

BOY DRIVING HIS FATHER TO CONFESSION

Four times now I have seen you as another
Man, a grown-up friend, less than a father;
Four times found chinks in the paternal mail
To find you lost like me, quite vulnerable.
Twice it was your incredible distress,
Once your adult laughter, now your weakness.
There was the time when my child-brother died
And in the porch, among the men, you cried.
Again, last year, I was shocked at your tears
When my mother's plane took off: in twelve years
You had not been apart for one whole day
Until this long-threatened, two-week holiday.
I left you lonely at the barrier,
Was embarrassed later when you stood a beer.
The third time you made a man of me
By telling me an almost smutty story
In a restaurant toilet; we both knew
This was an unprecedented breakthrough.

Today, a sinner, and shy about it,
You asked me to drive up to church, and sit
Morose as ever, telling me to slow
On corners or at pot-holes that I know
As well as you do. What is going on
Beneath that thick grey hair? What confession
Are you preparing? Do you tell sins as I would?
Does the same hectic rage in our one blood?
Here at the churchyard I am slowing down
To meet you, the fourth time, on common ground.
You grunt and slam the door. I watch another
Who gropes as awkwardly to know his father.

Seamus Heaney