

ZNOTES // IGCSE SERIES

visit www.znotes.org



CIE IGCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE 0486

NOTES ON POEMS FROM “SONGS OF OURSELVES” [PART 2]

THE CITY PLANNERS

- **Summary:**
 - Persona addresses the perfection, robotic, bland and uniform structure of the city as she takes a cruise through it on a Sunday, something she finds completely sickening.
 - Setting: Suburbs; 'houses in ... rows'
- **Split into four parts according to topic**
 - Part 1 = Stanza 1 to 2 (Observing perfections and imperfections)
 - Part 2 = Stanza 3 to 4 (Foreshadowing)
 - Part 3 = Stanza 5 to 6 (Blaming politicians and planners)
 - Part 4 = Stanza 7 (Enigma)
- **Margaret Atwood:**
 - Canadian poet, novelist, literary critic, essayist, and environmental activist.
 - Winner of the Arthur C. Clarke Award and Prince of Asturias Award for Literature
 - Fascinated by Canadian wilderness

THE CITY PLANNERS

- **Language:**

- Semantic field of organization and perfection, 'pedantic rows', 'levelness', 'straight swath', 'neatly sidestep', 'same slant'
- Personification, 'driveways neatly sidestep hysteria', 'too-fixed stare', 'avoidance to the hot sky'
- Imperative, 'No shouting here'
- Simile, 'like a rebuke', 'gradual as glaciers'
- Oxymoron, 'rational whine'

- **Structure:**

- No rhyme scheme
- Enjambment throughout poem

- **Sound devices:**

- Sibilance, 'straight swath', 'sidestep', 'same slant', 'smell of spit'
- Alliteration, 'gradual as glaciers', 'now nobody notices', 'wide windows', 'wall in the white'

THE CITY PLANNERS

- **Attitudes/feelings:**

- Negative towards urbanization: 'offends us is the sanities',
- Unorganized/natural things treated like imperfection: 'like a rebuke to the dent', 'discouraged grass', 'sidestep hysteria' (hysteria=grass/nature), 'smell of spilt oil a faint sickness', 'splash of paint... as a bruise', 'too fixed stare of the window'
- Foreshadowing: 'future cracks in the plaster', 'houses... will slide', 'now nobody notices'
- Nature will take over: 'into the clay seas', 'white vanishing air',
- Planners/politicians go forward and don't realize what's going on behind them: 'over unsurveyed territories', 'each in his own private blizzard', 'guessing direction', 'in the white vanishing air'

- **Linking poems:**

- The Planners, reoccurring problem of urbanization being bad for society
- Where I Came From, both poets favor the rural area,

THE PLANNERS

- **Summary:**

- About how 'the planners' built perfected and precisely calculated man-made structures. How man-made structures erase nature's flaws by being so perfect and also don't care about damages caused to nature.
- Setting: No setting - generalized

- **Split into three parts according to stanzas**

- Part 1 = Stanza 1 (Perfection of structures & retreating of nature)
- Part 2 = Stanza 2 (Replacing nature with man-made. Continue to build/plan without mercy)
- Part 3 = Stanza 3 (Persona's feelings towards planners- in favor of planners)

- **Boey Kim Cheng:**

- As a student he won the National University of Singapore Poetry Competition received the National Arts Council's Young Artist Award (1996) teaches creative writing at the University of Newcastle in Australia.

THE PLANNERS

- **Language:**

- A mixture of literal and figurative language used - mostly figurative
- Semantic field of perfection: 'mathematics', 'gridded', 'plan', 'alignment'
- Metaphor: 'The country wears perfect rows of shinning teeth'
- Hyperbole: 'perfect rows', 'shinning teeth'
- Constant Repetition: 'They'

- **Structure:**

- Constant enjambment throughout poem.
- No rhyme scheme
- Dramatic pause: 'not bleed poetry.'

