

The Georgic Tradition: Examining Nature through Rural Labour and Farm Lives in Seamus Heaney's Poetry

ขนบวรรณศิลป์กสิกรรมจอร์จิก: การพิจารณาธรรมชาติผ่านแรงงานและวิถีชนบท ในกวีนิพนธ์ของเซมัส ฮีนีย์

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Abstract

The Georgic tradition is the literary representation of rural lives that focuses on an agrarian society where crops and livestock farming become the fruitfulness of hard labour. Traditionally in literature, the writers of the trend often imagine the natural environment to create balance and peace in nature, a response to emotions and experiences of human beings living a romanticised pastoral life. However, the georgic mode investigates the farmers' hard labour in ploughing the land to produce crops and rear animals while encountering the complexities of nature such as the weather, seasonal cycle, success and failure in the birth and death of plants and animals, the didactic mode of farming knowledge, and the use of tools and technology in farming. Although the georgic tradition was popular in the 18th century, this paper explores the 20th century Irish poetry of Seamus Heaney to examine the georgic elements in the reminiscence of his childhood and his imagination of the natural environment within an ecocritical framework. Heaney's poetry reveals the interconnectedness between the agrarian culture and society, highlighting the significance of hard labour and farming as a result of his strong bond with the land, and the ancestral and cultural heritage which are needed to pass on to the generations to come.

Keywords: farm poetry, Georgics, Seamus Heaney, ecocriticism

บทคัดย่อ

ขนบวรรณศิลป์กสิกรรมจอร์จิกว่าด้วยรูปแบบวรรณกรรมที่นำเสนอภาพของวิถีชีวิตชนบท โดยเฉพาะการแสดงภาพการเกษตรได้แก่การเพาะปลูกพืชและการปศุสัตว์เพื่อความอุดมสมบูรณ์ของผลผลิตทางการเกษตร โดยทั่วไปแล้วการจินตนาการภาพธรรมชาติในงานวรรณกรรมมุ่งพิจารณาความสมดุลสวยงามของธรรมชาติที่ตอบสนองต่ออารมณ์และประสบการณ์ของมนุษย์ในวิถีชีวิตแบบภาพชนบทตามขนบวรรณกรรมท้องทุ่ง (pastoralism) ทว่าขนบวรรณศิลป์กสิกรรมจอร์จิกมุ่งพินิจความอดุสาหะและความยากลำบากในการพลิกฟื้นผืนดินให้ออกผลด้วยแรงงานของเกษตรกรที่เผชิญกับความท้าทายในความซับซ้อนของธรรมชาติอาทิสภาพอากาศ วัฏจักรฤดูกาล ความสำเร็จและความล้มเหลวในงานเกษตรกรรมเช่น การเกิด ความเจ็บป่วยและการตายของพืชและสัตว์ ขนบจอร์จิกยังถ่ายทอดองค์ความรู้ทางการเกษตรตลอดจนการใช้เครื่องมือเทคโนโลยีเข้ามาอำนวยความสะดวก

ชนบทวรรณศิลป์กสิกรรมนี้ได้รับความนิยมในช่วงศตวรรษที่ 18 และในงานวิจัยนี้ได้มุ่งเน้นกวีนิพนธ์ในศตวรรษที่ 20 โดยอ่านตีความบทกวีของเซมัส ฮีเนย์ กวีชาวไอริชผู้สะท้อนภาพสังคมชนบทผ่านประสบการณ์จากวัยเด็กถึงวัยผู้ใหญ่ ผู้วิจัยวิเคราะห์บทกวีด้วยแนวคิดวรรณกรรมวิจารณ์เชิงนิเวศและตั้งข้อสังเกตว่าภาพของธรรมชาติและสิ่งแวดล้อมที่กวีจินตนาการเปิดเผยความเชื่อมโยงทางสังคมและวัฒนธรรมกสิกรรมอันมุ่งเน้น ความยากลำบากของแรงงาน ปัจจัยทางสิ่งแวดล้อมและเศรษฐกิจ ความผูกพันกับผืนดิน ตลอดจนมรดกทางวัฒนธรรมจากบรรพบุรุษและมิติทางสังคมสังคมที่ถ่ายทอดไปยังชนรุ่นหลัง

