

Leaving Cert English (H) Grinds - **Week 18**

Topic:

Brendan Kennelly



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Sound & Visual Check

“I am now talking....”

“If you cannot hear me or see my screen please say “Cannot hear/see you” on the chat.”

“If some of you can’t hear me, please restart your computer and join the class again.”



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Lesson Overview:

By the end of this lesson you should:

- Understand *how to approach the Kennelly's poems*
- Understand *what to look for when approaching Kennelly's poetry*
- Know *how to find the correct information and construct a response*



BRENDAN KENNELLY.

● Begin *

● Bread *

● Dear Autumn Girl

● Poem from a Three Year Old

● Oliver to His Brother

● I See You Dancing, Father

● A Cry for Art O'Leary

● Things I might Do

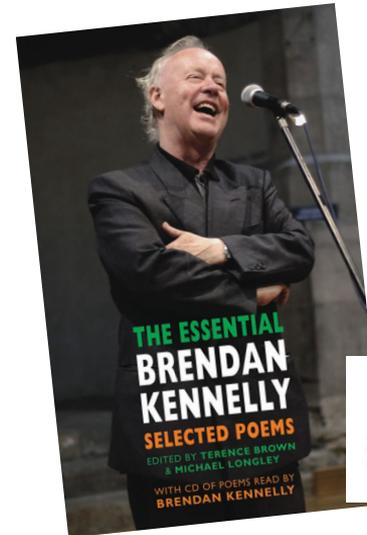
● A Great Day

● Fragments

● The soul's loneliness

● Saint Brigid's Prayer *

What word
does each of
the highlighted
titles inspire



Brendan Kennelly.

- Brendan Kennelly (born 1936- October 2021) was an Irish poet and novelist from Ballylongford in Co.Kerry. He grew up in a close-knit, rural village.
- In 1957 he won a scholarship to Trinity College Dublin where he studied English and French and got a first-class honours.
- His close friend remarked '*He was like the proverbial culchie - he had a belted mac, a little cap down over his eyes.*' He was certainly not the typical wealthy Protestant Trinity student of the time; he was a rural GAA-playing Catholic, but he took to life in Dublin easily without forgetting his roots.



Later Life.

- Kennelly gave up alcohol in 1986 after drinking heavily for years. It was on the advice of a doctor who told him he would be dead within the year if he didn't stop. One change he found in being sober was that he was writing longer poems.
- In October 1996 he underwent a quadruple heart bypass.



Brendan Kennelly.

- He retired from teaching, but he was Professor of Modern Literature at Trinity College, Dublin until 2005.
- He is now 84 years of age and resides at Trinity College Dublin.



Social and Cultural Context.

- Kennelly's work stems from an emerging Ireland. Religion and Patriarchy were losing their grip on this emerging nation.
- In later life Kennelly has become incredibly religious. His daughter Doodle told the Irish Independent " He speaks as if he has an umbilical cord coming straight from mother Mary herself... he is the most holy person I know".
- Kennelly himself admits to going to Mass every Sunday.



In your own time. Create a research slide/ time line/ quiz/ poster on Bredan Kennelly

- The life and times of Kennelly
- His inspiration
- His work



What comes to
mind when you
see this title?



what are other
words for
begin?



start, commence, initiate, open,
originate, inaugurate, launch,
set about, institute, arise





His Inspiration for the poem:

- I like that old Kerry saying: *“Once you get up in the morning and stick your old leg out, you should be grateful”*.
- He also said *“The quality which has stood by me is determination, a determination to begin again”*.
- **Summary: a philosophical reflection on starting something new again and again communicated through the description of a morning walk across the Grand Canal in Dublin.**



Begin again to the summoning birds
to the sight of the light at the window,
begin to the roar of morning traffic
all along Pembroke Road.
Every beginning is a promise
born in light and dying in dark
determination and exaltation of springtime
flowering the way to work.
Begin to the pageant of queuing girls
the arrogant loneliness of swans in the canal
bridges linking the past and future
old friends passing though with us still.
Begin to the loneliness that cannot end
since it perhaps is what makes us begin,
begin to wonder at unknown faces
at crying birds in the sudden rain
at branches stark in the willing sunlight
at seagulls foraging for bread
at couples sharing a sunny secret
alone together while making good.
Though we live in a world that dreams of ending
that always seems about to give in
something that will not acknowledge conclusion
insists that we forever begin.

