

Task for *Burial Rites*

Context – podcast handout

Context refers to the many factors beyond the text itself that influence its meaning. These factors include the social, cultural, historical and ideological surroundings in which texts are produced and consumed. A writer's context inevitably shapes the text produced by that writer.

The author's context must be considered because texts are not simply products of the author's imagination and creativity. Rather, 'texts and authors are produced by a network of ideas, social circumstances and material conditions that are current in a particular place and time.' (Beardwood, R. *Literature for Senior Students*. Insight, 2013, p.70)

Because the contexts of production are so influential in how we read texts, let us look at the context of author, Hannah Kent. Kent's own story in visiting Iceland on a rotary exchange at age 17, her first and subsequent encounter with Agnes's story, aroused in her a deep curiosity. What seems like a story on the opposite side of the world geographically to us, in fact, offers us many human experiences and emotions that are familiar.

Listen to "[Conversations with Richard Fidler](http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2014/08/19/4070174.htm)" a fifty-minute podcast in which Fidler interviews Kent about her writing of *Burial Rites*: www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2014/08/19/4070174.htm

As you are listening, make notes in response to the questions that follow.

1	What are the sources of isolation that Kent identifies in her own experience of Iceland?
2	What details about the climate and landscape does Kent provide?
3	When Kent discusses Icelandic food with Fidler she refers to skyr. What is it? Describe it.

4	What aroused Kent's curiosity about Agnes's story?
5	What does Kent identify that worked against Agnes, i.e. what made Agnes unpopular or an easy target (in the 1830s)?
6	Fidler refers to Agnes in the novel as 'a Lady Macbeth' type character (37:40). In what way is this true/not true? Justified or not?
7	Record some of the barbaric details of Agnes execution to which Kent refers.
8	Fidler identifies the influence of the oral traditions on histories. What does this suggest about narratives and storytelling?
9	Other notes:

Something extra: you can find a [video of Kent's story of writing the novel](#) here:

www.express.co.uk/entertainment/books/480247/Burial-Rites-Story-behind-Hannah-Kent-s-book