

## War rhetoric, fragile peace

EILIS O'HANLON says the Irish media lavishes glorious inattention on the activities of the IRA and Sinn Fein

[...] The same glorious inattention was lavished on senior IRA leader Brian Keenan's comments to republicans in South Armagh last weekend, first reported in Monday's *Boston Herald*, that the "war" was not over and, what's more, that "the revolution can never be over until we have British imperialism where it belongs, in the dustbin of history."

5 The *Irish Times* squeezed a report about this intriguing speech down the side of Page 9 under the heading, "Call for unity at republican rally in Armagh." And it really doesn't sound too bad, when you put it like that. "I think it's silly," said Gerry Adams when asked about the ensuing row subsequently. "I think it's stupid." The *Irish Times* appeared to agree.

10 It may have been Keenan's comments which were really "stupid"; it may even have been that nobody was fooled – least of all the South Armagh homeboys whose "give war a chance" spirits were being thus soothed. But the IRA's enemies could hardly be expected to just ignore the whole thing like the *Times*.

And why should they? This was a dangerous audience to be mollifying with what can only be interpreted as promises of future bloodshed if the compromises of peace prove unenticing. It looks suspiciously like trying to douse a smouldering fire by pouring petrol on it. Still, Sinn Fein and the IRA may know their own business, and they certainly ought to know their own people. Perhaps we should, as Adams advised, "put all of this into context". But if rhetorical belligerence is a legitimate tactical manoeuvre from republicans, if it buys time for an ailing peace process, then one can hardly complain if David Trimble, seeking to pacify his own unruly fringe, adopts a little equivalent rhetorical belligerence of his own, especially with July looming.

25 That's not how it goes, of course. Such language from Unionists would be called a breach of the Belfast Agreement, and news of it wouldn't be squeezed into the edges on Page 9 of the *Irish Times* either. Such selfish concerns are for Sinn Fein alone because, so they earnestly believe, it's their peace process and they'll cry havoc/wolf/into their Guinness (delete as appropriate) if they want to. They don't even think it matters what they say, however ill-timed, intemperate and anachronistic, because they are not the problem.

Gerry Adams inadvertently revealed as much in the aftermath of the *Boston Herald* mini-spat. "If it wasn't for the likes of Keenan," he said airily, "there wouldn't be a peace process."

30 The fact is that, if it wasn't for the likes of Brian Keenan, there wouldn't need to be a peace process at all. Alas, IRA/Sinn Fein still seems to expect thanks for not killing as many of their neighbours as they would, under ideal circumstances, like. The heart bleeds for them, it really does.

Someone else's heart, usually.

## Annotations

- I. 10 South Armagh homeboys** IRA supporters in the South Armagh district;  
**I. 15 unenticing** *adj.* not attractive;  
**I. 21 July** allusion to elections to be held in July;  
**I. 25 cry havoc** (of military commander) in medieval times, allow soldiers to destroy and take what they want  
**II. 25-26 cry havoc/wolf/into their Guinness (delete as appropriate)** parody of multiple choice forms, alluding to the wilful behaviour of the IRA

## WORKSHEET

### I. Questions on the text

- |   |   |    |
|---|---|----|
| 1 | Explain the subtitle: Say in your own words what lavishing "glorious inattention" on the IRA means.   | 10 |
| 2 | Brian Keenan is quoted as saying that "British imperialism" should go into the "dustbin of history" (l. 4). Explain this metaphor and its function.   | 10 |
| 3 | Here are three headlines from other articles published on 5 March 2001. Decide which of these you find most interesting and explain why it would prompt you to read the whole article.<br>"Britain Braces for More Bombs After BBC Blast" ( <i>The New York Times</i> )<br>"Outside but inside: How the Real IRA influences the wider republican movement" ( <i>The Times</i> )<br>"Will the Real IRA please stand up?" ( <i>The Guardian</i> ) | 20 |

### II. Translation

Translate lines 22 – 34 into idiomatic German.

40

**max. 80**

## War rhetoric, fragile peace

### I. Questions on the text

- 1 Explain the subtitle: Say in your own words what lavishing “glorious inattention” on the IRA means.

