Now, to pry into roots, to finger slime,
To stare, big-eyed Narcissus, into some spring
Is beneath all adult dignity. I rhyme
To see myself, to set the darkness echoing.

- Personal Helicon, The Death of a Naturalist.

Chapter II

Pry into roots: Remember, Recollect, Rehabilitate.
Seamus Heaney hails from Ireland, a country torn by colonial strife, as well as by religious and political conflicts for centuries for centuries. Heaney’s poetry mirrors the plight of the marginalized Irish people and the impact of colonization on the culture, traditions, identity, language and economy of Northern Ireland and throws into relief the attitude of hegemonic societies. His negotiations are based on the binaries of metropolis/periphery, self/other, colonizer/colonized, England/Ireland. The major impact of centuries of colonizations in Ireland has been the dislocation of Irish identity. Despite the noble veil of cultural and moral missions, one of the basic motives of colonial enterprise is economic exploitation.

Heaney delves into the past to interpret the present scenario. The bogs represent a storehouse of the memories that, when released from its depth, sometime underscore, and sometime contradict the verdicts of history. In the four anthologies, published from 1966 to 1975, which are going to be analyzed in this chapter, Heaney is preoccupied with the concern of redeeming the pride and consolidating the fragmented identity of the Irish people. He chooses to be a digger, and digs deep into the layers of Irish history to expose and fill the voids of historical amnesia.

Heaney’s poetry has the objective of rehabilitating culture and traditions, manners and morals, language and identity and history and politics of Northern Ireland. His negotiations are pleas for reconciliations and peace. Heaney deconstructs Irish anxieties and preoccupations from a universal perspective. He identifies common metaphors that interrogate the compromises and the compensations of all colonized people and also the impact of these negotiations on the colonizers.
Death of a Naturalist (1966)

Seamus Heaney’s childhood memories of growing up on a farm in Northern Ireland and the exploration of subsequent dislocation from his cultural and agrarian heritage are central to his first anthology Death of a Naturalist (1966). Heaney gives a kaleidoscopic view of Irish rural life. He recreates a world of green turf, barns, wells and fields. The uninterrupted harmony of men working in green fields, women occupied with domestic chores, children playing in the fields, are some of the vivid pastoral images with which the anthology is crowded. Nature is a source of powerful wisdom and inspiration to the poet and is frequently offered as a balm to the suffering humanity. Heaney’s rural Ireland is populated with the people who, the reader is coerced into believing, do not deserve to suffer. Unforgettable characters, precious memories, nostalgia, are followed by narratives of cruelty and of resilience. The poet desires to compensate. In his poetry, he attempts restore dignity and peace to his own community as a compensation and strives to build a new world through compromise.

The anthology opens with ‘Digging’. The title of the poem indicates the notion of excavation for exposure. The significance of the poem is indicated in the collection of Heaney’s essay entitled Preoccupations.

Digging, in fact, was the name of the first poem I wrote where I thought my feeling had got into words, or to put it more accurately where I thought my feel had got into words.¹

In the anthology and particularly in the poem, ‘Digging’, Heaney invokes the experience of his childhood at Mossbown a place located between Castle Dawson and Toome in County Derry. Heaney’s poetry exudes with the ‘sense of place’. There seems to be an umbilical cord between Heaney and his rural background. Through this umbilical cord, he seems to receive inspiration and thus creates the ingredients of his poetry.

Under my window, a clean rasping sound
When the spade sinks into the ground:
My father, digging. I look down.

(ll 3-5, Digging, DN)

Heaney presents a moving picture of a man bound to his land. The father digs the land and the son (poet) writes. The sound, smell, touch and sight of land tilled yet again for a new crop permeate the poet’s being and awaken ‘living roots’ in his head. The poet’s job to bring salvation to his people has begun.

The speaker sits inside ‘look [ing] down’ from his window. This implies a distance between the two men, marked by their relative positions. The father digs the ground with a spade but the son has ‘no spade to follow the men like them’. He opts for the ‘pen’ with which he ‘digs’ through the layers of history to lay bare forgotten truths. Walcott suggested the need for a new beginning to postcolonial history ‘a new Adam and a new Eden, one which dispenses with imperial history altogether’\(^2\). The rereading and rewriting of European history and literature are subversive and compensatory gambits. Postcolonial literatures are constituted in counter-discursive strategies to the dominant discourse. Wilson Harris thinks the task of postcolonial subversive stratagem is ‘to evolve textual strategies which continually ‘consume’ their ‘own biases’ at the same time as they expose and erode those of the dominant discourse’\(^3\).

Heaney analyzes the intricacies of the marginalization strategies of the colonizers. The impact of colonization on the world was always a complex process that took many forms. The suffering and loss of life was on an immeasurable scale. The sense of cultural dislocation, alienation and disintegration of rural life was a result of industrialization which colonialism had brought with it under the veil of a civilization mission, frequently described as the ‘White Man’s burden’. The phrase, taken from Rudyard Kipling’s famous poem, has been used widely to describe the colonial attitude of the Imperialists. In the poem Kipling talks about the fundamental tactics that have been used by the colonizers to legitimize their control over the natives. ‘The White Man’s burden’ is the Eurocentric view of colonization. In the words of Frantz Fanon ‘Colonialism was a
denial of all culture, history and value outside the colonizer’s frame; in short a systematic negation of the other person.⁴

Heaney strives against the fragmentation of rural identity. Identity is a product of history and, on a personal level, of memory. The identity of rural Irish people was fractured by colonization. The identity of ‘colonized’ was imposed on them. The inheritances of loss, sense of living in a cultural vacuum are common feelings shared by all the colonized people of the world. Culture is entangled with history. So, too, is literature. Writers have registered the events of colonization from its very advent. Heaney shares the feeling of suppression. The plight of the ruled is reflected in the poem.

The colonizers have taken control of the native lands hence the original rural culture and identity are under threat of annihilation. Heaney, unlike his ancestors, could not use the inherited the ‘spade’ and instead turned to the ‘pen’.

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests; snug as gun

(ll 1, 2, Digging, DN)

The phrase ‘snug as gun’ indicates that violence had become very common and holding a gun was as comfortable as holding a pen. Heaney’s digging activity also suggests his desire to restore the dignity of his nation through his writings. The postcolonial writers have used their writings for resistance and also as a mouthpiece to raise their voices against their calibanization. The English historical records and literary representations have stripped the real identity of Irish people. In postcolonial literature across the world, Caribbean, Irish, Indian, the writers describe the colonial past, decolonization and writer’s quest for the original identity. Heaney chooses the ‘pen’ to accomplish this task. He ‘digs’ for the redemption of a dignified identity by ‘going down and down’. Heaney describes ‘rot’ which is recurrent in the anthology. He deploys several verbal effects.

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap

22
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge.

(II 25-26, Digging, DN)

Heaney’s use of compound words ‘cold smell’, ‘curt cuts’ traces a metaphor of a wasteland where the farmer’s crop rots. The inverted image of agricultural produce as ‘rotting’ rather than blossoming projects a world waiting for the poet’s healing touch. The poet’s heightened sensitivity makes him aware of the farmer’s helplessness and pain.

The family tradition of earning by ‘spade’ is rejected by Heaney very consciously.

By God, the old man could handle a spade
Just like his old man.

(II 15-16, ‘Digging’, DN)

‘Spade’ represents the continuous, hard physical labour of a farming family. Generations gave their best to the land. The continuous long line of farmers ‘Just like his old man’ indicates that the land was their chief source of income. Heaney chooses to give it up so that he can shoulder the greater responsibilities of rehabilitating the Irish image. However, the realization that he had ‘no spade to follow’ unleashes a wave of nostalgia for the old order. The use of autobiographical elements in postcolonial writings is a process of recreation of original identity. Thus, ‘Digging’ is not merely a poem of recollected childhood memories. Heaney goes beyond to touch upon the unspoken and deeper issues related to the Irish people. A deep-seated yearning to preserve the honest contribution of his hard working ancestors and to save them from degradation and defamation can be identified in these lines. Heaney’s preference for the pen can be defined as a compensatory act. Edward Larrissy was not off the mark when he stated:

Digging represents the recovery of past, of intimate relationship. The style of ‘Foregrounding’ the metaphor, as I call it, (taking hint from Terence Hawkes), suggests intimacy in its need for startling transformation it suggests alienation.
Heaney sacrifices the ‘spade’ and compromises with the ‘pen’. He uses it to reserve the damages incurred by the colonizer’s pen. Heaney believes in the power of words and in the poetics of responsibility.

Between my finger and my thumb  
The squat pen rests  
I’ll dig with it.

(ll 29-31, Digging, DN)

The closing lines of the poem, stand in contrast to the opening lines where ‘gun’ is snug. Heaney advocates resistance through his writings. He makes sociological compromises by not advocating ‘gun’ against ‘gun’.

Heaney once again uses the image of his father in the poem ‘Follower’.

My father worked with a horse-plough,  
His shoulders globed like a full sail strung

(ll 1-2, Follower, DN)

Apart from the evocative descriptions, the poem highlights the familial and local Irish world. Heaney memorializes the cycle of hard labour on his father’s farm. Heaney’s father is symbolic of ‘Every Irish farmer’ who is the carrier of the original tradition of ‘spade’. As a child, Heaney had the ambition ‘to grow up and plough’, to carry forward his social identity. Heaney registers intimacy, warmth and love for his ‘expert’ father who ‘would set the wing / And fith the bright steel-pointed sock’. He boned well with his father and looked up to him.

A different image of his father is presented in the final section of the poem. The old man now comes ‘stumbling’ behind Heaney indicating a lack of confidence.

It is my father who keeps stumbling  
Behind me, and will not go away

(ll 23-24, Follower, DN)
Heaney's father serves as a signifier for the dilapidating, disintegrating rural Irish self. The preoccupation of Irish self ‘will not go away’ from Heaney’s mind. He feels that even though he has become a famous poet in the world’s literary circle, his real Irish identity will never be erased. This is the compensation that Heaney accepts. The real Irish identity will be redeemed and rehabilitated through his poetry. The remapping becomes Heaney’s central concern.

