Patrick Kavanagh and the New Myth of the Irish Peasant in the Great Hunger

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Abstract

This article claims that Patrick Kavanagh sets the peasant free from the traditional romantic myth of the Revivalists that mythologizes the peasant, his existence, and his surroundings. The romantic myth of the peasant celebrates the peasant as a figure who embodies the pure Irish national identity and culture. Kavanagh is not destroying the Revivalist myth of rural Irish idyll but he is presenting another side of the rural Irish life. He believes in the sustaining power of the peasant myth but he is exposing its limitations. Kavanagh focuses on the mundane, bleak and difficult aspects of the peasant life. Kavanagh's acknowledgement of the significance and importance of the local and the mundane is his best poetic legacy in The Great Hunger (1942). Similarly, the poet underlines the intellectual, sexual and emotional poverty of the Irish peasant that signals a significant shift from the revivalist's idyllic portrayal of rural Ireland. Kavanagh articulates a new voice of realism. The Great Hunger induces a change in poetry motivated by Kavanagh's belief in the local and the articulation of the unheard voice. The poem is the first critique of the Irish peasantry lifestyle as it undermines the cozy images of rural contentment advocated by both the church and the state.

Keywords: peasants, myths, life style.

1. Introduction

This article claims that Patrick Kavanagh sets the peasant free from the traditional romantic myth of the Revivalists that mythologizes the peasant, his existence, and his surroundings. The romantic myth of the peasant celebrates the peasant as a figure who embodies the pure Irish national identity and culture. Kavanagh is not destroying the Revivalist myth of rural Irish idyll but he is presenting another side of the rural Irish life. He believes in the sustaining power of the peasant myth but he is exposing its limitations. Kavanagh focuses on the mundane, bleak and difficult aspects of the peasant life. Kavanagh's acknowledgement of the significance and importance of the local and the mundane is his best poetic legacy in The Great Hunger (1942). Similarly, the poet underlines the intellectual, sexual and emotional poverty of the Irish peasant that signals a significant shift from the revivalist's idyllic portrayal of rural Ireland. Kavanagh articulates a new voice of realism. The Great Hunger induces a change in poetry motivated by Kavanagh's belief in the local and the articulation of the unheard voice. The poem is the first critique of the Irish peasantry lifestyle as it undermines the cozy images of rural contentment advocated by both the church and the state.

The miseries of the peasant that are ignored by the national narratives of the Revivalists are the main focus of The Great Hunger. Kavanagh demythologizes the Revivalist image of the peasant as a cultural image. He moves away from the dominant images of the revival towards a localized and parochial rural setting. This achievement is obvious in his famous poem The Great Hunger. As the title suggests, Kavanagh presents a compelling presentation of the life of a poor, normal, bachelor and uneducated Patrick Maguire that breaks with the preceding myth of the peasant advocated by the Revivalists that celebrates the idyllic farmers and their lofty sentimentalism. Maguire is a ploughman dragging himself through the mud when the moon is 'April-watery.' (Kavanagh 1942: 228)

Maguire's colloquialism and vibrant imagery present an authentic portrayal of the rural Irish peasant culture. The Great Hunger is a reaction to the revivalist movement that sought to define postcolonial Ireland as a pure and rural Catholic state and to exclude all other possible national identities. The deprived character of Maguire presents an earthly image of the peasant that does not fit the sentimental peasant. Maguire is a suffering, hopeless, and pathetic representation of the peasantry masses that are ignored by postcolonial Ireland. Kavanagh presents the grotesque reality of the humble farmers, their harsh rural life and its monotonous daily experiences. The Great Hunger describes the sterile and monotonous life of Patrick Maguire who farms his land and Maguire's painstaking attempts to survive emotionally, psychically, spiritually, and psychologically in a world that is ignorant of his existence. The outside world is not bothered to take a close look at the depressing reality of the peasant life.

