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The Dynamics Of Questioning In Seamus Heaney's Major Works: A Problematological Study

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Abstract: The principal aim of this paper is to prove apodictically that Seamus Heaney, the poet, critic and translator, is a problematologist and therefore questions permeates his oeuvre. This paper does also intend to asseverate that despite his auctorial design and determination to arrive at some sort of resolutions, revelations and “diamond absolutes” in his major works, Heaney has not devalued questions and questioning and so, therefore, most of his answers are problematological in their essential essence.

Key Words: Heaney Scholars, Heaney Canon, Problematological, Foundationalism, Argumentation, Questioning, Oeuvre, Field Work.

INTRODUCTION

“Super (in)vention of novelty” (T. S. Eliot, 38-39) thy name is Seamus Heaney, the Nobel Laureate for poetry in 1995. Really, he is the poet laureate of the whole of the English speaking world. That is why; Heaney enjoys ‘a global audience’. He is ‘arguably the most popular’, ‘most institutionalized’ and ‘most trusted’ and ‘most prolific’ major poet of the Contemporary World. He has dominated the field in terms of critical attention and international frame on the undisputed valency of his ‘poetic authority’ (James, 264).

‘The famous Seamus’ (Seamus Deane, 62) is a multifoliate litterateur. His status as a poet, critic and translator is really ‘unassailable’ (Andrews, 18). Principally because of his increasing eminence, ‘Heaney Studies’, ‘scholarship’/ ‘criticism’ has been whetting the critical fervor of legions of Heaney scholars. Naturally, therefore, “the Heaney phenomenon” (O’Brien, 1) is the cynosure of contemporary critical attention.

Over the years the “Heaney Canon” has been explored and re-explored from raft of perspectives, such as

- a) ‘Thematic Analysis’
- b) ‘Symbolic Study’
- c) ‘Stylistic Study’ and
- d) ‘Inter-textual Concomitancy’

In the light of the facts mentioned above, it is submitted that “Heaney studies” has really become at once a trap and a lure. Yet, Heaney has prompted the post structuralists and deconstructionists among Heaney scholars to re-scrutinize the Heaney oeuvre to ‘renew our vision’ and to challenge the poetry (of Heaney) and Heaney, the poet, from various perspectives.

- a) “Poetic process” (Brian John, 1989, Ruben Moi, 2007 and John P Waters, 2009),
- b) “Craftsmanship” (Steven Ratiner, 1981, Majorie Perloff, 1981, and Rand Brandes, 1994),
- c) “Poetics” (Frank Kinalian, 1982, Henry Hart, 1989 and Eugene O'Brien, 2001),
- d) and poetic ‘mode’ (Marisa Galvez, 2009, S. Jeans, 2014, P. Chandler, 2015, Anne Villa, 2015 and G.F. Neckelmen, 2021)

Seamus Heaney, the bard of Northern Ireland, has struggled and survived in a crises-crazed and problem-laden Ireland, continuously being ravaged and ramped by by sectarian violence, both internecine and irreducible. so Heaney’s over-exposure to the problems of ‘dual heritage’, ‘two humped tradition’ and ‘adversial binarism’ has made him attempt post modernist/ post structuralist deconstructions of the poetic responses of his ‘exemplars’/inspires like Dante, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Keats and Yeats to the problems of their respective worlds, much disturbed and disturbing, ravaged and ravaging. Very much like Dante, searching for answers to the questions/problems/issues destabilizing his war-torn native-land, Heaney has searched for answers to the questions stated below:

- i. What is the ‘legitimacy of poetry’ in a war-torn society?
- ii. “How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea?”
- iii. “What attracts to a poet?”
- iv. What is poet’s proper role in the problem-throttled world?

Since his answers are ‘by no means simple’, he has returned to the problems (mentioned above) throughout the 1970s and 1980s in the considered opinion of Michael Thurston, Heaney has found ‘successive resolutions satisfactory’ and so there is no eddy of questions both in his poetry and critical works.

Perhaps, because of the prominence given to the questions raised by Heaney himself in his oeuvre Heaney scholars like Helen Vendler, Michael R. Molino, Kevin McGuirk, Christopher Ricks, Blake Morrison, Eugene O'Brien, Andrew Murphy and Harold Bloom have demystified Heaney Canon from the perspective of interrogacy.