คำสำคัญ: กวีนิพนธ์กสิกรรม จอร์จิก เซมัส ฮีเนย์ วรรณกรรมวิจารณ์เชิงนิเวศ

Introduction and Literature Review

Seamus Heaney, the Nobel Prize Poet in 1995, was praised “for works of lyrical beauty and ethical depth, which exalt everyday miracles and the living past.” Since his poetry reflects the Irish rural ways of lives and ancestral culture, Heaney’s profound craftsmanship of words brought the reader to the landscape of childhood memory with its clarity and emotional perspective. Born in County Derry, Northern Ireland, Seamus Heaney absorbed the rural life and later imagined them in his literary works. Not in a romanticised mode that some nature poets usually depict the rural landscape, Heaney has keen eyes on the hard work and challenges in farming as he vividly demonstrates how the labourers, farm animals and the working processes on the land can reveal the arts of mastering nature for farming productivity. Thus, in this article, it is pivotal to decipher how rural poetry can be presented in relation to the environment, society, and culture in a more challenging perspective.

Heaney’s poetic work has been examined in relation to a rural culture and farming heritage. “Digging” from *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) represents his strong bond with a place and Irish cultural tradition in his family. As Heaney depicts his father and grandfather using their spades to dig the ground for potatoes, the poet has a resolute answer to use his pen to create poetry. Though he seems to be self-conflicted at some point, Heaney illustrates his sense of pride in his ancestors, their labour of love, and a strong bond with their land by passing on this farming heritage from the previous generation to the following one. This filial art of writing poetry about a rural life reflects his deep consciousness of the Irish identity and the poet’s responsibility to present this overlooked dimension of the local culture in the 20th Century. Digging potatoes seen again in the poem “At a Potato Digging” also reminds readers of the historical disaster of the Great Famine in Ireland in the 19th century which shapes his awareness of the Irish cultural identity and the history of agriculture.

The criticism on Seamus Heaney’s poetry has been widely examined in various disciplines including politics, mythology, archeology, linguistics, history, cultural studies, etc. Heaney’s critique of the Irish culture and the long-lasting crucial debate over the colonial politics between England and Ireland are dominant in his literary scholarship. Michael Parker (1993) finds that Heaney’s poetics moves from his sense of birthplace to a wider scope of social and political representations. As he grew more mature, Heaney critiqued the Irish politics and society by questioning the role of English influence on Northern Ireland. Parker emphasises how the predecessor Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh’s *The Great Hunger* (1942) plays an important part in Heaney’s poetry. Heaney said that writing poetry is to “bridge the physical world of the farm and the sacred world of literature” (32). By doing so, Heaney depicts the traditional images of the rural craft and labour in his writings by emphasising on the Irish cultural landscapes. Apart from the cultural representation of Ireland, Eamonn Hughes (1997) refers to Julia Kristeva’s intertextuality in reading Heaney’s book, *North* (1975). Hughes traces the literary influences on Heaney that he might have received from the British Romanticism and Irish forefathers such as Seamus Deane, W. B. Yeats, and Patrick Kavanagh. This assumption is in line with Parker’s observation of Heaney’s early years of poetic affinities with places and rural ways of life.

In Heaney's establishment of his poetics, David Lloyd (1997) observes that Heaney's poetry concerns particularly about the Irish cultural identity through the inevitable contemplation of politics. With a subtle strategy, Heaney uses his poetry to mediate his national spirit by uncovering the common archetypes of Northern Ireland: political conflicts, peasantry and landlords, Catholic and Protestant, nationalists and unionists. Lloyd claims that Heaney poses his poetics of identity by "the reterritorialisation of language" (161), using native names of places or objects to differentiate the Irish identity from the English. At the same time, the poet also aestheticises the Irish cultural root or "the family romance of identity" (162) through reimagining the myth of Kathleen Ni Houlihan, the motherland as the Irish-Gaelic poetic convention of *aisling*. However, this paper will move from the previous interpretation of Heaney's rural poetry to the more pressing discussion on the examination labour and farm lives in the georgic mode.

Reading Heaney's Poetry with the Georgic Convention and Ecocriticism

Despite the rich linguistic complexity in his poetic creativity and his social, political, and cultural heritage, this research aims to investigate the significance of agriculture in Heaney's poetry and inspiration. In this project, Heaney's representation of rural life and farming will be critically explored through the georgic mode to examine the close relationship between human labour and nature. The selected poems in this paper include 1) "Follower" from *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), 2) "Bann Clay" from *Door into the Dark* (1999), 3) "Fodder" and 4) "Servant Boy" from *Wintering Out* (1972), and 5) "The Seed Cutters" from *North* (1975), all are from 25 poems in the collection *Opened Ground: Poems 1966-1996*.

