



A Study Of Ripples Of Imagination In Patrick Kavanagh And Seamus Heaney's Select Poems

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Abstract

The article discusses an emerging feature and aspect of two fascinating Irish poets in the twentieth century namely Patrick Kavanagh and Seamus Heaney with respect to their naturalistic poetic qualities. Both poets have represented their locale beautifully with elegance and great firmness of touch. Whereas Kavanagh's creative faculties rely on inspiration and intuition Heaney's poetry explains and explores his own roots, celebrating the ancient skills and craft that sustained the farming community that nurtured him and his family for generations. Their poetry almost always concerns the gap between Irish psyche and the milieu. The ripple phenomenon in their poetry adds great quality to their literary contributions

Keywords: Ripple, Naturalism, Irish psyche, milieu, intuition.

INTRODUCTION

The Irish poet Seamus Heaney is one of the most accomplished and internationally acclaimed poets in Twentieth century English poetry. Seamus Heaney himself who admired the (relatively lesser known) Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh and whom he considered to be the closest Irish country counterpart of the great Wessex Novelist and poet of Great Britain, namely Thomas Hardy was one of the formative influences in his poetic journey. Heaney wrote of the significance of Hardy to him in "Squarings, Lightenings vi" wherein Heaney portrays Thomas Hardy as a child, pretending to be dead in the field of sheep. What follows is a betrothal at once distinct from and yet continuous with the marriage of the mind and nature witnessed in Heaney's early poetry. It is a moment of the poet's betrothal to last things:

In that sniffed-at, bleated-into, grassy space

He experimented with infinity.

His small cool brow was like an anvil waiting

for sky to make it sing the perfect pitch
of his dumb being, and that stir he caused
In the fleece-hustle was the original
Of a ripple that would travel eighty years
Outward from there, to be the same ripple
Inside him at its last circumference.

(“Squarings: Lightenings, VI”)

What Heaney portrays here is a vision of the artist as, to use the German Philosopher Martin Heidegger's words, a being-toward-death. In short, he is exemplary of the ‘self-proper’ since, for Heidegger, to be human is to have one's consciousness defined by the awareness of death. What is remarkable in Heaney's poem is how the child Hardy's consciousness of death creates an imagined space of wholeness, as if the field itself were not so much a field of sheep but the field of consciousness, and by extension the wider, infinite field of being of which the child is a part.

Heaney appraises the emblematic significance of the incident: the commotion, the child-Hardy generated among the sheep (in the fleece-hustle, represented his initial impact on the world – a small mass hitting water, creating a wave effect (i.e a ripple) that would reach tsunamic proportions across his lifetime still part of his being (inside him) till his soul departed from this world. This poem seems to come in direct response to Hardy's own re-illumed transformation in poems like “For Life I had Never Cared Greatly in which he describes his turn from the evasions of his earlier poetry; that long and stressful pilgrimage to joy and love and radiant beauty. Thus, Ronald Schuchard (emeritus) from Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia concludes that Heaney's transformation not only led him to admit the marvellous into his poetry, but to justify it in his criticism with special reference to Hardy.

In yet another poem, *Glanmore sonnets* Heaney jumps over the recent past in Belfast to land in his rural surroundings in Mossbawn farm skirted by the Castle Dawson railway line. Precociously curious, the child-poet was to be interested in the messages of sound. If one knew how the railway track, he was told would broadcast in advance the metallic song of an express seem locomotive speeding headlong. Nothing so romantic in his case, just the echoes of freight traffic from Castle Dawson marshalling yard carried through space. He recalls one of the farm animals: -

The head
Of a horse swirled back from a gate, a grey
Turnover of haunch and mane, and I'd look
Up to the cutting where she'd soon appear.
Two field back, in the house, small ripples shook
Silently across our drinking water
(As they are shaking now across my heart)
And vanished into where they seemed to start.

(*Glanmore Sonnets*, IV)

The youngsters' power of close observation recorded a clear, almost imperceptible seismic transmission in the family's quarters, the tiny echo of a passing train registering in their scullery on the surface of what was stored there from the well. Such is the real lesson pulling Heaney's emotional strings- his gift of capturing and storing those fleeting poetic charges before they faded.

As for Patrick Kavanagh, the Irish literary critic and historian John Wilson Foster notes that Kavanagh claimed to be poor in Monaghan but not in Dublin and even when referring to his life in the city – or indeed, to his poetic reputation. The Irish poet's adherence to the elder faiths underlies his Catholicism as he eloquently remembers in a later poem titled, "Father Mat"

Ancient Ireland sweeping
 In again with all its unbaptized beauty
 The calm evening
 The whitethorn blossoms
 The smell from ditches that were not Christian.

According to Seamus Heaney, Kavanagh's early poetry is under the influence of a Blakean notion of consciousness in *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. Yet another poem which has a splendid opening is "Shancoduff" which begins-

My black hills have never seen the sun rising,
 Eternally they look north towards Armagh.
 Lot's wife would not be salt if she had been
 Incurious as my black hills that are happy
 When dawn whitens Glassdrummond chapel.

as an example of 'no-caring' style of his much earlier poetry. "Shancoduff" by Kavanagh speaks from the poet's perspective about a patch of farmland he owned that never saw the sun. The lovely poem "Spraying the Potatoes", has lines that goes like this-

And over that potato-field
 A lazy veil of woven sun,
 Dandelions growing on headlands, showing
 Their unloved hearts to everyone.

And I was there with a knapsack sprayer
 On the barrel's edge poised. A wasp was floating
 Dead on a sunken briar leaf
 Over a copper-poisoned ocean.

The axle-roll of a rut-locked cart
 Broke the burnt stick of noon in two.
 An old man came through a cornfield
 Remembering his youth and some Ruth he knew.

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