By claiming that “the media lavishes glorious inattention on the activities of the IRA and Sinn Fein” Eilis O’Hanlon makes it clear that she thinks the media don’t pay enough attention to the unionist activities. Since she labels this lack of awareness “glorious” it becomes even more obvious how irresponsible she finds this attitude. Finally, the verb “lavish” makes the media’s passivity seem absurd, as it is logically impossible to heap nothing upon nothing.

- 2 Brian Keenan is quoted as saying that “British imperialism” should go into the “dustbin of history” (l. 4). Explain this metaphor and its function.

Keenan’s metaphor of suggesting “British imperialism” should be put into the “dustbin of history” means two things. First of all, he implies that British presence on Irish ground is due to imperialism – a desire to subdue and control the other country. This form of relation between two nations is outdated, it does not work any more and therefore has to be disposed of, in a dustbin. Secondly, the image of the “dustbin” makes this supposed British attitude appear revolting and ugly, like other waste material.

- 3 Here are three headlines from other articles published on 5 March 2001. Decide which of these you find most interesting and explain why it would prompt you to read the whole article.

EXAMPLE:

Personally, I find the third headline most interesting. Its wording is an allusion to a current song on the hit parade, rapper Eminem’s “Real Slim Shady”, in which the chorus uses the same request (“Will the real Slim Shady please stand up?”). Thus the headline makes me curious because it reminds me of the question of confused identity and general disturbance I associate with the song. This thought, in turn, already leads to the content of the article which is probably about the identity crisis the IRA is undergoing. It is becoming increasingly difficult for officials to tell whether a certain statement is issued on behalf of the whole IRA or if it is one of the splinter groups that is even more radical than the majority of the extremists. – In this context, the headline is can be taken as an appeal to the “real” IRA, who promised to decommission their arsenal, to stand up and keep their word.

### II. Translation

Translate lines 22 – 34 into idiomatic German.

Genau so läuft es natürlich nicht. So eine Sprache von seiten der Unionisten würde ein Bruch des Belfaster Abkommens genannt werden, und die Nachricht darüber würde auch nicht an den Rand von Seite 9 in der *Irish Times* gequetscht werden. Solche selbstsüchtigen Anliegen sind nur für die Sinn Fein allein, denn – wie sie ernsthaft glauben – es ist schließlich ihr Friedensprozess und nur wann sie es wollen, lassen sie wüten und zerstören / rufen sie Zeter und Mordio / weinen sie leise in ihr Bier (Nichtzutreffendes bitte streichen). Sie meinen sogar, es spiele keine Rolle, was sie sagen, wie unpassend, ungemäßigt und anachronistisch es auch immer sein mag, denn sie sind ja nicht das Problem.

Gerry Adams ließ so etwas ungewollt erkennen im Gefolge des Geplänkels über den Artikel im *Boston Herald*. „Wenn es solche Leute wie Keenan nicht gäbe“, sagte er leichthin, „gäbe es keinen Friedensprozess.“

Tatsache ist jedoch, wenn es solche Leute wie Keenan nicht gäbe, dann wäre überhaupt kein Friedensprozess nötig. Ach, die IRA/Sinn Fein scheinen immer noch Dank zu erwarten dafür, dass sie nicht so viele von ihren Nachbarn umbringen, wie sie’s unter idealen Bedingungen täten, quasi. Das Herz blutet für sie, also ehrlich.

Das Herz eines anderen, normalerweise.

---

ELK 2000/2002 –Rg–

Question not used:

- x How does the author interpret Keenan’s words? Refer to lines 13 – 17. 20
- 
- x How does the author interpret Keenan’s words? Refer to lines 13 – 17.

O’Hanlon sees only one way of interpreting Keenan’s speech. She is certain it means that the IRA are ready to kill more people if they don’t like the results of the peace process (ll. 13-15). As there are dangerous tensions already, the author is convinced that what Keenan said will only fuel the emotions of IRA extremists (ll. 15 f.). However, Eilis O’Hanlon reserves the possibility that those aggressive words are just stereotypes, that there is no real danger behind them if they are – as Gerry Adams recommends – “put [...] into context” (ll. 16-17).