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# **THE IMAGE OF THE FATHER IN SEAMUS HEANEY'S "DIGGING", "FOLLOWER" AND "MID-TERM BREAK"**

A Paper

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*Dedication*

*To Family*

*Whose support and intimacy grant me the impetus to go on  
and on*

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper is about Seamus Heaney and the effect of his personal life on the production of some of the most amazing poems. It is divided in Three Chapter. Chapter One gives an introduction to the paper including Heaney's life and works as well as the influences which affected his poetry. The third section in this chapter tackles the term "modernity" with possible dating and definitions.

In Chapter Two, three of the most prominent of Heaney's poems were selected and analysed.

The paper is concluded with Chapter Three in which the finding of the paper are summarized

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Seamus Heaney life and works

Seamus Justin Heaney was born on April 13, 1939, in Mossbawn, near Castledawson, County Derry. (Parker 1994. P. 1)

He is the Boylston Professor of Rhetoric at Harvard University and was Professor of Poetry at Oxford and in October 1995 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. (Allen 1997, P. 172)

In May 2003, *Finders Keepers: Selected Prose, 1971-2001* won the Truman Capote Award for Literary Criticism. The \$50,000 prize, billed as the largest annual cash prize for literary criticism in the English language, is administered for the Truman Capote Estate by the University of Iowa Writers Workshop. Writing for *The New Yorker*, former Capote Laureate Helen Fidler praised *FindersKeepers* for "A brimming metaphoric energy...a buoyant vivacity of description...reflective humor... and an imaginative penetration...unequaled in contemporary critical prose." (Bland Crowder and David Hall. 2007 p. 74)

He is the most important Irish poet since Yeats Seamus Heaney was described by the American poet Robert Lowell, who was a friend of the poet Heaney. They depicted the intensity of the Irish experience in much of Heaney's work. (Blooms 2003. P. 18)

He died on August 30, 2013. The cause of his death was heart disease. heaney's loss to the republic of poetry, literature and the world. (Rankin Russell.2016)

Seamus Justin Heaney was born on April 13 , 1939 in Mosban . His father, Patrick, born at the end of the 2000s, was a cattle trader, who owned a 40-acre farm, medium in size by Northern Ireland standards. Patrick Heaney, a common farmer who served as a rural advisor, personified solidarity. (Parker 1994. P. 1)

In August 1965 he married Mary Devlin. In July 1966 his son Michael was born . That same year, Heaney was appointed Lecturer in Modern English Literature at Queen's University and began working with BBC Radio and Television as a contributor to their educational programmes. Christopher Heine's second son, was born in February 1968. Political violence peaked in Northern Ireland in 1969 , where Heaney became a visiting lecturer for the university's 1970 1971 academic year . In 1972, the Heaney family was offered a longer sanctuary by a friend of theirs who had a country house for rent in Glanmore, in southern Ireland. Seeing as a wonderful opportunity to devote himself to his writing , Heaney quit his position at Queen's University and packaged up the family. His Winter Collection ( 1972) was published shortly thereafter and received a contradictory response. His poems transcended the personal and naturalistic into the broader public sphere, yet some critics have said that this, as they have said of his other works, showed a very limited scope ( Bloom. 2003. P: 19)

At Glanmore in 1973 , Heaney's third child , Kathryn Ann , was born , and as the family continued to be in relative isolation , Heaney felt his marriage , family relationships , and the flourishing of his writing . While the family lived for a few years in a cottage , during this time Heaney also traveled giving poetry readings in England and the United States , editing anthologies and writing numerous articles . In 1975 .

