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Reading W. B. Yeats and Seamus Heaney in a Postcolonial Context: Exploring Landscape and Identity

W.B. Yeats ve Seamus Heaney'i Postkolonyal Bağlamda Okumak: Manzara ve Kimliğin İncelenmesi

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Abstract This article critically examines Ireland's postcolonial position, with a specific focus on the poetic works of influential Irish writers William Butler Yeats and Seamus Heaney. The exploration begins by delving into Ireland's historical and cultural context as a colonized nation, shedding light on the profound impact of English domination and the complexities of Irish history. Furthermore, the article draws parallels between the Irish experience and anticolonial movements in Third World countries, emphasising the similar struggles in resisting colonization. The central argument posits that having endured colonialism, both Yeats and Heaney actively contribute to the postcolonial discourse by employing themes of landscape and identity as distinct forms of resistance. Yeats, driven by a personal interest in mythology, mythologizes resistance against the colonizer through the revival of heroic deeds in his poetry. Conversely, Heaney engages in a subversion of the "us vs them" dichotomy, responding to the Empire through his works. The imagery of earth, depicted in his poetry, symbolises the connection between physical landscape to Irish identity. By situating Yeats' and Heaney's poetry within a postcolonial framework, this article seeks to acknowledge their collective contribution as a form of "writing back to the Empire," thereby enriching the discourse surrounding Irish postcolonialism.

Keywords: postcolonial Ireland, Irish identity, William Butler Yeats, Seamus Heaney, postcolonial literature

Öz Bu makale, önde gelen İrlandalı şairler W. B. Yeats ve Seamus Heaney'in şiirlerine odaklanarak İrlanda'nın postkolonyal bağlamdaki konumunu incelemektedir. Makale ilk olarak, sömürgeleştirilmiş bir ulus olarak İrlanda'nın tarihsel ve kültürel arka planını ele almakta, İngiliz egemenliğinin etkisini ve İrlanda tarihinin karmaşık yapısını incelemektedir. Makale ayrıca, İrlanda deneyimi ile Üçüncü Dünya ülkelerindeki sömürgecilik karşıtı hareketler arasındaki paralellikleri tartışmakta ve sömürgeleştirmeye karşı direniş sürecindeki benzer mücadelelere vurgu yapmaktadır. Makale, sömürgeciliği deneyimlemiş olan Yeats ve Heaney'nin, manzara ve kimlik temalarını farklı direniş biçimleri olarak benimseyerek postkolonyal söyleme katkıda bulunduklarını savunmaktadır. Yeats'in mitolojiye olan kişisel ilgisi, sömürgeciye karşı direnişi mitleştirmek için kahramanlık eylemlerini canlandırdığı şiirlerinde gözlemlenir. Heaney "biz ve onlar" ikilemini yıkarak İmparatorluğa cevap yazar. Eserlerindeki toprak imgeleri, fiziksel manzara ile İrlanda kimliği arasındaki bağlantıyı sembolize eder. Bu makale, Yeats ve Heaney'nin şiirlerini postkolonyal bir çerçeveye yerleştirerek, onların eserlerini "İmparatorluğa geri yazma" olarak tanımayı ve böylece İrlanda postkolonyalizmine katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: postkolonyal İrlanda, İrlanda kimliği, William Butler Yeats, Seamus Heaney, postkolonyal edebiyat

Introduction

Defined as "a system of domination" by Jurgen Osterhammel, colonialism politically and socially dominates the culture of the colonised (2005: 4). The case of Ireland, besides being socio-politically dominated by England, does not differ from other colonised countries as its resources, economy, identity, language, institutions have been altered by the English.

> The crucial question of whether or not Ireland was a colony, and whether its history is therefore in large measure a colonial and subsequently a postcolonial one . . . is no mere antiquarian or academic squabble, since what is at stake is nothing less than the whole question of Irish identity, the present course of Irish culture and politics, and above all, the interpretation of Ireland, its people, and the course of its history (Said 2003: 176–177).

