

The Revival of Heritage and Tradition in the Poetry of Seamus

Heaney

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Abstract:

According to the critic Robert F. Garratt, most of those who immediately followed Yeats, however, were writers whose imaginations were more imitative than inventive, and they tended to repeat rather than to expand the early success of the Revival. (Garratt 3) Seamus Heaney (1939–2013) is considered a major figure of post-'Yeatsian poetry. Seamus Heaney was born on 13th April 1939, the same year Yeats died. Heaney's early poetry shows the poet's relationship with the landscape, heritage and traditions especially of childhood. This paper tries to shed light on this theme focusing on samples of poems especially those which he himself regards as an Irish unique heritage.

Key words: (heritage , tradition , history , revival).

إحياء التراث والتقاليد في شعر شيمس هيني

م. رزاق زغير شناوه

وزارة التربية، المديرية العامة للتربية في محافظة ذي قار

الملخص:

يعتقد الكاتب روبرت ف. كارت Robert F. Garrat أن أغلب من جاءوا بعد الشاعر بيتس W. B. Yeats هم مقلدون أكثر مما هم مبتكرون وتراهم يكررون ما اسس حول إحياء التراث في أشعارهم. وفي مقدمة هؤلاء الشاعر

شيمس هيني Seamus Heaney (1939 – 2013) الذي يعد من أبرز من كان لهم الدور في فترة شعر ما بعد بيتس. ولد الشاعر شيمس هيني في الثالث عشر من نيسان عام 1939 وهو نفس العام الذي توفي فيه الشاعر بيتس. وأظهر هيني تعلقا بالتراث والتقاليد منذ نعومة أظفاره.

تحاول هذه الدراسة تسليط الضوء فكرة إحياء التراث والتقاليد في شعر شيمس هيني مركزة على عينات من القصائد التي تناول تراث إيرلندا الذي يعتبره هيني فريدا من نوعه. الكلمات المفتاحية: (التراث ، التقاليد ، التأريخ ، إحياء).

In his Seamus Heaney: Poet of Contrary Progressions, the critic Henry Hart deals with the poem " The Forge " as an example of Heaney's meditative style with its dentations and connotations. As a part of reviving the Irish heritage in this poem, Heaney focuses on the creativity he sees inside the blacksmith's shop to praise the community he comes from, a community for which he wants to express solidarity in poetry. To him, the blacksmith's silent achievements are integral to everyday life. The speaker in this poem sees the blacksmith as a very important part of the community. (Hart 37)

The ' All I know is a door into the dark ' which is first line of Seamus Heaney's poem " The Forge " is used by Heaney as a title for his early volume about tradition. This poem focuses on a craft which he does not like to be abandoned. In this poem, Heaney describes the traditional craft in a blacksmith's workshop. The accuracy of his poetic language starts with the title ' forge' which does not stand for normal shop. Rather it is used for a shop where metals are shaped by being heated. Historical references are obvious in this poem since this craft is considered as one the Irish heritage crafts which are relating to farming.(Hope 20)

Going back to history is also clear in the structure of this poem. He composes it as a fourteen-line sonnet. The speaker of this poem starts with a comparison between external and internal content of the forge confessing that all what he knows is a door into the dark. He emphasizes that what is outside is just old tools such as axels and a hoop made of iron. His detailed description of what is inside conveys a message about how heritage crafts are accurate. " Outside, old axles and iron hoops rusting; / Inside, the hammered anvil's short-pitched ring 2-3"

In his Seamus Heaney, Andrew Murphy indicates that the opening part of "The Forge" represents Heaney's penetration into the dark side of the world which is beyond everyday world. Murphy adds that this poem is a call to enter the darkness or to see what is beyond the outside part of life. It also comes as an encouragement to revive the heritage with all its tools by mentioning all the smith's tools. (Murphy 22)

Sometimes, leather-aproned, hairs in his nose,
He leans out on the jamb, recalls a clatter
Of hoofs where traffic is flashing in rows;
Then grunts and goes in, with a slam and flick
To beat real iron out, to work the bellows. (9-14)

Another poem which is considered a companion to " The Forge " is "Thatcher". the thatcher's job is to support a tendency to the traditional roof making of village cottage that are normally covered by straw or ' thatch'. Heaney deals with this theme because these crafts are diminishing due to modernizing rural houses. Like " The Forge", a poem in

which Heaney describes the smith's tools in detail, "Thatcher" shows all the tools and materials used by the thatcher who is seen as a creative intelligent craftsman who – from the straw – is able to produce wonderful things. (Hope 21)

Another poem which shows how Heaney describes heritage and tradition, especially concerning farming, is his poem "Night–Piece". The title of this poem, which is the first poem in his volume *Door into the Dark*, does not give an impression that the poet is going to talk about an Irish traditional symbol which is the horse. Despite the fact that the image of horse is also tackled in other poems of Heaney such as his poem "Gone" where he talks about how a horse was 'leaving this stable unmade' with green froth, "Night–Piece" comes with an 'opalescent' way. It is a short poem in which he describes the horse and clarifies its haunch, hoof, muscle and even sponge lip.

