

Context: Jane Weir and 'Poppies'

Jane Weir (1963–)

Jane Weir describes herself as Anglo-Italian, and grew up in on the outskirts of Manchester on a council estate. She is a textile designer, writer and poet who has recently drawn high praise from her peers, including the Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy.

'Jane Weir's poems are made and measured dreamcoats. They are exquisite garments which clothes and enfold us in her imagination.'

Simon Armitage

As an adult, she has lived 'all over the place', including in Belfast, Northern Ireland during the Troubles (in the 1980s). She has won several poetry prizes and her first collection, *The Way I Dressed During the Revolution* (2005) was shortlisted for the Glen Dimplex New Writers Award in 2006.

Her publications have been diverse and include a pamphlet called *Alice* (2006) which was based on the life of an early 20th century political activist, Alice Wheeldon. She has also written about the poet Charlotte Mew and the writer Katherine Mansfield and, more recently, a poetic biography of two highly respected women textile designers. Weir currently lives in Derbyshire and Manchester, where she writes and runs her own textile and design business. She is also the fiction editor of the literary magazine *IOTA*.

'Poppies'

Weir's poem 'Poppies' was commissioned by Duffy as part of a collection of ten contemporary war poems which were published in the *Guardian* in 2009, as part of a response to the escalating conflict in Afghanistan and the Iraq inquiry.

Weir describes being surprised by the 'overwhelming response' she had from readers across Europe to 'Poppies'. Many of the readers who contacted her were mothers of soldiers killed in action in recent conflicts. She commented in an interview that, 'I wrote the piece from a woman's perspective, which is quite rare, as most poets who write about war have been men. As the mother of two teenage boys, I tried to put across how I might feel if they were fighting in a war zone.'

Weir has acknowledged that 'A lot of my poems are narrative driven or scenarios', and in 'Poppies' she tells the 'story' of a mother's experience of pain and loss as her son leaves home to go to war. She has indicated that: 'I was subliminally thinking of Susan Owen [mother of Wilfred]... and families of soldiers killed in any war when I wrote this poem. This poem attempts on one level to address female experience and is consciously a political act.'

Weir has commented that she likes the adventure of 'cross dressing' in terms of her use of language, often borrowing from the 'language of other genres, be it fashion, art... and so on'. This is apparent in 'Poppies' where the tactile language of fashion and textiles seems to permeate the text. Her poems have been described as 'multi-sensory explosions'.

Bibliography

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bbc.co.uk/radio4/womanshour/2005_49_thu_05.shtml

youtube.com/watch?v=EzTfnOZElys – video of Jane Weir reading 'Poppies'

thisisderbyshire.co.uk/news/Writer-Jane-overwhelmed-war-poem-touches-hearts/article-1227243-detail/article.html

Some quotations from the poet used above were included in a handout provided by Jane Weir at the AQA GCSE English 2010 Ready Conference in October 2009.