

Reading...

Donna Stonecipher's *Model City*

First Published: Shearsman Books (Bristol: 2015)

Genre: Poetry, prose poems

Introduction to the Author

To date, American-born poet Donna Stonecipher (c.1969) has authored five critically acclaimed collections of poetry and is recognised as a formidable talent within the genre of prose poetry. Stonecipher's most recent collection, *Transaction Histories* (2018), featured in the *New York Times* top 10 list of poetry books of 2018. As well as writing and translating poetry, Stonecipher is also a literary critic: her critical study *Prose Poetry and the City* (2018) explores the poetic development of prose poetry and how the form has come to be uniquely associated with writing urban spaces. In this respect, it would make for a very good piece companion piece for anyone reading Stonecipher's collection *Model City* (2015).

Introduction to the Text

Model City is predicated upon a poetic conceit, where a question is posed and answered. At the outset of this collection the inaugural question that is posed is 'What was it like?'; over the course of a 73-section, 288-prose poem sequence or cycle, the poet attempts to answer it. The subject – the 'it' – of that question is ambiguous, indeed from poem to poem the subject (the "it") shifts. The title of the collection (*Model City*) combined with the book's epigraph from famous Swiss-French modernist architect, designer and urban planner Le Corbusier ("We are waiting for a form of town planning that will give us freedom") give us a good starting point: was it like to live in a model city that was built as an architectural ideal, as a model of urban planning? The multitude of answers reflects the multitudinous and multifaceted nature of cities. Although it may start as a rumination on the folly of utopic dreams and social experimentation, this collection grows and sprawls (as cities do) to consider bigger concepts: capitalism; the passage of time; identity.

Introduction to the Genre

This is a difficult poetic form to pin down because it doesn't really look like poetry. On the page prose poetry can resemble paragraphs of prose (non)fiction. This type of poetry does not depend on line breaks – like most other forms of poem – but still contains many poetic features (symbolism, extended imagery, sonic techniques etc.). An easy way for you to think about this poetic form might be: looks like prose, behaves like poetry.

Look on our website to find a PDF containing poems 46, 49 and 71 from the *Model City* collection.

Reading...

Model City

at Level 4

Set Text Paper

Read Edwin Morgan's 'A City' (found in *Edwin Morgan - Collected Poems*, Carcanet, 1996) and answer the questions below.

Questions

1. Quote **two** examples of **jargon** used by the writer to develop the idea that Glasgow is 'a film, an epic'. [2 marks]
2. Explain why the writer uses **parenthesis** (paired dashes) throughout this poem. [2 marks]
3. Quote one **word** or **phrase** from the last **seven** lines of the poem that proves the importance of the children to the city and explain how this word shows their significance. [2 marks]
4. **Read lines 10-15**. Choose **two** different features of language used by the poet in these lines and analyse them fully. [4 marks]
5. Identify one piece of **sentence structure** used in the last four lines and explain why you find it interesting. [2 marks]
6. With reference to this poem and to **at least one other poem** you have studied explain how the writer describes an urban or city space in an interesting way. [8 marks]

Commonality

From the Extract

From Elsewhere