

Chapter 1

Ancient Irish Pagan Conversion and Its Influence on Seamus Heaney

General Background

The myths of any culture become intertwined in the literature it produces. Irish culture is no exception to this. Seamus Heaney is one of the major Irish poets who has successfully interwoven myth and literature. We can find a lot of mythical allusions in his poetry. In the proposed thesis, the main argument is that Heaney connects the ancient Irish world to the modern world through the use of pagan myth, tradition and symbolism in his poems.

Ancient Celtic religion comprises the religious beliefs and practices of Iron Age people of Western Europe, commonly known as Celtic paganism. Celtic religion was polytheistic in the sense that they believed in multiple deities, both gods and goddesses. Some of them were venerated only in a small, local area while others had a wider geographical distribution. The names of over two hundred of these deities have survived to this day, although it is obvious that many of these names are different titles or epithets used for the same deity. The ancient Celts were one of a larger group of Iron Age polytheistic religious cultures found across Eurasia.

Figures from medieval Irish mythology have been interpreted as iterations of earlier pre-Christian insular deities in the study of comparative mythology. Like other Iron Age Europeans, the early Celts maintained a polytheistic mythology and religious structure.

After the downfall of the Roman Empire in Europe, the Celtic convention was overshadowed by Christianity and was replaced over much of the continent. In Ireland, the Celtic population was gradually christianized, beginning in 432 AD, supplanting the earlier religious traditions.

The Ancient Pagan Convention, Its Metamorphosis and Legacy in Modern Times

It is often claimed that Celtic Druids engaged extensively in human sacrifice. As a matter of fact, very little history of this period survives from the Celtic perspective. Julius Caesar, the Roman Emperor, kept extensive war records. There is a tendency throughout history where the invading/conquering party benefits by writing the history in winners prospective and that makes the people they conquer seem savage or barbaric. The British Empire used the same process.

So, the fairly common idea is that the Celts were barbaric cannibals who regularly practiced ritual human sacrifice, may be an artifact of history and we ought to qualify that perspective with the idea that human sacrifice was probably not nearly as extensive as commonly thought, though it did evidently happen. For comparison, the slaves and dependents of Gauls of rank would be burnt along with the body of their master as part of his funerary rites. Is this not also ritual human sacrifice? St. Patrick went to Ireland and Christianized people, where they were forced to either convert or be killed but this is rarely discussed in history books” (Carr-Gomm, Philip. “What do Druids Believe?” Train in Druidry, Granta, 3rd April 2006, <https://www.druidry.org>. 7th Sept., 2019)

Philip Carr-Gomm, a scholar of psychology and psychotherapy, exhibits the fact in his writing about the practice of Druids that this conversion or metamorphosis essentially eradicated the Celtic society.

Druids are still active today but their lineage has been broken. They have only received in a small number of traditions discovered in a few primary sources recorded by medieval Welsh and Irish monks who wanted to preserve these traditions. As the druid’s knowledge was orally transmitted, it is possible these stories may have

survived in some parts of Europe or Ireland as a lineage but this, if it exists, is undocumented. I would say their lineage was likely completely destroyed or possibly went underground.

Celts once were known as some of the most powerful people and dominated much of Europe. But they were reduced to a few small groups after the Roman invasions. The Romans never invaded Ireland so paganism continued there, in isolation, until the Christians conversions began in 432 A.D. Nevertheless, their mythology has survived in the works of some medieval Irish and Welsh monks who made an effort to write down the stories. Adventure, heroism, romance, and magic are a few of the perennial elements that make Celtic mythology one of the most entrancing mythologies of Europe.

The Celts were a group of people who began to spread throughout Europe in the 1000s B.C. At the peak of their power, they inhabited an area extending from the British Isles in the west to what is now Turkey in the east. They conquered northern Italy and Macedonia, plundering both Rome and Delphi in the process. They had a reputation as being fierce and courageous warriors and were viewed with respect.

Richard Murphy in his *Saga and Myth in Ancient Ireland* talks about the different genres of storytelling from literary texts to live-storytelling. Indeed, from the observable differences between different genres of storytelling, from references in literary texts to storytellers of different ranks in society, and from analogy with the first steps of an ascending scale is still to notice in Gaelic speaking districts. Murphy brings us in the depth of such mythical story telling conventions:

It may be concluded that in ancient Ireland, a whole hierarchy of storytellers existed, ranging from the humble teller of folktales to the fili, who as well as being a learned poet, master of senchus (history)

and dinnshbenchbus (place lore), had been trained to 'narrate the chief stories of Ireland to kings, lords, and noblemen, from the text of Eighth century Irish, for example it is learnt that Mongan son of Fiachna, an East Ulster king was told a story by his fili, Forgoll during every winter night from November to May. (5)

Irish scribes have tended to record in their manuscripts only contemporaneous stories and not much of the ancient lore. However, there was the class of scribes known as fili who were scholars, poets and historians who did record the ancient lore in their medieval manuscripts. These manuscripts have preserved the stories of pre-Christian Ireland.

Murphy further elaborates about the types of tales:

Twelfth Century filid divided the tales they told into prime-scela and fo-scela, main tales and subsidiary tales; and though the numbers are hardly to be taken as exact, they claimed to know in all seven times fifty (350) tales, of which five fifties (250) were main tales and two fifties (100) were subsidiary tales. Comparatively few of the tales have been preserved till the present day. (13)

In the list of above discussed tales, these were classified according to the first words of their titles, but the modern scholars prefer to separate the tales according to their subject-matter and their spirit such as into Mythological tales, Heroic tales, King's tales, Finn tales, and Romantic tales.

The Irish narrative tradition has on the whole been essentially oral till the middle of seventh century. According to *Tuatha De' Donann*, originally meant the people of the goddess Donu, who told stories which introduce Aes or Tuatha De Donann as principal actors. Today, this term refers to the set of mythological tales

told by these people. Most of the stories are centered around the main gods of pagan Ireland, who are surrounded by the lesser divinities and spirits, and humans, who have some influence over how they are ruled (sacrifice, prayer, and propitiation).

According to Murphy, “from the oldest period of Irish tradition down to the present day, Irish storytellers speak currently of a spirit folk living close to human beings, but normally concealed from them” (14). In the ancient and modern Irish tales, we expect to find much of the mythology of the primitive Celts, full of its fundamental religious beliefs and practices of pagan life.

During the Celtic period (Druidism) that is before the Christian era the poets and the priests were the intermediates between people and the spirit world. If the crops were not growing well, if the women were not able to become pregnant, people would visit them and do some kind of ritual to solve such problems. The Celts regarded the feminine (the earth) and masculine (the sky) aspects of nature as divine powers and spirits. In the Celtic world, time, nature, seasonal cycles, death and birth were sacred and eternal. Thus, a hierarchy of deities came to represent the various mystical powers of earthly life and nature. Life was integrated with the sacred and the mundane, and it was the priests and poets (shamans) who guided the people in their relationship to the divine, and one of the main ways this was done was through storytelling.

The shamans were able to transcend earthly existence through rituals and dreams, and if they were accepted by the land (divine mother/feminine) in their dreams they could become an earthly king of the Druids. Ireland was personified as a goddess of the Earth, who would be born, be young, get old and be born again like the mythical bird phoenix. If she could sleep with the right king, she could be young again. But the king should be a decent one. The land was blessed in the union of male

and female powers, this is a core belief of paganism.

According to one of the mythological stories, two leaders came to Ireland: a warrior and a poet. The warrior who was trying to conquer Ireland, was actually drowned and killed by the sea's waves whereas, the poet, who preached and prayed for Ireland was accepted by the land and became its king.

Ireland is unique because some of the pagan conventions are still in practice there. Irish storytelling is one such beloved modern tradition that thrillingly reveals in a rich collection of tales something unique - aspects of a Western-European pagan tradition which largely avoided the influence of Roman civilization and even survived the later conversion of Irish culture to Christianity. While much of what made paganism whole has been lost to time, many of the stories and much of the mythology of ancient paganism were preserved through the Christian era by monks and scholars who wrote them down, and live storytellers who continued the oral traditions.

Paganism was the predominant culture in Ireland before the Christian era became dominant. After St. Patrick went there and Christianized people (circa AD 432), everything began to change. The way St. Patrick observed animals was something absolutely different from the Celtic world view. According to Christian norm, the animals were beasts having no soul. The Bible made man the owner of animals, which were not sacred. In the final judgment, animals are temporary and the land is not sacred due to the sin of Adam and Eve. This established the concept that only human beings will pass into eternity, that only they were divine. The Christian priests do not respect the land but they have power from the one true God.

Druidism went through a metamorphosis under the influence of Christianity in Ireland. In order to ease the transition the symbols of paganism were appropriated into Irish Christian iconography. Pagan icons were adapted to Christianity (as happened

everywhere) - the Easter bunny, Santa Claus, etc. Even the timing of Christian holidays all reflect pagan beliefs. Even in present day, 'St. Patrick's Day' is celebrated as a national holiday in Ireland on the 17th of March every year. The Virgin Mary has replaced the myth of the Earth Mother divinity, but she was betrothed to God alone, no longer spirit but the mortal virgin mother of Jesus Christ, the king of kings. Compared to Celtic Cycle, the roles are reversed - the feminine has been brought down to the earthly level and the masculine elevated to the divine. This represents the metamorphosis of the goddesses of Earth and Love into the mortal Virgin Mary while the living Jesus is transformed into the immortal deity of Christ himself - the Son of God - who becomes the intermediary between the divine and mundane. These kinds of metamorphosing images are reflected in the poems of Seamus Heaney.

Pagan Convention and Modernism - Influence on Heaney's Life and Work

Heaney uses his own life experience as a metaphor for the metamorphosis of Irish culture. During his life, Heaney moved far from his origins and thus went through a transformation not unlike the historical change that Ireland has undergone. The archetypal image of old Ireland as pagan, regional, rural, immobile, and accommodatingly tribal, has yielded to a new Ireland that is Christian, national, urban-suburban, mobile and revengefully tribal. His own life reflects this transition. He was born to a traditional Gaelic catholic countryside home, and moved as boy to a modern suburb that contrasted sharply with his origins.

Heaney drew content and purpose for his work from his childhood in Northern Ireland, which was interwoven with much division of religion and culture. He spoke Gaelic (the ancient language of the Druids) as his first language and played football for a Gaelic football team, but belonged to the minority Catholic religion. He was in a

place between two worlds - the more traditional Gaelic Catholic minority and the prominent, modern English speaking Protestant majority. These distinctions became more apparent and concerning during his young adult life and higher education.

Throughout his work, Heaney attempted to explore deeply the daily events of life around him, which were hard and painful, to discover the forces below his country's history in an attempt to bring back life, unity and hope to his country and to his own life. Heaney reckons the conflicts of his early traditional life and family with the challenges of adapting to modernism.

