

Seamus Heaney's Landscape Poetry: A Medium of Cultural and National Revival

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Abstract

This paper investigates the close relationship between places, landscape, farming duties, and Irish national identity in Seamus Heaney's poetry. Landscape is no more a reference to natural existence but it serves as a wider cultural image that is filled with memory and passion, and most importantly it refers to the emerging nation after suffering of English colonization. Ireland suffered centuries of oppression and the subsequent elimination of Irish language, history, culture, and national identity. What is unique about Heaney's landscape poetry is that it is a literary medium of resisting English domination by deploying placenames that resist Anglicizing as placenames assert its peculiar Irishness. Similarly, landscape poetry serves as a tool of cultural healer to the poet and Irish people in general. In his early literary career, the poet shows an ambivalent attitude towards nature but towards the end of his literary writing, nature is symbol of beauty and turns into a political entity that celebrates the Irish national identity. Landscapes are fundamentally involved in the formations of the Irish national identity. The poet feels his obligation to follow the paths of his father and ancestors in reviving Irish traditions related to farming through landscape poetry rather than actual performance of farming activities.

Keywords: Irish landscape, national identity, farming duties, writing and digging, retreat.

1. Introduction

This paper investigates the close relationship between places, landscape, farming duties and Irish national identity in some of Seamus Heaney's poetry. Landscape is no more a reference to natural existence but it serves as a wider cultural image filled with memory and passion, and most importantly it refers to the emerging nation. For Heaney, the celebration of landscape entails more than a nostalgic longing for a return to pre-colonial state of bliss and tranquility but rather landscape provides him with a poetic medium to resist the colonial condition and to reimagine a new world. Such re-imagining reconfigures places through a complex interaction of topography, history, and language. The relationship between identity, language, and nature is closely connected to Heaney's belonging to a marginalized community. Heaney's landscape poetry explores the historical, cultural, and linguistic origin of his country and the linguistics of placenames testifies the sectarian conflict and colonial dispossession. Ireland has suffered from centuries of English colonization so the process of place-naming with its unique Irish characteristics is an artistic form of resisting colonial oppression, as well as, preserving the Irish

local culture. In the face of violence and colonization in Northern Ireland, Heaney's pastoral poems preserve poetry as a mode of redressing at national, cultural, and linguistic level. Heaney's natural poetry celebrates a textual construction of landscape as a literary medium of social, cultural, linguistic, and national importance. Representations of places are marked with a disparity between them and the real place they represent. Landscape becomes a problematic space that corresponds with an ambivalent relationship with an imagined and the real world. Placenames combine language with distinct Irish characteristics and landscape that are loaded with cultural connotations and consequently this process of naming is becoming a process of constructing the emerging Irish national identity. English colonization imposed its language on Ireland and its institutions and this marginalization of Irish language denied Irish people their right to express their experiences using their own language. In a country where its principal language is superseded by the language of the colonizer, the Anglicization of placenames is an example of linguistic colonization. David Lloyd (1993) states that Heaney's preoccupations with the relationship between language, place, and identity is symbolic of cultural repossession:

Place, identity and language mesh in Heaney, as in the tradition of cultural nationalism, since language is seen primarily as naming, and because naming performs a cultural reterritorialization by replacing the contingent continuities of an historical community with an ideal register of continuity in which the name (of place or of object) operates symbolically as the commonplace communicating between actual and ideal continua. The name always serves likeness, never difference. Hence poems on the names of places must of their nature be rendered as gifts, involving no labour on the part of the poet, who would, by enacting division, disrupt the immediacy of the relation of culture to pre-culture. (Heaney, 1993: 24)

Landscape poetry records the special relationship between place and identity. Heaney maintains an ambivalent feeling towards Irish culture and Irish tradition that finds full expression in writing poetry about farm practices and landscape. In "Death of the Naturalist," (1966) the sublime images of nature are contrasted and undercut by the brutal realities of the rural life:

Smudging the silence: a rat

Slimed out of the water and

My throat sickened. (Heaney, 1966: 6)

'Glanmore Sonnets' from "Field Work" (1979) celebrates a rural representation of the Wicklow landscape; however, the physical world and the linguistic representation evoke a sense of tension:

Sensings, mountings from the hiding spaces,

Words entering almost the sense of touch

Ferreting themselves out of their dark- hutch. (Heaney, 1979: 61)

Landscape poetry helps sustain and develop Irish landscape and countryside. Heaney's rural poems reveal the influence of locale in Irish poetry. The poet digs up the wealth of the aesthetic and the cultural associations that the poet can derive from the Irish landscape. Place is connected with the notions of language, culture and history. Heaney's exploration of place helps him to

come to terms with and overcome political division and conflict. Digging is a metaphor for the poet's explorations. Heaney turns to pastoral poetry to steer his critique and resistance to colonial violence. He expands the scope of his poetic artifice and moves poetry away from politics into pastoral poetry. Landscape is a repository of familial, locale and national bonds. Rural setting is a perfect location for the interplay of the natural and the mythical and Heaney's poetic medium of cultural and national restoration. Landscape is Heaney's medium to reconcile between artistic freedom and national responsibility. It illustrates the poet's responsibility to his national cause, freedom to express himself and ultimately his life in a rural republic of his own creation. The Irish landscape is a record of the poet's fascination with nature that penetrates his soul. His interest in retrieving the communal past excavated in distant history is related to the political turbulent that was marked by geopolitical division. Landscape poetry is a literary search for understanding his own territory that has been characterized by excavating his Irish roots. For the poet, understanding the place is linked with language which is central to the place and political history of Ireland. Elmer Andrews (1992) asserts that Heaney's concern with the place is a political one as "possession of the land, like possession of different languages, is matter of particular urgency in Ireland." (2) and that "For Heaney, a sense of place and a sense of history, something which is typical of the Irish writers and derives to some extent from the writer's desire to protect and preserve what is threatened and diminished." (Andrews 1988, 369) The close relationship between landscape and language in Heaney's poetry celebrates the emerging national identity by using the Irish language.

