Selling Manhattan

The Collection: Carol Ann Duffy's second collection concerns itself with the way that money affects people and cultures. Written at the height of Thatcher's Britain, it shows an increasing political concern and a rejection of the unregulated market economy which dominated Conservative thinking and practice.

As in 'Standing Female Nude', there is a reliance on dramatic monologue, with a wide range of characters talking to us.

The poem: The first voice is that of a colonist. What do we learn of his character?
The second voice, that of the Native American, is in sharp contrast. The importance of the earth is stressed and the devaluing of a culture is present in the contrast between 'slow' and 'rapid'. The single Indian is able to speak on behalf of his people. The speed of the poem slows and becomes more thoughtful. The link between the people and the earth is highlighted in stanzas two and three and this is contrasted with the material profit of the colonist. In a similar way, the 'dawn chant...starlight psalm', draw a parallel with Christian religion, (the religion of the colonist?) which is shown to be lacking because it is tied to times rather than to the actual occurrences. The Native American sings 'with a true love' and his peace is echoed by the sibilance at the end of the stanza.

The fourth stanza puts forward a point of view in sharp contrast to the colonist's. Dreams are important as opposed to hard currency. Wisdom is not something that can be acquired cheaply but must be learned. The Native American shows how he has gained knowledge from being close to nature. Again, alliteration is used to link natural occurrences together.

Addressing the colonist (and us) directly. Our need for ever increasing land and money is questioned. We are made to appear small in comparison with the 'endless sky'. The loss of culture is everlasting, 'Last time, this moment, now...' and is again tied to nature and its unchanging appearance.

The sixth stanza is given prominence and shows hope for the future. The Native American will live on in the buffalo, a symbol of his culture; and in the grasshopper, one of the smallest of creatures. We are unable to ignore either.

The pathetic fallacy of the final stanza leaves us realising what we are losing in our rush to acquire wealth.

Dutch Settler, Peter Minuit is reputed to have bought Manhattan in 1626 from Native Americans for $26 worth of glass beads.