In this regard, we can see that Irish myth itself has gone through a similar transformation. We can point out Heaney's transformation from a Gaelic boy into a modern Irish man. There has been an analogous transformation of Ireland from the Celtic era through the invasion of Christianity and the British, where the very same forces impact Heaney's development as a man and artist.

In this way, the functions of Irish Myth in both an ancient context and in the modern context are very powerful tools to convey the message and connect the present with the past. Heaney is a major factor in reviving these myths and reconnecting the Irish to their ancient roots, while living in modern society.

Seamus Heaney was born on April 13, 1939, in Northern Ireland as a catholic minority and raised in a somewhat insular traditional Gaelic speaking country home called Mossbawn in County Derry. When he was fourteen, his family moved from Mossbawn to another end of the Parish called The Wood, which while not far geographically, was a world away from what he had been used to. In the Wood he was exposed to modern Ireland, to the political, cultural and religious tensions between Protestants (British nationalist) and Catholics (more traditionally Irish nationalist). The move had a great impact on Heaney and has inspired him to

compose two poems on “Mossbawn” which stands guard over that first, given world, the world he instinctively returns to for the material in many of his earliest poems in his fourth book, *North* (1975), and the modern world he was required to adapt to. *North* develops this historical theme further where he uses bog myth and various other myths to comment on sectarian violence in Northern Ireland.

Heaney attended Anahorish Primary School; when he was twelve years old, he won a scholarship to St. Columb’s College, a Roman Catholic boarding school in County Derry. He then went to Queen’s University in Belfast in 1957 to study English language and literature and graduated with a First-Class Honours degree in 1961.

Heaney began to write in 1962, and in his early poems, he reflects the images of the countryside, its history and of the natural world. His later poems move from private history to the public events of the past and how they have influenced the present political and military situation in Northern Ireland.

In his book *The Redress of Poetry* (1990), a collection of critical essays, Heaney develops a visual image of the complicated poetic truth of Irish identity using the diagrammatic structure called the ‘quincunx’ which is:

An arrangement of five objects with four at the corners of a square or rectangle and the fifth at its centre, used for the five on a dice or playing card, and in planting trees. It is a diamond, shaped around the central tower. Heaney equates these towers with the different incarnations of Irish Identity commonly referred to in literature as ‘Irishness’. The central one represents the native Irish tradition, the round tower of pre-invasion, insular dwelling. Around this, he imagines a diamond with towers in the north, south, east and west. These stand for Louis MacNeice’s Carrick Fergus Castle in the north,

representing the Protestant tradition; Edmund Spenser's colonizing presence in Cork in the south, representing the colonizing English tradition; Yeats's magical and mythical tower in the west, representing the Celtic revival tradition and Joyce's Martello tower in Dublin, representing a modernist approach to Irishness. (O'Brien, Eugene. "Seamus Heaney's Five Towers of Irish Identity". *The Irish Times*. <http://syracuseuniversitypress.syr.edu/spring-2016/seamus-heaney.htm>. 3rd Sept. 2019)

Heaney's awareness of split culture took on new meaning while he was at university and he worked to adopt some kind of balance between the sophistication of modern literary education and the ideas and impressions he received during his childhood.

Heaney was born in Ireland and lived throughout many of the most challenging times Ireland has faced, including the First and Second World Wars and the Irish Civil War. Heaney took evidence from history about the troubles in Ireland as a first hand witness such as the Great Famine that happened between 1845 to 1849 AD, much earlier than Heaney's birth. In fact, these challenges provided much inspiration for Heaney as he often explored the troubles faced by the Irish people and their search for freedom and equality within their own country through his poetry.

The British were a colonizing people, and they employed the tools and politics of division in order to gain the authority to rule and thereby achieve their colonization plans. Britain invaded and occupied Ireland in the early seventeenth century. From that point onwards, the people of Ireland were emotionally divided. Most wanted independence, but many still didn't want to fight with Britain.

In 1921, the country was partitioned into North Ireland (under British rule) and the Independent Republic of Ireland in the south after the War of Independence

which lasted for two years. It is during this time that the Irish Republican Army (IRA) emerged. These events were very significant to Heaney's life and work and he studied both the events themselves, and the effects they had on the Irish people.

Heaney also celebrates the beauty of nature and motherland throughout his poems. It is not surprising that nature can be found throughout his poems because Ireland is such a beautiful place, but the depth and commitment of his descriptions is phenomenal. It is a combination of all of these factors that led to the diverse themes throughout his poems and all over in his anthologies.

Seamus Heaney is considered one of the greatest poets of the 20th and 21st centuries. He was the best-loved of the group of Irish poets who came to prominence in the second half of the twentieth century. He became universally known when he won the Nobel Prize in literature in 1995. He was praised "for works of lyrical beauty and ethical depth, which exalts everyday miracles and the living" ("The Nobel Prize in Literature 1995". NobelPrize.org, Nobel Media AB 2019. Sat. 7 Sep 2019.

<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1995/summary/>).

Review of Literature

Having attracted readership from several continents and having been awarded many prestigious literary awards and honors, including the Nobel Prize, Heaney's work has often been scrutinized by the literary community. Having produced over 20 volumes of poetry and criticism, Heaney has a broad selection of work to be viewed and analyzed from various perspectives.

In *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Donaldson Abrahams mentions about Heaney's perception about Irish bogs and history as:

The Irish bog is a memory bank, in that it preserves everything thrown into it, an idea that produced the powerful bog poems of *North* (1975).

By then, this political poet felt constrained, he had crossed the border to live in the Irish Republic to fulfill his thirst for freedom. The troubles of Ireland continue to surface in the poems that he has written since then but the rich harmonies of *Field Work* (1979), *Station Island* (1984), *The Haw Lantern* (1987), *Seeing Things* (1991) and the *Spirit Level* (1996) confirm the wisdom of his decision to move South and the truth of Robert Lowell's judgment that Heaney is "the best Irish Poet since W.B. Yeats." (2819)

Abrahams not only gives an autobiographic description of Heaney's poetic career, but indicates Heaney's roots as an Irish man and his awareness of ancient pagan culture. Heaney's memory banks are filled up with the ancient pagan mythical stories and sagas as well as experience of modern times full of trouble which he depicts in his anthologies and revitalizes them as the modern Irish identities.

Heaney's poetic themes, especially in his early work, make use of ancient and modern Irish subject matter and were heavily influenced by his childhood upbringing in County Derry, with its farmlands and natural beauty, family tragedies, and wonders, which he contrasts with the vagaries of modern life. By using mythical characters and allusions, Heaney is using the ancient mythical language shared by people who never had any voice against the sacrificial ritual killings of past times, or the often brutal and murderous colonial suppressions of the British in contemporary times.

Heaney drew on his personal experiences of having lived in both cultures to produce extensive volumes of poetry. Metaphorically speaking, his use of mythical birds and characters are the voice of the suppressed and reflect his own personal lamentations as a poet living away from his native County Derry. He freed himself

from the limited local mentality of his early childhood to become a nationally and universally accepted poet, known for his insight into the ancient and the modern.

Henry Hart in *Seamus Heaney: Poet of contemporary Progression* evaluates that “Heaney’s poetry vacillates between antinomies... At the roof of his work is a multifaceted argument with himself, with others, with sectarian Northern Ireland, with his Anglo Irish heritage and with his Roman Catholic, nationalistic upbringing” (352). Hart points out that the major contraries of his poetry are pastoral and anti-pastoral tension (in his early volumes), and the impact of the colonizers on the colonized in *North*. The poem, which makes connections between the respective horrors of Heaney’s contemporary Belfast and ancient civilization, draws a shaming admission out of the author more pertinent to the contemporaneous than the prehistoric. He compares the adulteress’s treatment to that of Catholic school girls in Belfast, who were literally tarred and feathered by the Provisional IRA for flirting with British soldiers. But he cannot speak fearlessly against such cruel punishment as he was probably compelled to stay quiet in the troubled time or was politically preoccupied.

Heaney used his work to reflect upon Irish troubles, the often-violent political struggles that plagued the country during Heaney’s young adulthood. The poet sought to weave the ongoing Irish struggle into a broader historical framework embracing the general human situation in the books *Wintering Out* (1973) and *North* (1975) where he resurrects the dead bog people and has them narrate the story.

Blake Morrison, in his work *Seamus Heaney*, credits Heaney for his high personality and profound knowledge of Irish history and cultures. He admires:

The author is that rare thing, a poet rated highly by critics and academics yet popular with the common reader. He could serve his own community by preserving in literature its customs and crafts, yet

simultaneously gain access to a larger community of letters. This shows that the dominant source of his poetic language are landscapes and the figures of archaic rural Irish cultures. A general spirit of reverence toward the past helped Heaney resolve some of his awkwardness about being a writer. (26)

Heaney was especially moved by artists who created poetry out of their local and native backgrounds—authors such as Ted Hughes, Patrick Kavanagh, and Robert Frost. Heaney's work has always been most concerned with the past, even his earliest poems of the 1960s. He was also inspired by the Irish poetic tradition, especially the poets Yeats and Kavanagh whose poetry on rural life gave Heaney the courage to begin writing of his early life and to realize that his personal experiences were good subject matter for his work.

Recalling his time in Belfast, Heaney once noted saying that his local County Derry childhood experience, which he had considered archaic and irrelevant to the modern world, was to be trusted. He thinks that they taught him that trust and helped him to articulate it. *Newsweek* correspondent Jack Kroll mentioned in *Poetry*

Foundation:

Using descriptions of rural laborers and their tasks and contemplations of natural phenomena—filtered through childhood and adulthood—Heaney makes you see, hear, smell, taste this life, which in his words are not provincial, but parochial; provincialism hints at the minor or the mediocre, but all parishes, rural or urban, are equal as communities of the human spirit Heaney has written poems directly about the troubles as well as elegies for friends and acquaintances who have died in them; he has tried to discover a historical framework in which to

interpret the current unrest; and he has taken on the mantle of public spokesman, someone looked to for comment and guidance. Yet, he has also shown signs of deeply resenting this role, defending the right of poets to be private and apolitical, and questioning the extent to which poetry, however committed, can influence the course of history.

(“Seamus Heaney”. Poetry Foundation. Chicago, 2019.

www.poetryfoundation.org. 7th September, 2019)

Heaney wished to remain unconcerned with the social and political disorder of his society but his deep attachment to his country and culture forced him to be more pragmatic. He could not remain unconcerned with political, social and cultural disorder in Ireland. Thus it was necessary for him to find a way to that voice and he finds it by using and creating myth. The myth is that strife and violence are a pattern of life. They are inevitable.

His first foray into the world of translation began with the Irish lyric poem “Buile Suibhne”. Heaney’s translation of the epic was published as “Sweeney Astray” (one the works selected for this paper), a version of this mediaeval Irish saga featuring the fortunes of an Ulster king, who must wander the harsh countryside under the delusion that he is a bird.

