Chapter 1

Introduction: The Making of the Poet

Any study that proposes to trace the elements of continuity and resistance in the poems of Seamus Heaney needs to have a good look at the literary and communal heritage which are vital to the making of the poet. The socio-political elements of a nation can either be the shaping spirit of a writer or a stumbling block to his creativity. Colonisation, among the many evils it has wrought, has been responsible for causing a dichotomy in the minds of the writers especially with regard to identity and the actualization of artistic sensibilities. The poet in Heaney has to face the dilemma of serving the cause through art and subordinating art for the cause. In the Irish literary scene, writers have responded in various ways to the question of identifying themselves with the tradition or resisting it. The development of Heaney as a creative writer is a process in which he has not evaded the issues of appropriating the tradition and participating in the political resistance. The aesthetic and the political issues have had their say in his emergence as one of the significant voices of contemporary Ireland. The reading of Heaney’s works could be done with profit and understanding when the distinguishing phases of his creative career are identified and analysed. “Tradition” and “resistance” are chosen as key terms to
study how Heaney's thinking evolves and the question of "two-mindedness" is resolved.

This introductory chapter places Heaney in the Gaelic-Irish and the Anglo-Irish poetic traditions which have moulded him. The first section traces the role of the poets in the pre-Christian and Christian Ireland before the British conquest and the nature of their output. It also presents a brief survey of the Irish poetry in English since eighteenth century. The second section focuses on the Ireland of post-Yeatsian times prior to Heaney's entry and Heaney is seen in comparison with his predecessors and contemporaries. The third section of this chapter provides a profile of the poet, and the concluding section spells the argument of the thesis, explaining the key terms.

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In Ireland, poets had been honoured from the very early times and music and poetry were considered to be at par with the divine. Diodorus Siculus, a Greek historian of the first century B.C., writes that when two armies were fighting, the Celtic poets would throw themselves into the midst of the combatants and appease them. "Thus even amongst the most savage barbarians anger submits to the rule of wisdom, and the god of war pays homage to the Muses" (qtd. in Scherman 23). Ogma was the god of literature and was
described as "honey-mouthed" and as one who drew "a willing crowd of people, fastened to him by slender golden chains, the end of which pass through his tongue" (qtd. in Scherman 34). Katharine Scherman records.

His [Ogma's] devotees . . . were the filid (poets). This class went back to Ireland's legendary beginnings, to Amergin, the druid, a son of Mil, who chanted a poetic incantation to the beings of earth and sky as he stepped on Ireland's shore in the fifth and final mythical invasion. (34)

The "filid" class comprised of historians who sang of the deeds of heroes and recorded the genealogies which were quite important to a society based on hereditary aristocracy, "brehons" who devoted themselves to the study of law, and poets and philosophers who composed eulogy or satire. This last group used the earliest form of language Bearla-Faine.

When ordained after twelve years of instruction, a fili received the degree of Ollambh and with it the right to bear the golden musical wand (actually a branch) of office, the right to wear a mantle of crimson bird feathers and the right to be second only to the king in power and prestige. (Arden, Greene, and Lecar 211)

The chiefs and the kings were afraid of offending the filid because
they were thought to have magical powers and their a'ér (lampoon) could destroy a man's dignity and cause the victim to die of humiliation.

The Irish had alphabets called Ogam, named after the Celtic god of literature, Ogma. Yet, most of the poetry was in oral form because the Irish believed that writing could destroy the magical quality of verse. The "filid" class was divided into "ten classes from Oblar who knew only seven stories to Ollam who knew three hundred and fifty. Unlike the bards, the file [fili] never invented, they remembered" (Jusserand 11). Later when Christianity made writing easy with the Roman alphabets and the monks took care to preserve these old tales, these ancient epic tales were transcribed during the seventh and eighth centuries. These stories were classified into numerous classes or types, "such as cattle raids, wooing, battles, deaths, elopements, feasts, exiles, destructions, slaughters, adventures, voyages and visions" (Holman 278). The monasteries were the treasure-houses of these ancient texts. Both the Norse invaders who raided the monasteries regularly during the ninth and tenth centuries and the Anglo-Norman conquerors were equally destructive, and hence only a few volumes remain as an evidence of a vast literary activity that had flourished in the bygone days. The huge volumes that remain are miscellanies of tales, poems, histories and genealogies written in prose interspersed with verse.
The oldest stories belong to the so-called *Mythological Cycle* and they, intermingled with the mediaeval accounts, form *Lebor Gabala* or *Book of Invasions*. The existing myths were synchronized with the happenings in the classical world and there are interpolations of stories with Christian impact. It begins before the Deluge, deals with the battles against Nemedians who came from Scythia and Fromorians who were believed to have emerged from the sea, and the arrivals of several other tribes like Tuatha de Danaan and Milesians. In these narratives there is no demarcation between supernatural and real. They are fairy-tale fantasies mixed with reality. Some of the lyrics are heroic in tone and some are in praise of simple pleasures but in general they lack tranquility which is found rarely in the Irish social setup. The verses are episodic and have an unfinished quality about them (Jusserand 12–13).

The next set of tales belong to the *Heroic Age*, the period before the advent of Christianity in the third century A.D. The tales are compiled into a series called Ulster cycle as they describe feasts, journeys, battles and love stories of the warriors of the court of king Conchobar of Ulster. They were constantly at war with the knights of Connacht, a province ruled by Ailill and his aggressive queen Maeve. "Táin Bo and Cualnge" is the longest and most spectacular saga of the series and Cuchulain is its main hero (Scherman 28; 254–56). It narrates the conflict of the two great bulls the
Finnbhennach and the Donn of Cuailnge. Donn wins and scatters the fragments of the mangled one from his horns all through Ireland thereby causing the creation of a series of well-known historical place names. When he reached his home, his heart “broke like a nut in his breast” and he died. “These bulls show the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic aspects of the deity, the herdsman-god” (MacCana 50). “Book of Armagh”, “Book of the Dun cow”, “The Book of Leinster” and “The Exile of the sons of Usnech” are some of the sagas which emphasise human courage and the arrogant defiance of fate which is the hallmark of a Celtic tribal hero. These tales reveal a lot of information on the life style of the Irish Celts.