Postcolonialism is broadly defined as the after-math of Western domination, colonisation of the so-called "Third-world" countries. Since it was European cultural imperialism which subordinated non-European people, placing the former in the centre and the latter in the

periphery, the “us” and “them” binary opposition viewed the non-European/non-Western as “the other” that needed civilisation. Since the Western world has been the center of the center-periphery model, the subjugated peoples of the West such as the Welsha and Irish had been overlooked, at least in terms of colonialism, until very recently. Robert Blauner postulates a theory for internal colonialism; he examines how different cultures in nearby lands or close approximation to the dominant culture can be blurred under the occupation (1969: 394).

> For one thing the West has often colonized itself, as when England’s subjects colonized what is now Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, and then fought to free themselves of England. Ireland’s long history of English domination can also be invoked. Thus, the contemporary literatures of Ireland, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and more reluctantly the United States have been admitted into postcoloniality (Moore 2006: 15).

Based on such admission, this article endeavours to investigate on what grounds William Butler Yeats’ and Seamus Heaney’s poetry can be read in the light of postcolonial criticism. According to Said (2012: 261), nationalism acts as a catalyst for resistance, protests, and movements seeking independence during the decolonization era. The Irish struggle against their oppressors, namely England, their defiance against the enforced use of the English language, their resistance during the Celtic Revival, and their fight against English dominance and derogatory portrayals of the Irish in English society, bear resemblances to the process of decolonisation by marginalised groups. It is possible to interpret the extent of the Irish situation as one of colonisation rather than cultural assimilation. Albert Memmi establishes a distinction between assimilation and colonisation. He asserts that while colonisation shares some characteristics with assimilation, it differs from it in that it creates a binary opposition in the relationship between the colonised and the coloniser (Memmi 2013: 167). In assimilation, the minority culture or subculture, by force or inadvertently, resembles the dominant culture, adopts mainstream behaviours and takes on the dominant culture's values. In contrast, systematic colonialism involves the coloniser deliberately and purposefully erasing the cultural memory of the colonised. Once the coloniser cuts people off from their native language, colonisation of the mind follows. The coloniser then has the power to manipulate the colonised into believing constructed myths about themselves.

The Celtic Revival Movement, primarily emerging in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, was a cultural and literary resurgence in Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and other Celtic regions, aiming to revive and celebrate Celtic heritage, languages, folklore, and artistic traditions. The movement sought to counteract the cultural dominance of English colonialism and foster a renewed sense of national identity. It encompassed various artistic forms, including literature, visual arts, music, and theater, and played a significant role in the shaping of national consciousness and political movements, laying the groundwork for the eventual independence struggles in Ireland and other Celtic nations.

> (...) The colonial process itself begins in language. The control over language by the imperial centre – whether achieved by displacing native languages, by installing itself as ‘standard’ against other variants which are constituted as ‘impurities’, or by planting the language of empire in a new place – remains the most potent instrument of cultural control (Ashcroft et al. 2006: 261).

Language is culturally significant however the restriction of language does not solely operate to culturally assimilate a nation. In colonial context, speaking the language of the coloniser is necessary for establishing control on the coloniser’s social institutions. Many British laws were enacted, and acts were passed to restrict and prohibit the use of the Irish language, a practice common in the so called Third World colonised languages. In oral traditions, it is almost impossible to recover pre-colonial tradition as it has never been

recorded. Therefore, any cultural reconstruction happens to be no more than interpretation. It is also very likely that many indigenous languages have vanished over time without being recorded or used, thus the colonised had no chance than to convey their colonial experiences through the languages of the coloniser. In the case of Ireland, the situation is slightly better. "The contemporary folklore of the Irish countryside and the ancient Gaelic literature (revived by archaeologists and translators) served as dual sources for new Irish literature" (Hirsch, 1991, p. 1121). Yeats' prominent role in conflating these two sources is indisputable. This article posits that his contribution to these dual sources resists the cultural imperialism imposed on his culture. It should be noted that both Yeats and Heaney write poems in English as they write back to the Empire, a writing that "involve[s] a confidence that English can be used in the process of resisting imperialism" (Ashcroft et al. 2006: 283).