Heaney’s poem reads as a memoir of his life in Ireland. His exploration of his roots is, most of the time, undertaken on behalf of the whole Irish community. His own childhood is seen as a picture gallery of memories and experience of the vanishing ways of rural life. His portrayals of the traditional agro based ways make his poetry a storehouse of old values and customs.

The long family link with the land has instilled the love of nature in Heaney. The rural identity is part of his collective unconscious. It directs all behaviour and it is the most powerful trait in his personality. Jung wrote that the form of the world into which one is born is already inborn in him as a virtual image. The poem ‘Death of a Naturalist’ presents a world of innocence of a child who is in the process of gaining maturity. The title is symbolic of metaphorical death of a ‘Naturalist’. Heaney returns to his childhood days at school but his vision is scrutinical. The innocent world is reassessed through the lens of adult vision. The teacher explains the life cycle with reference to ‘daddy frog’ and ‘mammy frog’, the new life or the exact opposite of ‘death’. The poem does not deal only with the natural world and rural sentimentalism. It also depicts the small scale violence of country life. It expands upon the complexities of the internal world of a child; his awareness of his own tiny stature in contrast to the grandeur and enormity of the natural world. Heaney returns to the image of rot amidst the beauty of the natural world of ‘bluebottles’.

All year the flax-dam festered in the heart
Of the townland; green and heavy-headed
Flax had rotted there...

(II 1-3, Death of a Naturalist, DN)

Heaney uses sensuous imagery and exposes the influence of Keats when he
writes lines like ‘bubbles gargled delicately’ and uses onomatopoeia like ‘whoosh’.
This reflective poem captures the power of nature. Heaney writes about a pastoral
world yet the poem is littered with the metaphor of wars.

Poised like mud grenades; their blunt heads farting.

(II 30, Death of a Naturalist, DN)

Heaney is always preoccupied with the concern of violence in his country. He
writes a pastoral poem yet he infuses it with these violent images of ‘vengeance’,
‘obscene threat’, ‘punishing sun’.

The powerful wisdom of the natural world is offered as a compensation for the
vengeance of the ‘gross-bellied... slime kings’. The nightmare image of powerful
spawn stretching out to grab the child to punish him for a childhood act viewed as a
crime signifies power reversal. It may be read as a metaphor for the isolation of the
native in his homeland by the colonizers. Heaney employs the war metaphor in other
poems as well.

Heaney uses military imagery in order to mirror the violence in Ireland. He
searches ‘for images and symbols adequate to our [his] predicament’. Heaney
writes a pastoral poem to compensate for the violence of wars in his country. Fussell
suggests that the opposite of experience moments of war is proposing moments of
pastoral.

Heaney’s poetry is a kind of window through which one can have glimpses
of violence of ‘Troubles’. His poems are effective in explaining the plight of Ireland
to the outer world.
The theme of loss of innocence and gaining of renewed vision is again taken up in another poem ‘Blackberry Picking’. The poem describes a childhood activity of berry picking but the poem subtly hints at the developing sexual maturity of these Irish children. Heaney believes that unsupervised children become dysfunctional. Colonization affected every aspect of Irish life. The peace of everyday life was disturbed by violence. Schools were not functioning properly and were closed most of the time. The children had more than enough time to indulge in unsupervised games in place of normal childhood activities. Unlike Wordsworth, Heaney does not believe in ‘nature as teacher’. He believes that if children are left unguided and unsupervised, nature would make them wild and enhance their barbarism. The innocence of childhood is transient and in real life disillusion has to be dealt with.

You ate that first one and its flesh was sweet
Like thickened wine: summers’s blood was in it
Leaving stains upon the tongue and lust for Picking...

(ll 5-8, Blackberry Picking, DN)

The poem’s metaphorical language intimates that it is loaded with sexuality. The first berry’s ‘flesh was sweet’ enhancing the ‘lust for picking’ leaving the children’s ‘palms sticky as bluebeards’. The poem ends with the acquisition of a new vision- the knowledge of helplessness, insatiated desires and failed hopes. The premature knowledge of sexuality terminates innocence. Heaney sympathizes with such deprived children who were marginalized and deformed for no fault of their own. Heaney’s poetry serves to explain and compensate by exposing their condition before the world. Heaney has just ‘words’ to offer to his people. He exhibits his burden of guilt towards these children in his flashback. He says ‘I always felt crying. It wasn’t fair’.

Colonization through, various colonial divisions, resulted in imposing another identity on natives. The shift took place in identity from ‘ours’ to ‘theirs’, from ‘natives’ to ‘colonized’. The colonial world is divided, as Fanon describes:
This world is divided into compartments, this world cut in two inhabited by two different species. The originality of colonial context is that economic reality, inequality and immense difference of ways of life never come to the human realities.\(^9\)

The stripping of identity took place at individual as well as personal levels. The experience of colonization, with all its harmful manifestations, is shared by other colonies of the world. Post colonialism claims the right of every individual on this earth hence in a postcolonial text the question of identity returns as persistent questioning of frame and the space of representation.

Heaney belongs to the Roman Catholic community of Northern Ireland. In the 1940s when Heaney was growing up, there was the emergence of the Catholic middle class. Their growing dissatisfaction led to the civil rights campaign of the 1960s. Violent riots between the Catholics and Protestants took place in 1969 and 1970. However, the formation of Provisional Irish Republic Army launched a campaign of violence against the Army deputed by the British Government. The campaign, modeled on the civil rights campaign in the United States involved protest marches, road blocks, poster processions and sit-ins and the bloody backlash of the Army.

Heaney’s colonial consciousness leads him to search for his original identity amidst the confusing mazes of the mechanized world. He engineers his own rural identity in ‘The Barn’.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Threshed corn lay piled like grit of ivory} \\
\text{Or solid as cement in two lugged sacks} \\
\text{The musky dark hoarded an armoury} \\
\text{Of farmyard implements, harness, plough-socks.}
\end{align*}
\]

(\text{ll 1-4, The Barn, DN})

Heaney, through agricultural images and rural landscapes, collects the pieces his fragmented identity. This works as compensation against the colonial divisions created by more than one factor. Heaney presents even the minutest details of rural Irish life.
Manners and morals are mirrored in his poetry. He seems to zoom into the heart of rural Irish life. In ‘Churning Day’, he projects an image of his mother busily churning butter.

My mother took the first turn, set up rhythms
Than slugged and thumped for hours.

(ll 1-2, Churning Day, DN)

The tender and touching picture recollects the security of a childhood otherwise ruined by external turmoil of the violence in Northern Ireland. It mirrors the psychology of a child to whom domestic security matters more than external violence. It also mirrors the ideology of the adult who perceives the need for external security for perfect domesticity. In the closing poem of the anthology ‘Personal Helicon’, the agrarian world is represented by ‘wells’ and ‘old pumps’. Water represents the source of nurturing both to the farmer and the poet. Heaney describes his affinity with rural life:

I loved the dark drop, the trapped sky, the smells
Of waterweed, fungus and dank moss

(ll 3-4, Personal Helicon, DN)

Heaney reveals that he will ‘pry into roots’ and ‘set the darkness echoing’. Heaney explains the reasons and the purposes of his poetry. He writes in order to look inward, at himself and into history. He evokes the testimony of time to disprove the false claims of the colonizers.

Heaney recreates Ireland in all its myriad-coloured splendour. Its hustle-bustle is given a vivid presentation. In ‘Diviner’, Heaney paints the magic of the Diviner who searches for water with his divine rod. These beliefs and myths are integral to rural life. The Diviner is professional in his hunt. The search of water is the quintessence of every life on the earth and it is among the oldest quests of mankind. He recreates the old forgotten Ireland and talks about the skill that people once took very seriously. The Diviner is busy in ‘Circling the terrain, hunting the pluck / Of water’. The ‘bystanders’ try their hand at his skill but they are unsuccessful until ‘He gripped expectant wrists’ and than ‘The hazel stirred.’ The beautiful image of lending a helping hand implies the image
of guidance and support which a beginner needs. The Diviner is a noble spirit who is ready to share his art with every body. The humane image of the Diviner defines the relationship with society. The theme of the poem implies that Heaney would also serve his society with words. Heaney recreates, bit by bit, the world which had blurred and faded at the advent of colonization.

The theme of fear, in various forms, is prevalent throughout the anthology. It surfaces as the childhood fear of ‘Slime Kings’ in ‘Death of a Naturalist’, and as the fear of darkness in ‘The Barn’. In psychoanalytical criticism, fear and desire find their outlet in creative activity. Heaney’s poetry can possibly be interpreted as a creative outlet through which his repressed desires and fear find expression. John Keble claimed in his lectures ‘On healing power of poetry’ (1844), ‘Poetry is indirect expression...of some overpowering emotion, or ruling taste, or feeling, the direct indulgence whereof is somehow repressed’.  

The expression of fear exhibits a desire for a psychological compromise with changed circumstances. Heaney often pauses at intersecting sites like. The theme, landscape and images of the rural world are testimonies of the fact that Heaney wishes to write about his rural identity. He wishes to recreate every single picture of the world in vernacular colours to compensate for the blurring and marginalization of Irish civilization. Heaney seems to suggest that even through he remains cognizant of the much loved rural Irish identity, his poetry will move beyond. Another overpowering concern of this anthology is to highlight the significance of filial relations. His father and grandfather appear in ‘Digging’, his mother figures in ‘Churning Day’, and a younger brother in ‘Mid-term Break’. ‘Mid-term Break’ is an ironical poem that discusses a sudden, accidental death in all its finality. While some other distant relatives are referred to in other poems such as ‘Ancestor’s photograph’. Heaney advocates the united extended family against the nuclear. In a disharmonized world where almost everything is fragmented, a united family represents unity and harmony.
Door into the Dark (1969)

Heaney’s poetry is populated with people living far from the madding crowd. He revitalizes the beauty of bucolic life, history, mythology and culture of Ireland. Memories and recollections are primary colours with which Heaney paints the arena of his concerns. Tradition merges in the contemporary context, life into death, and so do poetic and political divisions, and also inner and external reality in his memory and in his poetry.