From the very first line of the poem, readers are presented with frozen terrain, rusty ploughs, and ditches that reveal the absence of human vitality in rural Ireland. The Revivalists have created a romantic and sentimental image of the peasant that is ignorant of Maguire and his futile intellectual, spiritual and sexual life. The Revivalists including W.B. Yeats, John Synge, Lady Gregory, Douglas Hyde and many others believe in the vitality of the peasant culture. Kavanagh denies the tenets of the Revival literary movement, their idealization of rural Ireland and the celebration of the peasant as a cultural icon. In his letter to his brother Peter, Kavanagh states that, "Of the Irish movement you know plenty … they presented an essentially sentimental Ireland…. The Yeats-Synge phony Ireland was eminently suited for export to America and it has falsified the picture of this country." (Letter to Peter Kavanagh, August Bank Holiday, 1947)

Kavanagh rejects Synge's peasant and states that Synge's peasant embodies "picturesque conventions speaking a phony language" and similarly renounces "the Irish Protestants who are worried about being Irish with an artificial country." (Warner 1973:81) In his autobiographical diary, Kavanagh resists the Irish Literary Movement and emphasizes that "[The Irish literary Movement] that purported to be Irish and racy of the Celtic soil was a thorough going England-bread lie." (Kavanagh 1964: 9) In Self- Portrait, Kavanagh contrasts the popular revivalist imagery and states that "Although the literal idea of the peasant is of a farm laboring person, in fact a peasant is all that mass of mankind that lives below certain level of consciousness. They live in the dark cave of the unconscious and they scream when they see the light. They take offence easily, their degree of insultability is very great. (Kavanagh 1964: 70) Similarly, in his poem "The Paddiad." Kavanagh attacks the post-Yeatsian Irish poets and their narrow visions:

Similarly, in the corner of a Dublin pub

This party opens- blub- a blub-Paddy whisky, a Rum and Gin
Paddy Three sheets in the wind;
Paddy of the Celtic Mist,
Paddy Connemara West,
Chesteronian Paddy Frog
Croaking nightly in the bog.
All the Paddies having fun
Since Yeats handed in his gun. (Kavanagh 1968: 34)

W.B. Yeats's "Under Ben Bulben" urges the future Irish poets to"

Learn your trade,
Sing whatever is well made,
Scorn the sort now growing up,
All out of shape from toe to top.
Their unremembering hearts and heads
Base-born products of base beds.
Sing the peasantry, and then
Hard-riding country gentlemen,
The holiness of monks, and after
Porter-drinkers randy laughter;
Sing the lords and ladies gay
There were beaten into the clay
Through seven heroic centuries;
Cast your mind on other days
That we in coming days may be
Still the indomitable Irishry. (Yeats 1989:105)

Kavanagh in an ironic poetic reply entitled "Irish Poets Open Your Eyes (After Yeats) exhorts the Irish poets to:

Irish poets open your eyes,
Even Cabra can surprise;

Try the god tracks now and then-

Shelbourne park and crooked men. (Kavanagh 1986:107)

This focus on the tangible and local underlines a shift in Irish literature that investigates the dismal and the dreadful. Richard Kearney states that Kavanagh's importance "as one of the writers who stayed home and resolved to undermine the revivalist movement from within," and that "Kavanagh's work "cultivated wit, iconoclasm and a deliberate estrangement from accredited wisdoms." (Kearney 1997: 110) Through his criticism of the Revival, Kavanagh sets himself free from other writers. He creates a new poetry that offers him the label of a peasant poet. Kavanagh complains in The Irish Times that "The Irish Literacy Revival consisted of a few writers of real quality and a large crowd of hangers-on pretending to be drunk on the fumes of the cask. Then- the warm fog lifted, and … people began to wonder what happened to all the young geniuses." (Kavanagh 1942: 15)

The passing world and travellers do not have a close look at the depressing reality of the peasant life. Kavanagh suggests that if onlookers and passersby stop to look closely at the peasant life, they would perceive the rural people with hopes, desires and optimism like pulled seeds withered in the summer. Kavanagh's achievement in The Great Hunger explores the poetry of the deprived peasants that is more realistic of the rural life. Kavanagh prefers what he refers to as "the reality of the spirit." (Kavanagh 1942: 30) The voice given to the peasant by Kavanagh is closer to reality than many other literary representations of this cultural icon. Antoinette Quinn states that The Great Hunger "disposes of a literary myth of the importance of peasantry which has flourished in English poetry since Wordsworth published the preface to Lyrical Ballads." (Quinn 1991: 43)

The Great Huner opens with a direct reference to the land and its clogging nature:

Clay is the word and clay is the flesh

Where the potato-gatherers like mechanized scarecrows move

Along the side-fall of the hill- Maguire and his men. (Kavanagh 1942: 34)

