

Belfast Confetti

Suddenly as the riot squad moved in, it was raining
 exclamation marks,
 Nuts, bolts, nails, car-keys. A fount of broken type. And the
 explosion.
 Itself - an asterisk on the map. This hyphenated line, a burst
 of rapid fire...
 I was trying to complete a sentence in my head but it kept
 stuttering,
 All the alleyways and side streets blocked with stops and
 colons.

I know this labyrinth so well - Balaclava, Raglan, Inkerman,
 Odessa Street -
 Why can't I escape? Every move is punctuated. Crimea
 Street. Dead end again.
 A Saracen, Kremlin-2 mesh. Makrolon face-shields. Walkie-
 talkies. What is
 My name? Where am I coming from? Where am I going? A
 fusillade of question- marks.

Ciaran Carson**Ciaran Carson says:**

'-if there was a riot in the shipyard they would assemble the collective nuts and bolts, iron bits for this and that and the other thing... 'For we'll throw some Belfast Confetti on them and see how they will be getting on with that.'-and the accent comes across...'Belfast Confetti' ...it's not nice.'

'-I see those poems as being very much just as if I were an eye on the scene. As if I were alert to the sounds of the time and what was going on at the exact time.'

Suggestions for work on BELFAST CONFETTI - CIARAN CARSON**TALKING AND LISTENING - FOR DISCUSSION**

War has been with us since the beginning of time. People have always discussed, argued, fought over issues which concerned them. The idea of people living in total peace has never existed. Why do people argue, fight? What is it about human nature which makes people struggle for position? Is there such a thing as a totally peaceful society? In groups discuss these ideas to see if there is a common viewpoint.

Points to consider:

1. Ciaran Carson states the importance of poetry telling a story. What is the story which he tells in this poem?
 2. What do you understand by the title of the poem? Is the title ironic?
 3. Consider the list of street names. Can you see any significance in their names?
 4. Consider the length of the lines of the poem, the short sentences and the questions. Why do you think Ciaran Carson writes in this style?
 5. How is the craft of creating a poem mirrored in the events of the story of the poem?
4. The Wall: what is a 'dry-stone wall'? What is the poet momentarily doing in the poem? As he hunkers there what thoughts or images are conjured up in his mind? How might this relate back to what was said in question one?
 5. How can The Lake 'duplicate at any time...'? How can the poet?

The Grauballe Man

As if he had been poured
in tar, he lies
on a pillow of turf
and seems to weep

the black river of himself.
The grain of his wrists
is like bog oak,
the ball of his heel

like a basalt egg.
His instep has shrunk
cold as a swan's foot
or a wet swamp root.

His hips are the ridge
and purse of a mussel,
his spine an eel arrested
under a glisten of mud.

The head lifts,
the chin is a visor
raised above the vent
of his slashed throat

that has tanned and toughened.
The cured wound
opens inwards to a dark
elderberry place.

Who will say 'corpse'
to his vivid cast?
Who will say 'body'
to his opaque repose?

And his rusted hair,
a mat unlikely
as a foetus's.
I first saw his twisted face

in a photograph,
a head and shoulder
out of the peat,
bruised like a forceps baby,

but now he lies
perfected in my memory,
down to the red horn
of his nails,

hung in the scales
with beauty and atrocity:
with the Dying Gaul
too strictly compassed

on his shield,
with the actual weight
of each hooded victim,
slashed and dumped.

Seamus Heaney

Seamus Heaney says:

'-There is a brutality and a ruthlessness and a cruelty and casualness and abusiveness about 'slashed and dumped.'-in a sense you are administering the shock to yourself as well as hopefully to the world and the reader that this is what's being done... 'dumped' is a brutal ending and is meant to be.'

'-It is very true to say that work done by writers is quite often an attempt to give solid expression to that which is bothering them...They feel they have got it right if they express the stress.'

