

BOG POEMS AS THE PRAXIS OF SEAMUS HEANEY'S POETICS

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ABSTRACT: *Any full-length critical work on Seamus Heaney's poetry indispensably or pertinently touches on his bog poems incorporated in Heaney's first four poetry collections. Composed mostly in quatrains, these poems actually represent the essential Heaney and subsequently suffice to fathom his distinctive poetics in the Irish-English literary tradition. The first of these poems constitute Heaney's archaeological discourse on the metaphorical grandeur of Ireland for its temporal and spatial features of bog while the later ones which raised Heaney to a greater prominence define his aesthetic and political stance during the Irish Troubles. In fact, Heaney's bog poems have become windows into his oeuvre including his prose works too. This paper claims that the bog poems alone constitute Heaney's distinctive poetics per se and make him perpetually relevant in literary studies. The corollary of this paper comes to the point that understanding the essential Heaney is grounded in the bog poems.*

KEYWORDS: Bogs, Seamus Heaney, Poetics, Discourse, the Troubles

INTRODUCTION:

In 2016, the Irish writer and television programme maker Magan proudly claimed the Irish bogs to have been “catalysts for poets, painters, playwrights, dancers, novelists and film-makers since at least the 19th century.” Magan made references to the renowned artists Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) and Barrie Cooke (1931-2014) whose paintings fed on bog images at a time when Heaney was “equally bog-enchanted”. In Parker’s (1993) view this enchantment is Heaney’s constant “relishing of the bogland landscapes, and his wonder at the fragments and treasures they cast up” (p. 135). Magan’s word “catalyst” apparently suggests Heaney’s bog memory and imagination that fostered his poetic faculty with symbols and metaphors—the essence of modern poetry—that Irish bog expanse proffered the poet. Before Heaney’s poems, says Collins (2003), the bogs of Ireland were hardly taken as a subject of poetry with “a central or organizing metaphor” (p. 55). In Heaney’s poetics, the bog becomes “a viable subject for poetry, a fecund source of cultural identity”, gradually emerging from backdrop to foreground and taking “the position of dominant metaphor” in his “crisis of identity” (Collins, 2003, p. 55). Heaney views bog as a kind of memory which induced his poetic faculty with the thought of making a “congruence between memory and bogland” thus dealing with national consciousness (“Feeling into Words”, *Preoccupations*, 1980, pp. 54-5). While the bog is a natural, infinite archive of happenings, the poet fashioning his poetry on his personal memory eventually expands his subject matter encompassing his “national consciousness”; a probe into this consciousness will unveil the myth and history of his nation.

As it is manifest in the poetry of Patrick Kavanagh (1904-1967), one of his progenitors, an inextricable sense of place draws Heaney to the bogs. This attachment spawned in him an aesthetic perspective on the geographical beauty and archaeological content of the bog expanse. Later this perspective encompasses Heaney’s deeper understanding of man’s ritualistic violence which lies in the collective unconscious, as the bogs reveal victims of such violence in the name of a cause

the verisimilitude of which is perpetuated like an “archetypal pattern”. This understanding actually vouches for his responsibility as an Irish-English poet in the contemporary factional reciprocation of violence during the times called the Troubles. Heaney’s perspective developing successively in two phases is declared in his bog poems. Therefore any comprehensive approach Heaney’s essential poetry starts and ends with his bog poems. Remarkably, Heaney himself analogizes the genesis of a poem with the emergence bog treasures: “I have always listened for poems, they come sometimes like bodies come out of a bog, almost complete, seeming to have been laid down a long time ago, surfacing with a touch of mystery” (Belfast, 1980, p. 34).