Landscape is evident in the early poetry of Heaney in the form of natural ecology, place names, and farming duties. Heaney is indebted to John Montague's proposition that "the whole of the Irish landscape is a manuscript which we have lost the skill to read." (Heaney 1980, 132) Landscape is a crucial element in understanding and defining national identity as it is a witness to Ireland's historical and national transformation and a key component of Irishness. Heaney's natural poetry that incorporates time and space reinforces his quest for poetic reconstruction of Irish identity. Heaney is attempting to present Irish tradition, as well as, Irish history in his landscape poetry that celebrates his commitment to national culture. Landscape with its distinct geographical features and images is the reserve of Irish history and national consciousness.

Heaney's poetry is unique in presenting a close connection between place and identity. Furthermore, landscape is an outlet to express the poet's national feeling and to approach artistic freedom. Both language and landscape play a key role in building the new state and the new Irish language. Heaney ((1980) writes "words themselves are doors" which "provide point of entry into the dark centre, the blurred and irrational storehouse of insight and instinct, the hidden core of the self." (52) Heaney has drawn heavily on the language of the rural work finding in its vocabulary a resonance derived from its distance from the actual world. The poet underlines the peaceful countryside landscape before the English colonization. The old countryside with its vanished musicality is contrasted with the landscape under English colonization. The natural poems take place in an uncivilized and wild setting where the English colonization cannot tread. Landscape poetry is a medium of literary resistance that celebrates national identity.

Geographical landscape is not only about natural beauty, but it reflects the Irish culture and history. The countryside landscape is extended to illuminate the poet's relation with Irish natural

scene, and the relationship with his home land, culture, history, identity, art and politics. Landscape is a source of catharsis and healing for the poet himself and the Irish people. Landscape is a curative tool that allows the poet to grieve political unrest and to present hope in the future. The pastoral landscape offers the poet images of restoration, rebirth and hopefulness that eliminate the fecundity of his earlier pastoral poems and eventually fulfills the poet's ambition of breaking the cycle of violence in Ireland. Heaney's early poems reveal abject pastoral poetry that are serving as political spaces of resistance and anti-colonialism; however, the most recent pastoral work is identifying hope and restoration in the same abject landscape. In "The Tollund Man," (1984) there is a close relationship between naming and identity. "The Tollund Man" is divided into three poems. The first poem describes the Tollund man whose body was preserved in a bog water. His description in the first poem is framed by the place name Aarhus. In the last poem, there is a complicated correlation between Aarhus and bog man:

Something if his sad freedom

As he rode the tumbril

Should come to me, driving,

Saying the names

Tollund, Grabaulle, Nebelgard,

Watching the pointing hands

Of the country people,

Not knowing their tongue.

Out there in Julland

In the old man-killing parishes.

I will feel lost

Unhappy and at home. (Heaney, 1984: 67)

This poem reveals the speaker's exclusion from his country and an identification with it through cultural experience. The speaker in the last poem is no longer seeking Aarhus and bogman but he identifies with the old man-killing parishes. Aarhus initially signifies the bogman but now the bogman and the places that are associated with him signify a history of cultural and political violence.

In *Field Work* (1979), Heaney explores the poet's role amid political violence, "What will become of us? Our island is full of comfortless noises." (45) and in 'The Strand at Lough Beg', the poet mourns the death of his cousin who was a victim of the sectarian war. The poem begins with the speaker, a mouthpiece for the poet describing the political unrest and the geographical scene. The poem describes the preparations of a corpse for the burial. The grass symbolizes the unity between Irish people and their country with no regard to their religion or political affiliation. The speaker anoints the corpse with mud and this ritual signifies the idea that

landscape is having a redemptive power to Irish people who suffer from antagonism. Heaney concludes with blessing:

Then kneel in front of you in brimming grass
And gather up cold handfuls of the dew
To wash you, cousin. I dab you clean with moss
Fine as the drizzle out of a low cloud.
I lift you under the arms and lay you flat.
With rushes that shoot green again, I plait
Green scapulars to wear over your shroud. (Heaney 1980, 114)

This reveals the political struggle in Ireland and the poet's message to politicize Irish people and make them aware that they all belong to one nation with no regard to politics or religion. Another example in this regard is *The Cure at Troy* and the rendering of Sophocles's *Philoctetes*:

History says, Don't hope
on this side of the grave. But then, once in a lifetime
The longed for tidal wave
Of justice can rise up,
and hope and history rhyme. So hope for a great-sea change
on the far side of revenge.
Believe that further shore
is reachable from here.
Believe in miracles
and cures and healing wells. (Heaney 1979: 305-306)

The poet recalls the wells of his childhood and his personal helicons are sites of potential miracles, cures, and healing. The poem proceeds with the chorus affirming the restorative power of nature because of its fecundity:

If there's fire on the mountain
And lightening and storm
And a god speaks from the sky
That means someone is hearing
the outcry and birth-cry
of new life at its term. (Heaney 1999, 306)

In *Personal Helicon*, the poet explores the depths of the Irish soil. He begins the poem with explaining his love for wells. The poem is about the pleasures derived from exploring wells:

I Loved the dark drop, the trapped sky, the smells
Of waterweed, fungus and dank moss. (Heaney 1966, 11)

The poet remembers his childhood, the fearful nature of wells, and his attraction to such mysterious places. He recalls his encounters with such fearful places:

So deep you saw no reflection in it,
when you dragged out long roots from the soft mulch
a white face hovered over the bottom. (Heaney 1999, 14)

This fascination with healing wells is an Irish tradition that has a history of superstition. From this point onward, Heaney presents the fertility of nature and the possibility for rebirth and regeneration.

