Chapter 3

Lure of the Souterrain: The Land and the Tenets

Heaney's poetic ideology is associated with the factors of continuity and resistance; and this chapter is a study on how the poet retraces his steps into the past and explores certain larger areas which in strange ways provide the thread of continuity. It also attempts to show how in Ireland resistance itself is a continuing phenomenon. Though the tendency of reaching back to the past to find poetic material is seen throughout his poetic career, the early books of Heaney are concerned with affirming his identity as a Catholic poet of Northern Ireland writing in English, the language of his rulers. The first five volumes, *Death of a Naturalist, Door into the Dark, Wintering Out, North* and *Field Work* alone are here taken into consideration to prove that Heaney in the early phase of his poetic career digs into antiquity to see himself clearly in the context of his country's space, time and mindset and establish himself exclusively as an Irish poet. Once the individuation is achieved, the poet finds himself free to transcend and cross the boundaries and the later poems reflect this growth.

In "Toome," a poem in his third volume of poetry, Seamus Heaney writes,
I push into a souterrain
prospecting what new
in a hundred centuries'
loam, flints, musket-balls,
fragmented ware,
torcs and fish-bones
till I am sleeved in
alluvial mud that shelves
suddenly under
bogwater and tributaries,
and elvers tail my hair. (WO)

"Souterrain" is an ancient underground burial chamber and Heaney does not stop pushing through the loam of the recent past but goes beyond to delve deep into the alluvial mud and the bogwaters. The "flints" and "musket-balls" in the poem above would refer to the days of British military supremacy but the "torcs" and "fish-bones" suggest pre-historic and primeval times. Morrison comments, "The final Medusa-like image has echoes of evolution theory or may be intended to suggest that the poet has restored contact with what he has described as the valuable 'life-forces' that prevailed in Ireland before Saint Patrick banished the snakes" (44).
This ubiquitous "hankering after the underground side of things" (Heaney, *Preoccupations* 21) is the result of the "conflicting" recognitions, self-division, inner quarrel" and a hybrid identity that Heaney has inherited as Northern Ireland's Catholic poet. Obviously he shows resistance to the baggage which he could not part with, which only forces him to "wrong-foot" and which creates in him a feeling of "in-betweenness" and inadequacy. In *The Redress of Poetry*, Heaney writes that one of the unignorable causes of the problem is the frontier that divides "Britain's Ireland from Ireland's Ireland" and it has "entered the imagination definitively" (188). Heaney's reaction is to regress, to go back to the past when Ireland was Ireland, when the divisions of North – South, British – Irish, English – Gaelic, Unionist – Nationalist, and Protestant – Catholic were unheard of, and when there was an undivided identity. In a lecture given at the Royal Society of Literature in October 1974, Heaney announces that poetry is "divination" and the efforts of his predecessors like Yeats and others of this century "to define and interpret the present by bringing it into a significant relationship with the past" should be "urgently renewed" (*Preoccupations* 60).

The four prominent entities which have left an indelible mark in the development of the Irish nation, as seen in the poems of Heaney, are the following: the political history marked by numerous invasions which resulted in inheriting a mixed identity of the
subjected people; culture and traditions that are kept alive by the racial memory; religious consciousness and mythos that had been prevalent at various times and had invaded their world view; and lastly, the topographical features that have both changed and defied change. These four areas are scrutinised and their effects are examined in the following sections.

[1]

It is inevitable that the political history of the nation supplies part of the heritage, for in a nation that has been possessed and repossessed, the invasions and the ensuing establishments set the milieu in which a person is born and brought up. The recent past is filled with British colonial aggressiveness that brought about the divisions in the island and among its inhabitants. Heaney goes back further into the Viking past and the partly mythic, partly historic days of the Celtic tribes.

Ireland, commonly known as 'Emerald Isle' has a long and rich history, yet a chequered one fraught with conflicts, violence and bloodshed. Around 600 B.C., towards the end of Irish Bronze Age, the first Celtic invaders, led by powerful clan chiefs and armed with superior weaponry began to establish themselves by warring on one another. The Nemedians who were the first to settle were overrun by the Fromorian pirates followed by the Firbolgs. Tuatha de Danaan, the magic-practising tribes of goddess Dana were the next
to conquer, though they were later displaced by the Milesians. The internal strife ceased for a while and with the arrival of Christianity in the fifth century A.D., Ireland flourished in scholarship and arts (Nicholson 18).

In A.D. 795, Ireland was once again troubled by the plundering raids of the Vikings who were extremely brutal and destructive. The Norman invasions in the twelfth century were less devastating because they assimilated with the Gaelic-Irish. The Tudors conquered Ireland in 1534 and Henry VIII brought about in due course the submission of the principal Gaelic and Anglo-Irish chiefs. Despite oppositions, he became the supreme head of the Church of Ireland. Ireland was largely Roman Catholic and during the time of Elizabeth there was a great resistance to any design of making Ireland Protestant. Settlers were brought in large numbers and Catholics were barred from positions of authority in both public and civil life. The bitter resentment that was seething boiled over in 1641. Since then, the sectarian attitudes have become stronger and atrocities committed by both sides have increased. Apart from the massacres and oppression, famine and disease took their toll. In December 1921 Britain signed a compromise treaty making twenty-six southern counties into dominions. In 1949 these counties finally left the British Commonwealth and became Republic of Ireland. Six counties of Ulster in Northern Ireland chose to stay with the
British. Thus the divide was firmly established and the frontier firmly set (Nicholson 19-25; Kee 33).

“Bog Oak” is a poem that shows the domineering attitude of the British conquerors and its effect on Heaney. A “black, long-seasoned rib” of oak retrieved from the bog and carted to become the first thatch in a building brings to the poet, images of the “moustached dead” and “the creel-fillers“, the Irish Gaels of a bygone age. He makes out,

Edmund Spenser,
dreaming sunlight,
encroached upon by
geniuses who creep
‘out of every corner
of the woods and glennes’
towards watercress and carrion. (WO)

These “geniuses” were the survivors of the war in Munster after which, in 1598, 400,000 acres of land were confiscated and granted to the English families. Landless, the natives became wood-kernes, exiled in their own country searching for watercress and carrion for survival. Spenser writes about them in his A Vewe of the Present State of Irelande:

Out of everie Corner of the woods and glinnes they come
Creeping uppon theire handes for theire leggs could
not beare them, they loked like Anatomies of deathe, they spake like ghostes Cryinge out of their graves, they did eate the dead Carrions, wheare they Could find them...

(qtd. in Annwn 112)

Commenting on Spenser's report, Heaney writes in *Guardian*, "From his castle in Cork, he [Spenser] watched the effects of a campaign designed to settle the Irish question . . . . At that point I feel closer to the natives, the geniuses of the place" (qtd. in Andrews 50). This identity finds expression in "Exposure", the final poem in *North* where Heaney calls himself a "Wood-kerne", an "inner émigré."

The conquerors not only deprived the natives of their land and livelihood but were insensitive to the core. The dramatic monologue, "For the Commander of the 'Eliza'", shows the attitude they had towards the Irish during the time of the Great Famine. The persona of the poem is the English naval captain of Eliza, a patrol boat off the coast of West Mayo. Between 1845 and 1849 "in two seasons, one after another, the harvest was suddenly blighted. Hundreds of people were starving. Fever followed famine and numbers died" (Johnstone 175). As most of the Irish peasants lived on potatoes which they grew themselves, the famine, by starvation, disease and emigration, reduced Ireland's population by two million people. On board, the crew of Eliza had plenty of flour and beef but as he had
no mandate, the captain had to refuse food to those who were rowing towards them for help. They were,

Six grown men with gaping mouth and eyes
Bursting the sockets like spring onions in drills.
Six wrecks of bone and pallid, tautened skin.
‘Bia, bia
Bia’.