While reviewing *Opened Ground*, Heaney’s selected poems 1966-1996, Jay Parini in *The Nation* mentions as:

Opened Ground includes the essential poems from Seamus Heaney’s twelve previous volumes of poetry , as well as new sequence drawn from *The Cure at Troy* (Heaney’s version of Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*) and *Sweeney Ashtray* (an adaptation of the mediaeval Irish poem *Buile Suibhne*) and the number of previously uncollected poems. It

closes with his Nobel Lecture, 'Crediting Poetry,' since, as he explains, the ground covered in the lecture is ground originally opened by the poems which here precede it. Having just reread most of his poems, I find myself more, not less, interested, and convinced that I have only begun to plumb their bracing depths ... The poems stay in the mind, which is the one essential feature of major poetry. (Blurb qtd. in *Opened Ground*)

This review provides a good ground for us to see Heaney as one of the most popular poets moving his voice in contemporary and this century. And in finding that voice, perhaps in his work translating the Irish lyric poem "Buile Suibhne" into "Sweeney Astray," Heaney seems to have been transformed himself. His later work takes on a new and lighter tone, in comparison to the darkness often found in his earlier work.

With the publication of *New Selected Poems, 1966-1987* (2002), Heaney marked the beginning of a new direction in his career. Poetry contributor William Logan commented on the cover of the same book that "the younger Heaney wrote like a man possessed by demons, even when those demons were very literary demons; the older Heaney seems to wonder, bemusedly, what sort of demon he has become himself" (Blurb qtd. in *New Selected Poems*). This indicates that Heaney has shifted his focus from beginning as he becomes more and more popular poet of the world. He has transformed himself from country poet with rustic and family matters to national and serious historical and political issues of his contemporary times in Ireland.

The publication of *North* gave rise to critical debate about precisely what position in relation to IRA violence the poem is assuming. In this regard, Conor Cruise O'Brien reviews as quoted in Nail Concoran's *Seamus Heaney*:

It is the word 'exact' that hurts most: Seamus Heaney has so greatly

earned the right to use this word that to see him use it as he does here opens up a sort of chasm. But then, of course, that is what he is about. The word 'exact' fits the situation as it is felt to be: and it is because it fits, and because other situations, among the rival population, turn on similarly oiled pivots, that hope succumbs. I have read many pessimistic analyses of 'Northern Ireland', but none that has the bleak conclusiveness of these poems. (116)

The volume *North* is certainly the voice of violence by IRA and counter violence by the British Solders in Northern Ireland. Heaney himself is a Northern Catholic. The myth of *North* is that it connects with the violence where he remains silent but it parallels the scarifies during the Celtic tradition of Ireland.

Regarding *The Redress of Poetry* (1995), James Longenbach mentions, "Heaney wants to think of poetry not only as something that intervenes in the world, redressing or correcting imbalances, but also as something that must be redressed—re-established, celebrated as itself" (Blub qtd. in *The Redress of Poetry*). The book contains a selection of lectures Heaney delivered at Oxford University as a Professor of Poetry. While he was criticized of giving the political colour of regionalism that is his feeling of suppression as politically marginalized Catholic in North and independence of empowered Protestants in the South. As a national poet, Heaney is aware of having the poetic journey with his dual peddles of reconciliation.

Heaney's *Finders Keepers: Selected Prose, 1971-2001* (2002) earned the Truman Capote Award for Literary Criticism, the largest annual prize for literary criticism in the English language. Reviewing this work, John Carey in *the London Sunday Times* proposed:

Heaney's is not just another book of literary criticism... It is a record

of Seamus Heaney's thirty-year struggle with the demon of doubt. The questions that afflict him are basic. What is the good of poetry? How can it contribute to society? Is it worth the dedication it demands?'

Heaney himself described his essays as 'testimonies to the fact that poets themselves are finders and keepers, that their vocation is to look after art and life by being discoverers and custodians of the unlooked for' ("Seamus Heaney". Poetry Foundation. Chicago, 2019.

www.poetryfoundation.org. 7th September, 2019).

Heaney's poetic philosophy became more and more matured in the later years. The Poems written in a specific time and contexts depict the contemporary scenario by capturing his moments and poetry becomes a timeless genre. This idea of Heaney supports the memories and experiences recollected in the poems are finders and also nice keepsakes of thoughts.

As a pioneer translator, Heaney's most famous work is the translation of the Anglo-Saxon epic poem, *Beowulf* (2000), which is considered groundbreaking because of the freedom he took in using modern language. The book is largely credited with revitalizing what had become something of a tired chestnut in the literary world.

In the introduction notes of Heaney's translation of *Beowulf*, he discusses the original poetry and his own translation of it. Heaney states that:

It is a work of the greatest imaginative vitality, a masterpiece where the structuring of the tale is as elaborate as the beautiful contrivances of its language and that it is a tragedy that the poem is generally read only as an official paper used in university and school classrooms.

Heaney wished to find an intersection between the Irish language

spoken by his family throughout his youth; and the language, melancholy and fortitude found in Anglo-Saxon poetry that he had developed an appreciation and feeling for during his years at University. (ix)

This epiphany allowed Heaney to offer a translation of *Beowulf* that celebrated the furthering of language and the provided a modern, direct and relatable reading of the poem that encourages audiences to find enjoyment in this masterpiece, rather than perceiving *Beowulf* as merely being for educational consumption. Heaney's translation opens the door for readers to sample the Anglo-Saxon literary world, while also exploring 'the dark ages', the historical and imaginative world of the poem and the mythic potency that *Beowulf* possesses.

About the epic translation Andrew Muldoon in *Financial Times* states that:

The whole performance is wonderfully intermediate-poised between the Bible and folk wisdom, between the Light Ages and the Dark Ages- and at the same time, pulverisingly actual in its language. He has made a masterpiece out of a master piece (blurb qtd. in Heaney's *Beowulf*).

Thus Heaney bridges the Anglo-Saxon literature to the most recent postmodern era transiting the ancient myth and knowledge through his translation and deep knowledge of culture.

Helen Vender described Heaney as "a poet of the in-between" (O'Driscoll's, 261-7) who was a colleagues at Harvest and she knows his vast knowledge and experience of ancient culture of England and Ireland in particular as well as his big leap to the Universities in the USA with his poetic journey. Heaney who has dedicated two of his books to Helen, was Heaney's audience while he was receiving

the Nobel Prize in 1995.

Stepping Stones is the first book-length portrait of Seamus Heaney through the interviews taken by his fellow poet Dennis O'Driscoll. Its title is taken from Heaney's Nobel Prize acceptance speech, in which he described, "journey into the wideness of language, a journey where each point of arrival - whether in one's poetry or one's life - turned out to be a stepping stone rather than a destination" (24). This is Heaney's personal experience on how he retraces his steps from his first exploratory testing of the ground from his childhood walls to what he called his 'moonwalk' while winning the 1995 Nobel Prize in Literature.

Heaney further opens up in the interview while speaking of the poetry:

there's such a thing as truth and it can be told - slant; that subjectivity is not to be theorized away and is worth defending; that poetry itself has virtue, in the first sense of possessing a quality of moral excellence and in the sense also of possessing inherent strength of reason by its sheer made-upness, its integrates, consolation and clarities. (25)

This is Heaney's answer to the question 'what poetry had taught him' as asked by O'Driscoll, Heaney's answer is typically thought-through and characteristically straightforward.

Short Synopsis of Heaney's Selected Poems

The following works have been selected to support this thesis.

a. "Digging"

In Heaney's title poem "Digging", collected in *Death of a Naturalist*, the readers are introduced to Heaney's rural upbringing on a farm. The images of flowerbeds, his grandfather cutting turf, and the smell of potato mold set a realistic scene of farm life. He uses this detailed and realistic imagery to romantically depict

for the viewer the life of the indigenous population. Heaney seemed to be fascinated with specific points in the historical landscape of Ireland.

b. “Bog Queen”

“Bog Queen” is a myth of the feminine and nativizing spirit of the soil in the theme of bog. Bog queen was buried after a natural death in Ireland and unlike other bog bodies, the bog queen was found in Ireland and the first bog body which was recovered properly, discovered by turf cutters in 1781 on the estate of Moria.

c. “The Tollund Man”

This Poem initiates Heaney’s myth of goddess, bog and tribe. He tries to relate the ancient pagan religion and cult of sacrificial killing to the contemporary sectarian killing and violence in Northern Ireland. The body of Tollund man dates back to the Iron Age and is the oldest of all the bog bodies found in Northern Europe. The poem begins with a promise of pilgrimage as Heaney says that someday he will go to Aarhus to see the Tollund man. Throughout the poem, the Tollund man is described in mystical terms. Heaney gives him a mythical status.

d. “Punishment”

Another Heaney’s great work, “Punishment” is at its essence, a poem about the bombings that were happening in Ireland in the mid-1970s due to the uprising of Irish Republic Army and British fighter planes. The young girls were brutally punished and killed by the IRA in the accusation of their adultery and flirting with the British Soldiers. In the end of punishment, the man being talked about is said to have been blown up by the bombs. It is one of important bog poems of Heaney.

e. “Blackberry Picking”

As the title suggests, “Blackberry-Picking” is a nostalgic memoir of Heaney’s youth, which he spent as a boy picking blackberries in the late summer. Heaney refers

to mythical 'Bluebeard' which is a character from the legendary French fairy tale who has killed his seven wives. But his eighth wife discovers the bodies of her predecessors and kills him. The speaker is excited when ripening berries are full of juice 'like thickened wine'. They felt sad as they could not save them for later when much of the blackberries and the juice turned sour.

f. "Sweeny in Flight"

Heaney translated Sweeney Astray (English version Sweeney Ashtray) in 1984 from the Medieval Irish tale *Buile Suibhne*. By closing an ancient Irish mythical character, it gave him a chance to work with Irish myth. As the name suggests, it deals with the male character, Sweeney who

g. "Station Island"

"Station Island" is a long meditative poem in twelve sections with the first person persona 'I'. The poem describes a three days pilgrimage taken by Catholics to the Irish Station Island seeking spiritual renewal. Here the narrator encounters the souls of his dead ancestors and Irish literary figures who speak to him. The bird is 'badly shot' can be understood as a metaphor that the people in Ireland had been cruelly shot in the Northern Sectarian murders. Heaney blows his own cries on the dead bird's voice box, just as he briefly and poignantly returns a voice to the dead with his own voice that sounds through the voice box of Sweeney, the mythical birdman was transformed into a bird as cursed by priest Renan. Heaney is flying around the forest beyond the confined political boundaries on the wings of Sweeney.

Organization of Study

This study is divided into four different Chapters. The first chapter deals with establishing the connection between Heaney as a poet and his affiliation into ancient pagan Irish convention. It further deals with Heaney's short biography as an Irish Poet

with a short synopsis of his selected poems extracted to be analysed with mythical reflection and its significance in brief. In the following sub-chapter, a short historical background of ancient Irish Pagan conventions has been presented to establish the relationship between Heaney's subject matter and reality. The review of literature approached the responses to Heaney's poetry from the earlier times till the date – providing a bird's eye view to past critical observations made by a number of critics about Heaney.

