

CAE Texts

PART 5 - HOME COMFORT

It was a lazy Sunday afternoon, the lull before the storm of Monday morning madness of alarm clocks, traffic jams and deadlines. The clock struck three and Rebecca's elbow still rested on the arm of the tapestry-covered sofa. With her fingertips she began caressing the rough piping that ran along its seams. Simultaneously, the toes of her left foot moved back and forth across the edges of the sheepskin rug. This action Rebecca found comforting; it reminded her of being at home as a child when she used to sit in the family sitting room, her toes playing with the fringes of another kind of rug. Her mother would snap at her to stop it, so of course she did it all the more.

Rebecca had a sudden whiff of the glue that Katy was applying to make one of her artistic creations. Her daughter was seated on a cushion right in the middle of the room, looking like an island, surrounded by a sea of cardboard cut-offs, sequins, felt-tip pens, and pristine sheets of white A4 paper that she had disobediently pinched from

her father's study. She really should be working at the kitchen table, Rebecca thought, but I don't have the appetite for the outburst that might happen if my genius-daughter-at-work is disturbed. Every three minutes and 50 seconds Katy got up to replay Kylie Minogue's version of 'The Locomotion'.

"Why don't you listen to the CD all the way through, Katy?" her dad said, who was sprawled out on the other sofa. "You'd like the other songs as well." "Nah, too boring."

Rebecca glanced at David and then said, "I could do with something to perk me up." Her words trailed off with a heavy sigh, and then a yawn. It was the first in a series of hints that she would like him to get up and make her a cup of tea.

On the lamp table next to the sofa, she noticed a letter that had been delivered a week ago, advertising exercises classes and a slimming club. She had kept it on the table as a reminder, or perhaps to conjure up the same kind of magical effect that people believe in when they splash out on membership to a fancy gym without going near the place more than once every two months.

“Have you seen this flyer?” she said to her husband. “Just the thought of going for a workout makes me want to go and lie down.” Once more she didn’t get a response. “Who’s going to make the tea then?” was her third and most blatant attempt to get a drink before she died of thirst.

He stood up. “I suppose it’s my turn. Again.” He went off into the kitchen while Rebecca, the victor, snuggled a bit further into the sofa. Charlie, who’d been asleep on the sheepskin rug, now started up with his own brand of baby chatter. He was attempting to cover the whole repertoire of vowel sounds this afternoon, like a singer performing warm-up exercises. Then, occasionally, he jammed his fingers into his mouth to make a sound approaching an elongated ‘w’.

He lay underneath a baby gym, which consisted of a tubular frame in patriotic colours of red, white and blue and a top bar, from which dangled two clowns, one on a swing and one in a position that Rebecca thought was called a pike. (It was a long time ago that she had achieved her gold star award in the trampoline.) Once Charlie made eye contact

with Rebecca, his happy babbling began to turn into a grizzle.

Does Charlie want feeding again?" Rebecca asked in the baby voice that irritated them all, herself included. She bent down to scoop her son up. "Mum, he doesn't want feeding again. You've only just fed him," Katy said. "I'll try – just in case he's hungry." In the kitchen she warmed through the mush of potatoes and broccoli that Charlie liked and took it back through to be with Katy.

Luckily, the baby was actually ready for a feed, which meant that Rebecca not only saved face with her daughter, but showed that she had no need to feel guilty about sending her husband to make the tea. David walked back in the sitting room that very minute, her cup of Earl Grey with its delicate scent of bergamot wobbling in its saucer. In his other hand he clutched a large mug. Rebecca gave him a warning look that dared him not to put the cups down on the oak blanket box that served as their coffee table. Its surface was already scarred by two rings where hot drinks had been carelessly placed directly onto it.

“Thanks. You’re a treasure.” She settled down to feed Charlie, knowing that her tea would be the perfect temperature to drink in one go by the time he had had enough.

“Where’s Katy got to?” David said, after a few minutes. The answer came from upstairs as they heard the sound of their older child passing through the curtain in the doorway of her bedroom. It was like those beaded curtains that used to be in fashion when Rebecca was a child, but instead of beads this one was formed from a dazzling collection of pink, purple and silver shimmering plastic squares. She couldn’t remember which one of them had named it the ‘jingle-jangler’ but it was very apt.

Rebecca's mood at the start of the story is

1. calm and reflective.
2. cross and irritable.
3. restless and agitated.
4. sad and upset.

