



Epic

Patrick Kavanagh

I have lived in important places, times
When great events were decided, who owned
That half a rood of rock, a no-man's land
Surrounded by our pitchfork-armed claims.
I heard the Duffys shouting "Damn your soul!"
And old McCabe stripped to the waist, seen
Step the plot defying blue cast-steel -
"Here is the march along these iron stones."
That was the year of the Munich bother. Which
Was more important? I inclined
To lose my faith in Ballyrush and Gortin
Till Homer's ghost came whispering to my mind.
He said: I made the Iliad from such
A local row. Gods make their own importance.

Vocabulary

- **Epic** - traditionally a long poem dealing with heroic deeds
- **Rood** - a traditional measurement of land, a quarter of an acre
- **no-man's land** - No man's land is land that is unoccupied or is under dispute between parties who leave it unoccupied out of fear or uncertainty. Also used to refer to the areas between the opposing trenches in World War I
- **Munich bother** - a reference to the Munich Agreement, (September 30, 1938), settlement reached by Germany, Great Britain, France, and Italy which attempted to avert World War II
- **Homer** - Greek epic poet credited with creating the epic tales of The Iliad and The Odyssey
- **The Iliad** - epic poem concerning the Trojan War

Pre-reading task

- What expectation does the title of the poem create?
- Can you think of any epic tales, legends or stories?

Questions

1. How does the poet capture the reader's attention in the opening lines?
2. When Kavanagh declares that he has 'lived in important places, times' do you think he is being serious?
3. Is the land that is the subject of dispute between neighbours valuable?
4. What does the fact that the disagreement is so volatile tell us about the lives of these Monaghan farmers?
5. How does the poet create a sense of drama in his depiction of the local dispute?
6. Is Kavanagh a participant in or an observer of the dispute?
7. How many references to war or militarism can you find in the poem?
8. Is Kavanagh sincere when he refers to the Munich Conference as 'the Munich bother'?
9. Do you find this reference humorous?
10. What do you understand by the final line - 'Gods make their own importance'.

Overview

The poet uses hyperbole to capture the reader's attention, saying that he has 'lived in important places, times/When great events were decided'. Together with the poem's title this creates an expectation that he is describing a great world event however it emerges that he is describing a local dispute between neighbouring farmers over a small patch of poor land - 'half a rood of rock'. The argument is brought vividly to life through imagery and dialogue. Kavanagh tells us that it occurred in 1938, the same year as the Munich Conference, which he refers to dismissively as 'that Munich bother'. On reflection he wonders if the rivalries of his locality of Ballyrush and Gortin are trivial. However, he summons up the ghost of the ancient poet Homer, who reminds him that his own great work 'The Iliad' was about 'a local row'. Kavanagh concludes that 'Gods make their own importance'. Is he suggesting that poets should not ignore the local for the universal, that 'the stuff' of poetry is all around us?

Key Points

- Vivid Imagery
- Ordinary life
- Narrative
- Simple language
- Local and Universal

Word Bank

- Create a bank of words you might use when writing about the poet's work.
- Some are provided for you.
- Add your own.
- You can write definitions of words you don't know.
- You can pick out suitable quotes to go with the words.

[illegible]

Mind Map