These lines underline the connection between the sacred and the mundane. The imagery of the clay runs through the whole poem and Patrick Maguire, the persona is presented with both empathy and resistance towards sentimentality. Maguire who is the main farmer in the rural Monaghan is a bachelor farmer who lacks intimacy and lives with his aging mother. Maguire's natural world is devoid of idealism, love, and sentimentalism. Maguire's farm is a rural spot full of rusty ploughs, ditches, and frozen ground that is harmonious with Maguire's futile life-force:

… Watch him, that man on a hill whose spirit

Is a wet sack flapping about the knees of time

He lives that his little fields may stay fertile when

His own body

Is separated in the bottom of ditch under two coulters

In Christ's name. (Kavanagh 1942: 35)

Kavanagh presents Maguire with a mixture of affection and repulsion. Maguire suffers from spiritual, intellectual and sexual hunger as he is unmarried and cares for his old mother. Maguire always dreams about a better life and better harvest, the right woman to marry and the right love but unfortunately there is always the routine and the harsh agricultural duties and the woman exists only in his mind. Additionally, there is the rigid morality of the church and the guilt-ridden responsibility that traps Maguire. The most pessimistic statements in the poem deal with the ironies of the religious faith that has lost its capacity to engender love:

And Patrick Maguire

From his purgatory fire

Called the gods of the Christian to prove

That this twisted skein

Was the necessary pain

And not the rope that was strangling true love. (Kavanagh 1942: 43)

Terry Gifford states that The Great Hunger functions as "an attack on the way the Church has pastoralized Nature as part of the process of taking over an innate pantheism and repressing sexuality." (Gifford 1999: 129) In the end of the poem, Maguire never marries and lives his old life alone in loneliness defeated by his narrow existence. Thus, Maguire, the farmer whose livelihood grows and develops, he withers and diminishes. Kavanagh writes that:

No crash

No drama

That was how his life happened.

No mad hooves galloping the sky,

But the weak, washy way of true-tragedy-

A sick horse noising around the meadow for a clean place to die. (Kavanagh 1942: 53)

This realistic portrayal of the harsh rural life testifies the false view of the land perceived by the Revivalists. Yeats declares that:

John Synge, I and Augusta Gregory, thought

All that we did, all that we said or sang

Must come from contact with the soil, from that

Contact everything Antaeus-like grow strong. (Qtd. Hall 1961: 318)

In contrast to the Revivalists who perceive the rural surrounding as primarily an imaginative entity, Kavanagh depicts the hostility of the rural life: the hard work, its sterility, and the poverty

of mind, heart, and body. Kavanagh's resentment runs throughout The Great Hunger, especially when he refers to the problem of poetic imagination. In the midst of giving the reader specific details about Maguire, Kavanagh provides general references to the peasant who tries to sing but he repeats the same melody. In section XIII, the poetic imagination is fully discussed and goes beyond mention:

The peasant has no worries;

In his little lyrical fields

He ploughs and sows;…

His heart is pure

His mind is clear, …

The peasant who is only one remove from the beasts he

Drives

The travelers stop their cars to gape over the green

Bank into his fields.

There is the pool in which the poet dips…

The peasant is the unspoiled child of Prophecy,

The peasant is all virtues- let us salute him without irony

The peasant ploughman who is half a vegetable

Who can react to sun and rain and sometimes even

Regret that the Maker of Light had not touched him more intensely. (Kavanagh 1942: 52-53)

The above lines represent the harsh realities of the rural life and similarly criticize the romantic vision of the peasant advocated by the previous generation.

Antoinette Quinn notes that The Great Hunger "is bred of a new iconoclastic movement in Irish letters, a realist revolution against anachronistic and destructive national fantasies." (Quinn 1991: 29) The self-sufficient and independent married farmer is regarded by both the church and state as the basic economic and social unit of post-independent Ireland. Within this microcosm, traditional family life is sustainable and consequently the values and morals of a Catholic state are given importance. However, in The Great Hunger the poet raises a crucial question:

… is there anything we can prove

Of life as it is broken-backed over the Book

Of death. (Kavanagh 1942: 4-6)

Kavanagh challenges the inferences drawn by Eamon de Valera regarding the values dominant in the rural Irish society. De Valera's address in St. Patrick Day celebrates the beauty of the Irish countryside, "a land whose countryside would be bright with cozy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of industry, with the romping of sturdy children, the contents of athletic youth and the laughter of comely maidens, whose firesides would be the forums for the wisdom of serene old age." (de Valera 1980: 466)

