

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

Context (AO3)

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.

Poet Laureate – Bridges was appointed Poet Laureate between 1913 and his death in 1930. He was known for his emotive and rhymical poetry.

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.

Language, form and structure

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Themes

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.

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.

Poems for comparison

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.

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.

Ere again I go

Well does it beseem

Thee to hear again

That familiar strain

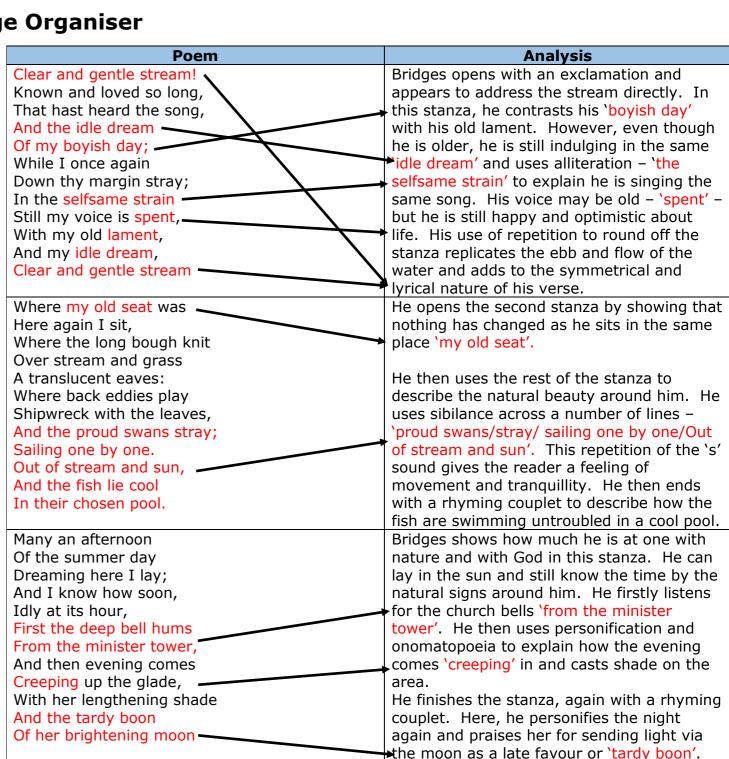
Silent now so long

With my old lament,

Clear and gentle stream!-

And my idle dream,

Be as I content



Clear and gentle stream! In the last stanza, Bridges repeats many of the ideas he has discussed in the previous Where thou dost not flow. 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 Once my youthful song, stream for a while, he still happy to sing the same song of praise and have the same hopes and ambitions.

> As he does in the first stanza, he repeats the title of the poem – with an exclamatory sentence - clear and gentle stream!