Heaney became Head of the English Department at Careford College, a teacher training school in Dublin . Heaney recovered from country life but felt he had isolated his family long enough , and Heaney moved to Dublin . His fieldwork collection was published in 1979 and received generally strong reviews . In 1984 Boylston was appointed Professor of Rhetoric and Rhetoric . In 1989 , Heaney was appointed as well

He earned a doctorate in poetry at Oxford University in England for five years , which required him to give three public lectures each year. In 1995, Heaney was awarded the Nobel Prize, and the committee praised him for “works of lyrical beauty and moral depth, which glorify everyday miracles and the living past.” (Bloom. 2003. P.: 20)

In 1965 his *Eleven Poems* was published as a pamphlet . In May 1966, his first book of poems, *Death of a Naturalist*, .. While this first poetry collection was generally well received, and by 1969 his second collection of poems was published, *Door into the Dark*. In general , it gained a good critical response (Bloom's. 2003. p.19)

By 1975 his collection *North* appeared, with its first part emphasizing the mythic and the second focusing on the political Northern Ireland and the role of the poet. His collection *Field Work* was published in 1979 and received generally strong reviews . In 1980, two books appeared, *Selected Poems 1965-1975*, and *Preoccupations: Selected Prose*, which contains essays on poets as well as frank discussion of his own poetic growth. In 1984 his book *Station Island* was published and , for the most part , well . received . In 1987 his book *The Haw Lantern* was published additional publications including *The Midnight Verdict* (1993), *The Spirit Level* (1996), *Opened Ground: Selected Poems, 1966-1996* (1998) and his best-selling translation of *Beowulf*, which was published in 2000 (Bloom's .2003 p: 20 )



There are, over 30 books completely devoted to the study and analysis of his, and to list the number of articles and chapters on Heaney would probably be a book - length enterprise in itself. Gave that Heaney is a Nobel Prize winner, many critics refer to these essays and lectures. For example, Elmer Andrews, in his *Icon Critical Guide* (1998) to Heaney's work, makes frequent use of Heaney's second collection of essays, *The Government of the Tongue*. (O'Brian. 2003. P: 9)

Among the writings of Heaney's profession are in the main prose Preoccupations: *Selected Prose* 1968-1978 (1980); Among Schoolchildren (1983); Place and Displacement: *Recent Poetry of Northern Ireland* (1985); The Government of the Tongue: The 1986 T. S. Eliot Memorial Lectures and Other *Critical Writings* (1988); The Place of Writing (1989), The Redress of Poetry: *Oxford Lectures* (1995), *Crediting Poetry* (1995), his Nobel lecture and the most recent summative collection *Finders Keepers* (2002), which also includes some new material. (O'Brian. 2003. P: 13)

titles italics.

*Eleven Poems. 1965.*

*Night Drive: Poems. 1970*

*Sweeney Astray: A Version from the Irish. 1984.*

*Crediting Poetry: The Nobel Lecture. 1996. Opened Ground: Selected Poems, 1966-1996. 1998. Beowulf: A New Verse Translation. 2000. Electric Light. 2001. (Bloom's/2003/p:100-101)*

## 1.2 Influence on Heaney

In general , Seamus Heaney describes other poets like a protein. Michael Cavanagh and Eugene O'Brien have lately recognized Heaney's relationship to Frost without examining it. In Cavanagh's exhaustive *Professing Poetry* (2009), Heaney's inspirations are meticulously examined, yet Frost remains a spectre. (Tyler, 2013 , p.204)

From post-imperial Poland or the Czech Republic to Eastern Catholic and Orthodox culture, Heaney often emphasizes the tight and strong link between Irish and Eastern European literary traditions. A more elegiac and tragic view of life with less trust in perfectibility the note of intimacy” which he says is not so audible in Anglo-Saxon literature.(Miroux , 2017 , p.1)

There are many reasons why we should view Yeats as the biggest influence on Seamus Heaney's poetry after midcareer have been suggested by Seamus Heaney in recent years. Yeats is featured significantly in “Crediting Poetry,” Heaney's Nobel Lecture from 1995, in which Yeats' work is seen as having important aspects of poetry such as self-gratification and realism. (Cavanagh ,2009, p.74)

It is clear from Hobsbaum's poetry criticism that he had a significant influence on Heaney ( Haughton 63) and that his personal championing of Heaney as a talent (suggestive of a shared poetic aesthetic) indicates that Hobsbaum was a decisive in Heaney's poetical and professional development. (Side,2012 , p. 144-145)

### 1.3 Modern Poetry

“Modern,” a term referring to many poets, movements, and many styles of the 20th and 21st centuries. And it is widespread in the art world. It also refers to literary works written since the beginning of World War I [1914-1917] poets who, being some poets, who in fact laid the foundation of modern poetry in the English-speaking world .