“Electric Light” (2002) marks a new turn in the poet’s poetic career and more specifically on the possibility of creation, hope and rebirth in abjection. In “Toomebridge,” Heaney refers to the past English colonization with its negative ions that becomes a source for poetry in contrast to “the slime” that made poetry before. The poet refers explicitly to the painful and bloody history of Ireland in search for new hope. The three eclogues in “Electric Light” affirm the transformation from abjection to hope and life. ‘Bann Valley Eclogue’ can best illustrate hope, revival, and rebirth. This poem was written on the occasion of Heaney’s niece’s pregnancy written in a form of conversation between the poet and Virgil. Ian Twiddy (2012) observes that “Heaney’s recent work has examined the ability of the eclogue and the pastoral elegy to unlock cycles of violence and stalemate, and to advance the possibilities of integration.” (52) The poem begins with asking the Bann Valley Muses for a song that will please Virgil and the poet hopes that:

Maybe heavens, sing
better times for her and her generation. (Heaney 2002, 12)
Virgil responds that he will offer the poet:
a call for poetry, order, the times, the nation, wrong and renewal, then an infant birth
and a flooding away of all old miasma. (12) and:
But when the waters break
Bann’s stream with overflow, the old markings
will avail no more to keep east bank from west.
The valley will be washed like the new baby. (Heaney 2002, 12)

In "Station Island," Heaney's notes incorporated at the end of the poem place the poem in a geographical context, "It is a sequence of dream encounters with familiar ghosts, set on Station Island in Lough Derg in Co. Donegal." (Heaney, 1984: 122) The poet investigates the value of poetry. The poet is challenged with figures and incidents from the past to the extent that his murdered cousin accuses the poet of evasion and confusion and another victim relives his assassination and the poet responds that "Forgive the way I have lived indifferent." (Heaney 1984, 200) Heaney wants to atone and shows his involvement with the Irish political cause. By initialing the pilgrimage, the poet hopes to atone, clear his conscience and his poetic project of not being communal and dutiful. In "Sweeny Astray", Heaney and through the figure of the Irish king who fled to the forest to write poetry in isolation celebrates his poetic freedom. The Sweeney that flies away from the crowd represents the poet himself who believes that poetry must be rare and imaginative and not bound by church and state. Such poetic freedom is fulfilled in "Haw Lantern" and "Seeing Things" as the poet lives in a world of his own creation. The transformative power of poetry in "The Spirit Level" is apparent in "A Sofa in the Forties" as the poet recalls when children knelt on the sofa and imagined they were on a train. Through imagination, the unreal becomes real. This poem recreates a reality that poetry should offer: poetry should possess a transformative power rather than mirroring actualities. The poem is loaded with rhythm and sound that match childhood experiences and through poetic imagination the spirit of the poet is lifted as the poem is charged with sound and rhythm. This reveals the power of poetry to redress disappointment and dark realities. In the same poem, Heaney's brother is a piper and he has the ability to revel:

your pop-eyes and big checks nearly bursting

With laughter, but keeping the drone going on

Interminably, between catches of breath. (Heaney 1987, 10)

Poetry has the ability to sustain memory and fun with contemporary bombing and bullet:

Grey matter like gruel flecked with blood

In spatters on the whitewash, A clean spot

Where his head had been. (Heaney 1987, 11-12)

In "Seeing Things," Heaney celebrates the idea that earth, a place of the marvelous seen for the first time and readers have to go backward in time to sustain freshness. This collection of poems recalls the poet's life in County Derry. The poet praises his brother who has an enduring stamina, laughing and waving. Artistic freedom is a counter to the dark realities and political turmoil. Andrews comments that "Seeing Things reminds us that freedom is attained through the actual, not evasion of it, with the result that Heaney collapses the distinction between the actual and the imagined; this explains why the collection is always returning to the ordinary in pursuit of its spirituality." (Elmer 1992, 227) Similarly, Richard Russell (2014) asserts that "poetry ... could have an ameliorating effect on the violence in the province [North Ireland] - could save it from a descent into a sectarian hell which was quite prevalent especially during his life time." (69) Heaney uses poetry to reconcile contradictions in Ireland and his home town, including Protestantism and Catholicism, Republicans and Royalists and Activist and Pacifists. Heaney

refers to national and political matters in light of his private affairs. Elmer (1988) states that “the centre of the poet’s imaginative world is also the centre of family and community life... . For Heaney, a sense of self depends on a sense of place and a sense of history; something which is typical of the Irish writer’s desire to protect and preserve what is threatened and diminished.... [Thus] he extends his excavation of the self to place it in relation to the past.” (369)

The spontaneous language with its distinct Irish characteristics represents the landscape with its local colour and Irish nationalism that is resisting English colonization. Heaney remarks that “Irish landscape, whether in the form of the savage sublime, the picturesque, or the straightforwardly scenic has been presented in such a way as to remove the traces of a disastrous history and instead make Ireland fit for public tourist consumption.” (Qtd. in Deane 1994, 148) In “Sense of Place,” a lecture given in Belfast’s Ulster Museum January 1977 and later included in his “Preoccupations: Heaney writes that “the landscape was sacramental, instinct with signs, implying a system of reality beyond visible reality.” (Heaney 1980, 132) Anthony Bradley (1983) observes that in Heaney’s poetry that “The Irish landscape is inseparable from language, from the etymology and music of place names, from work both agricultural and artistic, from history both archeological and contemporary; landscape is inseparable, too from the present political conflict as well as from atavistic sense of nature as religion and work as ritual; it is inseparable, finally, from the community as divided and the community as unified.” (3) Both language and landscape highlight the Irish people’s language and their life experiences. The emerging Ireland needs to celebrate its unique landscape, language, and culture. As the digging going down, Heaney’s poetry will preserve the Irish tradition with its push earthward. In “Preoccupations,” Heaney (1980) observes “The poet as ploughman, if you like, and the suggestive etymology of the word ‘verse’ is pertinent in this context. ‘Verse’ comes from the Latin *versus* which could mean a line of poetry but could also mean the turn that a ploughman made at the head of the field as he finished one furrow and faced back into another.” (65)