Heaney’s imagining of poems emerging like bodies coming out of a bog resembles the view of his contemporary poet-friend, Ted Hughes, who, in his much celebrated *The Thought-Fox*, indeed, his *ars poetica*, entwines “the *act* of writing with the *action* of the animal written about” (Webb, 2013, p. 35). As *The Thought-Fox* opens, the poet sits in the midnight ‘beside the clock’s loneliness’ with a blank page and conjures up the fox ‘deeper within darkness’ culminating in an animal-poetry synergy:

Till, with a sudden sharp hot stink of fox
It enters the dark hole of the head.
The window is starless still; the clock ticks,
The page is printed. (The Thought-Fox, Lines 21-24)

This paper establishes Heaney’s bog poems as the praxis of his poetics—the affirmations of his *ars poetica*—which are anthologized in his first four collections: *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), *Door into the Dark* (1969), *Wintering Out* (1972) and *North* (1975), and which essentially contain almost all the motifs of his poetry (e.g., childhood, personal and collective memory, Irishness, the poet’s stance amidst the Irish troubles, archaeological quest). In fact, Heaney’s quintessential Irishness discernible throughout his poetic oeuvre, his poetic identity within the parameters of his familial and communal tradition (Donoghue, 1988, p.11; O’Brien, 2002, p. 31), finds its mature exposure in the bog poems which again, according to Nordin (2010), constitute “a central motif in contemporary Irish poetry, where the relationship with the land can be seen in a political context, associated with territorial rights and national identity” (p. 244). Hence I also claim that the bog poems connect Heaney’s first four poetry collections through an identical spirit—a symmetry of thought, marking a genealogical progression from his exclusively subjective interest in bog to his comparatively objective-humanistic probe into the array of things and human bodies that became symbols for his poetic voice. This progression, says Kavanagh (2009), “celebrates the ongoing, both in the world and in the mind of the poet” (p. 48) with the effect that from “Digging” (1965) to “The Tollund Man” (1972), Heaney actually “establishes a parallel to the development of Eliot from “Prufrock” to “The Waste Land,” a poem that, like North, was written in the second phase of the poet’s career” (p. 80).

The distinctive significance of the bog poems as the building blocks of Heaney’s poetics can also be discerned by the fact that a selection of the poems with bog as the recurring site of Heaney’s poetic exploration were distinctively published under the title *Bog Poems* in a limited edition by Olwyn Hughes, the sister of Heaney’s contemporary Ted Hughes, from her Rainbow Press in 1975. Since then, the poems commonly referred to as Heaney’s “bog poems” or “Bog Poems” (each word capitalized), have formed a prelude to understanding the poet and his poetics. Remarkably, in times of crisis, Heaney’s poetics grounded by the bog poems encompasses both his aesthetic choice and ethical concerns as a poet.

“DIGGING” AS THE INCEPTION OF HEANEY’S POETICS:

The embryo of Heaney’s distinctive poetics is planted in “Digging” in *Death of a Naturalist*, his manifesto poem, where he proclaims: “I will dig with it”. Here Heaney heralds his poetics as an act of “digging” symbolic of poetic search for adequate expressions. His preference of the pen over the spade for the act of digging marks his beginning in the fashion of what Edward W. Said (1978, 1995, 2001) said, “[B]eginnings have to be made for each project in such a way as to *enable* what follows from them” (16). Heaney’s beginning determined what would come next. Hence this symbolic “digging” made all the difference between his ancestors’ use of the bogs and his archaeological digging into these tracts. He initiated his poetics from the same site – the Toner’s bog—that his forefathers exploited for potato cultivation or collecting peat. The notion of poetry as an act of digging is widened through “At a Potato Digging”, which, according to O’Brien (2002), contains “new mythic tones that would seem to place this poem as a precursor to the darker bog poems of *Wintering Out* and *North*” (p. 12). In a similar tone, Daniel W. Ross (2007) maintains that the bog poems “follow a pattern that Heaney had established in his first volume (*Death of a Naturalist*) by using the metaphor of digging or divining” (p. 95).

Therefore, the bog poems, though composed at different times of his burgeoning years and contained in different collections, comprise a distinct order of expressions allowing Heaney to proclaim a distinguished stance in the Anglo-Irish tradition of poetry—a stance which diverges from those of his predecessors like Yeats, in that he feels more inquisitively and compassionately drawn to the bog that promises him a kind of prophetic clairvoyance and evocation to search for meanings—the bog objects being the decipherable glyphs or signifiers to him.

