Rosemary: Seamus, when did you first know that you were a poet?

Seamus: Well, being a poet I think is slightly unknowable. I began to think of myself as a poet at a specific moment. I mean I had published three books at the time and it was when I left my job in Belfast in 1972 and came with my wife and children to a cottage in Irish Public(?) in -- yes, after three books. I committed myself to writing full-time or freelance writing, whatever you want to call it and I felt I had followed my calling at that point. I had discovered something like conviction, confidence and had committed my life to it in a different way. I think there's a difference between the joy of doing something creative, the suddenness, the magical change that is glimpsed when you do something that you think is right, that rewards you, that confirms something in yourself. Writing your first poem, writing poems, I mean I've made this distinction before, writing poems and being a poet are different things.

Rosemary: They're different, yes.

Seamus: And I mean writing poems are totally satisfactory, joyful, really life-changing in a way for people. For myself it was. But there hovers that other very archaic almost sacred (?) term still in any language I guess, even in English which has been secularized, the word poet retains some kind of large aura of mystique or quality or whatever, vocation, responsibility to something that's not quite nebulous but it's there. So to call -- I mean to call yourself and say that I am a poet, I was very shy of the term because it is so large and going back to our visit, our trip to Wicklow and or going to Wicklow and our children at that stage. After I'd been there for a year, they had to go to the local school. So I went down to enroll them with them that morning and I had been used to saying, "What's your profession? What's your occupation?" I would say lecturer or freelance writer or something, always avoiding the large sacred term. And the headmaster when he came up to me, he put in the names of the kids and of course it being a public environment the official language that they speak was Irish. So he filled in their names and came to the column that said occupation of the parent or whatever it was and he put in in Irish the word file which means poet. That's that.

Rosemary: Wow. That was the stamp.

Seamus: I thought that was the stamp given.

Rosemary: When you were in Belfast, what kind of work did you do there?
Seamus: Well, I was a schoolteacher from 1962 to 1963. I was an upwardly mobile graduate for many years in Belfast. I had a first class honors degree in English from Queens University. I did a year of teacher training. I went into a school in Belfast in Ballymurphy, a kind of deprived area where I was teaching. No real fulfillment, a lot of panic, not really sure that I was teaching right. And at that stage of course I think in a desperate compensatory move, that's when I really began to try to write. Then I went from the school to a teacher training college which was a third level institution and I was teaching English there, lecturing in English. I mean it was a higher grade of engagement represented by the word lecturer. So and at that point I was beginning to write. And I really began to write in October, 1962, in earnest, with excitement and that was when I had started to teach.

Rosemary: Wow. So you were teaching and writing.

Seamus: Yes. I mean this is school teaching, when I say…

Rosemary: How old were your students?

Seamus: Oh, they were from the age of 12. There were different classes. I was teaching kids from the age of 12, another group, 14/15, and another group of what we called in those benighted days ESN, educationally sub-normal. I had them for physical education so I just had to kick football and play in the park with them. Anyway, I did write at Queen's University as an undergraduate. I mean I did English. I was packed with poetry and I mean poetry, I responded to…

Rosemary: And papers, papers on poetry?

Seamus: Right. I wrote a lot of essays and so on, yes.

Rosemary: Well, you learned a lot about poetry in doing that, didn't you?

Seamus: That's where I learned almost everything about poetry in my undergraduate years.

Rosemary: Because when I reread your Nobel Prize speech and some of your other prose writing and you referred to Yeats and Frost and Bishop and the whole range.

Seamus: Yes. Oddly enough, Yeats I read later on mostly. I mean I read two or three, a few poems of Yeats' early on but it was the English, the canon of English literature, I mean from Beowulf through Chaucer through Wyatt and Surrey through Shakespeare through the metaphysical poets, Milton, 18th century, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Victarias(?), right up to T.S. Eliot, W. H. Auden and I mean I didn't really read that many novels there. I didn't have a way of talking about them properly. I liked Hardy a lot and I liked Lawrence a lot, but it was mostly poetry.
So I had a very strong internalized sense and I realized of English verse and of stanzas and of lines I was tuned if you like by the canon, by the canonical literature of English.

