

Identity, language and culture in Seamus Heaney's *The Haw Lantern*Haris Qadeer<sup>a\*</sup><sup>a</sup>Gautam Buddha University, Greater Noida, 201312, India

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## ABSTRACT

The present paper attempts to study Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney's poetic collection *The Haw Lantern* (1987) from postcolonial lens. The paper explores Heaney's negotiations with the hegemony and the compromises and compensations which he makes in the process. It explores Heaney's quest for reclaiming his original Irish identity which is profoundly imbedded in native culture. The desire and need of a single reliable version of the past and the need to revise past in the light of new historical circumstances are among the strategies employed by Heaney to re-write history and scrutinize the misrepresentations of Irish culture and traditions in hegemonic records. Heaney's effort of dismantling the hegemony and deconstructing colonialism will also be dealt with.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, Irish, Identity, Culture, Language

Heaney's early allegories subvert Britain's patriarchal powers so that the silenced, matriarchal voices of his heritage can speak. In *The Haw Lantern*, Heaney again summons the British power brokers to the debating table, and although the talk is perhaps more metaphysical in tone and subject, the underlying political and linguistic issues are similar to earlier ones.<sup>1</sup>

Postcolonialism attempts to uncover the history of colonized whose identity is branded and on whom an alien history is imposed from outside in colonial version of history and literature. The colonized may lack a recorded history they nonetheless possess a remembered one in their memory. The silence of the historical records of the colonized is audible in their memories. The silence of the historical records of the colonized is audible in their memories. Postcolonialism demonstrates the inheritance of colonial traumas and ethical negotiations of recovery. The postcolonial writers across the world have been trying to dismantle and deconstruct the hegemony of the Empire. The present paper attempts to explore the issue of language, culture and identity in the poetry of Seamus Heaney using the parameters of postcolonialism.

The Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney (1939-2013) uses his poetry for the process of decolonization. From the beginning of his poetic career he has opted to be a 'digger' who digs down the layers of history, mythology and literature to revive and rehabilitate the original Irish identity. Heaney's preoccupation with the role of language in the construction of

social and political identity is a significant issue which he considers in the collection *The Haw Lantern* (1987). Helen Vendler claims that "*The Haw Lantern* is a book of strict, even stiff, second thoughts".<sup>2</sup> Heaney embellishes the collection with parables, allegories and satires on the social, political and religious aspects of Irish life. He deploys these strategies to define the marginal status of Northern Ireland as within the colonial divisions created by the rules of the British Empire and the Protestant church. To repair the fractured identity of Irish people, the poet uses his poetry as a medium to provide compromises and compensations.

The opening poem 'Alphabets' traces the metamorphosis of Heaney from a small boy "when he goes to school" to a proficient professor who "stands in a wooden O" and "alludes to Shakespeare" and "Graves". It traces the poetic journey of his life from the rural primary school to the top university where he studied and worked in later in his life. The poem was written as the Phi Beta Kappa Poem (An academic honour society of American college and university students showing high academic achievement. It was founded in 1776) at Harvard in 1984. The poem hints at the educational system of Northern Ireland, in which the child is exposed to the different scripts direction and intonations of the English, Latin and Irish language. As the child grows, the languages broaden his comprehension of place and culture and expand his linguistic and literary process. Heaney penetrates into the psyche of a child and projects all the confusions and curiosities.

There he draws smoke with the chalk the whole first week,

Then draws the forked stick that they call a Y

This is writing. A swan's neck and swan's back

Make the 2 he can see now as well as say

The two rafters and a cross-tie on the slate

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Are the letter some call *ah*, some call *ay*.  
There are charts, there are headlines, there is a right  
Way to hold the pen and a wrong way.

(ll 5-12, *Alphabets*, *HL*)

Grasping "*Elementa Latina*" in the "stricter school", the child "learns...other writing" and masters the language when he grows up and functions as a poet and a teacher, delivering lectures on the legends of literary traditions and researching their primeval, mysterious origins.

The globe has spun. He stands in a wooden O.  
He alludes to Shakespeare. He alludes to Graves.