BOG POEMS AS DISCOURSE ON IRISH PAST: FIRST THREAD OF HEANEY’S POETICS

In the conviction that he proclaimed at the outset of “Fosterage” in *North* (1975): “Description is revelation!”, Heaney begins each of the bog poems like an archaeological discourse that “represents for him, paradoxically, the dream of full and immediate presence, time at once historical and perennial, in which the dichotomy between self and other is obliterated” (Donoghue, 1988, p. 189). Each artifact from bog becomes the key to his archaeological imagination by which he brings up the Irish past in the present allowing him to ponder over the prospect of transcending his time and place, and his desire for the sublime where the poet takes on some prophetic revelation for his nation prompted him to view poetry

as divination, poetry as a revelation of the self to the self, as restoration of the culture to itself; poems as elements of continuity, with the aura and authenticity of archaeological finds, where the buried shard has an importance that is not obliterated by the buried city; poetry as a dig for finds that end up being plants. (“Feeling into Words”, *Preoccupations*, 1980, p. 41)

Bogs being intimately associated with his childhood memories starting from his geographical attachments to psychological ones, Heaney says, he “had been vaguely wishing to write a poem about bogland, chiefly because it is a landscape that has a strange assuaging effect on [him], one with associations reaching back into early childhood” (Heaney, 1980, p. 54). From childhood, he

recollects bog-butter, butter kept fresh for a great number of years under the peat, the skeleton of an elk taken out of a bog nearby. Later in “Bogland”, which concludes his *Door into the Dark* (1969) but which evidences the fructification of his poetics, Heaney remembers the elk scene:

They've taken the skeleton
Of the Great Irish Elk
Out of the peat, set it up
An astounding crate full of air. (Bogland, Lines 9-12)

In an interview with Randall (1979) Heaney avows that the bog became “a genuine obsession” for him – an obsession that fed on pleasure and nostalgia impressed on his mind like “the script that’s written into your senses from the minute you begin to breathe” (pp. 17-18). This script essentially containing the word “bogland” in his nostalgic imagination emerged with its symbolic elements in “Bogland”. In this poem, the bog becomes “deeply affiliated with the locative vision of place” (Tobin, 1999, p. 29) and exquisitely defines Heaney’s sense of Irishness as opposed to the breadth of American prairies. It articulates Heaney’s Irish sense of place linked with an ancestral past and immanent in the bottomless centre of the bog (Llena 2010, p. 141). It projects his bog-centricity which manifests itself in his subsequent poems, defining bog, at the same time, as an unbound, unfathomed receptacle of artifacts.

Heaney also attributed to “Bogland” an inclusive symbolism that he acquired for the first time with a natural force that would continue (Druce, 1978, p. 30). The force of that symbolic status is elevated when Heaney claims: “...Our unfenced country/Is bog that keeps crusting/Between the sights of the sun” (Bogland, Lines 6-8), thus imagining bog “as the defining feature of the Irish landscape, both because of their ubiquity and their capacity to preserve” (York 2005, p. 175). In Heaney’s view, there is no last demarcated point and no end to the outlet of archaeological facts emanating from the multi-strata of deposits:

Melting and opening underfoot,
Missing its last definition
By millions of years. (Bogland, Lines 17-20)

The layered depth of the bog expanse records ages after ages like the pages of an encyclopedia: “Every layer they strip/Seems camped on before” (Bogland, Lines 25-26). This temporal and spatial infinity is echoed through the opening quote of the archaeologist, Seamus Caufield, regarding bog treasures in “Belderg”: ‘They just keep turning up/And were thought of as foreign’ (Lines 1-2). In “Belderg”, “the first plough-marks”, “The stone-age fields”, and “the tomb/Corbelled, turfed and chambered” lead the reader’s imagination through linear time back to the ancient people who lived on the bog. Named after an excavated Norse settlement in County Mayo, the poem “Belderg” records Heaney’s experiment with prehistoric marks, tools and objects for meanings, starting with quernstones, milestones discovered in a bog, the hole in the middle of the stone like an eye, a “pupil dreaming/ Of neolithic wheat” (Belderg, Lines 7-8). Thus Heaney’s bogland, says Donoghue, “contains and preserves the human past in forms deeper and more secret than history” (1988, p. 189).