Rosemary: How about Irish language in literature?

Seamus: I had that in a way I had French and Latin that in terms of knowing what was there and knowing the language but of course culturally speaking I had it in a different way. It was -- I mean I considered myself Irish as opposed to British. It was important in Northern Ireland. It was a badge of not only ethnicity but cultural fidelity and so on. So Irish did mean a lot to me but I don't think in terms of what I might call a genesis or the genetic ear. The way I wrote, I don't think Irish language poetry. I'm not conscious of that. I mean it will be present in if you like the folk element in my own tradition which is writing in heavy rhythms and recitation and songs maybe either of a ______ fashioned Irish style singing, very traditional, very Arabic or West Indian or ro-da-de-down(?) Irish folk stuff. But I'm not conscious of at that stage anyway of any Irish language influence.

Rosemary: Well, then I also read about how you talk about having your ear up to the radio and listening to the BBC on the one hand and then hearing your parent's conversations and the rhythms of the household on the other hand and those two, the interplay of those. That's a very powerful image, that idea.

Seamus: Well, I think that is almost the whole thing really as terms of metaphor, the in between-ness of one's life. I think any adolescent is in between I mean so many languages and so many places.

Rosemary: But especially that culture.

Seamus: Well, Northern Ireland was compounded by political identity, nationality. Also was British, also was Irish. So yes, there's ______ where I say pronunciation ran tyrannically from the BBC but that's probably okay. I mean much is made of the unionist populations, crisis of identity in Northern Ireland but the nationalist Catholic, whatever the hell you want to call the minority, they were caught between things also. I mean they were living in the north but they were dwelling in some ways, not all of them, not all the time but they were dwelling over the border in your mind a little bit. But that could be an overstatement. I mean that’s taking it far too diagrammatic and far too origin…

Rosemary: It was more myth.

Seamus: Exactly.
Rosemary: My family is from County Down. My father's parents came from County Down in 1914. So he was born in the States but six months after they arrived but he was conceived in County Down. But they were from the other side, the Protestant side and in fact I'm going to go visit my cousins in ____ Ireland. So I heard, I always heard my grandparents' stories.

Seamus: Yes, of course.

Rosemary: So at any rate, when I first started reading your poetry when you first started coming to Emory, I guess for the Ellmann Lectures.

Seamus: That's right. Yes.

Rosemary: That was brilliant, the Ellmann Lectures. Ron Schuchard has done such a fabulous job of that.

Seamus: Emory represented a terrific excitement to me because of Ron, because of the people he introduced me to and indeed because of the guy who was, blind fellow who used to sing Yeats' poems who was doing a -- this was a lad who was doing a PhD I think on what Ron has just published a book on, the Minstrel, the Age of the Minstrel. This lad had -- he was blind and he played a sultry(?), the instrument that Yeats had made for him in the 1890s with _____. Anyway, the first night there I went to Ron's house and this lad sang Yeats’ poem _____ a blind minstrel that was extraordinary, and they, the pair of them Ron ______ such majestic figures, majestic in their generosity and _____.

Rosemary: Very generous, yes.

Seamus: _____

Rosemary: The full life.

Seamus: Very, yes.

Rosemary: Yes, that lecture series has transformed our campus--it’s something to--and this coming year Umberto Eco is coming to campus and just the wide range.

Seamus: _____ an electrical charge _____ speaking of creativity.

Rosemary: Yes, yes, absolutely. I think that's a great description.

Seamus: Well it does change . I mean the presence of somebody like that on campus changes the atmosphere for a while, all right.
Rosemary: What year was that, that you came to Emory?


Rosemary: So I had just finished -- I had just started -- I finished my dissertation and I had young children. I was just starting to do some writing myself. And so I didn't, I actually didn't know much about your poetry at all. I knew your name but I didn't know much about it. But by going to the lectures and hearing them, then I started reading the poetry and it opened up a whole world, a whole new view for me.

