Neither Internee nor Informer: Seamus Heaney - the Poet, the Public Spokesman and the Anthropologist in *North*

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**Abstract**

This article shows that for the Irish poet, Seamus Heaney, poetry has a special function and he uses it to deconstruct, decolonize and dismantle the hegemonies. Though the raw material of a contemporary poet is drawn from the grim realities of the world which he inhabits, Heaney’s concern is for healing the world and presenting a futuristic vision where the world is not divided by political boundaries. Heaney internalizes the sorrows and sufferings of humanity and tries to reduce the pain in the ideal sphere of poetry. This poetic compensation may be viewed as the poet’s tribute to Ireland in particular and to humanity at large.

In the collection of poems entitled *North* (1975), Seamus Heaney continues to explore the themes of Northern Irish origin. Heaney provides poly perspectives of Irishness in the collection. The first section of *North* contains poems which are rich in mythology and history and the poems in the last section discuss the political conditions and the plight of living in a divided, colonized society. For the Nobel Prize winner, Seamus Heaney, poetry has its own special action and purpose and it has its own mode of reality. In *The Poetry Society Bulletin*, Heaney writes ‘During the last few years there has been considerable expectation that poets from Northern Ireland should ‘say’ something about ‘the situation’… in the end they will only be worth listening to if they are saying something about themselves’ (Heaney 1). Heaney as a spokesperson communicates ‘the tragedy of a people in a place: the Catholics of Northern Ireland’ (Gupta and Johnson 263). Heaney, through his poetry, provides a transparent window on the Irish past and present. He gives a mythical version of history. To lay bare the past, he borrows imagery from archaeology, linguistics and anthropology. His mythical versions set the contemporary Irish history, especially the violent campaigns of the I.R.A., against the background of the early Iron Age. The main impetus behind the bog
poems were the photographs and the descriptions of the bog people in Glob’s *The Bog People*:

...through their sacrificial deaths...were themselves consecrated for all time to North’s, goddess of fertility-to Mother Earth, who in return so often gave their faces her blessing and preserved them through the millennia. (Glob 192)

Heaney’s bog can be regarded as an answering myth to the American prairies which ‘slice a big sun at evening’. Ireland contains more bogs than any other country except Finland. It has almost 1,200,000 hectares of the island which is nearly 1/6 of the country. The bodies of Celtic human sacrifices are still preserved in the bog. The corpses were thrown into the bogs from which they were discovered. The bog, for Heaney, is a store house and a memory bank, ‘a dark casket where we have found many clues to our past and to our cultural identity’ (Broadbridge). Heaney makes sensuous references to these bog victims in a number of poems. The bogs for Heaney are repositories where the ‘past’ is preserved. As he digs down in the ‘wet centre’ which is ‘bottomless’, he develops a new relation with old culture. He juxtaposes the past with the present.

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

(ll 25-28, ‘The Bogland’, *DD*)

Most of these bog bodies were either victims of sacrificial rituals or they were punished by death for crimes. Heaney as an act of compensation gives them a literary space. He resurrects them and makes them speak. Now they can tell their story to the whole world. He gives them back their dignity and their voices. ‘The Grauballe Man’, ‘The Bog Queen’, the Windeby girl of ‘Punishment’ and the girl of ‘Come to the Bower’, they return from the Iron Age to share truths with the whole world. The role of the bog is that of an observer. Silent and patient it watched and waited for centuries for the poet to relieve it of its dark and deadly secrets. It witnessed the atrocities wrecked by man upon man. It concealed the horrific secrets until they were unearthed by the ‘digger’, Seamus Heaney. The
vital concerns of postcolonial criticism are the search for truth and establishment
of an amnesia free perspective. Heaney investigates the bog memories to find the
truth. The bog bodies might have been static in the descriptions and photographs,
but they come to life in Heaney’s poetry. While uncovering the layers of history
mummified by nature, guilt envelops Heaney and he feels wretched, and attempts
to shoulder ‘a kind of manhood / steeping in to lift the coffins / of dead relations’? These poems elicit the shame and horror but they also suggest the peaceful and
non-violent ways of reforming society.