By critically looking at Heaney's presentation of the natural and environmental elements, the researcher will examine his depiction of hard labour in land cultivation and the care for livestock. Focusing on the mastery of nature (the farm environment, livestock, and man labour), the researcher argues that Heaney's poetic creativity is motivated by his childhood on the farm and influenced by the georgic tradition. His elaborate depiction of farming activities and the country folks' ways of lives all contribute to the analysis of the poet's ecocritical consciousness, the georgic tradition, and a sense of place to the Irish landscapes.

In general, the georgic mode in literature is the depiction of the natural environment in relation to agriculture by not only romanticising or glorifying nature but also portraying its hardships in the country. The georgic mode is often seen in a didactic poem which intends to instruct farming skills related to growing plants, raising animals, or harvesting crops. In fact, the pastoral and the georgic are closely interconnected; however, co-operation and the reality of hard rural work are particularly highlighted in the latter. John Goodridge (1995) argues that the pastoral is limited to its idealisation of nature while the georgic centrally considers the practicality of labour in rural life. In other words, the pastoral refers to a manifestation of an apparently universal, pre-conscious, human desire to an ideal and simple world. Because this desire is usually unable to be fulfilled in the "real" world, it has been realised in the natural territory of art and literature. In comparison to romanticised peace and harmony, David Fairer (2011) contends that the main theme of the English georgic, in contrast to the pastoral, is labour, which is normally hidden but the georgic presents a positive and even a heroic view of labour as pleasurable and socially progressive.

Georgic writing can be traced back to Hesiod's *Works and Days* (eighth century BC) as a founding text, while eighteenth-century georgic poetry is modelled after Virgil's *Georgics* (36-29 BC) (Juan Christian Pellicer, 'The Georgic', 2014), a didactic poem on cultivation and animal husbandry. The georgic tradition became popular through James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1726-44) which considers the natural elements in agriculture, John Philips's *Cyder* (1708) which examines the cultivation of the apple orchard and cider production, and John Dyer's *The Fleece* (1757) which instructs shepherding practice and textile economy. These georgic texts were created to be didactic and instructive for

farmers. They send out, too, an environmental message of control, management, and an ethic of care to the readers. In relation to ecocriticism, Fairer argues that georgic poetry, which is often viewed by modern ecocritics as peripheral and antagonistic to green rhetoric due to its desire to harness nature, can, in fact, help define ecocriticism. The perception that the georgic is engrossed in the mastery of nature and exploitation of natural resources for human ends is limited and reductive. The georgic mode can be seen as uncertain frustrating and challenging, but, with cooperation and care between man and nature, farmers can achieve their goals and productivity.

Reading Seamus Heaney's works through ecocritical perspectives, many recent critics have examined his poetry in ways to challenge different aspects such as nature poetry, ecopoetry, environmentalist poetry, pastoral and georgic modes. Richard F. Thomas (2001) argues that the georgic also represents political situations and social changes. By comparing Virgil's *Georgics* with Heaney's "Digging", the writer shows some similarities between agricultural labour and warrior's combat, as revealed in Heaney's poetic line "snug as a gun". Not only physical hardship in sweat and labour, Thomas also connects the plagues in Heaney's "At a Potato Digging" with Patrick Kavanagh's *The Great Hunger* which suggests "a web of allusivity that is likewise Virgilian" (144). In this way, Heaney's rural poem is not romantic but critical of the social and cultural dynamism that can be dealt with the georgic.

To identify Heaney's poems with the georgic as an anti-pastoral mode, Jack Thacker (2019) comments that "'At a Potato Digging' expresses this very paradox, resisting the mismanagement of the Irish countryside under British colonial rule at the same as it comes to terms with the buried traumas of Ireland's past by way of the notion of good husbandry" (144). With this conceptual transition of the mode from deconstructing the pastoral, romanticised depiction of the countryside in the term, 'anti-pastoral' to the celebration of labour and adaptation of farm life for fruitfulness and productivity, it can be summarised that poetry about farm life and the natural environment offers another mode of presentation in the name of the georgic.

