

Fear in childhood – heaney and montague essay sample

[Life](#), [Childhood](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Heaney and Montague both write about fear in childhood. Compare and contrast two poems, one by each poet, taking account of the methods which each poet uses to write about fear in childhood. 'The Barn' by Seamus Heaney and 'Like Dolmens Round my Childhood, the Old People' by John Montague are two poems that explore the theme of fear in childhood. The fears of each poet are very different in that Heaney's fear of the barn is triggered by his vivid imagination whereas Montague's fear of becoming like 'the old people' is a much more complex and emotional issue that relates to real life experiences. Furthermore, the idea of fear in childhood is clear from the beginning in 'The Barn' and Heaney uses progression in his poem to build on these childhood fears. In contrast, it is only at the end of 'Like Dolmens Round my Childhood' that the reader becomes aware that Montague's fear was ending up like the elderly people he knew as a child. Both poems are well structured; 'The Barn' consists of five stanzas with four lines per stanza and 'Like Dolmens Round my Childhood' is made up of seven stanzas with seven lines per stanza. The number seven is significant as it refers to the 'perfect number' and this tie into the subject matter at the end of Montague's poem.

Unlike 'The Barn', 'Like Dolmens Round my Childhood' contains two lines, one at the beginning and one at the end, which acts as a framework around the poem. Moreover, 'Like Dolmens Round my Childhood' is longer than 'The Barn'. Whereas Heaney develops the story in 'The Barn' with each stanza, Montague uses each stanza to focus on a completely different story or issue. Both poems use alternate rhyme; Heaney uses half-rhyme in 'The Barn' and in 'Like Dolmens Round my Childhood' occasional rhyme is used

to emphasise key words such as ‘ cried’ and ‘ deride’. ‘ The Barn’ is written from the perspective of Heaney as a child. On the other hand, ‘ Like Dolmens Round my Childhood’ is a reflective poem in which an adult Montague looks back on certain experiences from his childhood and reflects on the effect that they had on him. Both poets use language and imagery for effect. Montague uses detailed descriptions in order to present a clear image of each elderly person and Heaney uses detailed descriptions to present a clear image of the surroundings. Heaney often uses language to appeal to the scenes ‘ musky dark’ ‘ smooth chill’ whereas Montague does not apply this technique in ‘ Like Dolmens Round my Childhood’.

Heaney uses emotive language to convey the terror of the boy ‘ you felt cobwebs clogging up your lungs’ likewise Montague also uses language to reveal his disturbance at certain people ‘ dead eyes, serpent-flicked’. Both poets use alliteration – Heaney uses the phrase ‘ cobwebs clogging’ in order to create a feeling of claustrophobia and to heighten the sense of panic. Likewise, Montague uses the phrase ‘ penny every pension’ to highlight Jamie’s generosity and kindness. Montague often uses transferred epithet for effect – Mary Moore’s ‘ crumbling’ house refers to her life that has essentially crumbled around her. On the other hand, Heaney does not use this method in ‘ The Barn’. Both poets make use of similes and metaphors –Montague uses the metaphor ‘ well of gossip’ in order to show society’s negative view of Maggie Owens. Similarly, Heaney uses the metaphor ‘ I was chaff’ to convey how small and insignificant the boy feels at the end of the poem. Both poets use consonance for effect – in ‘ Like Dolmens Round my

Childhood' the repeated ' I' sounds in the first three lines of the third stanza create a somewhat musical tone and add to the beautiful description of the countryside.

Likewise, Heaney uses consonance in ' The Barn' to emphasise the terror felt by the boy. Montague uses emotive language for effect such as ' defiled' and ' fanged', just as Heaney uses emotive language such as ' great blind rats' to convey the fear of the boy. Heaney refers to childhood fairy tales in ' The Barn' in order to show the boys fear ' when the zinc burned like an oven'. Heaney compares entering the barn to entering an oven which is a reference to the fairy tale ' Hansel and Gretel'. Montague doesn't refer to childhood fairy tales however he does refer to aspects of ancient Irish culture towards the end of his poem ' The rune and the chant, evil eye and averted head/Fomorian fierceness of family and local feud'. Both poets refer to otherworldly, mysterious tales whether that is a fairy tale or an Irish superstition ' chant' ' rune'. The tone in ' The Barn' begins as a combination of curiosity, excitement and fear; the boy refers to the equipment as ' an armoury' and describes the barn as if it were a pirates cove filled with treasure ' grit of ivory'. However, as the poem progresses, the tone changes from fear to utter terror ' I lay face-down to shun the fear above'.

In contrast, the tone in ' Like Dolmens Round my Childhood' remains solemn and sad until the last stanza. The tone is reflective in the last stanza as Montague is summing up the impact the people he previously described had on him. However, Montague also reveals that he has conquered his fear from childhood ' for years they trespassed on my dreams/until once, in a standing

circle of stones/I felt their shadows pass'. In stark contrast, 'The Barn' ends on a peak of terror with the boy having a nightmare 'the two lugged-sacks moved in like great blind rats'. Montague is over his fear whereas the boy is not. In conclusion, though both poets explore different aspects of fear in childhood, they both express these fears using similar literary techniques. However, Montague not only explores childhood fears in 'Like Dolmens Round my Childhood' but he also refers to issues in society and his disgrace at modern society 'Ancient Ireland, indeed! I was reared by her bedside'.