

**Which poets' writing, school or movement of poetry, has had a direct effect on your own? Your answer should include examples and some description of the processes by which your poems are written.**

Prior to this module, I believed poetic form simply meant stanza and rhyme. Upon reading Robert Hass' *A Little Book on Form*, I have gained expansive new understanding of the formal imagination as the energy of relation and 'the way the poem embodies the gesture of its making.'<sup>1</sup>

With this in mind I revisited the works of a favourite poet; Seamus Heaney. According to Jonathan Bate, poetry is 'the relationship between external environment and ecology of mind,' and thus I connected with Heaney's poems.<sup>2</sup> They centre on themes of Ireland's language and nature, and his connection to them in childhood.<sup>3</sup> Through the exploration of my own childhood I aim to uncover my poetic identity and best-suited forms.

Under Heaney's influence I consider myself an aspiring Naturalist with roots in Romanticism. I believe in Wordsworth's theory that man is closest to nature in childhood, and these ideals are also evident in *Death of a Naturalist*.<sup>4</sup> As an only child growing up in Hertfordshire, I found solace within surrounding nature. Aged nine, I was uprooted to Rhyl and lost my connection with the natural world.

Heaney's early work was influenced by many poets including Patrick Kavanagh and Ted Hughes. In researching Anglo-Welsh poets like Owen Sheers and Christine Evans, I discovered fresh inspiration in differing perspectives of Wales.<sup>5</sup> I believe my personal heritage creates a unique version of North Wales, as with Heaney's Ireland. He 'invests deeply in experience and little in ideas,' hence his poetry containing more concrete

---

<sup>1</sup> Robert Hass, *A Little Book on Form* (New York: Harper Collins, 2017) p.3, p.27.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002) p.252.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Allen, *New Casebooks: Seamus Heaney* (Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1997) p.23.

<sup>4</sup> Seamus Heaney, *New Selected Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 2002); Blake Morrison, *Contemporary Writers: Seamus Heaney* (London: Methuen, 1982), p.22.

<sup>5</sup> Owen Sheers, *Skirrid Hill* (Bridgend: Seren Books, 2005); Christine Evans, *Selected Poems* (Bridgend: Seren Books, 2004)

imagery than abstract: 'Wearing a poppy bruise on his left temple/he lay in the four foot box as in his cot.'<sup>6</sup>

This was something I consciously attempted in my poems whilst referring to Hass' energy of relation. After first draft completion I counted images per line, as well as sentence length and stresses.<sup>7</sup> This improved structure and helped realise the sea/mouth metaphor of *Croeso*.

Heaney regularly uses a water-as-writing metaphor as with *Anahorish* ('my place of clear water').<sup>8</sup> In *Croeso*, the sea is the mouth of Wales, attempting to welcome me in its native language. Similarly, the dinghy parallels the boat in *The Prelude*;<sup>9</sup> in which the growth of Wordsworth's mind occurs. This also connotes my 'tether' to Wales.

*Croeso* is the first word seen when entering Wales, and was ironically an unwelcome change in my life. I utilise Welsh words like 'cwtch' for aural aesthetic and to convey the juxtaposition of languages, emphasising cultural conflict within myself. Reading Ruth Padel's analysis of sound in relation to content inspired me to inhibit letters absent in the Welsh alphabet as I succumb to its language in the final stanza (K,Q,V,X and Z)<sup>10</sup> The Irish language is vital in Heaney's collections, exploring sounds and meanings of words: 'Anahorish, soft gradient/of consonant, vowel-meadow.'<sup>11</sup>

Both he and Kavanagh lovingly elaborate place names from memory, beautifully immortalising their language.<sup>12</sup> In *Lullabies of Llugwy*, Beddgelert and Llugwy provide the "velvet and guttural" sounds of my childhood.

My inspiration began with themes and continued with Heaney's form and technique. His themes are conveyed beautifully in quatrains, which provided a good starting point for my own. Quatrains were an enjoyable experimentation and these poems show how their

---

<sup>6</sup> Allen, *Casebooks*, p.105; Heaney, *Selected Poems*.