Information (themes)

tone

structure

Poetic techniques





Begin again to the summoning birds

to the sight of the light at the window,

begin to the roar of morning traffic

all along Pembroke Road,

Every beginning is a promise

born in light and dying in dark

determination and exaltation of springtime

flowering the way to work.

Begin to the pageant of queuing girls (celebratory imagery connection)

the arrogant loneliness of swans in the canal (moments of isolation in life)

bridges linking the past and future (metaphor)

old friends passing though with us still,

Begin to the loneliness that cannot end

since it perhaps is what makes us begin, (pain suffering, loss- use of opposites)

begin to wonder at unknown faces (change in life)

at crying birds in the sudden rain (metaphor for pain/ suffering/ resilience)

at branches stark in the willing sunlight (winter, personification- resilient sun)

at seagulls foraging for bread (toil work_

at couples sharing a sunny secret (moments of beauty, connection)

alone together while making good. (oxymoron opposites differing moments)

Though we live in a world that dreams of ending (per-hopelessness, dream Pos)

'Light in the window'- brightness, positive, hope. 'window' a threshold- a mode of entering or escaping. An opening into a new world. (sight)

Sound- aural. Onomatopoeia 'roar' full of life, personification of the traffic, brought into the city. Realism- location

'every' reflects the universal nature of beginning again. 'promise' - a promise to himself- sacred, precious. 'light' and 'dark' use of opposites referring to the good and bad situations of life.

Personification highlighting resilience, 'determination'. Springtime- new life/ new beginnings. 'flowering' positive, beautiful, hopeful, colourful

Reference to loss death. 'us still' sense of hope. Sibilance= comforting

'Begin' starts and ends with the same word. It comes full circle reflective of life. Positive order from the speaker

Entire poem draws upon the experience of walking along a Dublin canal and viewing the different moments of life. The good and the bad. Contemplating life. After life threatening surgery, he is beginning again. A new start, a new beginning.

Everyday life
'w'
alliteration



that always seems about to give in (always pain, ache , suffering)

something that will not acknowledge conclusion (resilience- unwilling to give up)

insists that we forever begin. (hope, resilience, rejoicing)

Information (themes)

tone

structure

Poetic techniques





Find the quote
to match the
picture





















Context:

- Kennelly wrote '*Begin*' in his fifties while recovering from heart surgery. He had radically changed his lifestyle after a series of health and personal problems. His renewed enthusiasm to live every moment to the full is evident in the poem's celebratory tone.



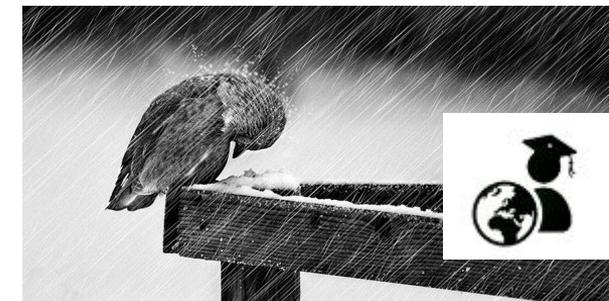
Main Message:

- The poem is an upbeat, happy one.
- We are told that every new day is a fresh start, a new beginning, that we can always begin again.
- The word 'light' is repeated twice in the first half of the poem, light is a symbol of hope.



Darker side of life;

- He addresses the fact that life can sometimes be hard and difficult, but like the bird in the rain, we too must weather the storm and hope that the next day will be better and brighter.



Style feature

- **anaphora** adds a sense of determination as does the repetition of the word “begin” throughout the poem
- **enjambment** highlights the never ending need to begin again
- **imperative tone**, “begin again” is an encouraging command to never give up
- **alliteration** e.g. “dying in dark / determination” enhances the imagery
- **reference to familiar places**, “Pembroke Road” near the Aviva Stadium in Dublin 4, make the poem more accessible
- **imagery** appeals to multiple senses: “summoning birds”, “sight of the light”, “roar of morning traffic”, “crying birds in the sudden rain”, “branches stark in the willing sunlight”
- **use of contrast**: “born in light and dying in dark”
- **personification**: “the arrogant loneliness of swans in the canal”
- **metaphor**: “bridges linking the past and future”
- **simple yet precise language**, especially the simple dynamic emotive verbs: a promise is “born”, exaltation is “flowering”, etc.



