



SEAMUS HEANEY AS A POST-MODERNIST POET

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ABSTRACT

*This paper is based upon the analysis of Seamus Heaney as one of the most famous post-modernist poets and his poems which make him a kind of famous poet. Heaney's cultural identity as a writer is a complex one. He was born and brought up in the north of Ireland which technically makes him British citizen. He is first two books *Death of a Naturalist* and *Door in to the Dark* are notable mainly for the virtue of accuracy in their descriptions of a traditional rural activities which the poet remembered from his childhood. His early poems *Death of a Naturalist* and *The Early Purges* recreates sound, sight and events of his childhood. His poems are the specimen of the post-modernist elements where the reality of the society and the personal experiences are at the core. The poetry of Heaney has been acknowledged for its cultural and social themes with the touch of modernity in them and the language which the poet uses is of the highest quality. Thus, we will discuss all these things in the following argument in the present paper.*

Key words: *Post-Modernist, Cultural, Farmer's Son, Child, Community, Agricultural activities, Traditional.*

INTRODUCTION

Seamus Heaney is one of the most famous post-modernist poets. He has written so many good works which are famous and rich in the poetic qualities as well. Heaney's cultural identity as a writer is a complex one. He was born and brought up in the north of Ireland which technically makes him British citizen. As far as traditional matters are concerned the poet seems to be perplexed. He generally involves himself in the agricultural activities

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because his father is a farmer. It was in England and not Dublin that he was first published and recognized as a poet. But the same time, he is also a Northern-Irish Catholic and therefore he is a part of a minority that belongs officially to the United Kingdom. Heaney's awareness of such ambiguities and divisions in his personality is reflected in his works. Seamus is one of the most popular poets and there are very few writers who have achieved the sort of fame as that of Heaney. In this light, Rand Brandes, popularly known as the co-author of a widespread bibliography of Heaney, considers:

"...more critical and media attention has been focused on Heaney and his work than any other contemporary Irish poet and perhaps any other poet in the English - speaking world outside of America in the last thirty years. (Rand Brandes, 30)

The poetry of Heaney has been acknowledged for its cultural and social themes with the touch of modernity in them and the language which the poet uses is of the highest quality. Helen Vendler states, in this light that,

Heaney's poetry is an oeuvre of strong social engagement looking steadily and with stunning poetic force at what it means to be a contemporary citizen of Northern Ireland. He has made imaginative cast after another in an attempt to represent the almost unrepresentable collective suffering of the North, yet it has tried equally consistently, to bring intellectual reflection to the emotional attitudes that too often yield, the binary position taking of propaganda. (Helen Vendler, 2)

His first two books *Death of a Naturalist* and *Door in to the Dark* are notable mainly for the virtue of accuracy in their descriptions of a traditional rural activities which the poet remembered from his childhood. His early poems *Death of a Naturalist* and *The Early Purges* recreates sound, sight and events of his childhood. These poems also deal with his feeling of hesitancy and awkwardness for having taken up the career as a literary artist. The reason for this feeling is his family ancestry and lineage from which he has broken away by choosing to be a poet. Traditionally Heaney has been associated with agricultural activities for many generations. His father was a farmer and also a cattle dealer. So, after all he is a farmer's son. Thus, his family is of solid farming stock. Born on the land the oldest of eight children, Heaney broke away from his rural communities trained academically in university and became a university lecturer. His own career reflects his major theme;

"The loss of the old traditional community which I knew as a child." (Heaney, 21)



These early poems focus upon the inhibitions in Heaney about the writing of poetry. When his poem first began to appear in university magazines, he preferred not to put his real name to it. Instead he adopted his pseudo name 'Incertus' to produce his work during his university day in order to conceal his real identity as a farmer's son with rural agricultural background. Heaney is also obsessed with the sense of guilt that to express himself freely through literature was to betray the traditional value of his farming tribe which values silence over speech. His dilemma as literary artist is;

"How, having been educated in British literary tradition to keep faith with one's own family and tribe?" (Heaney, 28)

The most striking features of Heaney's first two books is the mediation between silence and speech. Heaney also devotes much of his energy in his books to produce a body of poems that is about itself.

His first book *Death of a Naturalist* begins with an image of him holding a pen and ends with him gazing like some 'big-eyed Narcissus' into well. This narcissistic self-consciousness about the business of writing is major theme of Heaney's work. This thematic pre-occupation arises out of his sense of belonging to a silent ancestry with which he has awkward relation as a writer. His earlier poems deal with various rural traders' laborers, craftsman and their daily routine activities. Unlike Heaney these rural peasants and farmers are lacking in speech. The water-diviner the fisherman the haymaker, the black smith, the Docker Value silence over speech. His work considers taciturnity as a mark of proficiency;

"getting the work done means, avoiding the luxury of work."

For them, silence is a golden virtue whereas noise and sound is a serious threat and a vice. In the first part of the poem, the child is at the center of womb like protective world of tadpoles and frogs pones near a pond, but in the second part this protective silence is broken by the arrival of 'angry frogs'. Here, Heaney connects his earlier taking of frog's pones with this noisy vengeance of the adult frogs. What is noticeable about this poem is that the felling of terror in the child is evoked through the violent noise of 'bass chorus' from which child runs away suffering the loss of childhood innocence. The poem richly visualizes the experience of child.

Another poem from the same collection *The Early Purges* is about the drawing of kittens which Heaney witness as a small child, The real interest of this poem lies in its accommodation of three contrasting voices; the child Heaney who is upset by the act of violence, the adult voice who sees it as an act of necessity and the poet Heaney who



overcomes his feeling of remorse by setting the matter in the favour of Dan Taggart. Among these three different viewpoints, the third voice is the most sophisticated. This poem is one of his several poems in which he takes pen to inform us that this brutality arises from his anxiety to “Keep Faith” with his tribe. Gradually, in successive volumes of poetry Heaney overcomes this anxiety by arriving at a firm conviction that he could also serve his own community by preserving in literature its costumes and crafts. So, one can make a remark about his two volumes that Honey is mainly preoccupied with ‘finding his own voice’ as a poet.

In conclusion we may say that among his various collection of poetry. Heaney brought fame with his two books *Death of a Naturalist* and *The Early Purges*. Though he is born in the English family, he considers himself as an Irish Catholic.

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