<sup>7</sup> Hass, *On Form*, p.30, p.87, p.399-412.

<sup>8</sup> Heaney, *Selected Poems*; Morrison, *Contemporary Writers*, p.32.

<sup>9</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (London: Penguin, 2004)

<sup>10</sup> Ruth Padel, *52 Ways of Looking at a Poem* (London: Vintage, 2004) p33, p.184-185.

<sup>11</sup> Heaney, *Selected Poems*.

<sup>12</sup> Patrick Kavanagh, *Collected Poems* (London: Penguin Books, 2005) p.21.

prosodic effects can differ. 'Prosodic form and the relation to its content are indissoluble.'<sup>13</sup> *Croeso's* alternating line lengths mirror tidal ebb and flow, eroding my resolve of hatred for a country that 'took away' my birthplace. The lines in Heaney's *Follower* are of consistent length, relaying an image of expertly ploughed fields.<sup>14</sup>

I moved away from full rhymes by creating subtler resonances within lines, attempting the ricocheting assonance and alliteration of Hughes and Heaney ('runs its tongue over soft gum-beds'). They use plosive and guttural consonants, which when spoken demand a conscious and physical effort.<sup>15</sup> *Croeso* is full of dense words during my struggles with Welsh becoming easier in the final couplet with sibilance.

Reading *Digging* and *Follower* prompted me to write about my own father's profession.<sup>16</sup> Imitating the form of *Follower*, *Inkwell's* ABCB pararhymes never quite meet the reader's expectations, paralleled with the father's disappointment. Patterns such as the -ion suffix (aurally 'shun') ending first lines disappear, and enjambment disturbs the meter, providing further frustration. This enables poetic movement through the energy of relation.<sup>17</sup> As I gain confidence on my path and stop following my fathers', the form and meter grow tighter and full rhyme occurs. 'The shape of a poem ought to track... the movement of its thought.'<sup>18</sup>

These poems will become the cornerstone of a bigger collection exploring my heritage; the contrasting cities of my childhood and the effect their cultures had on me as a writer.<sup>19</sup> I now consider form and language in ways previously unimagined. I have begun to explore deeper meaning within form, sound and structure, creating poetry with clearer movement. I believe this newfound depth has bridged the gap between being an amateur poet and the road to becoming a great one.

---

<sup>13</sup> Hass, *On Form*, p.207.

<sup>14</sup> Heaney, *Selected Poems*.

<sup>15</sup> Terry Gifford and Neil Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study* (London: Faber & Faber, 1981), p.35; Philip Hobsbaum, *Meter, Rhythm and Verse Form* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1996) p.9.

<sup>16</sup> Heaney, *Selected Poems*.

<sup>17</sup> Derek Attridge, *Moving Words: Forms of English Poetry*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) p.122.

<sup>18</sup> Hass, *On Form*, p.426.

<sup>19</sup> Padel, *52 Ways*, p.31.

## **Bibliography**

Allen, Michael, *New Casebooks: Seamus Heaney* (Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1997)

Attridge, Derek, *Moving Words: Forms of English Poetry* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013)

Bate, Jonathan, *The Song of the Earth* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002)

Evans, Christine, *Christine Evans: Selected Poems* (Bridgend: Seren Books, 2004)

Gifford, Terry and Neil Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study* (London: Faber & Faber, 1981)

Hass, Robert, *A Little Book on Form* (New York: Harper Collins, 2017)

Heaney, Seamus, *New Selected Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 2002)

Hobsbaum, Philip, *Meter, Rhythm and Verse Form* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1996)

Kavanagh, Patrick, *Collected Poems* (London: Penguin Books, 2005)

Morrison, Blake, *Contemporary Writers: Seamus Heaney* (London: Methuen, 1982)

Padel, Ruth, *52 Ways of Looking at a Poem* (London: Vintage, 2004)

Sheers, Owen, *Skirrid Hill* (Bridgend: Seren Books, 2005)

Wordsworth, William, *The Prelude* (London: Penguin, 2004)