Similarly, Chapter two deals with what myth is, its types and use in literature. This chapter transits the assumptions of chapter one with the theoretical framework on how the myths are reflected in Heaney's poetry by bringing in various features of myth-making including that of metamorphosis.

Chapter three is an attempt of analyzing the selected poems by Heaney looking through the mythical spectacles. A total of seven representative poems namely "Digging", "The Bog Queen", "The Tollund Man", "Blackberry picking", "Punishment", "Sweeney Ashtray" and "Station Island" are analyzed from the mythical point of view. The fourth chapter concludes with the note that a majority of Heaney's poetry is influenced by the ancient Celtic convention which is the poet's nostalgia for its rich culture which no longer survives but has frequently transformed due to the socio-political and religious transformation. The final page of the thesis contains 'works cited', that provides the details of the works from which materials have been cited in the thesis.

Chapter 2

Myth Theory and Its Application in Literature

Myth, Origins and Theory

Myth is the set of traditional stories handed down from generation to generation in oral or written form. Across cultures, mythical stories vary widely in their details and characters but there is a great tendency for myths to share common themes, and in this sense they are thematically universal. These stories serve to help people understand and cope with the mysteries and hardships of human existence - the cycles of birth and death, the questions of origin, life, nature, the feminine and masculine, power, emotion and so much more. As we live, we grow and learn and are changed, for better or worse by our experience, and myth is there to guide us as we grow and change.

Myths provide answers and people are drawn to them with religious devotion where the stories and characters become intertwined with the identities of the people who receive, share and produce them. Some may see them as allegorical but many take the stories quite literally and believe in their truth with all their hearts, and with religious devotion. Myths are sacred and ritualistically told by shamans, priests and storytellers; they are viewed by the people and culture as authoritative, and the keepers of the myths are the authorities and intermediaries between the divine and the mundane. Common cultural myths shape us, our psyches, our ethical and moral values and identities, often without our even recognizing how strongly we are defined by them.

Myths usually contain some moral or ethical core along with often incredible and mystical elements. They tell us of our history and help explain how we have come to this place in time. They contain legends of great battles, warrior kings and noble

heroes. They tell us of great victories but also of great struggles and tragedy. They tell of great spiritual beings who interact with humans in dreams but also in physical form. Mythical characters are often god like inasmuch as they have supernatural powers - they can take physical form and wield their powers on earth as well as in the heavens but more often than not, these gods and goddesses are as conflicted and emotional as any human, capable of doing both good and evil. The figures of myth take many forms and in this regard many have chosen to view that as archetypal - not just of humans but of the earth itself and the many aspects of nature including animals, weather, the cycles of nature and its deep interconnectedness (ecology).

The mythical is taken as a living reality hidden deep within and beyond the mundane aspects of ordinary life; it may tell of legends, heroes and gods, but whether or not they really happened or exist, the mythical itself is real and continues to influence human destinies. Myths are born not made. They are born in the infancy of the people they owe their future to, not to any historic person but to the imaginative efforts of generations of storytellers. In this regard, Hazard Adams in *Critical Theory since Plato* opines:

Mythology is a system of hereditary stories of ancient origin which were once and still are at times believed to be true by a popular cultural group in order to explain the evolution of the earth as they provide a rationale for social customs and observance. (170)

Myth informs a collective cultural consciousness and gives the people they belong to a sense of purpose and unity around a shared past, present and destiny. Myth is not created out of nothing, it seeks to inform and guide us and in this sense truth is always contained inside the myth, if one is wise enough to find it.

Myth deals with the origin of the world and its exploration through mythical

vision, not as a literal proposition about reality. Nevertheless, many religious leaders and scholars present their myths as if they were the real scenario of the world's creation and development.

Laurence Coupe in *Myth, the New Critical Idiom*, discusses that myth serves in multiple paradigm like fertility myth, creation myth, and the myth of deliverance as named in the notion of Northrop Frye, myth of hero and myth of literary or mythical literature. In order to elaborate these mythical phenomena, Coupe elaborates various mystical allusions:

So we may say that a myth is typically a traditional sacred story of anonymous authorship and archetypal or universal significance which is recounted in a certain community and is often linked with a ritual; that it tells the deeds of superhuman being e such a gods, demigods, heroes, spirits or ghosts; that it is set outside historic time in primal or esthetological (i.e. last, ultimate) time or in the supernatural world , or may deal with comings and goings between the supernatural world and the world of human history; that the supernatural beings are imagined in anthropomorphic (i.e. humanly formed) ways although their powers are more than human and often the story of naturalistic but has the fractured, disorderly logic of dreams; that the whole body of people's mythology is often prolix (i.e. lengthy wordy), extravagant and full of seeming inconsistencies; and finally the work of myth is to explain, to reconcile, to guide action or to legitimate. (6)

Myths can provide a path to finding solutions as people regulate and interpret their lives and find value and purpose in their existence. Myths keep us aware of sacred realities that underlie and extend beyond the mundane, the fundamental sources of

existence, power, and truth. Myth is how we deal with the constantly changing nature of reality - and therefore change itself is a kind of archetype greatly explored in literature. Change, transformation and metamorphosis are fundamental to literature and myth.

From the above discussion myths can be further categorized in different ways and what follows is a broad overview.

- a. Aetiological Myth –Such myths are the myths of any kinds of origin, such as the world, the self, animals, etc.
- b. Historical Myths –Such myths are legends, wars and battles won and lost and about the historical figures and heroes of a place.
- c. Psychological Myths –Such deal with the mind, emotions and behavior in and between gods and humans.
- d. Archetypal Myths - Archetypal myth are our primordial image, idea and experience which we perceive as generally practiced consensus. The literary criticism the term to signifies image, story, a hearsay or a character type that occurs frequently in literature, myth, religion, or folklore and so on. ,
Therefore, such myth is believed to evoke sublime feelings because it touches our unconscious memory and our brain gets more excited. For example, when we show the image of Hanumana, the mythical character of oriental civilization, people in the contexts are more excited than we are just talking about monkey.
- e. Other important categories include - Animal myth (Animism); Creation and fertility; Death; and the Hero Myth.

Thus, there are various types of myths, but in the present research, the archetypal myths are more pertinent. However, each poem of Heaney gives life to various

characters, events and places which profound archaic symbolism in Irish contexts.

Archetypal Myths

The term archetype is of ancient Greek origin where the root words are 'archein' which means for original or old and 'typos' means pattern, model or type. Thus the combined meaning of archetype is an original pattern of which all other similar persons, objects, or concepts are derived, copied, modeled, or emulated.

The term 'archetype' is brought into literary criticism by Carl Jung from *The Psychology of Unconscious* (1913), later retitled *Symbols of Transformation*. For him:

The archetypes are permanent, eternal patterns of understanding. Though unrepresentable, in themselves, they are made manifest as 'archetypal images'. These are universal motifs that come from the 'collective unconscious' and are the basic content of religions and mythologies. The 'Collective unconscious is inherited not acquired. (qtd. From Guerin in Coupe 139)

The psychologist Carl Gustav Jung used the concept of archetype in his theory of the human psyche. He believed that universal mythic characters and archetypes reside within the collective unconscious of people.

Archetypes represent fundamental human motifs of our experience as we evolved, and they consequently evoke deep emotions. All myths are thematic stories dealing with specific subjects. But stories also have characters, and in the case of myths they are often representing much more than a single person doing this or that at a whim or from some basic human need. They are not just types, but archetypes, often human but not exclusively so.

In the literary critical analysis of myth (called myth theory or archetypal theory) these archetypes go beyond just the types of people and core emotions that

exist. In myth theory nature in all her aspects - human nature, earthly nature, divine nature, and even plots and situations can become characters or literary elements of mythical proportions. This unconscious racial memory makes powerfully effective for us with a group of primordial images shaped by the repeated experience of our ancestors and expressed in myths, religion, dreams, fantasies, and literature. The primordial image that taps this pre-logical mentality is called the archetype.

The literary critics apply the term to an image, descriptive detail, a plot pattern, or a character type that occurs frequently in literature, myth, religion, or folklore and is, therefore, believed to evoke profound emotions because it touches the unconscious memory and thus calls into play illogical but strong responses.

While they may be applied to individuals as personality types, archetypes generally form the core characteristics of our shared human existence, whether taking the form of deities, monsters, demons, heroes, humans or animals, they are also representative of broader things such as struggle, birth, life and death, love, power, plot and so on.

Heaney uses myth, its characters and symbolism, to weave a common thread from the past into the present. He weaves this thread through in his own life and the life of his country and culture.

Plato was a pioneer forefather to discuss myth. He called myths as fictional stories. These themes are found in every mythology. As far as creation stories are concerned, these are found in every culture, whether monotheistic or polytheistic.

Norton Frye, in this connection clarifies:

A mythology nearly always begins with some form of creation myth and others unfold from it. A creation myth in this sense is the only myth we need, all other myths being implied in it. Some critics,

notably Coleridge, also think that the only theory of literature is a theory of creativity. (241)

In the modern age of advertising and mass entertainment, imaginations lay disposed to fantasy and manipulation, but the literary criticism of myth, for all its esotericism, has put mythology in its true place as lessons in the history of the human mind and experience.

Myth is a powerful instrument, and has been a source of inspiration for Irish writers to promote the cultural identity of different ages in Irish literary history.

Kavanagh expresses his Irish experience in his epic poem “The Great Hunger” as:

The Great hunger’, Kavanagh’s long poem on the ‘metaphorical hunger’ (for more fulfilling experience) for the small Co. Monaghan farmer, which opens by watching ‘the potato-gatherers like mechanized scare crows move /Along the sidefall of the hill’.

(Corcoran 47)

Some Irish Poets, such as Patrick Kavanagh concern themselves with the problem of poor, rural catholic citizens and their plights. Here Heaney uses this as archetypal myth to draw parallels between the past and present of Irish contemporary society.

Further elaborating on types of archetypes according to Frye, coupes states that:

The Four mythoi that we are dealing with; comedy, romance. Tragedy and irony can be parallel as four aspects of a central unifying myth. Agon or conflict is the basis or archetypal theme of romance, the radial of romance being a sequence of marvelous adventures. Pathos or catastrophe, whether in triumph or defeat, is the archetypal theme of

tragedy. Sparagmos, or the sense that heroism and effective action are absent, disorganized or foredoomed to defeat, and that confusion and anarchy reign over the world, is the archetypal theme of irony and satire. Anagnorisis, or recognition of a new born society rising in triumph around a still somewhat mysterious hero and his bride, is the archetypal theme of comedy. (Coupe 169)

According to Frye, there are four 'aspects to the quest-myth' which may be related to the four genres of literature themselves. The first being agon or conflict, while second, third and fourth ones are pathos or death, the disappearance of hero and reappearance and recognition of the hero respectively.

