

His t-shirts

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Medium-sized t-shirts on his dark body.
He's totally Chinese - more so than me.
But in periods when he's building bridges,
fixing window panes or drilling roads,
5 I think he's from Africa.
Yellow skin is black in the sun.
Who said colours are God-given?

Medium-sized t-shirts he has aplenty.
Elated, in countries foreign, we do not forget
10 at home he's suppressing his worried lips.
He wants nothing from us, but
we like the idea of giving. And so he's
wearing t-shirts from London, Thailand,
Auckland, Japan, Finland, India,
15 Malaysia, Poland, Korea...
'Where are you from, father?' We are
teasers. Names of places bold
in English on his chest. He doesn't know.
'China,' he answers. We laugh.
20 We laugh. Bad daughters.

Medium-sized t-shirts on top of Large
-sized ones in his drawers.
He once stood huge
in front of a snack bar,
25 buying us coca-colas,
and we cheered.

Suggested Questions and Answers

1. What is this poem about?
2. Who is the speaker in this poem?
3. Describe the relationship between the speaker and her father. Support your answer with evidence from the poem.
4. What changes has the speaker observed in his father over time?
5. Does the poem have any important symbol? What meaning does it bring to the poem?
6. What is the theme of the poem?

Suggested Questions and Answers

1. What is this poem about?

The family life of a father and his children

2. Who is the speaker in this poem?

One of the father's daughters

3. Describe the relationship between the speaker and her father. Support your answer with evidence from the poem.

The poem depicts the bond between the speaker and her father through the narration of their everyday lives. While the love from the working class father to the speaker is unconditional (e.g. He wants nothing from us in line 11), the speaker shows her love by buying him t-shirts as souvenirs from her trips. The warm and affectionate way she and her sisters tease their father also indicates their close relationship.

4. What changes has the speaker observed in his father over time?

The speaker has observed that her father has aged and shrunk over time. He “once stood huge” and used to wear large-sized t-shirts but now he is shrinking and needs to wear medium-sized t-shirts as he is getting old.

5. Does the poem have any important symbol? What meaning does it bring to the poem?

- “Medium-sized t-shirts”, which echoes with the title “His T-shirts”, stands out in the poem as it is repeated at the beginning of each stanza.
- The word “medium-sized” is used to describe the father’s body size while “t-shirts” are the gifts from his daughters. “Medium sized t-shirts” symbolises the love and bond between the father and the daughters and the aging of the loving and well-loved father.

6. What is the theme of the poem?

Family love / the idea of giving