**British Poetry since 1945: Analysis of Selected Poems**

**1. Seamus Heaney’s *Digging***

**Short Biography of Seamus Heaney**

Ireland's most celebrated living poet, Heaney was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995, "for works of lyrical beauty and ethical depth, which exalt everyday miracles and the living past". Seamus Heaney was born in County Derry, Northern Ireland in 1939. At the age of 12, he won a scholarship to a Catholic boarding school. Heaney went on to study English at Queen's University Belfast before training as a teacher. Heaney's first book, Death of a Naturalist (1966), contained rich depictions of his rural upbringing but by the 1970s, as Ireland's troubles increased, his work took a more political turn. Heaney's poems are often triggered by small, intimate memories. Fascinated by folklore; he also published an award-winning translation of Beowulf. Heaney has held Professorships at Harvard, and was Oxford Professor of Poetry. Despite having a foot on both sides of the border, Heaney has resolutely identified himself as Irish, famously protesting against his inclusion in the Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poets.

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| Digging  Between my finger and my thumb  The squat pen rests; snug as a gun.  Under my window, a clean rasping sound  When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:  My father, digging. I look down  Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds  Bends low, comes up twenty years away  Stooping in rhythm through potato drills  Where he was digging.  The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft  Against the inside knee was levered firmly.  He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep  To scatter new potatoes that we picked,  Loving their cool hardness in our hands.  By God, the old man could handle a spade.  Just like his old man. | My grandfather cut more turf in a day  Than any other man on Toner’s bog.  Once I carried him milk in a bottle  Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up  To drink it, then fell to right away  Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods  Over his shoulder, going down and down  For the good turf. Digging.  The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap  Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge  Through living roots awaken in my head.  But I’ve no spade to follow men like them.  Between my finger and my thumb  The squat pen rests.  I’ll dig with it. |

**Discussion Question**

Consider the poem in cultural, more specifically postcolonial terms, how is this indicative of a postcolonial situation?

**2. Ted Hughes’s *Hawk Roosting***

**Short Biography of Ted Hughes**

Ted Hughes was born on 17 August 1930 in Mytholmroyd, Yorkshire. Growing up in the valleys and moors of Yorkshire, he developed an early fascination with animals. He had a natural talent for writing, and encouraged by his teachers and elder sister, he had started writing by the age of fifteen and by sixteen he knew he wanted to be a poet. Therefore, after graduating from Cambridge, he concentrated on his poetry and at the age of 27 he released his first book of poems, which not only earned critical acclaim, but also established him as a poet. Later he started writing books for children and quickly made his mark in that field. However, his marriage to another celebrated poet Sylvia Plath was not successful and he was blamed for the latter’s suicide. Although he kept quiet for the sake of their two children, he talked about their complex relationship in ‘Birthday Letters’, a book of poems published just before his death. Today, he is ranked as one of the best poets of his generation and also one of the best writers of the 20th century. Ted Hughes was an English poet who was the Poet Laureate of England from 1984 until his death in 1998. He is considered as one of the best poets of his generation.

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| [Hawk Roosting](https://allpoetry.com/Hawk-Roosting)  I sit in the top of the wood, my eyes closed. Inaction, no falsifying dream Between my hooked head and hooked feet: Or in sleep rehearse perfect kills and eat.  The convenience of the high trees! The air's buoyancy and the sun's ray Are of advantage to me; And the earth's face upward for my inspection.  My feet are locked upon the rough bark. It took the whole of Creation To produce my foot, my each feather: Now I hold Creation in my foot | Or fly up, and revolve it all slowly - I kill where I please because it is all mine. There is no sophistry in my body: My manners are tearing off heads -  The allotment of death. For the one path of my flight is direct Through the bones of the living. No arguments assert my right:  The sun is behind me. Nothing has changed since I began. My eye has permitted no change. I am going to keep things like this. |

**Discussion Question**

Explain how Hughes’s poem presents the poet’s fascination with creative-destructive forces in nature.

**3. Philip Larkin’s *Annus Mirabilis***

**Short Biography of Philip Larkin**

Philip Arthur Larkin was born on the 9th of August in 1922 in Radford, England. His early years were cloaked with the dominance of his father, which never let him enjoy the true entertainments of the childhood period. However, Sydney’s love for poetry influenced his son during his childhood. Philip Larkin, a prolific literary figure, was homeschooled up to the age of eight. His well-read father introduced him to many great literary figures, including [James Joyce](https://literarydevices.net/james-joyce/), [Ezra Pound](https://literarydevices.net/ezra-pound/), and D. H. Lawrence. Besides this, his mother and sister also helped him develop his creative abilities during his childhood until he was sent to Coventry’s King Henry VIII Junior School followed by King Henry VIII Senior School. He made regular contributions to the school magazine, The Coventrian. At eighteen, he passed the entrance exam of St John’s College, Oxford, and started studying English. Later, in 1940, he joined the Oxford University and earned a first-class honored degree. Later, he became a successful librarian, but never stopped reading and writing. Philip Larkin, an influential figure of the twentieth century, fell seriously ill in 1985. In his final decades, his poetic inspiration largely faded, when he wrote only a handful of poems. He died at the age of sixty-three on the 2nd of December, in 1985.

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| **ANNUS MIRABILIS**  Sexual intercourse began In nineteen sixty-three (Which was rather late for me) – Between the end of the Chatterley ban And the Beatles’ first LP.  Up to then there’d only been A sort of bargaining, A wrangle for a ring, A shame that started at sixteen And spread to everything. | Then all at once the quarrel sank: Everyone felt the same, And every life became A brilliant breaking of the bank, A quite unlosable game.  So life was never better than In nineteen sixty-three (Though just too late for me) – Between the end of the Chatterley ban And the Beatles’ first LP. |

**Discussion Question**

In what does the above poem represent the controversial social change that British society witnessed during the 1960s?