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ELEMENT OF NATURE IN SEAMUS HEANEY'S POEM "THE BLACK BERRY PICKING"

RAYEES AHMAD¹, IQRA SEEMAB²

¹ Research Scholar, Devi Ahilya Vishwavidyalaya, Indore.

Email:ahmadrayee888@gmail.com

²City University, Peshawar, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Seamus Heaney is twentieth century, internationally acclaimed poet of Ireland. Heaney ascended the Nobel Prize for remarkable poetry; the main theme of Heaney's Poetry is nature, which is one of the major concerns of this research paper. Heaney struggled for the creation of self-identity and Irish Literature. Therefore, This Research work aims to figure out the immense impact of surrounding on Seamus Heaney's work. Particularly the influence of Wordsworth on Heaney will also be the major focus of this paper. Being the father of nature, Wordsworth has influenced numerous writers that is why this research suggests that Heaney has adopted devotion for nature from Wordsworth that shaped Heaney's attitude thus the treatment was same. Thus, this work will trace the elements of Wordsworth's pantheism in Heaney's poetry. Like Wordsworth, Heaney tried to preserve and protect the nature through literature.

Key words: Seamus Heaney, Nature, self-identity, influence, Wordsworth, attitude, pantheism and treatment.

Introduction

Nature, this word has myriad senses. Synchronically, in classical epoch, it meant something philosophical or ideal and an art was wielded by man to fulfill and complete the nature. While for neoclassicists nature was instinctive and made up of incommutable rules. Romanticists used this term in two ways for "ideal nature" and for "factual nature (Godwin, 2009, p.4). All romantic writers had common in them, the love for nature. All of them treated nature divergently in their poetry. For Keats it was a cradle of escapism, while Coleridge treated it as an enigma. Nature was a healing agent and driving force for Wordsworth, which made him write (Almiqdady, etal. 2015). As William Wordsworth in his poem "Tintern Abbey" describes nature as

"In nature and the language of sense
The anchor of my purest thoughts
The guard, guardian of my heart and soul
Of all my moral being" (Wordsworth, Tintern Abbey)

The concern of William Wordsworth for nature is very crucial as he is accounted as father of English Romantic poetry and influenced other romantic poets (Almiqdady, 2015). Seamus Heaney also inherited devotion for nature from Wordsworth and deal it the way he dealt.

Seamus Heaney is widely recognized as one of the major poets of the 20th century. A native of Northern Ireland, Heaney was raised in County Derry, and later lived for many years in Dublin. Heaney composed more than 20 volumes of poetry and also contributed in the field of criticism. Heaney has attracted a readership on several continents and has won prestigious literary awards and honors, including the Nobel Prize (Carter & Mcrae, 2001, p.446). As Blake Morrison noted in his work *Seamus Heaney* (1982). "The author is that rare thing, a poet rated highly by critics and academics yet popular with the common reader. Part of Heaney's popularity stems from his subject matter, which is modern Northern Ireland, its farms and cities beset with civil strife, its natural culture and language over run by British rule."

This paper focuses the immense impact of surroundings on Heaney's work and how Nature is precedence. As Heaney was inspired by Wordsworth and was driven at Queen's University by the artists like Ted Hughes and Robert Frost, who cheered up the nature in true sense and paved the way for Heaney to walk on. In *New York Times Book Review (1976)*, Murphy described Heaney as "the poet who has shown the finest art in presenting a coherent vision of Ireland, past and present." (Gangola, (2015). p.339).

This work will further investigate Heaney's treatment of nature and will try to prove that nature was a driving force to Heaney Therefore, Nature dealt as an instructor, preceptor and motivator by Heaney. Seamus Heaney once noted that: "The experiences of childhood in County Derry which were considered antiquated and impertinent by Heaney to this modern world were to be trusted. Heaney was of view that the nature has taught and helped me to articulate it." (Murphy,1976). Heaney's works has always been most concerned with the past, even his earliest poems of the 1960^s is a general spirit of admiration towards the past that helped Heaney to resolve some of his discomfort about being a writer: he could serve his own community by preserving in literature its customs and crafts, yet concurrently gained access to a larger community of letters.

