

# Seamus heaney 'death of a naturalist'



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Throughout this assignment I will be examining how Seamus Heaney's attitude towards childhood is portrayed throughout his poetry. I will initially be looking at individual poems, then drawing a collective conclusion of his overall childhood impressions.

The poem Follower shows that the child's view of farming is that of imitating his father's actions: 'I wanted to grow up and plough, To close one eye, stiffen my arm.' Heaney obviously admired his father then: 'All I ever do is follow' This metaphor is seen through the poem although the positions are now reversed: 'But today It is my father who keeps stumbling Behind me, and will not go away.' I feel that the poet has troubled memories of his childhood, perhaps because he feels he hasn't lived up to his father's hopes and aspirations and followed in his footsteps and become a farmer. Digging, is a similar poem to that of Follower where Heaney as a child is watching his father: 'My father, digging. I look down' Throughout the poem the poet is identifying his family background and shows Heaney is looking to return back to his own roots. His father was seen as digging the potato drills and his grandfather digging turf, for which he was famous as the best digger on the peat bog: 'My grandfather cut more turf in a day Than any other man on Toner's bog.

' So here Heaney is seen as not celebrating his strength rather his expertise. The poem The Early Purges is about the loss of innocence. The theme is of the first time Heaney as a boy witnessed the farmhand killing kittens: 'I was six when I first saw kittens drown.' However, as the poem continues he obviously becomes used to this action 'It makes sense: 'and' on well-run farms pests have to be kept down.' Heaney's language turns to that of swearing

when he refers to the puppies as: 'bloody pups,' when he tries to copy the language of Dan, who describes the kittens as: 'the scraggy wee shits,' So here we see an older person trying to deceive a child and therefore protect him from his compassion: 'Sure isn't it better for them now?' However, you have the feeling that the child is not convinced. The poem Mid-Term Break is about the death of Heaney's infant brother Christopher and people's reaction to this.

Heaney being away at boarding school was driven home to meet his distressed father: 'In the porch I met my father crying' The poet is obviously made uneasy by the baby's happiness on seeing him: 'The baby cooed and laughed and rocked the pram' When I came in, and I was embarrassed' Then late at night when his brother's body returned Heaney sees him not as a person but: 'the corpse,' This is contrasted dramatically in the last part of the poem when he is seen as being alone with his brother and a calm mood exists: 'Snowdrops And candles smoothed the bedside;' Here we feel that perhaps now Heaney has come to terms with the death. When comparing Heaney's poems I can see that as a child he had an enormous fascination with death. The fact that in the poems Mid-Term Break and The Early Purges he can remember how old he was when the kittens were drowned and the time on the clock when he was driven home after his brother was killed. This shows his attention to detail and how he considered much of his childhood to have revolved around death and dying.

Where as in Follower and Digging they are about Heaney as a child, and his father. In these we can compare what Heaney has become and what expectations were put upon him as a child, both by others and himself.