

**“The subjects of Heaney’s poems are treated with great love and sympathy together with a keen eye for significant detail .”**

**Would you agree with this estimation of the poems by Seamus Heaney on your course?**

**Support your point of view by relevant quotation or reference.**

I agree with this statement. One of the things I like most about Heaney is the great affection with which he writes about people, mainly his family. He remembers scenes and incidents from his childhood and writes about them in great detail making them come alive to the reader.

Heaney writes about the often unexpressed love between himself and his father in ‘The Harvest Bow’, ‘A Constable Calls’ and ‘A Call’. He describes with great affection and gratitude the nurturing care of his aunt in ‘Sunlight’. He celebrates the craft and mystique of the local blacksmith in ‘The Forge’. Finally he remembers with wry affection his wife and his younger self as newly-weds on honeymoon in ‘The Underground’.

In the ‘Harvest Bow’, Heaney remembers an incident from his childhood as a time of great closeness between himself and his father. Heaney’s eye for detail brilliantly recreates this special moment – ‘I see us walk between the railways slopes Into an evening of long grass and midges’. He describes in loving detail the skill and craft of his father as he ‘plaited the harvest bow’ and ‘implicated the mellowed silence’. He portrays his father as an ordinary countryman - ‘whacking the tips off weeds and bushes’. Rather than looking down on his father’s rural ways he celebrates the ‘hands

that aged round ashplants and cane sticks/ And lapped the spurs on a lifetime of game cocks”. It is clear that his father never expressed his love for his son in words, instead the poet must ‘glean ..the unsaid off the palpable’. However Heaney does not condemn his father for this lack of public affection, instead he takes the harvest bow as a physical representation of his father’s unspoken love and treasures it - ‘pinned up on our deal dresser...burnished by it’s passage, and still warm’.

Heaney’s childhood love for his father can again be seen in ‘A Constable Calls’.

Although the poem deals mainly with the fear and anxiety felt by the young Heaney when a member of the RUC visits the family farm it is also an expression of the love the child Heaney feels for his father. Through his use of detailed observation Heaney recreates a child’s eye view of the constable and the fear that he evokes with his ‘heavy ledger’, polished holster’, ‘revolver butt’ and ‘baton case’. This fear springs from the child’s love for his father. He innocently assumes that his father will be arrested – ‘I assumed small guilts and sat /Imagining the black hole in the barracks’. In a way Heaney shows great sympathy for himself as a child. Although there is some humour at the child’s naivety and innocence, the adult Heaney never diminishes the real emotions experienced as a child.

Love, albeit unexpressed, is central to ‘A Call’. In this poem Heaney again creates a tender, affectionate picture of his father – now an older man. He still admires his care and attention to detail – ‘Down on his hands and knees beside the leek rig, Touching, inspecting, separating’. Heaney shows the same care and attention to detail when recreating the scene in his mind’s eye, down to the smallest detail – ‘the amplified

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