The modernist movement began around the beginning of the twentieth century and was an unexpected break with traditional ways of viewing and interacting with the world. Experimentation and individuality became virtues, and it was poets who made the most of the new zeitgeist. ( Yasmin khalida / 2015 /p:63 ‘ 64 )

Modern poetry of the twentieth century begins in the late 1950's;critics began to see through the smoky screen of New Critical antiromanticism. Critics discovered important affiliations between poetic, romantic, victorian, and modern. Following the pioneering work, Modernism makes more sense to understand it As part of an ongoing series.

In the 1930s, for poets like Randall Gabriel, modernity became a thing of the past.

Of the importance of modern poetry in stories that talk about literary history totally recording this importance usefully and effectively, we have to realize that as early as the 1930s, modernism seemed to poets like Randall Jarrell (born 1914) a thing of the past—something they could respond to but in which they could no longer partake. Modernity collapsed in a period of time . ( Michael Levenson/2003 / p:100 )

The most important characteristics and themes of the modern poetry are realism, love, pessimism, romantic elements, nature, violence, chaos, ambiguity, organization, clarity, human and democratic observation, religion and mysticism.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE POEMS

#### 2.1 “Digging”

Digging is a narrative poem which was written in 1964 by Seamus Heaney. As the first poem of Heaney's collection, *Death of a Naturalist*, it talks about work. As the speaker, a writer, holds a pen in one hand, he hears his father, a former farmer, working the ground outside. The speaker admires his father for his determination to work tirelessly and the skill with which he uses a spade. The speaker is reflecting on the rural history of his family. It is an 8 stanza, 31 line poem.

Written in the summer of 1964, "Digging" is the first poem of Seamus Heaney's debut collection, *Death of a Naturalist*. In it, the speaker tries to reconcile his poetic vocation with the Irish, rural tradition from which he comes, a tradition embodied initially by the poet's father, who is heard digging outside the window as the poet writes. The sight of his father stooped over his spade triggers in the poet childhood memories of his father "Digging" potatoes and his grandfather cutting peat. The poet describes both activities with great care and admiration, focusing not only on the earthy smells, sounds, and rhythms of digging, but also on the refined technique with which both men practiced their occupation. "By God," the poet reflects, "the old man could handle a spade. / Just like his old man." In a romantic fashion, then, digging represents both an art form and a means of identification with his native people and land his own "living roots." And though he feels briefly alienated from his

forebears' tradition ("I've not spade to follow men like them"), he quickly realizes that poetry itself is a form of digging, of "going down and down" into memory to express the experience of his father and grandfather. Thus, while his poetic career is in one way an emancipation from the rustic Irish past- Heaney is, after all, writing in English, a language once foreign to rural Ireland-it is also a way in which he, too, can help carry on his family's tradition. (Cengage Learning, Gale,2016,p..)

Under my window, a clean rasping sound

When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:

My father, digging. I look down

In the first stanza, the poet starts the poem saying that there is a short, thick pen resting between his finger and his thumb. He compares the pen to a gun which is in comfortable position

Then, in the next stanza, the poem then rather smoothly begins to transition into metapoetry and conveys Heaney's initial anxieties. As he writes this poem, the images of "The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap / Of soggy peat, [and] the curt cuts of an edge / Through living roots" seem to charge a feeling that had lain dormant within him . He realizes that he has "no spade to follow men like them" . This statement is Heaney's acknowledgement of his "being set a bit apart" from his family. In the poem, he is also physically set apart from his father and grandfather. In the poem, Heaney writes from a heightened position: "Under my window, a clean rasping sound / When the spade sinks into gravelly ground: / My father, Digging" . He is not down on the

ground with his father but is, instead, writing in an upper- story room. Perhaps he feels inadequate, since he has no spade, and seeks the comfort of a space in which he feels more included. Or perhaps he chooses to stay inside and write instead of going outside and digging. Either way, he is definitely not following in his father's and grandfather's footsteps.(Thompson, 2015, p.57)