The British captain reports:

Sir James, I understand, urged free relief
For famine victims in the Westport Sector
And earned tart reprimand from good Whitehall.
Let natives prosper by their own exertions;
Who could not swim might go ahead and sink.

(“For the Commander of the ‘Eliza’” DN)

Sir James Dombrain was the Inspector General of the Coast Guard Service and was in charge of the Relief Commission.

The insensitivity of the rulers and their dehumanizing responses are brought into contrast with the suffering humanity that becomes “violent without hope.” The commander of the “Eliza” who seems to be sympathetic is bound to obey orders and hence his human sensitivity is subordinated to his role as a British official. The poem thus does not show one man’s inhumanity to another, but illustrates the political power that could reduce a human
relationship into the ruler and the ruled. The pathos is furthered by
the epigraph from Cecil Woodham-Smith's *The Great Hunger* and
the usage of the Irish word for food, "bia", but it is the indignation
and the submerged anger of the poet that stand out, though his
presence is skillfully hidden. The indignation of the poet is not
always oblique. "Docker", one of his early poems which appears in
*Death of a Naturalist*, is outrightly critical of a Protestant "ship
yard worker probably of Harland and Wolff's, the giant Belfast yard
which has been a place where 'no Catholic need apply'" (Blackburn
193). Though the poem was written in the early sixties when
troubles were far less, Heaney feels, "That fist would drop a hammer
on a Catholic – / Oh yes, that kind of thing could start again;"
("Docker" *DN*).

The fiftieth anniversary of 1916 Easter Rising brings to
Heaney's mind an earlier rebellion in 1798 of the "Croppy boys" who
revolted against the English land lords. They were mercilessly
slaughtered and "thousands died, shaking scythes at cannon. / The
hillside blushed." ("Requiem for the Croppies" *DD*). The superior
foreign technology prevailed over the native patriotism but past is
not a dead past in Heaney. It has the energy to reconstitute and
perpetrate. The narrator speaks from beyond the grave. He had been
one of the "Croppy boys" who had been on the run and not having
the facilities to cook, the rebels had stuffed their coat pockets with
barley. When they were mowed down "without shroud or coffin".
earth claimed them “And in August the barley grew up out of the grave.” The casual-looking barley image is symbolical of the continuity of resistance and the poem augurs renewal of violence, and it proved to be so. The encounter between Protestant yeomen and Catholic rebels was reenacted during the summer of 1969 in Belfast, two months after the book was published. The British occupancy kept widening the gap between the colonisers and the natives.

Before the British, there had been other invaders. Watching the sea at County Down, the poet’s mind sees wave after wave of new invaders. He bids,

Listen. Is it the Danes.
A black hawk bent on the sail?
Or the chinking Normans?
Or currachs hopping high
On to the sand?           (“Shoreline” DD)

Ireland has three thousand miles of breathtaking coastline and the sea in the past has served more as a passage rather than a fortification. The shoreline, constantly exemplifying intrusion, becomes an emblem of Ireland’s political history that has never been at peace. Arklow, a town mentioned in the poem “Shoreline” was originally established by Vikings. Four centuries later, the Normans took over and the town was given to Theobald Butler by the Norman
King John. In spite of the attempts to stabilize, "the region was never completely conquered nor even completely peaceful" (Molino 46). The Wexford insurgents were repulsed at Arklow during the 1798 uprising. The succession of conquests seems to have made resistance a way of life.

Heaney's fourth volume *North* is concerned with the divided culture. The structure of the book itself is created in such a way that Part I is completely about the Irish past and Part II is concerned with the immediate conflicts in Ulster. Even the language, verse form and tone of these two sections are different. Part I has several poems that trace the Viking history and have references to the life before the Viking period. An archaeological find, a piece of bone kept at the Viking Dublin exhibition at Irish National Museum, stirs Heaney's memory of the old Vikings. For him, the bone with a specific design incised on it, is not just a find of dead past, but it is an artistic piece of work reminding him of his own creative output. Finally, he remembers the Vikings and names them thus:

neighbourly, scoretaking

killers, haggers

and hagglers, gombeen-men,

hoarders of grudges and gain.

("Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces" *North*)
and calls after the manner of Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce's

*Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*:

Old fathers, be with us.

Old cunning assessors

of feuds and of sites

for ambush or town.

("Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces" *North.*)

Stephen's apostrophe was Joyce's effort to "forge the uncreated conscience of the [Irish] race" (253) and Heaney follows suit.

If in "Viking Dublin: Trial Pieces", Heaney seeks help from those "fabulous raiders", in "North" he gets it. Their "longship's swimming tongue" tells the poet to remain faithful to his instinctive, sensuous intimacy with the world. But it also gives a sweeping historical summary to prove its relevance as a theme for the poet:

it said Thor's hammer swung
to geography and trade,
thick-witted couplings and revenges,

the hatreds and behindbacks
of the althing, lies and women,

exhaustions nominated peace,

memory incubating the spilled blood. ("North" *North*)

The compulsion to find a lost origin and a time of unity, as a member of a dispossessed community, is seen clearly in "Belderg", a
poem in the same volume, *North*. Once again Heaney finds the continuity of Irish history in the Scandinavian past. The poem opens with the assertion of a friend about the quernstones unearthed out of a bog. He says that they “were thought of as foreign.” But the poem goes on to show that they are not foreign but part of Ireland’s complex past and prove their “congruence of lives.” The friend suggests how the historical ages of iron, flint and bronze ushered in through the invaders supplied “growth rings.” Each grinding stone adds to the formation of a column of vertebrae which gives the power to stand up and resist. This leads the poet to discuss the name of his farm, “Mossbawn” which has a forked root. In English it could mean “planter’s house on the bog” and in Irish or Gaelic “the white moss” or “the moss of bog cotton.” But the friend is quick to point out the “older strains of Norse” in the word “Moss”, and the poet sees in his “mind’s eye” “A world-tree of balanced stones, / Querns piled like vertebrae, / The marrow crushed to the grounds” (“Belderg” *North*). The “world-tree” refers to Yggdrasil, the ash tree of Norse legend which supported the cosmos and whose roots extend through the whole universe. The poet visualises a nation that has inherited a multiple tradition due to the arrival of various tribes. The quern stone also is a common tool in the agricultural society and it exemplifies the “congruence of lives” and is a symbol of belonging to a larger community that lives beyond the shores of Ireland. The word ‘quern’ recurs
in some form or another in many branches of the Indo-European family of languages: . . . the recurrence of the word *quern* in so many languages suggests a genetic relationship among languages and cultures, a coexistence of similarities and differences. (Molino 98)

Going back through the political and cultural traumas of Ireland, Heaney finds that terror, savagery and violence have always been the sustaining power of Irish past. Like the quern stones threaded together like vertebrae, Ireland is the amalgam of many traditions and it is true that the changing historical and political structures have made Ireland what it is — a firm and resolute nation. But it is also true that the "marrow" is "crushed." Several other poems in the first five volumes like "Midnight", "Tollund", "Triptych", "Oysters", "Punishment", "Ocean's Love to Ireland" and "Act of Union", also look backward in trying to find the present.

[2]

Heaney is also interested in the collective unconscious of his race, the alluvium that has stored for centuries customs and beliefs, fears and formulas that quietly direct the non-rational behaviour of his people. C. G. Jung in his *Symbols of Transformation* says:

The unconscious, on the other hand is universal: it not only binds individuals together into a nation or race, but
unites them with the men of the past and with their psychology. . . . In loving this inheritance [archetypal contents of unconsciousness] they love that which is common to all; they turn back to the mother, to the psyche, which was before consciousness existed, and in this way they make contact with the source and power which comes from the feeling of being part of the whole.

