
วารสารมนุษยศาสตร์และสังคมศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยอุบลราชธานี
ปีที่ 13 ฉบับที่ 2 กรกฎาคม-ธันวาคม 2565

การปรับปรุงภาพพจน์เปรียบเทียบวัยเด็กในไอร์แลนด์ในบทกวีคัดสรรของเชมัส ฮีนีย์ และ พอล มัลดูน

The Reworking of Irish Childhood Trope in a Selection of Poetry by Seamus Heaney and Paul Muldoon.

พิมพวรรณ ใช้พานิช

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Received: Aug 06, 2021

Revised: Aug 05, 2022

Accepted: Aug 09, 2022

บทคัดย่อ

วัยเด็กในฐานะภาพพจน์เปรียบเทียบทางวรรณกรรมมักถูกทำให้ยวนใจเปรียบเสมือนช่วงเวลาที่ควรทะนุถนอมและปกป้อง ศิลปินและกวีต้องปรับปรุงภาพพจน์เปรียบเทียบของวัยเด็กเพื่อให้สอดคล้องกับวัยเด็กของตนในการนำเสนอวัยเด็กในฐานะประสบการณ์การใช้ชีวิตจริง วัยเด็กในไอร์แลนด์ได้รับอิทธิพลทางการเมืองโดยหลีกเลี่ยงไม่ได้ ทำให้การนำเสนอวัยเด็กในไอร์แลนด์ในฐานะภาพพจน์เปรียบเทียบท้าทายกวีหลากหลายรุ่นในการต่อรองและปรับปรุงภาพพจน์เปรียบเทียบตามขนบวรรณกรรม ประวัติศาสตร์ และอัตลักษณ์แห่งชาติ

การศึกษานี้มุ่งเน้นสำรวจบทกวีคัดสรรบางส่วนที่เกี่ยวกับวัยเด็กของกวีไอริชร่วมสมัย ได้แก่ เชมัส ฮีนีย์ และ พอล มัลดูน ตามกระบวนการอ่านละเอียดภาพพจน์เปรียบเทียบของวัยเด็กในไอร์แลนด์ตามอรรถปริวรรตศาสตร์ ผลการ

วิเคราะห์แสดงให้เห็นว่า กวีถ่ายทอดประสบการณ์วัยเด็กหลังการแยกเป็นเอกราชของไอร์แลนด์ผ่านจินตภาพที่เน้นภูมิหลังทางการเกษตร และวิถีชีวิตตามชนบทในไอร์แลนด์เป็นหลัก เมื่อจินตภาพเหล่านี้ถูกวิเคราะห์เข้ากับบริบทางประวัติศาสตร์และความไม่สงบการเมืองของไอร์แลนด์ บทกลอนเหล่านี้เผยให้เห็นว่า ความผิดหวังที่มาพร้อมกับความทรงจำวัยเด็กนั้นกลับเป็นแหล่งสร้างแรงบันดาลให้กับกวีทั้งคู่

คำสำคัญ: วัยเด็กในบทกวี อรรถปริวรรตศาสตร์ บทกวีไอริช พอล มัลดูน เชมัส ฮีนีย์

Abstract

As an artistic and literary trope, childhood is often romanticised as a period to be cherished and protected. To present childhood as a lived experience, artists and poets must rework the trope to match their own childhood. Inevitably influenced by the dramatic turns of political changes, Irish childhood presents the Irish poets of different generations with the challenging task of reworking literary tradition, national history, and identity.

To understand how contemporary Irish poets, Seamus Heaney and Paul Muldoon, complete such a task. This study examines a selection of their poems about childhood from a hermeneutic approach by closely reading their reworking of childhood tropes. The analysis shows that the poets mainly convey their childhood experiences of post-independent Ireland through visual imageries that foreground agricultural background and Irish rural life. Once rural images are contextualised within the history of political unrest, they

reveal that a sense of disillusion that comes with childhood memory is an underlying source of inspiration for both poets.

Keywords: Childhood in poetry, Hermeneutics, Irish poetry, Paul Muldoon, Seamus Heaney

1. Introduction: A conceptual review of Irish childhood and its artistic representations

The Western idea of childhood as a period of innocence and playfulness worthy of protection and prolongation is a relatively new concept. The emergence of childhood in Europe was formed around the late eighteenth century when the agrarian society rapidly declined due to the transition into an industrial society, which coincides with the propagation of romantic movement in arts and literature. In this sense, childhood is "a romantic phenomenon" and "a romantic invention" (Austin, 2003, p. 75). According to Kimberley Reynolds (2014) the romantic worship of childhood probably reached its peak in the nineteenth century, the golden age of children's literature, and became known as the cult of childhood. Since then childhood has become one of the most familiar and recurring tropes of artistic expression. Paintings, poems and songs constantly revisit and sometimes even reinvent it to suit the changed sociohistorical contexts.

At the periphery of European geopolitics lies Ireland. Childhood plagued by poverty and starvation was not intrinsically endemic to Ireland, yet the early formation of Irish childhood is by far

the most interesting for the extreme degree of ideological contestation to which it was subjected in the area of artistic and literary representations. The recent study on the Irish childhood reveals that " the historiography of this key demographic group remains in its infancy" (Regan, 2019, p. 141). This implies that the nineteenth-century Irish childhood has yet remained a terrain of lived experience to be fully explored should one wish to understand how the concept has transpired in the following centuries and the contemporary arts.

