

# DECOMPOSITION BY ZULFIKAR GHOSE

first person – personal experience      negative connotation of decomposing or dying  
opposite meaning to composition, as the 'composition of a photograph'

1 I have a picture I took in Bombay of a beggar asleep on the pavement :  
poverty      grey-haired, wearing shorts and a dirty shirt,  
negative - unclean      description of beggar suggests poverty  
his shadow thrown aside (like a blanket).  
shadow – lacks reality      simile – shadow like a blanket – suggests beggar lives on the street

5 His arms and legs could be cracks in the stone,  
insignificance of beggar – ants/flies walk on him      routes for the ants' journeys, the flies' descents.  
metaphor – suggests beggar is like part of the pavement – arms and legs are like thin lines on the paving  
Brainwashed by the sun into exhaustion,  
he lies veined into stone, a fossil man.  
metaphor – his arms and legs are like veins on stone      fossil is dead – a mere impression in stone

10 Behind him there is a crowd passingly bemused by a pavement trickster and quite  
paying no attention      indifferent to this very common sight  
enjambement suggests tourist is walking on      suggests lack of interest  
of an old man asleep on the pavement.      the literal statement of what the poem is about

15 I thought it then a good composition and glibly called it 'The Man in the Street'  
connotation suggests uncaring attitude      title of the poem      which man? ambiguous  
15      remarking how typical it was of  
India that the man in the street lived there.  
seems a callous, insensitive remark  
1. the tourist taking the photograph  
2. the beggar lying in the street  
3. the 'representative man'

20 His head in the posture of one weeping into a pillow chides me now for my  
presumption at attempting to compose art out of his hunger and solitude.  
makes old man seem childlike  
insensitivity to man's actual plight – tourist is concerned about the artistic nature of his photograph



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*Decomposition – Zulfikar Ghose*  
Intermediate 2 Textual Analysis

**QUESTIONS**

- (a)
- (i) In verse 1 (lines 1 – 4) the poet describes the subject of his photograph. Suggest a reason why the narrator took the photograph of the beggar. (1)
- (ii) Read lines 2 – 4: ‘a beggar ... like a blanket.’

Identify any **two** feelings which the poet’s description of the beggar might arouse in the reader. Pick out a **word** or **phrase** which you feel arouses each of these **two** feelings effectively, clearly explaining your choice. (4)

- (b) Read verse two (lines 5 – 8): ‘His arms and legs...a fossil man.’

- (i) ‘His arms and legs could be cracks in the stone.’ (line 5)

What does this suggest about the appearance of the beggar’s limbs? (2)

- (ii) ‘Routes for the ants’ journeys, the flies’ descents.’ (line 6)

Look at the references to insects in this line. What do you think is the significance of these references? (You may wish to consider the title of the poem.) (2)

- (iii) ‘he lies veined into stone, a fossil man.’ (line 8)

Say what the poet is comparing the man to here, and then, in more detail, explain how the comparison might affect the reader’s feelings towards the man. (3)

- (c) Read verse three (lines 9 – 12).

- (i) The poet describes the crowd’s response to the pavement trickster as ‘passingly bemused’, while they are ‘quite indifferent’ to the beggar. Explain the difference clearly in your own words. (2)

- (ii) In verse three (lines 9 – 12) the poet uses *enjambment* : each line runs on into the next without punctuation. Can you suggest the poet’s reason for doing so, taking into consideration the scene which he is describing? (2)

- (iii) Suggest a reason why the poet mentions that the beggar is ‘a very common sight’ (line 11) in Bombay. (2)

(d) What **two** meanings might be understood by the poet's title for his photograph :  
'The Man in the Street' (line 14)?

(2)

(e) The word 'decomposition' in the title of this poem can mean decay, especially of an animal or human body. There is also a pun on the word 'composition', which is used of artists designing a picture.

Can you suggest why the poet chose this title for the poem?

(2)

(f) In verses four and five (lines 13 – 20), the poet explains two different feelings he has towards his photograph. Show how effectively you feel he has expressed the difference. You should refer to at least **two** of the following : ideas; word choice; imagery; tone; sentence structure.

(8)

Total 30 Marks