The *Ossianic Cycle*, numbering eighty thousand lines, is said to be more romantic and modern than the earlier lores. These poems, more often in ballad form, are about Ossian the poet who was the son of Finn Mac Cumail, and Finn’s followers who were called the Fianna. Hence the cycle is also called Fenian Cycle. “The colloquy of the Old Men”, “The Pursuit of Diarmait and Grainne” and “The Voyage of Maeldwin” are a few that stand out among the rest in the cycle. In contrast to the knightly character of the Ulster Cycle, the Ossianic poems are more in the nature of folk tales. The Fianna was an army of the forests led by the demi-god Finn. The warriors were originally a group of semi-nomadic hunters living off the land. To enter the army one must swear to break all ties with
family and undergo a severe training. One must be a poet well-versed in the twelve traditional forms of poetry. The poems show their love for the untamed woodlands, the joy in hunting and the close relationship they had with the animals. While the heroic tales made much of the horse, the Fenian tales do not have a place for it. One of Finn’s wives was a doe and he himself could be changed into a deer. The tales also had Christian overtones. A friendly meeting of pre-Christian and Christian life styles with Christian morals inserted is a common characteristic. Hence voyages and visions abound (Scherman 38-40; 260-63).

A genre known as “dinnshenchas”, the lore of the high places, existed during this period even though the events they narrated in connection with the place names belonged to the past. Every hill, river and lake has a name in Ireland and each name has a legend appended to it. These poems of historical geography form a distinct branch of native poetry. MacCana comments,

The dinnshenchas is thus a kind of comprehensive topography, a legendary guide to the Irish landscape and it is for that reason significant that it assigns a conspicuous, even a dominant role to the female divinities, . . . who are primarily associated with the land in all its various aspects: its fertility, sovereignty, its embodiment of the power of death as well as life and so on. (49)
These early Irish poems have been translated and their precision, clarity and richness have been commented on. Kuno Meyer, a scholar and translator of Celtic languages feels that "these poems occupy a unique position in the literature of the world. To seek out and watch and love Nature in its tiniest phenomena as in its grandest was given to no people so early and so fully as the Celt" (qtd. in Heaney, *Preoccupations* 182). The Christian influence made the simple nature poetry to take two directions: celebratory verse and penitential verse. Love of place, and yearning to be there, is a typical strain that has existed as early as fifteenth century. The following poem sung by Oisin to St. Patrick, whom he calls "son of Calpurnius", is a lament on the loss and lost glories:

Benn Boilbin that is sad to day,
peak that was shapely and best of form,
at that time, son of Calpurnius,
it was lovely to be upon its crest.

We were on this hill
seven companies of the Fiana;
to-night my friends are few,
and is not my tale pitiful to you.

(qtd. in Heaney, *Preoccupations* 184–85)
The monks of the Middle Ages deserve much commendation for recording the native poetry but their contribution does not stop with that. Most of them were poets themselves and the monastic literature is in no way negligible. The earliest writing was that of St. Patrick, and “Faedh Fiada” (Cry of the Deer) is his well-known poem in which he invokes the forces of sun, moon, fire, wind, rocks and ocean and the power of God to defeat evil. St. Columba was a master poet and two hundred poems are attributed to him. His songs of exile are quite poignant. Most of the poems do not have the author’s name attached to it and hence the authorship may be doubtful but in the mediaeval times this had little relevance. These poets used a wide variety of form and also continued to experiment. Thus the apostles of new religion promoted the love of literature and scholarship which had always been there.

When the Norman invasion took place in the twelfth century, Ireland was brought down. England was engaged in more than conquering the nation. Watson considers England’s behaviour as “an abjection in Lacanian terms of the essential otherness of Ireland: hence the banning of all things Irish – art, law, language, literature, naming, games” (Giddings 41). There was a suppression of all poets and Douglas Hyde is of the opinion that a few centuries after the Anglo-Norman conquest, literature in Ireland had lost its flourish and the bards “continued on the cut and dry lives of tribal
genealogy, religious meditations, clan history and elegy for the dead" (454). Imagination, initiative, and the joy in voicing out in rhyme were lacking. Manuscripts of lyrical works had to be circulated surreptitiously even during the middle of the eighteenth century.

During the late eighteenth century, the ballads and songs composed by peasants, hedge-school masters and their scholars and sometimes by the street beggars began to be widely circulated. Gavan Duffy founded and edited the *Nation*, a newspaper that sought to unite Protestants and Catholics for the deliverance of the nation. In it, the hitherto-voiceless published their poems and later these poems were collected and published. The Great Famine and the emigration that followed gave rise to a type of fierce poetry born out of intense suffering. The kind of poetry turned out by the Fenian Movement had the fire of patriotism but the rage in it, it was claimed, undermined the quality of those poems. Translations of old Irish poetry into English preserving the original metres were successfully accomplished by Dr. Hyde and Dr. Sigerson (Brooke x-xii).

One of the distinct elements of the Irish poetry written in English is its patriotic note. It reveals the pride of the will unconquered by the trials and declares the courage to endure till the end. “The Wearin’ o’ the Green” is a fine street ballad that
exemplifies this quality:

Oh, Paddy dear! an' did ye hear the news that's goin' round?
The shamrock is by law forbid to grow on Irish ground!
No more St. Patrick's Day we'll keep, his colour can't be seen,
For there's a cruel law agin the wearin' o' the green!

An' if the colour we must wear is England's cruel red,
Let it remind us of the blood that Ireland has shed;
Then pull the shamrock from your hat, and throw it on the sod—
And never fear, 'twill take root there, tho' under foot 'tis trod!
When law can stop the blades of grass from growin' as they grow,
And when the leaves in summer-time their colour dare not show,
Then I will change the colour, too, in my caubeen
But till that day, please God, I'll stick to wearin' o' the green.