Heaney’s compensation goes far beyond ordinary compensations. He experiences
sympathy and empathy with these corpses. As compensation, he even exhibits
erotic passion. In ‘Come to the Bower’, the ritual communion with the bog girl is
as romantic as any in the seduction poems by John Donne or Andrew Marvell.
The only exception is that the beloved is a corpse. Heaney, in this attitude, comes
very close to the Romantic Gothic tendency. Heaney’s apparently macabre claims
are designed to shock the readers out of complacency. In ‘The Bog Queen’, he
speaks for the first documented body ever dug out of a bog. She is resurrected
from the depth of the bogs where she lay waiting for the revelation.

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

(ll 1-4, ‘The Bog Queen’, N)*

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

* All the quotations are from Seamus Heaney’s *North*, London: Faber, 1975 cited here as *N.*
...You have a society where girls heads were shaved for adultery, you have a religion centering on the territory, on a goddess of the land, and associated with sacrifice. Now in much fury of Irish Republicans is associated with a religion like this…(Glob 114)

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

I can feel the tug
Of the halter at the nape

...........
I can see her drowned
body in the bog,

(ll 1-2, 9-10, ‘Punishment’, N)

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

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

(ll 37-40, ‘Punishment’, N)

Corcoran comments ‘Heaney’s dumbness is blameworthy, then neither ‘connivance’ nor understanding can excuse it’ (Corcoran 117). Heaney’s guilt-trip exhorts the reader to do more than simply observe. He skillfully draws attention to universal fear psychosis regarding insurrections. The very civilized world,
ironically, contains the same attitude and problems as the primitive world. Violence has just one aspect- barbarism. ‘The Grauballe Man’ is another bog body, ‘poured in tar’ with his ‘slashed throat’. He was discovered in a bog and was named after the town in Jutland near where he was found in 1952. Glob described that his neck was slashed from ear to ear and his naked body was dumped in the bog around 310 B.C. He was a victim of ritual sacrifice. Grauballe Man is retrieved from ‘the peat, / bruised like a forceps baby’, symbolizing a technically assisted new birth. Heaney comments on the myth:

I think poetry is seriously attempting to purge our land of a terrible blood-guilt, and inwardly acknowledging our enslavement to a sacrificial myth. I think it may go a long way towards freeing us from the myth of portraying in its true archaic shape and colour, not disguising its brutality (Murphy 39).

Heaney commemorates the bog people through the images of the collective unconscious. In ‘Strange Fruit’, he describes the visage of a beheaded bog girl. She is ‘Murdered, forgotten, nameless, terrible / Beheaded girl’. Heaney’s poetry also traces not only British colonization but also the invasion of the Vikings and the subsequent imposition of their culture. The analogy is drawn between the violence of the Vikings and the violence prevalent in contemporary Northern Ireland. In ‘Viking Dublin’, he comments on the repetitive history of Ireland and prays to the ‘Old fathers’:

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

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

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

I am Hamlet the Dane,
skull-handeler,parablist,
Heaney identifies images and recalls figures from literature. He uses them as expressions of his plight. Heaney, who described his poetry as a ‘slow, obstinate papish burn’,(Deane 62) uses the historical epithet of Romans for the British soldiers after the ruthless killing of civil protestors by British army on Bloody Sunday in Derry in 1972. On that Sunday, a civil rights march with almost ten thousand participants, ended in the killing of fourteen unarmed civilians. The differences between Catholics and Protestants became more acute. Heaney mythologizes the situation. In ‘Kinship’, Tacitus is called to witness the internal religious conflicts.

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

(ll 121-124, ‘Kinship, VI’, N)

In Germania, Tacitus† describes a sacred grove where sacrifices of human beings in public mark the birth of a nation. The German tribe worshipped Nerthus or Mother Earth after drowning the slaves who participated in the rituals. Heaney used the metaphor of ritual sacrifices for mirroring similar killings in contemporary time. He remarks:

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

‡ Whose praenomen is uncertain and birthplace unknown, was probably born c A.D. 55 of a good Roman family, and probably died about the end of the reign of Trajan (A.D. 117). It is conjectured from the words in which he briefly refers to his career that he was a military tribune and held one of the offices of the vigintivirate (q.v.) under Vespasian, was quaestor under Titus, and praetor under Domitian (A.D. 88).
It turns out that the bogs in Northern Europe in the first and second centuries A.D. contained shrines of the god and goddess of the time, and in order that the vegetation and the community would live again after winter, human sacrifices were made: people were drowned in the bogs. Tacitus reports on this in his Germania... Now in many ways the fury of Irish Republicanism is associated with a religion like this... there are satisfactory imaginative parallels between this religion and time and our own time. They are observed with amazement and a kind of civilized tut-tut by Tacitus in the first century A.D... (Heaney 851-853).

