

Dead.



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The Digging Skeleton and Bone Dreams are poems written by Seamus Heaney during a time of conflict between England and Ireland. He writes poems in hope to bring peace and to stop the fighting and bloodshed. He reflects this mindset in his poems with the use of imageries. His main focus seems to be around corpses and incorporates a lot of corpse imageries within his poems. The skeletons seem to be representing dead soldiers during the conflict between England and Ireland and the traitor that they speak of could be interpreted as Seamus Heaney. This might be because of the guilt Heaney feels for not participating in the war. In Bone Dreams, Heaney uses very abstract yet intimate language to describe his love for his country. Then, he makes the poem and his language much more concrete as to describe a dead animal which symbolizes the dead soldiers within the country. In the poems The Digging Skeleton and Bone Dreams Seamus Heaney uses skeleton and dead animal imageries to represent the lost soldiers during the conflict between England and Ireland.

In The Digging Skeleton, Heaney makes the skeletons come alive as they dig in the ground and speak of a traitor. They seem to be working under extreme conditions and their “spines hooped toward the sunken edge” (Heaney, 17). As they are digging in the “unrelenting soil” they give the implications that there is a traitor among them. This traitor that they speak of seem to bear resemblance to Seamus Heaney himself. The poem is set at a time where England and Ireland are currently in a violent conflict. During this conflict, Heaney refuses to join the army to fight and instead decides to write poems in hope to restore peace between the two countries. Because of this, he might feel guilty since he feels that he let many people die while he writes

poems in safety. This guilt might lead to him feeling like he was the “traitor”. He also uses many first person plural pronouns like “we”, by using this pronoun, he is including himself with the skeletons implying that the skeletons might hold some significant meaning or sentiment to him. In referring to the soldiers as the skeletons, he makes himself the “traitor” to compensate for the guilt that he feels. The skeletons may also be an illusion ghosting in Heaney’s mind. Therefore, the skeletons are moving and seem to have lives of their own, because Heaney has not forgiven himself so he feels haunted with the image of the deceased soldiers. In order for the skeletons to cease their digging and gain eternal rest, Heaney must first forgive himself and let go of the guilt that he holds in his heart.

In the poem Bone Dreams, Heaney describes a series of bones in a way that is like a maiden, then in the end, he recounts a dead animal that he finds in the early morning. Heaney describes the series of bones in a very intimate way suggesting that the bones represent something that Heaney holds dear. Therefore, the bones can come to represent Ireland or the soldiers that are in the war. Heaney then goes on to describe a dead animal on the road. This animal can also represent the dead soldiers as he depicts the animal as “small and cold as the thick of a chisel”, this makes the animal seem like a mere tool or weapon much like the soldiers fighting in the conflict. He expresses resentment towards the war as he compares the soldiers with tools. This shows that he believes the soldiers are dehumanized and the country is treating them only as tools and not as humans. Therefore, he is, in a way, protesting the war with his poems and imageries. This part of the poem is also much more concrete than before. He goes from declaring love

for his country to expressing guilt towards the dead soldiers. His imageries transition from abstract to concrete by starting with the country and ending with the soldiers fighting for the country.

These two poems are very similar as they both incorporate the deceased and make them come to life. The description of the deceased can both reflect his guilt towards the deceased soldiers from the conflict between Ireland and England. He also expresses attachment and admiration towards his country as he uses very intimate language to describe it. They both reflect the guilt he feels about not being able to participate in the war as well. These two poems are also both very abstract but they both have some very explicit, concrete element within. For example, in *The Digging Skeleton* they speak of the idea of a traitor which is fairly concrete and in *Bone Dreams* the vivid description of the dead animal is the concrete element. However, Heaney still uses very abstract language in most of the poems and that seem to be a theme throughout most of his poems as he seems to have a pension for using very abstruse language when he describes a scenario. These two poems have very similar aspects within as they both use the dead in order to reflect Seamus Heaney's mindset on the war between England and Ireland.

Seamus Heaney uses imageries of skeletons and dead animals in the poems *The Digging Skeleton* and *Bone Dreams* to represent the deceased soldiers lost during the conflict between England and Ireland. These poems are written during a time of conflict between England and Ireland. Seamus Heaney did not participate in this conflict and instead he chooses to write poems to express his desire for peace. His mindset can be seen all through his poems as they are full of imageries of the dead like skeletons, bog

bodies, and dead animals. The skeletons within *The Digging Skeleton* speak of a traitor who seems to be Heaney as he feels guilty for not being in the war and letting people die. He also writes of a dead animal in *Bone Dreams* representing the dead soldiers as well. He also has a common theme with these two poems as they are both very abstract poems with some sort of concrete element within. This unique style of writing made his poems a symbolic marker of this time period.