

# For the Opening of the Scottish Parliament, 9 October 2004 (Open the Doors!)

*Edwin Morgan*

## Evaluation – First Thoughts

Edwin Morgan wrote this poem in his role as National Poet for Scotland. It was commissioned by the Parliament to celebrate the opening of the new building and was read at the opening ceremony by Liz Lochhead.

- Discuss what you know about the Scottish Parliament, including the building itself and what happens there. Express any views or opinions you have about it.
- From a first reading of Morgan's poem, what do you think is Morgan's attitude to the building? And to its purpose?
- What do you think is the mood of the poem?
- How do you respond to the poem's mood?
- Has Morgan engaged you and encouraged you to think about the Parliament on a first reading? If so, in what way?

## Understanding

- In stanza 2, Morgan describes the Parliament building. On which features of its design does he focus?
- Stanza 3 moves on to the Parliament's historical context. How does he link the new parliament to Edinburgh's history?
- What does Morgan say that the Parliament's purpose should and should not be in stanza 4?
- Whom is Morgan addressing towards the end of stanza 4 and stanza 5?
- Whose voice is he representing at the end of the poem when he uses "We"?

## Analysis

- In what ways is the opening stanza (the first two lines) effective?
- Morgan has stated that in writing about the Parliament, he wanted to "make sure that the public would not feel itself excluded." Highlight or annotate ways in which Morgan includes the reader in his thoughts about the Parliament.
- The poem was commissioned specifically to be read aloud at the opening ceremony. Morgan has said, "in that sense, it would be a 'public' poem, one which would speak directly to the audience." Highlight or annotate ways in which sound is used effectively in the poem. Consider the use of structure as well as the sounds of specific words and phrases.
- How is the description of the Parliament in stanza 2 enhanced by the use of imagery?
- Consider the mood of the poem that you first identified. (Would you now adapt this?) How is this mood created? Pay particular attention to sentence structure.
- Highlight or annotate any other aspects of word choice, imagery, sound, structure or tone which you think are significant.

### **Evaluation Again**

- Look back at your responses to the first set of questions and re-evaluate in the light of closer study.
- Consider also what you think of Morgan's ideas: about the building and about democracy and politics. Consider whether you agree with him, or whether you find him convincing or persuasive.

Link to poem:

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/visitandlearn/Education/56969.aspx>

### **Glossary**

“syncopations” – this term is mostly used in music to describe a rhythm which is off the beat.

“the Mile” – the street in Edinburgh, also known as “The Royal Mile” which has Edinburgh Castle at one end and the Palace of Holyrood, and now the Scottish Parliament building, at the other.

“St Giles” – the Edinburgh cathedral situated approximately half-way down the Royal Mile.

“link-boys” – during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, men who got too drunk would be helped to their carriages by youths carrying torches.

“Enlightenment” – the 17<sup>th</sup> century period of scientific and intellectual thought which influenced 18<sup>th</sup> century society. Thinkers of this time promoted a rational and scientific approach to religious, social, political and economic issues.

“makars” – old Scots word for poet or writer; someone with ideas.

## Teacher's Notes

- Questions are aimed at introducing the poem as a Higher English text.
- They may also be adapted (or even used) with Intermediate 2 or Credit.
- Scottish Parliament website has picture library and further historical background and context.
- <http://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poetry/poems/opening-scottish-parliament-9-october-2004>– also a full text of the poem, with a very helpful and accessible author's note.
- Scottish Parliament website link for images, etc.
- Could be studied in conjunction with other poems of Morgan's which are optimistic in mood e.g. Trio, In the Snack-Bar.