In the early eighteenth century, a difficult condition of Irish childhood was suggested in Jonathan Swift's satirical essay, "A Modest Proposal" (1729). Swift's mock proposal "[f]or preventing the children of poor people in Ireland, from being a burden on their parents or country, and for making them beneficial to the publick" is most memorable for his savage wits. The Irish children born to poor parents should be sold as food for the rich. Swift continues his satire of the rich absentee landlords as he assures his readers that " this food will be somewhat dear, and therefore very proper for landlords, who, as they have already devoured most of the parents, seem to have the best title to the children" (para. 12). During this time, Irish childhood was precarious as a result of the country's political turmoil. Swift's real proposal is indeed cloaked in the mock proposal and heavily influenced by his religious faith. He saw the absentee landlords, an imbalance in trades with England, and moral decline among Irish people as the root causes of national problems. Ireland was utterly exploited by the British rule that, for the Irish people, staying in the motherland would mean a life of destitution, and becoming

subservient to the British imperialism by becoming indentured servants a different form of hardship and humiliation. The idea of childhood as something to be prolonged and cherished almost perished during the time of economic austerity, when children were hurried into labour market and put to work like adults.

A decade after the publication of Swift's satirical essay, Ireland suffered a period of severe cold climate and crop failure that eventually led to starvation and devastating demographic loss known as *Bliain an Áir* (the Year of Massacre). Thus, on top of the existing vicious political situation under the British rule, a series of ecological misfortunes worsened the deprived childhood. As earlier outlined, the nineteenth-century artistic representation of childhood was conceived from the romantic tradition. Around the same time, another artistic tradition, realism, was also developed. Realist tradition pledged a political ally to social reform movements that swept across the continent, hence preoccupied with the larger subject matter, for example social injustice, rather than the representational concept and individuals like childhood and children. Stricken by *an Gorta Mór* (the Great Famine) from 1845 to 1852, Ireland witnessed its greatest demographic loss to premature deaths and mass emigration.

Starvation and hardship from the past cement their place in the national history. Yet, for artists, writers and poets of later generations, their memories of Irish childhood undoubtedly differ from their eighteenth or nineteenth century precursors. From De Valera's Post-Independent Ireland in the early twentieth century to *an Tíogar Ceilteach* (the Celtic tiger) of the late 1990s and the early 2000s,

Ireland slowly emerged from being a poor agrarian nation to a liberal European Union member state. Thus, the national identity and collective memory molded from past traumas have become a challenge to the younger generations of artists, writers, and poets.

This article will next explore how the Irish childhood is remembered by "the nation's best poet since William Butler Yeats" (Poetry Foundation, 2022), Patrick Kavanagh, and transmitted to and reworked by Irish contemporary poets, Seamus Heaney and Paul Muldoon. Both Heaney's and Muldoon's childhood happened before the 1990s and by the time of *an Tíogar Ceilteach*, they already became highly respected poets as Heaney won Nobel Prize in Literature in 1995 and Muldoon became a professor of poetry at University of Oxford from 1999 to 2004. They witnessed the dramatic changes of Ireland's political terrain that affect the country's national memory and identity. To understand the lived experience interlaced in such matrix, the Irish childhood may also be explored from the poetic reworking of the concept. For while engaging with the remembrance of the Irish childhood framed by the national trauma from the past and depicted by their poetic forerunner, both Heaney and Muldoon, as contemporary poet, must renegotiate their perceptions of and experiences with the same concept. During such process, the persisting idea of Irish childhood that is traditionally upheld must come to term with the present experience and the vision for the future. Tradition and intergenerational transmission and revision are thus at the heart of this analysis.

2. Methodology: Hermeneutic approach to close reading of the Irish childhood

Since the emergence of digital humanities, close reading in the tradition of I. A. Richards has been much discredited and criticised for its lack of systematic research rigour and ability to analyse an expansive selection of texts. Moretti (2000), for example, attacks close reading' s dependence on canonical works to advance his distant reading agenda. This, however, does not prevent close reading from being a fundamental practice of textual analysis that effectively reveals the subtle meanings of works beyond the impression assumed from a computational analysis of linguistic data. Disapproving of Moretti' s devaluation of close readings, Smith (2016) asserts that "if the offense is that many worthy or interesting texts remain unread because of past biases, then what is wanted, surely, is to have those texts read, not just counted" (p. 65).

Despite such antagonism from computational linguistics and empirical inquiry, most humanities and some social science scholars argue for the importance of interpretation and the holistic inquiry to meaning. From the semantic aspect, Magee (2011) points out that the semantic rubric (linguistic, cognitive, social, and computational semantics) requires an eclectic approach. Hence, a study of meaning of literary texts are not exclusive to pragmatics and formal semantics but also includes hermeneutics (p. 38). From the critical discourse analysis (CDA) aspect, Wodak & Meyer (2001) point out that CDA methods and procedures are based on a hermeneutic process, although they might not be explicit and varied among critics (p. 22). The holistic inquiry to

meaning aligns hermeneutics closely with social semantic interpretation and CDA. In other words, hermeneutics-based inquiry is aware of language as social practice, context of language use, and the multiplicity of meaning.