(2-3)
Irish poetry is religious too. Catholics were oppressed in Ireland and most of these poems were written in prisons by people under the sentence of exile or death. Hence pathos and pain dominate the tone of these poems. Love of one's land in the face of danger is another characteristic of these poems. Love turns into rebellion and hence there is a cry for revenge by the injured people. John Keegan's "The Irish Reaper's Harvest Hymn" published in the *Nation* illustrates these features well:

> From my mother's mud sheeling an outcast I fly,
> With a cloud on my heart and a tear in my eye;
> Oh! I burn as I think that if Some One would say,
> 'Revenge on your tyrants!' - but Mary I pray,
> From my soul's depth, O Mary!
> And hear me, sweet Mary!
> For union and peace to Old Ireland I pray.  

There are also simple poems that celebrate simple pleasures in the lives of the poor Irish peasants. Thomas Moore, Charles Wolfe, Gerald Griffin and Edward Walsh were some of the early poets who contributed to the growth of Irish poetry. James Mangan intensified the patriotic element by depicting Ireland as the sorrowful and attractive virgin lady - Dark Rosaleen and Kathaleen Ny Houlahan. Gavan Duffy and many others that followed helped to keep poetry alive during difficult times.
Thus we find that the tradition to which Seamus Heaney belongs has revered poetry for long. In his *Preoccupations* Heaney writes, that he would prefer to see the poet in the role of the “fili” for it connects the poet with the mysteries of the grove and the poetic imagination with the barbaric life of the wood (186). The early Irish nature poetry, the religious feelings that had become fused to it, the love of their land and the longing to repossess, and the Irish tradition to internalise resistance have in one way or other influenced Heaney, so that in forming his own poetic self he digs into the past to find a continuation.

[2]

The contribution of the Irish writers to English literature has been quite considerable and as far as poetry is concerned, Yeats held an undisputed central place along with T. S. Eliot. The British and American critics have for long acclaimed Heaney's voice as the most important one since Yeats and the award of the Nobel prize has affirmed his position in the Irish literary scene. Garratt comments, “As Heaney's poetry develops, we understand the importance of the Irish literary tradition, the heritage of Yeats, Joyce, Patrick Kavanagh and William Carleton” (2). A short survey of the poets who followed Yeats would be valuable to place Heaney's contribution in the right perspective.
In the late nineteenth century W. B. Yeats led the literary revival which was intent on "Setting myth against history, ecstasy against irony, art against life" (Heaney, "Tale" 4). Whether they succeeded or not, they successfully lifted poetry from the confines of the locality. In the decades following his death, his figure loomed large over the horizon that it dwarfed any one whose poetry was rooted in the native soil of Ireland. Yet the lyrical tradition was carried on by the Irish poets, mostly in faithful observance of traditional methods of presentation. According to David Perkins, the representative Irish character in the poetry of this century has not been self congratulatory and sentimental. "National identity is frequently associated with harsh realism and satire" (472). In Heaney one finds the touch of realism if not satire, true to the native character, and he lets in a delightfully fresh puff of air and makes the traditional themes sparkle anew.

At the wake of the twentieth century, poets within the various principalities of the United Kingdom became conscious of the national identity and showed concern for their values and problems. Literary men had been ignored for a while in Ireland and many of the Irish writers had left its shores. The remaining poets had been heavily influenced by the English romantic tradition. After the literary revival there came a change in wanting to use themes and styles that were exclusively Irish that reflected their national
history and social reality. Their poems show a recollection of the past — the conquest, occupation, oppression and exploitation by the English colonisers — and reflect the centuries of fear and poverty, the Great Famine and the urgency of mass emigration. They question or accept the bond between the people and the Catholic Church and interpret the present in the light of the past.

Some of the poets who distinguished themselves in the Irish literary scene during the early twentieth century are C. Day Lewis, Patrick Kavanagh and Louis MacNeice. The poems of Day Lewis, written in the traditional Victorian mode, try to discover their roots in Ireland. They are occasional pieces that celebrate dead friends and dead artists, rediscover places and commemorate specific moments of pleasure and pain. In his poem “Emily Bronte” Day Lewis describes his country thus:

All is yet the same, for mine was a country
Stoic, unregenerate, beyond the power
Of man to mollify or God to disburden—
An ingrown landscape none might long endure
But one who could meet with the passion wilder-wintry
The scalding breath of the moor. (497)

After the war he became influential in academic and orthodox literary circles.
Patrick Kavanagh focuses on the grim side of the Irish poor banking on his personal experience. Heaney comments, "Kavanagh's poetry is born out of the quarrel between 'the grip of the little fields' and 'the city of Kings / where art, music, letters are the real things" (Heaney, *Preoccupations*, 121). His well-known poem "The Great Hunger" is concerned with the woes of the poor. As Heaney himself observes, for the first time since Merriman's poetry in the eighteenth century, "a hard buried life that subsists beyond the feel of the middle-class novelists and romantic nationalist poets, a life denuded of 'folk' and picturesque elements found its expression" in Kavanagh's poetry (*Preoccupations* 116). He has raised the "inhibited energies of a sub-culture to the power of a cultural resource" (Heaney, *Preoccupations* 116). Kavanagh reveals much anger at the cultural, emotional, spiritual and sexual deprivations that the Irish had long endured. He is concerned with the meaning and function of poetry too. His later poetry shows a distancing from the world outside. Heaney calls it, "a spurt of abundance from a source within and it spills over to irrigate the world beyond the self" (*Government* 13). It was Kavanagh's "A Soul for Sale" which gave an affirmation to Heaney that details of one's childhood in a farm could be treated in poetry.

Another poet who looks back to childhood experiences is Louis MacNeice. His poems reveal a nostalgia for the past and though he
relishes ordinary pleasures of life, there is seen a strain of stoic pessimism and melancholy in his poems. "Prayer Before Birth", "Autobiography", "Snow" and "The Sunlight on the Garden" are some of his well-known poems which are moving, sad and frightening. He experiments in form to suit his themes. His "Bagpipe Music" mimes the sound of the Scottish pipe music. He was much more modern than his predecessors and was granted an important place among the poets of the 1930s.