Born on a farm in rural country Derry (1939) in Northern Ireland, Heaney lived in a countryside full of natural scenes during his childhood. The conflict of his origin is embodied in his family’s farm Mossbawn, place placed between the English influence and the lure of his native experience. In 1972, he moved to The Republic of Ireland. In the pamphlet poem “An open Letter” (1983) he critiqued Andrew Motion and Blake Morrison’s inclusion of him in *The Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry* celebrating his Irish passport. He denies his status as British and points to the cultural suppression of his marginalized Irish identity. The sectarian violence that erupted in Belfast during the summer of 1969 affected his identity and his poetic career. Heaney (1992) reveals that his early poems reveal the cultural crisis, citing “*Docker*,” he states that the poem was “My first attempts to speak, to make verse, faced the Northern sectarian problem.” (Heaney 1992: 16) In his interview with Thomas Foster (1987), Heaney emphasizes that the poet writing in the midst of cultural crisis has the responsibility of “dealing with truth and justice” and “you must beware of the fallout of your words, and perhaps, I ‘ve been unduly aware of that, of the relationship between lyric and life, of the responsibility for what you say.” (Foster 1989: 57)

The rural landscape of Ireland is always apparent in his literary works. However, his family and his early education helped to develop an alienated relationship with landscape that was

sometimes associated with dark and fear. Heaney states that “The voices of my education pull in two directions, back through the political and cultural traumas of Ireland, and out towards the urgencies and experience of the world beyond it.” (Heaney 1980: 35) He describes his experience of reading Patrick Kavanagh’s poems for the first time, “I was excited to find details of a life which I knew intimately but which I had always considered to be below or beyond books- being presented in a book.... Potato-pits with rime on them, guttery gaps, iced- over puddles being crunched, cows being milked, a child nicking the doorpost with a pen-knife, and so on. What was being experienced was not some hyenic and self-aware pleasure of the text but a primitive delight in finding world become word.” (Qtd. in Hildebidle 1987: 7-8) Heaney chooses to efface through poetry the boundaries between world and word. Reading Kavanagh’s works marks the beginning of Heaney’s poetic identity and in *Preoccupations*, he states that “I began as a poet when my roots were crossed with my reading.” (Heaney 1980: 36-37) “Digging” celebrates this encounter with world and word by the skillful presentation of rural task as digging functions as aural counters adapted to the phenomenon described.

The vivid description of the landscape is Heaney’s device to reflect the hostile atmosphere in his home country, as well as, his familiarity with such natural scene. The farming landscape in Heaney’s early poetry initially suggests a feeling of alienation from home culture and tradition. In “The Death of the Naturalist” (1966), Heaney expresses his alienation from the natural world he experienced when he was a child. The pleasant and idyllic rural Ireland is replaced with:

All year the flax-dam festered,

green and heavy-headed

Flax had rotted there, weighted down by huge sods.

Daily it sweltered in the punishing sun.

Bubbles gargled delicately, bluebottles

Wove a strong gauze of sound around the smell. (Heaney 1998, 5)

Heaney similarly expresses his fear of the threats he encounters in rural landscape by writing that:

The great slime kings [frogs] because they were gathered there for vengeance and I knew

that if I dipped my hand the spawn would clutch it. (Heaney 1998, 5)

Heaney underlines the importance of his pastoral poetry by asserting that “pastoral poetry is not a tradition of antiquity, but rather a vibrant and current project, citing the work of Kavanagh and Synge- and by extension, of course, himself.” (Heaney 1980, 180) Heaney left Ireland for studying abroad and eventually he was unable to be fully engaged in farming activities like his father and his ancestors. In his interview with Thomas O’Donnell, he declares that “I didn’t work, say, from eighteen to twenty- four on the farm. I was constantly on the conveyer belt of colleges and schools. Then I taught when I finished my degree in Belfast. So in a sense I didn’t actually work on a farm except I grew up there and took part in the activities.” (O’Donnell & Campbell 1983, 64) Heaney was listening rather than participating in farming duties:

Under my window, a clean rasping sound
 When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:
 My father, digging,
 watching (his straining rump among flowerbeds)
 Bends low, comes up twenty years away
 Stooping in rhythm through potato drills
 Where he was digging.
 picking new potatoes, carrying milk for grandfather.(Heaney 1966, 34)

“Digging” is significant as it is a metaphor for the poet’s search for the connection between the land he treads at the present and the ancestral tradition that is buried underneath. P.R. King (1986) states “digging is about the poet discovering and locating his vocation within the rural traditions his father embodied, traditions that hold the historical roots of a nation.” (79-80) In this sense, land is a repository of familial, local and national significance. His education and his exile from his hometown created his ambivalent feeling towards home and home culture. Describing his education as an obstacle to working on a farm, Heaney complains “The voices of my education at odds with ancestral voices,” and “those voices pull in two directions, back through the political and cultural traumas of Ireland, and out towards the urgencies of the world beyond it. At school I studied the Gaelic literature of Ireland as well as the literature of England, and since then I have maintained a notion of self as Irish in a province that insists that it is British. Lately, I realized that these complex pieties and dilemmas were implicit in the very terrain where I was born.” (Heaney 2002, 40)

