EULOGY NEVILLE SYMINGTON Dec 19 2019.

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When the Irish poet Seamus Heaney died a few years back numerous letters were written to newspapers all over the world. A man from Co Kildare, Ireland, wrote a letter to *The Irish Times*. It read: ‘*Sir, I am saddened. As a nation we are a man down*.’

The Symington family is a man down. Psychoanalysis in Sydney, in Australia and worldwide is a man down. And the wider collective of people interested in the life of the mind, is a man down.

I first met Neville in 1979. I attended a year of his lectures at the Tavistock Clinic in London. His lectures offered stepping stones, into the past, into the future, into an internal world, into a world of ideas. (Those lectures became his first book *The Analytic Experience*.) I felt something then that would take some time to articulate. It is this: for a person, freedom and creativity go hand in hand. Freedom is not license. Freedom is the removal of constraints that others or circumstances have placed on our minds, or in our hearts, but more often the constraints we have placed on ourselves, constraints we have grown to live with and have forgotten how they got there. Finding them, articulating them and their removal requires emotional engagement with another human being.

I began to learn those things in Neville Symington’s presence forty years ago.

Neville has provided stepping stones for many people with his lectures over the years.

And in the books, those stepping stones are there to be found.

The English writer William Hazlitt said, *‘Most men’s minds are like musical instruments out of tune. Touch a particular key and it jars and makes harsh discord with your own*.’

Neville knew he needed to keep his own mind in tune. His lectures and his twelve books often ploughed the same ground, going deeper, keeping the mind in tune, keeping the mind free. He offered space, for exploration, for conversation, for further thought. I am grateful to have had as a lecturer, as a colleague and a friend, a man who, with feet firmly on the ground could point to minute changes of light and shadow inside the mind of another human being, a man who could rise up and take a bird’s eye view, a man who if he grabbed hold of his opinions too tightly and required forceful challenge, could, respectfully release his grip, a man who each day marveled at the simple, mysterious fact of possessing precious life, a man who, as his life receded, spoke openly of gracefully relinquishing that life.

Neville believed that no matter how interested and passionate you were about your life’s work, that it was good to forget it at times, and turn yourself to other things: to philosophy, to literature, to art, to science, to flying a plane, to anything that caught your interest.

Neville and Joan and I and a number of other analysts formed a poetry reading group about 20 years ago under the guidance of Jane Adamson. Before each meeting Jane would fax us the poems to be read. Recently while sorting out papers I came across some of the old fax sheets. The paper had yellowed and the print was faded, and words were hard to see.

But in the last few weeks a clear and vivid memory came in to my mind. It was of the evening at the Sydney Institute for Psychoanalysis at Penshurst St when we read the set of poems, eight sonnets, called Clearances, which Seamus Heaney wrote about the life and the death of his mother.

In sonnet seven Seamus is with his father and his sisters around his mother’s death bed. She was there.

*Then she was dead,*

*The searching for a pulsebeat was abandoned*

*And we all knew one thing by being there.*

*The space we stood around had been emptied*

*Into us, to keep...*

The 8th and final sonnet is about a chestnut tree. The day Seamus Heaney was born his Aunt Mary put a chestnut in a jam-jar. When it sprang small roots, it was planted in the front hedge of their house beside the wallflowers. He grew up with regular comparisons made between him and the growing tree. The family moved and the new owners cut the tree down. Seamus Heaney was very upset. He imagined the tree’s end. The hatchet hacking at its base. Chips flying. The tree falling.

Then, after a while, something strange happened. Having identified with the tree, he began to identify with the space where the tree had been. ‘I saw it’, he said, ‘*as a Luminous emptiness’.*

The space that Neville occupied, has been emptied, into us, to keep.

Sonnet Eight

*I thought of walking round and round a space  
Utterly empty, utterly a source  
Where the decked chestnut tree had lost its place  
In our front hedge above the wallflowers.*

*The white chips jumped and jumped and skited high.*

*I heard the hatchet’s differentiated*

*Accurate cut, the crack, the sigh*

*And collapse of what luxuriated*

*Through the shocked tips and wreckage of it all.*

*Deep planted and long gone, my coeval*

*Chestnut from a jam jar in a hole,*

*Its heft and hush become a bright nowhere,*

*A soul ramifying and forever*

*Silent, beyond silence listened for.*