During the early days of his poetic career, Thomas Kinsella was considered to be one of the most original and stimulating of Irish poets and won public honour and acclaim very quickly. He has translated several early Irish poems and prose epics, especially The Táin and is seen as a typical Irish poet. But the real matrix of his poetic creativity is more than his Irish experience. It is the more profound human experience that he is concerned with. His vision of human existence is that it is "an ordeal". George O'Brien comments, His poetry is a commitment to negotiate the leap of artistic faith which alone can overcome the abyss of unjustifiable unknowing that is the moral lot. The human potential to achieve that act of composed and graceful suspension is what gives his poetry aesthetic vitality. (Kirkpatrick 818)

He sees his own culture as a moral catastrophe where the heroic
spirit of the past has failed, and he sees himself as doubly cursed as an Irish as well as a modern man. His “Nightwalker” shows the extreme bitterness of a man who finds refuge in despair. It is often compared to “The Wasteland”. In spite of his scepticism he pays homage to art, nature and love. After 1968, his interest turned towards psychological themes and myth-making. *Notes from the Land of the Dead* is a collection that exemplifies the psychological thrust in his poetry. He was open to influences and was continuously experimenting with formal and aesthetic devices.

John Montague's work is a key to understand the changes that took place in 1960s in Ireland. He is a poet of his generation who has tried to break old ground anew. He follows Kavanagh and finds his poetic material in the rural background. He also deals with love and its vicissitudes. “Puritan Ireland's dead and gone” is his celebrated refrain. “The Rough Field” is a critique on cultural and historical components of Northern Irish reality. It attempts to reconstitute the life of his past. He has experimented with the epic tradition that the Irish are fond of (Perkins 478).

Michael Longley is not so well-known as some of his contemporaries are but his works have received notice from reviewers and critics. He has published three collections of poetry and served as the literature director of the Arts Council of Northern
Ireland. His "technical command" of language has been much appreciated and admired but there is also a charge that he gives insufficient attention to subjective experiences (Perkins 481). There are a few poems like "The Ornithological Section" where he shows a deep insight in describing the stuffed birds and then moving on to relate them with human beings. A few poems deal with the political situations in Ulster, and they are quite moving.

John Hewitt's poems show his concern at the cultural, historical and religious divisions that trouble Northern Ireland. He reveals his dilemma in the midst of a two-way pull – between the eloquent mainstream of English and the firm determination to identify with the Irish experience. Heaney reviews it in this way: "the pattern shows an early period when he examines himself against his native community; then, after his shift to England in 1957, he sets his lonely present against a rooted past, in terms of a lost community and family" (Preoccupations 209). His plight and quest for identity are shown in the opening lines of his poem "Ireland":

We are not native here or anywhere.
We were the Keltic wave that broke over Europe,
and ran up this bleak beach among these stones:
but when the tide ebbed, were left stranded here
in crevices and ledge-protected pools.

(And in Preoccupations 209)
He seems to prefer the traditional modes and emphasises professional standards in handling metre and rhyme.

Paul Muldoon is considered by Heaney as “one of the very best”, in his article “The Mixed Marriage” (*Preoccupations* 213). His poems are praised for their techniques but have been questioned for their subject matter. It is to be noted that Muldoon allows his imagination to formulate fictitious existences and creates parables and allegory out of them. They skillfully disguise what Muldoon has to say but occasionally they perplex the reader. Neil Corcoran is of the opinion that his work testifies to that “most bedrock marriage of all”, that of a Northern Irish Catholic sensibility and the English poetic tradition (Hamilton 371).

A group of younger writers from Northern Ireland like Derek Mahon, James Simmons and Tom Paulin have become popular. In his interview with Kinahan, Heaney says that each one of these writers differs in his mode of writing; yet they share the belief of what good writing is: “it wasn’t the let-it-all-hang-out school. it was the well-made school” which can be called “Formalist” (408). They also write about their quest for identity, the troubles in Ulster – present and past – and justice at a personal and public level. Heaney’s popularity and his success have overshadowed the claim of these younger poets for fame. Only time can assess the merit of their contributions.
This is the literary scene in which Heaney has carved a niche for himself, not as a poet who is different from them all in subject matter and technique but as one who continues to play the music that had been played by his precursors but does it in his own special way which resists to being pigeon-holed into a group.

The poetry of these predecessors and contemporaries of Heaney have certain elements which appear in Heaney's poetry too and it would be appropriate at this stage to find the unique factors that characterise Heaney's poetry. Many of these poets look back with nostalgia or find a continuity of barrenness from childhood onwards or find it reflected in social, religious, emotional and personal pursuits. Recollection of childhood is indeed a very common phenomenon in Heaney's work. He records incidents in which there is a clash between what he had known and hoped for and what he experiences. Disillusionment and frightening confrontations do fill his world but through all this there is growth. Fear is a dominant emotion but as Elmer Andrews rightly points out, fear is "enlarging and provocative of growth" (24). There is a loss of Edenic innocence as Heaney advances into adulthood and there is an acceptance of insensitivity and violence. Then as he matures, he finds new ways to counterbalance bigotry and intimidation that have become the order of the day.
The poet reports of the feeling he had in the past but the poems do not radiate the feelings. The reader does not feel that he is nostalgic about the past. Anger and depression do appear but they do not linger. Most of the poems begin in the past and move on to the present or relate an experience of the past and switch over to an abstract level. Childhood experiences, the crafts of the countryside and incidents that are most common in a farm have taught him to move from the palpable to the beyond. These factors are analysed and elaborated in the chapters that follow.

Irish poets have never failed to sing of their land which was called "a lyrical land, washed by sea and ocean and edged with dramatic cliffs or curving scimitars of dune-backed beach" (Nicholson 17). But lately in modern poetry the green landscape has changed into grey, wet and muddy. It has become an objective correlative of the troubles they endure. In Heaney both the sides are shown but one gets a feeling that he has not lost hope.

