Belonging – Steven Herrick’s *The Simple Gift*

**Chapter One – Champagne Billy**

“"I say goodbye to all that, throwing rocks down Longlands Road.”

1. What is the significance of the title of this chapter?
2. Making close reference to the text, describe the world that Billy is choosing to leave in Chapter One.
3. How is Billy’s sense of alienation or dislocation established in Chapter One?
4. The notion of belonging to or alienation from a particular place or environment is introduced in this chapter. Make a list of all the places mentioned in Chapter One. For each environment, find one quote/reference that signifies Billy’s connectedness or disconnectedness to it. For example:

   (a) the veranda of Billy’s home – “I sit on the veranda and watch the cold rain fall” – pathetic fallacy is used here to suggest that Billy is not comfortable in this environment

5. How do the poems of this first chapter convey via Billy’s story the complications of belonging and freeing oneself from belonging?
6. Identify two key ideas/concepts associated with belonging using the following as a sentence starter:

   *Chapter One of* **The Simple Gift** *suggests that belonging…*

**Chapter Two – Bendarat**

“I’d go off all alone, because you can’t trust those who want to break the rules and you certainly can’t trust those who make the rules, so you do the only thing possible, you avoid the rules.”

1. Describe Bendarat as presented in this chapter. Make close reference to the text.
2. Identify one example of Herrick’s use of pathetic fallacy in this chapter. Use quotes.
3. The notion of belonging to or alienation from a particular place or environment continues in this chapter. Make a list of all the places mentioned in Chapter Two. For each environment, find one quote/reference that signifies Billy’s connectedness or disconnectedness to it.
4. Describe “The Motel Bendarat” (pp.28-29). How does Herrick use suggest that this is one place in which Billy may feel connected? Refer to specific techniques.
5. How does Billy’s interaction with the librarian highlight the way that his perception of belonging has been shaped by past experiences?
6. Identify three key ideas/concepts associated with belonging using the following sentence starter:

   *Chapter Two of* **The Simple Gift** *suggests that belonging…*
Chapter Three – Caitlin

“As if we were both caught doing something we didn’t want to do but had to.”

1. What does the excerpt (above) suggest to the reader about the focus will be in this chapter?
2. Making reference to the text, describe Caitlin’s initial perception of Billy.
3. What information is given about Caitlin’s background in this chapter? In what ways is it different to Billy’s? Are there any similarities?
4. What clues are given that Billy is feeling a sense of peace and connectedness to Bendarat in this chapter? Use quotes to support your ideas.
5. “Hunger” (p.40) explores the idea of hunger for both Caitlin and Billy. Explain the importance of this feeling.
6. “…nothing real about it either” (p.45) - What is the significance, in terms of growing up, of the initial responses of Billy and Caitlin to each other and the forging of a sense of connection between them?
7. Chapter Three of The Simple Gift, “Caitlin”, suggests that belonging…

Chapter Four – The Hobo Hour

“Every second day I come here… to wash the world away.”

1. What is Old Bill’s role in the text?
2. Explain the significance of the final line of “The hobo hour”.
3. Why does Billy reach out to Old Bill in “Too early”?
4. What does “Billy’s cave” suggest about Billy’s emerging sense of belonging?
5. Chapter Four of The Simple Gift, “The hobo hour”, suggests that belonging…

Chapter Five – Work

“A kid who can’t leave well enough alone.”

1. How do the events of “Sorry” contribute to notions of belonging?
2. Discuss the influence that Billy is having on Old Bill. How does this connect to ideas about belonging?
3. How do the events of “Green” emphasise Billy’s growing maturity and esteem?
4. What does the ring symbolise?
5. How does “Need” (p.85-86) show the power of other people to influence one’s sense of belonging?
6. What does “Caitlin” (p.88) reveal about Caitlin’s perceptions of belonging?
7. Outline Old Bill’s history as revealed in this chapter. What has been the main impact on his sense of dislocation/isolation/loneliness?
8. Chapter Five of The Simple Gift, “Work”, suggests that belonging…
Chapter Six – *Friends*

“Sure there’s hope in the world
even for hobos like us.”

