

A Panorama of Pastoral World in The Poetry of Seamus Heaney

Vineet Kumar
Assistant Professor
Department of English
Gandhi Adarsh College, Samalkha

Pastoral life is the focused area of writing for poets and writers. From the ancient times, numerous works have been written on pastoral world in poetry and prose. It was Theocritus, who wrote idealized accounts of shepherds and their loves living simple, virtuous lives in Arcadia, a mountainous region of Greece. After his account of pastoral lives of shepherds, subsequent poets also wrote about rural lives of people. Poets of English world took the pastoral tradition by retreating from the trappings of modernity to the imagined virtues and romance of rural life in their writings, as in Edmund Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calendar*, Christopher Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love," and Sir Walter Raleigh's response, "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd." Later in 17th century, John Milton penned *Lycidas*, a universally acknowledge pastoral elegy for his friend, Edward King, who drowned when his ship sank in the Irish Sea off the coast of Wales in August 1637. In the second half of 18th century Oliver Goldsmith also portrayed a village life in his heroic couplets poem, *The Deserted Village* (1770). The pastoral poem lost its colour after the European Industrial Revolution of the 18th century, but its themes persist in poems that romanticize rural life or reappraise the natural world. In 20th century few poets looked back for rustic life and painted the rural life in their poetry; Dylan Thomas, Allen Ginsberg, and Seamus Heaney were pioneers among them.

Seamus Heaney (full name, Seamus Justin Heaney) was an Irish poet, playwright, and translator, whose works are notable for their evocation of Irish rural life and events in Irish history as well as for their allusions to Irish myth. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for

Literature in 1995, his other notable awards are: E.M. Forster Award 1975, Golden Wreath of Poetry 2001, and T.S. Eliot Prize in 2006. He received his graduation degree from Queen's University, Belfast in 1961. He started his career as a poet with the publication of his famous poetry collection, *Death of a Naturalist* in 1966. He also wrote other notable works which brought him into the limelight in the world; his next major poetry collections including: *North* (1975), the work that directly dealt with the Troubles in Northern Ireland, and it looks frequently to the past for images and symbols relevant to the violence and political unrest of that time, *Field Work* (1979), *The Spirit Level* (1996), *District and Circle* (2006), *Human Chain* (2011). He became a member of the Field Day Theatre Company in 1980. In 1982 he joined the faculty of Harvard University as visiting professor and, in 1985, became full professor—a post he retained while teaching at the University of Oxford (1989–94). Heaney also published translations, including *The Cure at Troy* (1991), which is Heaney's version of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, and *The Midnight Verdict* (1993), which contains selections from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and his famous translation of the Old English epic poem *Beowulf* (1999) became an unexpected international best seller, while his *The Burial at Thebes* (2004) gave Sophocles' *Antigone* contemporary relevance. He died on 30 August 2013 in Blackrock, Dublin.

A vivid picture can be seen in his famous poem about joyful experiences of youth when he shows his lust for delicious blackberries in his poem "Blackberry Picking". In this poem poet portrays harvest season during late August when he picks blackberries. He describes in some details the ripe berries, their flesh "like thickened wine", numerous and sticky as he gathered them. His colourful description makes the reader want to stuff a fistful of berries into his mouth and savour the experience. Heaney pictures the sweetness of blackberries as:

You ate that first one and its flesh was sweet

Like thickened wine: summer's blood was in it
Leaving stains upon the tongue and the lust for
Picking.

Heaney sensuously describes the sweet fruit, "hard as a knot", with "summer's blood" in it. Berries are filled with a delicious juicy pulp, tempting the poet with "lust" for picking. In the other part of poem, poet depicts the storing the berries in the byre. However, he then experiences a sense of loss and disillusionment, as the berries began to sprout a grey fungus. The fungus spread rapidly, ruining the harvest, despite the poet's obvious desire to save them from spoiling. This poem is a vivid description of pastoral world in which the poet shows his lust for berries but expresses helplessness when he is unable to keep them from spoiling.

"Follower" paints the rural portrait of a farm where a father and son are working in their field. Seamus Heaney describes the rustic scene of a farm where a son mimics his father. The poem depicts the two images, first one pictures Heaney's experiences of his childhood with his father in his field, when he follows his father everywhere in the field. He describes:

I wanted to grow up and plough,
To close one eye, stiffen my arm.
All I ever did was follow
In his broad shadow around the farm.

The second image is about his youth when he works in his field with his father but now their roles have been switched. He says now "It is my father who keeps stumbling / Behind me, and will not go away". The poem sketches the two contrasting pictures, first one is of poet's childhood where he follows his father in his field. The image is a wholesome one, of the father working with a plough, and he is compared to "a full sail". As he ploughs, his expert skill is described as "the sod rolled over without breaking". In second picture, the time

has been changed, now the father needs his son's protection and the poet has mixed feelings about him.

Here in another poem, Heaney portrays the picture of his childhood life. In this poem he describes the process of butter –making in his farm's dairy. He picturizes the rustic scene of a farm through the eyes of a boy. Heaney gives the minute details of his farm in Mossbawn. He also describes an event of a farming family, who is churning milk into butter. The poem begins with the description of the "four crocks", large Earth wave pots, which stood in the pantry. These pots held buttermilk, which was slowly fermenting into a "thick", "coarse-grained" crust, floating on top of the milk. Heaney details the pouring of the buttermilk into the great big churn, which they all took turn to work. His mother had to go first, and the butter-making process lasted for hours. He describes their plight "arms ached/Hands blistered", whilst their clothes were splattered with the creamy liquid.

Major theme in Seamus Heaney's poems is rural or pastoral life because of his root from a rural family. Many of his poems describe the vivid picture of village life, which is portrayed in a very skilful way. All in all, Seamus Heaney's major devotion was towards his root from a pastoral life. This devotion can be seen clearly in his many poems.

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