By looking back at the original version of the georgic, Heaney's adoption of Virgilian traits can be observed in English and Irish politics and societies:

Virgil's *Georgics* reflected those troubles, as well as the guarded optimism that was possible in the years after Actium. In the time of Ireland's recent troubles, never separable from its history of troubles stretching from Cromwell to Thatcher and beyond, and including the famine, whose causes lie in the rape of Ireland as much as in the potato blight that led to the diaspora, we find a georgic realism and a sense and use of agriculture as a grand metaphor for the problems of existence. In the starkness of its beauty such poetry connects to the profound visions of Virgil as it also connects to and corrects the trivializing traditions that had so transformed Virgil through an idealization bred of comfort and tranquility. (Thomas, 2001 : 147)

It is vital to interpret that Heaney's works which reflect the Irish political unrest suggest the poet's awareness of the georgic social agenda. Heaney's adoption of the georgic mode from Virgil can be observed in the discussion of the Irish social and political situations and that agrees with Thomas' reading of Heaney's work as the georgic of resistance to both British politics and culture.

Besides reading Heaney's poetry as a response to politics and social criticism, investigating his works with the georgic lens allows the new interpretation of rural and farm poetry in a richer and more complex angle. Rachel Falconer (2018) investigates Heaney's *The Last Walk* (2013) which is translated from Pascoli's *L'ultima passeggiata* with an ecocritical mind. Following Garrard and Lidström's positioning Heaney as "a fully-fledged environmentalist poet", Falconer looks at Heaney's poetry with aesthetics and ethics from the environmentalist view in *Field Work* (1979) and claims it as Heaney's most georgic-themed volume. This collection begins with poems about ploughing which suggests his fascination in farm works and the natural world. In terms of agriculture, Thacker (2019) demonstrates that the georgic works against

diminishing relevance and emphasises how traditional and modern agriculture are important to contemporary culture and our relationship with the physical environment.

This review of Seamus Heaney's scholarly studies has illustrated the gap that can be critically fulfilled by rereading his poetry with a more environmental and ecological consciousness of the georgic mode in social and political dimensions which will be analysed in the following section.

An Analysis of Heaney's Georgic Poems

Seamus Heaney's poetry often reveals the celebration of farm life and hard work, arguably following the georgic tradition. By describing details of the natural environments, he highlights the power of man labour in cultivating the farm and the way the natural elements affect its productivity by care and cultivation. Heaney's poems represent the ancestral heritage in agriculture, as already seen in "Digging". However, there are other poems in which Heaney exemplifies the power of labour and the dynamic natural elements in the farmland, the rain, the river, vegetation, animals, and more importantly hard labour of those farmers who dig the grounds to cultivate the land and pass on their Irish ancestral tradition to the next generation to come.

To begin with, "Follower" in *Death of a Naturalist* can be regarded as a georgic poem which exemplifies the farmer's strength and skills through young Heaney's view. It comprises the octosyllabic quatrains that illustrates what W.H. Auden metaphorically called, "farming of a verse" (Collins, 2003). Depicting his father working on a horse-plough, the speaker describes the farmer as skilled and versatile. Collins argues that "The polished lines and sophisticated linguistic topography also emphasize his schooling in the ancient pastoral tradition handed down from Virgil's *Georgics*" (39). The poet's use of metaphor enables the readers to see his father as an "expert", "His shoulders globed like a full sail strung". Here the farmer's physicality is exaggerated as a ship that allows him to further push the plough driven by the horses. His father is a skilled man controlling the wing and the steel-pointed sock of the plough and driving it through the soil without breaking. Patrick Heaney, his father, is categorised into that type whose mastery of the ploughing team was exemplary.

In this poem, the father is seen rigid in his calculation as he estimates the ground before he turns the furrows. Heaney uses the word "mapping" the furrow to imply rigidity and accuracy of his work, and this responds to Fairer's observation of the georgic element that requires knowledge of the land, "the furrow and the furrowed brow, the harrow and the occasionally harrowing, are all part of the georgic" (467). Also, the word "mapping" suggests the power of man working on the earth in ways that he can cultivate it by using technology. Michael Parker (1993) compares Heaney's father as "a Daedalus of the fields" (64) an artisan as much as an architect of the farmland. The first three four-line stanzas invoke a sense of experiences and skillfulness in the farmer whose labour is emphasised by his son-observer. For Thacker, the ploughman's careful calculation of the furrow can be examined in relation to the poetic rhythm:

As in Heaney's other poems about rural skills and crafts, there is an analogy to be drawn here between the ploughman's mapping of the furrow and Heaney's careful calibration of each line. His plodding abab rhyming stanzas reflect the turning of the plough and team at the end of each furrow, and in so doing they re-emphasise the etymology of 'verse', derived from the Latin 'versus', 'a line or row', specifically 'a line of writing (so named from turning to begin another line)' – an image which itself is taken from 'vertere', which means 'to turn', as in at the end of a field (*OED*). The credit for the pun, however, can be attributed not to Heaney but to Virgil, as in the *Georgics* (above). (155)

The root of the word, “verse” suggesting a line or a row, reflects Heaney’s expertise in crafting his poems and that metaphor of ploughing the land is compared to turning the words into imagery.

In farm ploughing, the poet emphasises the necessity of farm animals that accommodate their hard work. Using a team of horses with modern tools or plough, Heaney depicts his father’s strength and communication skills with the animals. By focusing on accuracy and skillful calculation, the farmer can control the horses to cut the ground and turn the sods. In these lines, “Of reigns, the sweating team turned round. / And back into the land.”, it is noted that the farmer becomes one with the horses in directing the plough to turn the soil. Not only his force to pull and push the team of horses, it is also important to signal them by using sound, clicking which has been a technique to domesticate farm animals since the ancient time. Therefore, using a team of horses suggests the cooperation between the farmer’s skills in ploughing and utilising the horses.

In the second section, Heaney turns his focus to the young speaker, stumbling behind his father. Young Heaney looks up at him as a role model; the boy examines the soles of his father’s boots (hobnail). Evidently his father’s care and love is revealed in their close relationship when the father carries his son on his back and rises to his plod. Farming for young Heaney was a dream job when he observed his father working on the farm though he changed his mind when he embarked on his literary career. Despite that fact, we can perceive the speaker’s intention to grow up and plough, “stiffening his arm” around his father and this image suggests the importance of hard labour and skills in farming as the poem progresses.

Heaney ends the poem, “Follow” with his retrospective image of the young son “tripping” and “yapping”, following his father around the farm. The poet is aware of his respect for his father and his desire to pass on this ancestors’ agricultural tradition to the next generation but it was not fulfilled as he wished. The young boy followed his father in terms of connection with the farmland and sense of belonging to the Irish culture. However, the turning point is stated in the poem with the contrastive signpost, “but” which refers to the opposite position of the father and the son. In these last two lines, it is not the son, who keeps stumbling after his father, but it is the father himself, who follows the grown up son. This metaphorical comparison implicates a sense of responsibility and yet burden in their relationship. On the one hand, the father is arguably perceived as a ‘ghost’, who follows his son in his childhood memory; on the other, the father might be interpreted as the burden that Heaney has to pass on to the following generation. In Parker’s point of view, the poem implicates a sense of guilt over Heaney’s rift with tradition. As a conflict of identity, Heaney’s poetry about farming and childhood memory can be regarded as a reconciliation and gratitude to his ancestors and the Irish culture in turning his farming skills into poetic creativity.

Associated with the land, Heaney’s poetry deals with the physicality of the earth in “Bann Clay” from *Door into the Dark* (1969). The poem aims to depict the hard work of making clay, the natural resource from the river. Heaney examines the geological dimension of the earth underneath the river by associating it with man labour. Referring to the topographical space of the longest river (River Bann) in Northern Ireland, the poet, covered in white stain, observes how workers pedal to take the clay from the river, “Slabs like the squared-off clots/ of a blue cream”. The image of the soft clay being transferred from the riverbed to dry on the bank epitomises the working process and utility of the natural resources. Heaney pays great attention to natural history and the passage of time in shaping the clay for their use, “for centuries”. Through geological processes with vegetation, the clay “Relieved its hoarded waters/ and began to ripen”.

Heaney’s value in the natural environment is embedded in its interconnection with geology and the landscape. The clay that the labourers are working on cannot be considered separately from its ‘dwelling’ at the riverbed as a residue. With the “webbed marsh” above, the Bann clay has been fossilised millions of years with vegetation where it is hidden under “the humus and roots”. The geological formation reveals its economic value or ‘enframe’ it in a Heideggerian term.