Theme

- *Persevering in the face of adversity*: it's not just about beginning once, but we “begin again” and “forever begin” rather than giving in even despite “dreams of ending”
- *loneliness*: “the loneliness that cannot end / since it perhaps is what makes us begin... alone together while making good”.
- Life
- Optimism
- hope

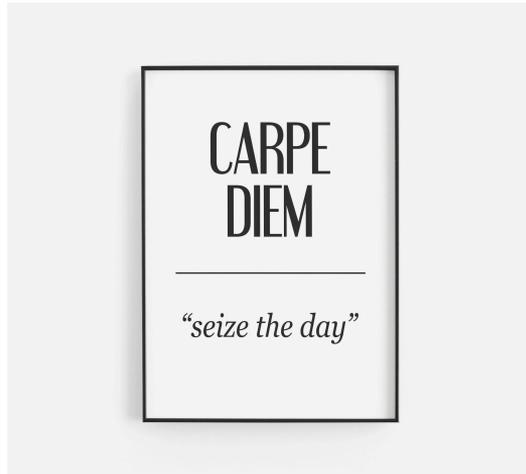


- Even though the poem is full of hope, it acknowledges that promises and beginnings are “born in light”, only to die “in dark”. This adds a realistic, down-to-earth quality to this otherwise incredibly energetic poem.
- The poet commands us to “begin” as the first and the last word of this poem, bringing it full circle. This emphasises the idea that even if we end where we began, we must begin again. The repetition of the word “begin” 8 times throughout the poem reminds us that it requires a constant effort to never give up. The poet is preaching the best of his wisdom to us in an encouraging yet understanding manner.
- The poem is filled with the sense of determination to be grateful for everyday experiences. (2) It starts off as a celebration of a new day, full refreshing opportunity, and progresses to examining the harder things in life: crossing the bridge from the past to the future, dealing with loneliness and death and not giving in.



Form.

- The structure is very straightforward; there are no stanzas to interrupt the flow and urgency of the poem. The poet also uses enjambment to emphasise how we must keep moving forward in life and *‘seize the day’*.



WRITE DOWN 3 PIECES OF ADVICE
BEGINNING WITH THE WORD 'BEGIN'



Look at the sample paragraph on p.157 and Q o 156 upload

- 1. underline the key words in the Q. Think of synonyms
- 2. Read the sample answer.
- 3. How are quotations used? How many/ length/ analysis?
- 4. What words or phrases link back to the Q?



Think

1. What three things does the speaker encourage the reader to “Begin again”?
2. What do you think is the overall mood of the poem? In what lines or phrases is this mood evident? (3-4 quotes)
3. Suggest an alternative title for the poem and explain and justify your suggestion.



Sample paragraph addressing the Q of Kennelly's poetry's appeal

'Begin' feels like an appropriate poem to discuss in order to start my explanation of why Kennelly's poetry appeals to me. This free-verse poem considers the theme of new starts in life and it showcases many of the qualities I have come to appreciate in his work. He uses personification to conjure an atmosphere of that is rich with possibilities: he writes of the day beginning with the "summoning birds" and the "roar of morning traffic" along Dublin's Grand Canal. His work is appealing because he can sum up a place with a few well-chosen words and specific locations – Kennelly has largely lived between Kerry and Dublin, and his work reflects these diverse but related experiences as well as that, he excels at extracting pleasure from the apparently mundane: he uses concise imagery to show readers the wonder of "unknown faces", "sudden rain", "seagulls foraging for bread" and "couples sharing a sunny secret". These everyday images contrast appealingly with the more profound side of the poem. What has a lasting appeal to me is his message. Kennelly's message is stark yet encouraging in its tone of delivery: Life is finite, live while it lasts. Because we could die at any moment, we should embrace our existence as 'something that will not acknowledge conclusion', that 'insists that we forever begin'. In short, the poet rephrases the modern notion that we should dream as if we will live forever and live as if we will die today; we must continue to 'forever begin.'





**BREAD.WHAT COMES TO
MIND?**





Context:

The poem is in praise of the poet's mother and grandmother, who would often make bread.



Where does bread come from?









DRAW AN IMAGE TO REPRESENT EACH STANZA

IS THE POEM SIMPLY ABOUT BREAD OR CAN
YOU SEE A DEEPER MEANING?



- Which of the following, in your view, best sums up the central theme of the poem? Explain.

