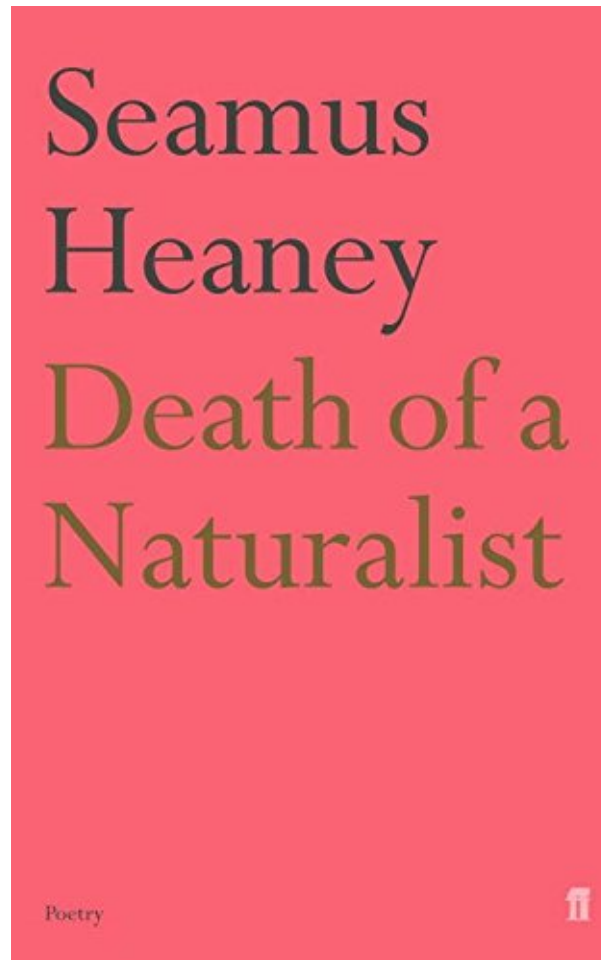


DEATH OF A NATURALIST BY SEAMUS HEANEY



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Seamus Heaney Death of a Naturalist

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Poems deal with fathers, the past, mortality, nature, violence, school, rural life, love, fear, and childhood.

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"My grandfather cut more turf in a day / Than any other man on Toner's bog."

By R. M. Peterson

DEATH OF A NATURALIST was Seamus Heaney's first published collection of poems. It appeared in 1966, when he was twenty-seven. Heaney grew up in a rural environment in Northern Ireland. Many of the poems, especially the early ones in the book, reflect that environment -- Heaney's love for it as well as his leave-taking of it. (Heaney was perhaps a little too squeamish to stay in the countryside, as reflected in the title poem.) Several poems deal with love and marriage. Most are personal; a few touch on larger matters, such as the Great Famine.

It is an impressive debut collection, worthy of a poet destined to be a Nobel Prize laureate. All of the poems have a formal structure, and many of them employ rhyme. There is one practice that I find overused: isolating a single word at the end of a line (the first word of the next sentence) or at the beginning of a line (the last word of the carry-over sentence). While few of the poems are profound or spark a desire to memorize, they all are comprehensible, almost all are engaging, and none are silly. Of the thirty-four poems, I marked nine to re-read at some indefinite time in the future, but I suspect that when I do pick up the book again I will re-read it in its entirety.

The longest poem covers three pages. The shortest is only nine lines. Entitled "Lovers on Aran" (the Aran Islands lie off the west coast of Ireland), here it is:

The timeless waves, bright, sifting, broken glass,
Came dazzling around, into the rocks,
Came glinting, sifting from the Americas

To possess Aran. Or did Aran rush
To throw wide arms of rock around a tide
That yielded with an ebb, with a soft crash?

Did sea define the land or land the sea?

Each drew new meaning from the waves' collision.
Sea broke on land to full identity.

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Outstanding Bookseller!

By William K. O'Brien

I misplaced my original copy and this beautiful copy eased my pain! Thank you so much!

6 of 7 people found the following review helpful.

How the Irish Hold Their Poets Holy

By Wordsworth

I began reading this first book of poetry by the Nobel Laureate from Ireland a few weeks ago. My wife and daughter were traveling on the Dingle Peninsula and stayed a few nights visiting Trinity College and drank pints of Guinness and Bushmills at the Temple Bar and witnessed the statues of James Joyce and Oscar Wilde in the greens of the great Gaelic capital. Ireland is an island which adores its poets, literary novelists and playwrights with a national ardor that I devoutly wish for my own country so immersed in commercial fare and cultural pap. Have you ever seen photos of the Library at Trinity College Dublin? It's where God goes to read on Sunday. I stayed at home to work and as the iPhone photos came in from Dublin, Galway, Coole, Adare and Dingle, I connected with my beloved family by reading the great Irish naturalist, Seamus Heaney. I finished this book without knowing that he had been so ill and he died the very next day. The timing of the death of this Nobel naturalist and my reading of him struck me as providentially uncanny. But what a magnificent literary legacy he leaves behind and one could see his prolific poetic gifts in this work, his first published collection which paints such a humble and humbling portrait of life among the farms and villages of rural Ireland. This is a hard life with grim realities. It's a life of tilling the boulder laden sod behind horses pulling a plough. Heaney writes about digging potatoes flashing white in soil from the spade and how blackberries ferment and turn green so soon after the picking. He writes about the ability of the Irish to endure great tempests blasting off the ocean. And about the grim business of shooting snipe at dawn. The writing is, at times, brutally frank in the way in which Robert Frost was later in life as a poet of the countryside of New England. Frost and Heaney had much in common in their respect and honest portraits of the simple life in the country. Both can bring vibrant images flying off the pages in 3D after only a few short, well chosen words. The writing is vivid, realistic, unsentimental and has the power to leave one stunned by the poet's discernment and rough sensibility at the conclusion of a poem. Some of this work is hard to read in a wince causing way because Heaney wants to show the reality of his existence as a naturalist with such gripping candor. At times, he almost seems intent upon sensationalism as in his poem about the drowning of kittens. I loved his poem about "The Trout" and his vision of the playwright Synge and lovers on the bare island of Aran. Heaney gives us a compelling portrait of a hard life in Ireland in his day. That he was destined to become a Nobel Laureate is evident from the beginning in this first collection. Pay homage to the great poet and read this work.

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