(ll 41-42, *Alphabets*, *HL*)

Neil Corcoran is of the view that the "wooden O" refers to a large lecture hall, such as Globe Theater.<sup>3</sup> Corcoran, further, suggests that Heaney's thought-process has undergone transformation as a result of his altered position in life.<sup>4</sup> The letters become signifiers of reality. The reference to "the necromancer / Who would hang from the doomed ceiling of his house and "The astronaut" who tries to figure out the globe "from his small window" raises the poet's hopes for a unified global vision. Tobin writes that Heaney "is driven to pursue a unified vision of the world. The hope of such global vision is embodied by the two exemplary figures that end the poem."<sup>5</sup> Heaney has always stood for the universal brotherhood and for a free and independent world which is not fragmented by the evil force of caste, creed, and colour. Through his vision, he compensates for hatred and lends helping hand in breaking down the wall that divides the world; he thus struggles for bringing global harmony.

The poem can also be read as an elegy upon the diminishing rural life and on the extinction of the Irish language, thus denying to the Irish people, a concrete, linguistic and cultural identity. Another concern which the poem shows is regarding the role which supervision and education play in a child's life. Heaney earlier took up the theme of ruined childhood in poems such as 'Blackberry-Picking' in *Death of a Naturalist* and 'The Railway Children' in *Station Island*. He claims the lack of supervision and education damaged the potential of the children which, otherwise, could have been utilized in creative tasks. Unlike those deprived and neglected children, the properly supervised and educated child can utilize his caliber in re-structuring and re-shaping the world. It was the concern for the importance of education that made Heaney joins hand with Ted Hughes to bring out co-authored works such as *The Rattle Bag* and *The School Bag*. Thus, Heaney seems to compensate for the failure of the society in shaping the lives of the deprived Irish children.

The colonial divisions of the Irish society placed Heaney where he is unable to make compromises with either. He "grew up in between", as he writes in the poem 'Terminus'. He "is still parleying" with the colonizers for some compromises and compensations. The colonizers left no stone unturned in the exploitation of the Irish people. Covering their devilish desires under the veil of development, they introduced the railway "engine" and the "factory chimney" in the place

where large green farms and fields had once been. Fanon, while explaining the ways in which colonialism operates, stated:

When we consider the efforts made to carry out the cultural estrangement so characteristic of the colonial epoch, we realize that nothing has been left to chance and that the total result looked for by colonial domination was indeed to convince the natives that colonialism came to lighten their darkness. The effect consciously sought by colonialism was to drive into the natives' heads the idea that if the settlers were to leave, they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation and bestiality.<sup>6</sup>

The natives became alien to their own culture. Industrialization stripped them not only of their rural inheritance but also of identity. Post colonial theory analyses representations and identity formation of the colonized in the literary and cultural text. It also examines various stages, strategies and exploitations employed by the dominant. Identity is a product of culture and history and it can be divided into three phases: The pre-colonial identities, the colonial identities and the postcolonial identities. The pre-colonial identities are created independently. They are free from the impact of the colonizers. The divisions in pre-colonial identities are based not only on ancestry and visible traits such as skin colour and facial feature. It is also based on linguistic, cultural and regions. The colonial identities are result of colonial divisions. During the Enlightenment, the 'races' were the base of the division. The non-whites races were regarded as inferior and thus best fitted for the lives of toil under White supervision. The colonizations of Africa and Indian subcontinents were based on the dialectics of White / Black. One of the significant feature about the Irish colonization was that both colonizers and the colonized were Whites and it was not based on the binary oppositions of colours. The dominant were not colour conscious. The post colonial identities are formed through negotiations and by rejecting the dominance of colonial identity.

Industrialization was brought at the expense of rural life. The colonizers stripped natives of their lands, belongings, and freedom. They spoke of "prudent squirrel's hoard" and "mammon of iniquity" when the natives were left with just few "coins". This reflects their double-standard. The 'mammon' and 'coins' are the binary oppositions and there is a large difference between them as is in between the rich and the poor or between the colonizers and the colonized. This reflects the financial position of the 'Masters' who have reached this position by depriving the 'Slaves'. The simile of squirrel's hoard very aptly echoes the rural attitude. The squirrel is an innocent rodent that saves its food for the rainy season. The rustic Irish people saved their hard-laboured earning to secure their future but the colonizer confiscated that too and gave just a fraction to them. The fraction of the profit "shone like gifts at a Nativity". Heaney attempts hard to negotiate with the colonizers.