1. How does this title of the chapter address notions of belonging?
2. What does Billy identify as a key aspect of belonging in ‘Comfort’ (pp.102-103)?
3. “because without his ghosts he’s afraid he’ll have nothing to live for.” (p.105) What does this suggest about the power of people to shape a sense of belonging?
4. How does Caitlin describe her house (p.108)? What does this suggest about the difference between a house and a home? How can this influence an individual’s sense of belonging?
5. Identify the irony of Old Bill’s situation, using “Hobos like us” (p. 109) as evidence.
6. Chapter Six of *The Simple Gift*, “Friends”, suggests that belonging…

Chapter Seven – *The Simple Gift*

“Wandering from room to room
discovering
another side of the moon.”

1. Describe Caitlin’s initial perception of Old Bill. Why does she change her opinion?
2. How many times does Herrick use the word ‘sunshine’ in the poem “In the sunshine” (pp.118-119)? Why is this important in terms of understanding the connection between characters?
3. Describe the ‘simple gift’ that Old Bill identifies in this chapter. How does this connect to notions of belonging?
4. Billy and Caitlin take another step in their relationship in this chapter. Comment on the importance of this in the journey of both the characters.
5. Make a list of the positive emotive words used in the poems “Tell the world”, “Share”, “Billy, dancing” and “Heaven” (pp. 131-135). How does this list shape the reader’s perception of the importance of a sense of belonging in an individual’s life?
6. Chapter Seven of *The Simple Gift*, “The Simple Gift”, suggests that belonging…

Chapter Eight – *Closing In*

“I tried to read
between the lines
holding someone’s past
in my dirty hands.”

1. Explain how Billy has had a positive influence on Old Bill’s life. What are the key signs that Old Bill’s sense of belonging is growing?
2. What does this chapter suggest about the influence of the past on a person’s sense of belonging to the present?
3. Comment on the symbolism of Old Bill’s memory of Jessie’s association with birds.
4. What do we find out about Old Bill’s past in this chapter?
5. Describe Old Bill’s plan. Explain why this is such a large step for both Old Bill and Billy.
6. Chapter Eight of *The Simple Gift*, “Closing In”, suggests that belonging…
Chapter Nine – *Locks and Keys*

“We shake hands, and my hand in his stops trembling for a moment.”

1. Explain Herrick’s use of the swallow symbol in this chapter (p.172 and p.173).
2. Making close reference to the text, describe Old Bill’s life at this house prior to Jessie’s accident.
3. There are many references to hands in this chapter. Find three of these and comment on the symbolism of each reference in connection to ideas about belonging.
4. What does the house represent in this section of the text?
5. Is the occupation of Old Bill’s house by Billy and Caitlin a step towards a more enriched belonging or a kind of return to the old worlds they left behind? Explain your response.

Chapter Ten – *Old Bill*

“The swallows still sang on the veranda, as Caitlin and I stood there measuring a life.”

1. Why is this chapter called “Old Bill”?
2. How does the reference to the Great Barrier Reef connect to other key symbols in the text?
3. What does Old Bill’s memories of Jessie suggest about the power of the individual, whether present or not, to shape an individual’s sense of belonging?
4. What is the purpose of the detailed description of Old Bill’s house in “Measure” (p.186)?
5. Herrick uses another meal as a symbol in the chapter. How does this meal differ from past experiences of shared food? Why is this important?
6. Chapter Ten of *The Simple Gift*, “Old Bill”, suggests that belonging…

Chapter Eleven – *The Hobo Sky*

“The taste of being sober all day.”

1. Why is it important to Billy to revisit his carriage?
2. Explain the connection between the idea of respect (“Respect”, pp.199-200) and aspects of belonging.
3. What connection can be made between the contents of *Maybe*” (p.201) and ideas of belonging?
4. What is the significance of the last word in the text in terms of a study of belonging?
5. Chapter Eleven of *The Simple Gift*, “The Hobo Sky”, suggests that belonging…