



Stepping Stones: Interviews with Seamus Heaney

By Dennis O'Driscoll

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Widely regarded as the finest poet of his generation, Seamus Heaney is the subject of numerous critical studies, but no book-length portrait has appeared before now. Through his own lively and eloquent reminiscences, *Stepping Stones* retraces Heaney's steps from his first exploratory testing of the ground as an infant to what he called his "moon-walk" to the podium to receive the 1995 Nobel Prize in Literature. It also fascinatingly charts his post-Nobel life and is supplemented with a number of photographs, many from the Heaney family album and published here for the first time. In response to firm but subtle questioning from Dennis O'Driscoll, Heaney sheds a personal light on his work (poems, essays, translations, plays) and on the artistic and ethical challenges he faced during the dark years of the Ulster Troubles. Combining the spontaneity of animated conversation with the considered qualities of the best autobiographical writing, *Stepping Stones* provides an original, diverting, and absorbing store of reflections and recollections. Scholars and general readers alike are brought closer to the work, life, and creative development of a charismatic and lavishly gifted poet whose latest collection, *District and Circle*, was awarded the T. S. Eliot Prize for Poetry in 2006.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. There is no shortage of writing by or about Nobel Prize–winning Irish poet Heaney. Yet this big book is a unique and useful addition to the Heaney canon: beginning in 2001, the Dublin-based poet, essayist and anthologist O'Driscoll entered into an extended correspondence with Heaney for the purpose of collaboratively constructing a kind of autobiography-in-interviews. The result is a collection of 16 discreet interviews, the first two of which discuss Heaney's childhood and poetic growth. Then there is one interview-chapter for each of Heaney's celebrated books (except the last two, which are grouped together), followed by a summing up. In conversation, Heaney comes across as extremely friendly, expansively intelligent and in possession of the groundedness in the details of his environment that readers of his poems will be familiar with. Here are boyhood recollections (Our travelling grocery van... was run first by a man called McCarney, but 'the egg man' was our name for him), memories of the famous Belfast Group and accounts of coming-of-age, and then coming to international prominence, against the backdrop of Ireland's troubled 20th-century politics. And, of course, Heaney traces the events—both political and personal—that led to many of his poems. For fans of Heaney, of 20th-century Irish literature or anyone eager to get deep into the mind of a major artist, this is an essential book. (*Dec.*)

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Review

“This really is a remarkable book. There isn't a dull, vapid or useless sentence in it; it's about what it is to be human, as much as it is about what it is to be a poet.” ?Nicholas Lezard, *The Guardian*

“[*Stepping Stones*] is a Heaney word horde that will not be surpassed for some time . . . [It] will be seized on by students of the work as well as the common reader . . . [Heaney] is intensely present within these pages--still surprising, still defying 'the merciless landscapes' with generosity, courage and joy.” ?Bel Mooney, *The Times (London)*

“[An] important book-length interview, designed to serve in lieu of a memoir . . . Dennis O'Driscoll [is] an excellent poet and critic, and a deeply informed and probing interviewer of his longtime friend.” ?Adam Kirsch, *The New Republic*

“*Stepping Stones* succeeds on many levels, and O'Driscoll's intelligent probing to go beyond Seamus Heaney the public figure to the inner man, to the essential inner poet, is masterful.” ?Katherine Bailey, *Star Tribune (Minneapolis)*

“These 'linked interviews,' as O'Driscoll calls them, set out to trace, book by book, the contours of Heaney's writing life and the events and memories that inform it. To a great degree, they succeed.” ?Sean O'Hagan, *The Observer (London)*

About the Author

Dennis O'Driscoll's previous publications include *New and Selected Poems* and *Reality Check*. He is the author of a collection of essays and reviews, *Troubled Thoughts, Majestic Dreams*, and works as a civil servant in Dublin.

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