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ENGL 8755

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Seamus Deane's *Reading in the Dark*

In my reading, I became wrapped up in "Katie's Story." Her ghost story reminded me of our discussion of how Irish Catholicism is mostly Christian wrapped paganism. The combination of the scene setting (the children gathering around the hearth for the ceilidh) and the fantastic motifs of the story include ghosts, changelings, and poltergeist activity allowed the layering of Catholicism and Irish paganism. By sharing these fairy stories, Katie hands down the literary traditions of the oral pagan tale.

Beginning with "ceilidh," I turned to the Oxford English Dictionary. The OED's second definition summarized it as "a session of traditional music, storytelling, or dancing." The scene before Katie's story were the children gathering around the hearth to hear a tale as they would normally do. The family does this because of the combination of not having money to go out with and it is within their heritage to gather around the fire. Gathering around the hearth is as important to the Irish people as gathering around the dinner table is for American's. Here the children are told a pagan like, ghost story through an oral tradition.

The oral tradition of Irish stories resembles oral histories that we hear now. These are stories help pass down a heritage of a people or a family. As Katie relays the story of Brigid and the siblings, she is also relaying the spiritual motifs of the Irish pagan religion. This idea is reinforced by the narrator's "instinct" being awakened by the mentioning of Grianan. Grianan, or Grianan of Aileach, is a site of a ring fort that has ties to the accent Gaelic kings of Northern

Ireland. For this story, Katie is telling the children about a supernatural power that can supersede the power of an earthly church.

Pagan traditions of Katie's story include the children only speaking Irish, the children ritualistically visiting their parents graves alone, the green lights that appear above the graves, the children changing their appearance (changeling) and eventual inability to appear in mirrors, and the children's unexplainable disappearance. Katie's main character's, Brigid, problems with the supernatural happened when she tried to get the children to learn English and when she prohibited them from visiting their parents' graves. When she tries to remedy this problem by bringing in a priest, who doesn't see anything wrong until the last possible moment. This may be a jab at the church for not being as wise as they claim to be.

Layering the Irish pagan and Irish Catholic beliefs has lead to the people that lived in Ireland during the narrator's time. Understanding the culture of the people experiencing the Troubles better allows outsiders to understand what is happening. The story makes readers realize what Unionist Protestants are to the Nationalist Catholic. Unionists are Brigid trying to make the Nationalist children conform to their views of living. After reading how this story, I believe the Unionists better call a priest because they have a fight on their hands.

Extra Work Cited:

"ceilidh, n." OED Online. Oxford University Press, December 2015. Web. 14 February 2016.