Moreover, representation is an indispensable aspect of colonial agenda as it is used to justify the atrocities and supremacy of the coloniser. Often in English literature and society, the Irish had been depicted as drunk and folly. Edward Hirsch reminds us of the Victorian stereotypes on the Irish: "(...) the stage Irishman was reduced in British characterizations to a subhuman figure, a 'white Negro' portrayed in Punch as a primitive Frankenstein or peasant Caliban" (1991: 1119). Hirsch also notes that English writers positioned the Irish on a "lower rung of the Darwinian ladder" (1991: 1119). Charles Kingsley used the following terms to describe his time in Ireland: "I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country. (...) But to see white chimpanzee is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much, but their skins, except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours" (1894: 111). Such racist ideology bled into common practices as well. The representation of the Irish as racially "other" and barbaric, asserted the justification of domination. Against this portrayal, Hirsch argues, comes the necessity of the Irish Literary Revival's dismantling of the unjust peasant image. A new construction of the peasant as a living embodiment of the Celtic imagination has become the discourse (Hirsch 1991: 1119). Heaney's pastoral and national literary works are therefore anticolonial, and thus his poetry should be read in the light of postcolonial theory.

While Yeats and Heaney do have certain common interests and themes in their work, they each come from distinct cultural and historical backgrounds. Yeats, a Southern Protestant, lived through significant events like the Easter Rising and the civil war, whereas Heaney, a Northern Catholic, witnessed the ongoing reverberations of events, such as the Troubles including Bloody Sunday. Eventually, the notion of Irish resistance permeates both Heaney's and Yeats' poetry. These occurrences exemplify a principle famously argued by Frantz Fanon (1995) that decolonization can often involve violence. Literary resistance, however, is non-violent. Relying on the means of literary resistance which consists of the use of language and representation, this article argues that the Irish Literary Revival and the revival of the Irish language (Gaelic Revival) should be considered as resistance against the oppressor and the coloniser, "turning the inculcation of inferiority into self-empowerment" (Young 2016: 275). This paper sheds light on intricate connections between history, identity and literature, providing a postcolonial perspective on Yeats' and Heaney's poetry, aiming to make a meaningful contribution to the often-overlooked field of Irish postcolonial studies.

William Butler Yeats' Poetry Within the Context of Postcolonialism

The necessity to establish one's identity typically emerges in the aftermath of colonialism and prolonged occupation. Yeats' vision of an ideal Ireland could also be viewed as a form of identity construction. "Yeats often said that he began his poetic career by creating an ideal Ireland in his imagination" (Kiberd 1984: 11). This ideal Ireland is a construct that subverts the coloniser's record of history. The construction of an ideal Ireland through

poetry is a way of writing back to the Empire. W.B. Yeats, deeply intrigued by imagination, magic, mysticism, Irish folklore, and mythology, once expressed,

> "(...) if I had not made magic my constant study I could not have written a single word of my Blake book, nor would The Countess Kathleen have ever come to exist. The mystical life is the center of all that I do and all that I think and all that I write" (qtd in Moir 2010: 112).

Yeats here admits that he overtly uses the Irish folklore in his poetry. His contribution to the Irish literary revival, which this article regards as a resistance to the coloniser, has been highlighted through his incorporation of Irish folklore from rural areas and representation of it in his poetry. "(...) Yeats's early work mostly treated old Irish legends or fairy themes together with mystical ones" (Bornstein 2014: 234).

The Celtic Revival movement, led by W.B. Yeats among others, enabled Ireland to construct and represent an Irish identity distinct from the English so as to fight English cultural imperialism. A notable outcome of the colonial conflict was the revitalisation and development of Celticism. Despite his Anglo-Irish heritage, or what might be called a hybrid identity according to Homi Bhabha (2012), Yeats opposed British dominance and control. The aim of this article is to offer postcolonial reading in two of his poems "September 1913" and "Easter, 1916". These poems are selected on the grounds that they are deeply embedded in the socio-political landscape of Ireland during its struggle for independence from British colonial rule. The paper argues that analysing these poems in postcolonial context will offer insights about Irish postcolonialism. The poems deal with issues of national identity and uprising against the British rule, they offer critique of the bourgeoisie and immortalise the martyrs who died for the national cause. Ireland's fight for independence and the complexities of the postcolonial condition of Ireland are reflected through these poems.