The land, landscape and the place names charged with mythological significance have shaped Heaney's poetic sensibility. The seed-cutting, potato-digging, threshing, clearing the ravines and reaping are some of the unromantic rural labour spoken of with great pride because the Irish history and identity are inextricably bound to the land. Though he calls the land "black mother" and
“bitch earth” there is no hint of abandoning it. Land is still the sustainer and even the wetness and mud have their lure. New waves of invasions have obliterated the beliefs and practices of previous generations. Yet bogs have preserved them for centuries. The landscape, as the traditional belief goes, has been shaped and governed by feminine principles and the land itself is Nerthus, the Mother Goddess. Land has been the subject of historical and contemporary struggle for possession. In Heaney’s poetry one can see the shift of focus from land and water to air and the nilness beyond space. When his mother died she left behind a space “utterly empty, utterly a source” (“Clearances 8” *HL*). Similarly as he learns to distance himself from the possessive love for the land, land becomes a source of pride and joy, not of divisions.

Following the Irish genre “dinnshenchas”, modern Irish poets have made use of place names in their poems. Kavanagh’s poetry abounds with these but they do not have any etymological implications. As Heaney says they are used as “posts to fence out a personal landscape”. But when Montague uses them they are redolent of the history of his people, dispossessed. Longley, Mahon and Muldoon also write about the bleak Glengormley, the bleaker still North Antrim and the parishes of Ulster but as Heaney writes, “They serve the poet and not vice versa. None of these poets surrenders himself to the mythology of
his place but instead each subdues the place to become an element in his own private mythology" (Preoccupations 148). Heaney also sings of Anahorish, Toome, Broagh, and a number of other places. His effort is to recreate the past and to overcome through art the condition of the dispossessed.

The Irish poets had long faced the dilemma of expressing themselves in the language of their oppressors. Clothing the Irish thoughts and musings in the English garb was like betraying their sensibilities but the pressure of the "crossed pieties", as Heaney calls it, has not left him in despair. In his early poems he struggles through this question and in Station Island he confronts it. Though earlier in his prose he has explained how his poetry is born out of the crossing of the Irish and the English strains, Heaney is sure of himself only in his later works. So the main body of his work shows him being extremely conscious of his position of "in-betweenness". According to John V. Foster this suspension between the various cultures and traditions reflects in his verse: "the archetypal sound in his work is the guttural spirant, half-consonant, half-vowel; the archetypal locale is the bog, half-water, half-land; the archetypal animal is the eel which can fancifully be regarded as half-mammal, half-fish" (qtd. in Riley and Mendelson 172).
The prevalent troubles in Ireland resulting in meaningless bloodshed and deaths that are not redemptive also have had their effect on the writers of Ireland. In fact poetry being a “clarification of life”, poets are expected to react to the political situation. Heaney’s anthologies *North* and *Field Work* deal with the political theme extensively though there are references in the earlier volumes also. The ritualistic slaughter of the past fascinates him and it looks as though he finds a continuity in the slaughter too. He does not advocate it but he also does not try to escape the situation in Ulster and presents them even in his ninth volume, *The Spirit Level*. Neither does he indulge in presenting the horror. One thing is clear: the poet does not seek for answers and unlike most Irish poets, he is neither embittered nor despondent.

Heaney seems to prefer “well-made” verse like his Irish predecessors and though there is variety in his versification there is not much radical experimentation as is found in the poets of the U.S. He was blamed for working with the language so intensely. The sensuous phrasings, alliterations and onomatopoeic sounds in the early collections had the effect of letting the words outweigh ideas. But Heaney has successfully run out of the danger and his later volumes continue to have the lilt and music of his earlier volumes and there is precision, originality and mastery over technique. When placed among the Irish poets of this century, Heaney reveals himself
to be one with them in finding inspiration in his native soil and yet he stands distinguished in the way he looks at his poetic material and fashions it.

[3]

A short sketch of the life and career of Seamus Heaney and samples of responses and reactions that his poems drew forth from his readers and critics from Ireland, England and America will give a better picture of the poet whose poems are analysed in the following chapters. Heaney was born on 13th April 1939 to Patrick and Margaret Kathleen Heaney at Mossbawn, a farm in county Derry, Northern Ireland. He was the eldest in the family of two girls and seven boys, and lived in an atmosphere of intimate domestic warmth and affection. His parents were Catholics and belonged to a farming community. From 1945 to 1951 Heaney attended the local Anahorish School and then became a boarder at St. Columb's College in Londonderry. He graduated with a first class honours degree in English Language and Literature in 1961 from Queen's University, Belfast. Having acquired a teachers' training diploma in the following year, Heaney started teaching in St. Thomas's Intermediate School, Belfast. It was there that he was introduced to Kavanagh by his headmaster, McLaverty. Kavanagh's poems reflected a pastoral experience which was similar to his own and to Heaney it was an eye-opener. He began to write in 1962 and published a few poems in a magazine called Interest edited by Alan Gabbey, a lecturer in Queen's.
Heaney has been aware of divisions from a very early time. It started with a name of the farm “Mossbawn” where he was born: “Moss” means the soft Irish bog and “bawn” was the name given to the fortified farms by the British settlers. “In the syllables of my home I see a metaphor of the split culture of Ulster” says Heaney (Preoccupations 35).

The Heaneys’ farm actually lay between a ‘bog’ of yielding peat and the cultivated ‘demesne’ of Moyola Park belonging to a peer who had served as head of the British establishment. It was bordered as well by townlands with malleable Gaelic names, Anahorish and Broagh. But it looked out on Grove Hill and Back Park, firm with definite consonants of a ruler’s voice. (qtd. in Marowski 162)

To Neil Corcoran, Heaney has said that because he went to Anahorish School, he learnt the Armagh Catechism but when he was confirmed in Bellaghy he did not know the Derry Catechism which was used there. Though he lived in Bellaghy he played football for Castledawson and had to play very often against the team of his own district. He confesses, “I seemed always to be a little displaced; being in between was a kind of condition from the start” (qtd. in Corcoran, Student’s 13).
The awareness of being “in between” extended to other areas as Heaney grew older. The sectarian oppositions in the fields of culture, religion, language and politics became more prominent and as Heaney developed into a poet, the question of allegiance to any one conflicting side loomed before him. In *Crane Bag* he has explained “my first attempts to speak, to make verse, faced the Northern sectarian problem. Then this went underground” (qtd. in Cahill 55). As a Catholic Nationalist living in Ulster dominated by a Protestant majority, Heaney was obviously pulled between his personal dedication to poetry as an art, and his public responsibility and political attitudes.