- It is a poem about baking

- It is a poem about the act of creation

- It is a poem about birth and life



Bread

Someone else cut off my head
In a golden field.
Now I am re-created

By her fingers. This
Moulding is more delicate
Than a first kiss,

More deliberate than her own
Rising up
And lying down.

Even at my weakest, I am
Finer than anything
In this legendary garden.

Yet I am nothing till
She runs her fingers through me
And shapes me with her skill.



Personification
of wheat.

Personal pronoun.
Introduces the woman

Verb: create. Make.
physical

Sense of confidence, pride.

Someone else cut off my head
In a **golden field**.
Now I am re-created

Metaphor adds a sense of value

Verb: new life/ renewal/ beginning

By **her fingers**. This
Moulding is more delicate
Than a first kiss.

Adjective: precious,
fragile, needs
gentleness/ care

Lovers, beginnings

More deliberate than her own
Rising up
And lying down.

Visual of bread rising, breath,
key step, sexual undertone

I am fine
As anything in
This legendary garden

Metaphor: Earth,
garden of Eden



Yet I am nothing till
She runs her fingers through me
And shapes me with her skill.

The form that I shall bear
Grows round and white.
It seems I comfort her

Even as she slits my face
And stabs my chest.
Her feeling for perfection is

Absolute.
So I am glad to go through fire
And come out

Sexual imagery
combined with awe
for the female form.

Childbirth the
combination of
pain and joy

Process of giving
birth. 'Bun in the
oven'.

Image of baby
resembling
that of baking
bread



Shaped like her dream.

In my way

I am all that can happen to men.

I came to life at her finger-ends.

I will go back in to her again.

Simile: for a mother's
hopes for her child

Love of mother. But also
love of women of the world.
Sexual reference- one of
worship.















'This moulding is more delicate than a first kiss'.



'I am fine as anything in this legendary garden'



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'The form that I shall bear Grows
round and white'.



'Even as she slits my face and
stabs my chest'.



'I am glad to go through fire
and come out'.



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'Shaped like her dream'.

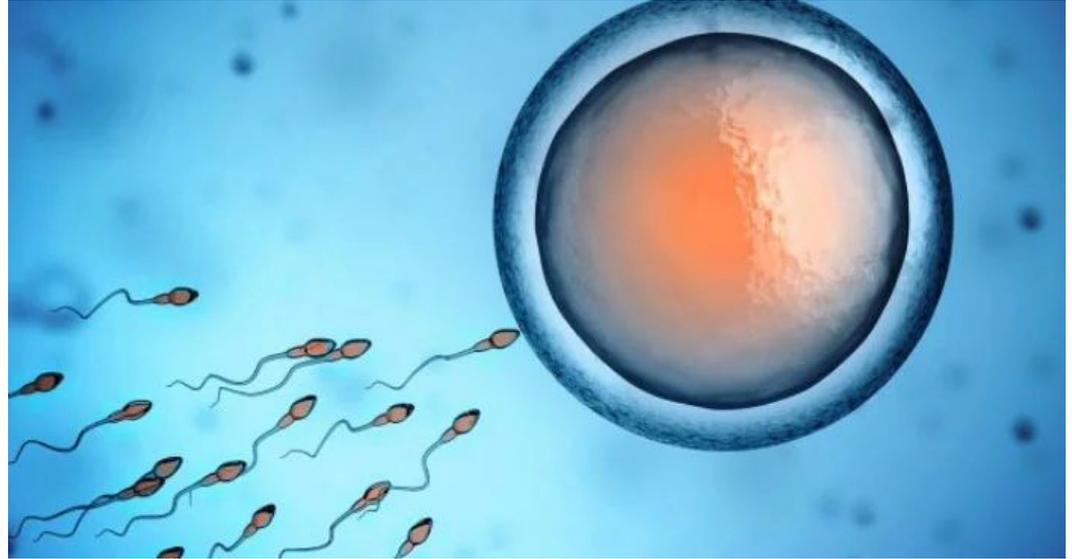


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'I will go back into her again'.