Must you know it again?
Dull pounding through hay,
The Uneasy whinny.
A sponge lip drawn off each separate tooth.
Opalescent haunch,
Muscle and hoof
Bundled under the roof. (1–7)

The image of harvesting dominates Heaney's poem "Dream". In this poem, the speaker is having a dream in which he sees himself having a billhook. He describes both the billhook and the stalk he hacks in detail.

The head of the billhook is heavy and the stalk is thick, similar to a pole of telegraph. The image of his sleeves encourages him to continue doing this traditional farming job " My sleeves were rolled / And the air fanned cool past my arms / As I swung and buried the blade " having these childhood images as a dream show his great longing to his heritage during the days he grew up.

In the poem " The Salmon Fisher to the Salmon ", Heaney employs the salmon fish, which is an Irish heritage symbol, to indicate the theme of exile with connotative and denotative meanings. This kind of fish begins the cycle of its life in Irish freshwater rivers. The aim of its migration to the ocean is to grow and get matured. Then it returns to Irish freshwater rivers to spawn and directly die ¹.

In this poem, the fisher speaks to the fish telling the fish how the latter after setting upstream will flail inland again. Then he tells his addresses that the exile in the sea will end one day by the gravity of home water, an image which revives the heritage in a salmon form from one hand and also can be taken as a symbol to the poet's exile as well. Then, he tells the fish that the latter is taken by the lure but he will come to grief " The Lure that took you best, but here you come / To grief through hunger in your eyes " 9-10

Respecting the Irish heritage comes in a form of reviving the language accent and history in the poem " In Gallorus Oratory ", a name about which several explanations have been given. One of which is that Gall Aras, according to the Irish, means something like a house or a shelter for

foreigners especially the pilgrims who come from other areas. This place has been described as the first Irish oldest establishment to serve bed and breakfast. In this poem, Heaney revives the Irish tradition of worship when he watches and writes the Irish Catholic prayers to investigate the relations between political power and the religious heritage. (Hart 41)

You can still feel the community pack
This place is like going into a turfstack,
A core of old dark walked up with stone
A yard thick. When you 're in it alone,
You might have dropped, a reduced creature,
To the heart of the globe. No worshiper
Would leap up to his God off this floor. (1-8)

¹ <https://fawbie.info/seamus-heaney-new-collection/the-salmon-fisher-to-the-salmon/>

Being proud of heritage and history is employed by Seamus Heaney in his poem "Requiem for the Croppies" by mentioning both Irish barley and history of battles. At the beginning of the poem, which talks about the heroism of Irish fighters, the speaker describes how fighters depend on grains of barley as an uncooked food in this battle. These rebels, whom the poet describes with an Irish heritage name ' Croppies', are untrained, but they quickly and suddenly moved to fight for their country.

The first line indicates that the pockets of the long fighters' coats are full of barley which they eat during the battle because they had no kitchen. Those croppies keep their identity not only with food which has an Irish symbolic in this poem but also with the weapons used are also farming Irish tools in the hands of fighters who are ' shaking scythes at cannon ', a rich image for bravery. The battlefields they cut are the fields they cut through reins. The poet finishes the poem with the theme of the enemies' atrocity and the rebirth of his country.

Reviving history in the poem "The Ash Plant" takes another form. It is a poem which Seamus Heaney wrote in his father memory. The image of a cattle-farming father is taken as a symbol. From the very beginning of the poem Seamus Heaney indicates that his father will never be able to rise again but he is ready. The poet remembers how his father was such an active farmer that he gave no attention whether the day is bright or cloudy, a farmer whose look through the window ' on the whole country' does not bring him any fear of weather.

Heaney – keeping the identity of farming heritage – describes his father as a sentry who stares at the first lorries that carry milk and the first cattle that go out, a sentry who wakes up relieved giving much attention to his outside appearance ' disencumbered as a breaking comber '. He finishes the poem with an image of a son who feels that his father is walking among them.

