

The forge by seamus heaney essay sample

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



* The word 'call' has both everyday and special associations. In this poem 'call' contains both casual and serious meanings. The call here is the phone call home but the speaker also meditates on the idea of a person being called home to God as in the medieval play 'Everyman'. * The opening of the poem, it could be argued, isn't poetry, it is ordinary, everyday speech. And yet the arrangement of the lines on the page and the overall rhythm create a musical flow. * Following this opening section the poem shifts to a silent description of the speaker imagining his father at work in the kitchen garden. The four simple monosyllabic words in line four, 'So I saw him' lead us into a detailed description of his father. The speaker imagines his father weeding very actively and also imagines how his father feels about this. This mixture of happiness and sorrow is experienced by the weeder, according to the speaker, because he knows that some plants will live, some will not. * The poem then shifts, in the speaker's imagination, from outdoors back indoors to the hall where he can hear, while he waits 'The amplified ticking of hall clocks'

Clocks are familiar symbols of the passing of time, our growing old, our inevitable deaths. * The atmosphere in the poem's third section is calm and beautiful. Everything is quiet except for the ticking of the clocks and the sun is catching the mirror and the swinging pendulums. This section, like the previous one, ends with an ellipsis, the three dots create a silence, a sense of quiet meditation. It reveals a speaker becoming more reflective and allows the reader to follow in that same direction. * The speaker now thinks of Death. Death, in this instance, as portrayed in the medieval play 'Everyman'. We do not know the day nor the hour but we know that death

will come. The speaker's idea of death is a summons, a call. Note the layout of the poem which slows down the poem's movement. The final line is very simple, the line is on its own yet it is a very complex line, full of emotion. The poem begins with his mother speaking, it ends with his father speaking. We hear what she says, we do not hear what the father says but we do hear what the speaker himself almost said. Mossbawn: Two Poems in Dedication by Seamus Heaney

For Mary Heaney

I. Sunlight

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.

From " North", 1975

The Forge by Seamus Heaney

All I know is a door into the dark.
Outside, old axles and iron hoops rusting;
Inside, the hammered anvil's short-pitched ring,
The unpredictable fantail of sparks
Or hiss when a new shoe toughens in water.
The anvil must be somewhere in the centre,
Horned as a unicorn, at one end and square,

Set there immoveable: an altar

Where he expends himself in shape and music.

Sometimes, leather-aproned, hairs in his nose,

He leans out on the jamb, recalls a clatter

Of hoofs where traffic is flashing in rows;

Then grunts and goes in, with a slam and flick

To beat real iron out, to work the bellows.

Notes on ' The Forge'

* The opening line of this poem hails a supernatural and eerie place that beckons further reading of the poem. It is an evocative opening. This line achieves its purpose as a first line to incite curiosity and questions, urging the reader to continue in order to find what answers lie ahead. The word “dark” has many negative and mysterious connotations; the placement of such a powerful word behind a door which promises to be opened attests to Heaney’s ability to subtly evoke resonance. * Not only has Heaney constructed the shape and the visual setting of an anvil, but he has also re-imagined the smells, sounds and tactile impressions of the experience inside a blacksmith’s shop. The shop is the “dark” of the first line; it is also a place that is no longer necessary for modern life: for instance, we no longer depend on horses’ hooves or wrought-iron nails. “Dark,” then, could refer to the unreachable past as well as the blackness of the anvil, the iron, and the soot of the shop.

Heaney chose to use the first person pronoun “I” in the first line, although the central character in the poem is only referred to as “he.” Easily, the

reference in the first line could also have been “ he,” which would have tied the poem together tightly. However, Heaney has consciously created a second character, an observer to the blacksmith; the reader is fully aware that there is one character here, observing another. The tone of the character, who apparently only knows the “ door into the dark,” is sympathetic and attentive to the blacksmith to such an extent that we can venture to assume that this character might be a child, perhaps even the blacksmith’s son.

If one reads the poem as a homage to a father figure we can also see the anvil as a symbol of an unreachable heritage, a tradition that the observer is not able to perpetuate because of the modernization of such aspects in society as transportation. The poem can be read as an elegy to the past, and a lament to the lost tradition of the blacksmith. The anvil is constructed as an altar, and the blacksmith is beating out “ real iron,” which the world in 1969, when this poem was written, has no need for. * In one of the many other ways of reading this poem, the blacksmith figure could also be a construction of the role of the poet as one who opens “ door[s] into the dark,” “ expends himself in shape and music,” and who grunts and flicks words and language, forging his poems.