

COVENTRY PATMORE'S FINE LINE

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Musings from the editor's desk.

Seamus Heaney has been among my favourite poets since my student days when I came across his second book, *Door into the Dark*, in a used-book shop a few years after its first publication. The sounds of his words were quite enough for me, since, like most of what I was reading at 19, I scarcely knew what on earth the words were about. However little I initially understood his poems, Heaney would become one of those authors whose next book I've looked forward to buying, one of those authors I feel fortunate to be alive when they are writing. It is that joy of witnessing the arrival of what Walter Pater refers to as "works of art [that] impress us as a new presence in the world" (*Appreciations* 80). I think *Field Work* was the book I was enjoying when it dawned on me that I could recite none of Heaney's poems with the ease I can with some of my Pre-Raphaelite favourites ("Of heaven or hell I have no power to sing"; "Who has seen the wind? Neither you nor I"; "Do tall white angels gaze and wend Along the banks where lilies bend?" "Last night, ah, yesternight, betwixt her lips and mine There fell thy shadow, Cynara"). This charge was not alarming to me, because my love for Heaney lies not in memorable lines but in his singular words, the monosyllabic Anglo-Saxon diction that startles us with the stubby strength of three- and four-letter words that get new meanings with long forgotten sounds: fen and hub; lea, lee, and lug; scop and sett; haw, hoke, and whin. Such arresting words are better read in a favourite book by the fireside than recalled and recited during a walk, as they continue to surprise me and thus renew themselves with each successive reading. It is this promise of delight that urges us to reach again for a treasured book, the delight that led William Morris to simplify the necessities

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