Hermeneutics is a qualitative approach to interpret texts or phenomena which aims to create a deeper understanding and acquire new insights. Hermeneutics and content analysis share a similar concern as both attempt to unpack implicit meaning. Yet, unlike content analysis that leans towards systematic method for unified interpretation (by rendering language into numerical dataset), hence closed semantic network of knowledge, hermeneutic approach focuses on the open structure of meaning. Apart from content analysis and computational hermeneutics, or what Mohr et al. (2015) term as "thin reading" and "thick reading" respectively, close reading is another hermeneutic approach to textual analysis. The usually implicit procedures of hermeneutic are explained by Gadamer (1975) in his hermeneutic circle to show the interdependence of holistic and atomistic interpretation and the importance of multiple interpretations of texts and contexts.

Acknowledging the rich cultural and historical context of the trope of Irish childhood, the researcher is of an opinion that it would be a lost opportunity to omit them for the sake of a formalist and empirical evidence-driven analysis of language studies. As noted in their reading of Burke's that "human experiences are more complex than [semantic ideal interpretation] because humans are suspended in elaborate webs of overlapping meanings", poetic interpretation by

means of close reading is needed for filling out of meaning and envisioning a vocabulary that goes through drama rather than avoiding it (Mohr et al., 2015, p. 3). Therefore, this study, grounded in the hermeneutic practice of close reading and an eclectic approach to literary texts, follows the research convention of literary and cultural studies. The hermeneutic method for close reading of poetry in this study focuses on the examination of formal and thematic elements i.e. imagery representing childhood. Reading of such imagery in each poet is not uncommon. What is needed is a critical examination of the same theme among different poets of different generations to reach a fuller picture of Irish childhood in Irish poetry. It must be addressed early on that though Kavanagh is not the poet in focus of this study, his influence on Heaney and Muldoon makes it essential to discuss his work along the discussion of the latter poets.

The rationale for the selection of these poets and poems lies in the general perception of the reading public that they represent the great tradition of Irish poetry as they are frequently anthologised together. Due to space restrictions, the researcher cannot present the analysis of the entirety works by chosen poets. Thus, the researcher purposively selects only five well-known poems with macro-topic relating to childhood, namely Kavanagh's "A Christmas Childhood", Heaney's "Digging", "Blackberry-Picking", and "Personal Helicon", and Muldoon's "Gathering Mushrooms".

3. Discussion

3.1 Poetic Reworking of Irish Childhood in Seamus Heaney's poetry

Heaney's interviews with *the Guardian* in 1972 and Henri Cole for the *Paris Review* in 1997 reveal about his literary background and influence. Heaney's background as, in his words, "the scholarship boy coming from the farm" explains his interest in the "documentation of farmland and farm life" (Cole, 1997, para. 120). A rural childhood in Ireland is a common ground in both Kavanagh (1904-1967) and Heaney. From both articles, Heaney told a story about his being introduced to Kavanagh's poetry in the 1960s after he graduated from Queen's University of Belfast and was teaching at St. Thomas's Secondary Intermediate School by the head of the school, Michael McLaverty. Heaney claimed that he was "pupped out of Kavanagh" and that Kavanagh's poetry is a "terrific breakthrough from English literature into home ground" (Cole, 1997, para. 141). In his prose titled "The Placeless Heaven", Heaney praised Kavanagh for his poetic achievement, as a genus of "a poetry which linked the small farm life which produced us with the slim-volume world we were now supposed to be fit for" (cited in Murphy, 2000, p. 11). Thus, to trace the string of literary tradition and the nuance in representations of Irish childhood in Pre- and Post-Independent Ireland in the Irish poetry, it seems necessary to briefly look at Kavanagh's poetic sensibility that influences Heaney's early works and is loved by younger generations of the post-*Tiogar Ceilteach* Ireland.

Born in 1904, Kavanagh's childhood was one of the Pre-Independent rural Ireland. One of the famous poems by Kavanagh that directly deals with the childhood memory in Ireland is "A Christmas Childhood". Kavanagh's visual images of farming construction, tools, activities and local geography effectively renders the local colours of Ireland, the essence of Irish rural life. Images of rural landscape and agricultural tools, for example, "the potato-pits", "ricks of hay and straw", "tracks of cattle", "stable-lamp", and "the bog" (Kavanagh, 2005, p. 39), are mentioned in a concrete and plain manner, stirring up a rustic and nostalgic sense of place. Rural life goes on as usual for a farming family in Ireland on Christmas: the mother milks the cows, the father plays the melodion, and the boy cuts the slits onto a doorpost with his gift penknife to mark the total number of his Christmases and prays. Through the child's eyes, the ordinary rural landscape overlaps with the mystical biblical landscape.

