

Paper 3

Snake

A snake came to my water-trough
On a hot, hot day, and I in pyjamas for the heat,
To drink there.

In the deep, strange-scented shade of the great dark carob-tree
I came down the steps with my pitcher
And must wait, must stand and wait, for there he was at the trough before me. 5

He reached down from a fissure in the earth-wall in the gloom
And trailed his yellow-brown slackness soft-bellied down, over the edge of the stone trough
And rested his throat upon the stone bottom,
And where the water had dripped from the tap, in a small clearness, 10
He sipped with his straight mouth,
Softly drank through his straight gums, into his slack long body,
Silently.

Someone was before me at my water-trough,
And I, like a second comer, waiting. 15

He lifted his head from his drinking, as cattle do,
And looked at me vaguely, as drinking cattle do,

And flickered his two-forked tongue from his lips, and mused a moment,
And stooped and drank a little more,
Being earth-brown, earth-golden from the burning bowels of the earth 20
On the day of Sicilian July, with Etna smoking.

The voice of my education said to me
He must be killed,
For in Sicily the black, black snakes are innocent, the gold are venomous.

And voices in me said, *If you were a man*
You would take a stick and break him now, and finish him off. 25

But must I confess how I liked him,
How glad I was he had come like a guest in quiet, to drink at my water-trough
And depart peaceful, pacified, and thankless,
Into the burning bowels of this earth? 30

Was it cowardice, that I dared not kill him?
Was it perversity, that I longed to talk to him?
Was it humility, to feel so honoured?
I felt so honoured.

And yet those voices:
If you were not afraid, you would kill him! 35

And truly I was afraid, I was most afraid,
But even so, honoured still more
That he should seek my hospitality
From out the dark door of the secret earth.

40

He drank enough
And lifted his head, dreamily, as one who has drunken,
And flickered his tongue like a forked night on the air, so black,
Seeming to lick his lips,
And looked around like a god, unseeing, into the air,
And slowly turned his head.

45

And slowly, very slowly, as if thrice adream,
Proceeded to draw his slow length curving round
And climb again the broken bank of my wall-face ...

50

... I looked round, I put down my pitcher,
I picked up a clumsy log
And threw it at the water-trough with a clatter.

I think it did not hit him,
But suddenly that part of him that was left behind convulsed in undignified haste,
Writhing like lightning, and was gone
Into the black hole, the earth-lipped fissure in the wall-front,
At which, in the intense still noon, I stared with fascination.

55

And immediately I regretted it.
I thought how paltry, how vulgar, what a mean act!

I despised myself and the voices of my accursed human education.
And I thought of the albatross,
And I wished he would come back, my snake ...

60

by D H Lawrence

Answer these questions.

1 What was at the water-trough when the writer arrived? _____

2 Which **adjective** does the poet use to describe the snake's mouth?

3 In lines 16–17 the snake was compared to cattle. How?

4 Did this scene take place during the day or at night?

5-7 Give the meaning of the following words as they are used in the poem:

'mused' (line 18) _____

'venomous' (line 24) _____

'perversity' (line 32) _____

8 Copy a line from the poem that indicates in which country the scene is based.

9 Find a line or **phrase** that is characteristically used to describe a snake.

10 Line 34 reads 'I felt so honoured'. Why did the onlooker feel like this?

11 Why does the poet describe the earth as 'secret' (line 40)?

12-13 Look again at lines 31-40. Using lines from the poem to support your answer, describe how the onlooker is feeling.

14-15 What is the snake's attitude while at the drinking trough? Use a line from the poem to support your answer.

16 The onlooker picked up 'a clumsy log' (line 51). Why was the log described as 'clumsy'?

17 Using evidence from the poem, explain why the onlooker threw a log at the snake.
