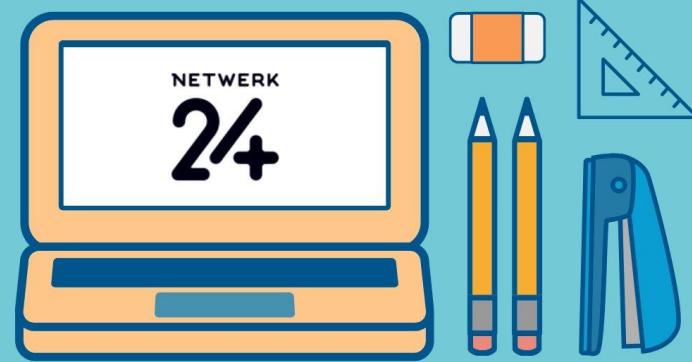


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ENGELS

Poetry: Mid Term Break

Mid-Term Break

BY SEAMUS HEANEY

I sat all morning in the college sick bay
Counting bells knelling classes to a close.
At two o'clock our neighbours 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

Poetry: Mid Term Break

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, stanchéd 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 his left temple,
He lay in the four-foot box as in his cot.
No gaudy scars, the bumper knocked him clear.

A four-foot box, a foot for every year.

Poetry: Mid Term Break

Type: **Lyric**= Expressing the poet's personal feelings, but also an **Elegy**= funeral speech/song

Mood : Melancholy/ mournful (Except the line about the baby)

Tone: Sombre/ sad

Rhythm: Iambic Pentameter

Rhyme: Blank/ free verse except the last rhyming couplet

Poetry: Mid Term Break

Title

Title: Ironic, one expects a poem about a holiday, but instead it is about death

Break: Fractured family/ cutting ties between him and his brother/ end of a life

Stanza 1:

I sat all morning in the college sick bay

He might have been feeling bored/apprehensive/ sad. He was not sick, but his brother had died so he had to wait there for someone to fetch him from school

Counting bells knelling classes to a close.

He had nothing else to do, so he had to sit alone in the sick room and count the bells signalling the end of classes.

At two o'clock our neighbours drove me home.

The fact he remembers specific times indicates trauma. One remembers exact details like times during stressful events.

I= personal pronoun, his own account
(isolation from his family?)

All morning= mentions time

college sick bay = room at school (he is 10) where the sick children sit

Alliteration of C: repeated sound like bells ringing. Hard sound= harsh death

Knelling: School bells ring, funeral bells knell= foreboding atmosphere.

Repetition of L- sound: slows down poem, reinforces mournful atmosphere

two o'clock: Specific time, progression of time from morning.

Neighbours: Unusual- something was wrong

Assonance of O: Long, drawn out sound, sad, mournful

Stanza 2:

In the porch I met my father crying—

The dash indicates the speaker was very upset seeing his father crying. Men in the 1950s didn't show much emotion

In the porch: He is home now- setting has changed

father crying: Unusual for his father to cry, upsetting

He had always taken funerals in his stride—

Crying is unusual for him, he had always been strong, now broken

in his stride: means to cope easily

And Big Jim Evans saying it was a hard blow.

Big Jim probably didn't mean to be insensitive, but he is awkward-doesn't know what to say to the family of a dead child

Big Jim Evans: Neighbour or family friend-close knit community

a hard blow: pun (double meaning)

Literal=the boy was hit by a car

Figurative= family emotionally hurt by death

Stanza 3:

The baby cooed and laughed and rocked the pram

The baby doesn't understand that she lost a brother, she is just happy to see her eldest brother (the speaker). The rhythm changes from slow paced to fast and bouncy because the baby is happy

When I came in, and I was embarrassed

Usually a child would stand up and greet a grown up, but now the men are standing up and shaking his hand as a sign of respect and condolences. He doesn't know how to react.