This reflection on Irish pre-history-to-present continuum is made again in “Bog Oak” which holds up “testimony to the wanton exploitation of Ireland’s colonial past” (Tobin, 1999, p. 91). In this poem, Heaney discovers “[a] carter’s trophy”, a roof-beam cut down during the clearances of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and ‘long-seasoned’ in the bog, and directs his poetic

imagination centuries back in time. Now an object of archaeological probe, the beam to him is “a symbol of strength and endurance that has outlasted generations” (Parker, p. 95) of the stereotypical Irish natives—“the mustached/dead” who were by trade “creel-fillers”. As “the bog is both a preserver and a witness to history” (Tobin, 1999, p. 91), a single artifact like “a carter’s trophy” can become the key to archeological imagination about the past. So Heaney is able to make out the English poet, Edmund Spenser, then a colonial civil servant, who, Heaney imagines, rejoiced himself with colonial high hopes and was allegedly callous to the plight of the colonized populace stranded by “their hopeless wisdom”. The bog objects come out as evidences of Ireland’s unique transformation from antiquity to a modern territory in “Bone Dreams”, where Heaney finds a bone lying on the grazing ground and continues his archaeological search for relics of past through philology as he discerns “the rough, porous/language of touch//and its yellowing, ribbed/impression in the grass:” (Lines 3-6), imaginatively throwing it at England in order to “follow its drop/ to strange fields.” (Lines 15-16) Seeking to connect with the bone, he tries to “push back/through dictions,/Elizabethan canopies” (Lines 21-23). Interestingly in “Bone Dreams”, Heaney, as an imaginative explorer (Ingelbien 2002, p.176), looks back towards England and Ireland’s common Celtic past (Moloney 2007, p. 128). Like the “carter’s trophy” in “Bog Oak”, Heaney brings up, in the third part of “Kinship”, “a turf-spade” which has lain “hidden” for quite a long time, “overgrown” with a mossy “green fog”, and which bears testimony to the history of bog farmers. “Kinship”, the last of the bog poems in *North*, offers the etymology of the bog that includes a succession of synonyms for the bog: “Quagmire, swampland, morass:/The slime kingdoms,/Domains of the cold-blodded,/Of mud pads and dirtied eggs” (Lines 25-28), Heaney re-imagines bog as a bleak space. Yet he declares in “Kinship” that he is “[k]inned by hieroglyphic/[p]eat on a spreadfield/[t]o the strangled victim,/ [t]he love-nest in the bracken” (Lines 1-4) and he “step[s] through origins/ [l]ike a dog turning/[i]ts memories of wilderness/[o]n the kitchen mat:” (Lines 5-8)

This intimate connection with the bog expanse, with digging as the primary means of exploration, runs deep in the veins of his memory, sustains him and nourishes his poetic faculty. In this respect, the poet is like Antaeus who sticks to the earth for his resilience against counter-forces and “cannot be weaned/[o]ff the earth's long contour” (Antaeus, Lines 6-7) Again, this linkage empowers him to symbolize, through microscopic imagery, whatever comes out of the bog, and, in other words, out of his memory of the bog. Heaney goes on “recovering there the traces and treasures of previous cultures and peoples, just as the bogland of Ireland literally preserves historical and prehistorical deposits which may be released by archaeology” (Corcoran, 1998, 19).

BOG POEMS AS CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL DISCOURSE: SECOND THREAD OF HEANEY’S POETICS

For Heaney, making use of imagery and symbolism in his earlier poems like “Bogland” was an exigency not merely because he followed the long-practised tradition of Irish poets like Yeats but because he flourished in time of the series of events termed as the Troubles—the name given to the violent conflict that raged between Protestant and Catholic factions in Northern Ireland from the late 1960s to 1998, reaching its first climax in 1972. In the harrowing reality, Heaney’s bogs no longer offered him glorifying artifacts, now that he was faced with bleak symbols of human atrocity committed in the name of some mythic beliefs. It forced him to search for “identity within a larger cultural milieu” (Collins, 2003, p. 57). The split between the Catholics and the Protestants that “clearly has shaped Heaney’s sense of self as his sense of place” (Tobin 1999, p. 7-8) becomes sporadically serious to him. In those grim times, he felt an urge to redefine his poetics, to initiate