Baronies, parishes met where I was born.

When I stood on the central stepping stone.

(ll 19-20, *Terminus*, *HL*)

Heaney does not desire a compromise where he would just stand “on the central stepping stone”. He wants to move away from the peripheral existence. Ireland is his own place where he “was born” and has every right to repose his land and to ask for compensations for himself as well as for his whole country. Ireland belongs to Irish people, yet they lived there on the periphery, subject to the whims of the administration. They have almost no role in governing their country. The colonial irony was that even in their own land they are looked at with suspicion. Heaney captures the dilemma when he is stopped and questioned in an army roadblock. He says that “everything is pure interrogation” and at last after the interrogation, the poet is “arraigned yet free”. The incident is significant. The ‘roadblocks’ suggest the hurdles of conscience and consciousness which a poet has to encounter in the journey of his writing “where it happens again”.

So you drive on to frontier of writing  
where it happens again. The guns on tripods;  
the sergeant with his on-off mike repeating

data about you...

(ll 13-16, *From the Frontier of writing*, *HL*)

Heaney gives second thoughts to the poetic liberties in the act of writing. Whatever freedom sanctions, a poet has to subjugate to ethical definitions. He has to compromise with moral and ethical responsibilities. The poem also regards the act of writing as a shelter, where the poet can find refuge and compensate for the atrocities of political subjugation and crisis. The conceit of “polished widescreen” reflects the sectarian divisions of the state. The requirements of ethical responsibility of poet is the theme of the poem ‘from the Republic of Conscience’, where he makes an allegorical journey to the republic of conscience. He crosses the political, linguistic and geographical boundaries and finds that the republic is “noiseless”. The vigilantes order him “to declare / the words of our traditional cures and charms / to heal dumbness and avert the evil eye”. Every society has its own traditional beliefs and rituals which the people inherit and takes seriously. Heaney seems to emphasize the fact that magic, tradition and faith combine to produce a significant archetype. The poem concludes with the return journey where he is asked to “consider” himself “a representative / to speak on their behalf in my own tongue”. Having been to the republic, Heaney fulfils the ethical and moral responsibility by speaking against the entire political crisis and against the ‘Troubles’. His responsibilities demand more than just being a mute witness to their calamity. His conscience desires him to speak out against the prevailing colonial divisions. It pleads with him to be a vociferous speaker and discourages him from confining his writings. It needs a healing touch and a soothing compensatory voice from the poet.

Heaney is exiled to the realm of speechlessness in the poem ‘From the Land of Unspoken’. He is unclear in his mind about how and “when or why our exile began / among speech-

ridden, but solidarity comes flooding up in us / when we hear their legends.” He is restless and wants to express to the marginal status of writers and their writings in affluent and capitalist speech-oriented society and he makes confessions of his contentment in living at the “hub”.

I have heard of a bar of platinum  
kept by a logical and talkative nation  
as their standard of measurement,  
the throne room and the burial chamber  
of every calculation and prediction.  
I could feel at home inside that metal core  
slumbering at the very hub of systems

(ll 1-7, *From the Land of Unspoken*, *HL*)

Heaney feels “at home” and comfortable in the logocentric “hub of system”. He longs for one standard system of measurement as the “bar of platinum” kept by the International bureau of Weights and Measurement near Paris. The enticement of the “slumbering” reverie is conked out with the realization that in this multicultural, multi-lingual and diverse world, one standard will be of no use and it will serve as an emblem of the dictatorial society in which Heaney himself holds no faith. Heaney regards the openly political poet as responsible for the linguistic corruption of language. He admits:

Our unspoken assumptions have the force of revelation. How else could we know that whoever is the first of us to seek assent and votes in a rich democracy will be the last of us and have killed our language? Meanwhile, if we miss the sight of a fish we heard jumping and then see its ripples, that means one more of us is dying somewhere.<sup>7</sup>

Heaney attempts to voice the position of modern poet amidst the political wasteland and the media which has displaced the position of the poet. He desires a proper position for the poet whose status and voice has been drowned in the deafening noise of mass media. Heaney’s demand is a compensatory yearning for the original status of the poet.

