from the journal of a disappointed man

andrew motion
Born in 1952. 50s-60s was a time of drastic change in Britain following the end of WWII

Was appointed poet laureate from 1999-2009

Grew up in rural Essex. Moved to the US from the UK because he felt ‘suffocated’

He often writes postmodern-romantic poems

His poems question whether any meaning can be gleaned from life's random events.

Many of his poems end without a conclusion.

They are characterised by an undercurrent of emotions that the narrator is unaware of/unwilling to show

Main subjects of his poems include:

- Experiences of war
- English traditions
- Historical narratives
the title

journal
- Private: usually recounts inner thoughts or personal events
- May also be public (travel journal)
- Outdated, holds sentimental value.

disappointed
- Definition: being let down
- Something had not met someone’s expectations. Long-term or short-term?
- An adjective used to describe feelings OR to describe a state of existence

man
- Man = who’s the man? Is the man the construction worker or the narrator?
- The word man is often used to describe mankind as a whole.
- May suggest that the message of this poem is universal
reconstructing a pier

bridge pile driving

observations of attitudes

conclusion about life
what is pile driving?

- Internal drop hammer
- Plug of dry concrete
- Leading casing
- Fully welded joint
- Additional sections added as required
- Mini Piling Rig

On completion of driving, casing is filled with concrete and reinforced.
stanzas 1–2

- Discovered: makes it seem less like it was an accident
- Caesura used when listing off the equipment — creates a sense of chaos
- Enjambment
- Occasionally slips into colloquialism
- Repetition of men in the last two lines
  - Powerful + massive
- Silent
- Ruminative

Introduces the theme of massive/big

Paraphernalia: equipment needed for a particular activity (in this case, rebuilding the pier)

Hawser: a thick rope or cable for towing a ship.

Ruminative: the tendency to think deeply about something

Sets up the setting, introduces the characters. Like setting the chess pieces before a game.
stanzas 3-4

- ‘Not something to interest them’. Creates and dramatises distance.
- Men’s speeches are clipped and functional — reduced to the very necessary words.
- ‘Strength and experience’: uses this to emphasise how difficult the task at hand is.
- References to water — perilous activity.
- Enjambment runs into next stanza, imitates water.

Functional speech vs. Conversational speech

What qualities do we look for in a role model/a hero today?

Water is a contextual symbol. Usually it represents birth and purity, but it may also symbolise destruction and violence.

Subject of these stanzas is the men, focusing on their characteristics.
(let’s stop here Rania)

1. Physiological needs: food, water, warmth, rest
2. Safety needs: security, safety
3. Belongingness and love needs: intimate relationships, friends
4. Esteem needs: prestige and feeling of accomplishment
5. Self-actualization: achieving one’s full potential, including creative activities

INTERJECTION!
stanzas 5-7

- Description of the workers: ‘Monsters’
  - Another negative connotation
  - Dehumanises and emphasises the lack of human qualities in them
- Repetition of tired
- The gesture of crossing arms: usually exhibits defensive and hostile emotions.
- ‘Could go on swinging until the crack of doom’
  - The worker doesn’t care, shows he has surrendered to natural forces (water)
- ‘The secret problem’ - may refer to the everyday issues that we can’t wrap our heads around, whether it be personal or academic.
- An hour: appropriate length of time to show respect or interest.

Crack of doom
An archaic term for the Christian Day of Judgement, popularised by none other than your bae Shakespeare.

Punctuation: all the stanzas end with full stops. Gives a more robotic tone, like the life has been sucked out of the narrator.

Stanza 7 uses words such as ‘gradually’, ‘finally’, ‘slackened’. Slows down the rhythm of poem and creates a drag-like motion with the words.

Tone of the stanzas is **morose**. Introduces the theme of giving up, hopelessness.
stanzas 8-9

- Combination of alliteration & enjambment creates a sluggish pace
- ‘Abandon his position’: position may represent positions in jobs or role in society that has constrained them
- Repetition of no one emphasises silence
- Round eyes: connotations of youth and curiosity, but may show backward development of the mind.
- Specialised vocabulary: adds formality
- Slow descent: illustrates the scale of the ‘depths’, emphasising the men’s insignificance

Mystic: a person who believes in the supernatural

Youth is traditionally linked to liveliness and clean slates.

Depths — represent realm of uncertainty, the unknown

The men are contemplating what to do about their work, whether to completely give up or turn around.
Actions of the foreman: ironic as he is said to be ‘the most original thinker’, but is the first to give up.

‘Heavy kind of majesty’ may suggest there is honour in running away.

Eclipse: connotations of darkness, otherworldly forces and swift transition

‘First in ones and twos...’ - society following majority opinion

Lack of closure in conclusion

Narrator is confused as to whether he should stay or give up

Foreman: Someone who supervises and directs other workers.

Repeated mentions of tobacco
Used as a means of escape, to numb the pain of being lost

Punctuation: all the stanzas end with full stops.

The secret problem remains unsolved, mirroring the unanswered nature of many existential questions
the symbols

**the pier** one’s existence and life

**the pile** contentment/satisfaction

**the men** modern society

**the water** external forces

the disappointment
the symbols

the disappointment

- Lack of progress
- Lack of purpose (both the narrator as the odd one out and the men working monotonously)
- Lack of identity (of the men)
- Helplessness against external forces
- Unresolved problem
themes

past vs future
(lost) glory

masculinity
(apparently)

giving up

existentialism

stagnation

controllable forces vs
the uncontrollable

human interaction
(or lack thereof)
Human existence can be described as ‘absurd’, a concept which has these meanings (heavily watered down):

1. Nature, as a whole, has no design and no reason for existence.
2. The concept of liberation and freedom itself is absurd.
3. Human existence is doomed to always destroy itself.

It defers from nihilism in the way that absurdism views existentialist crises as the human effort to search for meaning that is met with a cold, silent universe, and that this isolated existence should be accepted to reach some kind of contentment.

**Sisyphus** was the King of Ephyra in Ancient Greece

Punished for his trickery to roll a boulder up a hill, only to watch it roll back down, for all eternity.

The paradoxical nature of his punishment was chosen because he used to think his intelligence surpassed Zeus himself.

Camus offers 3 solutions:
1. Suicide
2. Embracing religion/spirituality
3. Acceptance
Jean-Paul Sartre

**en-soi (being-in-itself)**

Things that have an essence that is definable and complete, but they are not aware of it (rocks, birds, trees)

**pour-soi (being-for-itself)**

Things that possess consciousness and are aware of the fact that they exist (humans)

A ‘pour-soi’ is only aware of their existence when another pour-soi observes them.

People are only consciously aware of their identity when viewed by others with consciousness.

So a person only understands himself in relation to another.

Kafkaesque

**Franz Kafka**

His works often incorporated realism and fantasy, along with surrealistic situations.

Often have themes of existential anxiety, absurdity and alienation.

The term is used to describe a situation marked by surreal distortion and often a sense of impending danger, reminiscent of his work.
on a positive note...