
Kluwer Mediation Blog

And Hope and History Rhyme...

Sabine Walsh (Sabine Walsh Mediation) · Saturday, October 5th, 2013

Six weeks ago, Ireland lost one of its greatest poets when Seamus Heaney, Nobel Laureate, died at the age of 74. A native of Derry, he was a member of the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland and thus no stranger to tension and conflict. The passages which I want to share with you this month are from his work *The Cure at Troy* which is a verse adaptation of Sophocles' play *Philoctetes* relating to the Trojan war.

I should point out that I am by no means the first to quote these verses in the context of mediation and conflict resolution. Bill Clinton used excerpts from it when speaking to the people of Derry during the 1995 Northern Ireland peace process, perhaps one of the most remarkable examples of mediation in a political context in modern history. More recently, Joe Biden quoted some of the lines below during a memorial service for a police officer killed in the Boston marathon bombings.

While my sharing of these lines might not have nearly such importance or significance, I think it is no harm for those of us working in the field of peace making, on however individual a level, to remember why we do it and how profound an impact it can have.

The death of Seamus Heaney is a great loss to our troubled little island, but his works will enrich the lives of generations to come. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam.

Human beings suffer,
They torture one another,
They get hurt and get hard.
No poem or play or song
Can fully right a wrong
Inflicted and endured.

The innocent in gaols
Beat on their bars together.
A hunger-striker's father
Stands in the graveyard dumb.
The police widow in veils
Faints at the funeral home.

History says, don't hope
On this side of the grave.
But then, once in a lifetime

The longed-for tidal wave
Of justice can rise up,
And hope and history rhyme.

So hope for a great sea-change
On the far side of revenge.
Believe that further shore
Is reachable from here.
Believe in miracle
And cures and healing wells.

Call miracle self-healing:
The utter, self-revealing
Double-take of feeling.
If there's fire on the mountain
Or lightning and storm
And a god speaks from the sky

That means someone is hearing
The outcry and the birth-cry
Of new life at its term.

Seamus Heaney 1939 – 2013

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