



## **New Selected Poems 1966-1987**

*Seamus Heaney*

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## New Selected Poems 1966-1987 Seamus Heaney

This volume contains a selection of work from each of Seamus Heaney's published books of poetry up to and including the Whitbread prize-winning collection, **The Haw Lantern** (1987).

'His is 'close-up' poetry - close up to thought, to the world, to the emotions. Few writers at work today, in verse or fiction, can give the sense of rich, fecund, *lived* life that Heaney does.' John Banville

'More than any other poet since Wordsworth he can make us understand that the outside world is not outside, but what we are made of.' John Carey

## New Selected Poems 1966-1987 Details

Date : Published March 4th 2002 by Faber Faber (first published 1990)

ISBN : 9780571143726

Author : Seamus Heaney

Format : Paperback 246 pages

Genre : Poetry, Cultural, Ireland, Classics, European Literature, Irish Literature, Fiction

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## Ryan Werner says

For a very select audience, this documentation of 21 years of Seamus Heaney's poetry career will be an enjoyable and cathartic journey through Ireland and its culture.

As a retrospective of what is now the first half of Seamus Heaney's poetry career, *New Selected Poems: 1966-1987* (Faber and Faber, ISBN: 0-571-14372-5, 1990) does well in showing a man who rallied for not just justice and understanding for the working class, but the imagination and beauty within it.

Stretching from 1966-1987, this volume collects work from Heaney's first seven collections of verse: *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), *Door into the Dark* (1969), *Wintering Out* (1972), *North* (1975), *Field Work* (1979), *Station Island* (1984), and *The Haw Lantern* (1987). Also included are prose poems from *Stations* (1975) as well as excerpts from *Sweeney Astray* (1983), Heaney's English translation of the legend of Irish king Buile Shuibhne.

### A Strong Sense of Place

Heaney's work has a strong sense of place. Any reader familiar with "salt-of-the-earth" types may expect Heaney's dense stories of blue-collar Irish life to be easier to swallow. However, be warned that the weight of the work almost seems too condensed, as if there was a narrative thread running through each poem at one point, only to be removed later in favor of a more stated, "poetic" tone.

### Muddled Clarity

The early poems "Mid-Term Break" and "The Other Side" stand out because of their personal importance and focus on a sort of clever sadness. Heaney tries to imbed the woes and concerns of all of Ireland within every poem, and while a later poem such as "Hailstones" achieves a connection for the character and the country, there are more instances of the clarity being muddled from an attempt to pack a poem too full.

The prose poems do not fare much better, as any sense of narrative is absent. The longer work – poems from *Station Island*, specifically – show more of a tie from poem to poem, but even then poems like "Chekhov on Sakhalin" and "Making Strange" suffer from their own overuse of the poetic statement.

### A Vocalized Strength

These poems benefit greatly from being read out loud. A reader may find more power in the poems if she reads them audibly to herself (perhaps even with an Irish accent, like Heaney). To hear the poems brings out their best qualities: the smart line-breaks, the way Heaney unlocks the natural cadence in a piece of poetry, the emotion and timing of the language and the characters/narrators who use it.

More often than not, these traits ended up working near the actual meat of the poem as opposed to with it. When Heaney can grasp both his craft and his point in his hands simultaneously, as he does in "Strange Fruit," the results are quite good. While there are no offensively bad works in this collection, the results rarely transcend an audience of those who are interested in working-class Irish culture and history.

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### **Matthew Pritchard says**

At the comprehensive school I attended, for a young boy to admit to an enjoyment of poetry served only to guarantee him a one-way ticket to the bramble patch at the school gates. Despite this, I have loved poetry since my early teens, and Seamus Heaney has always been one of my favourites.

Apart from Ted Hughes, I can't think of any poet who writes about nature with such passion. His use of metaphor and simile is incredible, and the musicality of the language transports the reader straight to the peaty, boggy, rocky world of rural Ireland - ironically, such is Heaney's talent with describing nature, he could probably have written a beautiful poem about a teenage boy floundering in brambles trying to retrieve his school bag from a stream while his persecutors laughed and threw stones at him.

Highly recommended.

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### **Kari Ely says**

Heaney once said "Poetry is always somewhat mysterious and you wonder what is your relationship to it." This collection had me wondering just that. There were several poems that puzzled me, and others that made the kind of resonating, innate sense that prose never seems to do. Filled with acute observation, memory, imagination, and a definite sense of place, Heaney's poetry is about his relationship with the world. As such I suppose the reader's relationship to it will always be that of an outsider. A bit lost, but enjoying the view.

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### **Kevin says**

The early stuff is quite good, mostly because it's simply about nature and life and the things done in life and nature. Once Heaney seems to have made the decision to become an Irish Poet (TM), I lost interest. I can't fault him for making his poetry local or reflecting his experiences as an Irishman, but somehow it just wasn't that interesting to me, especially after the solid stuff earlier on in his work.

