

Critical essay on 'follower'

[Family](#), [Father](#)



Critical Essay on 'Follower' A poem which explores the problems of growing older is the poem 'Follower' by Seamus Heaney. This poem is about Heaney's childhood memories of his father working on the farm ploughing the land. Heaney talks very highly of his father and creates the impression of a very strong man who was an expert at what he done and a man who was his son's hero. It also talks about how Heaney used to follow his dad around as he worked and how he dreamed of growing up and ploughing like his dad. However, there is a twist at the end of the poem and Heaney goes from talking about how he was an annoyance to his dad when he was younger but now his dad is the annoyance to him as he is now old. In the first stanza, Heaney talks about his father and his work. He is talking very highly of his father and says, "The horses strained at his clicking tongue" This quote shows how his father was a man who was extremely good at his work as it shows how his father could control numerous strong farm animals perfectly and with ease just by clicking his tongue, a very hard thing to do using reasonable force never mind just by a simple gesture such of the click of his tongue. The image the reader gathers from this quote goes well with the image of a strong, well-built man that we get when Heaney writes, "His shoulders globed like a full sail strung" These two quotes together give a very good impression of Heaney's dad. Together they give the impression that his dad was a very heroic figure to him and that he aspired to be like him. It gives the image of the perfect male, a strong, graceful man that was an expert at his profession and that was an idol to his son. However, these hero-like images of his father when he was younger are dismissed later on in the poem when Heaney writes about how his dad is no longer the big strong

man that is an idol to younger males but the complete opposite, someone who is annoying and in the way of him rather than being someone who he looks up to, follows around and aspires to be. These positive quotes of the young strong man and the negative image created by the last stanza go hand in hand to show the problems of growing older. The same kind of idea of the negative points of growing older are continued in to the second stanza when Heaney continues to talk about how his dad was so much of an idol to him and how his dad was someone to be looked up to and to aspire to be like when he was younger and in his prime in this stanza. This time Heaney says, " An expert. He would set the wing" This is a very powerful line. The short sentence of only two words to start off the stanza is very effective as it gives the impression that his father wasn't only very good at his job but he was an expert, he was the best. This is once again showing how his father was so much of an idol to him and that he was a very respectable stereotypical perfect father when he was younger as it shows how good his father was at his job. The second part of the line shows that his father knew exactly what he was doing and gives us the impression that his father took his job very seriously and that he was very precise and concentrated when doing anything in his job such as setting the wing. The idea of his dad being so good at his job and being able to do it with ease is continued when Heaney writes, " The sod rolled over without breaking. At the headrig, with a single pluck" The quotes ' without breaking' and ' with a single pluck' reinforce the idea that his dad was an ' expert' at his job as they show that he could do hard work with ease and that he knew exactly what he was doing and that he could do it perfectly if he could turn soil without it even breaking and

control his animals with a 'single pluck'. Once again it is the negative image of his father given in the last stanza as he is older that shows the negative effects of growing older as it is so different from the image you gather from the first two stanzas alone about how good his father was at his job and how strong his father was and how much of an idol his father was to him when he was younger. The image of his father being so strong and good at his job in his youth is continued throughout the next three stanzas. The idea of him being an expert and being someone to look up to who was strong and almost perfect is continued through the continued use of quotes such as, "the sweating team" This shows that the work was not easy. If the team of strong farm horses that were doing the job were sweating and tired you could only imagine how much sweat and effort Heaney's father would have to put in to the work. It then continues to talk about his expertise in the job as it says things such as, "Narrowed and angled at the ground, Mapping the furrow exactly." The first line shows how his father took his work very seriously and that he was very precise in what he done and that he made sure he done it to a good standard therefore he had to concentrate greatly on what he was doing. The second line also reinstates the fact that he was an expert at his work as it shows how he mapped the furrow in his head and made sure it was exact once again showing that he took it very seriously and had pride in his work. Heaney then goes on to write, "Sometimes he rode me on his back" This gives the impression that his father was the ultimate as he has talked about how hard his work was when he wrote about the 'sweating team' and he was talked about how much effort and concentration that he had to put in to his work but he says how he still even managed to carry his

little son on his back while he did all of this. Something that would make the work even more harder and longer and would make it harder to concentrate but he still did it. However, all these quotes can be compared to the last three or so lines that show the real problems of growing older. Although he had listed all of these positive things and even said how he literally followed in his fathers footsteps all day, he finishes of the poem by saying, " But today It is my father who keeps stumbling Behind me, and will not go away. " This really highlights the problem of growing older as it shows how people can just disregard someone when they get old regardless of what they thought of them when they were younger. Although Heaney had idolised his dad when he was young and wanted to be exactly like him and used to stumble behind his father and annoy him, now that it is Heaney in the position of having his father stumbling behind him and relying on him, Heaney doesn't even want to know him. This is actually quite a sad ending to the poem as it really does highlight the problems of growing older as it shows how it seems that once you are older and start relying on those younger than you who once relied in you they don't want to know you. So, as you can see, the author, Seamus Heaney has been very successful at exploring the problems of growing older in his poem ' Follower'. Heaney does this by writing the vast majority of the poem about positive points about his dad when he was younger making him out to be a hero but then introducing a cruel twist in the last stanza about how even though he once idolised his dad and relied on him now that his dad relies on Heaney, he doesn't want to know him.