Heaney’s confidence in himself as a poet at such a juncture was brought about by Philip Hobsbaum, a Londoner who had read English under F. R. Leavis at Cambridge, and had founded the “Group” in London in the 1950s. Hobsbaum came to teach at the Queen’s and started a similar group in Belfast in 1963 in which Heaney, Longley and Mahon were regular participants. They held a festival in 1965 in which the poets released poetry pamphlets and Heaney’s was titled *Eleven Poems*. This paved the way for his later collections and thus his literary career was well under way. By then Heaney had married Marie Devlin, a teacher herself, and they have three children, two sons and a daughter. Heaney was an avid reader even from a young age and the poems of Wordsworth and Hopkins
and later, those of Frost and Ted Hughes made a deep impression upon him.

In May 1966 Heaney’s first collection of poems, *Death of a Naturalist* was published by Fabers. It was reviewed widely and brought in a lot of praise and a few awards to the poet. The *London Magazine* called it “a book of enormous promise”. The opening poem “Digging” introducing the metaphor of digging with a pen is considered to be his modus operandi. Charles Duffy finds in it more than that. Writing about it in 1988, Duffy comments that the poem establishes Heaney’s stand regarding the sectarian feuds:

In Heaney’s “Digging” the rich memories of civilizing agricultural work with the spade aid the poet in his decision to renounce the temptation to foster violent ways. The pen that had been initially too easily transformed into the bluntly terminal gun is now decisively beaten into the more elusive, life-giving and open-ended ploughshare of poetry. (45)

*Door into the Dark*, which was published three years after, was considered as “not an advance” on the previous book though it was the choice of the Poetry Book Society. Both the books deal with Heaney’s rural childhood and very often they are treated together as
“early poems”. Henry Hart, however, finds a psychological advance in the second volume. Though Heaney is still preoccupied with farming, fishing, thatching and forging, he casts his rural personae in roles that dramatize the opposition dueling in his imagination. Dark and light are now associated with speech and writing, forgetting and remembering, expiration and inspiration, blindness and insight, destruction and creation. (Hart, “Seamus Heaney’s Poetry” 1)

During this time the troubles that had been seething below surface had boiled over and Heaney’s attention was forcibly turned towards the political situation. In 1968 itself the Catholics had begun their civil-rights marches and the less liberal Protestants were fearful that any concession given to the Catholics may lead to the former’s incorporation into the Republic of Ireland. In the summer of 1969 murderous encounters between the Protestants and Catholics started and the poet in Heaney began to search for images and symbols adequate to the predicament. The Bog People by the Danish archaeologist P. V. Glob, in its English translation, was published that year and in those vivid photographs showing the victims sacrificed to the Earth Goddess, Heaney found his emblems. He wrote a few poems in literary journals openly addressing the problem in Ulster but soon he left for the University of California at Berkeley as a guest lecturer. When he returned, the situation in
Northern Ireland was worse and he resigned his job at Queen's and moved South to a cottage in Glanmore, twenty miles from Dublin, to work as a freelance writer.

*Wintering Out*, which was published in November 1972 after he moved to Glanmore, was disappointing to many reviewers. The poems did not confront the political situation in Northern Ireland as expected of him. Some felt that he was still searching for a theme and had not moved beyond the subject of his first two books. His change of residence itself had caused a hullabaloo in Ulster and in an interview with Seamus Deane, Heaney admits this:

For the Catholic writers, I think the Troubles were a critical moment, a turning point, possibly a vision of some kind of fulfilment. The blueprint in the Catholic writer's head predicted that a history would fulfil itself in a United Ireland or in something...I felt I was compromising some part of myself by staying in a situation where socially and, indeed, imaginatively, there were pressures 'against' regarding the moment as critical. Going to the South was perhaps emblematic for me...To the Unionists it looked like a betrayal of the Northern thing. (qtd. in Corcoran *Student's 32*)
What was long expected of Heaney was finally articulated in the next volume *North* (1975). Blake Morrison comments that when *North* finally appeared "containing some poems quite explicitly about the Troubles, there was an almost audible sigh of relief. Reviewers spoke of its recognition of 'tragedy and violence'" (56). Heaney does not celebrate the heroes who perpetrate violence in their struggle to assert themselves. In fact he chooses the passive victims of the violence and finds continuity of bloodshed in Irish history. "Whereas Yeats had looked to Celtic legend for the figure of Cuchulainn as the archetype of Irish hubris and defeat, Heaney has discovered his emblems in the buried history of his province, in its cycles of religious violence" (Quinlan 365). The book was greatly applauded, won several prizes and sold six thousand copies in the first month itself.

In the same year *Stations*, a series of prose-poems, was published in a pamphlet form in Belfast. As Heaney says in its preface, the "pieces" were begun in 1970 and finished at Glanmore where the "sectarian dimension of that pre-reflective experience presented itself as something asking to be uttered also" (3). Henry Hart makes a detailed analysis of this sequence and concludes,

Heaney takes an ethical stand against the self-righteous arrogance that destroys poets as well as nations . . . . As the sequence of prose poems crosses back and forth between these differences, Heaney
repeatedly returns on himself, bringing his highest hopes for peaceful co-existence down to earth for gritty analysis and raising his deepest fears and biases for lofty moral scrutiny. ("Crossing" 820)

In 1979 *Field Work* was published and was hailed to be the best of all he had produced so far. The volume has poems on a wide spectrum of subjects ranging from intimately personal ones to those of public concern dealing with questions like "what will become of us?" ("Triptych" *FW*). Denis Donoghue is of the opinion that Heaney has written "more powerfully than ever, more fully in possession of his feeling, more at home in his style . . . . These poems make you feel that the best part of poetry is . . . something you have had the luck to see, hear, smell or taste" (qtd. in Bryfonski and Harris 245 – 46). Heaney had been reading Dante and the influence of the classical poet is only too obvious in this volume and the subsequent ones.

