

Mid-term break

Seamus Heaney

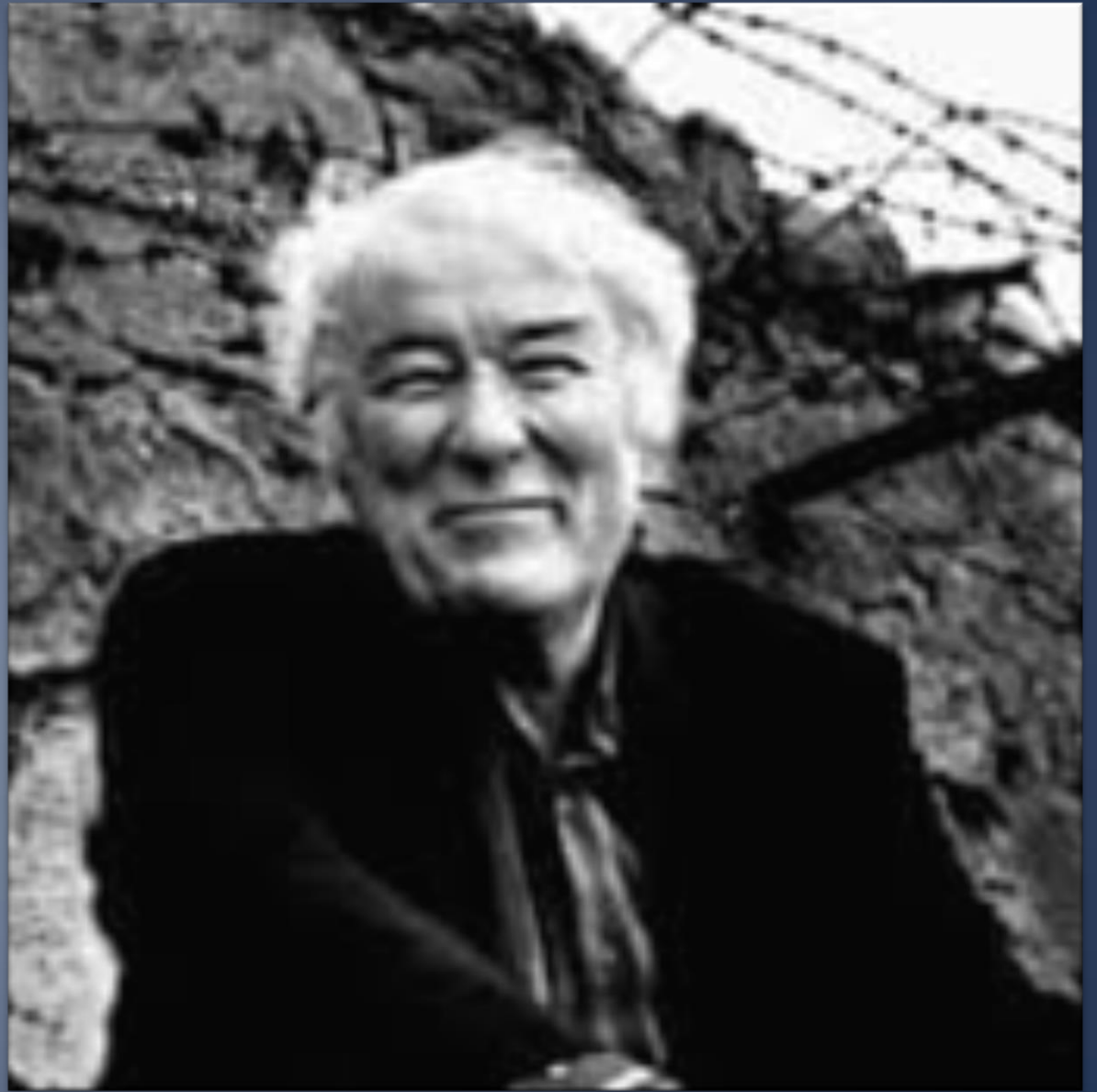
Mrs J Wessels

May 2020

Seamus
Heaney

April 1939- April 2013





About the poet:

- Seamus Justin Heaney- Was an Irish poet, playwright and translator.
- He was born on the 13th April 1939 near Castledawson, Northern Ireland.
- He passed away on the 30th August 2013 (aged 74)
- He received a Nobel Prize in Literature in 1995.
- Heaney was one of nine children. His younger brother Christopher was killed in a road accident while Heaney was studying at St Columb's. The poem "Mid-Term Break" is related to his brother's death.

Glossary

- Knelling- the sound made by a bell, especially for a death or funeral.
- Porch- a structure attached to the entrance of a building.
- Stride- a step in progress towards an aim.
- Cooed- Make a soft murmuring sound.
- Stunched- stop the flow of blood
- Poppy- a flower. Symbol of peace, sleep or death.
- Gaudy- Showy, bright and sometimes tacky.