Seamus: Those lectures were, I mean _____. They were written at a time when I was really exhausted, I would have preferred not to have done any lecturing. So they were done quite quickly I have to say and I look at them with some anxiety now.

Rosemary: I see.

Seamus: But it was a great time. It was and certainly -- the honor of it, doing the Ellmann thing and apparently Ellmann _____ suggested _____ for the job so that was great. But yes.

Rosemary: One thing you talk about is -- I can't remember exactly where it is but maybe in the Nobel lecture where you talk about poetry being a kind of concentration and a kind of focus, that concentration that reflects back ______.

Seamus: Oh yes, that's right.

Rosemary: And I'm wondering if in our time because it's so highly -- there's so many distractions of not just the usual distractions, but the electronic distractions, if poetry has a harder time surfacing in such a distractible culture.

Seamus: Well, I think it's hard to say how poetry surfaces. I am blessed with the opportunity to do poetry readings that have large audiences. So I would say poetry surfaces there in those auditoria and there's certainly something good I think and some commonality of concentration or attention or listening or daydreaming in _____ happens at the best of those, undoubtedly and it's made current in a communal setting, but the doubt persists where -- I mean that's actually a performance, it's a theatrical moment and there is in our culture I think -- I mean when I say our culture from about the invention of printing on, from reading, from silent reading begins there's a question of what constitutes in fact the reality of the poem. One definition that I would have is the -- I never thought of this before but it's true -- that which is respected by your peers as a work and that can be different from the poems which are current and most visible, what's the word we use, most ______.
Rosemary: Fully...

Seamus: Yes. And visible or whatever. For example, undoubtedly the most, undoubtedly, the most quoted poem of my own in recent years has been one that rhymes, that is traditional in that sense, that has an uplifting message and that was part of the public language at the peace process. It was a poem -- it was a chorus that I wrote for a play called *The Cure at Troy* and it’s full of decent sentiments ______ chorus, a great chorus has to speak general truths and the quoted stanza is “history says, stood hope on this side of the grave, but then once in a lifetime the long for tidal wave of justice can rise up and hope and history rhyme,” so hope for a great change and so on. Now that, I mean I believe in that. At the same time, it was written for a communal voice. It was written as a dramatic speech.

Rosemary: It had its own setting.

Seamus: Yes, that's right. And I'm not sure my peers in the arts would have considered this decent rhetoric, you know? So I think it's…

Rosemary: More theatre than poetry.

Seamus: That's right. So it has visibility, it has currency, it is part of the discourse of the culture, the political culture as well as the -- well, probably world political culture than the poetical culture. But I'm not sure that poetry needs that, poetry per se. Poetry is ______ of other poetry goes into -- it's the regard, I think, of peers. It's the other poets and other intensely passionate readers, those are your audience and then typically all ______ long distinction there is a public also and the public isn't - - not -- I mean it's not to be demeaned. It's just that they listen through -- first of all you broadcast your own signal. If you're lucky, the receiving stations of the first passionate interest group picks them up. Then if you're lucky again that group transmits it to an outer cultivated listening public who are the audience for art and keep the culture moving. And then if you're very lucky or unlucky, whatever, you go beyond that into the general public and you become a name and people don't need to know your work just to know that you're there. And I think…

Rosemary: And sometimes those converge.

Seamus: Of course they do. I mean that's a good thing.

Rosemary: Right and so that's like you giving a big poetry reading and then somebody like me hearing your poetry and then going and studying it and learning it and so there's -- it becomes, one develops into the other.

Seamus: That's right. But that is a good development. I mean that is a -- I'm not saying these are really bad developments in poetry readings but you can't expect more.
than maybe three percent of the audience maybe to look at a book afterwards. I mean that's overstating it maybe, but there's something in it, you know. So I think if you think of the United States, I mean Frost was a poet who had the respect of peers and then had a definite affect on the culture and made poetry current and retained his integrity I think as a writer and he was always a bit of a rogue. But Frost survived it and I think in a different way Robert Lowell but this is a different age, you’re quite right, at the age of print it was very different.

Rosemary: Yes, it is and the simultaneity of things happening.

