The Analysis of “Digging” by Seamus Heaney

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Digging by Seamus Heaney rich with imageries. The writer interested in this poem because it tells about the difference between the generation and it still tries to find a similar line within it. This poem tells about the speaker who doesn’t want to follow his father and grandfather steps but he wants to pursue his passion as a writer.

The writer will use biographical approach which includes the study regarding with the poet background and the situation around his life at the time this poem was created.

Digging

Seamus Heaney

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests; as snug as a gun.

Under my window a clean rasping sound
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:
My father, digging. I look down
Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds
Bends low, comes up twenty years away
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills
Where he was digging.

The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft
Against the inside knee was levered firmly.
He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep
To scatter new potatoes that we picked
Loving their cool hardness in our hands.

By God, the old man could handle a spade,
Just like his old man.

My grandfather could cut more turf in a day
Than any other man on Toner's bog.
Once I carried him milk in a bottle
Corked sloppily with paper. He straightened up
To drink it, then fell to right away
Nicking and slicing neatly, heaving sods
Over his shoulder, digging down and down
For the good turf. Digging.

The cold smell of potato mold, the squelch and slap
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge
Through living roots awaken in my head.
But I've no spade to follow men like them.
Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it.

- from Death of a Naturalist (1966)-

B. Problem Formulation
1. What issue does the poet want to tell?
2. How does the background of the poet influence the poem?

ANALYSIS

A. What issue does the poet want to tell?
This poem wants to tell about the comparison between digging with spade and digging with pen. The speaker in this poem is a writer which comes from a family who live as a farmer.

The first stanza tells that the speaker use his pen as a gun or weapon. In the second stanza described the speaker’s position where he is in the house and he look down outside the window where his father works digging the potatoes. This description means that the speaker position is higher than his father, he writes and his father doing farmer work.

The third and fourth stanzas tell about how his father is very skillful in digging the potatoes. The speaker describes what is needed to be done to plant potatoes. “Bends low, comes up twenty years away” this lines means that this skill comes up not easy but it gained by long time experience. “The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft. Against the inside knee was levered firmly. He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep”. These lines described how to plant new potatoes. It’s not something that can to be done randomly, but it needs skill. “Loving their cool hardness in our hands”. This last line in fourth stanza gives clue that his father especially loves doing his job, he is happy as he plants the new potatoes.

The fifth stanza tells that the first “old man” means his father can handle spade like “his old man” means his grandfather. It means that the job to be a digger already runs in the family from generation to generation. His grandfather is a farmer, his father also becomes a farmer and actually the speaker also expected to become a farmer too just like other people in the family.

The sixth stanza focused about his grandfather who was a great digger just like his father. “My grandfather could cut more turf in a day. Than any other man on Toner's bog.” means that his grandfather is hard worker and skillful in doing his job. He can gain or harvest more in a day comparing to others in their place. It continues with the explanation about the speaker memory regarding with his grandfather determination towards his job. Once the speaker bring him milk to the field for his grandfather. His father drank the milk and then goes back to his job. After regaining more strength from the milk that he drank, his grandfather working harder. “Over his shoulder, digging down and down. For the good turf. Digging.”

The seventh stanza tells that although in his entire life, the speaker already familiar with the farm job and this tradition running through his vein but he won’t follow his father and grandfather steps to become a farmer who ding the soil with the spade. The last stanza the speaker repeat that he is holding the pen now and he’ll use pen as a weapon to do his job as a writer, just like his father use spade to dig the soil.
B. How does the background of the poet influence the poem?

Seamus Heaney was born near Castledawson, County Derry, and grew up on his father's cattle farm. He was the eldest in a Catholic family of nine children. Heaney grew up as a country boy and looking up to his father who is a farmer.

This poem tells about the generation comparison between Heaney and his father. His father is a traditional farmer and Heaney didn’t want to follow his father steps to be a farmer but he desire to pursue knowledge and teaching. As a person who is literate and graduate from university. Heaney has a higher position in the society comparing to his father who is jus a farmer.

In here Heaney try to draw a line between his job as a writer and his father job as a farmer. Its two kinds of different job. The writer sometimes works inside and sitting in one place to find inspiration, it’s not rough job. But it’s very different for the farmer who must work under the sun and use his spade to break the ground; it’s a hard work and need a lot of energy. But although it’s different, it’s still the same. They are a digger. The writer dig with his pen and a farmer dig with his spade. The farmer digs his soil and the writer soil is his imagination.

CONCLUSION

The poem Digging by Seamus Heaney tells about the difference and similarities between a farmer and a writer. Heaney is a great writer who comes from the family who lives from farming. He was grown up in farming area. But because he is educated, he pursues a different path from his father and his grandfather who works in farm from generations. Heaney wants to emphasize that although the two jobs are very different but both of their activities are digging. His father is digging with his spade and Heaney is digging with his pen as a writer.

BIBLIOGRAPHY