"September 1913" encapsulates a poignant critique where the speaker's disappointment emanates from the stark contrast between the fervor of Ireland's romanticized heroes and the fading nationalism of the middle-class. This dissatisfaction transcends a simple comparison, the poem mourns the erosion of Romantic patriotism, the speaker laments because national heroes' legacy was betrayed by the indifference of the contemporary Irish people: "For this that all that blood was shed, / For this Edward Fitzgerald died," (ll. 19-20). John O'Leary, whose name constitutes the refrain in the poem, was a separatist, a supporter of Irish Independence from Britain who endured exile and imprisonment. Robert Emmet was also an Irish nationjuxalist who was executed in the 18th century. These names serve as representative of the former ideal to pursue, representing the noble figures who prioritized their nation above personal gain. The speaker implies that the children raised on these heroic tales, stories of individuals who faced hanging, execution, exile, and persecution for their beliefs, now exhibit an unsettling indifference toward these sacrifices and the causes they upheld. The speaker praises men who resisted English oppression, even at the cost of their lives. In the last stanza, the speaker suggests that if those patriots were alive, they would be subject to mockery. This suggests that the Romantic idealism embraced by those patriots would not be understood or appreciated by the contemporary Irish. It is a harsh criticism of modern people and their perception of the past, highlighting the significant disconnect between the past and present national consciousness, illustrating how far the nation drifted away from the national ideal. Yeats modifies the refrain and acknowledges that the nation does not deserve those heroes, suggesting that they should rest where they are, without any need or possibility to evoke what they have stood for. Yeats' pessimism is emphasised in this last stanza, as he expresses his belief that Ireland lacks the ability to self-sacrifice as individuals are unable to form a unified community.

In 1916, a group of Irish nationalists took control of factories, buildings and started an armed insurrection against the British rule. The British forces quickly suppressed the rising,

however the uprising of 1916 had a significant impact on Irish history. Ireland became independent only six years after the armed revolt. In “Easter, 1916,” Yeats shifts from the depressing tone and scathing condemnation of the bourgeoisie in “September 1913” to appreciation because the modern Ireland he despised demonstrated what might be called a heroic effort in the 1916 Easter Rebellion. The poem “Easter 1916” not only commemorates the martyrs of the insurrection in a general sense, but Yeats also specifically mentions the names of individuals he personally knew; he represents the individuals in his poetry. Yeat’s poem opens with personal recognition of the rebellious individuals; many of the people he encounters on the street are acquaintances, including past friends and fellow poets. The lines “And thought before I had done / Of a mocking tale or a gibe” (ll. 9–10) suggest that Yeats himself is the speaker of both “September 1913” and “Easter 1916” because the speaker of “September 1913” disparages Irish people by claiming they are incapable of resisting British tyranny. In light of this, and as the title suggests, “Easter 1916” serves as a sequel. The repetition of the oxymoron "terrible beauty" in three successive stanzas evokes a juxtapositon of emotions: a sense of pride in the rebellion against the coloniser intertwined with a profound sorrow for those who faced execution at the hands of the oppressor.

With a particular interest in heroic mythology, the poet embraces the concept of self-sacrifice in his poetry. He believes that the bloodshed in these acts of self-sacrifice, reminiscent of ancient mythical rites, will retain its significance as long as future generations preserve and honor the valiant deeds of those who have perished: “Yeats offered the myth of Mother Ireland as symbolic compensation for the colonial calamities of history. The mythological motherland served as a goddess of sovereignty who, at least at the imaginary level, might restore a lost national identity by summoning her sons to the sacred rite of renewal through sacrifice” (Kearney 1997: 113). Yeats is among those who immortalise the individuals who make sacrifices, ensuring that their voices and stories are heard by future generations. The complex interplay between grief and pride emerges as a profound consequence of the colonial struggle.