Seamus: Yes. Well, I’m kind of living in the past to some extent.

Rosemary: Yes, well that's probably okay.

Seamus: Well I think for poetry it is. I mean undoubtedly. I mean my poetry lives in the past anyway.

Rosemary: In your past.

Seamus: In memory, yes. I mean the origins of most of the stuff I do is out of a different world from this one. I look for corroboration to other writers _____, I think, I mentioned Hardy who _____ in 1928 _____ 1840.

Rosemary: There are some things about the present that are better. In one of your speeches you say something like you hope that the partition will become something more like…

Seamus: A tennis _____.

Rosemary: A tennis _____.

Seamus: Yes.

Rosemary: And I suppose that that’s happened. Do you think so?

Seamus: Well, I mean in this country?

Rosemary: In this country, yes.

Seamus: Oh, undoubtedly, yes. And I think, I mean can say without fear of contradiction that the arts have -- I mean they haven't changed the world but they've contributed to that.

Rosemary: Right, absolutely.
Seamus: They are kind of borderless in our partic -- I mean they're borderless all around. If you get across the border, _____; nobody's going to stop them. They're going to be…

Rosemary: Can't stop them. They can't be stopped.

Seamus: No, no. But the good thing is that Irish writers operate in the all Ireland context, I mean. I mean it would be difficult for a poet or writer in Northern Ireland to stop attention at the border _____ you've got Joyce and Yeats down here and so on. _____ but it's -- yes and I said once that the ironies and sympathies and tolerances and subtleties of the poets are _____ any imaginative writer. It's what's called for in the politics. It's what's in people. In Northern Ireland, each side, once they're called sides they're doomed. Once they are individuals they're grand. And at least literature appeals to that first solitary theater of individual consciousness which needs to be firmed up, which needs help to credit its better impulses. There's a line of, two lines of Derek Mahon's that I love to quote that the ideal future shines out of our better nature. Mahon might _____ because again it's a bit uplifting. But I think it is true of the effects of reading novels, of going to poetry readings and in our own context, in the domestic context I think that is healing, homeopathic activity to go and sit and no doubt that good effects are flowing from the writing, the reading, and the reading out loud of poetry.

Rosemary: I absolutely agree.

Seamus: And novels and so on. One of my favorite stories is about two Scottish poets. Norman MacCaig was a very ironical Scotsman and Scots Gallic poet called _____ McClain(?), a very bardic, a very solemn man who wrote in Scots Gallic and who was a headmaster in a school for many, many years. But when he came to Edinburgh to read one time, it took him a long time to get started. He took out his watch and he patted his _____ papers and dropped them and spoke to his wife in the front row and questioning and answering and so on. So MacCaig was sitting in the front row opposite of -- sat on the stage whispered to someone beside him, "I knew _____ was going to read," he said, "But I thought he was going to read out loud." So there is that thing which is called _____ reading into yourself. The master used to say to us, "Read into yourselves for a while, boys," when he wanted silence. Then there's reading out loud and I think both have their place. Reading into yourself is a crucial one. Reading out loud, you can listen and take into yourself.

Rosemary: How do you, with all of the attention on you and all of the energy in the air, how do you write poetry now? How do you maintain that poetic voice inside yourself?
Seamus: Well, I wish I knew because I’d like to do it a bit more. I think that the self forgetfulness is what's to be discovered in the act of writing and the act of reading I suppose. And that is -- it's hard to know how to do that. I mean, after my first book was published -- I keep saying I've been used to the problem from the beginning. My first book was very well received, over-praised probably. Even I knew that but who was I to go around saying it?

Rosemary: That's right.

Seamus: And to go back to the beginning of our conversation, I guess it wasn't until my fourth book came out that I felt I had earned much that had been said about the first. I had a very easy passage into reputation if you like. But as a result of that, as I say, from the beginning I was very conscious that I was under scrutiny or that I had that -- I was Seamus Heaney in inverted commas as well as myself and so I'd been used to trying to dodge myself I suppose and I don't -- I can't really answer your question in any clear way, Rosemary, because I do -- I depend on what use to be called a very old-fashioned term, inspiration or energy or surprise or an injection, a jag. And it's mostly for lyric poems, the short poems that I write. There has to be something like a beeper going off in your consciousness to waken some little excitement. And the little excitement based on an image, based on the memory, based on maybe an idea, very rarely on an idea. It's usually more an image or a memory or…

Rosemary: An emotion?