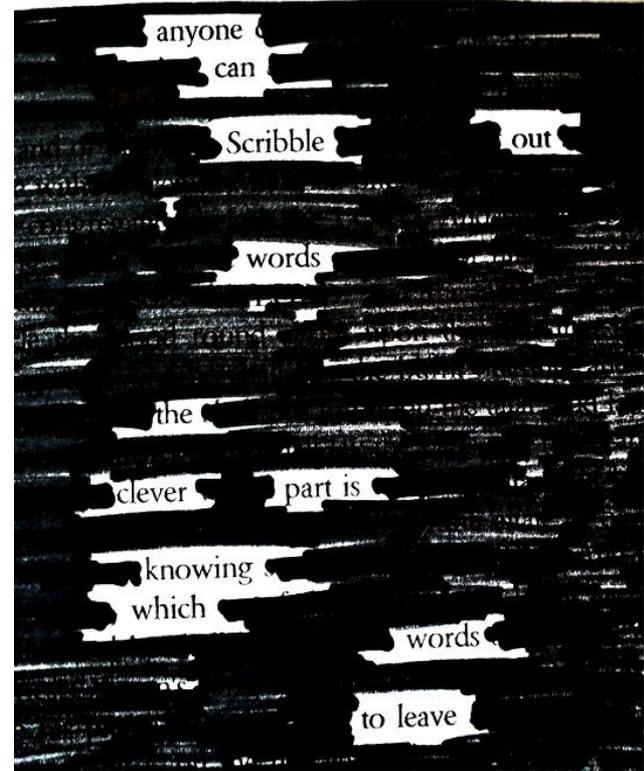
Context:

- The poem is about the poet's admiration for women as they create not only bread but also new life.
- He compares the art of making bread to sex and the creation of new life.
- The speaker in the poem is the bread.
- The bread coming out of the oven is compared to childbirth.



The poem could also represent the process involved in the creation of art.

- *'Moulding'* in line 5 is an interesting word. The woman is shaping the wheat into a dough which will rise and become something which sustains us. **Perhaps this is like the process of creating art; a poet, for example, takes basic words and shapes them, crafting them into something worthwhile and something beautiful.**



Language and Form.

- Kennelly uses run-on-lines/enjambment and occasional rhyme to give the poem a flow and pace without making it sound too lyrical. Thus the voice of the wheat seems animated and believable.



Questions

- How is a sensual or romantic relationship between the woman and the speaker suggested in the first five stanzas?
- Explain what you interpret the last three lines to mean.
- Which of the following, in your view, best sums up the central theme of the poem? Explain.
 - It is a poem about baking
 - It is a poem about the act of creation
 - It is a poem about birth and life



'Bread' is another of Kennelly's poems that appeals to me and it is arguably more traditionally poetic in terms of its intention and the thought processes behind it. However, its delivery and style is refreshing, deceptively simple, and new. 'Bread' is what the speaker becomes through the help and love of an unknown 'her'. What is so interesting about this poem to me is that the narrator evolves and grows from beginning to end. First, we learn of the narrator's somewhat violent origins – 'Someone else cut off my head' – albeit in the beautiful setting of 'a golden field'. Soon after we are immersed in the love experienced by the speaker at 'her' hands, 'I am re-created / By her fingers.' This woman's (indeed the poet's) use of her 'fingers' implies that this is a more careful, deliberate process, one requiring skill and dexterity, than that of the narrator's conception. The lines that follow reveal it is a loving act – 'Moulding is more delicate / Than a first kiss' – one the narrator deems an act of love. Subsequently, this poem's motif of love and care is compounded by its closing triplet: *Yet I am nothing till / She runs her fingers through me / And shapes me with her skill*. From these lines, I infer that 'her' baking is Kennelly's metaphor for the nourishing, creative power and effect that love's presence and/or a loving relationship has on him in his own life, on us all. I believe the speaker's feeling that they are 'nothing' in comparison with what 'she' makes them into is too strong and full of sentiment to be confined to this poem's literal meaning. It must speak of a loving relationship.



Heaven.

Do you believe in Heaven?

What do you imagine it to be like?

