

Appreciation of "mid
term break" by
semaus heaney
essay sample



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Appreciation of “ Mid Term Break” by Semaus Heaney Essay Sample

The opening stanza is set in the boarding school, with a young boy, waiting in sick bay. The very first word in the poem is “ I”, and this immediately brings the reader into the poem we identify with the poet. “ I sat all morning in the sick bay” we are aware that all is not well. This feeling of apprehension is emphasized with the second line of the opening stanza, “ Counting bells knelling classes to a close”. Heaney uses alliteration to emphasize the funereal sound of the tolling bells and the feeling of time dragging. The hard “ c” sounds point to an ending, whereas the long, gentle “ l” sounds suggest a drawn out passing of time.

The stanza begins with the “ morning” in line one, but it is “ two o’clock” when the neighbors arrive in line three, showing that hours have passed while heaney was waiting. The boy doesn’t just hear the class bells ringing, he counts them. This is an indication of time passing and gives us an image of a boy using the school bell to tell what time it is, to try to guess how long he has been waiting. The suspense of waiting is then finished by the arrival of the “ neighbors”, we now know or have some kind of indication to where the boy is going but at this moment the poem is still slightly unclear and we have questions about the boy.

The scene changes in the second stanza, which begins with the image of Heaney’s father crying as the poet meets him in the porch of their house. The confined space of the porch suggests a feeling of claustrophobia, as he enters a house unexpectedly crowded with people, and an atmosphere filled

with their feelings of grief and sorrow. To underline his father's usual strength, the reader is further reminded, almost as an aside in parenthesis, that Heaney's father had "always taken funerals in his stride".

It is a further indication to the reader that a particularly bad event has taken place his father is upset where he is usually fine showing us the extremity of the situation, We are then taken the reader with him as he walks through the house, we meet his father, "Big Jim Evans", the baby in its pram, the old men congregated in the room and Heaney's mother coughing out "angry tearless sighs". The reader enters the house with the poet, and the feelings of shock and realization come over both reader and poet at the same time. Jim Evans' line, "it was a hard blow" is significant, as it has multiple meanings.

Jim Evans obviously means to speak of a metaphorical "blow", caused by the loss of a son and a brother. However, we later learn that Christopher was, ironically, dealt a fatal blow by a speeding car. We do not know, therefore, whether Jim's speech is an unfortunate pun or another hint at the tragedy to come, this also might show us some peoples inability to act "appropriately when it comes to dealing with grief. The third and fourth stanzas put the poet's unease at the atmosphere inside the house, in rapid and disjointed set of images.

It is as we are flashing between each image as if in a film. He sees clearly the things around him, as if sleepwalking, notices them in a daze, but cannot make sense of anything. He notices that the baby, too young to no what is happening, is cooing happily and rocking in its pram. The happy sounds of

the baby, a new life, is contradictory to the grief-stricken silence in the room. The boy feels uncomfortable with the atmosphere of stiff formality and the attention he receives: " I was embarrassed/By old men standing up to shake my hand".

The fourth stanza begins with old men to expressing their condolences they tell the lad that they are " sorry for his trouble". This expression is strangely unfeeling and distant, a euphemism pointing to the death, and perhaps another indication of the poor expressions of grief. The poet is acutely aware of having been away from his family, and is not at ease with people whispering about him because of this. " Whispers informed strangers I was the eldest, /Away at school". It is also possible that there are feelings of guilt and regret in the boy, at having been absent at a time when his family needed him.

The fourth stanza ends with the poet's mother holding his hand. This image serves to move the reader on from the formality of the old men's handshakes, to the more intimate and personal grief of a mother, comforting her son, but also holding on to him, perhaps fearing, in her grief, that she will lose him also The three lines of the fifth stanza are a turning point in the poem, as they reveal that there has been a death in the family, and that the remains have been brought to the house. The first line is an image of the nature of the mother's grief.

A portrayal of a woman who is angry about being robbed of her young son. The second line brings the reader back to the action of the poem. His brother is not referred to in personal terms, but as a bandaged corpse that has been

brought to the house by ambulance. This image indicates how alienated and remote the poet feels from events, as if he is still in shock experiencing feelings of disbelief. He does not see his brother as a person, but as a corpse. His brother is shrouded in bandages, and is not clearly seen or described. This image brings home the truth that the poet's brother is dead.

The scene changes for the third and final time in the last two stanzas of the poem. The next morning the poet describes seeing his dead brother for the first time. Just as he waited alone in sick bay to be collected by the neighbors at the beginning of the poem, the poet is once again alone at the poem's end. It is more personal and affecting and the feelings towards his brother seem to be more real and not done by shock. The first things that the poet notices upon entering the room where his brother is lying are snowdrops and candles.

This image is significant, as it is here that the poet compares images of life and death. The snowdrops represent renewal, growth new life; whereas the candles are something you light for a dead person, and represent death. The final brief and understated line stands alone. It's the abrupt ending it gives the whole poem that compares to the abrupt ending of his brother's life. The line is also an expression of finality. The box is four feet long, a foot for every year of the dead child's life. The box will not grow, just as the child can no longer grow, both are still and dead.