The overtly political stuff is completely without interest to me, and not the sort of thing that makes for good poetry; it didn't work for Dante, for Milton, for Shelley, or for any number of poetasters of the last century. Politics in poetry is only manageable when it is masked in allegory, the way of *The Faerie Queene* or *Absalom and Achitophel*.

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### **Danny Daley says**

Once upon a time, I wasn't a fan of selected poem collections. I find that poems are as much a product of the collection they're in as they are a stand alone expression, so I've always avoided these "best of" collections in favor of their original context. My mind has changed on this, especially if, as is the case here, the "best of" collection was assembled by the poet in question. I saw, when reading, how Heaney created an entirely new

context for these poems by assembling them in this way, and it brought fresh insight and a new experience to my reading of these poems. This project was split into two volumes, this one featuring poems from "north" and "Death of a Naturalist" (among others), which are my two favorite of Heaney's collections. For anyone looking to get a good overview of the first half of Heaney's career, this is an excellent book.

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## **Dolors says**

Heaney's poetry is more a voice than a style.

It seems to have been written to be listened to rather than to be thoroughly dissected and scrutinized.

The evocative tinge of children's ideals and the brutality of a land divided by history and religion pulsate underneath the serene, almost romantic pace of his verses.

In Heaney's hands, poetry appears to be the only means of communication, the only possible language to capture past, present and vision. His words emanate in effortless streams of a semi-conscious state where remembered dreams and unadorned reality, in their all-encompassing rural splendor, keep an ongoing conversation that sounds too alien for the irrational violence that kills and persecutes whatever beauty the poet seeks to immortalize in timeless writing.

What is the use of poetry then, in a world where tragedy, pain and relentless conflict tears people apart?

The image of the poet seeking his own voice to describe the wonders of nature and calamity, tradition and war, myth and dogma, to exorcize his demons in order to reinvent his new meaning, should be enough of a response.

Poetry defines the self.

Poetry can be a conduit to understand life; its force is as powerful as that of love, loss or death.

Poetry binds us together in an invisible net, greater than ourselves, islands cease to be isolated, the infinite is graspable, and *landscapes become un-coded by water and ground founded clean on their own shapes, in all their extremity.*"

I followed the directions of Heaney's road map and arrived at a place where there is nothing else to say; the roaring of waves and the abrupt cliffs will always welcome me back home.

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## **C.T. Casberg says**

A thrift store find valuable as an emerald. Heaney's prose is haunting, thick, and rich; one smells the earth and feels the mist as they read his poems. We hear the guns, too, and the bombs, those blasting instruments of The Troubles. This collection features densely textured memories of the Irish countryside, dreamy visits from ghosts of assassinated friends, pilgrimages, and more. Heaney is a master of language, and he compresses meaning and sense into lines with great power. I won't pretend I understood every line of every poem—there is already an inherent obscurity in modern poetry, and Heaney employs such vocabulary and refers to such events and figures that I felt I needed to consult a reference nearly every poem—but I certainly felt each poem. Heaney elects handfuls of choice words that work deeply on the reader's mind and senses. I could feel the grit of churned, wind-blown soil in my teeth as I read.

A stunning collection, though some explanatory notes from the editors would not have been unwelcome, particularly in regards to history and mythology not well-known beyond Ireland's borders. A small complaint, however, and it is vulgar to fault someone else for my own ignorance.

The poem "The Republic of Conscience" (from 'The Haw Lantern', I believe) should be required reading for everyone, especially in these days.

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## **Rebekka Hindbo says**

Read for uni.

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## **????? ??????? says**

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## **Ashley McKnight says**

Few have mastered language like Heaney.

Distinctly Irish, he captures the culture, the landscape, the ordinariness of rural life, as well as the deep pain that affects so many as a result of the Troubles.

At times I felt transported back to an Ireland that is passing into the pages of personal history and memory.

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## **Nikki says**

Night Drive  
by Seamus Heaney

The smells of ordinariness  
Were new on the night drive through France;  
Rain and hay and woods on the air  
Made warm draughts in the open car.

Signposts whitened relentlessly.  
Montrueil, Abbéville, Beauvais  
Were promised, promised, came and went,  
Each place granting its name's fulfilment.

A combine groaning its way late  
Bled seeds across its work-light.  
A forest fire smouldered out.  
One by one small cafés shut.

I thought of you continuously  
A thousand miles south where Italy  
Laid its loin to France on the darkened sphere.  
Your ordinariness was renewed there.

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## **Stefan Grieve says**

A collection concerning poems on Bogs, purgatory, animals, nature, death, night drives through France (one of my favourites) and, of course, Ireland.