The “they and I” in the lines 13 and 14 in “Easter 1916” do not refer to the dichotomy of the colonised and the coloniser but rather to the coexistence of Protestants and Catholics in Ireland. “Being certain that they and I / But lived where motley is worn:” (ll. 13-14). “Motley” refers to a multicolored fabric, often associated with a jester's or clown's costume. The metaphor employed here is often thought as expansive, encapsulating the mosaic and multifaceted population: the Catholic, the Protestant, the affluent and the underpriveleged, English citizen or Irish citizen. Yeats’ pessimism about the modern Irish was thoroughly described in “Easter 1913”, on “Easter 1916” too, it can be interpreted that he defines Ireland as the place where jester’s costume is worn. It's plausible that he subtly echoes his position from the previously analysed poem, where he seemingly overlooked or downplayed the potential contributions of these rebels to Ireland, or, he intentionally draws a parallel between these rebels and the stereotypical, caricatured portrayal of Stage/Drunk Irish—a depiction often used in English plays to mock and ridicule the Irish people. This deliberate choice challenges and writes back to England's disparaging representations, because it is these very rebels, previously dismissed or misrepresented, who stood against imperial powers and became the architects of what Yeats termed a "terrible beauty". Major John MacBride was killed for his role in the Easter Rising of 1916. He was married to Maud Gonne, who had rejected numerous marriage proposals from Yeats. As a result, Yeats was familiar with John MacBride through his connection with Maud Gonne. Yeats initially describes MacBride as “A drunken, vainglorious lout” (l. 32) in the poem, but he still includes his name, despite MacBride's mistreatment of Maud Gonne: “He had done most bitter wrong / To some who are near my heart,” (ll. 33-34). In Yeats' initial portrayal of MacBride as a "drunken, vainglorious lout," (l.32) there exists a striking parallel to the coloniser's representation of the Irish, reducing them to derogatory stereotypes. This depiction, prior to acknowledging

MacBride's pivotal involvement in the uprising, aligns with the lens through which the coloniser often painted the Irish. Yeats acknowledges and appreciates his role in the rising, and thus includes him in the poem: “Yet I number him in the song;” (l. 35) because “He, too, has been changed in his turn,” (l. 38). Throughout the poem, there's a deliberate absence of specific names assigned to the individuals depicted. It's only in the final stanza that their identities are revealed, their names finally emerging. Moreover, there is a shift from the use of pronouns "they" and "I" to the "us" in the closing stanza. This subtle linguistic shift unites the narrator with the previously unnamed individuals, creating a powerful sense of collective Irish identity and shared purpose. These individuals evolve from being anonymous bourgeois figures in “September 1913” to figures akin to the heroic patriots explicitly named within the same poem.

The third stanza of the poem presents a pastoral setting, which holds significant importance as it marks the point from which Yeats begins to praise those involved in the Easter Rising. The extended metaphor of the landscape serves to establish a connection between the heroic acts of the revolutionaries and the Irish landscape, reinforcing the idea of their profound impact on the land. “Was it needless death after all? / For England may keep faith / For all that is done and said. / We know their dream; enough / To know they dreamed and are dead;” (ll. 67-71). Yeats raises the question of whether the casualties of the Easter Rising were worth it and concludes that “a terrible beauty is born” (l.80), suggesting that despite the tragic consequences, the rebellion has given birth to a renewed sense of hope and inspiration because the country is closer to an ideal: “MacDonagh and MacBride / And Connolly and Pearse / Now and in time to be, / Wherever green is worn,” (ll. 75-78). Instead of wearing “motley”, the cloth of a fool, the colour of Ireland will be worn. The colour green serves as a powerful metaphor for Ireland, symbolising the Irish identity and aspirations. As mentioned numerously, the foolishness is an attributed characteristic constructed by the English to defame the Irish. The sharp contrast between the lines “Being certain that they and I / But lived where motley is worn:” (ll. 13-14) and “Wherever green is worn” (l. 78) proves the uprising refutes the notions perpetuated by the English. The shift from motley to green represents a transformation from appointed identities to a cohesive unified Irish identity.