Poems which are named after places, such as "Anahorish", "Toome" and "Broagh", convey Heaney's concept of poetry as a finder of something which is greater than the particular in the local and also indicate the old tradition of Ireland which is called dinnseanchas. Doing so, Heaney is of the idea that dinnseanchas tradition can open the wider history of local place. Also, employing the language proper names attracts the attention to its native history. (Murphy 23)

Going back to old history is a main theme in "Anahorish", the place of Heaney's first school. In this poem Heaney tries to rediscover what is called the lost Eden of his early days and childhood. Anahorish is a small Irish town which is near the town where Heaney grew up. Significantly, in this school he used to be with both Catholic and Protestants. So, his choice of this name takes minds back to the conflict of the sixties. (Hope 27)

The name "Anahorish" is an ' anglicized conflation of the native Irish anarch fhior uisce' . Heaney starts this poem with a translation of the Irish phrase " My place of clear water " describing this place as the first hill in which shiny grass are washed by springs. Drawing the attention of the listeners to the Irishness of the place with a language heritage which he himself refers to with the lines " Anahorish, soft gradient of consonant, vowel-meadow 6-7" , he moves to its history and by whom it was inhabited.

after-image of lamps
swung through the yards
on winter evenings.
With pails and barrows
those mound-dwellers
go waist-deep in mist
to break the light ice
at wells and dunghills. (9-12)

Being attached to the Irish farming heritage, Heaney writes "The Harvest Bow", a poem which is considered a union or a group of elements. It tackles the straw from the earth's harvest from both masculine and feminine imagination in dealing with themes of love and marriage. This poem deals with " a throwaway love-knot of straw' and other lines which stand for moments from his boyhood in rural Ireland.

In his poem "Planting the Alder", which is described as a pastoral poem, the poet expresses his love for a tree that is linked with his personal biography and history. This tree has a symbolic importance for him not only because it is linked with his birthplace but also because its branches – with their nice colours and their special gathering for rain drops – represents a unique hospitality for birds. That is why, he finishes with poem with his call for planting such a tree " Plant it, plant it, steel-head in the rain 13-14 "

As far as the musical or singing heritage is concerned, Seamus Heaney tries to immortalize the Irish natural singing or serenades by mentioning some birds. He describes a special kind of nightingale giving him a uniqueness by being Irish. This bird – to Heaney – is very small with a loud voice that his listeners cannot even hear from a singing nation. Because of this heritage specialty, the speaker finishes the poem with an image that if he waken up by a voice, he wishes that this voice comes from this bird.

The Irish nightingale
Is a sedge-warbler
A little bird with a big voice
Kicking up a racket all night.
Not what you'd expect
From the musical nation (1-6)

His indignation for his language heritage, Irish accent, is clear in the poem " Traditions". This poem can be taken as a manifesto for the minority language or accents whose speakers moaning for marginalizing their words. He gives much attention to this poem by making it longer than most of the volume poems and dividing into three parts with three stanzas for each.

He starts the poem with a metaphor, guttural muse, sighing for neglecting his Irish traditional words such as 'coccyx' and changing them into a form of 'vestigial' which was forgotten. This marginalizing for words definitely leads to marginalizing customs in a country which is " bedded

down into the British Isles ". The poet does not deny that he is proud of the Elizabethan and the Shakespearean English. At the same time he is against what is called ' archaisms' which are correct according to Shakespeare.

He finishes the poem with what he starts it with; a call for reviving Irish accent. In the beginning of the poem, he expresses his disgust upon making Irish words such as ' coccyx' and ' Brigid's Cross' vestigial. He finishes the poem by raising a question – with Irish accent 'ish' – about how his identity will be if he cannot keep his heritage.

What ish my nation?
And sensibly, though so much
Later, the wandering Bloom
Replied ' Ireland,' said Bloom
I was born here. Ireland. (32-36)

Finally, one of the most famous Heaney's poem about the history of Ireland is "At a Potato Digging". It is a long poem divided into parts in which the poet reminds the Irish people about the famine they faced in history. The only Irish heritage weapon they face famine with is farming. In this poem, the poet glorifies the role of agriculture as a heritage symbol by which the Irish people not only keep their dignity and life.

CONCLUSION

Reading the previous poems by Seamus Heaney enables the researcher to draw a conclusion that reviving tradition a heritage is one of the aims he devotes much of his poetry to. This theme has taken different Irish

forms, some poems with a high simplicity; others simple but with rich connotative meaning while ambiguity dominates other.

Significantly, Heaney does not neglect any side he feels he can revive heritage in. first, language heritage or Irish accent takes over a large field in his poetic achievements. His poem " Tradition" is an obvious example of this kind of revival. The Irish jobs or crafts are tackled with both direct images and metaphorical such as the image of the smith in "The Forge" , which has been analyzed comprehensively by critics because it was taken as a kind for encouraging such an Irish craft which the poet is afraid that it will be 'out of fashion'

All in all, the Irish identity occupies Heaney's poetic mind not only with references but also with a loud direct voice which he mentions here and there such as in his "I was born here. Ireland. "

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