Heaney fixes the time and place of the poem 'Digging' in the present because for him the reality of a poem lies within it. Past, present and future are seamlessly merged. An image that has been stored in his memory is worked on by his imagination and eventually transformed into an immediate actual occurrence. In the poem 'Digging' the poet writes of sitting at the window in Mossbawn, observing his father as he digs potatoes. But in reality, he is not looking down at his father as he digs and the Heaney family are not, at the time of writing, living in the poet's beloved Mossbawn...they had moved from Mossbawn in 1954 the Christopher's death, understandably, given that Margaret constantly used the bus to go shopping, and this would have involved standing at the very bus-stop where her child had been knocked down and fatally injured. Heaney is writing from memory and memory is central to all of his writing. (Mulrooney, 2018)

The poet gives further information in the 3<sup>rd</sup> stanza, about the activity under his window. The speaker's father is straining there digging the land. His back is bending down and coming up While bending down and digging, the father's picture is visible in the present times. But, when he comes up, the speaker's vision sees his father in the past days. That is, the speaker's memories went back to the past days when his father used to dig in the potato drills.

The rough boots of the speaker's father firmly and comfortably stand on the support of the lug in the fourth stanza, He (father of the speaker) balanced firmly the shaft (long handle of the spade) against his knee and rooted out the tops of the potatoes. By burying the bright and sharp edge of the spade in the ground, the father is unearthing the potatoes and scattering them. Others who were there including the poet, were collecting the unearthed potatoes. The fresh potatoes were hard and cool. The poet could feel the hardness of the potatoes.

In the fifth stanza, the poet says that the old man (his father) was handling the spade, just like his father (that is, poet's grandfather)

In the sixth stanza, the poet is saying that his grandfather cut more grass/ turf in a day than any other man of their area – Toner's bog where the poet's family owned their farm. The poet says that as a child, once he carried milk in a bottle for his grandfather. The bottle was covered with a piece of paper. The poet's grandfather drank the milk and again immediately fell back to his work of cutting the grass and throwing it over his shoulder. The poet's grandfather used to go on digging the land further and further to find good turf.

The land where potatoes are grown is described as cold in the s and has a distinct smell. The wet and soft land is making sounds when the feet and hands of the workers enter into it and cut the edges with spades. The memory of the cutting and other works in the potato peats recurred to the poet/ speaker. The poet/ speaker says that he has no spade like his father and grandfather to follow their footsteps and work in the fields.

This final stanza tells about the resolution of the poet. The poet says that he has no spade with him to dig, like his father and grandfather. But,



he has the thick, short pen between his finger and his thumb. The poet will dig with his pen .

## **2.2 Follower**

Follower's first poem was first published in Seamus Heaney's anthology in 1966, entitled "The Death of a Naturalist". Because he dealt with the topics of Rádharc for the work of Heaney. There is also a feeling in which he felt the Irish countryside during his childhood, which regrets the old reports that disappear in modern life. Heaney considers that the connection of his family's work in the land and agriculture is a traditional labor, using the scientific metaphor "represented by dwarves standing on the shoulders of giants." Follower's poem has been republished in a wide range of literary laboratories in the collections of Heaney's work, for example in Heaney's *Opened Ground: poem 1966 - 1996*.

Poem Summary "Follower" consists of six quatrains. Each stanza follows an abab rhyme scheme, meaning the first and third line of each stanza rhyme, as do the second and fourth.

In the first stanza , Heaney took his subject describing his father when he plowed a field. where his father used to enter the field with an old manual plow drawn by a horse. He used horses for plowing, and its use indicated a certain level of prosperity and less cultivation. Well-trained plow horses respond to a man's voice. In the second and third lines there is a strange metaphor where the speaker looks at his son describing the parts of his father's body when he plows and expresses it like a curved sail "The transformation of the plow into a sail indicates that the plow as a whole sails over the field like a ship", where he believes

that the ship is what preserves the traditions of believers and Catholicism. (Gale, Cengage Learning /2016 )

The poet remembers childhood memories and begins his poem with "My Father." The poet focuses heavily on his father. He remembers the feeling of awe when he talks about his father. He describes his father as a farmer who masters his craft and presents the family relationship as a source of support and strength. This sounds like a simple description, but it's not as simple as it sounds. The poet portrayed a clear picture drawn with the words "Like a full sail" may evoke the same kind of shape - but it is "tapered/between groove and groove."

