

ASM TUITION ACADEMY

A WIDER VIEW

“From the backyard of his back-to-back
My great-great-grandad searched for spaces
In the smoke-filled sky to stack his dreams,”

“High enough above the chlorella to keep
them

And his newborn safe from harm.”

“At eighteen sixty-nine, eyes dry with dust
From twelve hours of combing flax beneath
The conical of light in Marshall’s Temple Mill”

“He took the long way home because
He carved the comfort of a wider view.”

“As he passed the panelled gates of tower
works,

The tall octagonal crown of Harding’s chimney
Drew his sights beyond the limits of his
working life”

“Drowned the din of engines, loom and
shuttles

With imagined peals of ringing bells.”

“Today, my footsteps echo in the sodium
gloom

Of Neville streets dark arches and the red-
brick vaults”.

“Begin to moan as time, collapsing in the river
Aire,

Sweeps me out to meet him on the wharf,”

SUMMARY:

The speaker imagines her great-great-grandfather in 1869, walking through the industrial landscape of Leeds. She envisions him desiring space and a healthier environment for himself and his young family, away from the crowded houses and polluted air. He hopes to hear pleasant sounds above the loud noises of industry.

The poem then transitions to the present day, with the speaker walking the same streets. She reflects on her connection to her ancestors, finding this familial bond more significant than the practical, industrial design of the city.

The poem’s key message:

The poem explores the human desire for a better life beyond one’s current surroundings. It also emphasises the enduring strength of familial ties across generations, more powerful than ties to a single place.

BACKGROUND:

Seneviratne was born and raised in Leeds where this poem is set. She has Sri Lankan heritage and imagines her great-great-grandfather’s experience of the growing, industrialised town in the nineteenth century compared to her own life in the modern-day city

KEY THEMES AND IMAGES:

The first three stanzas focus on Leeds in 1869. The houses are cramped ('back-to-back'), there are outbreaks of 'cholera', and industrialisation has created a 'smoke-filled sky'. The metaphor 'stack his dreams' conveys her great great-grandfather's wish to keep his family 'safe from harm' as well as, perhaps, his reasons for emigrating to Britain. He works hard at the Temple Mill to achieve a better future, 'eyes dry with dust / from twelve hours combing flax', and this is emphasised by the reference to 'the limits of his working life'. A pattern of three, 'the din of engines, looms, and shuttles', builds up the noise of the works.

The description of how he 'searched for spaces' perhaps contrasts the town with his upbringing in rural Ceylon and this is developed by the line, 'he craved the comfort of a wider view'. The 'conical of light' suggests he feels trapped working indoors but could also symbolise hope. The latter is also conveyed through metaphor when the mill's loudness is 'drowned' by the beautiful Italian-style architecture of the Tower Works steel factory ('tall octagonal crown' and, in stanza 5, 'gilded tiles, and Giotto's geometric lines'), providing some relief from the usual sights. It makes him imagine 'peals of ringing bells', implying freedom and happiness.

The last two stanzas focus on Leeds 'today' but a link in time is created through the 'Dark Arches' (an engineering achievement supporting the railway above) which were completed in 1869. Time is also symbolised by how her 'footsteps echo'. Personification ('red-brick vaults / begin to moan') and metaphor ('time, collapsing') are used to depict the speaker and her great-great-grandfather being brought together. The Tower Works is the 'axis of our gaze', using a historical landmark to imply that all time exists simultaneously. This is developed through the metaphorical description of how 'the curve of past and future generations/arcs between us', asserts the importance of heritage to one's identity. This links to the title by suggesting that we are more than just our immediate, narrow existence.

STRUCTURE:

The poet's ideas about time and identity may be reflected in how they have constructed the poem. The stanzas separate the past from the present but the free verse and enjambment simultaneously reduce this sense of structure. There is also alliteration throughout, perhaps emphasising the concept of links between the past and the present.

GRAMMATICAL TECHNIQUES:

1-METAPHOR

Metaphors are used to convey themes of hope in the poem. The phrase “a wider view” signifies the great-great-grandfather’s desire to see beyond the immediate confines of houses, polluted air and factories, symbolising his aspirations for a better life.

The “conical of light” in the mill is metaphorical for hope shining in darkness.

At the end of the poem, the speaker contrasts the “geometric lines” of the city with “the curve of past and future generations”. This image of a “curve” symbolises a link to her ancestors and descendants that is more emotional and enduring than the city’s practical design.

2-SOUND IMAGERY:

Sound imagery contrasts the man’s dreams with the reality of his environment. He desires to hear “ringing bells”, which could symbolise hope and freedom. But to hear these, he must drown out the industrial “din of engines, looms and shuttles”.

The present-day description of Leeds includes “the red brick vaults/ begin to moan”, personifying the architecture as old and in pain, suggesting a sense of decay and weariness.

3-ALLITERATION AND SIBILANCE:

Alliteration is evident in the line “craved the comfort of a wider view”, reflecting the speaker’s great-great-grandfather’s longing for a better life.

Sibilance (repetition of ‘s’ sounds) appears in the description “smoke-filled sky to stack his dreams”, creating a soft, whispering sound.

Alliteration and sibilance give these lines a poetic sound that enhances the dreamy quality of his aspirations.

QUOTES:

1-“My great-great-grandad searched for spaces/ in the smoke-filled sky to stack his dreams”

2-“imagined peals of ringing bells”

3-the curve of past and future generations/ arcs between us”

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