

# Follower

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A Critical appreciation of " Follower" ( Cecilia Rafiq, 24. 09. 07) " Follower" by an Irish poet, " Seamus Heaney" is a thought provoking poem in which he explores his relationship with his father when as a child he used to follow him around the farm 'stumbling' in his wake as he ploughed the fields. The poem deals with the passing of time, the innocence of youth and the knowledge which comes from experience. It raises issues such as childhood, growing up, and old age. Heaney adds power to his consideration of these issues by his use of effective language. Heaney introduces the theme of childhood by stressing the admiration that he had shown towards his father . Growing up is conveyed when Heaney states that he wants to be exactly like his father- a skilled farmer. Old age is developed in the final stanza of the poem when the poet's father has grown old and become feeble. Effectively their positions are reversed. His father is not literally behind him where as Heaney was during his childhood, but the poet is troubled by his memory, perhaps he feels guilt at not carrying on the tradition of farming, or feels he cannot live up to his father's example. The poem is divided into two sections: the first three deal with the memories of his father working on the farm and second three deal with the poet himself. The poet uses a sharp contrast of past and present which represents the passing of time and the life cycle. The mood of the poem is thoughtful, reflective, and the last two lines are tinged with the melancholy. The rhythm is very steady throughout, it reflects the act of plough e. g the use of onomatopoeic " Dipping and rising to his plod" , it reflects the subject under discussion, the natural rhythm of country music. The first line in the poem " My father worked with a horse-plough" , this is an effective opening line. The poet's use of word " My" instantly indicates that

he is talking about himself. The use of this word also stresses the importance of the personal experiences that is discussed throughout the poem. As a child, Heaney admired his father a great deal. The nautical image that conveys his father's strength, " His shoulders globed like a full sail strung Between the shafts and furrows" In this phrase the effective simile " globed" compares the father's sphere back to the shape of a fully sail strung. Here the father is a boat which goes through water exactly like a plough, the field is the sea and furrows are the waves which are left behind a boat. This whole image figuratively shows about father's responsibility which is compared to Atlas holding the world on his back. By writing " The horses strained at his clicking tongue", Heaney indicates that horses understood and obeyed his father. The father's control is effortless as in the second stanza, Heaney writes, " At the head rig, with a single pluck Of reins, the sweaty team turned around And back into the land" In unbroken way, it suggests the continuous movement of working, horses turning smoothly to the other row without posing which indicate that these stanzas are being linked through enjambment. According to Heaney's description of his father he is indeed very skilled at his job. Heaney opens and ends the second stanza with a simple but powerful phrases, " An expert." and " exactly." both phrases stresses on his father's expertise. The use of full stop emphasizes us to stop and think about these words. Another phrase in the second stanza that implies that his father was very skilled is " The sod rolled over without breaking " -like a wave. Mathematical terms- " Narrowed", " angled" ," Mapping" and technical term- " wing", " sock", " head rig" and monosyllabic terms- " set", " fit", " sock", " pluck"- All reflect father's geometrical

precision. The use of word " I" at the beginning of stanzas four, five and six emphasizes the personal tone of the poem. He emphasizes the qualities acquired by his father and states that he hopes to follow in his example. Heaney insists that he was nuisance, He writes, " I stumbled in his hob-nailed wake". This shows that he was much smaller and weaker than his father. He use of word " hob-nailed" suggests that his father wore heavy boots conveying the image of a strong, well built man. " Wake" are the trails left by the nails at the bottom of the boots, takes back to the image of boat leaving waves behind it. The fifth stanza is dedicated to the theme of grown up. The phrase: " I wanted to grow up and plough, To close one eye, stiffen my arm." suggests that Heaney's admiration has become stronger as he became older and wished to be exactly like his father but all he " ever did was follow". The sixth stanza deals with the theme of old age. His childhood memories are replaced by unpleasant feelings shown towards his father. The end of the poem shows complete role of reversal between Heaney and his father. Heaney uses pejorative language to describe his childish behaviour, " I was a nuisance, tripping, falling, Yapping always." His father could always find time for his son. This aspect of the stanza introduces a tone of guilt as Heaney also writes: " But today, It is my father who keeps stumbling Behind me, and will not go away." These two lines reveal the poet real concern which is full of pathos, it evokes a sense of pity in us. They boy stumbled because he was young but now the old man stumbles behind him. Heaney now sees his father as burden, he is impatient with is father who showed patience by riding him on his back when he followed him in his " broad shadow round the farm" which suggests his dependence on his father during his childhood. "

But today" his old father is dependent on him but Heaney cannot tolerate his father who was prepared to withstand his childish behaviour and took his responsibility. In conclusion " Follower" is a powerful poem which reflects the life cycle. The title is of the poem ambiguous- like young Heaney, many children want to follow their parents footsteps and wanted to be like them as they are proud of them but as time passes slowly and gradually, the attitude of the children changes towards their parents, they break their family traditions, which is a kind of betrayal. This poem makes me think to look towards the future. I hope that I can do best care for my parents when they need me, just like they have done for me when I needed them.