As a resistance and reparation of the colonizers denials, the natives demonstrate that their culture exists. The colonial theory confronted the natives’ mind with the theory of pre-colonial barbarity which results in the obsessive search for a national culture of the pre-colonial era. This is done, also, for the sake of shielding themselves from the colonizer’s culture. Heaney reclaims his culture and the cultural identity in the poem ‘From the Canton of Expectation’.

Once in the year we gathered in a field

of dance platforms and tents where children sang  
songs they had learned by rote in the old language.

(ll 6-8, From the Canton of Expectation, *HL*)

Identities are deeply rooted in culture. It emerges out of the cultural history of the natives. In post colonial era, the role of culture in construction of identity has become significant. Colonialism is responsible for manipulating, fracturing and imposing and constructing the identities of the natives. The cultural art form of dance and the traditionally inherited “songs...in old language” are the emotional cords which the natives of Ireland are attached to their culture. The shadow of colonialism blurred their ethnic identity. For the colonizers, the national song of the natives becomes a “rebel anthem”. This highlights the differences in the attitudes of the victim and the victimizer. Heaney tries to salvage the ethnicity of Irish traditions. It serves to recompense, redefine and rehabilitate the fading national culture. Fanon claims in his essay ‘On National Culture’:

The claim in the national culture in the past does not only rehabilitate that nation and serve as a justification for the hope of future national culture. In the sphere of psycho-affective equilibrium it is responsible for an important change in the native....colonialism is not simply content to impose its rule upon the present and the future of dominated country. Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it.<sup>8</sup>

The age old period of colonialism and the colonial discourse deprived the natives of their right to construct their own identities. There has always been a big difference in the point of view of the colonized and the colonizers. Thus, there are different versions of histories. One is written by the Masters and other the Slaves. Post colonialism gives preference to the re-writing of history by the natives.

Heaney is a postmodern poet who believes in the power of education. The Educational empowerment will furnish the “Young heads” with resistance for combating their crisis. Heaney paints a touching picture of young Irish children busy in their studies, which he believes “would banish the condition for ever”.

Books open in the newly wired kitchens.  
Young heads that might have dozed a life away  
Against the flanks of milking cows were busy  
Paving and penciling their first causeways  
Across the prescribed texts. The paving stones

Of quadrangles came next and a grammar  
Of imperatives, the new age of demands.

(ll 19-25, From the  
Canton of Expectation, *HL*)

Armed with the tools of education, which is the fundamental requirement of the “new age”, the future generation of Ireland will banish their ghastly circumstances. Heaney’s hope can be looked upon as a compensation for the deprived Irish children. The image of the children studying in “kitchens” implies that unlike earlier times, the Irish people will not compromise with their children’s lives. If needed, they will educate them at home. They seem to have understood losses associated with the lack of literacy and proper supervision. This is one of the campaigns initiated by Heaney. The first stanza of the poem talks about the attachment to native culture which is traditional and second stanza discusses the native resistance through educational empowerment. The implication here is that while pursuing modernity one must not compromise and let go of cultural and tradition. This suggests that Heaney hopes for a cultural compensation of a traditional society revived through education which will result in the unification of tradition and modernity. The attitude of Irish people preparing for future resistance can be traced to wood-kerne, rebels from Irish history, who on their defeat, took shelter in woods to prepare for the future. Heaney refers to them in the poem ‘Exposure’ in *North*. Heaney hopes gets a light of reality in the concluding stanza, where he possibly refers to the reversal of strong power of colonialism.