(177 – 178)

In “Kinship”, a poem in the collection *North*, Heaney writes,

I step through origins
like a dog turning
its memories of wilderness
on the kitchen mat:

I love this turf-face,
its black incisions,
the cooped secrets
of process and ritual;

Ireland is basically a farming community and the long coast and the abundance of loughs have also contributed to the thriving fishing industry. The labour done in contact with the earth and the waters is not seen as mere labour, a means of livelihood. There is an aura and a mystery about it, a feature that has come down from the pre-scientific days when the natural laws and phenomena and the
seasons were less understood. Both the elements of water and earth are like a womb-grave, that which gives birth and sustains but also claims back her sons. Hence there is a fatalistic passivity and fear of the unknown deep in their consciousness. The earth and the water symbolise fecundity and hence are female in form. The human being who comes into contact with it, as a priest to the goddess, must be male. Hence we see established roles of the sexes in the farming and the fishing community,

"The Wife's Tale" included in *Door into the Dark* very clearly depicts the roles of men and women. The wife brings food to the men working in the farm, spreads the linen cloth, calls them, pours the drink, butters the thick slices of bread and serves without a single word. He, the husband most probably, nods satisfaction at her white cloth on the grass and comments, "I declare a woman could lay out a field! Though boys like us have little call for cloths." He proudly declares that it was a good yield. The poem then closes with the following lines spoken quite subserviently:

I'd come and he had shown me
So I belonged no further to the work.
I gathered cups and folded up the cloth
And went. But they still kept their ease
Spread out, unbuttoned, grateful, under the trees.
The resentful narrator of “Shore Woman” remembers a frightening experience at sea on a night’s fishing trip. Her male companion, who could be her husband or father, was quite insensitive to her feelings. They met a school of porpoises and she asked him to return to the shore because she believed, as her people believed, that “They will attack a boat.” But he thought “it was a yarn / My people had been fooled by far too long / And he would prove it now and settle it” (WO). May be this disregard for ancient beliefs was itself responsible for taking a woman in his boat: “The woman is an outsider, she has no experience of the routines of fishing; indeed according to tradition, it is bad luck for a woman to be in the fishing boat at all. By allowing her to be there the man defies superstitious belief” (Andrews 70). She “lay and screamed” while he was brutally negligent to how she felt, and long after, she remembers only her hurt feelings and not how he disproved myths for obviously they have survived. She finds “safety” in the shore, walking alone in the moon light or she does that “to get away from him / Skittering his spit across the stove” (“Shore Woman” WO). The poem subtly imparts the feeling that these beliefs may be irrational but they have a sustaining power. The poem’s epigraph is a Gaelic proverb, “Man to the hills, woman to the shore.” The woman and the man have two different worlds and an interlacing of the two proves to be destructive as we see the woman to be seething
with hatred and revulsion and the break in their relationship is apparent.

The ritualistic nature that is manifested in the work of the farmers and the religious awe that coexists can be clearly seen in “At a Potato Digging”, “The Seed Cutters” and “A Lough Neagh Sequence.” In “At a Potato Digging” the labourers “fumble towards the black Mother” with bowed heads and bent trunks.

... Centuries

Of fear and homage to the famine god

Toughen the muscles behind their humbled knees,

Make a seasonal altar of the sod. (DN)

Thomas Foster comments, “This poem stands as his earliest invocation of the earth as mother-goddess-lover, demanding tribute, worship, sacrifice, as it is of kneeling or stooping as a characteristic Irish position” (16). “The Seed Cutters” the second dedicatory poem in North gives a picture of those who cut the seed potatoes. “They kneel under the hedge in a half-circle “and leisurely halve each root revealing “a milky gleam, / And, at the centre, a dark watermark.”

In fishing too, this phenomenon is seen. Heaney’s “A Lough Neagh Sequence” is a sequence of seven poems that describes the life of the eel and the ritual-like catching of the fish. Ronald Tamplin is of the opinion that in this poem Heaney is “more intent on examining a state of being” (39). Both the eel and the fisherman
of Antrim and Tyrone who fish in this large inland stretch of water are primarily instinctual and obey the compulsion of a deeper self, one responding to an agitating gland and the other to the time-honoured tradition. The poem is dedicated to the fishermen who are sticklers to the old ways of fishing. Weirs have been built near the Toomebridge and from time to time eels are caught "Five hundred stones in one go." But these fishermen speak of "fair play" and "confront them one by one / And sail miles out, and never learn to swim." When questioned they reply fatalistically, "we'll be the quicker going down" and "The lough will claim a victim every year" ("Up the Shore" DD). The dangers are accepted stoically and there is an acceptance of the fact that the water, their sustainer, like the Mother Earth, could be a devourer as well.

The fishers "pursue the work in hand as destiny." Everything about the whole process is described in terms of a ritual, as responding to the elemental energies and caught up in a mysterious cycle. The worms for the bait are caught "When lamps dawdle in the field at midnight, / When fishers need a garland for the bay / And have him, where he needs to come, out of the clay" ("Bait" DD). The small hooks that go forth to meet the eel become a "bouquet" and the bait "a garland." "The oars in their locks go round and round. / The eel describes his arcs without a sound" ("Setting" DD). The wakes of the boat are interwoven and Heaney sees the fishermen drawing the line and welcoming each eel abroad. The last poem of the sequence,
"Vision" shows a grown-up watching the eels crossing the land. This fresh water fish migrates through rivers and over the damp grass to the sea and breeds in salt water. The elvers find their way up rivers into lakes and ponds. When Heaney was a boy he was told that unless he combed his hair properly the lice would form a rope and drag him into the water. Years later as he watches the eel with fascination he is pulled towards the water in a different way. He closes the poem, "Time / Confirmed the horrid cable." ("Vision" DD).

According to Dick Davis, "The evocation of the subterranean and subaqueous in Heaney's poetry is in part an exploration of . . . a potency both destructive and fecund" (Curtis 32). In his creative moments Heaney's rapport with the past establishes connection as is shown in his rope and cable images.

Heaney is not only not critical of this old-world practices but is rather appreciative of their functions. In Preoccupations he talks about how they made the world "more magical than materialistic" and helped to discover a confidence in their place. The legends and folk beliefs bound the people of the Irish place to the body of their world (135). His analogies and metaphors are rich with the Irish customs and beliefs and a knowledge of these Irish practices enhances the understanding of the poems. "Brigid's Cross" and Halloween turnips appear in Heaney's poems as symbols. The harvest bow made by his father and described as

In wheat that does not rust
But brightens as it tightens twist by twist
Into a knowable corona,
A throwaway love-knot of straw.

("The Harvest Bow" FW)

becomes a symbol of hope, love and continuance. The green rushes cut on Brigid's Eve, the first of February, and plaited into crosses were supposed to bind them to the beneficent spirit of St. Brigid. (Heaney Preoccupations 33). Heaney remembers how a neighbour made these crosses 'plaiting all of us into that ritualized way of life' and how his father "plaited harvest bows from the new corn and wore them in his lapel. Halloween and the turnip, that homely and densely factual root became a root of some kind of evil" (Preoccupations 134).