In this process, the labourers utilise the mineral resource to make clays for construction. Heaney's reference to "Mesolithic Flints" adds in the scientific feature of the clay used as tools and worked flints in the past and also reflects its primitive condition and human community.

Unlike other georgic poems about the farm, "Bann Clay" delves into the deep aspect of the earth in connection with the hard labour of digging it up and drying it for use. At the end of the poem, the speaker "shoveled up the livery slicks" and labored toward it. This first-hand experience allows the speaker to learn the process of turning the river clay into a clay slab. This poem also recurs in the poem "To a Dutch Potter in Ireland" from *Spirit Level* (1996) which Heaney illustrates his fascination in the clay from the Bann Valley also. In that poem, the poet points out the rich quality of the glutinous clay like "viscous satin" suitable for ceramic artworks. To connect these two poems, transforming the clay through laborious processes can be regarded as reliving the past through the use of natural resources.

Like other peaty bog poems he wrote, in "Bann Clay", Heaney's root lays deep in the soil, the Irish landscape; to work on it relies on the labourers' effort. The shift of time from the past to present reflects the poet's engaged experience with the work on the earth. As Kirsty Williams (2003) said, "At the moment he shovels up livery slicks, a temporal truncation occurs, and a distant past physically impinges on the present" (78). Unlike other bog poems which revitalise the natural history in relation to human settlements, "Bann Clay" highlights the advantages and utilities of the clay as the poet fuses the past of the labourers with the present of his working. Byron D. Angelopulo (1987) contends that Heaney's examination of the dark earth illustrates his "willed determination to enter into the darkness of the landscape and the self" (86). Thus, the speaker wants to relive the moment of perception when the landscape and its history (conceived as a timelessly present geological formation) are opened (as the collection is entitled, *Opened Grounds*). Hence, moving from the land to the riverbed, Heaney persistently depicts the Irish landscape as the recollection of his memory of rural work and its natural history.

At his zenith of accomplishment in the 1970s, Seamus Heaney wrote *North* (1975) as a form of revitalising the ancestral history of Ireland by looking closely at the farms. "The Seed Cutters", the second poem of the sequence "Mossbawn: Two Poems in Dedication", can be read in relation to farm labour and its history. This age-old farm practice of potato seed cutting is imagined back to the old days when the community was closely-knitted and villagers joined hands to prepare potatoes for planting. Heaney presents this rural activity by reimagining the georgic elements of farm work in a less laborious way in the form of a sonnet; "The Seed Cutters" reveals how agriculture united people within the Irish peasant community.

"The Seed Cutters" opens with an image of field workers gathering in a half-circle and kneeling on the ground under the hedge; these farmers are perceived as if their seed cutting was a long tradition, "hundreds of years away". The speaker refers to the Dutch artist, Pieter Brueghel the Elder, whose works portrayed the rural lives in the 16th Century, and who might have created his artworks if he saw these people gathering and performing their activity. In the interview with Dennise O'Driscoll (2008), Heaney explains his identification with this farm culture and his contribution in poetry: "I always felt at home with his scenes – the hayfield, the peasant wedding, the hunters in the snow, children's games. Things looming large and at the same time being pinned down in the smallest detail" (174). This cultural heritage of farm works represents the combination of the pastoral and the georgic images. Here, he celebrates the labour of seed potato cutting in the field. Despite the fact that the seed cutters use a windbreak to keep them work efficiently, the wind immensely breaks through and challenges their tolerance and attentive experience.

In the second quatrain, Heaney examines the details of seed cutting to illustrate farm work which requires great care and skills. Buried under straws, the potatoes tubers are carefully cut because it is not urgent to hasten the job. The process is depicted to highlight the senses in the readers:

They are taking their time. Each sharp knife goes
 Lazily halving each root that falls apart
 In the palm of the hand: a milky gleam,
 And, at the centre, a dark water mark.

In this image of seed potato cutting, the poet invites his readers to participate in this farm work as if it was part of the craftsmanship. By dividing the eyes of the seed potatoes and the roots, the seed cutters can have more chances to get potato yields. The image of "a milky gleam" is in contrast to "a dark water mark", the juxtaposition of light and darkness. Thacker suggests that the dark watermark reminds the readers of the blight that devastated the crops during the Irish Famine (1844-1885) in the previous century (150). In this way, farm work can revitalise the history of Irish potato farming. The speaker is aware of the disappearing condition of this farming process in the 20th Century, which also reminisces his childhood experience. This seed cutting might be the lost custom as he exclaims in the twelfth line, "Oh, calendar customs" which implicates the time marker of agricultural seasons.