his “search for images and symbols” in response to the ongoing “predicament” presented Heaney with “a field of force” that found its way into the bog poems upholding “the perspectives of a humane reason” (“Feeling into Words”, *Preoccupations*, 1980, pp. 57-58). Hence the bog poems ranging from “The Tollund Man” in *Wintering Out* through “Bone Dreams”, “Come to the Bower” “Bog Queen”, “The Grauballe Man”, “Punishment”, “Strange Fruit” to “Kinship” in *North* actually mark the culmination of his dominant poetics, if we agree with Denis Donoghue on his enumeration of the themes of Irish literature as childhood, isolation, and politics, apart from violence (Donoghue, 1988, p. 184-185).

It was the distinguished Danish archaeologist, Peter Vilhelm Glob's black-and-white illustrated book, *The Bog People* (1969), detailing the “preserved bodies of men and women found in the bogs of Jutland, naked, strangled or with their throats cut, disposed under the peat since early Iron Age times” (“Feeling into Words”, *Preoccupations*, 1980, pp. 57-58) that spurred him to “explore the repercussions of the violence on himself, and on others, by transmuting all into a marriage myth of ground and victim, old sacrifice and fresh murder” (Deane, 1997, p. 69). Heaney realized the poetic potential of Glob's book for his own metaphorical dealing on the bog bodies with a view to telling the world how tragic deaths of that degree are still perpetuated in his times for reasons identically pitiable in the modern civilization. The ritual sacrifices to the Mother Goddess, who demanded new bridegrooms each winter to bed with her in the bog, her sacred bower, to gain renewal and fertility of the land in the spring, became analogous to the Irish political martyrdom to the national icon Kathleen Ni Houlihan. This semblance of thought and action reminds Heaney of “an archetypal pattern” of violence, explaining the reasons behind the “atrocities, past and present, in the long rites of Irish political and religious struggles” (“Feeling into Words”, *Preoccupations*, 1980, pp. 57-58).

In “The Tollund Man”, the first of his poems to draw on Glob's images, which Benton (2000) terms as “the heart of Heaney's myth” (p. 188), Aarhus in ‘the old man-killing parishes’ of Jutland repeats itself in recent brutal killings in Northern Ireland and makes Heaney feel ‘lost./Unhappy and at home’ (The Tollund Man, Lines 43-44). As an “analogy between Glob's bog bodies and the victims of Irish political violence” (Corcoran 1998, p. 34), The Tollund Man invokes what Heaney calls the “archetypal pattern” of victimization” and has become the symbol of “the four brothers who have been decapitated in death, as he, too, has been decapitated: only his head is to be found in Aarhus” (O'Brien 2002, p. 28). Heaney's empathy towards the bog body reaches so deep that he could even “risk blasphemy” defying whatever repercussions might befall him for such fellow-feeling. And because of this justified feeling, Heaney, in his interview with Randall (1979), evinces a humanistic concern when he says that the Tollund Man appeared to him like an ancestor, or maybe like one of his old uncles, or like one of those moustached archaic faces found all over the Irish countryside and that he felt a very close connection to his dead body. This feeling of lineage encourages him to “not explicitly, to make a connection between the sacrificial, ritual, religious element in the violence of contemporary Ireland and this terrible sacrificial religious thing in *The Bog People*” (Heaney interviewed by Randall, 1979, p. 18).

“The Tollund Man” overarches all the bleaker motifs of subsequent bog poems, referring back to the earlier images and symbols that the bog treasures induced. In this poem, Heaney's sense of place and history, and his sense of identity are measured against the weight of his poetic identity (Tobin, 1999, p. 93). The poem, at the same time, implies Heaney's belief that “like the bog itself, poetry might transfigure even the most intransigent subject—human sacrifice—into an emblem that begs our understanding and sustains meaning” (Tobin, 1999, p. 93). Heaney thinks Nerthus, a North European equivalent of the Mediterranean earth goddesses Ishtar and Aphrodite, for whose

benediction the Tollund Man endured his death by hanging, is perpetuated in Heaney's Ireland in such figures from the Nationalist pantheon as Kathleen ni Houlihan, the Shan Van Vocht, and Mother Ireland.

