**SEMESTER IV**

**The Social and Literary Context: Modernism and After**

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**PAPER 7 - POETRY FROM THE SIXTIES**

* Key Poets - Seamus Heaney, Ted Hughes

W.H. Auden, Philip Larkin

* Period - After the end of Modernism

Mid 20th century

* **Key features -**

the modernist trends continued. These poets looked upto Yeats, Eliot and other modern writers

Influences of metaphysical poetry

French symbolism was a key influence. Most of their poetry relied heavily on imagism. Imagism is the use of images as metaphors of various aspects in society. The poet’s intention and motive was clearly stated in an image without giving much importance to rhyme, meter and other structural issues.

Aftermath of the world war II. These poets were living in constant fear of world war III. They wrote in a time when England and the rest of the Europe was ravaged by the two world wars, affecting social, cultural, educational, religious lives of all mankind.

The importance of the past. These poets made a connection between the present and the past, using several motifs and images, key aspects from the past and juxtaposed with the rapidly changing scientific society where values and morals were slowly declining.

Animal Imagery. Both poets made use of images from nature - birds and animals to show the violent as well as the positive side of mother nature. Since nature is a mirror of mankind, so these images were used to compare the various moods and characteristics of man.

**SEAMUS HEANEY**

* Won the Nobel prize for literature in 1995.
* Irish by birth and constantly wrote poetry and aspects related to Ireland. Most of his setting, background are Irish. He talks about troubled Irish history, England’s ruthless rule in Ireland, the Irish fight for freedom in his poems. He even turned down the title of Poet Laureate (the official court poet of England) in protest of England’s unfair control over Ireland.
* Use of autobiographical elements - Most of his poems portray Heaney’s own past, his experiences as a young child in the Irish countryside (rural side). He grew up in a farm and the main occupation of the family was agriculture. Therefore he wrote about these experiences in his poetry collection *Death of a Naturalist* in 1966. In poems like “Digging*”* and “Follower*”* draw from the rural images of his past; his farm life providing the perfect setting. These poems allow the poet to self-examine his modern life and also long for the farm days.
* In *Digging,* Heaney justifies his choice of career, describing and assuring the reader, and himself, that there was a reason he chose the pen as opposed to the spade as his preferred tool. In explaining himself, he explains the farming tradition he grew up in, the dedication and hard work of his father, the expertise of his grandfather. The background provides a powerful context to the poem and contrasts the image of Heaney at the window writing, whilst his father worked below in the garden.
* Clear language and diction. He avoids traditional rhyme schemes, rhythms, stanzas and other technical aspects of conventional poetry. He writes in a free flowing manner which is very clear and straightforward to understand. For example, in “Digging,” he uses very easily recognisable words related to farming and other activities around a farm.
* In “Potato Digging”, he talks very clearly about the hard life of the farmers who go through hardships and famines very often. He uses the Irish history, the Irish famine of 1840s when there was a shortage of potatoes ( the staple food of Ireland, just like rice in Assam). He uses these past references to talk about the life of the farmers whose lives have changed little over the time.
* Naturalism. Heaney’s poetry is full of images from the nature which is not always pretty. Unlike Wordsworth who looked at nature as relaxing and peaceful, Heaney was quite different. He viewed nature as a violent place, similar to mankind who is always fighting for survival.
* Bog poems. He was also writing about the norther Irish bogs ( a wet muddy ground which cannot hold solid objects) from where several bodies were recovered. It was believed that many war prisoners who revolted against the English were killed and drowned in these bogs. These bog poems have become highly popular as they not only deal with nature, but also politics and specially violence. “Tollund Man” and “Punishment”, famous bog poems

**Further Studies:**

* [http://www.askliterature.com/poetry/various-themes-in-the-poems-of-seamus-heaney/#](http://www.askliterature.com/poetry/various-themes-in-the-poems-of-seamus-heaney/)
* Sanders, Andrew. *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*, Oxford: OUP, 2004