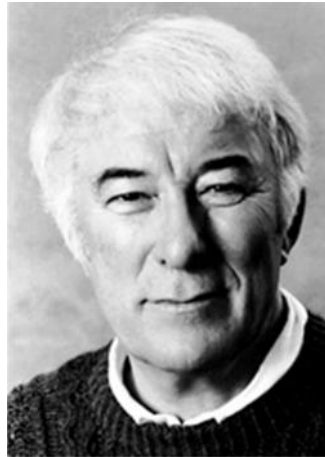


Nobel Prize in Literature 1995



Seamus Heaney

The Nobel Prize in Literature 1995 was awarded to Seamus Heaney *"for works of lyrical beauty and ethical depth, which exalt everyday miracles and the living past"*.

Seamus Heaney was born on a farm some distance west of Belfast in Northern Ireland 56 years ago. After studies and marriage he moved to the Irish Republic and has been living in Dublin since 1976. He has held a post as visiting professor in rhetoric at Harvard since 1982, and from 1989 to 1994 he was Professor of Poetry at Oxford. Heaney is a poet, essayist and translator.

One point of departure for Heaney is what he calls, in one of the poems in his collection "North" (1975), northern reticence. He sympathises with this stance but is of course at the same time aware of the risks it involves for a writer. In an interview, he acknowledges that he feels a form of guilt when he writes. He assumes that generations of rural ancestors - who while not illiterate were not literary either - are asserting themselves within him. He speaks with warmth of the rich experience his parents have communicated, but can also express some impatience with their reticence. It is against this background

that one can read the poem "Alphabets" (in "The Haw Lantern", 1987) with the lines "The poet's dream stole over him like sunlight / And passed into the tenebrous thickets".

As an Irish Catholic he has concerned himself with analysis of the violence in Northern Ireland - with the express reservation that he wants to avoid the conventional terms. In his opinion, the fact that there has been unwillingness on both sides to speak out - even about manifest injustices - has been of great importance in the explosive development. But he also opposes the defeatism of the Catholics, as in the poem "From the canton of expectation" (in "The Haw Lantern") which begins: "We lived deep in a land of optative moods, / under high, banked clouds of resignation."

In collections of essays such as "The Government of the Tongue" (1988) and "The Place of Writing" (1989) Heaney discusses the role of poetry and the poet, a theme he often returns to. Experiences from the lives of Osip Mandelstam and other 20th century writers lead him to the conclusion that the task of the poet is to ensure the survival of beauty, especially in times when tyrannical regimes threaten to destroy it.

In 1990 Heaney published "The Cure at Troy", a translation of Sophocles' "Philoctetes", from the point of view of composition the most modern of the classical dramas. The play was staged by the Field Day Theatre in the same year and received a positive reception although no direct link was made to his poetry. It can, however, be seen as one element of Heaney's continual endeavour to find poetic expression for complex ethical issues. The translation points forward to his next collection of poems.

"Seeing Things" (1991) includes the very interesting section "Squarings". Here the poems consist of twelve lines, their fixed, restrained form matching only superficially the content of the poems with their breadth of variation. A poem like "Lightenings viii", on the miracle at Clonmacnoise, is a crystallisation of much of Heaney's imaginative world: history and sensuality, myths and the day-to-day - all articulated in Heaney's rich language.

For more details please visit:

http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1995/press.html

Call for research and Review articles publication: ijsidonlineinfo@gmail.com