This research purports the significance of nature via Heaney's works. Indeed, Heaney's earliest poetry collection *Death of a Naturalist* evokes a hard, mainly rural life with rare exactness using the descriptions of rural laborers their tasks and contemplations of natural phenomena filtered through childhood and adulthood. Heaney makes you see, hear, smell taste this life, which in his words is not provincial, but parochial; provincialism hints at the minor or the mediocre, but all parishes, rural or urban, are equal as communities of the human spirit so, this research work aims to figure out the element of Nature in Seamus Heaney's poem the Blackberry Picking and significance of nature, which defines his approach towards nature, similar to Wordsworth.

William Wordsworth

Wordsworth, the pioneer of Romantic poetry, published the first volume in 1798 with the collaboration of Samuel Taylor Coleridge "The Preface to Lyrical Ballads", represented the idea of nature as central theme and prioritized nature. Nature is served as a cradle of inspiration for the opus of poetry by Wordsworth (Almiqdady, etal, 2015, p.9). Nature is a preceptor and a medium of imagination to Wordsworth, which could guide an artist and shape artist's art. That is why it is dealt as a teacher by Wordsworth as in a lot of places Wordsworth enunciated "Let nature be your teacher".

Analysis

This poem is the straightway description of cultivating Blackberries, which give birth to endless hopes. In this poem Heaney compares the childhood, the pure form of the nature with the impure form of nature, adulthood.

Stanza 1: Late August given heavy rain and sun

For a full week, the blackberries would ripen.

These lines set the overall theme of the poem. The cultivation, growth and decay of the Blackberries describe the law of nature. One has to grow before its decay. Therefore, picking blackberries is a sign of hope and motivation.

“At first, just one, a glossy purple clot
Among others, red, green, hard as a knot”.

The choice of words like “glossy” and “purple” describes the system of nature and the order it runs in. The things that follow the order of the nature grow well and have a taste of every instinct that exists in the world due to the absorption of nature. Like the ripen purple berries, are soft and sweet as compared to the green ones, which are not ripened due to less absorption of nature.

“You ate the first one and its flesh was sweet
Like thickened wine
Summer blood was in it
Leaving stains upon the tongue and lust for picking.
Then red ones inked up”.

Here the poet talks about the young man, filled with wonder and enthusiasm for the nature. That leads the man to explore and experience it. Heaney also describes the taste of the nature. Heaney has compared its taste to the wine that is addictive and its color to ink that is dark and irremovable. Tasting wine is considered, a refined activity that motivates a writer to write. Then, the poet talks about the lasting effect of tasting the nature. The person, once introduced, becomes the part of the nature and the lust to get lost in it, increases with the passage of time. The color of the berries is a connotation for the color of the nature that is irresistible and that has an endless mark.

“And then that hunger/sent us out
With milk cans, pea tins, Jam-pot
Where briars scratched and wet grass bleached our boots.
Round hayfields, cornfields, and potato drills
We trekked and picked until the cans were full.”

Heaney here is recalling the past days of childhood, the purest form of nature. Further the poet is talking about the activities that are specified to children. The word hunger is used to describe the nature of children, as young people are always curious about nature and has a lust to explore it until their hunger and thirst is quenched.

“Until the tinkling bottom had been covered with the green ones
And on top big dark blobs burned like a plate of eyes,
Our hands were peppered, with thorn pricks,
Our palms sticky as bluebeard’s”

In the lines above, Heaney describes the berries that are a connotation of nature. The struggle of the explorer in grabbing the nature and the resistance of the nature are also described here. An explorer has to bear some pains in order to taste the nature and to become one with it.

Stanza 2:“we hoarded the fresh berries in the byre
But when the bath was filled we found a fur
A rat-ray fungus glutting on our cache
The juice was stinking too
One of the bush
The fruit fermented, the sweet flesh would turn sour”.

Byre is the colloquial word used here for Northern Ireland. Heaney talks about the ultimate power that the nature has of making everything pleasant, sweet and if its beauty is violated, then it will affect all the other things. As the word "cache" is used to show the precedence of berries (nature) moreover, the oxymoronic properties are given to nature "sweet" and "sour". It means that the nature has the power to add taste to an individual's life or it can snatch the same taste.

"I always felt like crying
It wasn't fair
That all the lovely canfuls, smelt of rot
Each year I hoped, they'd keep, knew they would not."

In the last lines of the poem, Heaney describes the situation of decaying berries from the perspective of the child. The poet has embodied the sentiments of the nature lover via the view point of the child.

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