In his second collection of poems, Door into the Dark, he zooms into and focuses upon the minute and otherwise unobserved details of Irish country life. The anthology is sprinkled with pastoral nostalgia along side a futuristic vision. He once again celebrates the unsung heroes of the rural world. They may be simple village folk but he represents them as remarkable and special in their own ways. Heaney commented on the title of his anthology in the Poetry Society Bulletin:

...comes from the first line of ‘The Forge’, a poem that uses the dark active centre of Blacksmith’s shed as emblem for the instinctive, blurred stirring and shaping of some kinds of art. And I was happy to discover after I had chosen the title that it follows directly from the last line in my first book...12

The title of the anthology resonates with the last line of ‘Death of a Naturalist’, where Heaney declares that he writes poetry in order to set the ‘darkness echoing’. This is a linking of consciousness which anticipates vibes of the collection to follow.

In his early poetry, Heaney delves into his own childhood in order to relate it to the predicament of the present Ireland. The maturity and renewed vision is gained through childhood recollection via adult scrutinical vision. Its metamorphosis assumes social and historical dimensions. He gains a mature awareness of the divisions of his community and country.

All I know is a door into the dark

(II 1, Forge, DD)
The first poem ‘The Forge’ can also be read in contrast to ‘The Barn’ where the protagonist is afraid of and unwilling to face the darkness. The protagonist in ‘The Forge’ is willing to venture into darkness to find out what lies there, depicting possibly the psychological metamorphosis. He does not compromise with his fear but instead faces it squarely. He find that beyond the ‘anvil’s short-pitched ring’ and the ‘fantail of sparks’, a blacksmith is working on a new horse shoe. Heaney combines beauty and ferocity in the single image of ‘fantail of sparks’. The contrast of dark and bright, flesh and metal as well as intelligence and strength are gathered together in the phrase.

Heaney does not celebrate the smithy like Yeats. Heaney’s smith is unlike the smith in Yeats’s Byzantium poems. He is a common rural smith. A blacksmith is a representative figure of Irish rural life. The poet nostalgically categorizes him as a forgotten figure in modern day industrial life. The advent of industrialization has almost killed the rural trades. The rural modes of transport face the threat of extinction with the arrival of mechanized communication. The desire for quick profit has ruined the rural economy. Yet Heaney’s blacksmith compromises with life, living by recollections of bygone days.

He leans out on the jamb, recalls a clatter
Of hoofs where traffic is flashing in rows;

(ll 12-13, The Forge, DD)

Heaney’s smith is defeated by the grim realities of the developed world which cannot accommodate him. The decaying smithy represents a secluded spot where he can continue to exist.

Outside, old axles and iron hoops rusting;
Inside, the hammered anvil’s short-pitched ring,

(ll 3-4, The Forge, DD)

Like the blacksmith’s, another rural trade, that of the ‘Thatcher’, is also threatened with extinction. The thatcher is a rural roof-maker. With the advent of the
industrial revolution, and mass migration from village to town, the demand for the annual
repair of the roof declined sharply. Trained only in this trade, the thatcher lost his
livelihood. The poet mourns for a world gone by and also laments the fact that the new
world contained no room for the skilled workmen of the old agrarian society. Thus, the
thatcher symbolizes the creative instinct of rural people which was utilized in small
business.

Although a thatcher is an ordinary rural man, he has the power to turn ordinary
things like ‘straw and sharpened end of rods...staple’ into a neat ‘sloped honeycomb
roof’. Others gape at his ‘Midas touch’. Rural Ireland comes alive through such
delineations. Heaney, as a redress for his people glorifies their lives and professions in his
poetry. Heaney compensates for their fading identities by writing verses about them.

David Lloyd explains Heaney’s approach to poetry:

[the specific relation of an ‘Irish identity’ to English literary and political
establishment provides not only language but the very term for which it is
the question to be posed or resolved. For it is not simply the verse form,
the melody, or what not, that [Heaney] takes over, it is aesthetic, and the
ethical and political formulations, its subsumes, that Romantic and
imperial tradition supplies.]

Heaney is a poet and has words through which he can articulate his feelings but
his protagonists like blacksmiths and thatchers are silent because of the socio-political
conditions prevailing in Ireland. They are the silenced subalterns. Perhaps they are like
Spivak’s subalterns who are unable to speak because of ‘the phased development of
subaltern is complicated by imperialist project’. In social and political conditions
prevailing in contemporary Northern Ireland, giving vent to feelings could be a dangerous
thing. Blake Morrison remarks, ‘What links various traders, labourers and craftsmen who
fill his first books is that, unlike him [Heaney], they are lacking in speech’. Silence has
many manifestations. It can be a silence of resistance or compromise with the hegemony.

* A semi-legendary king of Phrygia, who, having hospitality entertained Silenus, the companion of
Dionysus, when he had lost his way, was given a wish, and wished that all that he touched might become
gold. Historically, ‘Midas’ was the title of all the kings of Phrygia, like ‘Pharaoh’ of the kings of Egypt. A
Midas perhaps of the 7th c. B.C. dedicated a throne to the god of Delphi.
Heaney celebrates the poetics of silence, speaking the unspoken, stating the unstated. Heaney deconstructs the British hegemonic hierarchies by giving primacy to writing over speech. Henry Hart analyzed that ‘if a logocentric preference for the spoken has devalued the written in Western thought, as Derrida insists, Heaney tends to celebrate the accomplishment of writing over evanescence of speech’.

Heaney employs these strategies to lend his voice to the voiceless, silent subalterns. He digs deeper into the history and the psyche of Irish peoples. ‘Requiem for Croppies’, resurrects the Irish rebels, who were killed by the English at Vinegar Hills in Co. Wexford in 1798. They are dead and gone, perhaps lost in the pages of history. Yet Heaney exhibits pride in their deeds. Their sacrifices are narrated in the poem:

The pockets of our greatcoats full of barley-
...And in August the barley grew up out of the grave.

(II 1, 14, ‘Requiem for Croppies’, DD)

These historically muted victims left behind the seeds of rebellion which sprout through poetry. Heaney juxtaposes the past and the present. He reflects the political scenario of contemporary Ireland through the rebellion of the past. The poem was written in 1966, when the Irish literary circle commemorated the fifth anniversary of the Easter Rising of 1916, of which, the seeds were sown in the rebellion of 1798.

He sings the requiem for the ‘croppies boys’ (named because of their cropped hair as that of French Rebels of French Revolution). These rebels were killed mercilessly at Vinegar Hills. The colonial cruelties burn through the poem. Heaney lends his voice to these historically muted victims, so, they can bring light to the dark deeds of the White colonizers.

They buried us without shroud or coffin

(II 13, Requiem for Croppies, DD)
The life of a native is worthless and cheap in the colonizer’s eyes. They even deprived the Croppies of a dignified burial. The Croppy boys were buried sans the burial rituals. For the British, the Croppy boys were rebels but for Ireland they represent the epitome of patriotism. Heaney glorifies their sacrifices as a compensation for their losses. He creates a literary space for the heroic deeds of the Croppies who are registered as terrorists in colonizer’s historical records. The postcolonial writers have taken the responsibility to reinterpret the history of the colonial period in their writings. The historical narratives are sometime termed as ‘slave narrative’. The Eurocentric version of history presented the paternalistic role of ‘masters’. The sense of belonging to inferior or superior race is acquired through the consciousness. The problem of history becomes crucial:

For not only are the questions of truth and fiction, of narrativity and indeterminacy, time and space, of pressing importance because the material ground, the political dimension of postcolonial life impresses itself so urgently, but the historical narrativity is that which structures the forms of reality itself.18

Heaney rewrites history through literature and writes back for an amnesia free view of history. The rewriting of history has been a major concern and significant strategy of postcolonial writers.

In ‘A Lough Neagh Sequence’, Heaney describes the act of poaching by the Irish fishermen who came in conflict with the colonizers. The colonizers exploited them economically. They took control of almost each and every aspect of economic resources. The natives were reduced merely to the position of slaves and labourers. Their own resources did not belong any more to them. The British Company officially owned the right of eel fishing on Lough Neagh.

The lough will claim a victim every year.
It has virtue that hardens woods to stone.

(11 1-2, A Lough Neagh Sequence, DD)
Heaney’s verses bring to the surface the exploitation of the colonized Irish people but these are not only confined to Ireland but to all the colonies of the world which share the same burden of economic exploitations. In ‘The Plantation’, Heaney maps the cycle of Irish colonization. The Irish plantation provides a historical emblem of the invasions, domination and exploitation of Ireland.

You had to come back
To learn how to lose yourself
To be pilot and stray-witch,
Hansel and Gretel in one.

(II 33-36, The Plantation, DD)

Ireland has undergone serial colonial domination by Scotts, Vikings and English. Hence Heaney regards it as an archetypal. He uses the fairytale of Hansel and Gretel to articulate his feelings. He dives in the pages of Irish history for retelling history.

The concluding poem in Door into the Dark is ‘Bogland’, which represents a new beginning. In an interview with Robert Druce, Heaney stated that ‘Bogland’:

...was the first poem of mine that I felt had the status of symbol in someway; it wasn’t trapped in its own anecdote, or its own dosing off: it seemed to have some kind of wind blowing through it that could carry on.

The poem ‘Bogland’ is dedicated to his friend T.P Flanngan. The poem can be regarded as a compensatory statement for Theodore Roethke’s ‘In the Praise of Prairie’. To Roethke’s ‘Horizons have no strangeness to eye’, Heaney’s answer is that ‘We have no prairies / To slice a big sun at evening’. The postcolonial Irish people will reanalyze history and look at the ‘bottomless’ and ‘wet centre’ of their own history for regaining their pride. Postcolonialism is a continuing process of resistance and reconstruction. For the reconstruction, the poet-archeologist regards the bogland as a symbol of hidden history. He remarked:
I had been vaguely wishing to write a poem about bogland, chiefly because it is a landscape that has a strange assuaging effect on me, one with associations reaching back into early childhood... 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. Moreover, since memory was the faculty that supplied me with the first quickening of my own poetry, I had a tentative unrealized need to make congruence between memory and bogland and, for the want of a better word, our national consciousness.  