Relating farm works with art works, Heaney ends the poem with a couplet that brings back the image of painting. He imagines that the seed cutters working on the farm could be included in the "frieze" decoration and those people might be placed in the composition, but without their individual names, "our anonymities". Heaney shifts from the pronoun "they" to "all of us there" as if he meant to fuse the past with the present and to include himself who was an observer in the preservation of this traditional farming practice. Tamsin Bracher (2020) views that "The Seed Cutters" offers "a momentary escape from the Troubles dominating Northern Ireland at the time" in the 1970s. Thus, the poet's representation of field workers handling the seed potatoes possibly suggests the connection between the peasant history and the earth which enriches agrarian culture in Ireland.

Heaney's fascination in farm works is not only presented through the images of the earth and the crops, it is also included in his depiction of livestock and care. "Fodder" in *Wintering Out* (1972) presents a laborious job of working on hay in the winter with an anecdote of a dialect, "fother". Heaney's interest in the Irish dialect is often incorporated with his poetry, which reflects his cultural identity. In fact, the collection title, *Wintering Out* in Irish, means to survive and pass the hard and cold season. The poem "Fodder" depicts the poet's farming experience by detailing his consideration of season and the simplicity of rural life. Opening his arms to take the hay, the poet explains how he starts unload the stack of hay and experience the fodder in the first three stanzas.

By taking the hay into the stall, the speaker describes his direct experiences of farming which reveals its connectedness with the weather and other natural elements. The stack fell on his feet recalling its process in the past summer after the grass was mown. It is seen in "swathes of grass and meadowsweet" that Heaney creates this pastoral image. Making hay requires good timing as well as hard labour to ensure that it is completely dry before it is wet again by humidity.

The last two stanzas of the poem epitomise the social aspects of Irish culture in Heaney's combination of religious image with rural life. As seen in the image of grass turned into hay and then fodder for livestock, Heaney illustrates the abundance of the hay through the Biblical allusion. The phrase "multiple as loaves and fishes" refers back to the miracle of Jesus Christ when he fed 5,000 people. This allusion to Christianity reveals the abundance of the fodder in ways that the poet wants to describe it in an exaggerated manner. It is known that Heaney is a Catholic who lived in Ulster, Northern Ireland. With Catholic upbringing, he went to Saint Columbus' College in Derry, which influenced his poetic creativity. The poet draws a close to the farm activity as the poet tries to make the stall more comfortable with the hay at the end of the laborious day. His emphasis on "These long nights" suggests the long process of hay making and the challenge in

'wintering out' in Ireland. It can be concluded that the imagination of unloading hay reveals a sense of belonging to the farm work and Heaney makes this hard work comforting and connects poetry with the rural farm life as their labour can be rewarding.

Apart from farm work, Heaney's reimagining of the georgic can be seen in his critique of social and political dynamism in Ireland via his critique of child labour. In relation to Virgil's *Georgics*, the georgic considers social changes as much as political resistance. It was Ireland's trouble in the 1970s Britain politically dominated Ireland. In *Wintering Out* (1972), Heaney depicts a life of a working class boy, who has struggled with his poverty as a servant. The poem "Servant Boy" deals with resilience in that problematic society as the poet portrays the boy trying to make ends meet in winter. The Irish expression, 'wintering out' suggests tolerance and patience of the poor, the marginalised group. Heaney begins with a servant going in the "outhouse" with a "hurricane lamp" to work for a rich family. The poem gives a sense of hurry in the "swinging" lamp and the poor condition is gradually revealed in "the back end of a bad year" and "a jobber among shadows". This might allude to the political turmoil in Ireland when the nationalist radicals called for Independence and that led to violence and losses in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland due to ethnic differences and sectarian conflicts (Catholic and Protestant). Thus, the boy's bad year results in his hard work which might be considered to be insignificant by those masters of the aristocratic houses, "among shadows".