*What looks the strongest has outlived its term.*

*The future lies with what’s affirmed from under.*

(ll 32-33, From the  
Canton of Expectation, *HL*)

The reversal of power- from margin to center, from strong to weak is a postcolonial compensation for colonized Irish people. According to Griffith and Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back*:

The alienating process which initially served to relegate the post-colonial world to the ‘margin’ turned upon itself and acted to push that world through a kind of mental barrier into a position from which a experience could be viewed as uncentred, pluralistic and multifarious.<sup>9</sup>

In the title poem ‘The Haw lantern’, Heaney takes up the role of “Diogenes with his lantern” and searches for “one just man”. The reference in these lines is of Diogenes of Sinope (4<sup>th</sup> c. B.C), the principal representative of the Cynic school of philosophy. He lived at Athens and Corinth, and his



extravagantly simple mode of life and repudiation of civilized customs made him the subject of many anecdotes.<sup>10</sup>

The quest for justice and truth is undertaken by Heaney and his countrymen. The colonial governance has distorted reality and blurred social, historical and political vision. Heaney transforms the hawk into an ethical lantern and sets off on an expedition to hunt for historical, political and social reality that will change the colonial fabrications. His lantern is “a small light for small people” and the little wish it makes is to protect its “wick of self-respect from dying out”. Heaney wishes his people to perceive the truth. He does not want them to compromise with their self-respect. Heaney’s quest is a compensatory quest. The dreadful childhood experience of classroom, in the poem ‘Hailstones’, is representative of colonial cruelty. “My cheek was hit and hit”, Heaney narrates. He is hit again with a “ruler across the knuckle”. The strikes descend like hailstones of colonial suppression, historical misrepresentations, cultural repressions and linguistic domination. The infliction of punishment is one of the tactics of the colonizers to cow down the natives and to impress upon them their marginal position and to transmit the values of colonial subjugation.

and left me there with my chances.

I made a small hard ball

of burning water running from my hand

(ll 7-9, Hailstones, *HL*)

The implication in these lines is that Heaney, as a compensatory counter attack, will redeem, re-write and re-use something that has been used to oppress him and his people.

He will invert the strategies of the victimizer. This refers to Heaney’s use of language and writings for re-writing and deconstructing the hegemony of the Empire. He speaks in Caliban’s voice. His poem serves as a post colonial compensation for literary misrepresentations and as a protest against linguistic hegemony. Griffith and Tiffin express a similar idea:

Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which concepts of ‘truth’, ‘order’, ‘reality’ become established. Such power is rejected in the emergence of an effective post-colonial voice.<sup>11</sup>

Heaney’s concern for a peaceful and harmonious society attracts attention in the poem ‘Parable Ireland’, where he destabilizes the nostalgia for a homogeneous culture by recognizing the differences in diversity. He mocks the divisions which “subversives and collaborators” have created with their version of Ireland. Heaney is aware of the existing divisions in his country. The religious differences between Celts and Christians, or the ideological differences between Protestants and Catholics, remind him of diversity but for the sectarians, they are indispensable. They are always indulged “with a fierce possessiveness / for the right to set ‘the island story’ straight. Heaney appeals to his people to set aside the differences and make them understand to compromise with unnecessary issues to facilitate a peaceful reconciliation. The poem concludes with the story of a man who “died / convinced / that the cutting of Panama Canal / would mean the ocean would all drain away / and the island disappear by aggrandizement.” The fruitless blood- shed will not serve their

purpose. They may belong to different ethnic groups but to the same species of human beings. Various colonizations, globalization and mass migrations and of people resulted in construction of different ethnic groups. Ethnicity emphasizes upon the relation of an individual to a perceived past and culture. According to Northern Ireland Census 2001, the population of Ireland constitutes of various ethnic groups including Whites, emigrants from Indian sub continents, Black Africans, Chinese, and Black Caribbeans. Much of the civil violence in Northern Ireland is because of the differences and divisions in the country. Heaney, as a philanthropist, advocates mutual love and understanding. He suggests that certain compromises are essential for love and harmony.

Heaney has always remained emotionally involved with the familiar and filial. Family bonds are vital in his life. In the elegies of this collection, he combines the concreteness of living in austerity of familial loss. As filial compensations he recollects and commemorates his relatives in the elegies. His young niece Rachel’s death in an accident and soul’s departure to heaven is remembered in ‘The Wishing Tree’, his father’s death is memorialized in ‘The Stone Verdict’ and in a sequence of sonnets, ‘Clearances’, he tenderly remembers his departed mother. ‘The Stone Verdict’ gives mythical dimensions to his father’s death. It imagines Heaney’s introvert father, who “relied on through a lifetime’s speechlessness”, on “judgement place”.