- **Sound devices:**

- Alliteration: 'gleaming gold', 'permutations of possibilities', 'dental dexterity', 'Anaesthesia, amnesia'
- Sibilance: 'skies surrender'

THE PLANNERS

- **Attitudes/feelings:**

- Awe-full: 'bridges all hang in the grace of mathematics'
- Power of Planners: 'They have it all', 'They have the means', 'The piling will not stop'
- Planners fix nature's inconsistencies: 'erase the flaws', 'history is new again', 'gaps are plugged', 'through fossils of last century'
- Nature is weak, 'sea draws back', 'skies surrender'
- Persona will not try to stop the planners: 'not a single drop to stain the blueprint' of our today

- **Linking poems:**

- The City Planners, Where I come from: all have Man vs Nature
- The City planners: Industry and Technology
- Horses, Pike: Constant awe

WHERE I COME FROM

- **Summary:**

- Persona expressing how people originate from nature and how the city differs from these people.
Then persona expresses how she stayed true to where she 'came' from (nature lover)

- **Split into four parts according to topic**

- Part 1 = Stanza 1 lines 1-4 (people originate from nature)
- Part 2 = Stanza 1 lines 5-11 (describing city)
- Part 3 = Stanza 2 (describing where she comes from - nature)
- Part 4 = Stanza 3 (expressing if u open your mind you'll get a hint of nature)

- **Elizabeth Brewster:**

- Canadian poet and academic
- Member of the Order of Canada, Canada's highest civilian honor.

WHERE I COME FROM

- **Language:**
 - Mostly literal, however some figurative
 - Semantic field of confinement: 'tidily plotted', 'guidebook', 'crowded at rush hours'
 - Semantic field of freedom: 'acres of pine woods', 'circle about', 'clucking aimlessly', 'violets grow'
 - Repetition: 'tidily plotted', 'woods'
- **Structure:**
 - Dramatic pause: 'People are made of places.', 'Where I come from,'.
 - No rhyme scheme - symbolise freedom
 - Constant enjambment
 - Enigmatic ending
- **Sound devices:**
 - Sibilance: 'smell of smog',
 - Alliteration: 'different drops', 'burned-out-bush',

WHERE I COME FROM

- **Attitudes/feelings:**

- Places influence people: 'People are made of places'
- They carry their 'home' with them wherever: 'They carry with them hints of jungles or mountains'
- Against the city (artificial/confined): 'smell of smog', 'nature tidily plotted', 'crowded'
- For Nature (freedom): 'acres of pine wood', 'circle about', 'violets grow', 'ice and the breaking of ice'

- **Linking poems:**

- Pied Beauty, Summer Farm, Pike: Natural world
- The City Planners and The Planners: Natural vs Manmade
- The City Planners: Response to place

THE WOODSPURGE

- **Summary:**
 - Persona is in deep depression and describes a surreal world, talking about a rare herb; the woodspurge
 - Setting: Nature/Countryside
- **Split into four parts according to stanzas**
 - Part 1 = Stanza 1 (he is driven through nature by the wind)
 - Part 2 = Stanza 2 (describes his physical position)
 - Part 3 = Stanza 3 (observes nature around him)
 - Part 4 = Stanza 4 (enigma – has faith?)
- **Dante Gabriel Rossetti:**
 - English poet, illustrator, painter and translator.
 - He founded the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood
 - Rossetti's art was characterised by its sensuality and its medieval revivalism.

THE WOODSPURGE

- **Language:**

- Very allegorical and many ideas have double meanings
- Repetition: 'wind' – hypnotic effect, represents society?, represents powerlessness of persona
- Personification: 'wind's will' – persona is driven
- Repetition: 'my' – everything is about him
- Oxymoron: 'perfect grief'

- **Structure:**

- AAAA rhyme scheme: monotonous and dull – echoes persona's feelings
- Caesura at end of each stanza; every sentence sinks in
- Half rhyme of 'was' – breaks monotonous rhyme scheme but then continues

