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Cuvinte cheie: conexiuni culturale, rolul poetului, restaurație, revelație, tradiție

Spirite înrudite - O săptămână în România

Rezumat

Acest articol se bazează pe o vizită recentă la universitatea din Baia Mare și oportunitatea pe care mi-a dat-o de a explora conexiunile inter-culturale dintre Irlanda și România. Programul academic s-a concentrat pe o selecție a poeziei lui Seamus Heaney, mai exact, pe acele poeme care relevă rolul poetului și relația sa cu comunitatea din care face parte. În realizarea unei paralele cu artizanii tradiționali, Heaney definește rolul poetului ca înțelept și vizionar, ca un "detector de voci ale lumii" și ca o persoană care sfințește, revelează și redă tradiția. Studenții români au găsit foarte multe elemente, pe care le-au recunoscut ca fiind familiare, în explorarea operei lui Heaney, și, datorită familiarității lor cu menținerea artelor și obiceiurilor tradiționale din Maramureș, ei au găsit multe puncte comune, între viziunea lui Heaney asupra artei și rolului ei în societate și propriul lor context cultural. Aceștia erau studenți care cunoșteau valoarea tradiției foarte bine și care erau entuziasmați să găsească legături, între o poezie pe care o explorăm împreună și propriile lor experiențe culturale. De fapt, ei au înțeles imperativul de a te folosi de trecut, pentru "a înțelege trecutul și a te pregăti pentru viitor".

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Kindred Spirits – A Week in Romania

Summary

This article considers a recent visit to Baia Mare University and the opportunity which it provided for the exploration of cross cultural connections between Ireland and Romania. The teaching programme focused on a selection of Seamus Heaney's poetry and specifically on those poems which consider the role of the poet and his relationship with his community. In drawing a parallel with traditional craftsmen in these poems Heaney variously defines the poet's role as sage and seer, as 'detector of the voices of the world' and as a person who divines, reveals and restores. The Romanian students found much to relate to in their exploration of Heaney's work and, because of their familiarity with the maintenance of traditional crafts and customs in the Maramures area in which their university is situated, they found significant common ground between Heaney's views on art and its role in society and their own cultural context. These were students who knew the value of tradition very well and who were excited to find ripples of connection between the poetry which we were exploring together and their own cultural experiences. In effect they understood the imperative to draw on the past in order to 'understand the present and anticipate the future.'

Kindred Spirits – A Week in Romania

I returned recently from Baia Mare University in Romania where I spent a week with friends, colleagues and students on a European teacher mobility programme. This programme is designed to forge links with universities across Europe and, in doing so, to explore congruences and connections which may resonate with participating partners. My area of focus on this occasion was a selection of poems written by Seamus Heaney, and part of that selection was a small group of poems which consider a range of traditional crafts and creative activities which the poet uses to explore the alliances between the art of writing poetry and the traditional crafts to which he pays homage. In celebrating the work of the thatcher or the diviner Heaney is in fact drawing parallels with the craft of the poet, and in marvelling at the fiddler in *The Given Note* he is similarly celebrating the joy of a creative gift in the hands of one who can ‘give form to the immaterial.’

Heaney has described poetry as divination revelation of the self to the self and restoration of the culture to the self. By such a definition it follows that the poet himself can become the *antenna*, the *detector of the voices of the world* and the *medium*, mediator or bridge between his own subconscious and the collective subconscious. Heaney has spoken elsewhere of the sense in which the poet is *sage and seer, a person who divines, reveals and restores*, and who, in some senses, is in a *privileged position as the conveyor of culture*. So, to find myself in Romania talking about these matters was, in a sense, a challenging but ultimately revealing and very rewarding experience. For Baia Mare university is located in the Maramures region of Romania, a place which is characterised by a very strong aspiration to hold on firmly to its cultural traditions and to find ways of expressing those traditions in creative and contemporary ways. And so, I found myself speaking to a very receptive audience, to students and staff who knew the value of tradition very well and who were excited to find ripples of connection between the poetry which we were exploring together and their own cultural experiences.

The first poem to which we paid attention was *The Given Note*, a poem which describes the journey made by a fiddler to one of the Blasket islands off the West coast of Ireland where he heard a singular kind of music in the sound of the wind. The fiddler thought of it as a *given* melody offered by the natural world to one who was attentive to its possibilities for both transmittance and transformation. Others who marvelled at the music which the fiddler produced, travelled to the island to listen to the wind of which he spoke, but failed in their attempt to either capture or replicate the fiddler’s experience. Heaney describes it thus:

*Strange noises were heard
By others who followed, bits of a tune
Coming in on loud weather
Though nothing like melody.*

The fiddler proposed that their *fingers and ear* were *unpractised*, their fiddling *easy*, suggesting that the degree of focus necessary for alert attentiveness, and the need for discipline in the practising of this are vital elements in the creative process by which the ordinary is rendered extraordinary in art. In a similar way Heaney, responding to the natural world around him, has created poetry which sanctifies the ordinary and, in doing so, transforms it for the reader in a way which encourages a fresh perspective on what is sometimes ignored, if not forgotten. Through the careful and meticulous practise of art and its craft, new realities and alternative perspectives can be reconstructed and reimagined so that the ordinary is charged with a new energy and a fresh sense of life as it is filtered through the creative process and experienced anew by those who can attend to its nuances. In a similar way the *small* details and practices of cultural tradition can be preserved and indeed renewed and reinvigorated by careful attention to both their preservation and their reconsideration in our contemporary world. To preserve them is to hold on to a sense of our past and its people, to understand their influence on our lives today and, in doing so, to pay homage to the singular kind of beauty in the traditions which they represent.

