What do you think of when I say the word “Farm”? Examples

Imagine trying to farm on this:

Imagine that you *have* to farm on this, day after day, in order to support yourself and your family. You have to work tirelessly to turn this into something you can eat, or at least something you can exchange for something to eat.

Does anyone know what this kind of land is called?

……hint: it’s in the vocabulary on the back

So as you can see on the sheet and in the picture, a *Bog* is a really wet, muddy area that’s kind of like a marsh. There are a few crops that will grow well in soil like this, like potatoes, or celery or cranberries, but the problem is that the soil is really acidic, which makes it difficult to plant most vegetables.

So really, the best crop you can get out of land like this is the land itself:

Peat is the really wet, acidic soil you find in boglands, which can actually be cut into blocks (called turf) and can actually be used as a great fuel source when burned, which is really important in areas like this, because when you’re living in land like this, there is not a whole lot of spare timber to be used for fires.

So I just want to add a few more things before we go into the poem [\*]

Like the speaker. I see “Speaker” as really a two-part kind of thing. Theres the narrator and there’s the author, which may or may not be the same person. In the poem it certaintly seems like it, but we cannot say that for certain. [\*]

The author (and we’ll go into the narrator later) is a poet named Seamus Heaney. He’s seen as one of the foremost poets of Ireland, where he was born and raised. He actually won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1995.

He grew up in a Farmhouse called Mossbawn. His father and many cousins were farmers. He was also the oldest of NINE children.

Some other important contextual details.

The poem was the first and arguably the most famous poem that Heaney put into a collection entiteld *Death of a Naturalist* which was released in 1966. [\*]

Toner’s bog, which is a name you’ll see in the poem, was the massive bogland that contained the farm that Heaney grew up on as well as many others. [\*]

In the poem, the narrator speaks of his grandfather farming and passing the duty down to his son. This is not true of the author, whose grandparents actually died an early death. It’s details like these that make you question whether the author is actually writing about himself, or just a character that went through a similar situation to his own.

The poem: [\*]

So instead of just doing this the normal way and reading the entire poem first, I actually want to do this stanza by stanza. So could someone please read the first stanza for us? [\*]

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1)Who can tell me what the speaker is doing here? *NOT writing; pen is stationary*.

[\*] [read 2]

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2)Does anyone think that they can describe the setting here? Where is the speaker in relation to his father? Where is his father?

[\*] [read 3]

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3) So the narrator describes his father is a strange way here. He says that he “comes up twenty years away”. Does anyone think that they know what is going on here?

The narrator sees a semi-familiar scene and reminisces what he remembers his father doing 20 years earlier.

4) continuation of the memory

Also for those of you who don’t know the bolded terms, you can flip to the vocabulary on the back: Coarse in this case means a rough, grainy texture , and lug is a piece of metal that hold the spade together.

So it seems pretty clear that in the scene his father is digging up potatoes. But what is the speaker doing in the memory? And who is he referring to by “we”?

A good portion if not the entire family was taking a part in the farming. (and remember he had 8 other siblings) All of their lives revolved around this farm, as it was what kept them alive. It kept them fed, it kept their house warm, it paid off their expenses.

5) What does the speaker think of his father? What can you come up with just from these two lines?

Pride, reminiscent admiration.

6) Cutting to the last line, “For the good turf. Digging”. The action of digging in this poem is highly symbolic, and this is one of the most revealing lines. What do you think the “good turf” might represent in this case? What is digging to him and to the family?

Digging towards the wellbeing of his family. Digging for pride.

7) We see a lot of imagery here, a lot of imagery that appeals to the sense (cold smell, potato mold, squelch, slap). It’s not exactly disgusting imagery, but it’s definitely not pleasant. The life of a farmer in an Irish bog was *not pleasant*. Considering this what might the last line, “I’ve no spade to follow men like him”. What does he mean by saying he doesn’t have a spade?

He’s saying that the life his father lived is not for him, that there is no longer a need to spend everyday shoveling peat and picking potatoes, that he has no inherent desire to follow in his fathers footsteps (no roots in his head).

8) And finally the last stanza

The author returns to the present. Reflecting on what we said earlier about digging and its importance to the father and to the family, what do you think the narrator means by “I’ll dig with my pen”