Mythology encompasses more than grade school stories about the Greek and Roman deities or clearer fables invented for the amusement of children. It may be true that myths do not meet our current standards of factual reality but then neither does any great literature. Instead, they both reflect a more profound reality. As Mark Schorer says:

Myth is the fundamental, the dramatic representation of our deepest instinctual life of a primary awareness of man in the universe, capable of many configurations, upon which all particular opinion and attitudes depend. (qtd. in Guerin's 159)

Myths are by nature collective and communal; they bind a tribe or a nation together in common psychological and spiritual activity.

In *The Language of Poetry*, edited by Allen Tate, "myth is the expression of a profound sense of togetherness of feeling and of action and of the wholeness of living" (160). Having established the significance of myth, we need to examine its relationship to archetypes or archetypal patterns. Although every culture has its own

distinctive mythology that may be reflected in legend, folklore, and ideology, it is the universal archetypes that take their specific shapes in the cultural environments in which they grow. Myth is, in the general sense, universal.

According to Jung:

Water is the commonest symbol for the unconscious; the sea is the mother of all life, with the depth of spiritual mystery including life, death and rebirth. Rivers, streams, and rain are seen to represent rebirth (water is used in the baptism ritual), swamps and bogs can represent death, struggle and the flowing of time into eternity; transitional phases of the life cycle; incarnation of deities. (qtd. in Guerin 161)

Furthermore, similar motifs or themes may be found among many different mythologies, and certain images that show in the myths of people widely separated in time and place tend to give a common meaning or, more accurately, tend to elicit comparable psychological responses and to serve similar cultural functions. Such motifs and images are qualified as archetypes.

Myth Criticism and Its Use in Literature

Mythology has been interpreted by the modern intellect in different ways. The myth critic is concerned with seeking out archetypal elements that universally inform human perceptions and reactions to events with a certain uncanny and often dramatic and predictable force. The myth critic wishes to discover how certain literary works, usually those that have become or promise to become classics, imagine a kind of reality to which readers are compelled to respond, while other works, seemingly as well as constructed and even more realistic, leave them cold.

Speaking figuratively, the myth critic seeks the wooden hawks of great literature: the so called archetypes or archetypal patterns that the writer has drawn

forward along the tensed structural wires of plot, and that vibrate in such a way that a sympathetic resonance is set off deep within the reader.

Myth criticism designates not so much a critical approach in literary studies as the convergence of several methods and forms of inquiry about the complex relations between literature and myth. So heterogeneous are these inquiries, connecting with so many disciplines and interdisciplinary issues, that it is perhaps best to think of myth criticism as the locus for a series of complex, if powerfully suggestive, questions. Is myth embedded in literature, or are myth and literature somehow coextensive? In fact, the great literature are produced with the profound understanding of the myth and one must have deeper knowledge about the history while borrowing the ideas of Levi-Strauss.

Carl Jung another seminal contributor:

focused on the immaterial aspects of human life. Jung was a psychiatrist who used myth and archetype to understand the human mind. His work theorizes myths and archetypes in relation to the unconscious, an inaccessible part of the mind. From a Jungian perspective, myths are the “culturally elaborated representations of the contents of the deepest recesses of the human psyche: the world of the archetypes.” (Walker 3-15)

Despite the special importance of the myth critics' contribution, this approach is poorly understood for several reasons. Interpretive tools are available through their development in such disciplines as anthropology, psychology, and cultural history to which many are unfamiliar. Secondly, many scholars and teachers of literature have remained skeptical of myth criticism because of its tendencies toward the cultic and the occult. Finally, there has been a discouraging confusion over concepts and

definitions among the myth initiates themselves, which has caused many would-be myth critics to turn their energies to more clearly defined approaches such as the traditional or formalistic. The key understanding of Jungian approach to mythology lies in the concept of the image, which provides the basics of his theory of the unconscious

Northrop Frye saw the function and effect of archetypes as his primary interest and their primary value in literary criticism. He was not interested in the material or unconscious aspects of myth because the former must be done and was not necessarily ritualized, and the latter was of such a nature that it could not be examined or studied. Frye was the first to theorize archetypal criticism in purely literary terms.

Lous Tyson in *Critical Theory Today* discusses:

In the late 1950s, Levi-Strauss created structural anthropology, whose goal was to discover when 'different' myths are actually different versions of the same myth in order to show that human beings from very different cultures share structures of consciousness that project themselves in the formation of structurally similar myths. These structural similarities, he claimed, reveal that certain human concerns cross cultural boundaries, and they include such practical questions as how to define kinship ties (in order to determine rights of inheritance and incest taboos) and such philosophical questions as how to account for the origin of the human race. (215)

An illustration of the latter question occurs in Levi-Strauss's analysis of the Oedipus myth, which he believed embodies the conflict between our knowledge that we are born of sexual union and the presiding belief among many cultures that we are born of the earth, as Sparta spring from the soil in the Oedipus myth.

Levi-Strauss emphasizes that, “there is no true or original version of any myth. Each version of a given myth is equally valid because each embodies the attempt of all structures to make sense out of an otherwise chaotic world” (217). Frye calls this method of classification archetypal criticism because it deals with the recurrence of certain narrative patterns throughout the history of western literature. The word archetype refers to any recurring image, character type, plot model, different versions of which recur throughout the history of human production: in our myths, literature, dreams, religions, and rituals of social behaviour.

Frye’s method thus, seeks the structural principles that underlie the western literary tradition:

Indeed, archetypes are themselves structural in nature: in order to be an archetype, an image, character type, or other narrative element it must serve as a structural model that generates numerous different versions of itself, that is, numerous different surface phenomena with the same underlying structure. So while the specific content of particular romances, tragedies, ironic/satiric narratives, and comedies is different - that is, their surface phenomena are different- however, the structure of each genre remains the same. (223)

No matter in what way myths are perceived or applied , the core or essence is same in the sense that it serves the human kind with the virtues like morality, wisdom, ethics, etc. and teaches to live a better life by learning the lesson from our past experiences, deities and our ancestors and live a noble life. Since we human mortals are not the perfect, we try to create a utopian world of perfectness to give solace and meaning to our life or else it becomes futile.

The Greek and Roman mythologies are transcendental. They live, even today,

in studies of ancient civilizations and in our fine art and on our televisions. Myth is as much a changing discourse as it is an animate discourse. Anyone who has tried to compare the adventures of Hercules, scoured in ancient sources, with those of modern action packed adventure series will be well aware that when we use mythology, we often change it even while preserving ancient mythical sources.

There is an astonishing amount of variation in the way the stories are told and what they are intended to mean. This was true to Romantic poets in their use of myth and gave these mythologies new life and new meaning. At the same time, myths were spoken in romantic poetry where poets used myth to speak to expressed and received ideas and comment upon the issues they felt crucial to their time and place.

The present research aims at analyzing Heaney's poetry through mythological prospective. The discussion that follows focuses on the mythological issues in some of Heaney's poems selected for the research.

Heaney said of the bog Irish bogs are like a memory bank which preserved everything that was thrown into it. This opened his eyes to a deeper level of mythical and historical congruence. He has produced eight poems based on the bog myth among which two bog poems are analyzed in this study.

Transformational Elements: from Ancient Pagan Culture to Heaney's Poems

Transformation is central to literature - it is always in some way focused on interesting and profound changes brought to characters (animate or inanimate) through the process of life. This is so fundamental that great myths have arisen to illustrate the process of change - the Hero's Journey is one such theme with Homer's Odyssey as a perfect example. In such myths, we can find some elements of metamorphosis where we can observe of complete change of form, shape, structure or substance; transformation, as in myths, by circumstance, magic or sorcery.

German novelist Franz Kafka in *The Metamorphosis* describes the, “transformation of his protagonist George into a giant roach, a negative transformation that is symbolic of the demeaning (perhaps monstrous in Kafka’s view) way human life is reduced to near meaninglessness in the modern world” (Kafka 27). Eventually, the protagonist dies when he transforms into semi human semi insect and family feels relieved. This is a great example of metamorphosis however the archetype of Kafka is that of negative transformation.

The title of the poem “Metamorphosis” in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* suggests transformation, and this is a major theme throughout the work. The concept of love seems to transform with each character:

In one case, a god takes the form of a man (metamorphosis) to desperately seek a particular woman and refuses to relent until he has her. In another instance, a female goddess cares deeply for a man and goes to great lengths to protect him from danger. In yet another case, a couple who are arranged to be married seem indifferent about the matter. (Brewer 353–86)

All of these can be seen as transformations of the love archetype. We can also sketch elements of transformation in Heaney’s poems and himself as a person.

During Christianity, the world view of religion was transformed from nature and poets being the intermediates of God to only priest (St. Patrick) being the medium to the only one true god (the pantheon of Celtic deities was destroyed). These elements of transformation have been revived by Heaney throughout his poetry. For example, he has revived the ancient ritualistic killings through his bog poems and through the spiritual character Sweeney, he flies like a bird to show the readers the gravity of social reality in ancient and modern Ireland.

Heaney addresses transformation in much of his work in both personal and public ways. An Analogy can be made in the shift in values as in old Ireland, the people as deeply connected to the land and the land is as sacred whereas in new Ireland (post Christian), the land is stripped of the sacred. Heaney uses landscape and land connections all the time, which is reviving old Ireland's land connection, some form of transforming the mundane (i.e. the everyday) into the sacred for common people.

Chapter 3

Heaney's Poetry: A Continuum of Irish Myths

Heaney's poetry is deeply rooted in his native Ireland. However, his messages and perceptions are of importance to the whole of humankind. Ireland has a long history of invasion as well as internal conflict. Heaney's poetry explores the history and prehistory of Ireland and draws parallels between and with them to modern times. Heaney was a postmodern poet who bore witness to the contemporary events that happened around the beginning of the second half of the 20th century and that of the first half of this millennium - seriously world changing transformations.

Heaney tries to find out the causes of contemporary violence in Ireland and offer some kind of solution. Sectarian conflict and violence are not limited to Ireland alone. World history shows that conflict among people and nations is all-pervading. Heaney gives a new perspective to study and solve such conflicts through his poetry with vivid use of myth. In this chapter, discussion is focused on what type of Irish myths have found space in Heaney's poetry and how they have influenced Heaney's literary career and modern Irish culture.

Heaney has extensively used Irish history and myth in his poetry which he parallels with the modern world that he lived. Various modern English poets have also used mythology in their work. The most notable example is T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Heaney tries to discover some basic pattern or archetype by exploring various myths in his poetry. The most important is the bog myth. Therefore, this essay will examine the Heaney's use of myth in his poetry and how myth saturates Heaney's poetry from the very beginning.