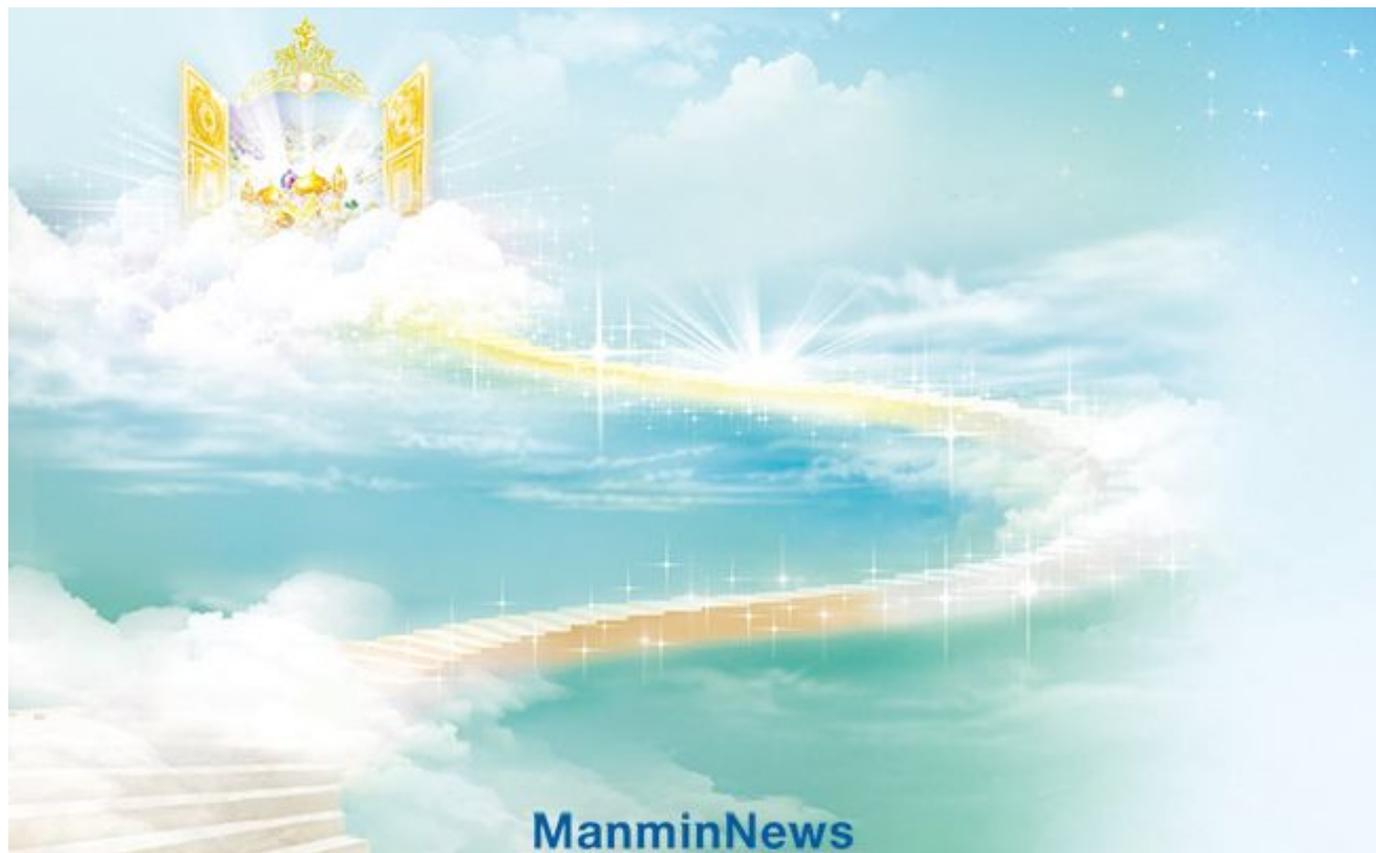
How do we get there?

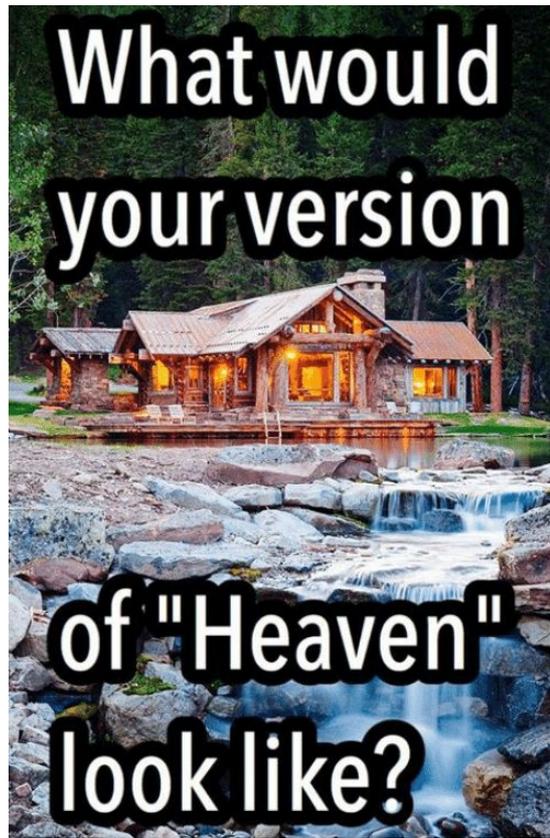
Make a list of ingredients for
your heaven.