His childhood memories find full expression in his poetry. Helen Vendler (1988) observes that “Profound family affections, eloquent landscapes as well as vigorous social concern” (5) are the main themes of Heaney’s poetry. Heaney has always been connected to his rural origin. The collections of his best poems “Death of a Naturalist” (1966), “Door into the Dark” (1969) and “Wintering Out” (1972) is about his childhood memories, his experiences in Mossbawn, agricultural procedures, and farm practices of his ancestors and his neighbors and place names. In these collections, he explores the historical and cultural origins of landscape and the linguistics of its placenames that reveals political struggle and English colonization. In “Oracle,” the narrator is an inhabitant of natural objects in the trunk of a willow tree. The poem reveals the poet’s attachment to rural landscape, its auditory imagination and his delight in its musicality:

The tawny guttural WATER
 SPELLS itself
 Moyola
 is its own score and consort,
 bedding the locale

in the utterance,
reed music, an old chanter
breathing its mists
through vowels and history. (Heaney 1972, 32)

In “Preoccupations,” art “has religious, a binding force, for the artist. Language is the poet’s faith of his fathers and in order to go his own way and to do his proper work in an agnostic time, he has to bring that faith to the point of arrogance and triumph.” (Heaney 1980, 98) Heaney (1980) declares that “feeling for word and syllable reaching down below the ordinary levels of language, uniting the primitive and civilized associations words have acquired.” (Heaney 1980, 81) Some of Heaney’s poems evoke a mystery at the heart of his landscape poetry. Appreciating the farming procedures of sowers, harvesters and thatchers and their sense of pride, Heaney reveals what he values:

a comparison between the thatcher and what the poet does

Then 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. (Heaney 1969, 15)

Heaney writes that Mossbawn “Moss, a Scots word probably carried to Ulster by the Planters, and bawn, the name the English colonists gave to their fortified farmhouses... Yet in spite of the Ordnance Survey spelling, we pronounced it Moss bann and ban is the Gaelic word for white. So might not the thing mean the white moss, the moss of bog-cotton?” (Heaney 1980, 35) Furthermore, Heaney combines landscape with the history of its owners: The Long Rigs, Broagh, The Round Meadow and the Demesne. Mossbawn detailed landscape is always present when Heaney recalling his childhood experiences and his hometown. In “Mossbawn: Two Poems in Dedication to Mary Heaney” included in Heaney’s *North* (1975) the poet revisits his Mossbawn, a name of a farm owned by his family where he grew up, place of rootedness, and ancestry. Heaney’s personal connection to his personal roots involves his search for poetic identity as this place involves instability and crisis. The two poems that make up “Mossbawn” explore the place. In “Sunlight, his childhood memories are revitalized in simple terms to evoke the place in contrast to the darker overtones of other poems included in the same poetic collection. Revitalization is due to Heaney’s tribute to aunt Mary who is remembered baking. There is a delight in the physical details of the rural life where his attachment to the place is prominent. In “The Seed Cutters,” Heaney focuses on the rural task of Irish farmers growing potatoes. Heaney presents the geographical details of Northern Ireland: Moyola River, Lough Berg, Bog and Grove Hill. The tranquil landscape that keeps recurring in his poetic oeuvre is a consolation for the poet who is troubled with violence in Ireland. Similarly, the serenity of landscape offers him a consolation when he is lost in his poetic career. Beauty of landscape offers the poet varied experiences and reactions. He states that “he feels at the heart of a different life” when he is working in his farmyard and this experience ultimately helps him to discover the world and

himself, “in that tight cleft, you sensed the embrace of light and branches, you were a little Atlas shouldering it all, a little Cerunnos pivoting a world of antlers.” (Heaney 2002, 4)

In “Lough Neagh Sequence and “Relic Memory,” Heaney presents a distinct feature of the Lough Neagh including its fishermen, sum of water, worms, and eels to the extent that the place is a miniature of a real society that is full of natural force and mystery. Such details of the place turn the poem into cultural heritage that preserves Irish traditions. “Peninsula” depicts the aesthetic and visual beauty of landscape that provides a rich source of poetic inspiration:

When you have nothing more to say, just drive

For a day all around the peninsula,

The sky is tall as over a runway,

The land without marks, so you will not arrive

But pass through, though always skirting landfalls. (Heaney 1969: 56)

“Peninsula” illustrates how language is instrumental in formulating perceptions of landscape and questions the relationship between people and the natural setting. The poem opens with the lack of words and imagines filling that lack by viewing the landscape. Readers are presented with a landscape that is presented through language only.

Such subjective feelings that cannot be expressed run through the poem and surrender to silence while journeying around Peninsula. Landscape is a symbol of abstract beauty that is a source of poetic inspiration and vigour:

And then drive back home, still with nothing to say

Except that now you will uncode all landscapes

By this; things founded clean on their own shapes

Water and ground in their extremity. (Heaney 1969: 78)

Beauty of landscapes needs the sharp eye of the poet to be expressed in a poetic language. Michael Parker (1993) observes that:

The primeval, and sometimes pre-Celtic landscapes of “The Peninsula,” “Whinlands,” “The Plantation,” “Shoreline” and “Bogland” all illustrate Heaney’s increasing concern with Irish geography, history, and archeology, and how names mean something greater than the Mossbawn microcosm. [...] His imagination lights upon natural forms and shapes from both childhood and adult experience, ones which articulate the identity of the whole of Ireland, and not merely his own. (85)