Opened Ground (Selected Poems 1966-1996) published in 1998 was selected by Heaney himself and includes essential work from Heaney's twelve previous books

of poetry, as well as new sequences drawn from two of his landmark translations, “The Cure at Troy” as well as “Sweeney Astray”. A number of mythical elements in Heaney’s poems speak as if it is coming mythologically from Heaney’s own voice, such as in the following selected poems, namely “Bog Queen”, “The Tollund Man”, “North”, “Digging”, “Blackberry Picking”, “Station Island” and “Punishment” which are collected in the very anthology edited by himself.

Heaney has used bogs as a symbol for the long memory of Irish civilization. He regards Irish bogs as a storehouse or memory bank, as repositories of the Irish past, memory, and culture and the source of cultural identity for Irish people. The Bogs are the reservoir of history and memories. Heaney used a bog myth to express communal themes in his poetry. Along with the myth of the goddess Earth, the Bog Myth (ritual human sacrifice) is also used by Heaney as a mythical response to America’s myth of the modern west. Heaney composed a total of eight poems around the bog, which elaborate his bog myth. These poems are thematically based in one way or another on Globe. In 1976, his political preoccupations were brought into sharper focus by his reading of P.V. Globe’s *The Bog People*. Hazard Adams notes of *The Bog People* as:

It was chiefly concerned with the preserved bodies of men and women found in the bogs of Jutland, naked, strangled or with their throat cut, disposed under the peat since early Iron Age times. The author argues convincingly that a number of these, and in particular, the Tollud Man, whose head is now preserved near Aarhus in the museum of Silkeborg, were ritual sacrifices to the mother goddess, the goddess of the ground who needed new bridegrooms each winter to bed with her in her sacred place, to bring new life forward in the spring. Taken in

relation to the tradition of Irish political martyrdom for the cause whose icon is Kathleen Ni Houlihan (mythic figure emblematic of Mother Ireland), there is more than an archaic barbarous rite: it is an archetypal pattern. And the unforgettable photographs of these victims blended in my mind with the photographs of atrocities, past and present, in the long rites of Irish Political and Religious struggle.

(2819)

Heaney was highly influenced by the book and felt deeply connected by it to his ancient roots. The bog poems depict the bog bodies found in Danish and Irish bogs, which are offered as a sacrifice to the Earth goddess Nerthus. Many of the bog bodies are described using non-human terms. They are likened to the bog itself. Ireland has as much as 1.2 million hectares of land which counts world's largest number of bogs areas besides Finland.

“Digging” is one of Heaney’s best known title poems collected in *Death of a Naturalist*. This is about a poet’s relationship with his father and in a sense that the working-class son is adopting a path very different from his father and his father before him as he has chosen the profession of poet rather than farmer:

But I’ve no spade to follow men like them.

Between my finger and my thumb

The squat pen rests

I’ll dig with it. (Line 28-31)

The poem gives voice to Heaney’s desire to explore the past, while serving as an apology for the literary life on which he was about to embark.

“Digging” shifts from childhood through memory and comparison to the more distant past, evoking the continuity of life in a small farming community in Ireland,

which carries a sense of history and time defined by a certain performance. Heaney as the young man looks down from his writing table:

Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests, snug as a gun.
Under my window, a clean rasping sound
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:
My father, digging. (Line 1-5)

We are clear that the persona believed this poem to be highly significant one. In this respect, it is a very personal declaration - the son of the farmer is no longer connected to the land and spade but will instead use the pen to dig his way into life.

Heaney assimilates himself regarding the poem:

I now believe that “Digging” poem had for me the force of an initiation: the confidence I mentioned arose from a sense that perhaps I could do this poetry thing too, and having experienced the excitement and release of it once, I was doomed to look for it again and again. “Digging”, in fact, was the name of the first poem I wrote where I thought my feelings had got into words. (qtd. in O’Driscoll 66)

According to him, Heaney was well aware of his Catholic upbringing and rebellious Ulster identity, but after the invasion and occupation, the British government refused even to acknowledge Ulster and, Heaney realized, rather than open dialogue they intended to disconnect the natives from their real identities. Many people, amongst much upheaval, were forced to leave their occupations but Heaney chose to move pen instead of spade to be the voice of revolt against colonization, drawing parallels to his personal longing for freedom. Here pen is archetypal for the voice for freedom by writing songs of freedom.

“Digging” exhibits the condition of people in British-occupied Northern Ireland and such imperialist myths produce counter-narratives in which the virtues of the colonial subject are demonstrated. At the same time, digging potatoes exhibits a parallel archetype to the great hunger crisis in Ireland which killed many people. One of the features of Heaney is he takes frequent interest in creating archetypal situations, relationships, and persons. Working in a rural setting is an archetypal situation while the boy and his grandfather can be taken as archetypal persons and the loving relationship between them is a love archetype.

“Digging” is a central metaphor in his poetry that is directly related to the landscape and his rebellious nature as a poet. Throughout his early poems, Heaney evokes the myth of decay and death within nature in order to depict the loss of originality: the loss of a rural way of life, the loss of loved ones and indifference to the ancestral occupation.

In this regard, he uses the pen as a gun myth as he justifies his interview in *Stepping Stones*, “This informs a great deal of Heaney’s subsequent work, when it is translated out of its specifically agricultural application into the view of poetry as archeology, the poem as an act of cultural retrieval” (Corcoran 51). Heaney resolves to use his pen as his digging implement, and to perform a different kind of excavation from which was being practiced by his forefathers, and he exposes and mourns the transformations being imposed upon him and his country.

“Bog Queen” replicates the voice of the bogs. One salient feature of this poem is that it is only the “Bog Queen” who has given voice among all other bog bodies. The bog queen tells the story of her discovery and decay in her own voice:

I lay waiting,

Between turf-face and demesne wall,

between heathery levels
And grass- toothed stone
My body was braille
for the creeping influence. (Line 1-6)

In the opening lines, the bog queen says that she is waiting for centuries to tell her story. She lays waiting between turf face and demesne.

The body of bog queen is open to various influences and interpretations as Heaney compares her body to 'Braille'. The Bog Queen archives a mythical reputation as she describes her own body in the peat bog:

dawn suns groped over my head
and cooled at my feet,
through my fabrics and skins
the seeps of winter
digested me,
the literate roots
pondered and died
in the carvings
of stomach and socket. (Line 7-15)

Her body was subjected to extreme variations in temperature as rising sun groped over her head and setting sun cooled at her feet. Her body was riddled with vegetation as seeds of winter digested through her skin fabric. The literate root died in the carvings of her body. In this way, she tells the readers that her body has faced the turbulence like roller coaster for centuries. She tells us how her body tolerated the destructive forces of nature.

In Spite of her body facing many destructive forces, her brain is still fertile

with imagination, still alive and responsive:

my brain darkening ,
 a jar of spawn
 Fermenting underground
 dreams of Baltic amber. (Line 18-21)

Her active brain still dreams of the Baltic amber and shows her high-born Viking origins. The Scandinavian seafaring pirates and traders, known as Vikings, traded the Baltic amber that was found in the shores of Baltic Sea in Jutland. Amber was very valuable at those times because it was used in jewelry and it gave a pleasant sweet smell if burned.

Here, we can find the creation myth as in the course of time, she becomes an earth goddess:

My sash was a black glacier
 wrinkling, dyed weaves
 and Phoenician stitchwork
 retted on my breasts'
 soft moraines. (Line 29-31)

The bog queen was also aware of her fertility and regrets that the time and destructive forces of nature destroyed it the long winters in Ireland reminded her of her warm Scandinavian home.

The last part of the poem deals with her exhumation and violation of her privacy. For the first time, she suffered defilement at the hands of a turf cutter:

I was barbed.
 and stripped
 by a turf cutter's spade

who veiled me again. (Line 40-43)

She was barbed and stripped by a turf cutter's spade. However, he, the turf cutter was kind enough to bury her once again in the bog. Nevertheless, the bog queen suffered defilement second time when peer's wife bribed the turf-cutter and he once again exhumed her from the bog. She bribed him for the bog queens' hairs. She says that the hairs are like a birth cord, which connected her to the bog, and when they were cut, she is left as an object, which is totally fragmented.

The bog water preserved her body, but when it was severed from it, it becomes just small gleams on the bank. In this sense the poem can be read as parallel to a colonial narrative, she was after all an invader.

In the beginning, the "Bog Queen" sits between the Catholics and Protestants. However, at the end of the poem, she emerges from the bog as a form of rebirth and comes to life in the poem. This has parallels to the creation myth or archetype.

In this regard, Edna Longley's comment in the book *The Art of Seamus Heaney* seems worth mentioning here:

Bog Queen, although over-amplified like The Grabaulle Man, renews that well-worn genre the ailing by presenting Ireland as her landscape, weather, geography and history, and by pushing her 'old bag' incarnation to an extreme. Since this is the one bog poem with true Ireland antecedents, it can begin with an apt analogue of dormant nationhood and end with an equally plausible rising. (Longley 91)

"Bog Queen" is perhaps the most reverently elegiac and vividly detailed among the poems of its kind. It serves as a myth of the feminine (creation) as well as the nationalizing spirit of the soil. This poem is different from other bog poems in many respects. First, other bog bodies in the bog poems were either sacrifices to the mother

goddess or they were victims of ritual or tribal sacrifices. But bog queen was buried after her natural death. Other bog bodies were found outside Ireland, especially in northern Europe whereas bog queen was found in Ireland itself. It was the first bog body which was recovered properly. It was discovered in 1781 on the estate of Moria by turf cutters. Though it was found in Ireland, it is thought to be of a rich Viking woman.

Apart from her mythical significance of bog queen, the poem can be interpreted in diverse ways. "Bog Queen" is a speaking agent and not just a bog body and she could be talking on behalf of all other bog bodies. "The Bog Queen" also symbolizes the Irish landscape. This view is also supported by Henry Hart when he says that Heaney has mythicized the actual Viking body into a symbol of Northern Ireland (Hart 90). In "The Tollund Man", Heaney tries to relate the ancient pagan religion and cult of sacrificial killing to the contemporary sectarian killing and violence in Northern Ireland. They are described with all the graphic exactitude characteristic of Heaney's style: Heaney likens the bogs to Jung's concept of the collective unconscious, which is the residue of racial memory. Heaney has used some myths and rituals to preserve the remote past for future generations and to comment on the sectarian violence in contemporary Ireland. He draws a parallel between Iron Age sacrificial killings and contemporary sectarian violence.

P.V. Globe elaborates on the fertility rituals in the Iron Age in his book *The Bog People*:

Tollund Man and many of the other bog men, after their brief time as god and husband of the goddess (Mother Earth) - the time of the spring feast and of the wanderings through the villages- fulfilled the final demand of religion. They were sacrificed and placed in the sacred bog.

(190-91)

The Tollund man was offered as a sacrifice to the Fertility goddess. In ancient Pagan societies, a man was offered as sacrifice to goddess Earth to renew the fertility of the land.