Summary of the poem:

- It presents an elder brother having to deal with the terrible trauma, the death of his younger brother.
- The poem is powerful and moving because of its emotional restraints and control of tone the male speaker uses.
- An elegiac tone is established at the start of the poem (elegy), this is a poem written to remember a person who passed away.
- The little boy is remembered clearly and very realistic as he lies in “A four foot box, a foot for every year.”
- This poem is a first person account of the experience of facing death.

Analysis Stanza 1

- Line 1-3
- The 'I' shows isolation and being alone.
- The 'sick bay' is a place where one goes when one is not feeling well and from experience we know it is where one waits for your parents or guardians to come and pick you up when you are sick or something serious happened.
- 'Counting bells', shows waiting for time to pass.
- The word 'knelling' is appropriate for this poem as it is the sound of a funeral bell. It is also onomatopoeia.
- From line 2, the reader can pick up that there is a dark and gloomy atmosphere.

Analysis Stanza 1

- The rhythm and alliteration of the 'c', and 'l' sounds reinforces a mournful tone and the 'bells' and 'knelling' help to suggest that time is slowing down or coming to an end.
- The speaker is driven home by a neighbour and not his family which contributes to the idea that something serious is going on.
- The speaker clearly remembers that it was "two o'clock" which is important because humans tend to remember the precise dates and times of traumatic events.

Analysis Stanza 2

- This stanza focusses on the speaker's father and his emotional response to the death of his child.
- He did not usually respond to funerals in this manner. "Funerals in his stride"
- This death is different from other funerals for the father because it is personal.
- Big Jim Evans' statement that the death was "a hard blow" has a double meaning. It is used figuratively to refer to the emotional impact the death had, as well as literally how hard the car had to hit the boy to kill him.

Analysis Stanza 3

- This stanza presents another contrasting idea. The babies innocence and oblivion is visible when he is happy to see his brother VS the stark reality of why his brother returned home. “The baby cooed and laughed”
- Above also represents a change in the rhythm from sombre and sad to bouncy and happy.
- The unusualness of the situation is further developed in lines 8-11.

Analysis Stanza 4

- In the lines above the speaker is “embarrassed” by the sympathy the old men provide because it is awkward. The awkwardness stems from the use of euphemisms for example “Sorry... for his trouble” (line 10).
- “Whispers” contribute to the hushed, muted atmosphere in the house.
- Enjambment into the next line shows that the mother had been crying continuously.

Analysis Stanza 5

- Concentration now shifts to the speaker's mother.
- His mother does not say anything, instead she holds his hand and “coughed out angry tearless sighs” (line 13)
- Line 13 implies that the mother cried so much there are no more tears to cry, however she is enraged with anger because the driver of the vehicle failed to avoid hitting her son.
- Line 14 presents us with another exact reference to time and the reality that the family is receiving the corpse (there is no more life).
- The fact that the corpse is “stanced” and “bandaged” shows that they tried to save the boy.
- This is the first indication of what “the trouble” actually is.

Analysis Stanza 6

- The speaker visits his brother's room.
- The details surrounding this event emphasises the quiet atmosphere as the boys are reunited after “six weeks”
- “Snowdrops” represents a pure image. Together with the “candles” they are symbolic of life, however used in a ritual manner as one would have at funerals.
- “Soothed”- presents the idea that the candles and the flowers are there to comfort the dead boy but also provides comfort to the grieving family.
- The speaker is unable to come to terms with the death of his younger brother and instead refers to him as looking “Paler”.

Analysis Stanza 7

- A “poppy” is a flower. The use of this term to describe the bruise draws attention to how such a insignificant injury had such a devastating effect.
- It also shows fragility of life, which a poppy is traditionally associated with.
- The description now becomes unbearably powerful as the speaker uses such restraint to describe his brother.
- The use of the words “cot” and “pram” emphasises the horror faced by parents who is predeceased by a child.

The final line

- The final line stands on its own because the statement reminds us of the small stature of the boy and the brevity of his young life.

Tone, mood, imagery and themes.

- The tone of the poem is a sombre tone and this is supported by the choice of diction.
- The mood is one of calmness as there is no mass hysteria over the death of the young boy, only the mother shows some anger towards the driver.
- Themes: Death, grief, central feeling of loss and sadness.

Questions:

- 1. What is the tone of the poem? (1)
- 2. Identify two themes in the poem and support your answer by quoting from the poem. (2)
- 3. How did the speaker's brother pass away? (1)
- 4. Identify the use of a euphemism in the poem. (1)
- 5. How did the speaker's father usually react to funerals? (2)
- 6. What is significant about the speaker remembering the exact times of specific events that occurred in the poem? (2)
- 7. Why is the last line of the poem on its own? (1)