However, in the mid of this vivid landscape, there is mystery, darkness and uncertainty that is most apparent in “Night Drive” and “The Peninsula”. This feeling of uncertainty could reflect the alienation, disorientation, and strangeness the poet himself feels. Heaney (1980) complains:

Any point in that wood

Was a center, birch trunks
Ghosting your bearings
Improvising charmed rings
Wherever you stopped.(38)

This uncertainty is a communal feeling that is reflected in using the pronouns ‘you’ and ‘they’ instead of ‘I’. George Cusack states (2002), “the site [landscape] is both an ancestral home and frighteningly alien history. The competing claims of Catholics and Protestants to Irish soil force the speaker to see the landscape in double vision, through which sites like Lough Beg become both familiar and deadly at the same time.” (58) In “Strand at Lough Beg,” Heaney mentions that the same landscape dominated by terrorism was in fact filled with tender cradle in which Irish children enjoyed delight and joy:”

Leaving the white glow of filling stations
And a few lonely streetlamps among fields
You climbed the hills towards the Newtown Hamilton
There you used to hear guns fired behind the house
Long before rising time, when duck shooters
Haunted the marigolds and bulrushes,
But still were scared to find spent cartridges,
Acrid, brassy, genital, ejected,
On your way across the strand to fetch the cows. (Heaney 1979, 17-18)

Heaney’s close connection with Irish land is evident in “Bog Landscape,” a typical poem with geographical features. In “Feelings into Words,” the poet differentiates between craft and technique in writing poetry which is similar to the equation of writing poetry and digging. He argues:

Craft is what you can learn from other verse. Craft is the skill of making. ... Technique ...involves not only a poet’s way with the words, his management of metre, rhythm, and verbal texture; it involves also a definition of his stance towards life, a definition of his own reality.... And if I were asked for a figure who represents pure technique, I would say a water diviner.” (Heaney 1980, 47)

The poet elaborates:

So, I began to get an idea of bog as the memory of the landscape, or as a landscape that remembered everything that happened in and to it. In fact, if you go round the National Museum in Dublin, you will realize that a great portion of the most cherished material heritage of Ireland was ‘found in bog’. Moreover, since memory was a faculty that supplied me with the first quickening of my own poetry, I had a tentative unrealized need to make a congruence between

memory and bogland and, for the want of a better word, our national consciousness. (Heaney 2002, 22)

In describing the Irish landscape, “Bogland” is the first poem to describe bog in details:

We have no prairies
To slice a big sun at evening-
Everywhere the eye concedes to
Encroaching horizon,
Is wooed into the Cyclops's eye
Of a tarn. Our unfenced country
Is bog that keeps crusting

Between the sights of the sun. (Heaney 1998, 41)

Bogland is a symbol of Irish identity, geography and history. Boglands are wet, moist, fertile and primitive lands and they are serving as cultural history, fertile source of cultural identity, and childhood memories. Before Heaney, the Irish bogs were scarcely a subject for poetry. Heaney writes that “The wet centre is bottomless” and their imaginative possibilities are unlimited, “Our pioneers keep striking inwards and downwards” and that “I had a tentative unrealized need to make a congruence between memory and bogland and ... our national consciousness.” (Heaney 1980: 73) Bogland offers Heaney with access to “the images and symbols adequate to our predicament.” (Heaney 1980:95) and particularly to the Troubles that began after the protestant siege of Bogside in August 1969 and resulted in the English Government sending troops to Northern Ireland. Although the avowed purpose of the army was to protect the Catholic minority in Ulster from attacks by Protestant gangs, the Provisional Faction exploited military insensitivity in order to redirect Catholics' indignation from their Protestant neighbors towards Britain and its army of occupation.

The physical beauty of the bogland represents a poetic motif to be enjoyed by the poet:

Butter sunk under More than a hundred years
Was recovered salty and white
The ground itself is kind, black under butter. (Heaney 1969: 45)

The bog crusts itself over the relics of history to preserve them for years, as well as, it preserves the deep coal that is associated with national consciousness. The fluid bog could refer to Irish people who cannot assign themselves to a single signification. Heaney at the end of the poem reveals that the Irish people work vertically inwards and downwards to explore their Celtic past. The bog's bottomless centre is similar to human imagination that knows no boundaries. This exploration is a whirlpool of new discoveries, “Every layer they strip/ Seems camped on before.” (Heaney 1969: 78) Rejecting conventions and boundaries and embracing a new perception of landscape, Heaney is successful in portraying the consciousness of Irish people. Memory is the

immediate point of reference to explore the collective memory of Irish people. The anomalous state of Ireland makes it impossible to formulate a national memory but only through the bogland. Heaney successfully produces a single narrative for Ireland.

Heaney's landscape poetry is a repository of farming practices of his father, grandfather and his ancestors that include potato digging, blacksmithing, digging, cattle-raising, ploughing, thatching and milk churning. Heaney presents Irish farming skills and makes them alive in his poetry. He observes a close connection between poetry creation and farm practices. He uses the pen rather than his father's spade or any farming tools to celebrate Irish tradition and his fascination with countryside. In "Preoccupation," Heaney (1980) declares that "I think there are two ways in which a place is known and cherished, two ways which always may be complementary but which are just as likely to be antipathetic. One is lived, illiterate and unconscious, the other learned, literate and conscious." (131) He highlights the bond between the literary practice and place. In "Digging," Heaney presents the digging skill of his father and grandfather. Potato and turf are two main farming experiences that Irish peasants rely on for life continuity. Heaney highlights the difficulties facing the rural community. Christopher Malone (2000) observes that "in digging, Heaney expresses a desire to follow after his father through the craft of poetry 'to dig with it' in a way similar to his father's working the earth." (1083-1109) Heaney hints at the idea of digging his personal, as well as, communal records using poetry to document Irish history. 'Digging' reveals the poet's admiration and respect for his father and grandfather who represent his Irish roots. He laments that:

I've no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb

the squat pen rests.

