



Poetry - Heaney

English Past Exam Questions

Ordinary Level

Paper 2 – Section 3 – Question A

A A CONSTABLE CALLS

His bicycle stood at the window-sill,
 The rubber cowl of a mud-splasher
 Skirting the front mudguard,
 Its fat black handlegrips

Heating in sunlight, the 'spud'
 Of the dynamo gleaming and cocked back,
 The pedal treads hanging relieved
 Of the boot of the law.

His cap was upside down
 On the floor, next his chair.
 The line of its pressure ran like a bevel
 In his slightly sweating hair.

He had unstrapped
 The heavy ledger, and my father
 Was making tillage returns
 In acres, roods, and perches.

Arithmetic and fear.
 I sat staring at the polished holster
 With its buttoned flap, the braid cord
 Looped into the revolver butt.

'Any other root crops?
 Mangolds? Marrowstems? Anything like that?'
 'No.' But was there not a line
 Of turnips where the seed ran out

In the potato field? I assumed
 Small guilts and sat
 Imagining the black hole in the barracks.
 He stood up, shifted the baton-case

Further round on his belt,
 Closed the domesday book,
 Fitted his cap back with two hands,
 And looked at me as he said goodbye.

A shadow bobbed in the window.
 He was snapping the carrier spring
 Over the ledger. His boot pushed off
 And the bicycle ticked, ticked, ticked.

Seamus Heaney

1. (a) From your reading of this poem, explain why the constable called to the Heaney home. Support your answer with reference to the poem. (10)

(b) The poet as a young boy observes many details about the constable in the poem. Identify the detail that you find most striking and explain why you find it to be so. (10)

(c) *...I assumed
Small guilts and sat
Imagining the black hole in the barracks.*
Explain what you think the poet means by these lines. (10)

2. Answer **ONE** of the following: [Each part carries 20 marks]

(i) What do you learn about the world of Seamus Heaney's childhood by studying this poem? Support your answer with reference to the poem.

OR

(ii) In which one of the following collections of poetry do you feel this poem best belongs?

- A collection of poems about rural life.
- A collection of poems about the past.
- A collection of poems about childhood.

Give reasons for your choice with reference to the poem.

OR

(iii) Imagine you are the young Seamus Heaney. Write a diary entry about the day the constable called. Your diary entry should be based on your reading of the poem.