Heaney highlights the predicament of the servant boy working as a "work-whore" and the poet connects him with "slave-blood" to invoke the powerlessness of his working-class status. In exchange for money, the young boy has to use his labour to earn a living and this might imply the Irish class struggle against the British landlords whose status historically dominated Northern Ireland. Heaney asks for some attention from the readers to grant the servant boy a sense of respect in which he might not receive from his employers. Although he is not identified as an African-related boy, his subservient position places him in a "slave-blood". In this light, his social condition is devalued and shrunk in the biological metaphor of a slave. Thus, the boy's past genealogy is mixed with his present condition of a servant. Historically driven by poor economic conditions on a market day, the poor Irish children offered themselves for hire to catch the bidder-master's attention. Heaney, despite his disavowed position, admires the young boy's courage and dedication to his work as he noticed the servant's "patience". This working-class's life is a "trail" which suggests the issue of poverty and how he wants to show their resilience to the unrest situation of Northern Ireland during the turbulent time.

In "Servant Boy", Heaney emphasises resilience to hardship as the boy works from house to house to perform his duty: from stable to the backdoor of the rich house of "little barons". Besides general errands, the boy has to manage farm work ("fodder") with his labour to earn some money. Heaney sympathises with the servant's poor conditions which are manifested in such words as "broken", "haggard", and "stiffened", all reflect that poor work conditions and the inevitability of child labour. Whether exhausted or sick, the servant always "comes first-footing". This vividly signifies the reciprocal relationship between the upper class and the working class in Northern Ireland, where employment is not fairly balanced. Heaney ends his criticism of the Irish society by presenting the boy carrying warm eggs with his "resentful and impenitent" feelings. Indeed, it is the social inequality that the boy resents; however, he has no other options but these laborious works to earn a living. The depiction of the servant boy in Belfast might be a clear representative of the poor Irish families who had to rely on the rich Anglo-Irish upper class and that inequality might be the origin of the political conflicts in Northern Ireland. From a postcolonial perspective, Daniel Tobin (2009) argues that the boy glances at the big estates owned by the "absentee landlords who collected 'rackrents' from the natives who worked the land" (84) and this poem illuminates a degree of the colonial mind as well as of the poet, who strongly identifies with the plight of his community (85). Despite that resentment, Heaney shows the boy's determination to do his job without any regret of his

poor conditions. The last image of him carrying warm eggs might open more interpretations to read the boy's cheerfulness and optimism.

In the last section of "Servant Boy", the poet, despite portraying the boy's feeling of impenitence, reveals his sense of anger in being in his situations. Heaney's engagement with the servant boy by addressing him, "you", allows us to think that he sympathises with the boy and his "heightened sense of Ireland's tumultuous history compels him to identify with victims of poverty and dispossession" (Colin, 2003 : 67). In this light, the servant boy is regarded as a victim of social inequality which leaves him no option but a struggle to survive. For Helen H. Vendler (2000), Heaney's examination of Irish poverty reflects his "historicized alter egos" because the poet illustrates his "sociological awareness" of the inferior social status (86). The alter egos such as a thatcher, a blacksmith, or a servant boy, can represent a dead end to the role of poetry and social criticism.

Heaney traces his imagination of the servant boy based on an old man named Ned Thompson, who visited his house once or twice a week (130). The poet relates his poetic imagination with his critique of the Irish working class's living conditions or the minority with resentment and impenitence as a result of social injustice, as O'Driscoll (2008 : 130) indicated: "In the poem, the servant boy 'kept his patience and his counsel' while he was wintering out: whatever he said, he said nothing; he knew the score, bore the brunt and bided his time. But by the time of the Civil Rights marches his stoop had begun to be straightened and his walk, I would like to think, was being braced by the poem in which he appeared." Thus, Heaney's poetry is prominent about the working class and his criticism on poverty in the Irish society. The reference to the hard work from the farm to the master's house signifies Heaney's examination of rural life in which child labour was inevitable but it is resilience of the social and political problems in Ireland.

Conclusion

In this study, Seamus Heaney's fascination with farm work has been examined to confirm that he is one of the greatest georgic poets. Thoroughly analysing the selected poems, the researcher found that the poet reimagines rural poetry by considering the natural elements of the farm in relation to its workers' labour. It would not be wrong to conclude that reading Heaney's georgic poems significantly reveals the poet's celebration of hard labour and examination of natural history, especially the earth, as well as the role of his poetry as a resistance to social and political complexities. Unquestionably, to read Heaney's poetry with the georgic lens is to shed light on how cultural identity is closely interrelated with the natural environment and its history.

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