Background information:

In the 1950s, Danish turf cutters dug up human bodies from bogland. These were the remains of sacrificial victims who had been killed during the Iron age. PV Glob wrote a book about the discoveries called *The Bog People*. Seamus Heaney read the book and started to write a series of poems about the bog bodies.

Suggestions for work on THE GRAUBALLE MAN by SEAMUS HEANEY**TALKING AND LISTENING - FOR DISCUSSION**

'Dulce et Decorum Est Pro Patria Mori'. This was the idea challenged by the First World War poets such as Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. More recently, Sebastian Faulks and Pat Barker have written memorable novels showing the sacrifice made by ordinary people who were obliged to fight for their country. The idea of humans being sacrificed has been happening since the beginning of time. What do you understand by the word 'sacrifice'? Do you have to make sacrifices in life? Why? Are these sacrifices important or worthwhile? Can you understand why ancient tribes would have felt the need to offer sacrifices to satisfy the Earth Goddess? Should people be prepared to sacrifice their lives to save their country?

Points to consider:

1. Describe the picture which Seamus Heaney presents of the body.
2. Why is the body so well preserved?
3. Why does Heaney present a series of comparisons with familiar objects?
4. Pick out as many similes as you can and explain the reason for the description.
5. Pick out as many metaphors as you can and explain the reason for the description.
6. Why did Heaney first become interested in the Grauballe man?
7. Explain the stanza:

'Who will say 'corpse'
to his vivid cast?
Who will say 'body'
to his opaque repose?'
8. How does Heaney relate this poem to modern times in the last stanza?
9. Heaney seems to combine care and tenderness with brutality and ruthlessness in his description. How does he do this?

Final thoughts for discussion:

Does the description in this poem shock you? Does violence dominate the poem? Pick out words and phrases which interest you most and explain why they do so.

The Civil Servant from Wreaths

He was preparing an Ulster fry for breakfast
When someone walked into the kitchen and shot him:
A bullet entered his mouth and pierced his skull,
The books he had read, the music he could play.

He lay in his dressing gown and pyjamas
While they dusted the dresser for fingerprints
And then shuffled backwards across the garden
With notebooks, cameras and measuring tapes.

They rolled him up like a red carpet and left
Only a bullet hole in the cutlery drawer:
Later his widow took a hammer and chisel
And removed the black keys from his piano.

Michael Longley

Michael Longley says:

‘-It was a friend of mine who was murdered by paramilitaries and I didn’t want to identify him, so I gave him the title ‘The Civil Servant.’

‘-when somebody walks into a home where there is a smell of cooking and where BBC Radio is playing music and takes out a gun.... they are offending the gods really... They are desecrating civilisation. They are disrupting far more than they probably thought about’.

‘-I do believe that poetry is about all of those things that happened to people and war is one of the most huge and one of the most horrible things that happens to millions of people.’

Suggestions for work on THE CIVIL SERVANT by MICHAEL LONGLEY

TALKING AND LISTENING - FOR DISCUSSION

Wilfred Owen, along with the other twentieth century war poets stressed ‘the pity of war’. He emphasised the idea that ordinary human beings became involved in war because of governmental decision making. The ordinary men suffered indignity, degradation and humiliation. The people who survived the first world war were scarred and were haunted by their memories and experiences. Look at *Dulce et Decorum Est* or *The Send-Off* by Wilfred Owen and consider how he expresses the extent of the suffering by the ordinary man.

Points to consider:

1. What is the ‘story’ behind the poem?
2. What is the significance of the title of the poem?
3. How does the poet evoke the contrast between the atrocity of the act committed by the murderer and the normality of the routine and pattern of the civil servant’s existence?
4. What effect does the death of the civil servant have on his wife?
5. The poem is presented in the form of an eye-witness account. Consider the tone used by the poet.

Final thoughts for discussion:

Do you find the events described in this poem shocking? How would this event be described on the news? In groups conduct an interview with a neighbour of the widow to find out reactions to the event. Write an article for a local newspaper which describes these events.