> One side of the potato-pits was white with frost –
> How wonderful that was, how wonderful!
> And when we put our ears to the paling-post
> The music that came out was magical.
>
> (Kavanagh, 2005, p. 39)

Though textual surface of the poem is plain and unornamented, the first stanza opens with the child's wonder of the snow-covered landscape on the Christmas day and sets the child's innocent awe as the controlling tone. The now commercialised and materially exuberant Christmas is certainly not the Irish childhood Kavanagh presents. This Irish childhood is steeped in spirituality and natural

world as Kavanagh vividly recalls his childhood memory on his family's farm as he projects the scene of the nativity of Jesus onto the Irish landscape. The snow covering covers the potato-pits and making the lights of the normal stable-lamp twinkle on Christmas days radiates a mystical allure. Such a mystical quality is tied to the spiritual atmosphere of Christmas. Two stanzas that well demonstrate this point are "The light between the ricks of hay and straw..." and "To eat the knowledge that grew in clay...". The light that shines through the cracks in the barn as if there is "a hole in Heaven's gable", the apple tree and its forbidden fruits of knowledge, and the "gay Garden", the heaven soon to fall from grace—all of these images are biblical allusions. What appears at the beginning as the speaker's reminiscence of childhood memory, then, turns into a delicate representation of social and cultural context of the place. The agricultural and rural landscape of Ireland, "the potato-pits" covered by "the frost of Bethlehem", is reimagined as a biblical terrain as it is superimposed by the nativity scene. This representation of spatial superimposition suggests the close connection between the Irish people, their lands and the strong Catholic faith.

Though the tone is heart-warming and blissful, Kavanagh's representation of childhood is not entirely romanticised. The awareness that "the gay Garden that was childhood's" can fall from grace by the acquisition of "the knowledge that grew in clay / And death the germ within it!", hints at Irish history wrought in religious conflict that mars their nation's true unity. For though Irish identity may be united through their agrarian connection with their land,

Plandáil Uladh (the plantation of Ulster) in the early-seventeenth century started a centuries-long period of British colonisation and the resistance against it. The religious difference between the Catholic south and the Protestant Ulster that turns Irish people against themselves is foreshadowed in Kavanagh's poem. The penknife, the Christmas present the boy receives foregrounds this concern towards the Irish childhood in the Pre-Independent Ireland. It symbolises a preparation for the future disappointment and obstacle, for though the penknife is now used in cutting "six nicks on the door-post" by the age of six, there is also "a little one for cutting tobacco" when he is old enough to smoke and to take the bitter fume that lingers over Ireland. Should the boy in Kavanagh's poem is himself, six years after Christmas 1910 he would be twelve years old and Ireland would again undergo a major political upheaval in 1916—*Éirí Amach na Cásca* (the Irish Easter Rising).

Heaney was born in 1939, two decades after the partition of Ireland. Unlike Kavanagh's childhood of one Ireland, Heaney's was one of the two Irelands. Despite being shaped by the new geo-body, the Irish isles still remain an agrarian isle. Heaney's geographical perception of a country does not seem to be constructed by the geo-politics shown on the map but overlapped with the borderless tie of the natural world. Agriculture is a way of life that binds the two countries together and transcends the political division. As previously shown in the analysis of Kavanagh's poem, his recollection of Irish childhood is strongly connected to the rural way of life and homeland. Such poetic power evoking geographic images and childhood nostalgia is what

Heaney directly inherited from Kavanagh. Many of Heaney's poems in *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) bear textual evidences of his reception of the aforementioned literary influence from Kavanagh, particularly visual images of rural life in Ireland. The connection between his childhood memory and his family's rural background appear in, for example, "Digging", "The Barn", "Blackberry-Picking", "Churning Day", "Follower", and "Personal Helicon". These are poems that explicitly commemorate the childhood memory as Heaney himself mentioned that *Death of a Naturalist* is indeed the "stuff out of County Derry from childhood" (Campbell, 2006, para. 11).

Yet, Ireland from his childhood and the one he knew for the most part of his life are quite different. When the 27 years-old Heaney began to publish his poems in the 1960s, Ireland was deeply divided. The one Ireland could no longer be bound merely by its agrarian background nor geography in the middle of the sectarian conflict known as *Na Trioblóidí* (the Troubles). In the 1974 article in the *Guardian*, Heaney ruminated on his perception of Catholicism as Irish identity during the Troubles and its connection to his position as a poet. To him, Catholicism in Northern Ireland during that time was "almost a racist term, a label for a set of cultural supposition" (Heaney, 1974, p. 17). The following statement reveals how the poet perceived his childhood Ireland differently from the one of the 1960s and 1970s,

> [W]hen I think about my territory and my hinterland and my past I am thinking in terms of Ireland as a whole and the history of the famine and the rebellion. Within Northern Ireland having

> that set of myths for yourself and your nation is what it means to be a Catholic.
>
> (Heaney, 1974, p. 17)

The shared agrarian background under the one Ireland concept was associated with Catholicism and the Republican, and the violent paramilitary movements. Therefore, when the Troubles was aggravated in the late 1960s, the reception of Heaney's poetry was of mixed opinions. In the same article in the *Guardian*, the anonymous critic commented on Heaney's works as being "a literary purity in which the act of poetic creation is equally balanced with the tenor of his comment" and a result of "a wholeness within the poems which infuriates those critics who suggest that the [poet] has ignored or played down the situation in Ulster" (Heaney, 1974, p. 17). The political climate of the Troubles in the 1960s and the 1970s may render Heaney's poetry politically mild from both extremes, but his poetic neutrality does not devalue his literary merit. Because of such quality, his literary success was reaffirmed in 1995 when he received the Nobel Prize "for works of lyrical beauty and ethical depth, which exalt everyday miracles and the living past" (Press Release, 2021).