In another poem, *Thatcher*, Heaney describes the careful and almost imperceptible preparations of another craftsman who, like the poet, does not appear to be engaged in any defined activity as he assembles and arranges the tools of his trade: *It seemed he spent the morning warming up*. But his level of precision in the restoration of the thatch suggests a reverence for the preservation of this traditional craft and a sensitivity to the degree of detail and attentive focus necessary for its successful renewal and recovery. Heaney describes how he:

...fixed the ladder, laid out well honed blades
And snipped at straw and sharpened ends of rods
That, bent in two, made a white-pronged staple
For pinning down his world, handful by handful.

This *pinning down* of his world is, of course, both actual and metaphorical, and the poet is acutely conscious of the sense in which he is doing the same with the craft of poetry. This idea of Heaney's poetry as a bridge between the traditional and the modern voices of Irish poetry is reflected in the way in which the thatcher too is restoring, preserving and recreating reality through his craft and creativity. So for both craftsmen there are elements of being in touch with the past and its traditions but also being part of a restorative and renewing presence into the future. The poem proceeds to describe the work of the thatcher:

Couchant for days on sods above rafters
He shaved and flushed the butts, stitched all together
Into a sloped honeycomb, a stubble patch,
And left them gaping at his Midas touch.

So, as the thatcher pays careful attention to the detail of his work, so too does the poet with his management of metre, verbal texture, tone and particulars of language, create a work of

art which, in the end is greater than the sum of its parts and which glows with the Midas touch to which the poem refers. This poem also made much sense to my Romanian students. They too have, in the Maramures region, many traditional Romanian houses which also require the skill of the thatcher. So, in interesting and perhaps somewhat unexpected ways, the students in Baia Mare understood well the idea that there could be a congruence between poetic and cultural crafts and between tradition and modernity. Like the thatcher they understood that the technique of poetry too entails as Heaney proposes, 'the watermarking of your essential patterns of perception, voice and thought into the touch and texture of your lines; it is that whole creative effort of the mind's and body's resources to bring the meaning of experience within the jurisdiction of form.'

In another poem *The Diviner* Heaney also reflects on the sense in which the work of one attentive, focused and sensitive person can resonate and reflect the craft of the poet. He describes the sense in which the diviner was *nervous, but professionally unfussed*, and when the rod *jerked with precise convulsions*, it resulted in:

*Spring water suddenly broadcasting
Through a green hazel its secret stations.*

As in *The Given Note*, the poet describes how others attempted to replicate the diviner's skill:

*He handed them the rod without a word.
It lay dead in their grasp till, nonchalantly,
He gripped the expectant wrists. The hazel stirred.*

Heaney's assertion that poetry is *the expression of the visionary and self-revealing capacities of the poetas divination and ...revelation of the self to the self*, and as an *antenna, medium and detector of the voices of the world* certainly resonates here. Again notions of concentrated attention, pure and uncluttered focus, attuned sensibility and the gifts of perception and imagination are central. That imperative to *bridge the gap between what can be said and all that can be witnessed – between the limits of language and the margins of the actual world in which we live*, is seen again in the self-conscious mind of a poet who is alive to the importance of the way in which poetry *carries truth, is utile and conveys wisdom*. Once again the poet becomes the medium through which experience is filtered and once again he acts as the *antenna* for the gifts which the world offers.

So I found myself teaching to a group of students who understood the way in which the traditions of former times can lend a cultural perspective to contemporary life and to the sense in which we gain our cultural bearings from the sense of continuity and connection which they provide. They, like Heaney and his gifted craftsmen, know the value of an intimate belonging forged from the preservation of culture and tradition so that *a vibrating sense of history* may be a lived experience for now and for the future. Cemented too on my visit were other connections and alliances – friendships renewed with former colleagues, encounters with the religious and cultural traditions of the Romanian Orthodox faith, participation in the Tomoiaga family celebrations and the

enjoyment afforded by visiting places of interest in the Maramures region. So, in more ways than one, I learned again the true meaning of the term *kindred spirits* – those congruences which span time and place, past and present, tradition and modernity, tribe and language. With Heaney's craftmen I learned again about the imperative to pay attention to the preservation of the really important things – life, love and the quiet pleasure of restoration and renewal. As the recent conference call for papers from the Department of Philology and Cultural Studies at Baia Mare reminds us: *take a step back and look into the past* and, in doing so, *understand the present and anticipate the future*.

Bibliography

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