- **Sound devices:**

- Alliteration: 'wind's will',

THE WOODSPURGE

- **Attitudes/feelings:**

- Loss of will: persona directed by 'wind's will'
- Deep grief:
 - May be death, 'shaken out dead'
 - Melodramatic position, forehead between knees – position of sadness
 - Dullness and darkness, monotonous rhyme scheme and 'out of the sun'
 - Vulnerable: 'naked ears', veiled – 'hair was over in the grass' – grief/death
- Faith: 'three cups in one', three represents Trinity and cup represents chalice – Holy Grail

- **Linking poems:**

- The Cockroach: allegorical – compare life with woodspurge/cockroach
- Continuum: surreal images
- A Birthday: medieval images + poetry based on emotion standpoint

SONNET: COMPOSED UPON WESTMINSTER BRIDGE

Page 14

- **Summary:**
 - A person is admiring the beauty of the Earth and nature
 - Also shows an appreciation of man –made things (less than natural)
 - Setting: Westminster Bridge, London, England
- **Split into four parts according to stanzas**
 - Part 1: First Quatrain – Line 1-4
 - Part 2: Second Quatrain – Line 5-8
 - Part 3: Sestet – Line 9-14
- **William Wordsworth:**
 - Helped to launch the romantic age in English Literature
 - Was also at some time Poet Laureate
 - He thought poetry was ‘the real language of men’

SONNET: COMPOSED UPON WESTMINSTER BRIDGE

Page 15

- **Language:**
 - Romantic and Figurative
 - Personification - 'City now doth like a garment wear' and 'the river gildeth'
 - Juxtaposition – 'The beauty of the morning; silent, bare'
 - Pathetic Fallacy – 'sun more beautifully steep'
 - Semantic Field – Geographical/Nature : 'valley', 'rock', 'hill', 'river', 'sun', 'sky', 'air', 'Earth'
- **Structure:**
 - The poem is structured as a sonnet, giving it a sense of romance (with nature)
 - The rhyme scheme is AB1/2BA ABBA CDCDCD
 - Half rhyme could to embolden the aspect of 'majesty' of the sight
 - The poem is structured physically all as one, but stanzas are identifiable due to rhyme scheme
- **Sound devices:**
 - Sonnet rhyme scheme makes it sound harmonic and emphasizes the air of romance
 - Sibilance: 'the very houses seem asleep'

SONNET: COMPOSED UPON WESTMINSTER BRIDGE

Page 16

- Alliteration: 'towers, domes, theatres and temples' (t) and 'Ne'er saw I, never felt' (n)
- **Attitudes/feelings:**
 - Admiration: 'Earth has not anything to show more fair', 'A sight so touching in its majesty' and 'Never did the sun more beautifully steep'
 - Serenity: 'a calm so deep', 'mighty heart is lying still', 'own sweet will'
 - Reverence: 'majesty'
 - Poem shows love for nature: 'river glideth'
 - Poem also shows how the creations of man integrate nicely with nature: 'The City now doth like a garment'
 - Also shows an appreciation for God and how all of this is his creation: 'Dear God!'
- **Linking poems:**
 - 'Pied Beauty': Both are very romantic
 - 'Summer Farm': Both show an appreciation of nature

A DIFFERENT HISTORY

- **Summary:**

- Shows a deep reverence and appreciation of religion, nature, and God (Or Gods in the poem)
- Discusses the act of being friends with nature rather than Man VS Nature
- Kind of takes a dark turn when they start talking about Man VS Man related things
- Setting: in persona's thoughts

- **Split into four parts according to stanzas**

- Part 1: Stanza 1 (Religion, Nature, Man)
- Part 2: Stanza 2 (Man VS Man)

- **Sujata Bhatt:**

- Many of her poems contain love and violence (interesting combination)
- Known for exploring racism and cultures around the world in her poems
- Considered 'one of the finest poets alive'