But in "The Grauballe Man" in which the bog figure is described as if he were a work of art, Heaney returns to the role of an archaeologist as he compares the body to "bog oak", "a basalt egg", "swan's foot", a "wet swamp root", a "mussel", and "an eel". Then Heaney reveals his characteristic concern for the bog-preserved human bodies:

I first saw his twisted face

in a photograph,
a head and shoulder
out of the peat,
bruised like a forceps baby,

but now he lies
perfected in my memory, (Lines 32-38)

In this poem, Heaney's allusion to "the Dying Gaul" (a sculpture from the 3rd century BC, depicting a dying Celtic warrior, with matted hair, lying on his shield, wounded, and awaiting death) brings up an evocation of "each hooded victim, / slashed and dumped" (Lines 47-48), in the manner the image of the Grauballe Man, a victim of tribal sacrifice, now represents the contemporary victims of sectarian violence, which troubled Heaney's mind more than anything else. Soon the "archetypal pattern" of violence prances upon women in "Punishment", where, through a female figure, the Windeby Girl—the drowned body of a young woman with a halter round her neck, Heaney creates an analogy between the execution of an adulteress by Glob's Iron Age people with the ongoing violence in Northern Ireland – the tarring and feathering of two Catholic 'betraying sisters' chained to their front porches for dating British soldiers. In this poem again, Heaney feels an emotional attachment, like the relatedness with the Tollund Man, when he declares to the victim girl: "I almost love you".

A notable implication of "Punishment" is Heaney's being guilt-ridden, as is noticed in the case of not following his ancestors' agrarian path, which resurfaces here, albeit for his position of "the artful voyeur" or political ambiguity in the face of such violence, as he confesses:

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

who would connive in civilised outrage
yet understand the exact
and tribal, intimate revenge. (Lines 37-44)

Echoing this conscious, self-accusing passivity, Heaney exudes a sense of regret, of failure, in "Exposure", the last poem of his *North*, to play a more prominent part as an essentially Irish poet in the Troubles:

I am neither internee or informer;
 An inner émigré, grown long-haired
 And thoughtful; a wood-kerne

Escaped from the massacre,
 Taking protective colouring
 From bole and bark, feeling
 Every wind that blows; (Lines 30-36)

So far “Punishment” has brought Heaney pejoratives like sexism, atavism and violent nationalism from critics. To dwarf all such blemishes, one argument in favour of Heaney is that whatever he conveys through this poem is part of his provenance, his poetics. This position of Heaney’s is the result of his tension not fully expressed through political activism but through the expression of his poetic mind. This tension, Cahill (1987) remarks, torments Heaney, that as a Catholic Nationalist living in Belfast during the worst of the Troubles, swaying him “between his personal dedication to a reflective art and his public responsibility towards political action” (p. 55).

With “The Tollund Man”, “The Grauballe Man” and “Punishment” inspired by Glob’s book, Heaney evokes what Kearney (1988) calls the transitional paradigm which “exemplifies the essentially conflictual nature of contemporary Irish experience” (p. 14). Like a *collage*, this paradigm Kearney shows Heaney “in transit between two worlds, divided between opposing allegiances” making the poet “write as *émigrés* of the imagination, conveying the feeling of being both apart and not part of their culture, of being estranged from the very traditions of to which they belong, of being in exile while at home (Kearney, 1988, p. 14).