Some of the poems collected here are indeed really powerful stuff, including some memorable classics and classic lines ('between my finger and my thumb The squat pen rests; snug as a gun' and 'A four foot box, a foot for every year' two early placed poems in this book spring to mind.)

There is a poem in this collection that in it's finite two lines is more elegant and eloquent than what other poets could do in twenty.

I preferred the single page poems however, as I found it a bit more difficult to get into the longer ones, even though I did enjoy 'Sweeney's' description of trees and later journey.

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## **Michael says**

### Mid-term Break

I sat all morning in the college sick bay  
Counting bells knelling classes to a close,  
At two o'clock our neighbors drove me home.

In the porch I met my father crying--  
He had always taken funerals in his stride--  
And Big Jim Evans saying it was a hard blow.

The baby cooed and laughed and rocked the pram  
When I came in, and I was embarrassed  
By old men standing up to shake my hand

And tell me they were "sorry for my trouble,"  
Whispers informed strangers I was the eldest,  
Away at school, as my mother held my hand

In hers and coughed out angry tearless sighs.  
At ten o'clock the ambulance arrived  
With the corpse, stanced and bandaged by the nurses.

Next morning I went up into the room. Snowdrops  
And candles soothed the bedside; I saw him  
For the first time in six weeks. Paler now,

Wearing a poppy bruise on the left temple,  
He lay in the four foot box as in a cot.  
No gaudy scars, the bumper knocked him clear.

A four foot box, a foot for every year.

Dear Mr. Heaney:

This poem brings me to my knees every time. The first time I read it was junior year of high school. There was a communal gasp as the last line left the reader's lips. I don't think any of us fully recovered.

Thank you for that.

Sincerely,  
Michael

P.S. "Digging" and "Bogland" are equal in beauty but much deeper.

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### **Linette says**

This is one of those books that can only be read in small portions. So much to think about and feel.

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### **Grace Sweeney says**

“When all the others were away at Mass  
I was all hers as we peeled potatoes.  
They broke the silence, let fall one by one  
Like solder weeping off the soldering iron:  
Cold comforts set between us, things to share  
Gleaming in a bucket of clean water.  
And again let fall. Little pleasant splashes  
From each other’s work would bring us to our senses.

So while the parish priest at her bedside  
Went hammer and tongs at the prayers for the dying  
And some were responding and some crying  
I remembered her head bent towards my head,  
Her breath in mine, our fluent dipping knives –  
Never closer the whole rest of our lives.”

“Tonight, a first movement, a pulse,  
As if the rain in bogland gathered head  
To slip and flood: a bog-burst,

A gash breaking open the ferny bed.  
Your back is a firm line of eastern coast  
And arms and legs are thrown  
Beyond your gradual hills. I caress  
The heaving province where our past has grown.  
I am the tall kingdom over your shoulder  
That you would neither cajole nor ignore.  
Conquest is a lie. I grow older  
Conceding your half-independent shore  
Within whose borders now my legacy  
Culminates inexorably."

Sparse, pious, Catholic.

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### **Brendan says**

"In the nineteen forties, when I was the eldest child of an ever-growing family in rural Co. Derry, we crowded together in the three rooms of a traditional thatched farmstead and lived a kind of den-life which was more or less emotionally and intellectually proofed against the outside world. It was an intimate, physical, creaturely existence in which the night sounds of the horse in the stable beyond one bedroom wall mingled with the sounds of adult conversation from the kitchen beyond the other. We took in everything that was going on, of course - rain in the trees, mice on the ceiling, a steam train rumbling along the railway line one field back from the house - but we took it in as if we were in the doze of hibernation. Ahistorical, pre-sexual, in suspension between the archaic and the modern, we were as susceptible and impressionable as the drinking water that stood in a bucket in our scullery: every time a passing train made the earth shake, the surface of that water used to ripple delicately, concentrically, and in utter silence."

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### **Melanie says**

Clearances  
In memoriam M.K.H., 1911-1984  
By Seamus Heaney

She taught me what her uncle once taught her:  
How easily the biggest coal block split  
If you got the grain and hammer angled right.

The sound of that relaxed alluring blow,  
Its co-opted and obliterated echo,  
Taught me to hit, taught me to loosen,

Taught me between the hammer and the block

To face the music. Teach me now to listen,  
To strike it rich behind the linear black.

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**Angela Paolantonio says**

When I read a Seamus Heaney poem I run, sprint, to my desk and write.

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**Margaret says**

1st book of poetry I read by Seamus Heaney. Other than the famous poems, it's an interesting book of poetry and I'd definitely read him again.

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**J says**

Lovely. A bit more bucolic that I'd normally choose, but wonderful stuff.

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