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Received: 13 December 2019 Accepted: 5 January 2020 Published: 15 January 2020

Abstract

The present research paper aims to reflect upon the various autobiographical elements projected throughout the poetry of Seamus Heaney. No poet, or for that matter artist of any sort can be isolated from the very circumstances prevailing around her/him. Nor do her/his poetic creations can be abandoned completely from the events of her/his life. In fact, Heaney's poetic faculty collected food for the real poetic production from his own life experiences which were in close proximity to him since his childhood to his mature years.

Index terms— autobiographical elements, close proximity, poetic faculty, childhood, mature years.

1 Introduction

amala Das asserts that "A writer's raw material is not stone or clay; it is her personality".¹ And this is quite evident in the works of Seamus Heaney. In his poetry one can recognize family affections, vibrant and self speaking landscapes and intense social concerns. It recites an expressive autobiographical story reaching from Heaney's boyhood to his elderhood, thereby crossing his sixties. The present research paper endeavours to study the manifold autobiographical influences exhibited in the poetry of Seamus Heaney, playing a major role in shaping the same.

2 II.

Analysis A poet's persona does not thrive in segregation. She/he is in fact the by-product of all such situations and conditions which occur around her/him. The versatile mind and the sensitive heart of a poet are always open to what is perceived by his senses. This research paper in particular focuses on the personality of Seamus Heaney which found its vibrant expression in his poetry through varied usage of images and symbols which are but inspired by his real life incident and the social structure in which he was born and brought up.

From the very initial years of his boyhood, Heaney was quite anxious about the peculiarities of the social arrangements that were often occurring around him and his family as well. Merely because of his Catholic faith, Heaney's father was debarred from the due social respect that he owed to earn on behalf of his sincere and hard work. The Protestants treated the Catholics as outcasts and overruled them from even enjoying the privileges of the basic human rights. These things find a continuous and concrete expression in the poetry of Seamus Heaney. Heaney's experiences as a child provided a lot of raw materials for his poetic creation. At many places he employs certain images and symbols which come directly from his own childhood. In this context, the words of Michael Parker are worth mentioning:

"The locations of his childhood prove to be as important to the later development of the poet as the human landscape." ² Here, it is quite relevant to mention the experiences of Heaney's academic journey in which he suffered poignantly because of being ignored in the huge crowd of the young Protestant students. Even the criteria of the punishment inflicted upon the students of the respective communities could tell the story of the discrimination that existed during those days. This obviously created a rift between the Protestant and the Catholic students. Heaney recalls such experiences of class distinction in his poem, "The Ministry of Fear", published in the famous poetry collection "North": "On my first day, the leather strap went epileptic in the Big Study. Its echoes plashing over our bowed heads, But I still wrote home that a boarder's life Was not so bad, shying as usual." ³

The fascinating stories of Heaney's father as well as his grandfather toiling hard in the fields also provided a solid substance for some of the remarkable pieces of poetry. Heaney's father was quite efficient at making a

fine web of furrows in the fields while ploughing. The images of a hard working farmer appear time and again in Heaney's poetry. There is a direct reference to Patrick Heaney in "Death of a Naturalist", when he describes a staunch, an energetic and a sturdy hero with a spade in his hands. The following lines refer the same: The problems faced and felt by a female, or to be more specific, the difficulties faced by a mother during the times of pregnancy is very well evident in these lines. In another poem titled as "The Wife's Tale", the poet portrays the sufferings of a farmer's wife, through the following lines: "They lay in the ring of their own crusts and dregs Smoking and saying nothing. 'There's good yield, Isn't there?' -as proud as if he were the land itself 'Enough for crushing and for sowing both.' And that was it. I'd come and he had shown me So I belonged no further to the work. I gathered cups and folded up the cloth And went. But they still kept their ease spread out, unbuttoned, grateful, under the trees. ?? 8 This very image of a typical farmer's wife is quite suggestive of the image of the poet's mother who also worked harder and harder the whole day long.

The poem "Churning Day" also recollects the image of the poet's mother. A lady, well trained in the household chores, involved in the activity of churning in the poem. The image portrayed in the following lines bear resemblance to the poet's mother: "Out came the four crocks, spilled their heavy lip Of cream, their white insides, into the sterile churn, The staff, like a great whisky muddler fashioned in deal wood, was plunged in, the lid lifted. My mother took first turn, set up rhythms that slugged and thumped for hours. Arms ached. Hands blistered. Cheeks and clothes were Spattered with flabby milk. Where finally gold flecks began to dance. They poured hot water then, sterilized a birchwood bowl and little corrugated butter-spades." 9 It would not be out of the mark to mention another poem by Heaney which is titled as "Mid-Term Break", that shares an intensely autobiographical tragedy of the death of Heaney's younger brother. Rather, it would be quite convincing to say that the poem "Mid-Term Break" is a direct result of this very incident. The poetic verse is overshadowed with the tinge of melancholy and sadness. The following lines from the poem will asset the same.

