Abstract

Name: B. Manivannan
Institution: Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli
Field of Study: Irish Poetry in English
Title of the Thesis: The Legacy of Tradition in the Poetry of W.B. Yeats, Seamus Heaney and Paul Muldoon.

Tradition is a vague term since it touches upon several domains like culture, nationality and faith. Religious tradition is strong and continues to hold on people for it descends from parents. But the present work engages itself with the literary tradition of three Irish poets, W.B. Yeats, Seamus Heaney and Paul Muldoon especially to the treatment of landscape in their writings. Landscape is the symbol of territorial identity, and so it is demarked between home and the world. Religious identity has been a thrust focus. In some culture, the cultural habits and rituals are considered markers of identity. As far as Irish Poets are concerned, they are able to synchronize all identities in terms of landscape. The three-tier symbolism-water, stone and tree, available in their works forms the major focus so as to figure out the continuity of literary tradition in the chosen authors.

The thesis comprises four parts and the first part contains two chapters; the second consists of three chapters and while the third has two chapters, the fourth one is given as a concluding chapter.

The Part I- Chapter 1, entitled, Tracing Irish History, deals with tracing both Irish political history and religious history. The political history gives an account of the history of Celtic Ireland, various foreign invasions from Vikings, Normans and the English. It also discusses the entry of Christianity and the establishment of Irish Missionaries. And, it traces the historical facts from the English rule in Ireland to the
modern period including Partition of Northern Ireland from Ireland. Also, the geographical description of both Ireland and Northern Ireland is given to support the historical perception. The religious history traces the Celtic rituals, pagan elements, and the Celtic-Irish faith in nature worship connected to stone, water and trees and plant cults.

The Chapter 2, **Figuring out the Irish Literary Tradition**, presents a review of Irish literary tradition that has been mapped out in this present chapter to highlight the fact that Irish literary tradition is largely drawn from Celtic tradition. This chapter speaks about a ‘brilliant galaxy of writers’ of Ireland. And, the chief among them was W.B. Yeats (1865-1939) and his poetry has been considered an influencing force behind the 20th century modern poetry. Also, a note on the comments of various literary critics on Yeats, Seamus Heaney and Paul Muldoon is included in this chapter. The literary history is reported right from Early Irish Literature to Modern period covering Irish writing as well as Irish writing in English.

The Part II has three Chapters and the first one is entitled, **W.B. Yeats: Revival of Tradition**. This chapter exclusively focuses on Yeats’ vision and mission of reviving Celtic myths and legends and studies how his use of land elements-water, stone and tree - grand the characters of Irishness to his poems. It is observed that his poetry is the result of his subjective tradition, which can also include the landscape tradition. From his early poems to last poems, Yeats’ works are marked with this landscape tradition. And, his prime concern as a poet is to rediscover Irish Celtic past in the presence of Irish nature subjects.

The next Chapter entitled **Seamus Heaney: Resistance and Continuity**, studies Seamus Heaney’s important poems and views how he retains the Yeatsian high seriousness with reference to myth making and treatment of landscape. The present chapter attempts to read the possible change through a scrutiny of the three-tier symbolism of water, tree and stone in his select poems. These symbols are the
part of dominant Irish landscape, but how they have been absorbed and explained by Seamus Heaney is a matter of significance. And it is noticed that Heaney tries to create myths out of his bog land that is part of Irish landscape as well as his poetry.

The third Chapter of part II, Paul Muldoon: Tradition and Transition, also studies the significance of three-tier symbolism-stone, water and tree- in his poems to mark the continuity of Irish landscape tradition. It also explains how his major poems express his voice for Irish tradition and politics though he is increasingly influenced by the process of urbanization and globalization. His poems attempt to trace the Irish-Celtic elements in his poems and his stand as a poet of Celtic tradition and his attitude to Northern Irish politics. Also, it discusses his earning for his native Ireland and her natural sources, as he has been settled in America. His transition to alien land acknowledges the parallel between his native Irish people and the natives of Northern America. Hence, his landscape metaphors are politics specific. His poetic techniques may be drawn from postmodern attitude but his content centers round tradition.

The Part III contains two chapters and the first one entitled, Meme Theory and Irish Poetry, deals with a modern western theory called Memeplex theory and its application to study the quest motif as one of the indices of tradition in the poems of Yeats, Heaney and Muldoon. It is a kind of cultural biology that ensures the continuum of some dominant behavioural patterns and has been named as Meme Theory, a term first used by Richard Dawkins, in 1976; the interpretation on religion and culture among a particular group of humanity could be termed as meme. In the case of Ireland, the identification of meme is possible in the religious observance of Catholic community, which is not observed by the other Catholic communities in the rest of the world. Here lies what one could call ‘identity meme’ or ‘Irish meme complex’. It is not entirely catholic; it is exclusively Irish. This could be read in faith practice demonstrated by rituals of worship or other life practices accepted as rituals.
This researcher has used the *Meme* Theory to read the traditional roots of the three modern poets.

The second Chapter of part III is entitled as **Tamil Thinai Poetics and Irish Poetry**. This chapter attempts to use Thinai Poetics of ancient Tamil literature to explain the chosen poets’ keen interest in landscape and nature elements in their poems. Thinai means poetic situation and as far as Tamil poetics is concerned thinai is generated and conditioned by landscape. There is a sophisticated convention with regard to landscape and the poetic situation. The poetic voice or the character’s speech could not be deciphered without relating the same to the landscape. Landscape is broadly divided into five regions, and each region connotes a particular poetic emotion and the Tamil poets of Cankam period diligently creates their meaning in the context of the landscape which becomes the language of poetry. Hence, it is applied to the poetic texts of the chosen poets to illustrate how their native places and favourite landmarks generate the cultural, mythical and political meanings in their poems.

The final Part presents the **Conclusion** of the study. The study confirms the assertion that W. B. Yeats is the chief among the 20th century Irish poets to revive a unique tradition from Irish Literature, Irish religion and Irish politics. And the three-tier symbolism is available in his works. Yeats, Heaney and Muldoon belong to different periods of modern poetry and yet they continue to explore both temporal and spatial elements of Ireland for their poetic substances that mark the legacy of tradition in their poetry revealing a commonality.

The prime metaphors, stone, tree and water, in their poetry are drawn from nature imagery with a distinct stamp of Irish landscape. Also, these symbols function as signposts to indicate Irish culture time that comprises legends, myths, history, politics and religion of non-Christian / Irish paganism or Catholic Christianity or the blend of both.

Key Terms: Irish Tradition, Memeplex Theory and Tamil Thinai Poetics.