Let it be like the judgement of Hermes,

God of the stone of heap, where the stones were the verdicts

Cast solidly at his feet, piling around him

Until he stood waist-deep in the cairn

Of his absolute

(ll 8-12, The Stone Verdict, *HL*)

His father’s prayer is that he be given the “judgement of Hermes”. Hermes, the figure from Greek mythology was a son of Zeus and Maia. He was summoned for killing the dogs of Agros. He faced a silent verdict in which gods silently cast their voting-pebbles at his feet and left him encased in a heap of stones. Heaney, in his poetry often returns the missing voice to the people. His father speechlessness suggests the silence of a colonized native. This is the silence of either compromising with the powerful Masters or of resistance against the Masters. Heaney hopes for a heavenly compensation of “absolution” for him. Heaney coins a religious philosophy of compensation for the noble, rendered in heaven to atone for the difficulties of this life. Such compensation for Heaney’s father will serve as an emotional compensation for the poet tortured by the trauma of separation.

In the elegiac sequence of eight sonnets ‘Clearances’, Heaney articulates his intimate relationship with his mother, who died in 1984, in uncomplicated and childlike terms. He warmly recollects the domestic chores of folding bed sheets, peeling potatoes and attending mass with his mother.

The cool that came off sheets just off the line

Made me think the damp must still be in them

But I took my corners of linen

And pulled against her, first straight down the hem  
And diagonally, then flapped and shook

(ll 1-5, Clearances V, *HL*)

Heaney universalizes the emotional bond between son and mother with such affectionate delineations. The simple domestic task of peeling potatoes together becomes the emblems of strong bonds of relations.

When all others were away at Mass  
I was hers as we peeled potatoes

(ll 1-2, Clearances III, *HL*)

Heaney attributes his life's success to his mother. He claims that she was always a motivating factor. He acknowledges the contribution of his mother in the lines with which he has prefaced the sequence. He admits that his mother "taught" him "what her uncle once taught her". She taught almost everything- from mechanical skills to "face[ing] the music". Heaney still wishes to be taught by her.

Teach me now to listen,  
To strike it rich behind the linear black

(ll 8-9, Clearances, *HL*)

Heaney, with touching vividness, recalls ordinary household items that bond him with his mother. The recollection of goods like "polished linoleum", "Brass taps", "The china cups", "sugar bowl and jug", the whistle of "kettle" and "Sandwich and tea scone" recreate the comforts of a childhood full of love. The personal affectionate moments of love are contrasted with the awareness of the turmoil going on outside the house. The burning atrocities in the outside world are somehow compensated for in the "cool comfort" in the house. Heaney's relationship with his mother which he describes as "Sons and Lovers phase" touches mildly upon an Oedipal vein. The loss of his mother inflicts a permanent wound in the poet's heart. No panacea can dull the pangs of longings. The emotional emptiness is depicted in the following lines.

The space we stood around had been emptied  
Into us to keep, it penetrated  
Clearance that suddenly stood open

(ll 11-13, Clearances VII, *HL*)

So while the parish at her bedside  
Went hammer and tongs at the prayers for dying  
And some were responding and some crying  
I remembered her head bent towards my head,  
Her breath in mine, our fluent dipping knives-  
Never closer the whole rest of our lives.

(ll 9-14, Clearances V, *HL*)

The void drives the poet to the act of writing. Recollections serve as psychological and emotional compromises. Heaney recollects special childhood moments spent with his mother

and turns them into poignant poetry to compromise with the lacerating pain of loss.

The poem 'Wolfe Tone' is the portrait of a Protestant Irish revolutionary, Tone (1763-1798), who strived hard for the harmonious existence of Catholics and Protestants against their religious differences. His vision of union was aimed against the sectarian dividing policies of the colonizers. He had to pay for his revolutionary vision. The colonizer compensated by capturing him and sentenced him for disloyalty. In fact Tone was loyal, if not to his ideological sect, but to his vision and his conscience with which he never made compromises. Ultimately, he committed suicide in the prison.