The Irish bogs preserved traces of ancient civilizations. The poem indicates that the bogs will ‘melt and open’ again. Heaney wishes to look ‘inwards and downwards’ into Irish history. The poem ‘Bogland’ looks forward to the bog poems of later anthologies. It serves as a preface to them.

**Wintering out (1972)**

The publication of Heaney’s third anthology, *Wintering Out*, corresponds with the intensification of political turmoil and chaos caused by Northern Irish Troubles. Heaney, through his poetry, wished to address the colonial divisions in Irish society as well as the problems of violence which resulted in dividing society. However, he did not wish to advocate the violent retaliation practiced by Irish Republic Army (I.R.A).

*Wintering out* (1972) is the reflection of his concern for ‘the distresses that we are all under going’. Explaining the title of his poem, he remarked:

> It is a phrase associated with cattle, and the hired boys also… It is meant to gesture towards the distresses that we all are undergoing in this country at the minute. It is meant to be, I suppose, comfortlessness enough, but with a notion of survival in it.  

In the previous two anthologies, *Death of a Naturalist* and *Door into the Dark*, Heaney’s poetry is permeated with Irish rural life in which he grew up. It is the poetry of self. The sense of belonging to his nesting ground is visible all along. Heaney describes it as ‘a sense of place’.
Wintering Out is more concerned with the Irish problems. The anthology searches out issues of suffering, resistance and endurance of Irish people. It encapsulates memories, landscapes, traditions and words from Heaney’s own world. In a number of poems in the anthology, he evokes historical, political and cultural genocide of rural Irish life. The anthology also contains some language oriented poems which depict the linguistic colonization of Ireland.

Or, as we said,
fother, I open
my arms for it

(ll 1-3, ‘Fodder’, WO)

Through language, Heaney reclaims collective identity. The Irish pronunciation for fodder is ‘fother’. Neil Corcoran claims that the poem reminds readers of the existence of ‘a lexicon and register of pronunciation distinct from ‘received’ or standard English’.

The poem is an assertion of cultural differences that exist between the Irish and English. Heaney exhibits affinity with the rural world. The word ‘fother’ makes him ‘open...arms for it’. The use of ‘we’ depicts the community identity. It portrays the poet’s patriotism. Ironically, the modern world of luxuries recedes and Heaney draws comfort from the rural environment.

These long nights
I would pull hay
for comfort, anything
to bed the stall

(ll 17-20, ‘Fodder’, WO)

The theme of linguistic genocide continues in different poems of the anthology. To compensate the loss Heaney recreates the colonizers from the pages of colonial history. One figure is of the British writer Edmund Spenser who glorified the monarchy in his Farie Queene. Spenser symbolizes the colonial dominance, exploitation and ventriloquism. In ‘Bog Oak’, Heaney traces history of Oakwoods derived from Boglands.
Perhaps I just make out
Edmund Spenser
dreaming sunlight
encroached upon by

(ll 21-24, 'Bog Oak', \textit{WO})

Spenser, the representative of the monarchy, wrote a prose account, \textit{A View of Present State of Ireland}, in 1598 in which he depicted what he defined as the miserable condition of Irish people.

Jon Stallworthy quotes Yeast’s introduction to the work of William Blake, he declares:

When Spenser wrote of Ireland he wrote as an official, and out of thought and emotions that had been organized by the state. He was the first of many Englishmen to see nothing but what he was desired to see.\textsuperscript{24}

History is always written from the perspective of the dominant. As the monarchy desired, Spenser saw just the grim aspect of Irish life:

Out of every corner of woodes and glynes they came creeping forth upon theyr hands, for theyr legges could not beare them; they looked like anatomyes of death, they spake like ghostes crying out of theyr graves; they did eate of dead carrions, happy were they could find them, yea, and one another soon after, insoe much as they very carcasses they spamed not to scrape out of theyr grave; and if they found a plot of watercresses or shamrokes, they flocked as to a feast...

One of the concerns of the postcolonialism is to critically analyze the representations of natives as ‘other’ in a colonial text. The natives have always been presented in negative shades in the works of colonizers. The famous postcolonial critic Frantz Fanon examines the image of Africans as ‘other’ in \textit{Black Skins, White Masks}:

My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recoloured, clad in mourning in that white winter day. The negro is an animal, the negro is bad, the negro is mean, the negro is ugly; look, a nigger, it’s cold, the nigger is shivering, the nigger is shivering because he is cold, the little boy is trembling because her is afraid of the nigger, the nigger is shivering with cold, that cold that goes through your bones, the handsome little boy is trembling because he thinks that the nigger is quivering withrage, the
Homi Bhaba questions the colonial Otherness and the colonial imagination, he writes:

It is the scenario of colonial fantasy which in staging the ambivalence of desire articulates the demand for negro which the negro disrupts. For the stereotype is at once a substitute and a shadow. By acceding to the wildest fantasies (in popular sense) of colonizer, the stereotyped Other reveals something of the ‘fantasy’ (as desire, defense) of that position of mastery.

The colonial lens has always viewed ‘natives’ as ‘savages’ to be civilized, as ‘heathens’ to be converted to ‘Christianity’, as ‘enemies’ to be defeated and as ‘other’ to be stereotyped. A re-contextualization of colonial text in relation to the cultural beliefs and political circumstances that produced them would reveal that they rendered a cultural service to the colonial ideologies.

Through Edmund Spenser and recalling the exploitations, Heaney attempts to bring the pathetic situation of Ireland before the world. He is like Coleridge’s ‘Ancient Mariner’ who has the albatross of colonialism around his neck and had a sad story of ‘otherness’ to tell the world. Perhaps he seems to make compensations for the silenced ‘other’ of the history, through his poetry.

In ‘Midnight’, Heaney comments upon the disappearance of Gaelic by equating it with wolf hunting in Ireland. In the process of linguistic dominance ‘The tongue’s leashed in my [Heaney’s] throat’. He captures the dilemma dealt with in ‘Traditions’, an allegorical elegy written for the loss of native Irish language. At its outset, the poem describes the damage of the Irish language. He equates linguistic dominance with the rape of Gaelic.

Our guttural muse  
was bulled long ago  
by alliterative tradition.

(ll 1-3, ‘Traditions’, WO)
Heaney’s concern for the language registers his divided loyalties. Irish people do not identify with the English language as it is the language of colonial oppressions which created colonial divisions between them. It gave birth to the binaries of English / Gaelic, England / Ireland, Colonizers / Colonized, Victimizer / Victims and Master / Slaves.

Following the Elizabethan Plantations of Ireland, the Irish language was ‘bullied’ and raped by the dominant and colonial Elizabethan ‘alliterative traditions’. The earliest meters of English poetry in Anglo Saxon and Middle English were alliterative in form. The feminine sensibility of ‘guttural muse’ was forcefully combined with masculine Elizabethan English. Andrew J. Auge points out:

…it takes the form of a colonial usurpation of an indigenous culture, a hierarchical act of appropriation that seems to call forth a countervailing revival of repressed element.  

The poem is centrally preoccupied with Shakespeare, during whose time the Ulster plantation took place. Heaney uses Shakespeare to create a sexual and linguistic metaphor. He alludes to Shakespeare’s *Othello* to depict the condition of colonial linguistic hegemony. The metaphor of rape continues. Heaney quotes the Duke’s speech, where he calls ‘opinion, a more sovereign Misris of effects’ to which Othello replies ‘Tirant Custome, most Grave Senators / Hath made the flinty and Steele Coach of Warre / My thrice-driven bed of Downe’.

‘Custome’ finally ‘beds...down into British Isle’, showing the victory of the language of colonizers over native Irish language. The simile of ‘Brigid’s cross yellowing in some outhouse’ is used to indicate the vanishing Irish language. ‘Brigid’s cross’ is an ancient Irish symbol which is believed to protect the house from fire. Beside the old age dominance, Heaney also talks about the contemporary bulling. The linguistic dominance of British had consequences on current English spoken in Northern Ireland. The Irish uses ‘Correct Shakespearean’ and the terms introduced by the colonizers. When the Londoner uses certain coinage it is to be treated as ‘Correct Shakespearean’. Irish English, on the other hand, is considered, by them, to be a lower variety. Parker is right
when he writes about Heaney’s divided feelings towards English language. He suggests that, in fact ‘correct Shakespearean...reminds him [Heaney] of defeat’.  

Heaney in order to compensate for the loss of and to revive the bygone pride of Ireland revitalizes characters from literary history. He recalls the character of Mac Morris from Shakespeare’s *Henry V* and James Joyce’s Leopald Bloom from *Ulysses*. In Act III of *Henry V*, Fluellen, the Welshman, is about to criticize the Irish to which Mac Morris replies ‘What ish my nation?’ in order to make his presence felt. Heaney asserts a sense of belonging and pride in the statement of Bloom, where he defends himself by saying ‘Ireland is my nation. I was born here’. Parker is of the view that Heaney pays homage to James Joyce for his contribution to Modern Irish literature. The image of the ‘other’ in Elizabethan literary traditions includes that of the Irish as comic buffoon, uncivilized, ‘anatomies of death’. This is countered in the poem by Leopald Bloom; Heaney recalls the figure of Bloom to claim compensation through poetry for stereotyping Irish people as ‘other’. Heaney admires Bloom and Joyce for compensating for the ill treatment doled out to the Gaelic language by inheriting the ‘alliterative traditions’ of Elizabethans and adapting it to suit the ‘guttural muse’.

Sometimes characters in Heaney’s poem suffer some kind of human problems. They are the victims of betrayal, marginalization and exploitations. Heaney contemplates on the callousness of human race. In the ‘Bye Child’, he describes the parental indifference. The poem deals with the story of a dumb boy who ‘was discovered in the hen house where she [his mother] had confined him’. Newton writes ‘for me, the most powerful conjuring of the wild child motif is found in Seamus Heaney’s poem ‘Bye Child’, part of his 1972 collection’. The insensitivity of the major population of the world in dealing with the disabilities and handicaps is a major concern in Heaney’s poetry.

