

Clear and Gentle Stream – Robert Bridges (1873) – Knowledge Organiser

Context (AO3)	
<p>Hymns – Robert Bridges wrote and translated a number of hymns later in his career. This poem – written in 1873 – has since been set to music and sung which reflects the lyrical nature of Bridges’ poetry.</p>	<p>Robert Bridges’ life – Bridges was a doctor for many years until he retired to become a writer. He was a literary scholar as well as a religious man and this is reflected in a lot of his poetry. In Clear and Gentle Stream, he shows not only his knowledge of a variety of literary styles but also how he was influenced by spirituality and nature.</p>
<p>Poet Laureate – Bridges was appointed Poet Laureate between 1913 and his death in 1930. He was known for his emotive and rhymical poetry.</p>	

Language, form and structure	
<p>Form and structure: The poem has four verses with an unusual rhyme scheme. There is an enclosed rhyme to start – ABBA, followed by alternate rhyme, CDCD and then ending with two rhyming couplets.</p>	<p>Contrast: Bridges uses the contrast between ‘boyish days’, ‘youthful song’ and his ‘old lament’ to show that time has passed. However, he still has the same ‘idle dream’ once he spends time near the stream.</p>
<p>Natural imagery: Bridges paints an idyllic picture of the stream with ‘proud swans’, ‘translucent eaves’ and ‘fish’ in ‘cool pools’. These beautiful, calm images unchanging as nature does not change even though Bridges himself has become older.</p>	<p>Tone: The poem is nostalgic and simple in tone. Bridges is thoughtful and allows his thoughts to get lost in the beauty of nature. There is a religious and thankful overtone as he indulges on a ‘summer day’ and is ‘dreaming’ by the stream.</p>
<p>Repetition: Bridges repeats the phrase ‘clear and gentle stream’ several times as well as the last three lines in stanza 1 and stanza 4. This repetition allows the reader to feel the flow of the water and to see how the water is unchanged and always flowing freely.</p>	<p>Personification: As with many poets in this collection, Bridges personifies nature. He talks about how the ‘eddies play’ and the evening draws in with ‘her lengthening shade’ and ‘her brightening moon’. This shows how nature and humans are at one with each other.</p>

Themes	
<p>Happiness: The poem is largely joyful and praiseworthy. Bridges is enjoying his day at the stream and seems as happy now as he was when he visited the stream as a boy.</p>	<p>Nature: Bridges poem talks at length about the untouched and nature beauty of the stream. He also emphasises the timelessness and power of beauty as he has aged, but the scene has not.</p>

Poems for comparison	
<p>Mild the mist upon the hill – Emily Bronte (1839). Brontë’s poem touches upon the same subject matter as Bridges – the idea that nature can evoke happy, childhood memories. Both also have a strong, lyrical almost dream-like quality as the poets’ use natural scenes to express their sense of belonging.</p>	<p>I Remember, I Remember – Thomas Hood (1826). Like Bridges, Hood uses natural and familiar images to remember pleasant times. However, the tone of both of the poems is very different. Hood’s poem shows regret and unhappiness whilst Bridges is more optimistic and happier in tone.</p>

Poem	Analysis
<p>Clear and gentle stream! Known and loved so long, That hast heard the song, And the idle dream Of my boyish day; While I once again Down thy margin stray; In the selfsame strain Still my voice is spent, With my old lament, And my idle dream, Clear and gentle stream</p>	<p>Bridges opens with an exclamation and appears to address the stream directly. In this stanza, he contrasts his ‘boyish day’ with his old lament. However, even though he is older, he is still indulging in the same ‘idle dream’ and uses alliteration – ‘the selfsame strain’ to explain he is singing the same song. His voice may be old – ‘spent’ – but he is still happy and optimistic about life. His use of repetition to round off the stanza replicates the ebb and flow of the water and adds to the symmetrical and lyrical nature of his verse.</p>
<p>Where my old seat was Here again I sit, Where the long bough knit Over stream and grass A translucent eaves: Where back eddies play Shipwreck with the leaves, And the proud swans stray; Sailing one by one. Out of stream and sun, And the fish lie cool In their chosen pool.</p>	<p>He opens the second stanza by showing that nothing has changed as he sits in the same place ‘my old seat’.</p> <p>He then uses the rest of the stanza to describe the natural beauty around him. He uses sibilance across a number of lines – ‘proud swans/stray/ sailing one by one/Out of stream and sun’. This repetition of the ‘s’ sound gives the reader a feeling of movement and tranquillity. He then ends with a rhyming couplet to describe how the fish are swimming untroubled in a cool pool.</p>
<p>Many an afternoon Of the summer day Dreaming here I lay; And I know how soon, Idly at its hour, First the deep bell hums From the minister tower, And then evening comes Creeping up the glade, With her lengthening shade And the tardy boon Of her brightening moon</p>	<p>Bridges shows how much he is at one with nature and with God in this stanza. He can lay in the sun and still know the time by the natural signs around him. He firstly listens for the church bells ‘from the minister tower’. He then uses personification and onomatopoeia to explain how the evening comes ‘creeping’ in and casts shade on the area.</p> <p>He finishes the stanza, again with a rhyming couplet. Here, he personifies the night again and praises her for sending light via the moon as a late favour or ‘tardy boon’.</p>
<p>Clear and gentle stream! Ere again I go Where thou dost not flow. Well does it beseem Thee to hear again Once my youthful song, That familiar strain Silent now so long Be as I content With my old lament, And my idle dream, Clear and gentle stream!</p>	<p>In the last stanza, Bridges repeats many of the ideas he has discussed in the previous stanza, mimicking the cycle of nature and the flow of the stream. He ends by stating that even though he hasn’t been to the stream for a while, he is still happy to sing the same song of praise and have the same hopes and ambitions.</p> <p>As he does in the first stanza, he repeats the title of the poem – with an exclamatory sentence – clear and gentle stream!</p>