In the Second Stanza, In the second stanza, the poet develops the father's experience as a farmer. It Describes the plow running above the ground and how to plant the seeds. The father plows the land by horses. The lower part of the plow is a traditional Irish metaphor. He also described his father's plowing skill and how he controlled the hard ground with simple tools. Since the introduction of the Greek alphabet, writing has changed where the first line of text reads from left to right, but the second from right to left, the third from left to right again, and so forth, the writer always writes the first character of the next line directly below the last character of the previous line. This type is called From writing the name bostrophedon from Greek words denoting the back-and-forth movement of oxen plowing across a field. ( Gale, Cengage Learning /2016)

The speaker highlights the simple wonder he had for his father. The short and simple description "Expert" is a simple summary of what a father does in his job. The poet highlights this so that the reader feels that it is a summary of what it is. We find actions and experience in these verses.

In the third Stanza , The third stanza reiterates the early themes of the poem: the father's skill and perhaps the nautical metaphor of the first stanza , if there are references to the age of exploration under sail in the sense of navigating through the field requiring the making of a new map . The sense of repetition itself is important since once the plowman has crossed the field he must turned around and exactly repeat his procedure over and over . back and forth , until the entire field is plowed . ( Gale, Cengage Learning /2016)

The circumstance "exactly" confirms how talented and experienced the father is. Again, the reader can imagine the speaker observing his father closely, almost recording his every move until he tries to transcribe it himself.

In the fourth stanza , Heaney sees his father through memory. He appears to the reader himself as a small hui, perhaps four or five years, before his schoolmaster entered his parish, working in the place where his father worked, and in the same place where he was due to leave once he entered a prestigious boarding school. Thus children were learning procedures and skills in work and farming. The analogy of the long wounds he made in the land by his father's plowing through the waves can be seen as confirmation of the marine metaphor. Heaney describes himself as a young man who is wounded and unable to walk in his father's way. The father carried his son Heaney on his shoulder, and this powerful metaphor confirms the relationship between father and son. ( Gale, Cengage Learning / 2016)

The poet focuses on himself in this passage. He imagines himself the opposite of his brilliant and glorious father. He is not sure of himself, he may have wanted to imitate his father but he was not able. We find a beautiful picture where we see love in their relationship. Although his

physically demanding work was difficult, he found the energy to take his son to work with him and carry him when he was tired.

In the fifth Stanza , The fifth stanza deals with the speaker's incapacity to imitate his father's way of life . This is his desire , but his imitation is childish and exaggerated . He cannot become a plowman but can only follow behind the plowman . His father casts a shadow larger than his young body, a reference to the idea of being overshadowed by one's predecessors. ( Gale, Cengage Learning /2016)

Like any child who is in awe of his father, Heaney remembers wanting him to grow up to be just like him. He wanted to imitate his movements - closing one eye to "stiff my arm". The speaker here shows an awareness that he will only be able to "follow" his father and that he has not been cut down to become a farmer. He plays on the term "being in someone's shadow," because he was literally and figuratively in his father's shadow. The adjective "broad" means that he will not be able to live up to his father's level.

In the sixth Stanza , In the first sentence of the last stanza Heaney characterizes his young self as a positive distraction, getting in the way of his father, and never able to keep up with him owing to his unstable awkwardness. Then , changing his perspective and tone , the speaker says that now the situation is reversed ; his father is the awkward follower . Heaney's father was a peasant farmer , a man of tradition .( Gale, Cengage Learning /2016 )

The speaker goes back to the present tense. Heaney has switched his role to the father and is now the one most likely to "stumble" due to old age. This last line indicates that no matter how troublesome it is to take care of him, he will always have the care that he once showed. He

presents their bond as unbreakable because, despite the fact that his father has become a burden at his age, he will not abandon him.

### **2.3 “Mid-Term Break”**

The early poem “Mid-Term Break” was written by Heaney following the death of his young brother, killed when a car hit him in 1953. It is a poem that grows in stature, finally ending in an unforgettable single line image. "My poems almost always start in some kind of memory..." Seamus Heaney said.(Centre,2020,p.154).