Heaney’s use of Glob’s illustrated narrative of Danish bog bodies, which Ozawa (2009) calls the poet’s “symbolic hieroglyphs” (p. 41), virtually ends with “Punishment” which is preceded by two other famous dramatic monologue poems “Come to the Bower” and “Bog Queen”, where the bog bodies represent the first properly documented body ever taken from a bog. This bog body of the ‘queen’ discovered on the Moira estate, about twenty miles from Belfast, in 1781 offers Heaney some native ground and “a genuinely historical, not merely an imaginative connection between Ireland and Jutland” (Corcoran, 1998, p. 69). Yet this sleeping bog queen can be another incarnation of Nerthus, the earth goddess, to whom the Tollund Man was sacrificed, thus maintaining a continuum of the mythological stream Heaney started with “The Tollund Man”. With the title culled from a Republican song, ‘Will you come to the bower?’—making a fervent appeal to Irish emigrants to come back home, the bower meaning Ireland in parallel with the arbour sacred to mythological goddess Nerthus, the poem “Come to the Bower” comes to “suggest in symbolic terms that such myths of blood sacrifice—which in modern Irish history are prominently associated with Padraig Pearse, poet and executed leader of the failed 1916 Easter Rising—continue to lie below the surface of Irish political life, and continue also to exert an appeal in which the politics has an almost sexual allure and mystique” (Corcoran 1998, p. 70). Then this allegory aligns with “Bog Queen”, paired often and relevantly with “Come to the Bower”. In “Bog Queen”, Heaney, for the first time in all his bog poems, entitles the Moira bog woman, who impersonates a kind of Kathleen ni Houlihan, a Mother Ireland, with a voice so that she “depicts her history and her sense of waiting to be unearthed, and, symbolically, to be brought to brought back to some form of life in the poem” (O’Brien 2002, p. 33). The poem is, comments Corcoran (1998), “on one level, a delicately accurate account of the processes of her decay, of the body being reclaimed by, and turning into, the land itself; but the implications raise the bog queen to the status of a symbol of

disaffected native resentment, biding its time underground” (p. 70). With this poem Heaney “achieves renewal through marrying elements of national and personal history, through myth and image” (Parker, 1993, p. 136).

It can be asserted that Heaney’s poetics heralded by the bog poems reaches its best in *North*, which has received mixed critical responses for the aesthetic depiction of sectarian violence, with Ciaran Carson, Blake Morrison and Edna Longley at the spearhead. Carson thinks that with these poems, with bog poems in focus, tend to normalize violence “as if there never were and never will be any political consequences of such acts” (Carson, 1975, p. 184). Morrison opines that Heaney’s “poetry grants sectarian killing in Northern Ireland a historical respectability which is not usually granted in day-to-day journalism: precedent becomes, if not a justification, than at least an “explanation”” (Morrison, 1982, p. 68). Longley criticizes Heaney’s implication of the Catholics as the only vulnerable side, as she says: “[Heaney] excludes the intersectarian issue, warfare between tribes, by concentrating on the Catholic psyche as bound to immolation, and within that immolation, to savage tribal loyalties” (Longley, 1982, p. 154).

After all, with these bog poems Heaney both bridges his mythological awareness and his obligation as a poet in the reality of violence against humanity in the name of concocted lofty purposes that two factions cherished in almost the same conviction as the ancient believers of Nerthus. Each of these poems, says Tobin (1999), “does nothing if not explore the violent outcome of a sacrificial crisis by inquiring into its origin in myths that have shaped the consciousness of his country and himself.” (p.124) As material for Heaney’s poems, these “symbolic bog people allowed him to follow the Yeatsian example of writing in a public crisis he tells a truth about the Troubles in a way that is inclusive of the complicated different reactions of consciousness” (O’Brien 2016, p.8).

CONCLUSION

The above findings and discussion maintain that Heaney’s several bog poems anthologized in his first four poetry collections constitute his distinctive poetics which beginning with the symbolism of ‘digging’ progresses through his archaeological, glorifying discourse on Irish past and reaches its zenith of excellence through the bog poems forming his more conscious, more political discourse on contemporary Irish Troubles. In both discourses of his poetics, Heaney professes his Irish identity linked with the national memory of place and the present conditions of his country. This poetics actually marks Heaney’s stature in the twentieth-century English poetry as well as his perpetual relevance in the literary tradition across the world for his humanistic stance in the later, elegiac bog poems.

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