I was shouldered oar that ended up  
Far from the brine and whiff of venture,

Like a scratching-post or a crossroads flagpole,  
Out of my men element among small farmer

(ll 7-10, Wolfe Tone, *HL*)

The political parable of Tone is an epitome of dedication to a visionary. Vision is the foundation of some of the concrete realities of the world. M.K Gandhi had a vision of free India, Parnell had a vision of free Ireland and beside them there are thousand of unsung heroes, who remained anonymous, but who were endowed visions to make the society a better place. Heaney too, joins the bandwagon, with his vision of a better Ireland. In the poem 'The Mud Vision', Heaney paints a picture of an anonymous country. The territory displays deserted rural barrenness and "casualties on their stretchers". The people maintain a safe distance and watch the commotion:

Watching ourselves at a distance, advantaged  
And airy as a man on a springboard  
Who keeps limbering up because the man cannot  
dive.

(ll 11-13, The Mud Vision, *HL*)

The compromised outlook and the vision of the people yield an impotent nation which needs to be renewed with a compensatory vision. The poem concludes with the recognition of "folly".

Just like that, we forgot that the vision was ours,  
Our one chance to know the incomparable  
And dive to future.

(ll 52-54, The Mud Vision, *HL*)

The poem expresses anger against the compromised survival and "convinced and estranged" existence. The survival seems to be the least accomplishment of the Irish people offering no compensation for the vanished vision. The vanished vision is also lamented in the poem 'The Disappearing Island'. The poem has a discussion about the past but it is not about the immediate past but the use of "Once" gives it a fairy tale like opening, depicting the remote past. The implication is that Ireland has been subjected to

oppression from very long time, so much so that even the poet is unable to speak the exact period of time.

Once we had gathered driftwood, made a hearth  
And hung a cauldron in its firmament

(ll 4-5, The Disappearing Island, HL)

Colonization had shattered the culture and the cultural identity of the people. Their original culture taught them to be united. The humane image of the people working harmoniously- gathering, making the hearth, and hanging cauldrons, probably for a cultural feast reflects Heaney's nostalgia for the re-unification against the ubiquitous colonial divisions. The long-lost harmony was a result of a vision which has become somewhat smudged.

All I believe that happened there was a vision

(ll 9, The Disappearing Island, HL)

Heaney yearns for a fresh and renewed vision. He is not keen to compromise with the old and fragmented vision. For a better tomorrow, the old distorted ethics have to be discarded and redundant values have to be forsaken. In the poem 'The Riddle', Heaney addresses the issue of ethics through the story of a man "who carried water in a riddle". The central image is of a sieve, that separate wheat from chaff, which others have "never ....used".

You never saw it used but still can hear

The sift and fall of stuff hopped on the mesh

(ll 1-2, The Riddle, HL)

Heaney uses an old world instrument and related processes to communicate a poetic ideology. With the advent of industrialization, the traditional rural skills have faded away. The machines have substituted the labourers, the grain polishers have taken the place of traditional sieves. Heaney uses such images to lament for the extinction of the cultural identity of the rural Irish people.

Heaney tells the story of the man, who discovered, that he was bullied, with false information about the wheat. Confused he kept the chaff and threw away the wheat. The story sounds

like the saga of colonialism. The natives were bullied and culturally confused. The manners and morals of natives were condemned as miserable, pathetic and full of errors by colonizer. They were forcefully burdened with an alien culture. The natives were just left with the 'chaff' where as colonizers relished the 'wheat'. This defines the colonial economic exploitation where the profit was taken by the victimizers and the victims were left with a very small portion of the profit. In the concluding lines, Heaney questions:

Was it culpable ignorance, or rather

A *via negative* through drops and let-downs?

(ll 11-12, The Riddle, HL)

Heaney investigates into the cultural, political, economical issues of colonial exploitation. Heaney revives and uses Irish legends, associates himself with the rural environs. Heaney's oeuvre is crowded with the sagas of exploitation of legends and mythological wars and divisions. He celebrates the past and endows it with 'dignity, glory and solemnity', as an endeavour to dismantle the hegemonic portrayal of Ireland. Heaney attempts to restore a forgotten culture which was at a tangent to the colonizer's definitions. He tries to rehabilitate a dying language and struggles to restore the voice to the subalterns who have been silenced by the hegemony.

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