In "Digging", Heaney wrote about his memory of his father's and grandfather's working on their land. The vivid recollection of this memory is achieved by his ability to successfully represent the clear onomatopoeia and the auditory sense of the act of digging as seen in words such as "rasping", "gravelly", "squelch" and "slap" (Heaney, 1998, pp. 3-4), and the visual images of the agricultural activities, such as bending, digging, rooting, burying, plucking, scattering, cutting,

nicking, and slicing. In addition, the presentation of auditory sense is reinforced by the iambic metre with the slight roughness of slant rhyme effectively imitating the rhythmic movement of act of digging. Heaney's diction and rhythmic metre in "Digging" are rustic and plain, inviting an association with the rural in the most natural manner. These vivid auditory and visual senses evoke a sense of nostalgia not only to the reader of Irish background, but also everyone with an understanding or an experience of agricultural and rural community and way of life. Because his poetic rendition of the rural experience transcends the geographical or national specifics by the virtue of poetic language and innate connection to the natural world, Heaney found a wider audience. The seemingly parochial elements of Heaney' s poetry concerning the Irish childhood and landscape encourage an appreciation of poetic reminiscence of the past and the place rather than impeding it. Although here, the past and the place of one whole Ireland he wrote increasingly became a myth.

The nuance of "Digging" is in its cultural reference when read as an autobiographical record of the poet' s contemplation on his family' s agricultural background and the intergenerational differences between his grandfather, his father and himself. In 1947, Northern Ireland Education Act was passed, and Heaney reaped the benefits of it. The " squat pen" and the " spade" initially function as the dichotomic symbols: they are the visual images representing the discontinuity in the familial and traditional profession in Heaney' s family, which, according to the poet, " belonged to a traditional rural Ireland" (Cole, 1997, para. 9). The opening of the poem begins with

the speaker's looking down at his father digging the ground. The spatial position of the one holding a pen at the top and the one with a spade at the bottom implies a visual distance and a spatial anxiety. It suggests the speaker's appraisal view of the intellectual pursuit that lives by the "squat pen" and the agricultural profession that depends on the "spade". Through such contrasting view of high and low position, the act of looking down ("I look down") suggests that the speaker, or the implied poet, is positioning his career as a higher profession. However, a sense of reconciliation is provided at the end of the poem, when the word choice shows the speaker's promise to use his pen to "dig", not to write. The implication of the digging by the pen emphasises Heaney's tendency to harvest his materials from the memory of his rural Irish childhood as he himself revealed that his poetry is "more or less autobiographical, based on memory" (Cole, 1997, para. 29).

Another poem that Heaney explicitly talked about a childhood memory is "Blackberry-Picking". Similar to "Digging", Heaney's choice of iambic metre assists in resonating the organic auditory image, which sets up the atmosphere of a natural landscape as the sound of each syllable flows naturally. In addition, the heroic couplet also enhances the narrativity of the poem about the speaker's childhood memory of blackberry picking and the disappointment inevitably derived from such activity that foreshadows the future disappointment. The hedgerow foraging is portrayed here against the backdrop of the Irish landscape, "Where briars scratched and wet grass bleached our boots. / Round hayfields, cornfields and potato drills" (Heaney, 1998, p. 8). The bodily representation of the blackberry and

the picking as seen in “its flesh was sweet”, “summer’s blood”, and “lust for/Picking” respectively, suggests the sensual impulse during the transition from childhood to adolescence (Heaney, 1998, p. 8). The “lust” to gather or to satisfy one’s appetite, “that hunger”, implies the youth’s intense need to gain a bodily pleasure (Heaney, 1998, p. 8). Yet, as noted by Andrew Murphy, such acquisition of knowledge comes with “the cost incurred in acquiring the knowledge that puts an end to childhood innocence” (Murphy, 2000, p. 15). In this case, the blackberry picking can also be read as the discovery of the transience of life, that the freshness of the flesh cannot last, and of the loss of innocence. Thus, even though the scene in the poem opens with an innocent atmosphere, it is quickly undermined by the gloomy contemplation.