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

a desolate peace.
Our mother ground
is sour with the blood
of her faithful,

they lie gargling
in her sacred heart
as the legions stare
from the ramparts.

Come back to this
‘island of the ocean’

(ll 125-134, ‘Kinship, VI’, N)

Heaney refers to a colonial situation where Irish ‘tribes’ fight and kill each other in the name of religion. In the line ‘a desolate peace’, he expands on his disapproval of such a peace and hints to Agricola§ by Tacitus. In the monograph British chief Calgacus assails

§ A laudatory monograph by Tacitus on the life of his father-in-law, Julius Agricola, published about A.D. 98; Agricola had died in A.D. 93. Tacitus recounts Agricola’s distinguished ancestry and early military service in Britain in the troubled times when Suetonius Paulinus was governor (the days of Boadicea), his advancement to the quauetorship and praetorship, to the governorship of Aquitania(A.D. 74-6) to the governship of Brotain(A.D. 77 or 78). He briefly narrates the
the Roman invader of the country: ‘Robbery, butchery, the lairs call Empire, they create a desolation and call it peace’ (Harvey 186). The violence of the Irish Troubles is described by Heaney as a gendered struggle between Kathleen Ni Houlihan and ‘a male cult whose founding fathers were Cromwell, William of Orange and Carson’ (Harvey 413) and whose godhead is figuratively Roman, ‘incarnate in a rex or Caesar resident in palace in a place of London’. The ‘legion’ who ‘stare from the rampart’, as the two divided communities, Catholics and Protestants, kill each other. The strategies of conquest, the poet realizes, are archetypal.

In ‘Funeral Rites’ the funerals of the contemporary victims of Northern Irish violence and the burial of Gunnar, one of the heroes of Njal Saga is juxtaposed. Njal Saga is an epic of Icelandic literature by an anonymous author which describes the progress of blood feuds and covers the period of Christian conversion in 999 and the details of Battle of Clontarf outside Dublin in 1014 A.D. Magnusson is of the view that the epic recounts ‘the years of savage internal strife, murderous intrigues, and ruthless self-seeking power-politics that lead, in 1262, to the loss of independence that [Iceland’s] pioneers had created’ (Magnusson 10). Heaney draws a parallel between the sectarian violence of Catholics and Protestants and the ethics of revenge of Norsemen of the saga. He talks of the years of the savage internal strife and the religious enslavement or the colonization of society through religion. The people are ‘shackled in rosary beads’ and they ‘pine for the ceremony’. The victims are ‘disposed like Gunnar / who lay beautiful / inside his burial mould’. Heaney desires a better society free from all social and religious conflicts. He visualizes an undivided healthy society where the Irish would live sans the shackles.

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

(ll 41-43, ‘Funeral Rites’, N)

The ‘Boyne’ scene of victory in 1690 is celebrated annually by Ulster Loyalists and it insists on a common ground shared by both the Catholics and Protestants. Heaney hopes that those victims who were ‘disposed like Gunnar’, may remain ‘unavenged’ by the present time Norsemen. Neil Corcoran is of the view that the poem ‘urgently desires an end to the terrible cycle, but it can imagine such a thing only in a mythologized visionary

history of the successive stages of conquest of Britain by Romans, culminating in achievement of Agricola. It ends with his death and eloquent apostrophe to a great Roman.
realms’ (Corcoran 111). Heaney moves to the histories of primitive cultures that are similar to the violence-ridden Northern Ireland.

the hatreds and behind-backs
of the althings, lies and women,
exhaustions nominated peace,
memory incubating the spilled blood.

