

SEAMUS HEANEY

'Follower'

*My father worked with a horse-plough,
His shoulders globed like a full sail strung
Between the shafts and the furrow.
The horses strained at his clicking tongue.*

*An expert. He would set the wing
And fit the bright steel-pointed sock.
The sod rolled over without breaking.
At the headrig, with a single pluck*

*Of reins, the sweating team turned round
And back into the land. His eye
Narrowed and angled at the ground,
Mapping the furrow exactly.*

*I stumbled in his hobnailed wake,
Fell sometimes on the polished sod;
Sometimes he rode me on his back
Dipping and rising to his plod.*

SEAMUS HEANEY

'Follower' (cont.)

*I wanted to grow up and plough,
To close one eye, stiffen my arm.*

*All I ever did was follow
In his broad shadow round the farm.*

*I was a nuisance, tripping, falling,
Yapping always. But today
It is my father who keeps stumbling
Behind me, and will not go away*

ELIZABETH JENNINGS

'One Flesh'

*Lying apart now, each in a separate bed,
He with a book, keeping the light on late,
She like a girl dreaming of childhood,
All men elsewhere - it is as if they wait
Some new event: the book he holds unread,
Her eyes fixed on the shadows overhead.*

*Tossed up like flotsam from a former passion,
How cool they lie. They hardly ever touch,
Or if they do it is like a confession
Of having little feeling - or too much.
Chastity faces them, a destination
For which their whole lives were a preparation.*

*Strangely apart, yet strangely close together,
Silence between them like a thread to hold
And not wind in. And time itself's a feather
Touching them gently. Do they know they're old,
These two who are my father and my mother
Whose fire from which I came, has now grown cold?*

OCEAN VUONG

Telemachus

*Like any good son, I pull my father out
of the water, drag him by his hair
through white sand, his knuckles carving a trail
the waves rush in to erase. Because the city
beyond the shore is no longer
where we left it. Because the bombed
cathedral is now a cathedral
of trees. I kneel beside him to show how far
I might sink. Do you know who I am,
Ba? But the answer never comes. The answer
is the bullet hole in his back, brimming
with seawater. He is so still I think
he could be anyone's father, found
the way a green bottle might appear
at a boy's feet containing a year
he has never touched. I touch
his ears. No use. I turn him
over. To face it. The cathedral
in his sea-black eyes. The face
not mine — but one I will wear
to kiss all my lovers good-night:
the way I seal my father's lips
with my own & begin
the faithful work of drowning.*

CHRISTOPHER RUSH

'My Grandmother'

I see her now
in her wheezing grey frailty,
clutching hold of her life at the kitchen sink;
the noise of her breathing like the sound of the sea
sucking back shingle.

Woman of waves was she,
she fought back her asthma,
standing there while I grew up
and the tides came and went.

Her fingers flashed silver,
The gullie terrible in her hand.
She was at home among the herring and flounders and cod.

Behind her
the crabs boiled red in the pot,
a stone on its iron lid
to keep them from crawling out
into my dreams.

CHRISTOPHER RUSH

'My Grandmother'
(cont.)

Eyes that wobbled wickedly on stalks
and claws that tore me to gobbets as I lay
drowning, drowning – she took these terrors away.

She showed me St Peter's thumb-print
on the side of the haddock.

She gave me the top of my grandfather's egg.

She washed me in the brine of her tears
that she shed nightly.

She taught me the ways of the sea.