Perhaps one of the best poems by Heaney that explicitly talks about the poet’s experience of his own poetic expression and the development of his poetic talent in capturing and remaking the past or childhood memory is “Personal Helicon”. This poem depicts the landscape, the material world as seen through the portrayal of those rustic farming tools or the local places that represent the Irish life (the wells, in this case) in order to articulate and preserve the local colour of the Irish landscape. The speaker recalls his own poetic development by creating a memory of the events through imagery and musicality. Different types of wells, ranging from the deep one, the “shallow one” to the “scaresome” one, represent different sources of imagination that rouse the ecstatic responses. The word “Helicon” in the title emphasises the implication of the wells as sources of imagination at

two levels: firstly, the helicon as in the round and spiral shape part of the musical instrument which gives forth musical sounds, and secondly, the Helicon as in the name of a mountain in Greece, in which, according to Greek mythology, live the Muses and is the location of the spring where Narcissus falls for his own reflection. To a child, the sources of sensory pleasure is found in the simple things such as the wells. The auditory, visual, olfactory, and tactile senses can be found through the interaction with the wells. For example, by dropping the bucket to fetch the water, the auditory sense, "the dark drop", "the rich crash", and the "echoes" that "gave back your own call / With a clean new music in it" (Heaney, 1998, p. 15). The visual sense is found in the "trapped sky", the reflection of the sky and the faces of the speaker's young and adult self (Heaney, 1998, p. 15). Olfactory and tactile senses are beautifully captured by the images of the ordinary substance and plants grow and decay around the wells such as waterweed, fungus, "dank moss", "soft mulch", fern, foxgloves and slime. These concentrated sensory images that are accentuated by the natural flow of the quasi Shakespearean rhyme scheme, bring forth a guileless and organic musicality in the simple materials of the physical world. In the last stanza, the tone slightly shifts towards the gloomy side as now the previously discussed innocent joy turns out to be "beneath all adult dignity" and seems to be lost from the adult speaker's aesthetic perception (Heaney, 1998, p. 15). However, the childhood memory of such experience becomes the source of materials for the adult speaker, who now must "rhyme / to see [himself], to set the darkness echoing" (Heaney, 1998, p. 15). In order

words, though it seems the innocent joy is lost and corrupted by the awareness of the Troubles, the memory of childhood is still resonant enough to restore or imitate a similar aesthetic pleasure. To bridge the past and the present, the poet's adult self-reconstructs the scenes from the past and the aesthetic perception or experience once perceived by his young self.

3.2 Poetic Reworking of Irish Childhood in Paul Muldoon's Poetry

Paul Muldoon is generally thought of as a disciple of Heaney. Yet his successful poetic career also proves that he also succeeds in establishing his unique poetic voice through his own creative divergence from his literary influences. Born in 1951 in County Armagh and later educated at Queen's University of Belfast, Muldoon's childhood and adolescence years sprung out around the time that accelerated the Troubles. In 1968, when Muldoon was seventeen, the poet had a chance to meet Heaney and Michael Longley, who at the time formed a critical group called the Belfast Group, and handed them his poems to criticise. Muldoon's poetic career started early as he published his first collection of poems *New Weather* in 1973 when he was only twenty-one years old. Clair Wills (1998) points out the significance of Muldoon's first publication as a follow-up of Heaney's *Wintering Out*, which was published one year earlier, and as a force of "something new, something to take notice of" (p. 25).

Upon being asked by the interviewer "Are your childhood memories still vivid?", Muldoon answered,

> Absolutely. I do feel very much that I can be in that moment, almost at will. It takes almost nothing to get me back there, certainly to the house I was brought up in, after the age of four, near a village called the Moy. The room I had there was a bedroom-cum-workroom looking on to a little backyard with a house, that my father had built, used mostly for pigs.
>
> (Wilson, 2004, para. 12)

He then fondly recalled the memory of his family's pig rearing and various animals on his home ground. Love of animals and pets may be the stereotypical hallmark of childishness, but when the interviewer described Muldoon's first collection as his "juvenilia" since it has a poem about hedgehogs, the poet replied, "I'm not sure where juvenilia begins and ends; I may not be out of that phase. I may not want to be out of it" (Wilson, 2004, para. 20). To Muldoon, there is a sense of prolonged childhood and a blurred boundary between the former and adulthood.

Similar to Kavanagh's and Heaney's, some of Muldoon's poems talk about his childhood memory and his father. Yet, his father figure is not presented as a stable figure who will remain the same like Heaney's father figure in "The Strand". Muldoon's absent father is dynamic and can be shifted according to the location or the land he works on. Sometimes he is a cauliflower and mushroom grower and sometimes a shopkeeper as seen in "The Right Arm". By recalling his childhood memory through the exploring of his father, Muldoon to

certain extents succeeds in recovering the childhood scenes from the past. However, these scenes are not fully concentrated and resonant in their poetic musicality and images like Kavanagh's or Heaney's poetry, but adequately intense in their creative juxtaposition of visual images. This recurring father figure in the poetry of the three Irish poets can be considered as what Malone suggests as "a trope loaded with cultural implications", whose effect may not be confined to the poets' recurring engagement with the same or similar subject matters only, but extends to the literary linage (Malone, 2000, p. 1009). Such literary patriarchal lineage between Kavanagh, Heaney and Muldoon implies an Irish poetic tradition and a continuing dynamic and modification in the Irish poetry that question and ponder on the national and political concerns over the Irish land and history. In case of Muldoon, his questioning of the father figures, the biological father as a symbol of the past and homeland and the literary fathers and their poetic heritage, can be found in the nuance of his narrative and his alternative poetic style and techniques in, for example, "Gathering Mushrooms".