Seamus: I don't know about an emotion, no. I think the emotion coheres around the image or memory or bleep, you know? Wordsworth talked about emotion recollected in tranquility but he also said that _____, that occurred but then he said in this -- when you're in the course -- when you recollect that, when you remember that thing, a second emotion appears akin to the first but not the same and in this mood, he said, successful composition usually occurs. So the emotion recollection and tranquility is the beginning of a process that leads to the writing feeling, whatever that is. I used to read -- I did read. I shouldn't say I used to read. I read once with great excitement a book by the _____ Thomis philosopher, Jacques Maritain, who was a very famous Catholic intellect _____ in the '50s. And he wrote a book called *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* and it was kind of highly philosophical but he had three stages of -- I've almost forgotten what they were but one was create emotion _____, I mean a desire, a need, a sense of possibility opening up. And then the second thing, Maybe he called it creative action, I don’t know, _____ cohering around something. And then the third thing, the finding of the words which in a sense is the easiest part. Once you're at that stage, once you're moving into language, and once that language starts to move that is then technique and pleasure. But you have to get the excitement or the creative emotions met. I know the word…
Rosemary: The desire?

Seamus: The desire maybe, the desire, yes. The desire. And I should go back to October, 1962. This is quite old-fashioned also. It's been -- I met this lady who excited me, I mean not just in terms of desire but in terms of coming alive. And it was at the same time I came on the poetry of Ted Hughes at the same time. I came alive literally. So the two things, meeting someone who became Mrs. Heaney. There's something very dull about a muse who is called Mrs. Heaney but that was kind of muse energy in the air, woman energy and a new poetry energy. And yeah, I didn't write about -- I didn't write love poetry _____. But there was a quickening of the whole _____.

Rosemary: One writer, Raymond Carver, says all poetry is love poetry.

Seamus: Well, maybe so.

Rosemary: What do you think?

Seamus: That would be stretching it a bit. I regret to say I can’t, I don't agree with that but I mean I like the idea. I like it. I do. I mean maybe all his poetry is love poetry but…

Rosemary: Yes, I don't know his poetry. I know his short stories. But I don't know his poetry but I thought that was an interesting…

Seamus: Well, it's rather beautiful. But a lot of the poetry that meant most to me in my later years was Eastern European poetry. By a poet like _____ Herbert was classical and allegorical if you like and political. Although, the other great classical and I think a great political poet himself is almost entirely a love poet that's _____. Greek, great, homoerotic poet. And Yeats certainly. He can make a case for Elliot also I think frustrated love, certainly Auden, Dylan Thomas.

Rosemary: Some of your poetry that I love the most has to do with Sweeney poetry which is historic and mythical and seems also, to me at least, seems personal and epic and you have two sets. You have the translation and then you have the later…

Seamus: _____.

Rosemary: Right, right.

Seamus: I think those were some of the best poems I've written actually.
Rosemary: I love those poems. In fact, I was reading those when I was at the Anna McCarick(?).

Seamus: They're Free(?) and Devil May Care were written very quickly. And speaking of creativity, in my own case the quicker the better. I mean maybe that's not quite true: The quicker the more enjoyable, the more durable, a joy to you as a writer but I mean there are certainly poems that I've written more slowly that I regard and still have a great trust in and affection for. But poems that come quickly, I think it's because they go back to the mythic sense of the poet. It gives you a sense that you are partaking in what is ancient about the art, that the muse is somewhere around, that this was given to you from somewhere. So those poems have a particular trustworthiness for you. And they often are some of the best I think also.

Rosemary: In one of the -- it might be one of those quotable quotes, but I guess the last poem On the Road, which that term has a lot of meaning, especially in America. You've read Jack Kerouac and all the…?