"Snowdrops And candles soothed the beside; I saw him for the first time in six weeks. Paler now, wearing a poppy bruise on his left temple, He lay in the four foot box as in his cot. No gaudy scars, the bumper knocked him clear. A four foot box, a foot for every year." 10 'The intensity of grief is summed up in the four foot box, one foot for every year. The poet's deep affection for his young brother and his intensity of grief at this unnatural calamity are filled in these minimum words. ??11 The latter part of the same poem reflects the responsible character of the poet: "And tell me they were 'sorry for my trouble'. Whispers informed strangers I was the eldest, Away at school, as my mother held my hand. ?? 12 Something that is quite spare and strange about Heaney's poetry is that, rather than comparing a feminine beauty to a delicate and subtle phenomena, the poet compares his wife to a wild bird like 'the skunk' and a water animal like 'an otter', which are but not quite beautiful creatures."The Skunk" by Seamus Heaney describes the speaker's married life through a biomorphic comparison between his wife and a Skunk.' The poem is a tribute to his wife. He had been teaching in California and greatly missed Marie. The nocturnal visits of a skunk remind him of her.'13 Heaney was criticized a lot for such a comparison and some found it to be quite insulting. No doubt, the comparison is somewhat unusual, yet it remains a magnificent piece of writing. Away from his wife Heaney recalls the skunk which reminds him of his wife. The poet says: By the sootfall of your things at Bedtime, Your hands-down, tail-up hunt in a bottom drawer For the black plunge-line nightdress." 15

3 Heaney infuses his deep emotion into words.

There is a continuous flow of the real life incidents into the poetic renderings of Seamus Heaney, thereby making his poems largely autobiographical in nature.

4 III.

5 Conclusion

It can safely be concluded that Seamus Heaney being a sensitive person and a versatile artist was largely influenced by the events and happenings of his life that occurred around him. And the poetic personality of Seamus Heaney was actually the product of the multiple influences floating around him which in no sense underscored his originality rather it added a new dimension to the poetic faculty of the great poet. ¹

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Nicking and slicing neatly, having sods over his shoulder,
going down
and down For the good turf.
Digging.” 5
K
”Under my window, a clean rasping
Sound
When the spade sinks into gravelly
Ground:
My father digging.” 4
Also, there is a clear reference to Heaney’s
grandfather in the following lines of ”Digging ”:
”My grandfather cut more turf in a day
Than any other man or Toner’s big.
Once I carried him milk in a bottle
Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up
To drink it, then fell to right away

Figure 1:

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- 93 [Ibid] , Ibid . p. 1.
94 [Ibid] , Ibid .
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96 [Kumar and Heaney ()] , Narendra Kumar , Seamus Heaney . *A Critical Study* 2009. Sarup Book Publishers
97 Pvt. Ltd.
98 [Heaney ()] *Death of a Naturalist: Churning Day*, Seamus Heaney . 1966. London: Faber. p. 9.
99 [Heaney ()] *Death of a Naturalist: Digging*, Seamus Heaney . 1966. London: Faber. p. 1.
100 [Heaney ()] *Death of a Naturalist: Mid-Term Break*, Seamus Heaney . 1966. London: Faber. p. 15.
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103 [Heaney ()] *Door into the Dark: Mother*, Seamus Heaney . 1969. London: Faber. p. 15.
104 [Heaney ()] *Door Into the Dark: The Wife's Tale*, Seamus Heaney . 1969. London: Faber. p. 16.
105 [Heaney and North ()] Seamus Heaney , North . *The Ministry of Fear*, (London) 1975. Faber.
106 [Heaney ()] Seamus Heaney . *Field Work: The Skunk*, (London) 1979. Faber.
107 [Parker and Heaney ()] Michael Parker , Seamus Heaney . *The Making of the Poet*, (London) 1993. Macmillan.
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109 [Kumar ()] *Poetry of Seamus Heaney: A Critical Study*, Narendra Kumar . 2009. New Delhi: Sarup Book
110 Publishers Pvt. Ltd.