The dark juices of goddess preserved his body for thousands of years and now he looks like a saint's preserved body:

She tightened her torc on him

And opened her fen,

Those dark juices working

Him to saint's kept body,

His body is out there in Jutland

In the old man-killing parishes

I will feel lost,

Unhappy and at home. (Line 13-16 and 37-40)

The body of the Tollund man was found at Tollund in Denmark in May 1950. The body of Tollund man dates to the Iron Age and is the oldest of all the bog bodies found in Northern Europe. This is also the first poem that initiates Heaney's myths of goddess, bog and tribe.

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Heaney was particularly inspired with the reading of Globe which provided a fertile ground for creating many bog poems for Heaney.

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goddess, bog and tribe.

The poem “Punishment” is the most controversial and debated of Heaney’s poems as it contains various shifting perspectives. There are spatial and temporal shifts and shifts from the Iron Age to contemporary Ireland. It begins with the narrator looking at representations of the violence:

Little adulteress,
 before they punished you
 you were flaxen-haired,
 undernourished, and your
 tar-black face was beautiful.

My poor scapegoat,

I almost love you. (Line 25-31)

The first two stanzas of the poem do not deal with the bog body, but try to recreate before our eyes the actual scene of punishment as was given to her during the Iron Age. Heaney draws a parallel between a young woman from the Bronze Age who was murdered for adultery and preserved in the northern European bogs.

During the British invasion, many other Northern Irish women (‘your betraying sisters’) were tarred and feathered as a punishment for their romances with the British soldiers who occupied Ulster:

but would have cast, I know,
 the stones of silence.

I am artful voyeur

[...]

I who have stood dumb
 when your betraying sisters,

cauled in tar,
wept by the railings
who would connive
in civilized outrage
yet understand the exact
and tribal, intimate revenge. (Line 32-44)

The narrator here imagines the circumstances of her execution. After that, he contemplates the contemporary context that is tarring and feathering of Catholic girls during the Troubles. Here the circumstantial, archetypal, and mythical are blended at the same time. The body was found at Windeby Estate in Schleswig.

“Punishment” is a remarkable exercise in sympathetic imagination not only for its ability to place the poet in the position of the murdered girl, but for its ability to keep its distance even as it does so:

I can feel the tug
of the halter at the nape
of her neck, the wind
on her naked front.
It blows her nipples
to amber beads,
it shakes the frail rigging
of her ribs.
I can see her drowned
body in the bog,
The weighing stone,
The floating rods and boughs. (Line 1-12)

The girl was pulled with a rope around her neck and she was probably naked. Her whole body was shaking with fear, horror, and cold. She was very weak and fragile. Heaney describes the drowned body of the girl and here we can feel the shift of time now. The drowned body in the bog was held in place by stones, floating rods and boughs. Heaney compares her body with a barked sapling. The skull still contains her brain. Her shaved head looks like a stubble of black corn. Probably she was blindfolded before drowning in the bog.

Heaney calls the girl ‘little adulteresses’ and imagines that she was very beautiful before the punishment:

Little adulteress,
 before they punished you
 you were flaxen – haired
 undernourished, and your
 tar black face was beautiful. (Line 25-31)

In these lines, Heaney gives a picture that she was undernourished and her black face with silky hair was beautiful. She was made a scapegoat for the sins of society, as she was the only one who got punishment to relieve sins of society. Here, Heaney shifts his talking to the bog body instead of the dead body. Heaney says that he almost loved her but could not have done anything to save her. Heaney regrets his lack of courage or the will to intervene in the injustice done to the girl. He must have felt guilty of silence as silence is speech. The next stanza obsessively deals with imagery of violence and death – brain’s exposed and darkened combs.

“Blackberry-Picking” is a rhyming poem containing twenty-four lines. As the title suggests, “Blackberry-Picking” is a nostalgic memoir of the speaker’s youth, which he spent as a boy picking blackberries in the late summer. The speaker is

excited when ripening berries are full of juice 'like thickened wine'. The poem reveals the anticipation of him and his friend who impatiently waited for blackberry to ripen. Out of their greed, they collected the ripened berries in makeshift containers from the vine. Unfortunately they felt sad when much of the blackberries and the juice turned sour like our life does at our older age sometimes. Heaney uses the mythical bluebird here as archetype to ruin and decay.

The poem is split into two stanzas, 16 and 8 lines respectively. The poem contrasts childhood with adulthood and explores the disappointments and the tension that follows. In two short stanzas the reader is taken into the exciting, idealistic world of the blackberry picker, and the harsh reality of time as perceived by the troubled adult.

This symbolizes this unfruitful quest for something that will ultimately always evades his grasp. The protagonist of the poem, the little boy exclaims in the first part:

Once off the bush,
 The fruit fermented, the sweet flesh would turn sour.
 I always felt like crying. It wasn't fair
 That all the lovely candles smelled of rot.
 Each year I hoped they'd keep, knew they would not. (Line 21-25)

The above stanza describes that once ripen berries soon decay, just like childhood memories are fleeting, it becomes impossible to keep things fresh all the time. So the actual fruit picking becomes a metaphor for childhood energy and the innocent, sweet and fruitful life. This can be taken as a parallel archetype with forbidden fruit that once they were tested by Adam and Eve, the first mortals by disobeying God's order, they were hurled down to the earth.

In the poem, Heaney refers to mythical Bluebeard which is a character from

legendary French fairy tale who has killed his seven wives. But his eighth wife discovers the bodies of her predecessors and kills him:

We trekked and picked until the cans were full,
 Until the tinkling bottom had been covered
 With green ones, and on top big dark blobs burned
 Like a plate of eyes. Our hands were peppered
 With thorn pricks, our palms sticky as Bluebeard's. (Line 12-16)

Heaney compares their sticky hands with those of Bluebeards. While Bluebeard's hands were sticky with the blood of his wives, Heaney's hands were sticky with the juice of ripe blackberries.

“Sweeney in Flight” is a verse translation of a medieval Irish saga from *Sweeney Astray*, a translation of the medieval Irish work *Buile Suibhne* chronicling the fortunes of a spellbound Ulster king who must wander the countryside under the guide that he is a bird. “Sweeney's Ashtray” is probably the most representative poems of Heaney where we can see him flying and resurrecting through Sweeney as a freed man:

As I saw myself
 rising into move in that dissimulation,
 top-knotted, masked in sheaves, noting
 the fall of bird; a rich young man
 leaving everything he had
 for a migrant solitude. (qtd. in Corcoran 172)

Heaney tries to distinguish a mythical or archetypal pattern in human violence.

Sweeney roams all over Ireland as a birdman and praises the woods across frontiers of Ireland which can be taken as a forest saga. Sweeney, The King of Ulster, is

transformed into a bird parallels the transformation of Ulster under colonial rule.

Sweeney also lavishly praises the animal kingdom and thus prefers the company of animals and birds to humans. Sweeney's lamentation for the loss of native land can be taken as parallel to Heaney's longing for the loss of Mossbawn, his birth place.

The mythical king Sweeney appears in a number of poems, interviews, essays and discussions in Heaney's work apart from "Sweeney Astray". He appears as a mythic paradigm for the condition of Heaney as a poet in exile. So, the first connection between Sweeney and Heaney is a personal one. Heaney feels close parallel between Sweeney's conditions and his own situation in exile, after he left Northern Ireland to live in the Republic of Ireland which is independent country.

Likewise, there is a topographical connection between Heaney and Sweeney. Heaney admits it in his *Preoccupations*:

My fundamental relation with Sweeney, however, is topographical. His kingdom lay in what is now south County Antrim and North County Down, and for over thirty years I lived on the verges of that territory, in sight of some of Sweeney's places and in earshot of others, Slemish, Rasharkin, Benevenagh, Dunseverik, the Bann, the Roe, the Mourne.

(Viii)

At that particular time, Heaney was feeling the pressure of Ireland's societal tensions on his creative spirit. He felt constrained and suffocated under the process of colonization and modernization. Heaney found that Sweeney was free from religious, political and educational pressures as well as modern parameters of morality and responsibility. So Heaney chose Sweeney, an Irish mythical figure out of all the modern political, social and moral considerations.

Heaney considers Sweeney as a poet like him:

Sweeney is also a figure of the artist, displaced, guilty, assuaging himself by his utterance. It is possible to read the work as an aspect of the quarrel between free creative imagination and the constraints of religious political, and domestic obligation. (VI)

Both Sweeney and Heaney gave profound importance to their native place and wrote poetry glorifying the same. All these things parallel the mythological Sweeney with the modern poet. Sweeney laments the loss of his native place throughout the books and becomes nostalgic with the cherished memories associated with his home ground.

Heaney expresses his isolation from his home ground in a number of poems in “Sweeney Astray”. Glen Bolcain is like this:

It has four gaps to the wind,
Pleasant woods, clean-banked wells,
Cold stream and clear sandy streams
Where green topped watercress
and languid brooklime philander
over the surface. (Line 14-19)

In the above lines, Heaney’s description of the beauty of nature at Glen Bolcain is probably the best among description of natural beauty in world literature. For Sweeney, Glen Bolcain is the Garden of Eden, thick with apple trees. One more reason why Heaney adopts the persona of Sweeney is that Sweeney is a figure from medieval Ireland. He is a figure above contemporary sectarian fractions in Ireland. One more aspect is the mobility and hospitality of Sweeney.

Throughout his writing career, Heaney wrote poems on the name of places to praise his home ground-Mossbawn. While he is away from home and in isolation, Sweeney finds comfort and consolation in the beauty of nature. Analogically

observing, Heaney finds peace and solace in the scenic beauty at Glenmore while is away from Northern Ireland although it is his home country. In the guise of Sweeney, Heaney once more meets the beauty of nature in Ireland and says, “so that Sweeney became a medium through which I could bring back that childhood intimacy with hedges” (Heaney vii). It is an evident that Sweeney, after being turned into a bird-man, spent his remaining life in the trees. Life as a birdman gives Sweeney first-hand experience of life in the trees. Sweeney, through his lyrics, throws light on the mystery and power in the woods.

Sweeney, in a rhapsody praises the trees at his native place, Glen Bocain. One more aspect of Sweeney’s persona is that, in his madness, he is not attached to any kingdom or nation. Literally, there are no boundaries to his roaming. He is free to fly over Ireland, Scotland and England. He is above any nation or religion. Sweeney provides an opportunity to isolate himself from the contemporary, typical and concentrate on what is universal.

As Sweeney roams Ireland and Scotland, mad and bare, there is a distance between place and person which Heaney uses to take an objective stock of situation. This is revealed in Heaney’s changed treatment of landscape in his later poetry. Sweeney also gives artistic freedom to Heaney to examine the hardship of history. Sweeney was equally at home in Southern Ireland and Northern Ireland. His ability of Sweeney to inhabit both cultures changes Heaney’s perception of cultural differences. His view of looking at history seems to change as well.