Heaney immortalizes in his poems some of the traditional art and skills which had been practised for centuries. To the modern Irish taste and needs, these may be outmoded and archaic but when Heaney brings them all before his mind's eye with a boyish wonder and a mysterious dimension, he describes them in ecstatic terms. The celebration is not for any one particular artist as such but for all craftsmen who in some way caught the elemental energies and made it palpable to the ordinary people and gave them a sense of continuity in their temporal world, thereby providing a taste of eternity.
The folk singers plucked their strings "Re-turning time-turned words, / Fitting each weathered song / To a new-grooved harmony" ("The Folk Singers" *DN*). Their humming "solders all broken hearts:" even "Death's edge / Blunts on the narcotic strumming." ("The Folk Singers" *DN*). In "The Last Mummer" Heaney laments the disappearance of the mummers. "Of course an ancient tradition lies behind the mumming which might have originated as mock-drama mumming the death and resurrection of the Divine Priest-King" (Annwn 113). His popularity has been usurped by the 'luminous screen' around which people sit "charmed." He waits for a long time "behind them" but nobody wants St. George, Beelzebub and Jack Straw to "be conjured from mist", ("The Last Mummer" *WO*).

The thatcher, the diviner, the cairn-maker and the blacksmith are skilled workers whose skill and practice do not exclusively belong to Irish tradition. Yet to Heaney they are of the Irish past and he is proud of them. They may not be needed any more but just as he asserted earlier that he would 'dig' with the pen, he identifies himself with them so that in his own way he could be what they were to the community. "The Diviner" does not simply tell about how the "forked hazel stick" jerked "broadcasting" the spring water's "secret stations." The final quatrain narrates how the by-standers held the rod which "lay dead in their grasp till nonchalantly / He gripped expectant wrists. The hazel stirred." (*DN*). Not only does
the diviner tap the latent source and assuage the thirst, but he also gives the experience of the mysterious stir. Heaney himself would have felt the gripping of the wrist.

The cairn-maker "piled up small cairns after cairns" in the Burren. It is an area in County Clare where there are remains of chambered cairns built by an earlier generation. Cairns were erected as a covenant with gods and as the cairn-maker builds among the existing ones, there is a strange affiliation

To what was touched and handled there,
Unexpected hives and castlings
Pennanted now, claimed by no hand:

("Cairn-maker" WO)

The thatcher like a magician turns up one morning and in his own leisurely and confident way begins his work. He pokes, flicks, twists, fixes, snips, sharpens, bends, shaves and flushes and stitches his materials and leaves "a sloped honeycomb, a stubble patch, / And left them gaping at his Midas touch" ("Thatcher" DD). Heaney's description of this wonder shows a mixture of skill and something transcendent, and the phrase "Midas touch" suggests that it is a gift. In his Preoccupations Heaney talks about the craft and the technique, the blending of which produces good poetry. "Craft is the skill of making" and technique "involves the discovery of ways to go out of his normal cognitive bounds and raid the inarticulate: . . . it
is a gift of being in touch with what is there, hidden and real" (47). The poet, in his own way, makes the commonplace, special, the straw, gold.

The blacksmith is not seen in action in the poem “The Forge.” His service station had seen better days. The axles are old and the iron hoops are rusting. The blacksmith recalls days when horse-drawn carriages necessitated his active contribution. What attracts the poet is the dark space where the anvil stands like “an altar” where the blacksmith could “beat real iron out” (DD). Heaney explains that the poem “uses the dark active centre of the blacksmith’s shed as an emblem for the instinctive, blurred stirring and shaping of some kinds of art” (qtd. in Stallworthy 164). The image of “altar” makes the blacksmith a priest who mediates between the perceiver and the object which is hidden to the common eye. The celebration of these country crafts shows the poet’s desire to honour the past and to find a continuity in his craft.

The excavation into Ireland’s cultural past reveals that many of the old practices are founded upon beliefs that border superstitions and hence appear meaningless in the present context. Some arts and crafts have become extinct and some gasp and plod. Yet the contact with the origins gives a sense of identity and belonging to the poet, and makes him a part of the whole. Heaney for awhile was interested in Field Day Theatre in which Brian
Friel's *Translations* was produced. In that play, the hedge school master advises the Irish students to constantly renew the images of the Irish past. If they cease, they would "fossilize" (qtd. in Molino 22). Heaney has taken the hint.

Religion plays a major role in the development of human consciousness because it explains the unknowable, gives meaning and direction to one's life, and thus colours one's perceptions. Religion, here, does not only refer to the institutionalised patterns of getting in touch with the creator God. It also includes something more. David Steindl-Rast, an anthropologist and psychologist, who excels in dialoguing of Oriental and Western spirituality, says, "The quest of the human heart for meaning is the heartbeat of every religion" and "to find meaning means finding how all belongs together and to find one's place in that universal belonging" (35;37). In the pre-scientific days and before the major religions came into being, myths held a powerful sway over the minds of the people and even wriggled their way in and found a place in the religious practices. According to the French linguist Maurice Leenhardt, myth is primarily "an expression of the living experience of the community." Levy Bruhl explains that in archaic cultures "they gain their knowledge of the world through mystical participation in reality and that this knowledge is expressed in myths." According to
Mircea Eliade, "myth reveals a primitive ontology – an explanation of the nature of being" (Long).

The religious and mythic tradition had been strong in Ireland for long. Before the Celts came to Ireland, the Phoenician Spaniards were in contact with the natives of the island as dispensers of commerce and religion. Thomas Moore writes, "But the remarkable fact contained in this record [Journal of Hanno and Himilco] – itself of such antiquity – is, that Ireland was then, and had been from ancient times, designated 'The Sacred Island'' (Moore 8). The tutelary deities of Ireland were known beyond its shores and the Celtic religion was a kindred one and so the building of cairns, erecting of stones, pillars and sacred memorials continued without any clash with the new religion.

The sacred grove and well – the circle of erect stones surrounding either the altar or the Judgement-seat – of all these known and acknowledged features of the ancient Celtic worship, . . . there remain, to this day, undoubted traces and testimonies, not only in the traditions and records of Ireland, but in those speaking monuments of antiquity which are still scattered over her hills and plains. (Moore 18 – 19)

Druidism came to Ireland from Britain and the Druidical class introduced learning and hence poetry and astronomy began to
flourish. Tuathá-de-Danaan, another tribe which invaded Ireland learned the art of necromancy from Greece and landed in Ireland, secretly "under cover of a mist which their enchantments had raised" (Moore 77). With them came the sorcerer's spear, the magic cauldron and such beliefs which blended without any hitch with the existing beliefs. Christianity entered the island even before St. Patrick came in A.D. 432 but it was his fervour and urgency which stood as a threat to Druidism. Many other Christian missionaries followed St. Patrick and it took almost a century for Christianity to become the national religion of Ireland and even then the Irish Catholicism did not come under the Roman discipline, and the older rituals, beliefs and practices were adapted into the Christian lifestyle with a few changes. It was only in the late sixteenth century that Ireland once again faced the compulsion of changing her faith. The settlers who came in large numbers were Protestants and the intrusion which took place in politics, community life and religion brought only indignation. "Roman Catholicism, for better or worse is so much part of the atmosphere of Ireland that Irish national identity can seem inseparable from it" (Kee 53). But Protestantism was identified with the rulers and hence alien, and so Ireland, which in the course of history had absorbed several streams of religious belief, resisted the new religion and became divided.
Being a Catholic, a Catholic in Northern Ireland, entails certain positions. Heaney in his interview with June Beisch says, “To have been brought up Catholic, as in my case, with some idea of eternity, is to live for ever with some sense of the provisional or secondary nature of historical experience” (168). Menna Gaillie, in *You’re Welcome to Ulster* says, “We know our place, us Catholics, that’s why we’ve the mark on us. the humility you are baptised into . . . . If you are an RC over here that makes you political” (qtd. in Giddings 38). Though Heaney readily identifies himself as a Catholic, in order to find his place in the universal belonging, he goes backward trying to understand the pre-Christian religions and their rituals and what they have bequeathed to the posterity.