In the process, they have re-iterated the tutelage of Heaney to Dante, William Shakespeare, William Wordsworth, John Keats and W.B. Yeats. If Daniel Feldman (2014) has subjected the art and craft of Heaney's questioning to a Yeatsian analysis, Kevin McGuirk (in 1994) has put the Wordsworthian search-light on Heaney's 'Field Work' to lend critical perspicuity to Blake Morrison's individual study of 'Field Work' from the perspectives of the "interrogative mode". In the process, Kevin McGuirk has made pointed references to (i) Henry Hart's study of "Field Work" from the perspective of Heaney's 'anxiety of trust' (1989, 87-108), (ii) Susan J. Wolfson's study of the works Wordsworth and Keats from the perspective of "the questioning presence" (1986, 28) and (iii) the theory of 'dialogic understanding' (1989), profounded by Hans Robert Jauss.

'Wit and grace attend Seamus Heaney always' (J. Chandler, 483). So he has made the best use of the legacies of his mentors/exemplars while re-ratifying his loyalty to them. Like Dante, he has tried to travel from 'uncertainty', 'ambiguity' and inner strife to assurance, affirmation and resolution. Like Shakespeare, he has viewed poetry as "a thing of allurements as much as searches, gleams as much as probe" (Heaney, 1996, 94). Much like William Wordsworth, Heaney has been 'questing and questioning, refining and redefining' (Paul Muldoon, 1984) while being fully aware of "the risk of direct rather than oblique political comment" (Michael Campbell, 13). Yet none of the critical studies mentioned above is holistic. Most of the Heaney Scholars, under reference, have not gone beyond 'field work' and 'seeing things' and 'preoccupation' even though questioning permeates almost all the works Heaney.

Furthermore, for none of Heaney scholars, specified above "Problematology" (Michael Moyer) and the "Interrogative Mode" Carry Clout despite Heaney's 'binocular gaze' (Cavanagh, 128), 'intensive probings' (Henry Hart, 1987, 1-17) and Heaney's status as a poet of witness, hence as "a diagnostic poet" (Henry Hart, 1987, 9).

Among Heaney scholars, Stuart M. Sperry (1987, 376-379) and M. Hakkioğlu (2011) have studied some of the works of Heaney from the perspective of the interrogative mode, though schismatically. Though this interrogative mode is a classical mode, hence 'as simple as profound' (H. Hart, 1990, 461-462) and an "accessible mode of writing" (Marisa Galvez, 2009 15-42), it is a matter of great concern that as of today no attempt has been made to study Heaney's works from the perspectives of (a) "problematology" and (b) "poetics of interrogacy".

'Problematology' (Michael Meyer, 1995) deals with "the questioning of questioning" in terms of both questions and answers, apocritical or problematological. So it refutes 'fundationalism', 'essentialism', 'propositionalism' and 'logical positivism'. That is why, it bonds well with 'Rhetorics' and 'Argumentation'. That is why; problematologists like Nick Turnbull, 2006, Elizabeth Perez (2012), Maziar

Mohaymeni (2018) et al have gone beyond 'Rhetorics' both 'old' and 'new'. In the process they have inferred that

- i) Problematicity is the primary condition of social life;
- ii) So man is a questioning animal;
- iii) All questions do not beget answers all the answers;
- iv) All the answers are not absolute;
- v) Some answers beget/ trigger questions different than the radical question, hence the initiating team question;
- vi) So, questioning is essential in a problematic world;
- vii) "To be human is to question." (Nick Turnbull).

CONCLUSION

"Art is a questioning process" (Elizabeth Perez) and hence in art questions are not dissolved by any sort of answer, whether aprocritical or problematological. That is why, art is ineradicably tinged with 'uncertainty', 'ambivalence', 'plurality', 'diversity' and 'plurisignification'. So far, Heaney's art and craft of questioning is concerned, he is more Wordsworthian than Parnassian and as a critic he is more Orphean than Eliotian and hence in his critical works, he digs and re-digs into the questions ending not infrequently with problematological answers.

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