Heaney’s poem is a true account of a boy who was cabined and confined in a dirty hen house. The figure of the tyrannical mother is given a colonial dimension. She acts like a colonizer dictating to the weak and disabled boy. Heaney empathizes with the
‘Little henhouse boy’. Heaney attracts attention by presenting a brutal portrayal of motherhood. The poem shows high degree of indifference of human society. The little henhouse boy was punished for his backwardness. He was not only confined but was deprived of parental care. Disabilities make the retarded people the ‘other’ of society. A philosopher and a social worker Kittay describes the social model of disability:

Disabled people have convincingly argued that disability itself is a social, not a natural, category. Human beings come in variety of forms, with different capacities and incapacities, abilities and disabilities, strengths and frailties. Some of the variants are distributed over a life span, some are distributed differently by birth or circumstances. Neither the fundamental equality nor the fundamental dignity of humanity is impugned by these variations. The disability that is associated with bodily impairment derives from social world which privileges some bodies over others, some minds over others, and in doing so, construct a world which allows human capacities to flourish in some but not the others.

Arthur Kohrman, a pediatrician, emphasizes that ‘our culture is not hospitable to (a) children; (b) children with chronic illness; or (c) particularly children who are technologically dependent’. Things will change for the disable with the change in the attitude of society. Heaney wishes to compensate through poetry. He also desires to highlight the fact that marginalization brings similar problems for the different groups.

The boy in ‘Servant Boy’ keeps patience and ‘counsel’ but finally gives voice to his anger.

...resentful
and impenitent,
carrying the warm eggs.

(ll 18-20, ‘Servant Boy’, WO)

‘The Last Mummer’ projects the transformation of resentment to retaliation. The ‘mummer’ is ‘lost’ depicting a vanishing rural life, ‘trammeled / in the taboos of the country’. Heaney as reparation gives places to these victims of human indifferences. Poems such as ‘Anahorish’, ‘Fodder’, ‘Toome’ and ‘Broagh’ follow the Irish tradition of ‘dinnseanchas’. It is a tradition about the sounds of a word, its pronunciation and usage, and the people who use it.
In the anthology Heaney comments upon linguistic hegemony. Neil Corcoran observes that ‘community of pronunciation is an implicit emblem for some new political community’ and the poem ‘acts as a linguistic paradigm of reconciliation beyond [or in spite of] sectarian division’. Heaney makes these Irish words known to the world to add local colours to his poetry to reintroduce them into common language and to save them from extinction. The speaker in the poem describes ‘Anahorish’ as ‘soft gradient / of consonant, vowel medows’. Heaney registers affinity and intimacy for Anahorish:

My ‘place of clear water’,  
the first hill in the world 
where springs washed into 
the shiny grass

(ll 1-5, ‘Anahorish’, WO)

Jon Stallworthy comments on Heaney’s use of names of Irish places in his poetry. He remarked ‘the naming of place gives Heaney magical access to his own country through mirror of its language’. In the poem ‘Toome’, the speaker’s ‘mouth holds round / the soft blasting’ and utters the sound of poem’s title again and again, ‘Toome, Toome’. Heaney never uses Irish words simply for the sake of sprinkling his poetry with local flavours. Often the so words are linked to painful historical memories as in ‘Toome’. The Toome Bridge was the site of Irish rebellion in 1798. The naming of Irish location continues in ‘A New Song’, the speaker describes his rendezvous with ‘a girl from Derrygrave’ and ‘Derrygrave... was just / Vanished music.’

Heaney also mentions landscapes and places such as ‘Castle Dawson’, ‘Upperlands’ and ‘Planted Bawn’. The word ‘planted’ is reminiscent of the plantation of Ireland in the seventeenth century during which thousand of English Welsh settlers arrived in the province. The speaker in ‘The Wool Trade’ alludes to the dying Irish society and economy. Heaney travels down the memory lane of Irish history. Following the surrender of Huge O’ Neills and O’ Donnells lords to the English in 1603, the rebel Earls left Ireland in 1607(also known as Flight of Earls) to seek Spanish help for a new rebellion. The lord Deputy, Arthur Chichester seized the opportunity to colonize the
province. Heaney laments the lost language and traditions of Ireland with the beginning of the Plantation. Heaney makes a compromise by accepting of Ireland’s changed economy and politics. He is fully aware of the colonial divisions created in almost every walk of Irish life.

In ‘Backward Look’, the speaker describes the dying Gaelic language as the flight of a snipe and fleeting of a hunter.

A snipe’s bleat is fleeting
its nestling-ground
Into dialect,
Into variants,

(ll 5-8, ‘The Backward Look’, WO)

The poem evokes Heaney’s pastoral vision in which the Irish language continues to live through the farmers who speak it. The landscapes, the language and traditions are intrinsic to the identity. Heaney recollects the fragmented pieces of Irish identity to compensate for the fractured colonized identity imposed on them by colonialism. In ‘The Otherside’, Heaney addresses the divisions in his society. ‘other’ refers to someone with whom one does not share similarity. In the poem a Catholic speaker comes face to face with a Protestant neighbour. The division between them is not only physical but ideological as well. This ideological division between them is the product of their ‘sides’. To the speaker’s ear, the neighbour speaks with ‘a fabulous, biblical dismissal. / that tongue of chosen people’.

The reference here is to the belief of Protestants that their faith is superior as it is steeped in Bible. The neighbour speaks a ‘patriarchal dictum’. Albeit their differences, they live under the single roof of Christianity. The neighbour emphasizes on his belief of practicing the direct teachings of the Bible yet he is not disrespectful about the other side of the house (the Catholics).

‘Your side of the house, I believe,
hardly rule by the Book at all’.

(ll 29-30, ‘The Other Side’, WO)
Avoiding differences, they discuss only the 'weather' or 'grass seeds'. They only touch each other on the shoulder or talk about everyday matters. The age old beliefs can not minimize their differences. The social and religious barrier forces them to be indifferent. Blake Morrison claims 'What Wintering Out does is to explore the deeper structures of present hostilities, the way in which divisions of Protestant and Catholic communities are embedded in language and topography'. The poem ends with various options which are quietly suspended. Heaney does not laying down any political or ethical judgment for himself.

The bog and its associations have always attracted Heaney's attention. The poet has written many poems which takes the theme of bog and its derivatives. In the earlier anthologies poems such as 'Bog Oak', 'Bogland' can come under this heading. Heaney was influenced by P.V. Glob's The Bog People which contains case studies and details of the Iron Age bodies found in the European bogs. The first bog body which makes its arrival is 'Tollund Man'. The reason for his death is unknown but Glob's prediction is that his death was a part of a religious sacrificial ritual. A fertility myth in which human beings where sacrificed to the fertility goddess Nerthus, so that she may renew the cycles of seasons and provide a good harvest to Iron Age community. In an interview with James Randall, Heaney accepted:

I wrote “Tollund Man” and it was an extremely important poem for me to write....And when I wrote that poem I had a sense of crossing a line rally, that my whole being was involved in a sense of- the root sense- of religion, being bonded to do something, being bounded to do something. I felt it a vow; I felt my whole being caught in this.....I think that brought me a new possibility of seriousness in poetic experience....the bog images....[were]...a deeply felt part of my life, a revelation to me.

Tollund Man is a 'Bridegroom to the goddess'. Heaney draws parallel between the sacrificial victims of the Iron Age and the sectarian killing of contemporary Ireland. The Tollund Man is transformed into 'a scapegoat, a privilege victim, and ultimately Christ-surrogate, whose death and bizarre resurrection might redeem, or symbolize redemption' for the violence-victims of conflicts in Ireland.
The Bog Body of Tollund Man
I could risk blasphemy,
Consecrate the cauldron bog
Our holy ground and pray
Him to make germinate

The scattered, ambushed
Flesh of labourers,
Stockinged corpses
Laid out in the farmyards,

Tell-tale skin and teeth
Flecking the sleepers
Of four young brothers, trailed
For miles along the lines.

(ll 21-32, 'The Tollund Man', WO)

The local incident of contemporary violence is woven with the historic evidence of the past. The murder of ‘four young brothers’ refers to an incident in which four young Catholics were murdered by Protestants and were ‘dragged along a railways line in an act of mutilation’. In a radio interview Heaney said, ‘I’ve tried to make a connection lately between things that come to the surface in bogs, in particular in Danish bogs, and the violence that was coming to surface in north of Ireland’. Heaney’s description underscores the archetypical pattern of human behaviour. The disastrous human history has not changed from the sacrificial and death penalties of the Iron Age victims to the sectarian murders of contemporary Northern Ireland. Ironically in the so-called civilized world the atrocities continue as an extension to the barbarities of the prehistoric civilization. This sense of incessant human savagery produces sense of ‘sad freedom’ and finding no compensation for the grim realities, the poet ‘feel[s] lost’ and ‘Unhappy at home’.

*North* (1975)*

The poems in the collection entitled *North* analyze into history, mythology and identity of ancient Ireland. There are some poems which uncover the history of conquests of the Vikings and later of the British. Heaney was influenced by P.V Glob’s *The Bog
People (1969). Glob’s study gives an account of how the turf cutters accidentally dug out the bodies of men and women buried under the bogs in the Iron Age, these unfortunate victims had been sacrificed during tribal rituals or killed as punishment and then consigned to the bog. Heaney writes of The Bog People:

It was chiefly concerned with the preserved bodies of men and women found in the bogs of Jutland, naked, strangled or with their throats cut, disposed under the peat since early Iron Age, times [...] taken in relation to the tradition of Irish political martyrdom for the cause whose icon is Kathleen Ni Hooligan, this is more than archaic barbarous rite: it is an archetypal pattern. And the unforgettable photographs of these victims blended in my mind with photographs of atrocities, past and present, in long rites of Irish political and religious struggles.

