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# CIE IGCSE ENGLISH LITERATURE 0486

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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'

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# 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,

NOTES

# 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 shining 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'

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# 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

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# 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.

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# 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',

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# 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

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# 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',

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# 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

- **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’

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# SONNET: COMPOSED UPON WESTMINSTER BRIDGE

- **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

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- 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

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# 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

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# 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'

# CONTINUUM

- **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

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