

STUDY QUESTIONS: SEAMUS HEANEY

“Digging”

- 1.) What is the point of all the details about the poet’s father at work in stanzas two through five?
- 2.) What is the point of the details about the grandfather in stanza six.
- 3.) Explain stanza seven; where are we in time?
- 4.) Consider the opening and closing lines that relate to the poet. Who is he, what is his relationship, besides kinship, to the men he describes and the work they perform?
- 5.) Consider the poem in cultural, more specifically postcolonial terms, how is this indicative of a postcolonial situation?

“Requiem for the Croppies”

- 1.) In the first line the reader is introduced to an “our” and the pronoun “us” is invoked throughout. Who is this “us”?
- 2.) Explain the lines two to four.
- 3.) Explain the point of the four lines that follow the colon at the end of line six; what is the poem talking about here?
- 4.) What is going on in lines eleven and twelve?
- 5.) Explain the significance of the final line.
- 6.) What kind of poem is this; consider it in terms of postcolonial ideas we have discussed.

“Bog Oak”

- 1.) Explain the title; what is this?
- 2.) Look at the details of this “carter’s trophy” in the first two stanzas; what is the point of these details? Where are we?
- 3.) Who are these “mustached dead”; what is this section about?
- 4.) What is the meaning of the line about no ‘oak groves’?
- 5.) What does Edmund Spenser have to do with anything (go on the net or to a reference source and learn something about his biography)?

6.) Explain the poet's position in the poem; where is he, what is his relation to his subject?

“Anahorish”

- 1.) Explain the first stanza and a half. What is the poet talking about here?
- 2.) Explain the next five lines after the italicized repetition of the title.
- 3.) What is he talking about in the last stanza?
- 4.) Relate this poem to the first; what is the point here?

“Viking Dublin”

- 1.) Examine the images in the first four stanzas. What are these, what do they suggest, how are they significant?
- 2.) What does the phrase “trial pieces,” announced in the title and repeated in section II, suggest?
- 3.) What is this phenomenon as it is revealed in section III, and what does one make of the image of the “long sword”?
- 4.) What is the point of section IV? What “enters [his] longhand,” and what does Hamlet have to do with anything?
- 5.) What is the point of section V with Vikings and “gombeen-men,” and “old fathers”?
- 6.) What is the point of skulls in Dublin in the last section?

“Act of Union”

- 1.) Who is the speaker in section I, and what is going on?
- 2.) What are we to make of some of this imagery: “gash breaking open the ferny bed,” “the heaving province,” “the tall kingdom over your shoulder,” etc.?
- 3.) What has happened by section II? What are the “little fists” the speaker refers to?
- 4.) Explain the title?
- 5.) Suggest a postcolonial reading.

“The Toome Road”

- 1.) Whose is the poetic voice; who is this “I”?
- 2.) What is he dealing with; what happens on the Toome Road?
- 3.) Interpret the last two lines.

“The Flight Path”

- 1.) Who is the speaker, the “I,” in this poem, and what is his initial feeling?
- 2.) Who is the “he,” and what is meant by the reference to *film noir*?
- 3.) After the ellipses (l. 26), what is going on? What is this border guard asking and how does the poetic voice respond?
- 4.) What is the point of the section on Dante and Ciaran Nugent?
- 5.) How does the poem end; what is going on with the answer the voice gives to the policeman’s inquiry?