(ll 25-28, ‘North’, N)

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

Speaking broad Devonshire
Raleigh has backed the maid to a tree
As Ireland is backed to England

And drives inland
Till all her strands are breathless

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

Robert Lacey lifts the curtain from the civilization mission:

He [Raleigh] came to the country, a younger son with a little wealth and no lands to inherit, with the express intention of carving out for himself from the lush and mineral-rich acre an estate whose resource he could never hope to win in England. In Ireland he could- and in due course did secure a castle from which he could lord it over the hapless natives whose leaders, lands and faith it was pride to have taken away (Lacey 34-35).
The line ‘drives inland’ connotes the power and force with which Raleigh chased his goal. Raleigh’s masculine force leaves the Irish maid desperate and panting, ‘Sweesir, swatter! Sweesir, swatter!’ The chastity of Irish maid was violated by the rapist. The frailty of her body is depicted in the lines:

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

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

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

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

(ll 15-16, ‘Act of Union’, N)

The impregnation suggests the dominance of male power and the continuity of the dynasty. Analyzed from this point of view the impregnation refers to the extension of English plantations through sowing of seeds suggesting the role of the father. Heaney says ‘Conquest is a lie’ and removes the veil of charity from the White man’s burden. The female has to compromise with the ‘pain’ bestowed tyrannically upon her. The Irish self is too weak to ‘ignore’ the huge kingdom of Britain.
I am the tall kingdom over your shoulder
That you would neither cajole nor ignore
(ll 9-10, ‘Act of Union’, N)

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

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

(ll 26-28, ‘Act of Union’, N)

The rapist Britain dominates Ireland the ravished maid and brands her with ‘stretch marked body’ and ‘big pain’ as a mark of brute supremacy of masculinity of the colonizers. This refers to the psychological and historical scars of colonial neurosis. In ‘Belderg’, he talks about the excavated Norse settlements in Co. Mayo. He explains the Scottish, English and Irish words which had their influence on the name of his family farm, Mossbawn, in Preoccupations, he explains the word ‘moss’ as:

…a Scotts word probably carried to Ulster by the Planters, and bawn, the name the English colonists gave to their fortified farmhouses. Mossbawn, the planter’s house on the bog. Yet …we pronounced it Mossbann, and the ban is the Gaelic word for white….In the syllables of my home, I see a metaphor of split culture of Ulster (Heaney 35).

The ‘fortified farmhouses’ hint at the physical colonial divisions between the colonizers and the colonized. ‘Fortification’ depicts a narrowness of vision. Strong walls separate the colonizers from the colonized. The walls symbolize distrust, hatred and fear. The colonizers who pretend to have come with a goodwill mission actually had hidden agendas. The fortification is a projection of this hypocrisy. In another poem the allegory of colonization is presented through the mythologized version of ‘Hercules and Antaeus’. Hercules is ‘sky-born and royal’ while Antaeus is a ‘mould-hugger’. Heaney empathetically relates with the banished and innocent who are compromised with such myths. He laments the fate of the defeated Antaeus. Hercules is a hero who defeated the native Antaeus by removing him from his source of strength in the soil.

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

(ll 29-32, ‘Hercules and Antaeus’, N)
The only ray of light for the oppressed people is that the ‘sleeping giant’ may one day break their shackles of enslavement. The defeated Antaeus becomes an icon of martyrdom, providing ‘pap for dispossessed’. Heaney provides a hopeful compensation for the dispossessed. Heaney implies a great deal in ‘Whatever You Say, Say Nothing’, which he wrote just after ‘an encounter / With an English journalist’, who is ‘in search of / views / On Irish thing’’. He talks about the contemporary media maniac society and highlights how serious issues are either trivialized or sensationalized to provide ‘news’ for the urban public. The world has become so insensitive, self-centered, inhuman and indifferent that ‘bad news is no longer news’. The media covers every corner of the world. This is a world ‘Where media-men and stringers sniff and points, / Where zoom lenses, recorded and coiled leads / Litter the hotels’. They are involved in covering violence and political affairs. Violence and the internal conflict are given prime slots and Heaney presents his concerns for a society that is becoming more and more abrasive.