Seamus: Yes.

Rosemary: So anyway, enough so there's a famous country music song by Willie Nelson called On the Road Again. Do you know that?

Seamus: That's good. When I can hear it I can understand it.

Rosemary: It's beautiful, yes. And so that on the road idea in America is a very powerful mythic idea. But anyway, in that poem you say something like all roads are one.

Seamus: There's a good few poems that might originate on drives and Mary(?) often noticed that my fingers go on the steering wheel counting de dum…de dum…de dum. So that’s got a little secret pleasure but yeah, the trance is driving me all roads are one. Well, it's truth. Yes. It is one form of self hypnosis if you like. I suppose I shouldn’t be saying this but you can't be attentive 100 percent and daydreaming or self forgetful, yes, and things come up and a lot you can work with, lines and all about losing attention to the road ahead.

Rosemary: Do you remember them when you stop?

Seamus: I must. Yes, I think so. I can't remember ever -- I tell you, the only time I really made up a poem that was in my head and I hurried to write it down was the very - - one of the very first poems I took myself seriously on. And that was in I think about October, 1962.

Rosemary: Very beginning.
Seamus: Yes. And I had read a poem by Ted Hughes and I’ve forgotten which poem? I think it might have been Docker or Turkeys Observed. The first poem I had -- well, there are three poems that came very early. There was one called Docker. There was one called Tractors. There was one called Turkeys Observed. Tractors didn't get into the book, the first book. The other two did. But I remember walking along and feeling the charge that came from reading Hughes and putting this charge into _____ Tractors or -- but they were in all those poems. But whatever the first one was I did walking up from Queen’s University to my flat and I walked in quickly and wrote it down. I think that was what…

Rosemary: That was the inspiration.

Seamus: That was the beginning, yes.

Rosemary: Yes, that was the inspiration.

Seamus: But usually I'm sitting down and yeah.

Rosemary: Well, anyway, it's really just a great pleasure to -- I feel like I know you because I've seen you at Emory. I've read your poetry. I've heard Ron and others speak. So especially, you came and gave a reading when Bill Chace…

Seamus: That's right, yes.

Rosemary: …stepped down as President.

Seamus: That was very moving to me actually. It was Chace _____.

Rosemary: Yes, it was very moving to everybody. And especially to have you there. So it was a great moment.

Seamus: I think just the magical thing about writing love poems, I think that's important to say that, that for people who wouldn't necessarily consider to be published or anything like that. But I think there is a reconstitution of confidence of some sort if you complete something whole and ____. The problem is I think it's hard to know when you have done that. And I think you're always wondering if what I've done is a poem. And I mean I've often said this to myself, but when I wrote the poem called Digging, I didn't care. I felt I'd struck the vein or hit…

Rosemary: And that's one of your most famous poems.

Seamus: Yes.
Rosemary: And it's so interesting because it has the farm and…

Seamus: Yes, it's got the makings of the thing, yes.

Rosemary: Right and it also has the archeological.

Seamus: That's right, yes.

Rosemary: All of those qualities to it.

Seamus: But I think actually coming from the Yeats _____, Yeats, the love poetry thing, the woman thing, the sexuality thing and creativity cannot be underestimated undoubtedly and I mean Yeats' operation at the end, his standard of operation to give himself sexual potency, even though it didn't work physically I've heard it worked for him creatively.

Rosemary: _____.

Seamus: Yes, right and had a regenerating effect.

Rosemary: Right.

Seamus: On the other hand, when you have someone like -- I shouldn't be speculating about anybody’s life, but I think one of the great poets of the last century and into this century was _____ and he was writing in his 90s and he got married again I suppose after his first wife died.

Rosemary: Right, he did.

Seamus: And then he lost his wife and I suppose erotic energy is -- _____ isn’t the subject all the time. It was there quite a lot of times. But there's so much more. But towards the end of his life it was not a Yeatsian crazy desire thing but a kind of plenitude serenity thing. I think serenity is too mild a term for it but it's a settled…

Rosemary: Dissatisfaction?

Seamus: A settled dissatisfaction _____.

