

Candidate 2

Seamus Heaney Essay (1)

The theme of change is one that is explored to quite an extent in the poetry of Seamus Heaney, in many senses of the word. Three poems which present good examples of this exploration of the theme of change are 'Death of a Naturalist', 'The Barn' and 'Personal Helicon'. In 'Death of a Naturalist' (DoaN), the narrative voice of Heaney's younger self delights in the less pleasant aspects of nature, like any child, but grows to find disgust and fear in them later on. In 'The Barn', another young-Heaney narrator grows and changes as he becomes aware of the true nature of the titular barn that is his childhood hideaway. And in 'Personal Helicon', the narrator's attitudes towards self-reflection ~~change~~ ^{change} just as strikingly over the course of the poem. ~~Des~~ However, despite the seeming unsimilarity of the three poems, they actually are tied together with common themes.

*change

All three poems start off narrated by a narrative voice which is a reflection of Seamus Heaney's own younger self, with relative innocence towards the world. In DoaN, nature is the main focus, with the narrator spending time around a flax-dam and revelling in nature. The messy parts that would repulse many are the ones that delight him the most - as evidenced by how he describes classically beautiful images like 'dragonflies' and 'spotted butterflies' before proclaiming that 'best of all was the warm, thick slobber of frogspawn'. The way that Heaney portrays his ~~innocent~~ childish delight with mess and 'slobber', which would repulse many, clearly builds up a sense of innocence, which is important for the rest of the poem and the theme of change. This is mirrored in 'The Barn', despite the setting being an abandoned and possibly dangerous barn, narrator-Heaney describes it as a 'musky darkness' and notes how the sacks of corn are 'solid'. In this, it becomes clear that the innocent young narrator draws a sense of stability and comfort from hiding away in the barn. 'Personal Helicon' handles the establishment of the narrator's innocence differently, though the effect is the same - the opening line of 'As a child, they could not keep me from wells' suggests ^{*}that the adult poetic voice is reminiscing about simpler, more innocent times. ~~Just~~ like As with the other poems, the narrative starts in a place where the young narrator had fun and felt safe.

*with its tone

*gradual

*after

The poems then move into a ^{*}transitional stage, where change begins to affect the narrator as he learns more about the things he loved in childhood. For example, ^{*}the frogspawn hatches into tadpoles in DoaN, (a distinctive visual shorthand for change in itself), the narrator notes how 'Miss Walls would tell us' about the life cycles of the frogs that make the frogspawn. Here, ~~the~~ learning about the frogs in what seems to be a structured, (possibly classroom) environment

Seamus Heaney Essay (2)

> barn is described as lying 'face-down to shun the fear above', which is a complete behavioural turnaround. In Personal Heicon, however, change is explored in a different way. The narrative voice appears to age between the last two quatrains, which brings about a deep attitude shift towards self-reflection.

*step away To stare, big-eyed Narcissus, into some spring is beneath all adult dignity' claims the narrator, which is a distinctive ~~change~~ * from the young narrative voice who describes staring into a different well in each quatrain. This altered attitude shows the gradual shift undergone by the narrator through the poem, and while it's a ~~different~~ they're different kinds of changes, the narrators of Doan and The Barn undergo them too.

*altered Overall, Heaney explores differing aspects of change effectively through these poems. In Doan, the focus is on growing up and how attitudes towards things you once loved can be ~~reversed~~ * by time. ~~to~~ The Barn, looks more at how much appearance can be different from reality. And in Personal Heicon, the theme of how your own attitudes to something can change is reiterated.