

Lamma Island Tofu-fa

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On the broken trail to Mot tat
a field of white ginger lilies
flags us down.
We shrug off our packs.
5 Huddled among ruins to our left,
a stone house
red clay roof sloping,
doorway gaping
like an old man sleeping.
10 A wriggly-tin shed
shades wooden tubs of tofu.
We sit at a plank table.
A tiny woman
with a toothless smile,
15 trembling, blue-veined hands,
carries a tray. Tofu-fa
is heaped like soft snow
in turquoise plastic bowls.
I love the tofu's smooth surface
20 but crave the sight of golden sugar
pocking its face,
tofu puddled in ginger syrup –
its sharp scent,
clearing my nostrils
25 with the first spoonful.
Dusk creeps under our table
grey as the old woman's dog.
The old woman dozes
on her low stool beside the shed,
30 bathed in the milk of the moon.

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Suggested Questions and Answers

1. What is the setting of the poem?
2. Who are “us” and “we” in lines 3-4? What do you think they are doing in Mot tat at the beginning of the poem?

3. Identify three comparisons from the poem to complete the following sentences:

_____ is compared to _____ because _____.

_____ is compared to _____ because _____.

_____ is compared to _____ because _____.

4. In lines 16-25, rich imagery is used in the description of tofu-fa.

- (a) Identify expressions that appeal to the following senses and complete the table below:

Sense	Examples
sight	
hearing	
smell	
touch	

taste	
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- (b) Which sense has not been used in the description of tofu-fa? Enrich the poem with a line that appeals to this missing sense.

_____ imagery that appeals to the sense of _____ has not been used in the description of tofu-fa. The poem could be enriched with the following line:

_____.

5. Comment on the special use of language in lines 21-22. What effects does it create?
6. Describe the mood in lines 26-30. How is the mood created?
7. If you could break this poem into different stanzas, how would you break the lines apart? Mark with // places you would like to start a new stanza and explain why.

Suggested Questions and Answers

1. What is the setting of the poem?

The poem is set in Mot tat on Lamma Island near dusk time.

2. Who are “us” and “we” in lines 3-4? What do you think they are doing in Mot tat at the beginning of the poem?

- The speaker and his friends
- They may be hiking as they carry backpacks.

3. Identify three comparisons from the poem to complete the following sentences:

- The stone house with a “sloping” red clay roof and a “gaping” doorway is compared to a “sleeping old man” (lines 6-9) because
 - they are both old;
 - the “sloping” roof resembles the posture of the old man with his body leaning forward when dozing off; and
 - the “gaping” doorway is like the sleeping old man with his toothless mouth wide open.
- Tofu-fa is compared to “soft snow” (lines 16-17) because they both melt easily and are white, tender and smooth.
- The dusk that “creeps” in is compared to the old woman’s dog (lines 26-27) because they are both grey and perhaps moving slowly and quietly.
- Moonlight is compared to “milk” (line 30) because they are both soft, white and pale.

4. In lines 16-25, rich imagery is used in the description of tofu-fa.

(a) Identify expressions that appeal to the following senses and complete the table below:

Sense	Examples
sight	“turquoise plastic bowls” (line 18) “golden sugar” (line 20) “tofu puddled in ginger syrup” (line 22)
hearing	nil
smell	“sharp scent” (line 23)
touch	“heaped like soft snow” (line 17) “smooth surface” (line 19) “pocking its face” (line 21)
taste	“ginger syrup” (line 22) “clearing my nostrils with the first spoonful” (lines 24-25)

- (b) Which sense has not been used in the description of tofu-fa? Enrich the poem with a line that appeals to this missing sense.

Auditory/Sound imagery that appeals to the sense of hearing has not been used in the description of tofu-fa. The poem could be enriched with the following line:

Slurp! The silky jelly melts in my mouth.

5. Comment on the special use of language in lines 21-22. What effects does it create? “Pock” and “puddle” are commonly used as nouns but are turned into verb forms as “pocking” and “puddled” in the poem. This special use of language makes the description of tofu-fa animated.

6. Describe the mood in lines 26-30. How is the mood created?

The mood is dreamlike, calm and tranquil. This is created by the rhythm and imagery of the lines:

- The use of long vowels in words such as “creeps”, “dozes”, “stool”, “bathed” and “moon” slows down the poem, creating a mood of serenity.
- The use of action words such as “creeping” and “dozes” imparts a sense of stillness and inactivity to the scene. “Dusk” is personified with the use of the word “creeping”, which suggests the motion is slow, light and quiet.
- The pale moonlight, which is likened to “milk” in line 30, adds a blurry and hazy touch to the scene, creating a dreamlike quality.

7. If you could break this poem into different stanzas, how would you break the lines apart? Mark with // places you would like to start a new stanza and explain why.

any reasonable answers