Seamus Heaney's Poetry Within the Context of Postcolonialism

“Digging”, “Bogland” and “Requiem for the croppies” are chosen on the grounds that Heaney explores the ancestral and thus cultural heritage and honors his farmer ancestors, using the imagery of potatoes as an allegory. He recognizes the rural and pastoral identity of his ancestors, and he approaches the act of “digging” with his pen and poetic stance in the former. The latter poems bring forth the “us vs. them” binary discourse. By converting the us/them dichotomy, through using “we” for, in British terms the “other”, the symbol of backwardness, the “born-to-be subjugated”, and using “they” for the coloniser, they write back to the Empire. Furthermore, according to Sanders, “He [Seamus Heaney], too, uses the bog as a place of national identity—in this case Irish national identity (...) His aim is to mend a conflicted-present in Ireland by understanding the depth of the bog (...)” (2009: 84–85).

Seamus Heaney’s family were potato farmers. Ireland's agricultural roots, the imagery of potato farming and farming labour are used as the essences of Irish elements in “Digging”. The poem navigates the fluidity of time, it begins in the present “My father, digging. I look down” (l.5), delves into the past transporting two decades back: “Bends low, comes up twenty years away/Stooping in rhythm/through potato drills/Where he was digging.” (ll.7-9), finally it converges back into the present with vision for the future: “Between my finger and my thumb/The squat pen rests./I’ll dig with it.” (ll.29-31). Through the evocative portrayal of his father and grandfather, Heaney skillfully transcends the personal realm, using their images as a profound symbol representing the broader Irish community. His poetic journey moves beyond individual narratives, extending into the collective experience of the Irish

people. By employing these familial figures as a collective emblem, Heaney gracefully shifts from the singular to the communal, weaving together the threads of personal history into the intricate heritage of Ireland and its collective identity. Heaney associates the act of digging into the soil with his homeland. In his poetic expression, the landscape and Irish culture are interconnected. The act of digging also constitute of bringing something to the surface. Thus, digging up the roots of his culture with a pen means he will unearth the culture and thus honour the nation. When he metaphorically digs into the depths of his culture, it is a profound act of reverence to the past. Through his writing, he recognizes and exhibits the richness of Irish culture with its intimate connection to the soil. He will dig with his pen, perform an act of what he considers as Irishness, but his act will not be silent. The values of his ancestors are revitalized through his vocal representation of them. He preserves the nostalgic memory of their agrarian lives. Memory transcends mere recollection of the past; it's a complex interplay of continuous time that intricately weaves together past experiences with the present moment. Rather than existing as a stagnant repository of past events, memory is an ever-evolving entity influenced by the ongoing passage of time.

The pronouns “we” and “they” are prevalent in “Bogland”: “We have no prairies / To slice a big sun at evening” (ll. 1-2) and “They've taken the skeleton / Of the Great Irish Elk” (ll. 9-10). “We” refers to the Irish, and the sentence itself refers to the landscape of Ireland. The pronoun “they” here refers to the English colonisers. The 19th century had experienced the peak of interest in evolution theory, zoology, and fossils. Those interested in flora and fauna went on expeditions in the peripheries, mainly in Africa, to collect specimen and exhibit them in England. Thus the line “They'll never dig coal here” further suggests that the pronoun “they” could refer to England. By referring to the English as “they”, Heaney subverts the coloniser’s “we/they” dichotomy.

