

**Carrigskeewaun:***For Penny and David Cabot*

## The Mountain

This is ravens' territory, skulls, bones,  
 The marrow of these boulders supervised  
 From the upper air: I stand alone here  
 And seem to gather children about me,  
 A collection of picnic things, my voice  
 Filling the district as I call their names.

## The Path

With my first step I dislodge the mallards  
 Whose necks strain over the bog to where  
 Kittiwakes scrape the waves: then, the circle  
 Widening, lapwings, curlews, snipe until  
 I am left with only one swan to nudge  
 To the far side of its gradual disdain.

## The Strand

I discover, remaindered from yesterday,  
 Cattle tracks, a sanderling's tiny trail,  
 The footprints of the children and my own  
 Linking the dunes to the water's edge,  
 Reducing to sand the dry shells, the toe  
 And fingernail parings of the sea.

## The Wall

I join all the men who have squatted here  
 This lichened side of the dry-stone wall  
 And notice how smoke from our turf fire  
 Recalls in the cool air above the lake  
 Steam from a kettle, a tablecloth and  
 A table she might have already set.

## The Lake

Though it will duplicate at any time  
 The sheep and cattle that wander there,  
 For a few minutes every evening  
 Its surface seems tilted to receive  
 The sun perfectly, the mare and her foal,  
 The heron, all such special visitors.

**Michael Longley****Michael Longley says:**

'-Carrigskeewaun is unbelievably beautiful - it's the most magical place in the world for me. It's the Garden of Eden and I often think about it. If I am depressed I go for a walk in my mind up the path to the cottage around the little ruined out houses and I stand taking in the view even though I am in Belfast or London or New York.'

'-The whole thing is an exploration and I think the emerging form of the poem is like a compass that an explorer might use when he is exploring unknown territory...the poet in the act of writing a poem should be discovering at the back of his or her mind things that he doesn't know about...it should be a surprise...if the poet doesn't surprise himself he is not going to surprise anybody else.'

'-The patterns of poetry are a way of finding, echoing mirrored shapes in patterns in the world around us.'

'-The major task for the poet is to find fresh rhythms. To make fresh music and not to repeat himself or anybody else for that matter, and the only way one is going to find new vital rhythms is being vital and alive and alert and responsive oneself. To live life with all of one's pores open.'

### Suggestions for work on CARRIGSKEEWAUN by MICHAEL LONGLEY

#### TALKING AND LISTENING - FOR DISCUSSION

The townland of Carrigskeewaun is very dear to the poet. See if you can geographically locate the area on a map. What other information can you find about the coast of County Mayo? Do some research and, in groups, share your findings. Nominate a place or area that you would describe as being 'dear' to you. Describe the place and explain why it has made such an impression on you.

#### Points to consider:

1. In his interview, Michael Longley talks about how the poem is divided into headed sections and how each section explores distance and closeness. How is this evident in The Mountain? Who is doing the 'supervising' in this segment?
2. Describe in your own words what happens in The Path. In what way is the swan different from the rest of the birds? How does the poet feel about this?
3. Investigate the word 'remaindered' in The Strand. What world of work does it belong to? In a way the poet could be said to be 'reading' the beach. What other word or image from the book trade does 'remaindered' link up with in this section?
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?

#### Final thoughts for discussion:

These sections are like poetic postcards or snap-shots. Have a rummage in your own memory and see if you can find a memory, a moment where you came in contact with the wild or natural world. Then preserve the memory in your own poetic snap-shot.

On a personal, individual level, ask pupils to focus on a member of their own family and think of an appropriate and effective image or series of images that somehow captures how they feel about that person. This might develop into a poem or piece of descriptive writing.

### The Perch

Perch on their water perch hung in the clear Bann River  
Near the clay bank in alder dapple and waver,

Perch they called 'grunts', little flood-slubs, runty and ready,  
I saw and I see in the river's glorified body

That is passable through, but they're bluntly holding the  
pass,  
Under the water-roof, over the bottom, adoze

On the current, against it, all muscle and slur  
In the finland of perch, the fenland of alder, on air

That is water, on carpets of Bann stream, on hold  
In the everything flows and steady go of the world.

### Seamus Heaney

#### Seamus Heaney says:

'-quite often the kind of poem I write is just an attempt to get back.'

'-these perch, although they are actually in the river, they are very much in a kind of fifty-five year old memory lake of my own.'

'-I think that water is immediately interesting. It's just as an element it is full of life. It is associated with origin, it is bright, it reflects you.'

#### Suggestions for work on THE PERCH by SEAMUS HEANEY.

#### TALKING AND LISTENING - FOR DISCUSSION

Discuss what the natural world means to you. Are you aware of it? Or do you pass through it not noticing, taking it for granted? *The Perch* is a short lyrical poem where Heaney takes pleasure from nature. In his interview the poet says, 'certain images are like...little frames from a film you forgot the story of but these single frames stay...' What images of the natural world stay with you?

#### Points to consider:

1. In his interview, Heaney talks about the pleasure of the poem and mentions the puns he allows himself to get away with in the poem. Where are some of these puns? Write a list and try to explain them.
2. What might the presence of so many 'r' sounds in the first few lines of the poem suggest or invoke in a poem about fish in a river?
3. 'I saw and I see...'
4. Why the two tenses? What might this say about writing nature poetry?
5. Consider and write a few lines about the religious significance of: 'the river's glorified body/ That is passable through...'
6. What qualities or human characteristics, even, does the poet admire in the perch?

#### Final thoughts for discussion:

Read Ted Hughes' poem *Pike* and then compare and contrast these two fishy poems. Say what phrases, words or sounds stood out for you in the poem and, if possible, why.