What's your version of heaven?
Can you think of something
better than the writers of the
Bible did?







Heaven in the movies





5 minute quick write

Bursting with bird song, laughter and joy my heaven is filled with so much love. Every face flutters with happiness, every tree and flower flourishes to perfection and every living creature is held on a podium enveloped in respect.

Family and friends are the foundation of my heaven, the walls are the natural world of forests, oceans and mountains, while the roof is constructed with beams of love. And, of course there is a sprinkling of puppies to add some extra joy.



What do you see as we read the poem and look at this image.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=li8vEZRnIVs>

Prayer of St. Brigid



I'd like to give a lake of beer to God.
I'd love the Heavenly
Host to be tipping there
For all eternity.

I'd love the men of Heaven to live with me,
To dance and sing.
If they wanted, I'd put at their disposal
Vats of suffering.

White cups of love I'd give them
With a heart and a half;
Sweet pitchers of mercy I'd offer
To every man.

I'd make Heaven a cheerful spot
Because the happy heart is true.
I'd make the men contented for their own sake.
I'd like Jesus to love me too.

I'd like the people of Heaven to gather
From all the parishes around.
I'd give a special welcome to the women,
The three Marys of great renown.

I'd sit with the men, the women and God
There by the lake of beer.
We'd be drinking good health forever
And every drop would be a prayer.



Context.

- Kennelly is a recovering alcoholic. He has publicly apologised for the things he has said or done whilst he was drunk.
- At one stage he was drinking three bottles of whiskey a day. The doctor told him that if he didn't stop he'd be dead within the year. He quit alcohol for good in 1986.



Context.

- It was written after the poet had major heart surgery.
- He woke up after his operation to see a man made of rain, whom the poet began to converse with.
- In the past the poet had given out about the Catholic Church. After his operation he regretted this and has since become incredibly religious. He now goes to Mass every Sunday.





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Saint Brigid.

- The feast day of Saint Brigid is the 1st of February.
- In one she worked in a leper colony, which found itself without beer. Centuries ago beer was the daily drink of the people, both because water near villages and towns was often polluted and because it was cheap nourishment. So "when the lepers she nursed implored her for beer, and there was none to be had, she changed the water, which was used for the bath, into an excellent beer, by the sheer strength of her blessing and dealt it out to the thirsty in plenty."
- In another she is said to have changed her dirty bathwater into beer so that visiting clerics would have something to drink.



The Three Marys of great renown'.

- Mary, Jesus' mother
- Mary, Jesus' aunt
- And Mary Magdalene, Jesus' friend



Themes

- **Generosity and inclusivity.** Brigid's vision welcomes all, and her message is a simple one: our trials on earth, our good works and efforts to please God and be closer to him will be rewarded with a very happy eternity.
- Brigid acknowledges the suffering and sacrifices people have endured on earth in order to put their religion first.
- **Companionship.** There is a great sense of hospitality and togetherness.



Language and Form.

- The repetition of 'I'd' throughout highlights Brigid's determination and deep desire to create a happy heaven.
- The second and fourth lines rhyme (except for stanza 3). This gives the poem a lyrical quality, and helps to create a happy image of heaven.



I'd like to give a lake of beer to God.
I'd love the Heavenly
Host to be tipping there
For all eternity.

I'd love the men of Heaven to live with me,
To dance and sing.
If they wanted, I'd put at their disposal
Vats of suffering.

White cups of love I'd give them
With a heart and a half;
Sweet pitchers of mercy I'd offer
To every man.

I'd make Heaven a cheerful spot
Because the happy heart is true.
I'd make the men contented for their own sake.
I'd like Jesus to love me too.

I'd like the people of Heaven to gather
From all the parishes around.
I'd give a special welcome to the women,
The three Marys of great renown.

I'd sit with the men, the women and God
There by the lake of beer.
We'd be drinking good health forever
And every drop would be a prayer.



Leaving Cert English (H)

Next Week:

Poetry of Brendan Kennelly



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