With the Industrial Revolution, England expanded the use of coal. Coal in fact had a huge impact on Victorian society as the steam engines, trains and ships which connect cities in England and overseas used coal to operate. Besides England, coal mines were situated in Wales and Scotland and multiple overseas routes of the Empire. The 1775 Act of Parliament referred to the coal mining situation in Scotland as a “state of slavery or bondage” (Lord 2007: 233). In the 19th and 20th centuries, there had been various disasters and strikes both in Wales and Scotland. Therefore, the aforementioned line stands as a resistance to colonial exploitation. The poem indicates that Ireland is a “bottomless bog”, although it seems fragile from outside like a bog does, its past identity lays beyond the bog and it is very deep if not limitless. “Our pioneers keep striking / Inwards and downwards” (ll. 23-24) stands for Irish nationalists, or revivalists who find the Irish history and identity under the bog. The use of pronouns like “we” and “our” shows that the speaker has a sense of belonging to both the natural environment and the local population. Another kind of resistance is to represent Ireland as a solid land where even colonisation cannot prevent the country from preserving its identity and culture. The speaker asserts that the coloniser fails and will fail in any attempts to erase Irish identity because the characteristics of the Irish landscape will not permit so. What lies under the bog is memory, the memory of past and present experiences. In other words, the bog contains the Irish culture, history and identity and thus becomes a metaphor for human history. The lines between distant and recent past become blurred within the fluid and moving bog, the layers are intermingled: “Every layer they strip / Seems camped on before” (ll. 25-26). “They'll never dig coal here” (l. 20) not only because of the swampy land barrier but also because the coloniser can never penetrate deep enough to obliterate what is at the bottomless realm. It can be interpreted that the roots of Irishness are beyond human reach. Like the bog, the use of enjambment swallows the reader in, introduces a new layer within the continuum. The enjambment gives the poem a fluid quality similar to that of a bog and creates a sense of flow from one line to the next. The

structure of the poem aligns with the metaphor of bog. Throughout centuries, England enjoyed pastoral art and literature, she constructed a national identity on the strength of a picturesque, green, paradise-like idyllic landscape. As Berberich states, “the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were, of course, periods of intense identity construction in Britain. (...) One way to reassert ‘Englishness’ was by reconsidering old traditions and values, and rural traditions and rituals in particular had always had a high status” (2006: 211).

The upper classes preferred the countryside to the urban decadence associated with degeneration, pollution and working class. Although it had become an industrial power, English national character tended to choose the countryside over urban life. The bourgeoise and higher classes owned the country homes, the rich had control over the lands and the properties. The English land granted them rank and wealth. The relationship between the English and countryside land ownership can be considered as the microcosm of the empire that invades lands and turn them into properties. Berberich quotes a remarkable point by Rebecca Scutt: “in English the word ‘country’ can be used to describe both a nation and a specific landscape” (2006: 214). The countryside represents the nation, while invaded lands represent the civilising mission and the power of the crown. While the Celtic nations have been underestimated for their prominent pastoral life, the English idyllic countryside has been embraced.

For hundreds of years now, the English countryside has been used as the most effective evocation of Englishness: in times of war and peace alike it has been used, by the English as well as by foreigners, to express both nostalgia and hope, a sense of belonging, a yearning for home. The English landscape was held up to the soldiers of both World Wars as ‘what they were fighting for’. Literature has, over the centuries, perpetuated this myth, although some more recent work has begun to interrogate and challenge it (Berberich 2006: 208). Heaney’s topographical poetry, through using landscape tropes in contrast to English countryside, subverts the long glorification of English landscape which has been “elevated to mythical status” (Berberich, 2006, p. 211). Heaney’s use of “cyclops’ eye” (l. 5) in “Bogland” too elevates the Irish landscape to the realm of myth. The bottomless bog also contains things beyond the human psyche.