In the porch I met my father crying-  
He had always taken funerals in his stride –  
And Big Jim Evans saying it was a hard blow.  
(Burt, 1996, p.90)

A poem with an ambiguous title, “Mid-Term Break” appears on the page as an orderly set of tercets, finished off with a single line, as if underlining everything that has gone before. Perhaps the poet wanted a neat, arranged form to control what could be a seriously upsetting scenario? So, twenty two lines with an echo of traditional iambic pentameter in each stanza, plus odd bits of occasional anapaests and spondees to reflect the varying emotions at play. Note the use of dashes, enjambment and other punctuation to slow and pause proceedings, or to let them flow; and the syntax is, as always with Heaney's early poems, worked in a formal conversational fashion. There are two full end rhymes, at the end, clear/year, which is a kind of closure on proceedings. Assonance is used throughout, helping to tie things together close/drove/home/blow/old...o'clock/rocked/coughed/box/knocked...whils

t alliteration occurs in the second, twentieth and last lines - counting/classes/close..four-foot/a foot. The second line is interesting as it contains both alliteration and assonance, plus the combination of the hard c and silent k suggest a confusion of sorts. Why is the speaker in the sick bay in the first place? Knelling is a word more often associated with church funerals (alternatives would have been tolling or peeling or ringing). Stanzas six and seven stand out the syntax alters in stanza six to meet the contrasting circumstances as the speaker enters the room where the little body lies. He is metaphorically wearing the poppy as a bruise. Note the punctuation and enjambment play a particular role in slowing everything down, carrying us on to the next stanza and that final devastating line. (Centre,2020,p.155-156)

In the first – four stanza he present how grief affects those family members and friends . In “Mid-Term Break” Seamus Heaney takes the reader right into the bosom of the family and provides first hand observations of people present at home, following the death of his young brother. Interestingly, it is not clear if this is a brother or not. It is a male but the speaker informs us only of the 'corpse' which is delivered by ambulance. From the start, there is a suggestion that something isn't quite right. The speaker has to sit in a sick bay with little to do but listen to the ominous sound of bells - foretelling of doom? The word knelling implies that the occasion is solemn. This is a little bit morbid, a touch ironic, because the title tells of a break, a holiday away from responsibility and formality. When we are told the neighbours, and not family, are the ones taking him home the intrigue deepens.

In the second stanza the speaker has arrived home from school, he notice his father crying on the porch of their home. This is surprising because men are seen as strong and they hardly show emotions like

crying. Atmosphere and tension are building by the second stanza as we learn of the father, the patriarch, being reduced to tears, and a family friend, Big Jim Evans, affirming the difficulty of the occasion. Tough men are showing emotion which is something the speaker isn't used to. Heaney softens the mood slightly by introducing us to a baby in the third stanza but this is countered when old men offer their hands to shake. Again, you can picture the speaker, the eldest son, trying to take it all in as 'sorry for your trouble' repeatedly hits home.

The eldest son is going through a rite of passage, in a sense this profoundly sad death in the family is forcing him to grow up and he's finding it understandably hard.

In the fifth stanza ,it's the mother who takes on some of the grief in the form of anger as the speaker holds her hand in a room of strangers and prepares himself for the arrival of the body 'stanced and bandaged. Compare the role of father with mother in this respect, at opposite ends of the grieving spectrum.

Heaneys use of "corpse" is clinical and a little cold, suggesting that the speaker is too upset to mention the child's name. The next day however he feels compelled to go upstairs to have one last personal meeting.

Snowdrops are the first flowers to show in winter, bursting through the cold earth, sparked by the increasing light. They are a symbol of hope - even in the depths of darkness life prevails. (Centre, 2020, p.156).

## CHAPTER THREE

### CONCLUSION

The image of the father is expressed explicitly in Seamus Heaney 's "Digging", "Follower" and "Mid-Term Break".

The poet Seamus Heaney was deeply influenced by his father and he talked about him in his poems. Heaney included details of how his father worked in the rural environment and dealt with things by their real names.

Imagery and symbols about that father is scattered in Heaney's poems but the paper dealt with the most related poems.



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