The Great Hunger presents a realistic, tangible, and recognizable reality of the peasant and his existence. Kavanagh asks if there are any conclusions can be drawn from the rural scene of men ploughing fields while the cows hover the fields while the men work hard to bring life to a wet ground. Kavanagh is suggesting the inevitability of life circle and the labor involved in the life of poor farmers making living of the barren ground. There is no romance in the depiction of the Irish rural life and therefore Kavanagh offers an alternative perspective of rural Ireland by questioning the basic assumptions of the romantic image of the peasant. He asks, "Is there some light of imagination on these wet clods?" (Kavanagh 1942: 9) The Great Hunger emphasizes Maguire's tragedy as he is partially to blame for his own idleness and that Maguire is the product of a society that Kavanagh accused of mediocrity that does not encourage any deviance from social, religious, and cultural norms. Maguire is a victim of de Valera's Ireland as the poem exposes the crippling emotional, intellectual and spiritual criticism of independent Ireland 's economic, cultural, and social outlook. Maguire presents the post-independent Ireland and questions the hegemony of the dominant image of rural happiness and individual integrity. W.B. Yeats symbolizes Ireland as a loving, and caring mother: Cathleen ni Houlihan. The mother figure is perceived as the bearer of the nation's children. Both the Church and the state perceive the mother as a fundamental national icon and the embodiment of the Catholic morality, as well as, personal morality. Maguire is aware of the life that he could have lived, and what he could have achieved in his life is the main cause of his tragedy. Maguire's mother presents a different perspective of the traditional caring mother. Maguire's farm, mother, and sister are the forces that dominate his life. Maguire knows that his mother is a liar:

He knows that in his own heart he is calling his mother s liar

God's truth is life- even the grotesque shapes of his foulest fire. (Kavanagh 1942: 1.84-5)

Maguire's only hope of social and economic release is through the death of his mother. Kavanagh attacks the social and moral milieu in post-colonial Ireland by undermining the family unit as a supportive and vital component of the Irish society. Kavanagh challenges the national identity that is advocated by de Valera and the Catholic church. Kavanagh supports a concept of the family as a sterile group of individuals with narrow visions of social, moral and religious codes. The mother's lie undermines the Irish motherhood and the concept of national identity. James Plunkett states that "In the literature of the 19th century the peasant is an amiable buffoon. In the literature of our day, he appears in various guises: the mystical peasant of Yeats, the unbaptized peasant of O'Donnell, the brute-like peasantry of O'Flaherty. It is only when we come to a poem, The Great Hunger by Patrick Kavanagh, that he emerges as a whole man." (Plunkett 1953: 31)

A major section of the poem satires the popular perception of the peasant. The section opens with a bold statement concerning Maguire's faithfulness:

Maguire was faithful to death:

He stayed with his mother till she died

At the age of ninety-one. (Kavanagh 1942: 101-3)

From the very beginning of The Great Hunger, Kavanagh breaks from W.B. Yeats and his idealization of the peasant when he portrays Maguire as frustrated and emotionally crippled individual controlled by social forces that impede his personal growth. In his essay on Yeats, Kavanagh states that "Yeats took up Ireland and made it his myth and theme. And you can see him today on the centre of that myth, uneasy that he doesn't belong" and Kavanagh refutes the Revival and singles out Yeats' Celtic writings, "The Work of Yeats which is deliberately Irish in this way sounds awfully phony. Irishness is a form of anti-art." (Kavanagh 1971: 80) Maguire's face in mist is coupled with the stones in his fist is linked to Kavanagh's attempt to revise the image of the peasant away from the mist placed by the Revivalists. Maguire is powerless in the face of moral, social, economic, and religious dominations that define the rural identity as Catholic, married farmer who is loyal to the church and the state. (1.228)

The main cause of Maguire's misery and frustration is stated by the narrator who states that:

Religion, the fields and the fear of the Lord

And ignorance giving him the coward's blow. (Kavanagh 1942: 229-30)

According to the Revivalists, the lore of the peasant lies within the mythical status of the domestic hearth and the village crossroads. According to de Valera's vision, the hearth fulfills the centrality of family life and the crossroads is the traditional scene of innocent matchmaking and dancing. Maguire's masturbation over the warm ashes reinterprets the significance of the hearth image as the hearth signifies the sterility of Maguire's life. Kavanagh revises the canonical imagery of the peasant as the poet reinterprets the hearth as the focus of Maguire and the sexual immaturity of the Irish rural community. The Great Hunger presents the evening at crossroads that captures the vacuum that occupies the rural community. A boy picks a stone off the road and throws it on the railway track. The narrator states that:

He means nothing.