Rosemary: Yes, it seems like in poetry there always has to be a bit of dissatisfaction…

Seamus: Yes.

Rosemary: …for there to be the energy.
Seamus: I know. That's right.

Rosemary: Do you know the poet Stanley Chinnup(?)?

Seamus: Indeed I do, yes.

Rosemary: And he wrote until he was…

Seamus: Yes.

Rosemary: …very old as well.

Seamus: Well, he got -- he got plenty of wounds early on I think. This kept him going. It's a different kind of -- it wasn't exactly -- he was probably bitter, driven by bitterness, lived by it, just in terms of literary terms. He didn't get great reception I don't think. But he was, again, credited by peers quite a lot and he was cherished by student poets who became fully fledged poets and he lived -- I think he lived a fairly deliberately poetical life I think also. And _____ happiness early on, definitely, yes.

Rosemary: And then got a lot of attention in the later years, got several, won several major prizes I think in his 90s.

Seamus: That's right.

Rosemary: So just to bring it around, for our students who want to develop their own creative spirit, what advice do you have for them?

Seamus: I think stay close to material. If you're a writer, stay close to material that awakens you. Even though it may not get great credit, I mean you can have a critical assessment of a writer and nevertheless feel affection, love, and energy from that writer. But of course maybe there’s second rate writer who does first rate things for you. I think stay close to that. And of course as Yeats said, the imitation of great masters, yes. But also if possible, stay close to people who waken you. I mean I think young writers _____ are kind of important, and a sense of solidarity or companionship with others. I mean quite often it's difficult to feel the reality of your venture or trust it unless you have friendship, companionship, or some little community together. I mean quite often of course that is supplied I suppose by the workshops that you mentioned, by the university situation. My own situation was that I did English literature and it wasn't until my 20s when I began to do some writing on my own. But I went to a workshop called The Group in Belfast. And there, The Group was important but more important were the people and the friendships that developed out of that.
So I think being young writers together in your 20s and 30s and then growing apart in your 40s and 50s, that's a part of the game.

Rosemary: That's the cycle.

Seamus: I think so, yes. So the energy comes from peers, not rivalry but something like -- the words aren't quite right, rivalry, competition but you are kept going and kept up to the mark by your companions and you will show them your work. And that is invaluable and the joy really. But I don't know what else to say. I mean it's quite mysterious the whole thing.

Rosemary: It is mysterious.

Seamus: Self trust is so central to it.

Rosemary: Sometimes you have to let it be mysterious and not over analyze it.

Seamus: Yes. The question is whether you can get any better at it. I'm not sure you can ever get better at it but you can get -- well, that's a foolish thing to say but there is a given, there's phasient aspect to it. I remember I used to say at the beginning of poetry workshops I taught in Harvard at the beginning of the semester when we'd meet and I had to describe the course to the people wanting to get into it, 60 or 70 or 80 people in 12 places. And I developed this perhaps false distinction but I said that I would be involved with your capacity as writers but not with your destiny. And it may have been a little _____ because unfortunately the students go into that situation think that their destiny is bound up with getting into the workshop. But when I say destiny, I take Ted Hughes’ destiny _____ class destinies _____ were bound together. Frost and _____ Edward Thomas _____ their destiny were bound together. Lowell and Bishop, in some way their destinies were bound together. Wordsworth and Coolidge, their destinies were bound together. Robert Browning and Elizabeth Bard, their destinies were bound together.

Rosemary: Heaney and…?

Seamus: I don't know. Maybe -- well, I was influenced. I think to be wakened up by a writer isn't necessarily to be -- well…

Rosemary: You were awakened up by Hughes.

Seamus: Wakened up by Hughes and also Patrick Cavanaugh here, but I was privileged to get to know Ted and I only felt that his friendship was a confirmation to it, all through.

Rosemary: And his papers now are also…
Seamus: They're _____.

Rosemary: So you are now connected.

Seamus: Yes. But I think that to get -- I mean, in Hughes’ case, you begin to shower you with the accolades and then you become a friend. But always in that respect and…

Rosemary: What was the difference in age between you and Ted Hughes?

