RUAE

“Is that it?” by Bob Geldof

In the following extract from his autobiography “Is that it?”, rock star Bob Geldof remembers watching the first news reports of famine in Ethiopia in the 1980s, a disaster which prompted him and other musicians to raise funds for the starving through the charity campaign “LiveAid”.

“It was coming to the end of 1984 and I could see no prospect for the release of an album the Boomtown Rats and I had sweated over and were proud of. Al day I had been on the phone trying to promote a single from the album. I went home in a state of blank resignation and switched on the television. But there I saw something that placed my worries in a ghastly new perspective.

The news report was of famine in Ethiopia. From the first seconds it was clear that this was a horror on a monumental scale. The pictures were of people who were so shrunken by starvation that they looked like beings from another planet. Their arms and legs were thin as sticks, their bodies spindly. Swollen veins and huge, blankly staring eyes protruded from their shrivelled heads. The camera wandered amid them like a mesmerized observer, occasionally dwelling on one person so that he looked directly at me, sitting in my comfortable living room. And there were children, their bodies fragile and vulnerable as premature babies but with the consciousness of what is happening to them gleaming dully from their eyes. All around was the murmur of death like a hoarse whisper, or the buzzing of flies.

From the first few seconds it was clear that this was a tragedy which the world had somehow contrived not to notice until it had reached a scale which constituted an international scandal. You could hear that in the tones of BBC reporter Michael Buerk. It was the voice of a man who was registering despair, grief and disgust at what he was seeing. At the end, the newscaster remained silent. Paula burst into tears and then rushed upstairs to check on our baby, Fifi, who was sleeping peacefully in her cot.

The images played and replayed in my mind. What could I do? Did not the sheer scale of the thing call for something more? Michael Buerk had used the term Biblical: a famine of Biblical proportions. A horror like this could not occur today without our consent. We had allowed this to happen. I would send money. But that was no enough. I was stood against the wall. I had to withdraw my consent. What else could I do? I was only a pop singer – and by now not a very successful pop singer. All I could do was make records that no-one bought. But I would do that, I would give the profits of the next Rats record to Oxfam. What good would that do? It would be a pitiful amount. But it would be more than I could raise by simply dipping into my shrunken bank account. Maybe some people would buy it just because the profits were going to Oxfam. And I would withdraw my consent. Yet that was not enough.”

***Adapted from “Is that it?” by Bob Geldof as printed in “Reportage”. Ed by Geoff Barton – Oxford Literature Resources***

**Paragraph 1**

1a. At the end of 1984, how did Bob Geldof feel about his career and why? **2**

b. How did watching the news reports affect his view of his own worries? Explain in your own words **2**

**Paragraph 2**

2a. How does the opening sentence of this paragraph act as a link between Paragraph 1 and 2? **2**

b. What is famine? Quote a phrase from the paragraph to show how you arrived at your answer.  **2**

c. Explain in your own words the meaning of “this was horror on a monumental scale”. 2

3. a “…they looked like beings from another planet.” Imagery?

3.b Comment on the word choice of the phrase “gleaming dully”

4. Word choice, which highlights how the writer wants you to make you feel about the Etheopian people?

**Paragraph 3**

5 a Describe in your own words the person’s reaction to the famine and why he or she might have reacted that way.

**Paragraph 4**

6a What does Bob Geldof mean when he says famine could not happen “without our consent”?