What action does Rebecca take with her daughter?

1. She reprimands Katy for making a mess on the floor.
2. She asks David to speak to Katy.
3. She appeals to Katy to play a wider range of music.
4. She does nothing in order to avoid a fuss.

When David first leaves the sitting room, Rebecca is

1. relieved that her baby is awake.
2. surprised to hear her baby chattering.
3. guilty that she's being lazy.
4. glad to have got her own way.

What is Rebecca's attitude to the letter lying on the table?

1. The adverb's claims are misleading.
2. She hopes it will prompt her to take up exercise.
3. It makes her feel more motivated.
4. She thinks the slimming club is good value for money.

Rebecca is worried when her husband brings in the drinks because

1. he might trip over Katy's equipment.
2. he doesn't like the smell of her tea.
3. tea is dripping from the saucer.
4. he might damage an item of furniture.

The curtain referred to in Katy's bedroom

1. is identical in design to one from a previous generation.
2. makes a tinkling sound.
3. is made up of unusual colours.
4. keeps out the light at night

PART 6 - The Architecture of Happiness

Four reviewers comment on philosopher Alain De Botton's book called The Architecture of Happiness.

A

Alain de Botton is a brave and highly intelligent writer who writes about complex subjects, clarifying the arcane for the layman. Now, with typical self-assurance, he has turned to the subject of architecture. The essential theme of his book is how architecture influences mood and behaviour. It is not about the specifically architectural characteristics of space and design, but much more about the emotions that architecture inspires in the users of buildings. Yet architects do not normally talk nowadays very much about emotion and beauty. They talk about design and function. De Botton's message, then, is fairly simple but worthwhile precisely because it is simple, readable and timely. His commendable aim is to encourage architects, and society more generally, to pay more attention to the psychological consequences of design in architecture: architecture should be

treated as something that affects all our lives, our happiness and well-being.

B

Alain de Botton raises important, previously unasked, questions concerning the quest for beauty in architecture, or its rejection or denial. Yet one is left with the feeling that he needed the help and support of earlier authors on the subject to walk him across the daunting threshold of architecture itself. And he is given to making extraordinary claims: 'Architecture is perplexing ... in how inconsistent is its capacity to generate the happiness on which its claim to our attention is founded.' If architecture's capacity to generate happiness is inconsistent, this might be because happiness has rarely been something architects think about. De Botton never once discusses the importance of such dull, yet determining, matters as finance or planning laws, much less inventions such as the lift or reinforced concrete. He appears to believe that architects are still masters of their art, when increasingly they are cogs in a global

machine for building in which beauty, and how de Botton feels about it, are increasingly beside the point.

C

In *The Architecture of Happiness*, Alain de Botton has a great time making bold and amusing judgements about architecture, with lavish and imaginative references, but anyone in search of privileged insights into the substance of building design should be warned that he is not looking at drain schedules or pipe runs. He worries away, as many architects do, at how inert material things can convey meaning and alter consciousness. Although he is a rigorous thinker, most of de Botton's revelations, such as the contradictions in Le Corbusier's theory and practice, are not particularly new. However, this is an engaging and intelligent book on architecture and something everyone, professionals within the field in particular, should read.

D

Do we want our buildings merely to shelter us, or do we also want them to speak to us? Can the right sort of architecture even improve our character? Music mirrors the dynamics of our emotional lives. Mightn't architecture work the same way? De Botton thinks so, and in *The Architecture of Happiness* he makes the most of this theme on his jolly trip through the world of architecture. De Botton certainly writes with conviction and, while focusing on happiness can be a lovely way to make sense of architectural beauty, it probably won't be of much help in resolving conflicts of taste.

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Which reviewer:

Has a different opinion from the others on the confidence with which de Botton discusses architecture?

1. Reviewer A
2. Reviewer B
3. Reviewer C
4. Reviewer D

Shares reviewer A's opinion whether architects should take note of de Botton's ideas?

1. Reviewer A
2. Reviewer B
3. Reviewer C
4. Reviewer D

Expresses a similar view to reviewer B regarding the extent to which architects share de Botton's concerns?

- 1. Reviewer A
- 2. Reviewer B
- 3. Reviewer C
- 4. Reviewer D

Has a different view to reviewer C on the originality of some of de Botton's ideas?

- 1. Reviewer A
- 2. Reviewer B
- 3. Reviewer C
- 4. Reviewer D