

Essay on limbo

[Family](#), [Parents](#)



The poem I selected is called "Limbo" by Seamus Heaney. He was an Irish poet and received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995. The poem tells us about a dead infant that was netted by fishermen. It was mentioned that he was an illegitimate child and so the mother killed his own son by drowning him into the ocean. The mother must have had to kill him to avoid bringing shame to the family by raising this child and being persecuted by the church. The setting of the poem is the Irish town of Ballyshannon. Some claims it to be the oldest town in Ireland. It is important to remember that the author of "Limbo" is from Ireland and since he was telling a tale that happened in an Irish town, there is a possibility that it was based from a true story.

The first literary device that I identified was the use of the word "limbo" as a religious connotation. Limbo refers to that place where the unbaptized go. The son was clearly not baptized because he was too young then and the church would have refused so. Several emotional and religious connotations can also be found in the lines "frozen knobs of her wrists", "tearing her open", "the sign of the cross", "now limbo will be" and "even Christ's palms, unhealed". They all talk about the hurt the mother was going through at the thought of killing her son and the consequences of this action according to her religion. The second literary device was the use of metaphors in several lines. This included "netted an infant", "illegitimate spawning", "minnow with hooks", "hauled in with the fish", "briny zone" and "cannot fish there". All these are related to being a fish and being in the ocean. This relations are: netted and hauled as to how fish are being caught, spawning which refers to the offspring of fish, minnow that refers to a small fish which are usually used as baits and explains the hooks. Briny means

salty and so, briny zone would refer to the ocean. The “ cannot fish there” line was used to describe how God cannot even save her son’s soul. The third device was the use of a rhyme. We can find this in the first paragraph and comparing the first and third lines. In these lines, Ballyshannon and salmon rhymes. As a fourth literary device, we can see the use of euphemism in the line “ ducking him tenderly”. If we were to see what happened in person, we would know that she is not ducking him but rather pitifully submerging him in an inhumane way we cannot simply call ducking. The tone of the poem is generally neutral or aloof. It seems that the author was just telling any kind of story where no special concern was necessary. As a reader, I feel sad for what had happened but the way the author told it to me somehow feels like reading from a newspaper. Outright facts are given and no opinion is really necessary because it won’t be taking sides. I do believe that author also feels sad about it but he just chose to tell it to me that way probably for out of bias. In terms of connection, I think all can relate to this not because we experienced death ourselves but because we can feel the sadness of losing a loved one. It makes me even sadder to think that the mother would die believing her son will forever be in a limbo.