In North, Heaney continues to explore the themes of Northern Irish origin. The bog, for Heaney, is a store house and a memory bank, ‘a dark casket where we have found many clues to our past and to our cultural identity.’ Heaney’s bog can be regarded as an answering myth to the American prairies which ‘slice a big sun at evening’. Ireland contains more bogs than any other country except Finland. It has almost 1,200,000 hectares of the island which is nearly 1/6 of the country. The bodies of Celtic human sacrifices are still preserved in the bog. The corpses were thrown into the bogs from which they were discovered. Heaney makes sensuous references to these bog victims in a number of poems.

For the Nobel Prize winner, Seamus Heaney, poetry has its own special action and purpose and it has its own mode of reality. In Poetry Society Bulletin, Heaney writes ‘During the last few years there has been considerable expectation that poets from Northern Ireland should ‘say’ something about ‘the situation’... in the end they will only be worth listening to if they are saying something about themselves’.

Heaney provides poly perspectives of Irishness in the anthology. The first section of North contains poems which are rich in mythology and history and the poems in the
last section discuss the political conditions and the plight of living in a divided colonized society.

The bogs for Heaney are repositories where the ‘past’ is preserved. As he digs down in the ‘wet centre’ which is ‘bottomless’, he develops a new relation with old culture. He juxtaposes the past with the present.

Every layer they strip
Seems camped on before
The bog holes might be Atlantic seepage
The wet centre is bottomless.


Heaney, through his poetry, provides a transparent window on the Irish past and present. He gives a mythical version of history. To lay bare the past, he borrows imagery from archaeology, linguistics and anthropology. His mythical versions set the contemporary Irish history, especially the violent campaigns of the I.R.A, against the background of the early Iron Age. The main impetus behind the bog poems were the photographs and the descriptions of the bog people in Glob’s The Bog People:

...through their sacrificial deaths...were themselves consecrated for all time to North’s, goddess of fertility- to Mother Earth, who in return so often gave their faces her blessing and preserved them through the millennia 48

Most of these bog bodies were victims of sacrificial rituals or they were punished by death for crimes. Heaney as an act of compensation gives them a literary space. He resurrects them and makes them speak. Now they can tell their story to the whole world. He gives them back their dignity and their voices. ‘The Grauballe Man’, ‘The Bog Queen’, the Windeby girl of ‘Punishment’ and the girl of ‘Come to the Bower’, they return from the Iron Age to share truths with the whole world. The role of the bog is that of an observer. Silent and patient it watched and waited for centuries for the poet to relieve it of its dark and deadly secrets. It witnessed the atrocities wrecked by man upon
man. It concealed the horrific secrets until they were unearthed by the ‘digger’, Seamus Heaney.

The vital concerns of postcolonial criticism are the search for truth and establishment of an amnesia free perspective. Heaney investigates the bog memories to find the truth. The bog bodies might have been static in the descriptions and photographs, but they to life in Heaney’s poetry. While uncovering the layers of history mummified by nature, guilt envelops Heaney and he feels wretched, and attempts to shoulder ‘a kind of manhood / steeping in to lift the coffins / of dead relations’. These poems elicit of shame and horror but they also suggest the peaceful and non-violent ways of reforming society.

Heaney’s compensation goes far beyond ordinary compensations. He experiences sympathy and empathy with these corpses. As compensation, he even exhibits erotic passion. In ‘Come to the Bower’, the ritual communion with the bog girl is as romantic as any in the seduction poems by John Donne or Andrew Marvell. The only exception is that the beloved is a corpse. Heaney, in this attitude, comes very close to the Romantic Gothic tendency. Heaney’s apparently macabre claims are designed to shock the readers out of complacency.

In ‘The Bog Queen’, he speaks for the first documented body ever dug out of a bog. She is resurrected from the depth of the bogs where she lay waiting for the revelation.

I lay waiting
between the turf face and demesne wall,
between heathery levels
And glass-toothed stone.

(ll 1-4, ‘The Bog Queen’, N)

The poet claims that her body was ‘braille / for the creeping influences’ and ‘illiterate roots’ entangled her. She shares her torturous story ‘I was barbered / and stripped / by a turf-cutter’s spade’. She might have been a sacrificial victim or an
adulteress who had her head shaven by the early Gauls. The I.R.A also tarred and shaved the head of girls who dated the British soldiers. Heaney explained the reason for these sacrificial punishments:

... You have a society where girls head were shaved for adultery, you have a religion centering on the territory, on a goddess of the land, and associated with sacrifice. Now in many fury of Irish Republicans is associated with a religion like this...

Heaney’s empathy for innocent victims and his hostility towards culprits reaches its most confessional pitch in ‘Punishment’. The inspiration once again comes form Glob, who describes how a fourteen year old girl in the first century A.D was led naked out on to the bog with bandaged eyes and a collar round her neck, and drowned in the little pit at the Windeby estate in Scleswig. Heaney describes the punishment by reliving it through powerful imagination:

I can feel the tug
Of the halter at the nape

I can see her drowned
body in the bog,

(ll 1-2, 9-10, ‘Punishment’, N)

Heaney condemns himself as the ‘artful voyeur’ who fantasizes about the event. He drowns in guilt as he can do nothing to stop similar punishments in contemporary times when the Catholic women were still tarred by the I.R.A. The theme of ‘Punishment’ is the core of the poem. The poet tortures himself for compromising with silence, for just being a mute witness to terrible punishments that negated the world’s claim to civilization.

I who have stood dumb
when your betraying sisters
cauled in tar
wept by the railings.

(ll 37-40, ‘Punishment’, N)
The Bog body of Windby Girl

Corcoran comments ‘Heaney’s dumbness is blameworthy, then neither ‘connivance’ nor understanding can excuse it.’ Heaney’s guilt-trip exhorts the reader to do more than simply observe. He skillfully draws attention to universal fear psychosis regarding insurgencies. The very civilized world ironically, contains the same attitude and problems as the primitive world. Violence has just one aspect—barbarism.

‘The Grauballe Man’ is another bog body, ‘poured in tar’ with his ‘slashed throat’. He was discovered in a bog and was named after the town in Jutland near where he was found in 1952. Glob described that his neck was slashed from ear to ear and his naked body was dumped in the bog around 310 B.C. He was a victim of ritual sacrifice. Grauballe Man is retrieved from ‘the peat, / bruised like a forceps baby’, symbolizing a technically assisted new birth. Heaney comments on the myth:

I think poetry is seriously attempting to purge our land of a terrible blood-guilt, and inwardly acknowledging our enslavement to a sacrificial myth. I think it may go a long way towards freeing us from the myth of portraying in its true archaic shape and colour, not disguising its brutality.

Heaney alludes to the ‘Dying Gaul’ (A sculpture known as the Dying Gaul, a copy in stone of the one of the bronzes from the groups of figures of defeated Celts which decorated the Acropolis at Pergamon in second century B.C.) from the poet David Jones. He almost gives him a heroic status. Dying Gaul is an image of heroic death.

....Dying Gaul
Too strictly compassed

(ll 43-44, ‘The Grauballe Man’, N)

Heaney commemorates the bog people through the images of the collective unconscious. In ‘Strange Fruit’, he describes the visage of a beheaded bog girl. She is ‘Murdered, forgotten, nameless, terrible / Beheaded girl’. Heaney’s poetry also traces not only British colonization but also the invasion of the Vikings and the subsequent imposition of their culture. The analogy is drawn between the violence of the Vikings and
The Bog body of Grauballe Man


the violence prevalent in contemporary Northern Ireland. In ‘Viking Dublin’, he comments on the repetitive history of Ireland and prays to the ‘Old father’:

Old fathers, be with us.
Old cunning assessors
of feuds and of sites
for ambush or town

(ll 77-80, ‘Viking Dublin: Trail Pieces’, N)

Heaney alludes to James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. In the *bildensroman*, the protagonist Stephan Daedalus, at the end prays, ‘Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead’ and ‘old father....Merchant and scholar who have left me blood’, from Yeats’s *Responsibilities*, Heaney also alludes to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and Synge’s *The Playboy of the Western World*.

I am Hamlet the Dane,
skull-handeler, parablist,
smeller of rot

(ll 54-56, ‘Viking Dublin: Trail Pieces’, N)

Heaney identifies images and recalls figures from literature. He uses them as expressions of his plight. Heaney, who described his poetry as a ‘slow, obstinate papish burn’, uses the historical epithet of Romans for the British soldiers after the ruthless killing of civil protestors by British army on Bloody Sunday in Derry in 1972. On that Sunday, a civil rights march with almost ten thousand participants, ended in the killing of fourteen unarmed civilians. The differences between Catholics and Protestants became more acute. Heaney mythologizes the situation. In ‘Kinship’, Tacitus is called to witness the internal religious conflicts.

And you, Tacitus,
observe how I make my grove
on an old cragnog
piled by the fearful dead:

(ll 121-124, ‘Kinship, VI’, N)
In *Germania*, Tacitus describes a sacred grove where sacrifices of human beings in public mark the birth of a nation. The German tribe worshipped Nerthus or Mother Earth after drowning the slaves who participated in the rituals. Heaney used the metaphor of ritual sacrifices for mirroring similar killings in contemporary time. He remarks:

> It turn out that the bogs in Northern Europe in the first and second centuries A.D contained shrines of the god and goddess of the time, and in order that the vegetation and the community would live again after winter, human sacrifices were made: people were drowned in the bogs. Tacitus reports on this in his *Germania*... Now in may ways the fury of Irish Republicanism is associated with a religion like this... there are satisfactory imaginative parallels between this religion and time and our own time. They are observed with amazement and a kind of civilized tut-tut by Tacitus in the first century A.D...

In the poem he writes about his motherland and its sectarian problems. He talks about the colonized and divided society.

> a desolate peace.
> Our mother ground
> is sour with the blood
> of her faithful,
>
> they lie gargling
> in her sacred heart
> as the legions stare
> from the ramparts.
>
> Come back to this
> ‘island of the ocean’

(1f 125-134, ‘Kinship, VI’, M)

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* A treatise on Germany by Tacitus, probably published in A.D 98. The treaty describes the geographical and physical characteristics of the country and appearance, political and social customs and dress of the inhabitants; the organization of army; their religion and land tenure; their sloth alternating with war like activity; their intemperance and gambling; the exemplary morality of their family life.