Muldoon's *Quoof* (1983) seems to contain many poems with biographical details. "Gathering Mushrooms" applies visual images of mushrooms in order to articulate his thought and vision concerning the growing political problems in Northern Ireland in juxtaposition with his nostalgia for childhood. Wills points out that the poet's juxtaposition, which concerns with both "brutal vision" and "highly nostalgic images of [Muldoon's] childhood home", occurs throughout the collection, and though it is difficult to tell the poet's goal of this juxtaposition, the goal of the juxtaposition is to accentuate "the roots of the poetry

within a very specific experience of dual Northern Irish culture" (1998, p. 87). Muldoon's poetry may be different from his forerunners' in a sense that he tends to explore the new techniques and styles that tease with the strict convention of rhyme and metre, but it is also bound by such poetic roots that grow in Northern Ireland's contentious experience of national politics. And though Wills is reluctant to identify Muldoon's purpose of the juxtaposition, it is arguable that, when considering Muldoon's poetry alongside other Northern Irish poets and treating his works as part of a long tradition, the poet's intention might be to rework the Irish childhood experience through his innovative style, form, and narrative potential.

The evidence of Muldoon's creative style and technique and his deliberate juxtaposition evident in "Gathering Mushrooms". Five stanzas of this poem appear in the sonnet-liked fourteen lines, yet the rhyme schemes of both octaves and sestets are uneven and irregular since they do not conform to the strict sonnet convention. The breaking of the rhyme is Muldoon's linguistic playfulness and trick. The poet himself revealed in an interview that many of his poems deliberately adopt an unconventional sonnet form that does not follow to the traditional sonnet's rhyme scheme, instead making use of the arbitrary slant rhyme and line break. As a result, Muldoon's alternative sonnet is dubbed by a renowned Irish literary critic, Edna Longley as the "Muldoonic sonnet" or as Ruben Moi calls "deconstructed sonnet" (Moi, R., 2020, p. 122). The effect from such use of innovative sonnet form is to tactfully divert and manipulate the reader to the more serious contents presented in the poem. Though

Muldoon's non-conformist form and technique may appear radical, his admission that the application of the sonnet form is not initially premeditated, yet that "[a] lot of the poems do end up with a sort of sonnet shape" suggests that the poet's innovative poetic form and technique which establish his uniqueness might not be recognised as a total break away from his literary forerunners, but a result of his questioning about his literary patriarch lineage (Wills et al., 1986).

When it comes to the narrative quality in his poem, Muldoon does not totally neglect the literary influences of his precursors as his narrative potential bears a similar sentiment about the Irish land and the troubles that root in it. The first sonnet of "Gathering Mushrooms" opens with his romanticised childhood memory of his father as a mushroom farmer, who is viewed as "one of those ancient warriors" that opens the "Gates of Troy" to unload the horse manure (Muldoon, 1998, p. 105). A sense of nostalgia for the glory of childhood can be perceived immediately in the first stanza. An interval for this vision of childhood memory comes in the second stanza, which, unlike the concentrated and uninterrupted depiction of father figures and the land in Heaney's "Digging", Muldoon selectively slices out only the essence of this agricultural activity, the mushrooms, and fuses them with the temporal leaping into the next fifteen years. Next, in the third stanza his projection of his father's mushroom farming and harvesting is portrayed as a permanent picture by the use of future and present simple tense and the active form, for instance, "He'll be wearing", "He carries", "He reaches" and "He'll glance" (Muldoon, 1998, pp. 105-

106). Such projection accentuates a stronger sense of nostalgia for the romanticised childhood in the first stanza.

A rift between generations is shown through the juxtaposition of the visual images of the mushrooms and their different usages. If Heaney' s narrative shows discontinuation and reconciliation between his generation' s and his father' s and forefather' s path through the dichotomic motif of the squat pen and the spade, Muldoon makes use of the image of the mushrooms, the agricultural product from his father' s generation that later turns into a hallucinogenic source in Muldoon' s generation who thinks of them " only of psilocybin" (Muldoon, 1998, p. 105). In Muldoon' s narrative, a reconciliation for the agricultural background of his father' s generation is not clearly shown nor fully committed since there is not any promise to reconcile nor to take up with the former generation' s agricultural tradition: the mushrooms are not regrown but consumed only for the hallucination effect. Yet, the remnant of the remembrance of his father's mushroom farming, like the haunting vision from the magic mushroom, suggests that the poet cannot deny his root established in the Irish agricultural background, thus, his narrative circulates around the images of mushrooms and a father figure as means to question the past. Muldoon' s preservation of the Irish literary root through his narrative potential is even more evident in the last stanza, in which he voices the Dirty Protest's prisoners' voice.

