

Scottish Set Text Critical Reading Practice

45 minutes

Read the poem below and then attempt the following questions

Mrs Midas

It was late September. I'd just poured a glass of wine, begun
to unwind, while the vegetables cooked. The kitchen
filled with the smell of itself, relaxed, its steamy breath
gently blanching the windows. So I opened one,
then with my fingers wiped the other's glass like a brow.
He was standing under the pear tree snapping a twig.

Now the garden was long and the visibility poor, the way
the dark of the ground seems to drink the light of the sky,
but that twig in his hand was gold. And then he plucked
a pear from the branch - we grew Fondante d'Automne -
and it sat in his palm like a light bulb. On.

I thought to myself, Is he putting fairy lights in the tree?

He came into the house. The doorknobs gleamed.
He drew the blinds. You know the mind; I thought of
the Field of the Cloth of Gold and of Mrs Macready.
He sat in that chair like a king on a burnished throne.
The look on his face was strange, wild, vain. I said,
What in the name of God is going on? He started to laugh.

I served up the meal. For starters, corn on the cob.
Within seconds he was spitting out the teeth of the rich.
He toyed with his spoon, then mine, then with the knives, the forks.
He asked where was the wine. I poured with a shaking hand,
a fragrant, bone-dry white from Italy, then watched
as he picked up the glass, goblet, golden chalice, drank.

It was then that I started to scream. He sank to his knees.
After we'd both calmed down, I finished the wine
on my own, hearing him out. I made him sit
on the other side of the room and keep his hands to himself.
I locked the cat in the cellar. I moved the phone.
The toilet I didn't mind. I couldn't believe my ears:

how he'd had a wish. Look, we all have wishes; granted.
But who has wishes granted? Him. Do you know about gold?
It feeds no one; aurum, soft, untarnishable; slakes
no thirst. He tried to light a cigarette; I gazed, entranced,
as the blue flame played on its luteous stem. At last,
I said, you'll be able to give up smoking for good.

1. Comment on Duffy's use of imagery in stanza two in creating a more menacing mood. **(3 marks)**
2. By referring to literary techniques, comment on how Duffy portrays the speaker's fear and astonishment at her husband's actions in stanza 4. **(3 marks)**
3. Identify and comment on the effectiveness of Duffy's use of humour in stanza 5. **(2 marks)**
4. Identify and explain the speaker's tone the final stanza. **(2 marks)**
5. Show how Duffy makes effective use of poetic techniques in "Mrs Midas", and at least one other poem, to convey the speaker's tone. **(10 marks)**