**. Whose praenomen is uncertain and birthplace unknown, was probably born c A.D 55 of a good Roman family, and probably died about the end of the reign of Trajan (A.D 117). It is conjectured from the words in which he briefly refers to his career that he was a military tribune and held one of the offices of the vigintivirate(q.v) under Vespasian, was quaestor under Titus, and praetor under Domitian(A.D 88).
Heaney refers to a colonial situation where Irish ‘tribes’ fight and kill each other in the name of religion. In the line ‘a desolate peace’, he expands on his disapproval of such a peace and hints to *Agricola* by Tacitus. In the monograph British chief Calgacus assails the Roman invader of the country: ‘Robbery, butchery, the lairs call Empire, they create a desolation and call it peace’⁵⁶. The violence of the Irish Troubles is described by Heaney as a gendered struggle between Kathleen Ni Houlihan and ‘a male cult whose founding fathers were Cromwell, William of Orange and Carson’⁵⁷ and whose godhead is figuratively Roman, ‘incarnate in a rex or Caesar resident in palace in a place of London’. The ‘legion’ who ‘stare from the rampart’, as the two divided communities, Catholics and Protestants, kill each other. The strategies of conquest, the poet realizes, are archetypal.

In the poems such as ‘Ocean’s Love to Ireland’ and ‘Act of Union’, Heaney returns to the metaphor of rape for the exploitation of Ireland by the British. Rape is not just the physical exploitation of a body but it, in a larger sense, is the exploitation and subjugation of the psyche as well. Heaney traces the colonial marginalization of a civilization and presents it as the metaphorical rape of an Irish maid by Sir Walter Raleigh. The title of the poem ‘Ocean’s love to Ireland’ is an inversion of Raleigh’s own long poem ‘Ocean’s love to Cynthia’. It expands upon Raleigh’s love for Elizabeth. Heaney’s attempt to write its companion piece with ironical shades can be regarded as an ironic compromise. Homi Bhabha is of the view that colonial mimicry is an ‘ironic compromise’. The poem depicts the rape of a young Irish maid by Sir Walter Raleigh, who tied her to a tree. The poem highlights the colonizer’s masculine superior strength represented through the portrayal of Sir Walter Raleigh against the weaker self of the colonized represented by the Irish maid. Behind the civilization mission can be discerned the naked lust for wealth and power.

* A laudatory monograph by Tacitus on the life of his father-in-law, Julius Agricola, published about AD 98; Agricola had died in A.D 93. Tacitus recounts Agricola’s distinguished ancestry and early military service in Britain in the troubled times when Suetonius Paulinus was governor (the days of Boadicea), his advancement to the quaesitorship and praetorship, to the governorship of Aquitania (A.D 74-6) to the governorship of Britain (A.D 77 or 78). He briefly narrates the history of the successive stages of conquest of Britain by Romans, culminating in achievement of Agricola. It ends with his death and eloquent apostrophe to a great Roman. ⁵⁸
Speaking broad Devonshire
Raleigh has backed the maid to a tree
As Ireland is backed to England

And drives inland
Till all her strands are breathless

(Il 1-5, ‘Ocean’s Love to Ireland’, N)

Robert lacey lifts the curtain from the civilization mission:

He [Raleigh] came to the country, a younger son with a little wealth and no lands to inherit, with the express intention of carving out for himself from the lush and mineral-rich acre an estate whose resource he could never hope to win in England. In Ireland he could- and in due course did secure a castle from which he could lord it over the hapless natives whose leaders, lands and faith it was pride to have taken away. 59

The line ‘drives inland’ connotes the power and force with which Raleigh chased his goal. Raleigh’s masculine force leaves the Irish maid desperate and panting, ‘Sweesir, swatter! Sweesir, swatter!’ The chastity of Irish maid was violated by the rapist. The frailty of her body is depicted in the lines:

He is water, he is ocean, lifting
Her farthingale like a scarf of weed lifting
In front of a wave

(Il 7-9, ‘Ocean’s Love to Ireland’, N)

Heaney uses sexual imagery and sexual linguistics to articulate the weightlessness and ease with which the maid was deprived of her chastity. The state of breathlessness suggests the exhaustion is suggestive of the exhaustion of Irish economic resources by Sir Walter Raleigh after the Desmond rebellion of 1569-73 and 1579-83 in Muster in Southern Ireland. The rebels were the Earl of Desmond dynasty- the Fitzgeriral family or Geraldines-and their allies. They opposed the efforts of Elizabeth English government to extend their control over the province of Munster. The result of the rebellions was the destruction of the Desmond dynasty and subsequent plantation and colonization of Munster with English settlers.
Heaney rewrites history in his poems. He recounts the destruction left behind by Raleigh. After the exploration ‘the ruin maid complains in Irish / Ocean has scattered her dreams of fleets’. Heaney sympathizes with the victim. The maid complains in Irish and she is still attached to her identity distancing herself from the victimizer’s language. Heaney points towards the negligible compensation for her. In the poem ‘Act of Union’, which symbolizes the historical Act of Union in 1801 which abolished the Irish parliament and formally united Ireland and Great Britain into the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Heaney once again evokes the gender-landscape analogy. In the poem, Heaney depicts a man addressing a woman pregnant with his illegitimate child symbolizing the attitude of England to Ireland.

And I am still imperially
Male, leaving you with the pain

(ll 15-16, ‘Act of Union’, N)

The impregnation suggests the dominance of male power and the continuity of the dynasty. Analyzed from this point of view the impregnation refers to the extension of English plantations through sowing of seeds suggesting the role of the father. Heaney says ‘Conquest is a lie’ and removes the veil of charily from the White man’s burden. The female has to compromise with the ‘pain’ bestowed tyrannically upon her. The Irish self is too weak to ‘ignore’ the huge kingdom of Britain.

I am the tall kingdom over your shoulder
That you would neither cajole nor ignore

(ll 9-10, ‘Act of Union’, N)

The ‘Mustering force’ and ‘parasitical’ attitude are too much for the weak Ireland to bear. Heaney continues with the imagery of pregnancy.

I foresee will salve completely your tracked
And stretch marked body, the big pain
That leaves you raw...

(ll 26-28, ‘Act of Union’, N)
The rapist Britain dominates Ireland the ravished maid and brands her with 'stretch marked body' and 'big pain' as a mark of brute supremacy of masculinity of the colonizers. This refers to the psychological and historical scars of colonial neurosis.

In 'Funeral Rites' the funerals of the contemporary victims of Northern Irish violence and the burial of Gunnar, one of the heroes of Njal Saga is juxtaposed. Njal Saga is an epic of Icelandic literature by an anonymous author which describes the progress of blood feuds and covers the period of Christian conversion in 999 and the details of Battle of Clontarf outside Dublin in 1014 A.D. Magnusson is of the view that the epic recounts 'the years of savage internal strife, murderous intrigues, and ruthless self-seeking power-politics that lead, in 1262, to the loss of independence that [Iceland’s] pioneers had created'.\(^{60}\) Heaney draws a parallel between the sectarian violence of Catholics and Protestants and the ethics of revenge of Norsemen of the saga. He talks of the years of the savage internal strifes and the religious enslavement or the colonization of society through religion. The people are 'shackled in rosary beads' and they 'pine for the ceremony'. The victims are 'disposed like Gunnar / who lay beautiful / inside his burial mould'. Heaney desires a better society free from all social and religious conflicts. He visualizes an undivided healthy society where the Irish would live sans the shackles.

the great chamber of Boyne,  
prepare a sepulchre  
under the cupmarked stones.

(ll 41-43, ‘Funeral Rites’, N)

The ‘Boyne, scene of victory in 1690 is celebrated annually by Ulster Loyalists and it insists on a common ground shared by both the Catholics and Protestants. Heaney hopes that those victims who were ‘disposed like Gunnar’, may remain ‘unavenged’ by the present time Norsemen. Neil Corcoran is of the view that the poem ‘urgently desires an end to the terrible cycle, but it can imagine such a thing only in a mythologized visionary realms’\(^{61}\). Heaney moves to the histories of primitive cultures that are similar to the violence-ridden Northern Ireland.
the hatreds and behind-backs
of the althings, lies and women,
exhaustions nominated peace,
memory incubating the spilled blood.

(ll 25-28, ‘North’, N)

In ‘Belderg’, he talks about the excavated Norse settlements in Co. Mayo. He explains the Scottish, English and Irish words which had their influence on the name of his family farm, Mossbawn, in Preoccupations, he explains the word ‘moss’ as:

...a Scotts word probably carried to Ulster by the Planters, and bawn, the name the English colonists gave to their fortified farmhouses. Mossbawn, the planter’s house on the bog. Yet ... we pronounced it Mossbann, and the ban is the Gaelic word for white...In the syllables of my home. I see a metaphor of split culture of Ulster.62

The ‘fortified farmhouses’ hint at the physical colonial divisions between the colonizers and the colonized. ‘Fortification’ depicts a narrowness of vision. Strong walls separate the colonizers from the colonized. The walls symbolize distrust, hatred and fear. The colonizers who pretend to have come with a goodwill mission actually had hidden agendas.

The fortification is a projection of this hypocrisy. In another poem the allegory of colonization is presented through the mythologized version of ‘Hercules and Antaenues’. Hercules is ‘sky-born and royal’ while Antaenues is a ‘mould-hugger’. Heaney empathetically relates with the banished and innocent who are compromised with such myths. He laments the fate of defeated the Antaenues. Hercules is a hero who defeated the native Antaenues by removing him from his source of strength in the soil.

and lifts and banks Antaenues
high as a profiled ridge,
a sleeping giant,
pap for the dispossessed.

(ll 29-32, ‘Hercules and Antaeus’, N)
The only ray of light for the oppressed people is that the ‘sleeping giant’* may one day break their shackles of enslavement. The defeated Antaenus becomes an icon of martyrdom, providing ‘pap for dispossessed’. Heaney provides a hopeful compensation for the dispossessed.

