

Question Sheet for Class #9

Liz's questions for Seamus Heaney's "Act of Union, I" pg. 272

"Act of Union, I and II," written in 1975, are connected sonnets that can be interpreted on both the personal and the political level. Heaney uses the extended metaphor of sexual union and the resulting pregnancy and imminent birth to illuminate the history and relationship between Ireland and England. (The Act of Union of 1800 legally united Ireland and Great Britain.)

1. How are geographical landforms used in this sonnet?
2. Who is the speaker in the literal interpretation? in the metaphorical interpretation?
3. Comment on Heaney's poetic language, rhyme scheme, rhythms.
4. What words or phrases are particularly interesting and effective?
5. What meaning is being conveyed in this poem?

Liz's questions for Seamus Heaney's "The Forge" pg. 271

1. The Forge, written in 1969, is a pastoral elegy (a poem about death and idyllic rural life). What words and phrases help to build this sonnet into a pastoral elegy?
2. What elements are seen and what elements are imagined by the poet?
3. What religious or mythological symbols are in the sonnet? Their purpose?
4. Divide this sonnet into three sections. Where are the breaks? What is the focus and purpose of each section?
5. How are the poet and the blacksmith similar?

Roz's questions for Adrienne Rich: from *Contradictions: Tracking Poems* "1" pg. 254 and "Final Notations" pg. 256

1. What does Rich want us to understand?
2. What can she not understand?
3. Who is "it", "you"?
4. What won't be "simple"?
5. What are your "stew of contradictions"?

Charlie's questions for Billy Collins' "American Sonnet" pg. 276

1. Is this a sonnet? Why or why not?
2. How does it resemble Wordsworth's "Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room?"
3. In line 4, what is meant by "poem on vacation?"
4. In the opinion of Professor Michael Ulliot of the University of Calgary, the "we" of stanza 3 is different from the "we" of stanza 1. What do you think?
5. In comparing a postcard to a sonnet, what does Collins accomplish, if anything?
6. Could this poem have been placed in any other country, or only in America?

Charlie's questions for Billy Collins' "The Golden Years" poets.org/poem/golden-years

This work was selected as typical of Collins' tone and style, in contrast to "American Sonnet." However, it is not typical of Collins' structure, as he wrote very few sonnets and rarely uses rhyme. This seems to qualify as a Shakespearean sonnet, except that lines 3 and 7 do not end in a rhyme.

1. Who is speaking?
2. How many ironic words or phrases can you find?
3. Do any lines stand out for you as examples of the conversational tone that Collins is noted for?
4. What serious themes, if any, are contained in this sonnet? Which words or phrases support these themes?
5. An element of this poem, intended to engage the reader, also appears in "The Night House" and "You, Reader." (Links on our website.) What is it?