Not damn thing (Kavanagh 1942: 240-2)

Kavanagh raises insignificant details to highlight the futility of the life experienced by the man setting near the bridge. There is no purpose, no ambition and no goal exemplified by the boy's action. The boy's action imitates Maguire's actions in section 1 when he flung a stone in the air for no apparent reason. Section 1 is a significant part in the poem as it prefaces the concluding 'no hope' of Maguire at the end of the poem. Kavanagh presents Maguire as a complex character despite his simplicity, "he is not always blind." (Kavanagh 1942: 687) Maguire contemplates his life but he is unable to induce any change, "There is no tomorrow." (Kavanagh 1942: 257) and consequently there is no hope. It is only within the confines of the pub that he finds solace. In section IX, the image of the peasant as the residue of the pure essence of the Irish life is questioned by Kavanagh. Kavanagh is dissatisfied with the appropriation of the peasant as the

icon of Irish culture, church, and family. In the middle of section IX, Kavanagh criticizes the imagined peasant existence and the Revivalist interpretation of life:

Why should men be asked to believe in a soul

That is only the mark of a hoof in gutty gaps?

A manis what is written on the label.

And the passing world stares but no one stops

To look closer (Kavanagh 1942: 384-8)

Kavanagh is questioning the primacy of the rural peasant who is poor and uneducated as the new model of national identity. In section XIII, there are no informed judgements regarding the peasants and this is evident when the travellers spot the peasant from the comfort of their cars. For the travellers, the peasant is no more than "the mark of a hoof in a guttery gap." (Kavanagh 1942: 385) The peasant who is presented as a powerless creature living in semi-darkness opposes the popular images of the peasant. The narrator states that "nobody can see the real tortured poetry (Kavanagh 1942: 390) that withers in the souls of these deprived people. The Great Hunger challenges the passing world's perception:

Like the afterbirth of a cow stretched on a branch in the wind

life dried in the veins of these women and men. (Kavanagh 1942: 397)

The above lines suggest that the people of Donaghmoyne are in the aftermath of their birth. Unfortunately, their lives, hopes, and dreams are limited from their birth by poverty and the moral immaturity of their environment. While the life of the people of Donaghmoyne is full of promises, they quickly become defunct. Similarly, the dried afterbirth represents the betrayal felt by many peasants after the establishment of the independent State. In the penultimate section of the poem, the poet criticizes the peasant as a carefree spirit born of the soil and evocative of personal and national purity:

The peasant has no worries;

In his lyrical little fields

He ploughs and sows;

He eats fresh food,

He loves fresh women,

He is his own master

As it was in the Beginning

The simpleness of peasant life. (Kavanagh 1942: 662-65)

Kavanagh attacks the previous advantages of the peasant life, its simplicity, and its untainted existence. He uses a religious language, "As it was in the Beginning." (Kavanagh 1942: 619) to

mix it with imputable beliefs articulated by those who claim possessing objective knowledge of the peasant life. There is a sharp contrast between these lines and the previous sections of the poem. Maguire has never loved a woman so the world has perceived the simplicity of his life that the outside world has lost but Maguire maintained through his pure heart and mind. Even the travellers who look at the peasants in their fields are paying their respect for the peasants as nature seems ignorant of their existence. Emphasizing the simplicity of the peasants' life and the rural setting, the outside world is adhering to the overall picture that fits the peasant into the national identity.

The peasant is a myth that allows the church and the State to sustain governance and because Maguire is 'half vegetable' this allows the State and the Church to proceed unchallenged. The peasant is the tool that impedes those who maintain a narrow vision of the national identity. The peasant who is powerless is essential to maintain the power of those who govern him: the Church and State. Kavanagh writes:

There is the source from which all cultures rise,

And all religions,

There is the pool in which the poet dips

And the musician.

Without the peasant base civilization must die,

Unless the clay is in the mouth the singer's singing is useless.

The traveller's touch the roots of the grass and feel renewed

When they grasp the steering wheels again (Kavanagh 1942: 675-6)

Kavanagh's achievement lies in challenging the homogeneity of the peasant myth. According to the outside world, Maguire is "only one remove from the beasts he drives." (Kavanagh 1942: 668) Maguire is a victim of a system that suppresses him to secure its survival. In nature, birds are thrown from their nests by their mothers to survive but the narrator depicts Maguire's mundane tragedy that the travellers either oversee or mor likely ignore:

But the peasant in his little acres is tied

To a mother's womb by the wind-toughened naval-cord

Like a goat tethered to the stump of a tree-

He circles around and around wondering why it should be.