“In Gallarus Oratory” illustrates how worshipping inside the chapel is rather oppressive: “it’s like going into a turf stack, / A core of old dark walled up with stone / A yard thick.” It only makes the devotee “a reduced creature” caught “under the black weight of their own breathing.” God does not seem to be in there. But, “how he smiled on them as out they came, / The sea a censer and the grass a flame”(*DD*). In “The God in the Tree”, a lecture that was later published in *Preoccupations*, Heaney speaks about the early Irish poetry, the distinctive feature of which is to celebrate the lush wild forest trees and the flora and fauna of the country side. After the introduction of Christianity, the Irish nature poetry included “the Christian discipline, the sense of a spiritual principle and a religious
calling that transcends the almost carnal lushness of nature itself” (183). “There was another god in the tree, impalpable perhaps but still indigenous, less doctrinally defined than the god of the monastries but more intuitively apprehended”(186). Heaney then goes on to describe his experience at Gallarus Oratory, a small chapel in County Kerry:

Inside in the dark of the stone, . . . I felt the weight of Christianity in all its rebuking aspects, its call to self-denial and self-abnegation, its humbling of the proud flesh and insolent spirit. But coming out . . . I felt a lift in my heart, . . . This surge towards praise, this sudden apprehension of the world as light, as illumination, this is what remains central to our first nature poetry and makes it a unique inheritance. (Preoccupations 189)

P.V Glob’s _The Bog People_ introduced Heaney to the cult of Nerthus, the fertility goddess of the bogs to whom ritual sacrifices were made. “Their murder in winter, and the disposal of their bodies in bogs sacred to the goddess, would ensure the fertility of the crops the following spring” (Corcoran, _Student’s_ 78). According to Carlanda Green,

the ring, or more specifically the torc, was the single distinguishing characteristic of the earliest representations of Nerthus. Many of her victims wore neckrings or nooses suggesting that they were
consecrated to the goddess to ensure fertility of crops, animal and man as well. Man's sexual union with or marriage to the goddess is a central aspect of the cult of Nerthus. (5)

Heaney's poem "Nerthus" describes her image as "an ash-fork staked in peat, / Its long grains gathering to the gouged split:" (WO). The wooden image has no markings except the sign of its sex gashed where the fork begins. In Heaney's work it stands for regeneration and creativity and the image he uses is that of a ring.

In "Poem", addressed to his wife, Heaney says that she should "arrange the world" "within new limits" and they would perfect within their "golden ring" the child that potters in his brain (DN). There is a circularity in the movements of eels and elvers and all those that are associated with them: their migration from fresh water to the sea and back to fresh waters, the lough claiming a victim every year, the fishermen's oars going round and round and finally the vision of "the eels crossing land / Re-wound his world's live girdle" ("A Lough Neagh Sequence 7" DD). "The Plantation" talks about the traveller who penetrates the "picknickers' belt" and finds "charmed rings", "toadstools and stumps / Always repeating themselves," (DD). The bogland is like "the cyclops' eye." The narrator of "Land" lies with his "thigh-bone / and shoulder against the phantom ground," in a shamanistic stance. He says, "if I lie with
my ear / in this loop of silence / long enough" he would find himself "snared, swinging / an ear-ring of sharp wire" ("Land" WO).

The Tollund man exhumed from the "cauldron bog" is "Naked except for / The cap, noose and girdle" ("The Tollund Man" WO). The quern stones unearthed in Belderg are round and they are reminders of various cultural influences which have been healthy too as "growth rings" to a tree ("Belderg" North). The "Field Work" sequence keeps referring to the vaccination mark that is like "an O that's healed into the bark" ("Field Work" FW). Images of moon, sun, sunflower, eggs, golden apples, holes, circles in hell appear in his poems and most often like the torc of Nerthus they serve as a noose. But just as the cyclical nature of night and day and winter and spring, resurrection and rejuvenation comes after death and the release of creativity follows after being held up in darkness and depths. It anticipates Heaney pushing forward once he emerges from the "souterrain."

Sacrifice is a phenomenon that looms large in most religions, and a motif of several cosmogonic myths is the act of sacrifice. In the Babylonian myth, Tiamat's sacrificial body is the earth and in the Hindu myth that is recounted in the Rig Veda the entire world is the result of sacrifice by the gods. (Long). The corner stone of Christianity is the fact that Jesus Christ offered himself as a sacrifice and thereby secured the salvation of mankind. The Celtic
religion believed in a literal continuing sacrifice. In his *Myth and Legends Series*, T. W. Rolleston observes,

In the *Book of Leinster* it is stated that on Moyslaught, ‘the Plain of Adoration’, there stood a great gold idol, Crom Crauch (The Bloody Crescent) To it the Gaels used to sacrifice their children when praying for fair weather and fertility – it was milk and corn they asked from it in exchange for their children. (65)

In the article “Mother Ireland” in the *Listener* Heaney himself explains,

It turns out that the bogs in Northern Europe in the first and second centuries A.D. contained the shrines of the god or goddess of the time, and in order that the vegetation and the community would live again after the winter, human sacrifices were made: people were drowned in the bogs. Tacitus reports on this in his *Germania* (qtd. in Hart, “History” 403).

Most of Heaney’s “bog poems” are about the victims of such ritual murders. To Heaney, they become objects of admiration and reverence. “The Tollund Man” is the first bog poem which appears in the third volume *Wintering Out*. This iron age corpse reposing in the museum at Denmark is described as “Bridegroom to the goddess” and

She tightened her torc on him
And opened her fen,
Those dark juices working
Him to a saint's kept body,

Heaney decides to go on a pilgrimage to see him, and pray to him "to make germinate" the seeds that have fallen on the present day Irish ground, the corpses that are "scattered, ambushed" and "laid out", especially of the four brothers who were the victims of the B-specials in 1920s. In his interview with Randall, Heaney confirms his religious feelings when he wrote the poem, after seeing the photographs and descriptions of P.V. Glob in his *The Bog People*:

“When I wrote that poem, I had a sense of crossing a line really, that my whole being was involved in the sense of – the root sense of – religion being bonded to some thing, being bound to do something. I felt it a vow." (qtd. in Andrews 65). Hart comments, “Heaney treats deity and victims as one, as if, having ‘died’ into spiritual and sexual marriage with the goddess, the devotee cannot be distinguished from the object of devotion” (“History” 404).

The victims seem to possess the power to replenish the living with virility. This has been a primitive belief and James Frazer in "The Dying God", the third part of his voluminous study in magic and religion, *The Golden Bough*, answers the question why the ancient tribes put a man god or human representative to a violent death. They put to death their kings when still healthy “In order that the divine spirit which he has inherited from his predecessors
while it is still in full vigour . . . the fertility of men, of cattle, and of the crops is believed to depend sympathetically on the generative power of the king . . .” (27). In some communities, instead of kings they chose young men for these fertility rituals.