‘Oh, it’s disgraceful, surely, I agree.’
‘Where’s it going to end?’ ‘It’s getting worse’
‘They’re murderers.’ ‘Internment, understandably…’
The ‘voice of sanity’ is getting hoarse.
(ll 21-24, ‘Whatever You Say, Say Nothing’, N)

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

I saw the new camp for the internees:
A bomb had left a crater of fresh clay
In the road side, and over in the trees
Machine-gun posts defined a real stockade.
(ll 50-53, ‘Whatever You Say, Say Nothing’, N)

Poetry, the ‘voice of sanity’, is a reflection of its society but it is also ‘getting hoarse’. The raw material of a contemporary poet is drawn from the grim realities of the

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

The second section of *North* was an attempt at some kind of declarative voice. The section is prefaced with the lines from Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* and W.B Yeats’s *Autobiographies*. Wordsworth is from the land of colonizer whereas Yeats is from the land of colonized. The epigraph from *The Prelude* provides a comment on ‘fair seedtime’ of his childhood where he ‘grew up’ and the ‘beloved Vale’ to which he was ‘transplanted’ and the lines from Yeats present a nationalist desire to die fighting the Fenians against the Orangemen. The colonizers have always engineered tactics of ‘divide and rule’; Orangeism is an ideology that promotes and protects the dominance of Protestants over Catholics. These tactics have been used by colonizers over the centuries to create sectarian problems in Ireland. In a declarative voice Heaney recounts the divided society of Protestants and ‘Catholics’ who ‘in general, don’t speak’. In fact Heaney belongs to the Catholic community himself and he speaks for them. In an interview with Frank Finahan, he claimed:

> The community to which I belong is Catholic and nationalist. I believe that the poet’s source now, and hopefully in the future, is to maintain the efficacy of his own “mythos”, his own political and cultural colouring rather than to serve any momentary that his leaders, paramilitary organization or his own liberal self might want him to serve (Heaney 405-414).

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

> To every cocked ear, expert in its greed,
> His battered signature subscribes ‘No Pope’.
> (ll 10-12, ‘Orange Drums, Tyrone, 1966’, *N*)

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

> A sense of children in their dark corner
> Old women in black shawls near open windows
> (ll 9-10, ‘Summer 1969’, *N*)
Heaney’s world is disharmonized and the ‘death-count’ is increasing at an alarming rate as the ‘two berserks club each other to death’. ‘Exposure’, which closes the sequence Singing School and North, is an appropriate conclusion to the anthology. It was written after Heaney moved away from Belfast to Eire in Co. Wicklow in 1972 ‘with a young family of my own and a slightly less radio set, listening to the rain in the trees and news of bombings closer to home’ (Heaney 452). The title of the poem has multiple meanings. It points to his exposition of the truth, thus filling the historical amnesia and also to his openness in living in communion with natural surrounding. Heaney has quoted a section of ‘Exposure’ in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, **Crediting Poetry**:

> Feeling puny in my predicaments as I read about the tragic logic of Osip Mandelstam’s fate in the nineteen-thirties, feeling challenged yet steadfast in my non-combatant status when I heard, for example, that one particularly sweet-natured school friend had been interned without trial because he was suspected of having been involved in a political killing. What I was longing for was not quite stability but an active escape from quick-sand of relativism, a way of crediting poetry without anxiety or apology (Heaney 419).

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

> I am neither internee nor informer;  
> An inner émigré, grown long-haired  
> And thoughtful; a wood-kerne  
> (ll 30-32, ‘Exposure’, WO)

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

Heaney seems to adopt the **modus operandi** of ‘digging’ and ‘exposing’ from the very onset of his poetic career. In order to search for amnesia free history, the poet starts a poetic campaign of ‘Digging’ through poetry for ‘Exposure’ of
truth. In the process, recollections, remembrances become an integral part of his poetry. Geogory Schirmer notes ‘Heaney has developed the image of the bog into powerful symbol of continuity of human experience’ (Schirmer 43). He deliberately uses Gaelic tradition of *dinnseanchas* to compensate the loss of the dying Gaelic language. Heaney’s use of mythology, politics and history has received reductive responses from critics such as Ciaran Carson and Edna Longley. Carson referred to Heaney as ‘a mythmaker, an anthropologist of ritual killing, an apologist for ‘the situation’ in the last resort, a mystifier’ (Carson 183-186) whereas Longley argues that Heaney ‘exclude the inter-sectarian issues...by concentrating on the Catholic psyche as bound to immolation to savage tribal loyalties’ (Longley 78). Richard Murphy maintains that Heaney’s poetry is ‘seriously attempting to purge our land of terrible blood-guilt’ (Murphy 39). These arguments, however, has certain limitations. Heaney is neither a simple anthropologist of ritual killing nor he is a mystifier. For Heaney, poetry has a special function and he uses it to deconstruct, decolonize and dismantle the hegemonies.

**Works Cited**