born*

*Writing deposit slips and checks
I think of him.
He taught me how.
This is the form,
he must have said:
the way it is done.
I learned to see
bits of paper
as a way
to escape
the life he knew
and even in high school
had a savings
account.*

*He taught me
that telling the truth
did not always mean
a beating;
though many of my truths
must have grieved him
before the end.*

*How I miss my father!
He cooked like a person
dancing
in a yoga meditation
and craved the voluptuous
sharing
of good food.*

*Now I look and cook just like him:
my brain light;
tossing this and that
into the pot;
seasoning none of my life
the same way twice; happy to feed
whoever strays my way.*

*He would have grown
to admire
the woman I've become;
cooking writing, chopping wood,
staring into the fire.*

- (1) Why do you think the speaker wishes that her father was not so tired when she was born? (04 marks)
- (2) What does the daughter say she learnt from her father? (04 marks)
- (3) Explain how cooking is used in the poem to compare the values and lifestyles of father and daughter. (04 marks)
- (4) What aspects of the speaker's life does she say her father would have grown to admire? What is the significance of the phrase "would have grown" in the poem? (04 marks)
- (5) How does the title of the poem help you to understand the mood of the speaker? (04 marks)