If Heaney, as a mature poet during the 1960s, only foreshadows the sense of disappointment stemming from the fruit of the land in his "Blackberry-Picking", the adolescent Muldoon exposes

it in his poem by straightforwardly talking about the political issue when he talks about the Dirty Protest during the Troubles through the implication of a mushroom image. The description of the mushroom shed in the first stanza as being rain-sodden "windowless [and] wide" superimposes on the depressing state of H-Blocks in the last stanza, where the political prisoners wrap themselves with "the soiled grey blanket of Irish rain" (Muldoon, 1998, p. 106). Thus, the perfect condition for mushroom farming is being compared to the dismal condition inside the H-Blocks where the Dirty Protest (or the Blanket Protest) was held. The political discussion is also highlighted by the shift to a more serious tone and the italicisation in the last stanza that effectively accentuates the poet's intention to show his direct engagement with the political debate. Muldoon once stated that his family, being surrounded by a considerable amount of neighbours who involved in the violence, "would have had Nationalist or Republican leanings", but they were "firmly opposed to political violence" (quoted in Wills, 1998, p. 100). It then seems inevitable for him to avoid political debate in his poem, as Wills suggests that the basic constituents of Northern Irish rural life can as easily be turned to Republican as artistic vision.

4. Conclusion

To these three Irish poets, it seems impossible to remember their Irish childhood without making connection to their agricultural and rural background, their fathers, and the country's politics. These elements are constant in their reworking of their childhood memories.

The recurring imageries of Irish flora, in Kavanagh's apple, Heaney's blackberry and Muldoon's mushroom, all imply that these poets were artistically nurtured by the Irish ground, upon which childhood memory is cultivated and out of which political violence erupted. It is this violent yoke of sentiments that fosters the romanticisation of Irish childhood in poetry.

To an older and more mature generation of poets like Heaney, his childhood might not be exposed to an immediate and obvious violence like Muldoon's. Thus, part of his reworking of childhood and his negotiation with the past memories tend to present childhood as a period of security and innocence with a strong fondness and nostalgia as seen in "Digging", "Blackberry-Picking" and "Personal Helicon". Yet, his hindsight about Irish political situation possibly affects this poetic reworking of his childhood, providing him with a sense of disillusion and disappointment in his beloved land as seen in the image of fermented blackberries. As for Muldoon, his being a member of later generation affects his poetic execution in a manner that seems to deviate from his literary precursors. The Irish soil Muldoon grew up on as a child by the time Heaney was an adult rapidly plunged into a serious political violence. His poetic expression of Irish childhood is, therefore, slightly different from Kavanagh's and Heaney's as Muldoon's childhood nostalgia comes with the memory of the disappointment in Ireland's politics by default. Subtle foreshadowing might not be sufficient and only a direct articulation of the political trouble itself is able to express his poetic reworking of the Irish childhood trope. Thus, the mushroom image is used in both the

reworking of childhood memory and the discussion of political problem to show the conjunction of his childhood memory and the political violence.

Another trope important to these Irish poets' reworking of their childhood memory is their reference to the father figures. This trope appears to function on two different levels: the first level is as an artistic and cultural trope significant to the recollection of the childhood memory, and the second as a symbol of Irish poetic heritage. As an artistic and cultural trope, these father figures recur in Kavanagh's, Heaney's and Muldoon's poetry because they symbolize the quintessential Irish agricultural profession, tradition and history. Reading Heaney's poetry in the georgic mode, Chaiyon Tongsukkaeng (in press) also notices the recurring father figures that are imbued with Irish cultural and agricultural tradition. What is interesting is the second level which the father figures stand for with the notion of literary lineage between Kavanagh, Heaney, and Muldoon. Heaney's and Muldoon's reworkings of childhood, thus, take a literary father figure as an original source of literary technique and form too. A string of literary influence is evident: Heaney as a young man read Kavanagh and Muldoon learned from Heaney. For Heaney, he seems to believe that the aesthetic dimension of poetry should be derived from the "physical emotion" or, in other words, the immediate perception of poetic beauty through the close and personal contact with the physical setting and material as seen in the child's aesthetic development from his interaction with the wells in "Personal Helicon" (Heaney, 1995, p. 8). This physical stimulation of emotion can also be

seen in Kavanagh's poem "A Christmas Childhood" through its visual vividness derived from a lyrical construction of rhyme scheme in the first part and a careful diction in the second part. Heaney, then, was directly influenced in this aspect by Kavanagh which can be seen in his effort to carefully construct his poetry by concentrating on the musicality of the sound to create the vividness of the sensory images and to effectively reconstruct the Irish childhood memory. As for Muldoon, the poetic influence of Heaney does not reach him in its entirety in terms of the poetic musicality. As a result, his unorthodox form and technique have become his unique trademark. However, his narrative potential focusing on the Irish soil and its agricultural background in " Gathering Mushrooms" is unmistakably the proliferating trope that inherently germinates the masterpieces of Irish poetry since Kavanagh.

Thus, through reminiscence, rework, and renegotiation about Irish childhood against the agricultural and rural background, these poets succeed in both capturing and escaping their nostalgic past and memory. Their works demonstrate their artistic expressions that attempt to encapsulate past and fleeting moments. Most interesting point is: though being born and raised in the different periods and locations, hence gaining different perceptions and experiences, Irish soil binds the three poets together and functions more than a mere local colour in their poetry. Kavanagh, Heaney and Muldoon may have their own unique characteristics but they may not deny that their lives are heavily grounded and rooted in the Irish soil for their agricultural and rural backgrounds unite their childhood experiences, bequeathing

inherent disappointment and disillusion from age-old political disputes as well as an unparalleled subject for their poetry.

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