Seamus: Oh, it was at least ten years. Ted died in 1998 when he was 68 I think. What age was I in 1998?

Rosemary: It would have been ten years ago.

Seamus: 59 was it?

Rosemary: Ten years ago.

Seamus: Yes, ten years, it was ten years difference, which is -- when you're 22 and he's 32…

Rosemary: It's a generation.

Seamus: It's a big difference, yes._____. But as I say, I think that help from other writers can come mysteriously. I mean to stand close to someone that you respect and not even have to talk to but to feel that you have encouragement and that they haven't spurned you, that in a mysterious way can be important too.

Rosemary: Yes. You used the term before, the soft confidence.

Seamus: Yes, I mean I knew Elizabeth Bishop for a term in Harvard and just _____ before she died in September, 1979. Marie and I and the kids were in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the spring of ’79. And it could be said we became friendly with Elizabeth Bishop, with Elizabeth _____ and we probably talked about poetry but in an oblique, merry way and then I never asked her to sign a book I felt it would intrude on something. But the fact that there was that kind of merriment and direct exchange and no hiding from each other.

Rosemary: A rapport.

Seamus: Yes and rapport. You felt that is verification of some sort. I felt that was the same as Lowell when I met him_____.
Rosemary: What about Robert Fitzgerald?

Seamus: Robert Fitzgerald was great to me. He was great. I mean that welcome that I got from him in Harvard, he wrote a piece about me in the New Republic. But again, he made me feel an equal when I landed as a _____.

Rosemary: And he was a literary giant.

Seamus: Yes. He was, not only was he a professor but _____, friend of Flannery O'Connor, etcetera. But his personal style was heroical and low key and it was very genuine attentiveness. He gave me his study in that year, 1979. He was off somewhere. He was off on sabbatical I think. So I lived in one of the best quarters in Harvard in the _____ library _____ study belonged to Robert.

Rosemary: So I can imagine you sitting there in his study and that would give you a great sense of connection to the place in the world of literature.

Seamus: Yes. But funny I always wrote when I came back from Harvard. I didn't write much ever when I was there because I was a -- perilous perhaps division into the executive and the _____ the writing self. When I was always a teacher, even though I went freelance or what, three years I was, then I went back into teaching and then we had our third baby and we came to this house in 1976 for the sake of the children to go to school and so on and I went back into full-time _____ education, head of an English Department, busy as hell at that and then Harvard came into play and they offered me this chance to go one term a year. But I was always _____ contrary _____ way saying I earned my keep. I won't trade on my poetic passport to be _____ creative. And I don't believe in that division, that there's creative guy and then there's the…

Rosemary: The working stiff.

Seamus: Yes. I want to do my work like everybody else. In other words, creativity doesn't exempt you from service. And that was a _____.

Rosemary: I agree with you. I think you're absolutely right about that. You're not in some separate echelon.

Seamus: No. But then I begin to wonder as older I get.

Rosemary: Well, now you have the…

Seamus: More time actually.
Rosemary: Yes. Yes.

Seamus: When you're earning your living, that's the other thing.

Rosemary: Yes. Well, you have the privilege. You have the certain privileges at a point. You earned the privilege of…

Seamus: Yes. But that was truly my feeling and that's why I did -- I mean I worked fully at my job and as you know yourself teaching is not -- it is a challenge.

Rosemary: Yes, that's right.

Seamus: And I also to be truthful realized I did a hell of a lot of traveling and really, and I enjoyed that, believed in it and there was a conviction about it. So that was okay. But there comes a point when you've done it too often and I mean I have less certainty about doing readings now to tell you truth, more anxiety about it. When I read my -- I mean I know a lot of the poems that _____ best. I've read them before to audiences and I begin to see, this is too audience friendly.

Rosemary: Well, you also want to feel fresh, you want it to feel fresh.…

Seamus: Yes, that's right.

Rosemary: …something that’s over baked or over cooked even though it's new to them you may want it to feel fresh for yourself.

Seamus: That's right. So I think…

Rosemary: You're very generous in your time…

END