Heaney implies a great deal in ‘Whatever You Say Say Nothing’, which he wrote just after ‘an encounter / With an English journalist’, who is ‘in search of ‘views / On Irish thing”. He talks about the contemporary media maniac society and highlights how serious issues are either trivialized or sensationalized to provide ‘news’ for the urban public. The world has become so insensitive, self centered, inhuman and indifferent that ‘bad news is no longer news’. The media covers every corner of the world. This is a world ‘Where media-men and stringers sniff and points, / Where zoom lenses, recorded and coiled leads / Litter the hotels’. They are involved in covering violence and political affairs. Violence and the internal conflict are given prime slots and Heaney presents his concerns for a society that is becoming more and more aberrative.

‘Oh, it’s disgraceful, surely, I agree.’
‘Where’s it going to end?’ ‘It’s getting worse’
‘They’re murderers.’ ‘Internment, understandably…”
The ‘voice of sanity’ is getting hoarse.

(II 21-24, ‘Whatever You Say Say Nothing’, N)

Heaney projects the barbarity of war which results in people becoming roofless and seeking refuge in camps as internees. Each day a ‘new camp’ is established.

I saw the new camp for the internees:
A bomb had left a crater of fresh clay
In the road side, and over in the trees
Machine-gun posts defined a real stockade.

(II 50-53, ‘Whatever You Say Say Nothing’, N)

*. The in Greek mythology, sons of Ge, said to have been produced when the blood from the mutilation of Uranus fell upon her. they were monstrous beings, partly human, of vast size, with serpents for feet. They rose against the gods and attacked them, but were defeated and imprisoned in the earth. 63
Poetry, the ‘voice of sanity’, is a reflection of its society but it is also ‘getting hoarse’. The raw material of a contemporary poet is drawn from the grim realities of the contemporary world. Heaney’s concern is for healing the world and presenting a futuristic vision where the world is not divided by political boundaries. He offers compensations through his poetry. Heaney, the poet, internalizes the sorrows and sufferings of humanity and tries to reduce the pain in the ideal sphere of poetry. This poetic compensation may be viewed as the poet’s tribute to Ireland in particular and to humanity at large.

The second section of *North* was an attempt at some kind of declarative voice. The section is prefaced with the lines from Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* and W.B Yeats’s *Autobiographies*. Wordsworth is from the land of colonizer where as Yeats is from the land of colonized. The epigraph from *The Prelude* provides a comment on ‘fair seedtime’ of his childhood where he ‘grew up’ and the ‘beloved Vale’ to which he was ‘transplanted’ and the lines from Yeats present a nationalist desire to die fighting the Fenians against the Orangemen.

The colonizers have always engineered tactics of ‘divide and rule’; Orangeism is an ideology that promotes and protects the dominance of Protestants over Catholics. These tactics have been used by colonizers over the centuries to create sectarian problems in Ireland. In a declarative voice Heaney recounts the divided society of Protestants and ‘Catholics’ who ‘in general, don’t speak’. In fact Heaney belongs to the Catholic community himself and he speaks for them. In an interview with Frank Finahan, he claimed:

> The community to which I belong is Catholic and nationalist. I believe that the poet’s source now, and hopefully in the future, is to maintain the efficacy if his own “mythos”, his own political and cultural colouring rather than to serve any momentary that his leaders, paramilitary organization or his own liberal self might want him to serve.  

In the poem ‘Orange Drums’ he talks about the ideological differences between them and Protestants who refused to acknowledge the leadership of the Pope.

61
To every cocked ear, expert in its greed,
His battered signature subscribes ‘No Pope’.

(II 10-12, ‘Orange Drums, Tyrone,1966’, N)

‘Summer 1969’ describes the sectarian violence which shadowed the life of Irish people. Peace vanished and fear engulfed them.

A sense of children in their dark corner
Old women in black shawls near open windows

(II 9-10, ‘Summer 1969’, N)

Heaney’s world is disharmonized and the ‘death-count’ is increasing at an alarming rate as the ‘two berserks club each other to death’. ‘Exposure’, which closes the sequence ‘Singing School’ and North, is an appropriate conclusion to the anthology. It was written after Heaney moved away from Belfast to Eire in Co. Wicklow in 1972 ‘with a young family of my own and a slightly less radio set, listening to the rain in the trees and news of bombings closer to home’65. The title of the poem has multiple meanings. It points to his exposition of the truth, thus filling the historical amnesia and also to his openness in living in communion with natural surrounding. Heaney has quoted a section of ‘Exposure’ in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Crediting Poetry:

Feeling puny in my predicaments as I read about the tragic logic of Osip Mandelstam’s fate in the nineteen-thirties, feeling challenged yet steadfast in my non-combatant status when I heard, for example, that one particularly sweet-natured school friend had been interned without trial because he was suspected of having been involved in a political killing. What I was longing for was not quite stability but an active escape from quick-sand of relativism, a way of crediting poetry without anxiety or apology 66

The poem is a reflection of the psyche of Heaney- his responsible tristia as a poet who wishes to articulate the voice of the community to which he belongs. Heaney, in the poem, is exposed to the cold weather of December at Wicklow when he went to see a comet. A sense of failure covered him when he ‘missed / The once-in-lifetime portent, /
The comet’s pulsing rose’. Heaney is gripped by dilemmas, doubts and second thoughts in the poem. However his vision is renewed when he is recalled to the ‘The diamond absolutes’ of his vocation as truth teller.

I am neither internee nor informer;  
An inner émigré, grown long-haired  
And thoughtful; a wood-kerne

(II 30-32, ‘Exposure’, WO)

Heaney is neither an ‘internee’ nor ‘informer’. He is ‘a wood-kerne’ or one of the rebels of Irish history who took to the woods, when defeated, in order to prepare for further resistance.

Conclusion

From the publication of Death of a Naturalist (1966) to North (1975), Heaney seems to adopt the modus operandi of ‘digging’ and ‘exposing’. The first poem of the first anthology Death of a Naturalist, is ‘Digging’ which resonates with the notion of excavation and the concluding poem of the fourth anthology North is ‘Exposure’. The poet commences a programme with ‘Digging’ through poetry for ‘Exposure’ of truth. In the process of the poetic excavations, bogs, attract the poet’s attention. Geogory Schirmer notes ‘Heaney has developed the image of the bog into powerful symbol of continuity of human experience’ 68. Heaney explores the theme of Northern origin and Irish Identity through recollections and negotiations. He explores his sense of place in poems of the Gaelic tradition of dinnseanchas.

Heaney has evoked mixed responses from the literary circle. A number of poems deal with Heaney’s memory of farm, familiar and filial. The canvas of Heaney’s early anthologies such as Death of a Naturalist and Door into the Dark, is crowded with the people living far from the madding crowd. Helen Vendler remarks ‘at first Heaney aggrandized and consecrated his infant world’69.
Heaney's use of mythology, politics and history has received reductive responses from critics such as Ciaran Carson and Edna Longley. Carson referred to Heaney as 'a mythmaker, an anthropologist of ritual killing, an apologist for 'the situation' in the last resort, a mystifier'\(^70\) where as Longley argues that Heaney 'exclude the inter-sectarian issues...by concentrating on the Catholic psyche as bound to immolation to savage tribal loyalties\(^71\). Seamus Deane, however, tries to dilute the charges:

The poems express no politics and indeed they flee conceptual formulation with almost indecent success. Instead they interrogate the quality relationship between the poet and his mixed political and literary traditions. The answer is always the same. Relationship is unavoidable, but commitment, relationship gone vulgar, is a limiting task. Neverthe less commitment is demanded during crisis.\(^72\)

Heaney confessed to Robert Druce:

When people are killing one another, what are you doing?....And that I came to this notion that, in a time of politics or violence, it wasn't artistic function just to be liberal and deplore it but if you believe in one set of values over the other, to maintain those values in some way. You needn't necessarily maintain that belief by writing political poetry or writing deploring army....But I think you can write about, or out of a sensibility or set of images which imply a set of values.\(^73\)

Richard Murphy maintains that Heaney's poetry is 'seriously attempting to purge our land of terrible blood-guilt'\(^74\) Parker claims that in 'Traditions' that 'Correct Shakespearean remind Heaney of the defeat'\(^75\). Heaney however uses the poem as a platform to criticize and compensate for the wrongs done to the Irish people by the colonizers. The argument, however, has certain limitations. Heaney is neither a simple anthropologist of ritual killing nor he is a mystifier. He digs down the layers of history not for the sake of anthropology but to lay bare the truth. He searches for the image and symbols to suit the predicament of the conditions of Northern Ireland. He makes compromises with academic disciplines like history and anthropology to rehabilitate the futuristic vision.
References


7. Heaney, p. 56.


11. All the quotations are from Seamus Heaney, Death of a Naturalist (London: Faber, 1996) cited here as DN.


21. All the quotations are from Seamus Heaney, *Door into the Dark* (London: Faber, 1969) Cited here as *DD*.


37. Stallworthy, p 166.


41. Murphy, Andrew, Seamus Heaney, (Tavistock,Devon: Northcote House, 2000) p. 32.
42. Broadbridge, E, Seamus Heaney: Interview, Copenhagen: Denmark Radio 1977.
43. All the quotations are from Seamus Heaney, Wintering Out (London: Faber, 1972), cited here as WO.
44. Heaney, Preoccupations p 57-58
45. Broadbridge, E, Seamus Heaney: Interview, Copenhagen, Denmark Radio.
49. Ibid, p 114.
50. Corcoran, Seamus Heaney p. 117.
54. Harvey, p 186.
55. Ibid, p. 413.
57. Harvey, p 14.
58. Heaney, Preoccupations, p 57
61. Corcoran, p 111.
63. Harvey, p 188.
66. Ibid, p.419.
67. All the quotations are from Seamus Heaney’s North (London: Faber, 1975) cited here as N.
73. interview with Robert Druce, op.cit, p 27
74. Murphy, p 39.
75. Parker, p 98.