Heaney's reputation was growing in America and he was invited to be a visiting professor in Harvard in 1982. He divided his time between Dublin and America for the next few years and his stay in the States brought in a new dimension to his poetry. His association with three ex-patriate poets in America, Derek Walcott from the Caribbean, Joseph Brodsky from Russia and Czeslaw Milosz from Poland broadened his vision and helped him find poetic sensibilities that crossed the national boundaries.
Heaney had become the director of the Field Day Theatre Company and in 1983 he published his "Open Letter" through the company. It was addressed to Blake Morrison and Andrew Motion, who had included Heaney's poems in the *Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry*, and it voiced his objection to being classified under the adjective "British". *Sweeney Astray*, a version of the long mediaeval Irish poem *Buile Suibhne*, translated by Heaney long before, was published in 1983 through the company as a "gesture, a form of solidarity" (qtd. in Corcoran, *Student's 40*).

*Station Island* was published next, in 1984. It is made up of three sections and the title sequence which is the middle section is his longest poem written so far. It is based on a three-day pilgrimage undertaken by Irish Catholics to Station Island for a spiritual renewal. It is obviously Dantesque in form and style: the terza rima echoes *The Divine Comedy* and the ghosts that Heaney meets remind one of the hell and the purgatory of the great epic.

*The Haw Lantern* (1987) shows a turn in Heaney's poetic sensibility. Molino feels that he "begins to strip away the burden of 'seed, breed and generation' that he has carried so long" (168). Even the metaphors and images undergo a change. Instead of digging with the pen, he proposes to step away from the "justified line". The similes present alternate methods of perceiving and comprehending
and unwinding the strands of tradition. In this collection, Heaney uses the allegorical mode which distances him from the subject matter but there is also a sonnet sequence entitled “Clearances” that gives intimate pictures of his mother and himself.

The next volume, *Seeing Things*, which was published in 1991 shows the transition that has occurred in the poet’s way of seeing things. The poet finds beauty and meaning in the quotidian and the doors open not into the darkness but help to “get back to upper air”. The collection has a sonnet sequence, “Glanmore Revisited” and the second part of the book called “Squarings” has forty eight short poems of twelve lines each and is divided into four sections. The poet points out that “Lightening”, “Section 1 of “Squarings” in *Seeing Things* is an image of the soul at the threshold of eternity . . . from an earthy to airy element” (Letter to this researcher). The other sections continue the trend and deal with crossing the waters, sensing things beyond the visible range, and entering a new life. Maurice Harmon is of the opinion, “In seeing things he may cross from one state of being to another. The familiar contains the preternatural . . . . It is another kind of pilgrimage: to go ‘Beyond our usual hold upon ourselves” (Genet and Hellegouarch 28).
Heaney was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1995 and honouring him, Shiv K. Kumar, an Indian academic and poet, writes that in the case of Heaney one cannot follow T. S. Eliot's "honest criticism" that confines itself to the work of art: “No, the creator cannot be divorced from his creations. Specially in a poet like Seamus Heaney who lives as he writes, sings as he soars, synthesising meaning and sound, thought and image, vehicle and tenor” (V). Heaney’s book of poems, *The Spirit Level*, that was published in 1996, exemplifies Kumar's comment. The collection has matters of family history, memories of boyhood days, elegies and reworking of old stories, and all these aspects point to a state of balance as suggested by the title.

Heaney has written several critical essays and has given lectures which have been published in three volumes: *Preoccupations* (1980), *The Government of the Tongue* (1988) and *The Redress of Poetry* (1995). *The Cure at Troy* (1990) is his version of Sophocles's *Philoctetes* and with Baranczak he has translated *Laments*, a collection of poems of Jan Kochanowski. Apart from the Nobel prize, he has received Cholmondeley award, Faber Memorial prize, Maugham award, Irish Academy of Letters award, American Academy E. M. Forster award, Smith Literacy award, P. E. N. Prize, for translation, Whitbread Award, *Sunday Times* Mont Blanc award and several others including the honorary degree of Doctor of Literature from Queen's University.
"Continuity" and "resistance" are elements that have been deeply imprinted in the Irish consciousness and to a poet who says, "I have always listened for poems, they come sometimes like bodies come out of a bog, almost complete, seeming to have been laid down a long time ago, surfacing with a touch of mystery" (Heaney, Preoccupations 34) it is most natural that these elements appear in his poetry in a subtle or overt manner. Ireland itself is a proof against cessation that time and change brings.

Everywhere you walk in Ireland you are conscious of overlapping layers of human history, visibly crumbling into one another . . . . The presence of the spirits of the past is palpable . . . you have the sense, wherever you step, that you are walking over the bones of the long-dead kings, poets, farmers, slaves and saints. (Scherman 13)

Ireland has not severed herself from her past and the marks of continuity are not only visible but also valued. With the land preserving fundamental human experiences like the communal rituals and relationship with the elemental energies in its peat bogs, the landscape featuring pre-historic burial mounds, passage graves and stone-age dwellers' bee-hive huts, place names recalling the ancient Irish beliefs and Celtic myths, and people still believing in
fairies and charms, continuity is a factor that is inextricably woven into the warp and woof of the Irish as well as Heaney's consciousness.

Resistance is an inevitable force if continuity is to be assured and Ireland, in its struggle to guard its identity, has been forced to resist through the ages. The repeated invasions and the hegemonic impulse of the British colonisers aimed at transforming the people and even the colonial space. The Irish bards were suppressed, a new religion was forced upon. the names of the places were anglicized or changed, and the gerrymandering of the provinces to suit the British convenience was effected and all these that had taken place over the years made an Irishman a stranger in his own land. The people never forgot the wrong done to them and Bill Kirkman, a fellow of Wolfson College who studied the problem recently, comments, "It is no exaggeration and no joke to say that for many Irish people, Oliver Cromwell is a recent factor in the question" (VIII). Resistance has been thus like a legacy passing from one generation to another, surfacing in physical, psychological and artistic forms.

Heaney, as an individual and as a poet needed to resist various forces in order to assert himself. Describing his family background, he explains. "There is the Heaney side, very intelligent, but with a belief in the authenticity of the unspoken . . . and my mother's side, the McCanns, very much devoted to argumentation
and discourse" (qtd. in Cahill 55). The society he sprang from also valued speechlessness but Heaney's role as a poet made others look upon him as a spokesman for the minority. Another pressure that fell upon every Irish poet writing in English, was the guilt of betraying the Irish identity by using the oppressor's language. It is best expressed in the image found in a popular Irish ballad, "a severed head with a grafted tongue". This speaks of a culture severed from the body of its tradition and forced to speak another language.

