

Reading poems from other cultures: 8. *Unrelated Incidents*

This audio bite is about *Unrelated Incidents* by Tom Leonard.

ELIOT: *Unrelated Incidents* is a poem about language. It's about being proud of the accent and dialect you speak, and how the television often uses just one type of accent and ignores the others.

ALIX: At the start it doesn't seem like a poem at all. It seems to be someone reading the six o'clock news, but it's not the normal English accent. Instead it's a Scottish accent, from Glasgow.

ELIOT: And instead of politely reading the news, the newsreader starts to call the listeners 'scruffs'. He tells them that if he talked like them, they wouldn't believe what he said. He then says that there's a right way to talk and a right way to spell. And what he's doing is the right way for him.

ALIX: And then he says that other people won't know this truth because they don't talk like he does. And finally, instead of ending the news normally, he tells his listeners to 'belt up'. So what is it all about?

ELIOT: Well, the poet is from Glasgow and he's making the point that most of the media, like the television or radio, comes from England. And the speakers usually have posh English accents, like BBC newsreaders, so people coming from different regions are ignored.

ALIX: It can easily sound like he's making fun of these announcers by using his own way of speaking. He's not actually reading the news – he's talking personally to the listeners, and at times he insults them.

ELIOT: But the poem can also be seen as serious. He is angry about the situation and feels that it is a political decision. English culture is so powerful that his local accent seems less important and less truthful that even people from Glasgow are less likely to believe him.

ALIX: And if you read the poem a few times you realise he is right – we find it funny to hear the news read out in this accent, but only because we aren't used to it. And it's not fair that different accents, whether in Scotland or elsewhere, are ignored.

ELIOT: In order to make it sound like the Glasgow accent, many of the words are spelled differently. For instance, 'my' is written 'M – I', and 'true' is written 'T – R – O – O'. As well as this, there are no commas and all the lines are very short. This makes it look like an autocue, which newsreaders use.

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ALIX: But the newsreader in this poem also sounds very informal, as if he's talking to someone in a pub and not on national TV. For example, he uses phrases like 'yi canny talk right'.

ELIOT: *Unrelated Incidents* uses language as its main topic. The main message is that there is no correct way to speak. The poet thinks that TV and radio commentators often speak with a BBC accent, so many people in Britain feel ignored.

You'll probably find the poem is funny, but the poet seems to be making a serious point, that different cultures are pushed aside.

Language is very important, so you need to write about spellings and about how the reader uses informal words, like 'scruff'. And don't forget that it doesn't use a lot of punctuation and the lines are very short, like an autocue.

Unrelated Incidents would make a good choice if you wanted to write about language, and how it can be used in unusual ways. You could also use the poem if you wanted to write about identity, or about different cultures.