“The Grauballe Man” celebrates one such victim found in 1952 in Jutland. According to Glob, his neck was slashed from ear to ear and his naked body was dumped in the bog around 310 B.C, during the mid-winter celebrations. After six stanzas of detailed description of the body which has defied decay, Heaney questions, “Who will say ‘corpse’ / to his vivid cast?” and shows him as a baby forced out of the bog-womb: “out of the peat, / bruised like a forceps baby”(North). In the next three stanzas, images of sacrifice and forgiveness, and sacrifice and undying resistance criss-cross. The Grauballe man is perfected in his memory as one with red nails, “hung” “with beauty and atrocity” with the actual weight of the hooded victims who are punished for their crimes even in the present day Ireland. The image that emerges is that of Jesus who hung on the cross, nailed to it, bearing the weight of punishment that is to be executed on the human race. It was atrocious and yet because the voluntary sacrifice spelled forgiveness and freedom, it was beautiful as well. The reference to “the Dying Gaul” in the poem echoes “the Dying God” but also refers to the statue of the naked Gaul. “an emblem of the colonized provincial dying as he seeks revenge on an indomitable imperialist” (Hart, “History” 407). There
is beauty in the way they faced death and in the courage to break rather than to bend, but to a civilized mind the atrocity is also glaring.

"Kinship" is another bog poem in the volume North where the "love-nest" of the Mother Goddess who is both a mother and a lover is focused on rather than the "strangled victim". The bog is called the "insatiable bride", a "seedbed" and a "melting grave" and "as they raise up / the cloven oak-limb", the wooden image of Nerthus, the Earth goddess, Heaney says, "I stand at the edge of centuries / facing a goddess." The enchantment with the heroic dead partly disappears when he comes to the sixth and final part. He proclaims,

Our mother ground
is sour with the blood
of her faithful,
they lie gargling
in her sacred heart

The goddess "swallows our love and terror." To an Irish Catholic, the words, "mother", "faithful" and "sacred heart" are loaded ones, and the subtle reference to Mother Mary and the sacred heart of Jesus and the faithful being saved and not swallowed, only makes the position of the poet more ambiguous.

The murder of the British Ambassador to Ireland, Christopher Ewart-Biggs in 1976 is the immediate context of "Triptych", a three
part poem in *Field Work*. In the first part, "After a Killing", "two young men with rifles" remind the poet of the "unquiet founders", the English monarchs, Cromwell’s army and the "Blacks and Tans" of the British. What they had done then, boomerangs now. In the next section the poet asks the Sibyl "What will become of us?" and she uses the imagery of resurrection: "unless the helmeted and bleeding tree / Can green and open buds like infants’ fists", Ireland would be doomed. For the resurrection to happen, first "forgiveness" has to find "its nerve and voice." "The helmeted and bleeding tree" could be Ulster which needs the turning into green, the Irish national colour. But the image also telescopes the cross, the bleeding tree on which the cycle of revenge stopped because of the forgiveness pronounced by Jesus to those who crucified Him. Elmer Andrews comments thus:

There is a big difference between this and the mystical, wishful kind of poetical ‘germination’ Heaney had entertained in *North*. Out of sympathy for the slaughtered Irish he had sought to turn them into saints and heroes and fertility gods, and their deaths into a manifestation of the ‘life-force’ rather than a defiance of it . . . . Heaney’s Sibyl is detached from all the traditional female representations of Ireland especially in the last stanza, where the traditional territorial numen, the insatiable goddess, is held responsible for
engendering atavisms that flout the life-force principle and leave the country ‘full of comfortless noises’. (136)

One cannot but remember Stephen Dedalus's comment, “Ireland is the old sow that eats her farrow” (Joyce 208). The choice of Sibyl in preference to other female images reveal a change that has come over in the poet's attitude.

The third part of the “Triptych”, “At the Water’s Edge” shows the failure of religions to usher order and harmony to the blighted island. Devenish, Boa and Horse Island are the three islands in Lough Erne. The monastic remains in Devenish were “crumbling like bread on water.” On Boa, the poet says, the pre-Christian sex mouthed stone “answered my silence with silence.” On Horse Island an army helicopter, called “one-eyed god” elsewhere, was patrolling. The poet next sees a hammer and a cracked jug on the windowsill, symbols of violence and the resultant destruction. He then says,

Everything in me
wanted to bow down, to offer up,
To go barefoot, foetal and penitential,
And pray at the water's edge, (FW)

though there is no indication that he took the intended pilgrimage. Instead he remembers their protest march at Newry, conducted a week after the Bloody Sunday massacre on Jan. 30, 1972, in which the British soldiers shot thirteen civil right marchers.
Water has been the symbol of life-giving principle to all races and fountains and wells were held sacred among the Irish (Moore 4). Commenting on the poem, Carlanda Green says,

Heaney turns from the killing to the living waters which he has always associated with the Earth Mother . . . . Giver and taker of life, she is the source of understanding for the poet and the source of renewal for modern man. The edge of the bog, lake or stream is holy ground for Heaney. (11)

This desire to be in touch with the elemental energies is accompanied by certain postures and attitudes as well. In his interview with Frank Kinahan, Heaney explains why he describes himself as a Catholic writer:

I mean that the specifically Irish Catholic blueprint that was laid down when I was growing up has been laid there forever. I think of the distrust of the world, if you like, the distrust of happiness, the deep pleasure there is in a mournful litany, the sense that there's some kind of feminine intercession that you turn to for comfort—this is part of the Irish Catholic thing. (408–409)

He goes on to say how the Catholic postures and attitudes are more supplicatory than those of the Protestants. The Irish Catholics have a “more elegiac and tragic view of life; they're less trusting in perfectibility” (Kinahan 409).
The water's edge is sought more for comfort than for its restorative or regenerative power. The phrase “the water's edge” brings to mind the Irish legend about King Lir who sought the water's edge to assuage his pain. King Lir married a jealous woman called Aoife who decided to kill her stepchildren. First she planned to drown them, but changed her mind and turned them into swans with human voices. The King, mad with grief, preferred to be close to his children and spent the rest of his life at the water's edge (Nicholson 27). Heaney's feelings nudge him to seek comfort in his religious beliefs but his memory takes him elsewhere. The poem “At the Water's Edge” ends with the scene of the protest march at Newry. Deaths seem to revive the poet's commitment to resist, though violence and bloodshed need not be part of it. Heaney's religious sense shows a dialectical tension between awe at the sacrificial deaths and an indecisive helplessness at the atrocities the religious fervour creates in a civilized society.

[4]

To one in exile or to one whose land has been seized, land has special connotations. In a review of Glob's *The Mound people*, Heaney has said, “In Ireland our sense of the past, our sense of the land and even our sense of identity are inextricably interwoven” (qtd. in Andrews 54). In his backward trudge to find himself, he explores the land which to him is a “stable element” and to which
they “must look for continuity.” Yet this hallowed ground had not been the same through the course of history. In 1833, the Ordnance Survey of Ireland was done by the British Corps of Royal Engineers which “mapped and surveyed Ireland and translated the Irish place names into English and introducing ‘national schools’ to educate Irish speaking children through English” (Corcoran, After 5). Edward Said opines thus:

More than any other of its colonies, Britain’s Ireland was subjected to innumerable metamorphoses through repeated settling projects and in 1801 through Act of Union. Ordnance survey . . . redrew land boundaries to permit valuation of property and permanently subjugate population. The survey had the ‘immediate effect of defining Irish as incompetent [and] . . . Depress[ing their] natural achievement. (226)

Heaney associates the places and the rivers with the past, before the British tampered with them. In “Gifts Of Rain” he visualises the flooded Moyola, the local river of Heaney’s first home, and in its airs he could hear the pre-historical whispers:

I cock my ear

at an absence –

in the shared calling of blood

arrives my need

for antediluvian lore.
Soft voices of the dead
are whispering by the shore
that I would question
(and for my children’s sake)
about crops rotted, river mud
glazing the baked clay floor. (WO)

He chooses not only to trace the pre-historical and the pre-colonial associations but also chooses to use a genre of Irish poetry called “dinnshenchas”. Dinnshenchas refers to “poems and tales which relate the original meanings of place names and constitute a form of mythological etymology” (Heaney, *Preoccupations* 131).