I'll dig with it. (Heaney 1998, 4)

Heaney uses the pen to inherit the tradition of his ancestors to dig the past national identity and history, "digging into living roots of the landscape, awakening the past, making memories similar with cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap/ Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge." (Heaney 1998, 3) The poet's pen is similar to the spade in the farmer's hand and shows his relation with his heritage. Cusack (2002) states "the poem contemplates the function of the poet in society and ends with a declaration of confidence in the socially redemptive power of poetry." (54) In addition, his poem "Follower" is about land ploughing by his father:

My father worked with a horse-plough,

His shoulders globed like a full sail strung

Between the shafts and the furrow.

These horses strained at his clicking tongue.

An expert he would set the wing

And fit the bright steel –pointed stock.

The sod rolled over without breaking.
At the headrig , with a single pluck
Of reins, the sweating team turned round
And back into the land. His eye
Narrowed and angled at the ground,
Mapping the furrow exactly. (Heaney 1998, 10)

Place names such as Anahorish, Broagh, Toome and Derrygarve are related to mythical tales to express the poet's relation with home culture. He relies heavily on dinnseanchas, an Irish genre that conceptualize the relationship between the human being and the place. Heaney writes "dinnseanchas relate the original meanings of place names and constitute a form of mythological etymology." (Heaney 1980, 131) in Dinnseanchas, Heaney revives his Gaelic poetic and linguistic inheritance. He recalls the violent history of a locale near his boyhood home in the Bann Valley, a site of a major campaign during the 1789 Rising. Heaney conjures up a tale of colonial domination and anti-colonial insurgency:

My mouth holds round
The soft blastings,
Toome, Toome,
As under the dislodged
Slabs of the tongue
I push into a souterrain
Prospecting what new
In a hundred centuries'
Loam, flints, musket balls,
Fragmented ware,
Torcs and fish-bones
Till I am sleeved in,
Alluvial mud that shelves
Suddenly under
Bogwater and tributaries,
And elvers my hair. (Heaney 1998: 54)

The above lines employ visual and auditory force to suggest the colonial violence inscribed into the Irish landscape and the Irish people's perception of native place. The homophone of Toome

in English is ‘tomb’ and the word functions as an interment and a historical reserve for Irish people. Heaney underlines the history and geography implied in the word Toome. The word Toome alludes to English colonization that was forcing its dominant language over Irish language and consequently the anglicizing of Irish place- names, history, and culture. In this sense, landscape is endowed with cultural, mythical and historical force. Heaney notes that a single word can serve as “etymological occurrence, as symptom of human history, memory and attachment.” (Heaney 1980 :150) The hybridized placename serves as “a concomitant of difference, the continual reminder of the separation, and yet of the hybrid interpretations of the colonizer and colonized.” (Heaney 1980: 34) The hybridized name is crucial in Heaney’s poetic endeavor to envision the power of poetry to restore culture itself. The closing lines of “Toome” evade the linguistic domination by transforming English language. The speaker employs unphilological sense of place before colonization where he discovers a language and release beyond colonial violence. The Irish word bog meaning soft emerges with the English water.

Rural landscape is a perfect location for the interplay of the mythical and the natural and a poetic medium for the poet’s endeavor of cultural recovery and his reconciliation with the past that he is trying to retrieve through writing poetry. He asserts that “Overtime and because of natural forces and human presence transforming the landscape, we just might have lost the skill to read these meanings, while a natural feature that endowed a place with its name may remain.” (Heaney 2002, 132) In his early poetry, Heaney combines farming duties and rural landscape into “the histories of its owners. Broagh, the Long Rigs, Bell’s Hills; Brian’s Field, the Round Meadow, the Demesne; each name was kind of love made to each acre. And saying the names like this distances the places turns into what Wordsworth once called a prospect of mind. They lie deep, like some script indelibly written into the nervous system.” (Heaney 2002, 6)

The poem “Anahorish” can best illustrate the combination between landscape and the ancestors’ farming activity. Anahorish is a place of clear water where the poet spent most of his childhood:

springs washed into
the shiny grass
and darkened cobbles
in the bed of the lane.

The musicality of the poem is related to the memory of:

Anahorish, soft gradient
of consonants, vowel-meadow,
after-image of lamps
swung through the yards
on winter evenings. (Heaney 1998, 47)

Anahorish belongs to Great Britain based on a political division but it preserves unique Irish characteristics. Sidney Burris celebrates the subversive potential of Anahorish by stating that “In

a poem such as “Anahorish,” Heaney imagines that the name itself possesses ineffable powers of cultural sovereignty. Irish place-names in the United Kingdom become for Heaney subversive incantations that both glorify his Celtic lineage and establish its integrity in British Northern Ireland. The poem dexterously appropriates a landscape politically British in its legal demarcation but linguistically Irish in its nomenclature.” (Burris 1990: 12) The English meaning defines it as a place of clean and clear water and a place of natural beauty. Later on, Anahorish is described using visual and auditory effects:

The first hill in the world
 where springs washed into
 the shiny grass
 and darkened cobbles
 in the bed of the lane.(Heaney 1998, 47)

This spot of natural beauty with clear water creates a natural painting of the landscape. There is a vivid juxtaposition between the green grass near the springs and the dark cobbles and this creates a visual impact and the vowels in Anahorish renders an image of flowing water in the river. What underlines the visual and auditory force of the poem a landscape that resists colonization. Instead of using the original Irish name ‘place of clean water’ to tell the story of the place, Heaney uses a predominant anglicized placename ‘Anahorish.’ The history of Anahorish as both place and word implies a history of colonization. Besides, the tools used by mound-dwellers are barrels and carts and this celebrates the tranquil, peaceful, and ancient Irish tradition. Towards the end of the poem, the poet presents a bucolic landscape without conflict and violence. The poem with its harmonious and distinguished rural landscape revives Irish tradition and history. Besides, the poem implies linguistic and territorial domination in its etymological excavations. The poet attempts to redress the damage of colonialism by inscribing placenames.