A DIFFERENT HISTORY

- **Language:**

- Quite literal language but a few memorable figurative aspects
- Personification: 'offending the tree', 'rude to a book'
- Simile: 'as snakes or monkeys'
- Repetition:
 - 1st Stanza: 'a sin' repeated four times
 - 1st Stanza: 'without' repeated twice
 - 2nd Stanza: 'Which language'
- Juxtaposition: 'love that strange language'

- **Structure:**

- No evident rhyme scheme
- Indentation: Line 3/10/12/14
- Enjambment: Line 9+10/11+12/13+14/15+16

A DIFFERENT HISTORY

- **Sound devices:**

- No rhymes
- Sibilance: 'a sin to slam'
- Power of 3: 'shove', 'slam', 'toss'
- Alliteration: 'whose woods'

- **Attitudes/feelings:**

- **First stanza:**

- Love and Respect for nature: 'turn the pages gently', 'without offending the tree'
- Reverence for religion: 'Great Pan' (Greek God of Nature), 'without disturbing Sarasvati' (Hindu Goddess of the Arts), 'a sin' (word from Christianity)
- Almost like a sensei teaching a grasshopper to be calm: 'sacred', 'gently', 'disturbing', 'offending'
- Sense of freedom too: 'roam freely'

A DIFFERENT HISTORY

- **Second stanza:** completely different
 - There is an air of darkness: 'murder', 'torture', 'scythe'
 - It is also very literal in the sense that she (an Indian) uses the language of those (The British) that conquered and killed her own ancestors
 - A sense of hypocrisy as she is using the language in the poem
 - Leaves a dirty taste in the mouth
- **Linking poems:**
 - 'Horses', 'Pike', 'Hunting Snake' and 'Cockroach': have mention of an animal
 - 'Pied Beauty' and 'Summer Farm': appreciation of nature and God
 - 'The Planners' and 'The City Planners': how man can destroy things, even themselves
 - 'A Birthday': Both have a strange twist in there 2nd stanza
 - 'The Woodspurge': Have a link between religion
 - 'Where I Come From': Have a link between the Man and Nature aspect

CONTINUUM

- **Summary:**
 - Persona is an insomniac
 - Describing his emotions in a sleepless night – confused between rational and irrational
 - Setting: Night time, in his house
- **Not split:**
 - It is just a flow of rational and irrational thoughts
 - Confusion just keeps flowing through
- **Allen Curnow:**
 - Known for poems discussing world issues
 - Frequently incorporates myth and symbolism in his poems
 - Uses childhood experiences in his poems
 - Almost always uses ideas of emotional stability and self-reflection
 - Many of his poems also often based on isolation from society

CONTINUUM

- **Language:**

- Figurative when irrational, literal when rational
- Personification: 'moon rolls over the roof and falls' suggesting hallucination
- Pathetic Fallacy: 'dark place', 'night sky' suggesting depression
- Juxtaposition: 'dark place... bright clouds' suggesting irrationality
- Repetition: 'the moon' emphasis on night time

- **Structure:**

- The poem is free verse (no rhyme)
- Suggests that his confusion is fluent
- What is consistent is that each stanza is 3 lines
- Also enjambment is evident in nearly every stanza and line suggesting flow of distorted thoughts

- **Sound devices:**

- Alliteration: 'rolls over the roof', 'to think thoughts', 'better barefoot', 'back to bed'
- Sibilance: 'stealthily in step'

- **Attitudes/feelings:**

- Lost in irrational and rational thoughts: 'the moon rolls over and falls... the moon does neither'
- He says he cannot think yet he is writing the poem suggesting confusion: 'nor to think thoughts'
- Against himself: 'one's mine the other's an adversary' – he says this about clouds in his mind
- Contrast between theme of darkness and light suggesting depression: 'dark place... bright clouds'
- Agoraphobia suggesting he does not like constriction or too much freedom: 'turn on a bare heel'
- Sense of elongated time: 'a long moment stretches' it is still night time, and he is still confused

- **Linking poems:**

- Summer Farm: both personas are lost within themselves
- The Cockroach: both have a sense of confusion