Most of the names that are mentioned in the first five books of Heaney are not known outside Ireland and all of them have a history. They are special to the poet because these places, and the landscape itself, have had a formative influence on him and they provide him a heritage and a sense of belonging. He is indeed proud of them. John Drinkwater says thus in his *Patriotism in Literature*:

Loyalty to one’s place is seen in mapping out the chosen landscapes. Place names have been common enough in English literature from the time when Chaucer lay in ‘Southwerk at the Tabard’ and watched the folk gathering ‘from every shires ende of Engelond.’ (143)

To Heaney, strangely, it strengthens his divided loyalty. In his interview with Seamus Deane, Heaney confides that the writing of
the etymological poems gave him a sense of release and joy and convinced him

that one could be faithful to the nature of the English language-for in some sense these poems are erotic mouth-music by and out of the anglo-saxon tongue—and, at the same time, be faithful to one's own non-English origin, for me that is County Derry. (qtd. in Hart, "Poetymologies" 217)

Two types of place name poems are found in Heaney: one in which the name of the place becomes the title of the poem wherein the place is the subject matter; the second is where the places are referred to casually or they provide a background to what is narrated.

Wintering out, Heaney's third volume contains three poems, "Toome", "Anahorish" and "Broagh", which like the dinnshenchas relate the original meaning of the names and go deeper into the mythological etymology. "Toome" evokes the past by the word "Toome" and the place it refers to. Toome is situated in Bann Valley and it has been the site of major archaeological finds. The name "Toome" is derived from the Celtic word "Taim" which means a "burial mound". The area does have a lot of underground chambers which are thought to be burial mounds and later they were occasionally used to store smuggled goods and arms. It was also the
site of the Irish rebellion in 1798 and at Toome Bridge the Irish nationalist McCorley was hanged after the rebellion. So when Heaney begins the poem with the words, “My mouth holds round / the soft blastings, / Toome, Toome,” (“Toome” WO), the word Toome “evokes the ‘blasting’ of British cannon fire as well as the pun on Tomb” (Molino75).

With every word, the past is unearthed and associated with political, historical and mythical strata, from the recent past to the primeval days. The final image in this poem “Toome” of elvers tailing his hair resembles Gorgon or Medusa heads which was popular in Celtic Ireland. It is a frightening figure for in the myths anyone who looked at Medusa will be turned to stone. “Torcs” and bogwater are remindful of the sacrifice to Nerthus. Being “sleeved” in the mud under the tributaries and elvers tailing his hair, has echoes of the Cuchulain legend. According to the saga “Cattle-Raid of Cooley”, Mór-rígu, the war goddess whom Cuchulain had previously offended, wanted to take revenge on him when he was fighting a single combat with Loich. So she took the form of an eel and wound around his legs under water. When he stopped to disengage, Loich wounded him severely on his breast (Hyde 325). Heaney’s “prospecting” has shown that the past at all times has been full of violence and bloodshed.
"The Toome Road" is a poem in *Field Work* and is also a fusion of the past and the present. Early one morning the poet sees "armoured cars" "all camouflaged with broken alder branches, / And headphonated soldiers standing up in turrets." The whole country was sleeping. He indignantly questions, "How long were they approaching down my roads / As if they owned them?" The poem then moves backward:

Sowers of seed, erectors of head stones . . .

O charioteers, above your dormant guns,

It stands here still, stands vibrant as you pass,

The invisible untoppled omphalos.

The invasion has been in all areas. The atmosphere, ecology, the emotions of the people and the land have been ruined. Early in the morning when "warbling" is to come from the birds an armoured convoy comes "warbling along on powerful tyres." Alder, a native Irish tree, praised in the Celtic lore as,

The alder is my darling,

all thornless in the gap,

some milk of human kindness
cursing in its sap. (qtd. in *Preoccupations* 187)

becomes a camouflage. The people are afraid of bad news. Heaney calls the Toome road "my" road, and the intrusion is clearly pointed out when he says that the British soldiers behaved as if they owned them.
The poem unlike ‘Toome’ ends in an optimistic note. The omphalos “stands vibrant”, and is “untopped” and “invisible.” In “Mossbawn”, Heaney explains, as has been earlier referred to, that omphalos, meaning the naval, is the conical stone at Delphi that was supposed to mark the central point of the earth. In 1940 as the American troops “groan towards the aerodrome at Toomebridge, ... the pump stands, a slender iron idol, snouted, helmeted, dressed down with a sweeping handle, painted a dark green and set on a concrete plinth, marking the centre of another world ... the plunger slugging up and down, omphalos, omphalos, omphalos” (Preoccupations 17). The “invisible” omphalos may refer to the underlying Irish spirit which could get its substance from deep within. The “sowers of the seed” know the seed germinates and the “erectors of the headstones” believed in a continuing life: “a dead hero is buried in a crouched position like a foetus in the womb, awaiting rebirth (Graves 212). From these basic beliefs the Irish spirit draws strength and defies destruction.

“Anahorish” means “place of clear water” and the first part of the poem “Anahorish”, presents the pristine beauty of this place which is aptly named. Heaney is proudly possessive and opens the poem as “My place.” Anahorish is the English transliteration for the original Irish sounds “Anachfhioruisce” of which the poem says, “soft gradient / of consonant, vowel-meadow.” Ronald Tamplin comments that “the first hill” is “associated with other beginnings, ‘spring’,
'bed', ‘wells’, ‘dunghills’ which are all points of source or life and growth.” So “in celebrating it he celebrates his Irish roots, his origins”(41). But the poem gives an after-image and the last part does not show a place of clear water where springs wash into grass and darkened cobbles:

with pails and barrows

those mound dwellers
go waist-deep in mist
to break the light ice

at wells and dunghills.  (“Anahorish” WO)

The past and present are mixed and just as the name has lost its Irish quality, the land had lost its Edenic loveliness.

“Broagh”, pronounced as “Bruach” is another poem which celebrates the oral tradition of Irish language. Broagh means riverbank but the word has not found its way into English dictionaries. Other words like “rigs” meaning “furrows”, “docken” meaning “docks” and “pad” meaning “path” that are used in the poem are dialectal. Here, the poet relates the land with the language and subtly points out the political implications. The bank

ended almost

suddenly, like the last

gh the strangers found
difficult to manage.(“Broagh” WO)
Neil Corcoran reports:

Heaney says that the word 'Broagh' is 'a sound native to Ireland, common to Unionist and Nationalist, but unavailable to an English person'. This community of pronunciation is an implicit emblem for some new political community; ... Exhilaratedly riding on its own melting, it acts as a linguistic paradigm of a reconciliation beyond sectarian division. (Student's 90)

Heaney's second, third and fifth volumes are dotted with names of places which are rich with the residuum of the past. Antrim, Tyrone, Wicklow, Mayo, Strangford. Arklow, Carrickfergus, Derrygarve, Cave Hill, Boa, Castledawson, Boyne, Kildare, Burren, Ballyshannon, Devenish, Newtown, Hamilton, Drogheda and Slane are some of the names, the utterance of which gives pleasure to the poet and at the same time refer to the endless levels of history and tradition that constitute the Irish consciousness. Mayo is in County Connaught, and archaeological excavations show that it had been a Viking settlement. Strangford and Arklow also were Viking strongholds. But when the Normans came later they established themselves in the old Norse centres. Kildare was annexed to Arklow. Carrickfergus Castle was built by the Normans and in 1316 after a year's siege, during which time the inhabitants were said to have resorted to cannibalism, Carrickfergus fell to the invading forces of Edward Bruce (Molino 46). Later it was used as a presbytery and a
garrison town. It was at Cave hill that Wolf Tone and his colleagues vowed in 1795 to strive until Ireland was independent. Derrygarve, which Heaney calls the “smooth libation of the past”, is a river that flows into Moyola around which are seen “rath and bullaun” which means pre-historic hill-fort and a ritual Gaelic basin stone. Antrim has a henge monument dating from the Neolithic period.