Pulled in one direction by the English literary tradition, pulled in another by a social and political tradition which continues its centuries-old antagonism to all things English, the Irish poet finds himself inescapably involved in a bleak and unromantic triangle: if Irish culture is his wife, English is his mistress and to satisfy one is necessarily to betray the other. (Shapiro 336)

A dilemma that brings further pressure on the poet is the search for the reason for poetry's existence in a world that is brutal where explosions rattle the windows day and night and innocent lives are shattered with no rhyme or reason. What justification could there be to sing when people die? Heaney questions himself whether it would be like Nero who was supposed to have fiddled when Rome was burning. Can a poet be truthful and yet present "a
joyful affirmation" of poetry which is not an "affront to life"?

There have been other forces that Heaney had to face as a reputed poet getting media attention. Henry Hart is of the opinion that in the "highly politicized areas of Irish letters" and in the British and American journals, Heaney has been "forced to wear many masks". He quotes Helen Vendler to illustrate how Heaney has been accused

of cowardice (being insufficiently political) and of propaganda (being too political), of complicity in violence (by seeing sectarian murder as endemic in the North since the Vikings), and of complicity in the status-quo (by refusing to lend his voice to sectarian politics).

("Seamus Heaney's Places" 383)

Heaney has to resist these efforts of fitting him into political straitjackets.

Critics who do not bother about his political stand try to pigeonhole him into literary and aesthetic traditions. Soon after Heaney published his first two volumes, his poetry was looked upon as an example of post-1945 nature poetry. "Heaney-the poet-and-potato-digger" was the image that the reviewers created and his poetry was said to be "loud with the slap of the spade and sour with the stink of turned earth". Jay Parini compares him with Theocritus
and Virgil and asserts, "This is the pastoral tradition, and Heaney's *Death of a Naturalist* fits into it". (qtd. in Hart, "Pastoral" 570). When the next volumes were published, the reviewers found more of antipastoral attitudes and images in his poems rather than those that follow the pastoral conventions. Martin Booth, writing in 1985, attributes Heaney's success for the following reasons: "Firstly he is Irish at a time when publishers see it 'fashionable' so to be. Secondly he is a superb wordsmith" (226). With each new book, Heaney seems to break down the category with which critics have labelled him.

This thesis seeks to show how Heaney finds continuity in his traditions and how he builds upon the foundation he has unearthed while struggling all the while to overthrow forces that prevent him from individuating into a full-fledged poet. Heaney's nine volumes of poetry published over a period of thirty years – from 1966 to 1996 – show a growth in the poetic consciousness and it is in this context of the growth of the poetic self, the elements of continuity and resistance are traced by this researcher. Jung calls this growth as "individuation process" in which the ego gets in touch with the unconscious, segregates itself and then reintegrates, establishing a wholesome self. The myth system, which provides archetypes for central human experiences, has the archetype of the human quest which symbolises the individuation process. The hero journeys
underground, fights with the dragon which corresponds to his mother, and comes up gaining the treasure. The writings of Gerald Slusser who specialises in psycho-social development and Erich Neumann, a psycho-analyst have been used by this researcher to validate the idea.

The thesis is divided according to the respective stages of growth of Heaney's poetic self and the poetry of the respective period has been taken into consideration. This first chapter is an introductory unit introducing the poet and his personal and racial past which had structured his individual and collective unconscious.

The second chapter, "Prying into Roots: The Terrain of Family and Farmyard" shows the first phase of the growth of the poetic consciousness. Heaney's choice of a poetic career sets him on to get in touch with the unconscious and in this chapter, the process as it is reflected in his first five books has been studied. The emphasis has been laid on the personal side of the unconscious and how his family and farmyard experiences contributed to it and this is traced in the poems of the five volumes, *Death of a Naturalist, Door into the Dark, Wintering Out, North* and *Field Work*.

The third chapter entitled "Lure of the Souterrain: The Land and the Tenets" focuses on another phase of growth, the other side
of the unconscious. By examining the poems of the five volumes mentioned above, it is studied how the political history, culture, religion and topography of Ireland have contributed to the collective unconscious of the poet. By "digging" into the past the poet gets in touch with the unconscious, the transpersonal psyche, in the first stage of the individuation process and this is reflected in the early poems of Heaney.

The fourth chapter, "Clearing the Stations: The Resolution", deals with the developmental stage when the regressing self takes a final look at the past, resolves the unsettled questions and doubts and moves on in a different direction. Station Island, Heaney's sixth volume of poems, which he calls his "book of changes" is dealt with in this chapter. Pilgrimage is a religious ritual in which a pilgrim goes through several stations, examining himself, repenting and reconciling, and finally finds light that frees him from guilt and conflict. In the three sections of Station Island the poet is seen as moving through Hell and Purgatory to Paradise in a Dantesque manner. By making use of the religious tradition, Heaney engages in self-examination and appropriation.

The fifth chapter, "Crossing the Frontiers: Textualizing Resistance" shows the final phase of growth where the poet individuates. The Haw Lantern, Seeing Things and The Spirit
Level, are taken up for the study, for the poems of this group reveal a poet mature and liberated and more sure of himself. In this stage of growth, the ego reintegrates with the unconscious to become a wholesome self. The changes that are seen at a formal level, in the attitude of the poet and in the use of metaphors and images in the three volumes are taken into consideration. This is the peak period in Heaney's poetic career when his mastery is acknowledged by the award of the Nobel prize for Literature.

The concluding chapter ties together the arguments of all these chapters by showing how in Heaney's growth of poetic consciousness, a reader can identify the elements of continuity and resistance. Resistance that was shown against all intimidating sources and forces that would engulf him into anonymity undergoes a metamorphosis. The text itself becomes an artistic expression of resistance affirming life with his tradition, in being a "fili" (poet), and there is continuity rather than conflict in his own creative self.