

Heaney and sheers use their nationality and background in their poems essay sampl...

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“Requiem for the Croppies” is a poem that confronts the brutal reality of Ireland’s past. The poem focuses on the battle of Vinegar Hill, fought in 1798 between the British army and the Irish rebels

In the past there have been many Irish rebellions: 1641. 1782. 1798. 1848. 1916. Heaney suggests that historical repetition is as natural as the cycle of nature and its seasons. The “barley” in this poem, a staple food for those without “kitchens on the run,” sprouts from the earth on which these soldiers died fighting. This new “barley” will feed the rebels of the next era, not just literally, but also metaphorically, as will the revered memory of those who planted it.

The poet segregates the rebels with the upfronted article; “A”. “A people [‘s]” lack of social conformity is emphasized in their unwillingness or inability to march; “hardly marching”, which would normally be the very picture of collective movement. Instead, the rebels are forced to be “on the hike,” an individual activity and one which suggests a terrain that is unsuited to mass transit. Moreover, the poet refers to the soldiers as “Terraced thousands.” This shows, not only the military formations that are necessary on a hill but also the artificial manipulation of the environment, again like nature’s rebellion against violence.

But regardless of how invasive these uprisings may be, they are also portrayed as natural and inevitable. Using the carved wooden “pike” against the melted metal of gun and sword, the Irish rebels seem to be in alliance with the forces of nature. The rebels “stampede cattle into infantry,” so they have virtually transformed the animals into ground militia. They then retreat

and seek refuge among the “ hedges where cavalry must be thrown.” There appears to be an ironic cooperation between the Irish landscape and the Irish rebel, which brings about these “ new tactics.” As the latest in a huge list of rebellions, these tactics cannot be new. The newness stems from the failure to recall past revolts. “ Each” separate rebellion regards itself as disconnected from the past, as if it were something “ new” “ happening each day.” The young rebels may feel a sense of infantile self-importance by convincing themselves that their tactics are new and different from the past but this only forces them to learn the hard way by direct experience. In the end they are left blushing with embarrassment at their naivety, just like the landscape.

Irish rebels are reduced to mere symbols within a legacy of Irish resistance. Perhaps they are partially redeemed by a memorable nickname (“ the Croppies”) or a signature battle (“ Vinegar Hill”). However these are just generalisations, much like the word “ Requiem” which Heaney uses in the title of the poem. In the past it signified the specific Catholic ceremony for a funeral mass. Now it means any sort of respect for the dead, mirroring the loss of identity that the rebels also suffered.

In Heaney’s poem the land serves as a memorial for the lost rebels and in Sheers’ poem “ Skirrid Fawr” the Welsh land holds a similar level of power and resemblance. Sheers personifies this hill and gives it a biblical importance; “ her holy scar”, highlighting its importance and the influence it holds. By using a biblical reference Sheers may be implying that the hill holds a collective history or meaning which we can all relate too. This may

explain why he so often uses landscape as the basis of his poems, from which he can explore more complex themes. For Sheers the land holds “ the answers / to every question I have never known”, suggesting that the landscape knows what Sheers is searching for even if he doesn’t himself, highlighting the strength of their relationship and the role of the hill as a source of inspiration for this poetry. There also seems to be a high level of intimacy with the Welsh landscape: “ Her weight, the unspoken words / of an unlearned tongue”, which intensifies his connection between the two and gives the sense that, to Sheers, the landscape is almost like a lover because the bond between them is that strong. One would say that the admiration of the Welsh landscape evident in this poem is similar to Heaney’s evocation of Ulster.

Heaney, like Sheers, grew up in a rural, farming background, like his father and his ancestors before him. This had had a huge influence on Heaney’s poetry as often the countryside or nature provides a foundation for his poems. His imagery is rooted in situations or descriptions that evoke the texture of rural Irish life. For example in his poem “ Follower” Heaney states: “ I wanted to grow up and plough,

/To close one eye, stiffen my arm.” This poem shows Heaney’s relationship with his father and the inspiration he drew from his father ploughing in rural Ireland.

The father is very skilled, he is ‘ An expert’ with “ His shoulders globed like a full sail strung / Between the shafts and the furrow”. This shows the

admiration Heaney has for his father's strength and skill with horses. This suggests a man who spends much of his time out of doors, a man who is a part of nature. The word "globed" also suggests great strength and gives the impression that the father was the whole world to the young boy. It is important to note that his father is not simply strong; his tender love and care for his son are emphasised by the fact that he "rode me on his back/ Dipping and rising to his plod". The sound and rhythm of these lines convey the pleasure young Heaney had in the ride.

Heaney remembers when he was a small boy, and in the poem he looks up to his father in a physical sense, because he is so much smaller than his father, but he also looks up to him in a metaphorical sense. The choices of the verbs "Narrowed", "angled" and "Mapping" suggest his father's skill and precision.

These memories of his rural childhood have given Heaney a great deal to write about, they have provided him with the inspiration to write poetry as he paints vivid, sensuous descriptions of these memories of Irish life.

"Hedge School", by Owen Sheers also portrays how his rural upbringing has influenced his ability to write poetry. Sheers recalls his boyhood self blackberry picking on the walk home from school. The blackberry picking provides Sheers with a "lesson" as he experiments with ways of eating the berries with different degrees of ripeness. The berries of different ripeness could represent the ideas that form a poem that he must hoard together to form the "hedgerow caviar" or a poem itself. Sheers chooses "not to eat

them at all, but slowly close my palm into a fist instead, / dissolving their mouthfeel over my skin". Sheers must take good care of his most precious ideas and not let them be lost to the depths of his mind, when his ideas emerge he cant just grab at them, he must protect them and let them develop instead, therefore Sheers is showing the intricacy and skill involved in creating a poem. Finally, he can express all his ideas in his poem as he allows the words to pour over the page in a similar way to how the berries dissolve on his skin. Therefore Sheers' rural Welsh background has taught him and provided him with the inspiration needed to write poetry, much like how Heaney drew on his Irish upbringing as a stimulus for his poetry.