The Irish landscape in all its variety is presented in the poems of Heaney. Riverbanks, rivers, waterfalls and loughs, sea and seashore, peninsula and islands, the farm yards, potato drills, whinlands and cornfields are seen as objects of continuity not only because they continue to be, but also because they have the potency to provide moments of flash back to the poet. For instance, watching girls bathing in Galway the poet is urged to say,

No milk-limbed Venus ever rose
Miraculous on this western shore
A pirate queen in battle clothes
Is our sterner myth. (“Girls Bathing, Galway 1965” DD)

History speaks of Anne Bonney, an Irish woman who left the west of Ireland and became a famous pirate. The reference could be also to Morrigan the Celtic goddess of the sea who loves to see men drown and preys upon battle fields.

It is the bog which dominates North and which gets the honour of being the Irish myth equivalent to the frontier being a
myth to the American consciousness. Watery ground has always had an attraction to Heaney, may be because it was “forbidden ground.” “Moss-holes were bottomless”, he was told, but when he bathed in the liver thick mud in a moss hole he had felt initiated. In “Feeling into Words” Heaney says that the bog had a “strange assuaging effect” on him. It was like “memory of the landscape” because of its preserving nature. He called it “national consciousness.” In “Bogland” the closing poem of Door into the Dark and the first of the many bog poems, Heaney describes,

The ground itself is kind, black butter
Melting and opening underfoot
Missing its last definition
By millions of years.
They'll never dig coal here.
Only the waterlogged trunks
Of great firs soft as pulp.
Our pioneers keep striking
Inwards and downwards,

Edna Longley comments,

He [Heaney] opens his proper door into the ‘matter of Ireland’ by imagining history as an experience rather that a chain of events . . . by discovering within his home-ground a myth that fits the inconclusiveness both
of memory and Irish history and by fusing the psychic self-searching of poet and nation. (Curtis 68)

As Heaney keeps striking "inwards and downwards", he finds much of the past continuing in some form in the present or the surfacing of something after a period of rest like the corpses from the bog or the internecine feuds. But certain things have died out. A part of Irish landscape has been wiped out and Heaney feels for the loss of the oak groves and expresses it in "Bog Oak":

The softening ruts

lead back to no

' oak groves' no

cutters of mistletoe

in the green clearings. (WO)

Oak was the tree of Dagda and other thunder gods and the prime symbol of Druidic religion. Thomas Moore writes,

The Oak, the statue of Celtic Jove was here [Ireland] as in all other countries, selected for peculiar consecration; and the Plain of Oaks, the Tree of the Field of Adoration, under which the Dalcassian Chiefs were inaugurated and the Sacred Oak of Kildare, show how early and long this particular branch of primitive worship prevailed. (46)
Mistletoe was also held sacred and its presence was inevitable at religious occasions.

The Druids held their ceremonies out of doors and many of these were connected with the worship of trees, particularly the oak. Oak groves were sacred places. Whatever grew on a tree was a gift from heaven, and this was especially true of mistletoe which at great events was cut with a golden knife by a Druid. The ceremony was accompanied by the sacrifice of two white bulls. ("Druids")

When Christianity was introduced the groves were destroyed. The Druids with their long beards and white robes cursed the intruders and managed to prevent the plunder for awhile. But the oak wood being strong was largely used for building purposes and as the fear of the Druids was soon allayed, the oak groves vanished.

To Heaney the oak groves and the mistletoe-cutting ceremonies were more than part of the romantic past. It was a centre that held the Irish people together, giving them a sense of being a part of the whole and to Heaney the poet, it was even more than that. In "The God in the Tree" he says that some authorities think that "the role of the file, the official poet in historic times, was continuous with the role of the Druid in archaic times." He would like this possibility because "the root of the word 'druid' is related to doire, the oak grove, and through that the poet is connected with the
mysteries of the grove, and the poetic imagination is linked with the barbaric life of the wood, with Oisin rather than with Patrick” (Preoccupations 186). With such associations it is but natural that Heaney delves into the past because the present is rather bleak and centreless.

Heaney’s journey into the past, as has been revealed in the poems dealt with in the previous paragraphs, shows that his nation’s past has been one of resistance and bloodshed. In the summer of 1969 when the murderous encounters between the Protestants and the Catholics started, Heaney found himself in a difficult position. He wanted to understand the psychology of violence and the religious intensity behind it. It was at this time that he found Glob’s book in which were the details of the preserved bodies of men and women who were sacrificed to the Mother Goddess found in the bogs of Jutland. Here he found a link and in “Feeling into Words” he writes:

Taken in relation to the tradition of Irish political martyrdom for that causes whose icon is Kathleen Ni Houlihan, this is more than an 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 the long
rites of Irish political and religious struggles.

*(Preoccupations 57–58)*

Heaney was criticised for ritualising and thus justifying murders and the atrocities committed by both Irish Catholics and Ulster Protestants. But it was not a justification that Heaney was providing. For the Vikings and the followers of the Druidic religion fighting and murdering had a different meaning from what it was to the British Christians. In *The Dying God* Frazer reports, “The heathen Norsemen believed that only those who fell fighting were received by Odin in Valhalla.” Hence it was even a practice to wound and kill a dying person with a spear so that he would receive admission in the Happy Isle (13–14). The British had a different reason for killing. Calder in his *Revolutionary Empire* says that the murdering of Gaels was from the start considered to be “patriotic, heroic and just” for the royal army. Spenser in his *Veuve of the Present State of Irelande* proposes that since the “Irish were Barbarian Scythians”, most of them “should be exterminated” (qtd. in Said 222).

The Celts, Vikings and the British who shed blood in one way or another were urged to do so because of the belief systems that had control over their conscious and unconscious minds. Hence it becomes an “archetypal pattern”, a ritual to Heaney. Yet there is a difference between the Britishers and the non-British invaders. To the Fertility cults, bloodshed rejuvenated the living. To the Vikings,
killing qualifies them to enter Valhalla. But the British were spurred by a patriotic zeal that aimed at the extirpation of what they thought was an inferior race. This difference is shown by Heaney's reaction – a wonder that borders veneration when he encounters the tribal rituals, and an indignation at the Protestant conquerors who could tell the Irish,

And I am still imperially
Male, leaving you with the pain,
The rending process in the colony,

... No treaty
I foresee will salve completely your tracked
And stretchmarked body, the big pain
That leaves you raw, like opened ground again.

("Act of Union" North)

This discussion thus affirms that in the first five books of Heaney, there are several poems which take the reader back into the historical, cultural, religious and topographical past of the nation and these assist the poet to find himself in line with his ancestors though the antithetical note of resistance is also evident. In the pre-Christian ways of venerating the elemental energies and in the mystification of skills and labour, the poet finds a kinship with his vocation. The very topography of his island helps him to sketch 'Wordscapes'. But the British manoeuvring that has resulted
in a split and the perpetration of bloodshed that finds sanction in the name of religion or patriotism and the oppressive ways that are found in both politics and religion cause him to resist. The identity and continuity phenomena find their intertwined manifestation in the creative work of Heaney.