



Mossbawn: Two Poems in Dedication (1) Sunlight

For Mary Heaney*

Seamus Heaney

There was a sunlit absence.
The helmeted pump in the yard
heated its iron,
water honeyed

in the slung bucket
and the sun stood
like a griddle cooling
against the wall

of each long afternoon.
So, her hands scuffled
over the bakeboard,
the reddening stove

sent its plaque of heat
against her where she stood
in a floury apron
by the window.

Now she dusts the board
with a goose's wing,

now sits, broad-lapped,
with whitened nails

and measling shins:
here is a space
again, the scone rising
to the tick of two clocks.

And here is love
like a tinsmith's scoop
sunk past its gleam
in the meal-bin.

*Heaney's aunt who lived with them on the family farm

Vocabulary

- Mossbawn - the Heaney's family farm
- Griddle – flat, metal cooking/baking utensil
- Bakeboard - a board on which dough is kneaded or rolled.
- Scoop - an implement for removing grain or flour from a container
- Meal-bin – a storage container for grain

Pre-reading task

- Have you ever made bread or seen it made? What images come to mind?
- What memories do you have of an older relative or loved one?

Questions

1. What images of heat or warmth can you find in the opening stanzas?
2. What effect do these have on the tone of the poem?
3. How does the poet describe his aunt as she goes about her daily tasks?
4. Do you get the sense that the woman gains some level of satisfaction from her baking of the daily bread? Why?
5. Comment on the use of repetition of the words 'now' and 'here' in the last three stanzas of the poem.
6. How does the poet create a sense of ease and time passing slowly towards the end of the poem?
7. The final stanza of the poem speaks of 'love like a tinsmith's scoop sunk past its gleam in the meal-bin'. Is this love openly expressed?
8. Compare this poem to the poems 'A Call' and 'The Harvest Bow' on your course.

Overview

The poet writes what amounts to a love poem dedicated to his Aunt Mary, his father's who lived with the Heaney family at their farm as Mossbawn. He paints a picture of peace and contentment in the farmyard and kitchen as she goes about her daily task of baking bread for the family. The opening stanzas create a sense of warmth and contentment of the family home before going on to describe his aunt. The poem focusses on her hands as she carefully? skilfully? methodically? lovingly? bakes bread. The final lines portray a sense of timeless and lack of rush as she patiently waits for the bread to rise. The last line of the poem speaks of 'love like a tinsmith's scoop sunk past it's gleam in the meal-bin'. This could suggest that like the scoop the love is not immediately apparent but is there if you look for it.

Key Points

- Deeply Personal
- Vivid Imagery
- Moment of revelation
- The passing of time
- Ordinary/Everyday
- Memory
- Childhood

Word Bank

- Create a bank of words you might use when writing about the poet's work.
- Some are provided for you.
- Add your own.
- You can write definitions of words you don't know.
- You can pick out suitable quotes to go with the words.

[illegible]

Past Questions

Honours

2021

3. Seamus Heaney

“Seamus Heaney transforms the familiar and the mundane through his powerful use of language, thereby enabling us to learn a range of profound lessons from his poetry.”

Discuss the above statement, developing your response with reference to your experience of the poems by Seamus Heaney on your Leaving Certificate English course.

2003

4. *Dear Seamus Heaney ...*

Write a letter to Seamus Heaney telling him how you responded to some of his poems on your course. Support the points you make by detailed reference to the poems you choose to write about.

Mind Map