Similarly, the poem creates a new national space for the new nation. In place names in poetry, Heaney revived the Gaelic tradition in language and landscape that was erased by English colonization. Burris Sidney (1990) states that place names embody cultural sovereignty, “Irish place names in the United Kingdom become for Heaney as subversive incantations that both glorify his Celtic lineage and establish its integrity in British Northern Ireland.” (12) In *Place and Displacement: Recent Poetry of Northern Ireland*, the poet refers to political turmoil. He declares motive in writing poetry:

To move to a higher level of consciousness and resolve the conflict symbolically in art.... The contemporary poet in Ireland is compelled to outstrip the unbearable political reality of Ulster, to transcend it in highly formal lyrics, to enter the linguistic mode of play that momentarily intensifies him and detaches him from his predatory circumstances,” and “the poetic transcendence is not an evasion of sympathy with national conditions but rather a transposition of that sympathy into symbol. (Qtd. in Schuchard 1989:12& 6)

Such serene and idyllic rural landscape provides Heaney with a spiritual retreat. Heaney refers to the political violence in Northern Ireland and points out that “the poet’s artistic drive... is to move to a higher level of consciousness and resolve the conflict symbolically in art... The contemporary poet in Ireland is compelled to outstrip the unbearable political reality of Ulster to transcend it in highly formal lyrics, to enter the linguistic mode of play that momentarily intensifies him and detached him from his predatory circumstances.” (Qtd. in Schuchard 1989,6)

In “Broagh,” the poet traces the origin of language and its construction. Broagh in Gaelic means ‘riverbank’ and it refers to the Irish people’s experience and understanding for Broagh. The first line of the poem presents a riverbank and its prosperous plants. Heaney in one interview declares that italicizing the word Broagh suggest the difference between its Gaelic and its English meaning. Poetry of place-names began in the 70s and the debate for independence and the Irish civil rights. The poet uses poetry of landscape to exclude the English colonization from the Irish tradition. This means that Broagh is different from the English riverbank. The Gaelic word refers to the Irish and national consciousness. The poem presents the interaction between man and the rural landscape.

As typical of the poet, he relates Toome to the farming practice of digging and later he regards Toome as a bog as a store of culture and history through the images of musket-balls, fragmented ware, loam, torcs and fish-bones that form a visual painting of ancient Irish landscape.

In “New Song,” a young girl from Derrygarve reminds the poet with the place-name, its music and landscape; however, Derrygarve is “a lost potent musk” that offers the speaker pleasure. The many words with vowels in the poem underline the Irish trait by renaming place-names in Gaelic and Irish rather than English, “now our river tongues must rise/ from licking deep in native haunts/ to flood, with vowelling embrace/ Demesnes staked out in consonants.” (Heaney 1998, 58) Heaney regards the poem as a Civil Rights poem as the consonants stand for English colonization in Ireland and the vowels stand for Irish native experience and those vowels resist the control of consonants. The poet was able to assert Irish language and art that are key components of Irish identity. Heaney observes the connection between landscape and language to present a diverse landscape. He states:

In any movement towards liberation, it will be necessary to deny the normative authority of the dominant language or literary tradition.... Neither MacDonagh nor Joyce considered it necessary to proscribe within the reader’s’ memory the riches of the Anglophone culture whose authority each was, in his own way, compelled to challenge. Neither denied his susceptibility to the totally persuasive word in order to prove the purity of his resistance to an imperial hegemony. Which is why both these figures are instructive when we come to consider the scope and function of poetry in the world. They remind us that its integrity is not to be impugned just because at any given moment it happens to be a refraction of some discredited cultural or political system. Poetry, let us say, whether it belongs to an old political dispensation or aspires to express a new one, has to be a working model of inclusive consciousness. It should not simplify. Its projections and inventions should be a match for the complex reality which surrounds it and out of which it is generated. (Heaney 1995, 56)

2. Conclusion

To conclude, Heaney is known as a chronicler of rural Ireland and his work is categorized as pastoral poetry. This paper closely analyzes Heaney's landscapes to fold them into political, cultural, national, and linguistic structures. Heaney's landscape poetry reveals an aesthetic, political and historical wealth. Landscape is put into a larger context and linked with the issue of history, identity, politics, and art. Irish landscape in Heaney's poetry is a museum of recording Irish history and geography. He draws the vitality of the Irish landscape and the intimate relationship with nature enables the poet to comment on art, language, nature and politics. The poet presents diverse and broad understanding of Irish identity by exploring landscape and language. Through his landscape and language exploration, the poet illustrates the sufferings of the Irish people and their political conflicts. The detailed description of farm practices explores the close connection between farming and writing poetry. Landscape is a retreat from the daily life, and political turmoil in Ireland. His reference to his family landscape is retreat into his personal space to create new poetry. Rural landscape poetry reveals a transformative role of poetry that is no more mirroring reality. Landscape and place names allow the author the opportunity to tell the story of a rural place and its geopolitical spot and at the same time to use poetry to write the nation again. Landscape poetry enables Heaney to explore historical and cultural background of Ireland and natural poetry becomes a literary weapon of celebrating the new culture and history of Ireland.

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