By old men standing up to shake my hand

Maybe death forces him to grow up too soon, which is implied by the fact that men now greet him as an adult

The baby: Innocent and unaware of the events taking place

Cooed: baby noises (onomatopoeia)

rocked the pram: kicking in joy

When I came in: enjambment (run on line), shows movement

Embarrassed: they treated him like an adult (unusual)

shake my hand: adult gesture of greeting

Stanza 4:

And tell me they were 'sorry for my trouble'.

*Death is not just a bit of 'trouble',
euphemism is used because
people feel awkward talking
about death*

And: Enjambment

'sorry for my trouble': Euphemism: death

Whispers informed strangers I was the eldest,

*People he didn't know (friends of
his parents??) were whispering
about him*

Repetition of "s" sound is called sibilance (onomatopoeia of whispering). People whisper out of respect. Contributes to muted atmosphere

Away at school, as my mother held my hand

Alliteration of "h": emphasises that his mother relied on him: coming of age- he has to comfort his parents

Stanza 5:

In **hers** and coughed out **angry tearless sighs**.

*Who is the mother angry with?
Herself? The father? The child who
died? God?*

At **ten o'clock** the **ambulance** arrived

With **the corpse**, **stunched** and **bandaged** by the nurses. **The corpse**: The speaker distances himself by not saying "my brother"

*The ambulance came to the
speaker's house with his brother's
bandaged body. In many cultures
(including Irish Catholic in the
50's, it is customary to display the
body before the burial so that
people can say good-bye*

angry tearless sighs: overcome with anger and grief, cannot cry anymore. Anger is one of the stages of grief

ten o'clock: specific time again. Shows progression of time.

Repetition of A= assonance (slows tempo, emphasises the words, short sound may indicate abrupt end to boy's life)

Stunched: To stop blood by using thick bandages

Stanza 6:

Next morning I went up **into the room**. **Snowdrops**

Mood: the speaker appears calmer. He has a private moment with his dead brother. He never expresses his own emotions throughout the poem, but there is a sense of grief and loss

And candles soothed the bedside; I saw **him**

For the first time in **six weeks**. **Paler** now,

When he last saw his brother he was still alive. Now that he is dead he looks pale. The speaker looks for differences since he last saw him

Next morning: time progression

Into the room: where his brother's body was displayed

Snowdrops: small white flowers that appear early spring. They could symbolize life after death/ a young child who died- the flowers are small and pale just like the child

Snowdrops and candles soothed the bedside: Personification, actually soothed the people coming to view the child

Him: No longer refers to his brother as "the corpse"- maybe a step to acceptance and peace?

six weeks: time is mentioned again. He was away at school and hadn't seen his brother for a long time. Does that make him feel guilty? Sad? Angry?

Paler: Lack of blood flow, he is dead (whiter)

Stanza 7:

Wearing a poppy bruise on his left temple,

Flower images (poppy and snow drops): Flowers are fragile and do not last long- just like the boy's life was short. Flowers also symbolise beauty and hope (life goes on)

He lay in the four-foot box as in his cot.

Important line: he doesn't look dead, just asleep. Not scary

No gaudy scars, the bumper knocked him clear.

Very shocking. Finding out how he dies at the end of the poem is very effective as it builds suspense

Wearing a poppy bruise: the shape and colour of the bruise remind the speaker of a poppy (a small red flower)- it doesn't seem to be part of him.

Left temple: Where the car hit him probably/ where he fell

Four foot box: coffin

As in his cot: simile, very effective- looks like he's sleeping

He, him/ his: No longer refers to his brother as "the corpse"- indicates acceptance

Gaudy: Impressive/ bright/ horrible

Bumper knocked him clear: We find out that his brother died in a car accident

Stanza 8:

A **four-foot box**, a foot for **every year**.

This line is placed alone for emphasis and dramatic effect. It is the only line in the poem that rhymes with another. It creates a feeling of deep sympathy with the reader_ the brother was so young and small. Finally we understand the father's sadness and the mother's anger.

Four-foot box: the coffin is very small-
young child

Alliteration of F: emphasises how small the boy was

Every year: He was only four years old