As mentioned in the introduction, violent resistance was one of the actions taken against English dominance. Seamus Heaney uses violence as a theme in some of his poems to suggest a form of resistance against the oppressor. One of Heaney's poems that uses violence as a theme is “Requiem for the Croppies,” a sonnet that recounts the tragic battle of Vinegar Hill (1798), in which British forces attacked the headquarters of Irish people seeking independence during the rebellion and caused many casualties on the Irish side. In this poem, Heaney remembers the dead and the separatists while drawing comparisons between two means of violence: resistance/self-defense and invasive attack. The subversion of “we vs. they” dichotomy is also present in the poem. Unlike the coloniser who uses “we” for the dominating power, and “they” as the subordinate, Heaney uses “we” to refer to the Croppies, Irish rebels who seek independence, and “they” to refer to the coloniser. The possessive pronoun in the line "We moved quick and sudden in our own country" (l. 3) emphasises that the land belongs to the Croppies. Although it is the land/country of the Irish, they do not move on their own volition. It is the action of the English that causes the Croppies to move quickly. The Irish are denied a robust life by the atrocities of the English. Within this oppressive environment, the English strip away individual identities, reducing both the priest and the tramp to an overarching and singular label—Irish. Being Irish is the only identity appointed to Irish people before anything else. The Irish are unarmed, they use farming equipment and pikes in the battle: “We found new tactics happening each day: / We'd cut through reins and rider with the pike” (ll. 6-7). While England is well-equipped for a battle, the Irish use agricultural tools and resources as self-defence: it is “scythes” against “cannon”, farmers against “artillery” and “cattle” versus horse and “infantry”. The

fundamental essence of Englishness evoked by the English countryside is subverted in the following line “the hillside blushed, soaked in our broken wave” (l. 12) by the personification of the landscape and the imposition of the Irish identity on landscape. Heaney writes back to the mythification of the English landscape by highlighting the Irish landscape’s vitality and significance of the Irish landscape in preserving Irish identity. The line, “They buried us without shroud or coffin” (l. 13), can be interpreted as an indication that the English did not honour the deceased. The object form of “we” further illustrates the Irish people’s sense of community and mutual grief. Barley, in the poem, is a symbol of hope, rejuvenation and regeneration. Killed by the English, the bodies perish but the barley in the greatcoats grow out of their graves. In fact, barley would not be able to grow from the greatcoats if the English had been compassionate and buried the deceased in coffins. In opposition to cultural imperialism, Heaney advocates that memories, human experiences and history cannot be erased, because they are rooted within the nation’s landscape much like barley in the poem.

Conclusion

Throughout the article, the recurring claims underscore the significance of recognizing the Irish colonial position as being on par with that of colonized nations. This parallel makes it apparent that the struggles and complexities faced by the Irish people bear striking resemblances to those endured by third world nations. Within the framework of the article, the literary contributions of William Butler Yeats and Seamus Heaney emerge as significant elements in the discourse of postcolonial literature, particularly through their act of “writing back to the Empire.” In “writing back to the Empire”, their works become instruments of reclaiming agency, asserting cultural identity. Through the power of language and artistic expression, they provide a counterpoint to the dominant colonial discourse, giving voice to those who have been marginalized.

Yeats and Heaney, each in their distinctive styles and eras, engage in a form of literary resistance that seeks to challenge, deconstruct, and reevaluate the narratives imposed by the colonial powers. Yeats, interested in mythology, glorifies heroic nationalism and resistance to the colonial oppression of British rule. He aspires to Romantic patriotism and the Classical period in his poems. Yeats mythologises the colonial struggle in his own terms. Heaney’s imagery of “digging” the uncovered earth symbolises the search for memories and history. He uses the landscape as a metaphor for a place where cultural characteristics are buried, preserved and wait to be unearthed. Linguistic revitalisations as well as the Celtic revival movement can unearth what is under the bog. The “pioneers” who “dig”, by looking for memories in light of cultural revival movements, can bring the buried into light.

In conclusion, the examination of Yeats' and Heaney's literary contributions within the context of postcolonial discourse illuminates their roles as agents of resistance and cultural reclamation. Yeats' mythological vision and Heaney's evocative imagery both serve as powerful tools for challenging colonial narratives and asserting the validity of Irish cultural identity. Moreover, their engagement with language and cultural revival movements underscores the potential for linguistic and artistic revitalization to bring buried histories and identities to the forefront, thereby contributing to a richer understanding of postcolonial literature and its transformative possibilities. Further analysis regarding these two poets' other literary works shall contribute to Irish postcolonialism and deepen the understanding of it.

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