No crash

No drama

That was how life happened.

No mad hooved galloping in the sky,

But the weak, washy way of true tragedy-

A sick horse nosing around the meadow for a place to die. (Kavanagh 1942: 701-10)

Much of the imagery in the poem suggests impotence of spirit and flesh. Sexual frustration and futility of life are the main sources of Maguire's disillusionment. He stands:

In the doorway of his house

A ragged sculpture of the wind. (Kavanagh 1942: 75)

Maguire is detached from the vividness of nature by deformed morality. The Great Hunger presents a place where life is extinguished:

Life went on like that. One summer morning

Again through a hay-field on her way to the shop-

The grass was wet and over-leaned the path-

And Agnes held her skirts sensationally up,

And not because the grass was wet either.

A man was watching her, Patrick Maguire.

She was in love with passion and its weakness

And the wet grass could never cool the fire

That radiated from her unwanted womb

In that country, in that metaphysical land

Where flesh was a thought more spiritual than music

Among the stars- out of reach of the peasant's hand. (Kavanagh 1942: 703))

On an essay on George Moore, Kavanagh refers to the strains of Catholic morality:

On reflection, it does seem to me that somewhere in the nineteenth century, or maybe earlier (or maybe it is somewhere in Irish religion, rather than in chronology) an anti-life heresy entered religion. Priests became infected with a heresy that as good as denied that they themselves were born of woman … If there is a disease in the body of Irish society the young priests sent out by Maynooth are not free from blame. (Kavanagh 1967:47)

Silence, endured frustration, misery, and repressed sexuality are juxtaposed in The Great Hunger with the fertility of clay, hope, love, and light that the natural world represents:

Religion, the fields and the fear of the Lord

And ignorance giving him the coward's blow,

He dare not rise to pluck the fantasies

From the fruited Tree of life. He bowed his head

And saw a wet weed twined about his toe. (Kavanagh 1942: 176))

As the curtain falls, the narrator's description of "applause, applause" (Kavanagh 1942: 733) is an ironic interpretation of the noises that surround Maguire as he finishes his day work in his farm and enhances the perception of the poem as a drama acted by the narrator and the audience. The use of theatrical motif for a poem is an attempt to revise the Revivalists, their Abbey Theatre and their romanticized vision of the peasant. Gus Martin states that:

It has been argued that this imagery of the theatre dissonates with the natural landscape of the peasant's world. But the dissonance, I feel sure, is planned. The kind of Irish peasant, the 'carefree' rural bachelor, had been a stock figure particularly on the Abbey stage for a couple of generations. Kavanagh's journalism and critical prose bristles with suspicion for this kind of superficial and facile portraiture of the people he knew so intimately. He saw it all as a 'thorough-going English-bred lie. (Martin 1987: 37)

Kavanagh concludes The Great Hunger with a biblical reference when he mentions the apocalypse. The apocalypse concludes the book of the New Testament but Kavanagh changes it in the opening line of the poem regarding the dramatic and predictable victory of humanity. Maguire's tragedy is lived in "every corner of this land," (Kavanagh 1942: 796) where the hungry devil erodes countless men and women until there is no hope. Maguire's cry is his last act as he stands in his doorway watching his farm. It is the cry of a man whose hopes and dreams are buried alive under an oppressive state, restrictive family system and religious domination.

2. Conclusion

To conclude, Kavanagh is labelled as the peasant-poet who is uttering new simple poetic utterances. The treatment of life in rural Ireland continues to be an important subject and remains realistic in The Great Hunger. Kavanagh opposes the romanticized, pastoral and nostalgic view of the Irish rural life. Kavanagh feels the indignation of the rural life. He depicts a rural world at odds with the Revivalists model of rural authenticity. The Great Hunger captures the heart of the peasant life and the essence of Kavanagh's deprived homeland. Kavanagh draws attention to the personal struggle of the peasant and the hardships of agricultural labor. Maguire's life mirrors both the values of rural life and the harsh reality of the farming laborer. The peasant is what is written on the label and any attempt to write the peasants' life will be influenced by the social and political domination rather than the reality of their situations and their actual experiences

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