Heaney leaves behind the sense of attachment to his native traditions of Northern Ireland. Sweeney gives a new perspective of looking at things without any attachment to Heaney, looked at the socio-politico-cultural situation from this perspective in his later poetry. His later poetry opened reconciliation between north

and south. As Sweeney roams the length and breadth of Ireland, Sweeney discovers that he has got great poetic powers and began to sing of Ireland and the beauty of nature.

The story of Sweeney is well known in Ireland. He was a minor king at Dal-Arie in 7th century. The messenger tells him about the plans of a catholic monk, St. Ronan to build a church in his kingdom. Sweeney was angry with the plans of St. Ronan. In their first confrontation he threw the Psalter (a book of religious poems as mentioned in the Old Testament) of St. Ronan in a lake in anger. Sweeney was cursed for his defiance. Miraculously the psalter is given back to St. Ronan by an enchanted otter. St. Ronan interprets it as a divine intervention as:

The herd's sharp spear has finished me,

Passed clean through my body.

Ah Christ, who disposed of all things, why?

Was I not killed at Moira?

Then Sweeney's death-swoon came over him and Moling, attended by his clerics, rose up and each of them placed a stone on Sweeney's grave. (196 final lines)

At the battle of Moir, St. Ronan tries to build a pact, but Sweeney does not compromise. It was decided that battle will be fought at a fixed period in a day and there will be no killing, but Sweeney breaks this agreement and kills one of the psalmer of St. Ronan. He also attacks St. Ronan but he was saved. St. Ronan not only curses Sweeney in his anger but turns him into a bird but also condemns him to roam around Ireland for the rest of his life. St. Ronan also makes him fear all other creatures.

Sweeny flies all over Ireland and Scotland in his madness lamenting his loss

of kingdom and native land. But Sweeney enjoys his new found freedom, too and rises above the petty disputes between the North and South. In the last phase of his life, he meets the priest named Moling and repents what he has done throughout his life. In his exile, Sweeney composes and recites poems lamenting his loss of kingdom and praises the beauty of the natural world around him. Finally, he was killed by a spear as cursed by St. Ronan.

Twenty poems in “Sweeney Astray” are in the voice of mad Sweeney.

Heaney has recorded about the origin of writing “Sweeney Astray” as:

When I began work on this version, I had just moved to Wicklow not all that far from Sweeney’s final resting ground at St. Mullins. I was in a country of woods and hills and remembered that the green spirit of the hedges embodied in Sweeney had first been embodied for me in the person of a family of tinkers, also called Sweeney who used to camp in the ditch backs along the road to the first school I attended. One way or another, he seemed to have been with me from the start. (Heaney Vii-Viii)

Heaney wanted to revive the green Celtic Pagan past and Sweeney, a birdman was best suited for that purpose. Sweeney in exile acts as a spokesperson for the poet himself. After being cursed by the priest Ronan, Sweeney becomes a bird-man in exile. He lavishes praise on the world of flora and fauna in great lyrical language. So, the split between the inner world of art and the outside world of Heaney gets freely expressed through Sweeney. Thus Heaney has been successful to speak the voice of voiceless through the mythical bird Sweeney by creating a myth within the myth.

“Station Island”, composed in nine sections, is a long meditative poem of Seamus Heaney’s own spiritual pilgrimage. The character ‘I’ in the poem is supposed

to be Heaney himself. The poem sets forth a series of encounters with ghosts or nostalgic figures of who, many of them are from Heaney's own life and from his reading. The poem takes its title and major setting from Station Island in County Donegal which is a devotional shrine and there are fixed locations of prayer.

Talking briefly, the poem is a parallel to Dante's *Purgatorio* (C. 1320). The island is also known as St. Patrick's purgatory because of a tradition that St. Patrick was the first to establish the penitential vigil of fasting and praying which still constitutes the basis of the three-day pilgrimage:

Sunday,
 the silence breathed
 and could not settle back
 for the man had
 appeared at the side of the field.
 with the bow-saw held
 stiffy up like a lyre.
 he moved and stopped to gaze
 up into hazel bushes,
 angled his saw in,
 pulled back to gaze again
 and move onto next .
 I know you, Simon Sweeney,
 for an old Sabbath-breaker
 who has been dead for years. (Line 6-20)

In these first few lines of the poem is a prelude to the pilgrimage itself. The encounter on a Sunday morning is with the unregenerate Sabbath breaker, Simon Sweeney, a

figure of fascination as well as fear, with his advice to stay clean of all processions.

During the three days pilgrimage, the process involved a self-punitive routine of prayer such as fasting and barefoot walking around stone circle or beds thought to be the ancient monastic cells. The shades which Heaney meets in the poem have all been inhabitants of actual Irish world whether personally known friends or acquaintances, or writers known from his work.

The irony of "Station Island" is that this pilgrimage leads to no confirmation in the religion and values of the tribe but renunciation of them in some extent.

Heaney is also sometimes in physical positions which dissociate him from the other pilgrims:

I was Faced wrong way
 into more pilgrims absorbed in this exercise
 a stream of pilgrims answering the bell
 Trailed up the steps as I went down them
 Towards the bottle-green still
 Shade of an oak. Shades of the Sabine farm
 On the stone beds of St Patrick's Purgatory (part IV-V)
 [.....]
 After the pilgrimage it was as if he stepped free to the space
 alone with nothing that I had not known
 already. Raindrops blew into my face. (Part XII)

It is possible to read out of the earlier parts of the poem a subtext of accusations against Catholicism. In the later poems, Catholicism is heavily implicated in Heaney's adolescence of sexual dissatisfaction and guilt and his unease and regret about his lack of any political commitment. This final linking of blank space with freedom

comes after Heaney has been counseled by James Joyce; and the whole of “Station Island” discovers its enabling and releasing alternative in its exemplary artist figure. Joyce is, implicitly, the repository of a new kind of personal and cultural help, when Heaney takes his hand ‘like a convalescent’ and feels an ‘alien comfort’ during his meeting in the journey to Station Ireland.

The poem also appreciates the *Divine comedy*. The moment when Dante is compelled on his journey by learning from Virgil of Beatrice’s intercession, in order to describe Heaney’s own sexual awakening after the enforced virginity of his Catholic adolescence. The truant, which Heaney is playing, from the pilgrimage there turns the tradition of the vision-poem on its head, making sexual not divine love the object of the exercise; it reminds us too that Dante’s great poem of Christian quest discovers its images of heavenly bliss in a transfigured human woman.

Heaney uses the masks as Sweeney and other mythical characters which has provided an opportunity for the new kind of autobiographical poetry and making self-evaluation of his own reputation and dissatisfaction of life.

In “station Island”, Heaney has created a parallel analogy of ancient myth or Dante and revitalized the myth of Purgatory and redemption by the sequence of dream encounters during his pilgrimage which lead him back into the world that formed him, and then forward to face the crisis of the present. Thus, Heaney has extensively used mythical characters and allusion which showcases his knowledge of both ancient and modern culture.

Chapter 4

Significance of Pagan Myths in Heaney's Poems

Long before Heaney was reading Glob's book *The Bog People*, he was fascinated by the bogs. "Bogland" from *Wintering Out* is the earliest poem that deals with the Irish bogs which are the repositories of the past as they contained various objects and other things from prehistory. Globe suggests that the bodies found in the bogs are probably the victims of ritual sacrifice offered to fertility goddess Nerthus. Every year, a male victim was offered to the fertility goddess in the spring to renew the fertility of land and bring good luck to community. These bodies were preserved intact by the power of water in the bog. In a sense, bogs are guardians of the past of Ireland from the earliest days.

In *North*, Heaney developed his bog myth to its full extent. Through bog poems, he has conferred a quasi-mythical status on Irish land. Before *North*, a number of poems dealt with the bogs, but bog myth was not extensively treated in those collections. First part of *North* is saturated with the bog myth. *North* is rich in mythological allusions. Like other bog poems, "Bog Queen" and "Punishment" elaborate and explain Heaney's conception of bog myth. "The Tollund Man" deals with the sacrifices offered to the fertility goddess. In these poems, the earliest history and legends of Ireland are treated in mystical terms.

Death of a Naturalist opens and concludes with poems related with the Greek myths. The first poem "Antaeus" is based on Antaeus myth. Heaney likens Antaeus with Irish native hero, who is a representative of the sons of soil. On the other hand, Hercules represents the modern heroes. Antaeus is related to dark while Hercules represents light and enlightenment. Eventually Antaeus is defeated by the forces of modernization. These poems are a dramatization of the colonizers and the colonized

and thus serve as the myth of suppressed and suppresser.

“Sweeney’s Flight” is a translation of the mediaeval Irish work *Buile Suibhne*, which tells of the penitential life left by Sweeney after he was cursed and turned into a wild flying creature by St. Ronan at the Battle of Moira as Heaney. Heaney links us with Dante through his poem “Station Island” which is a sequence of dream encounters set on an island in county Donegal where pilgrims go to perform the prescribed penitential exercises since medieval time.

With “Digging”, Heaney dug into his memory, uncovering first his father, and then going deeper to his grandfather. In this and later poems, his concerns have been to give a voice to the silence and oppressed.

Seamus Heaney was inspired by the readings of his Irish forerunner W.B. Yeats who contributed a huge foundation to revitalize Irish myth in his poetry. Much of Yeats’ poetry as a younger poet was based on Irish myth, particularly that of Cuchulain and the other ancient Irish warriors. Those themes also continue in Yeats’ early plays. Much of his work was inspired by Lady Gregory’s Collections of Myth, as for example, *Gods and Fighting Men and The Kiltartan Poetry Book*.

As successor to Yeats, Heaney continued to be fascinated by translating ancient epics including that of *Beowulf*, an epic poem of Anglo-Saxon origin that offers an epigraphic transcendence of history. His deep respect to ancient culture and knowledge to Anglo-Saxon, offers a translation of *Beowulf* that celebrated the furthering of language and provided a modern, direct and relatable reading of the poem that encourages audiences to find enjoyment in this masterpiece. It is not merely for educational consumption. Heaney’s translation opens the door for readers to sample the Anglo-Saxon literary world, and the mythic potency that *Beowulf* possesses.

In this way, we can reach conclusion that Heaney has contributed a great deal of poetry that reflect Irish Myth which not only transcends the ancient Irish characters to the modern time but also creates a powerful message by associating bogs with dark energies in the Irish culture. Bog and sacrificial bodies were the vehicle, objective correlatives for Heaney. It provided him with an opportunity to comment on sectarian violence in Ireland in an indirect, oblique way. Heaney was looking at this time for a vehicle which will convey the situation in Ireland. Heaney has always averred from writing direct political poems which would be a kind of propaganda. He used mythical situations and circumstances to depict the contemporary violence without being cheap and vulgar. This is the mythical method of Heaney employs.

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