

Charles University
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BACHELOR THESIS

The political and historical context of the bog poems of Seamus Heaney

Politický a historický kontext v básních Seamuse Heaneyho

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I have written this bachelor thesis by myself under the supervision of Bernadette Higgins, M.A. and all the sources that I have used were properly cited.

Prague, 20th April 2017

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ANNOTATION

The aim of the thesis is to find connections between the Troubles and the bog body poems of Seamus Heaney. In the theoretical part the origins of the Irish question are traced and the key events of the conflict in Northern Ireland are delineated. There is also a brief biographical part, which attempts to describe what defined Heaney's personality and works. Moreover, the author discusses a question of a relationship of art and politics by contrasting the arguments of literary critics and philosophers. The practical part offers a close reading of the selected bog poems from *North*, exploring the theme of violence and its victims and focusing on the analogy between the past and the present.

KEYWORDS

Seamus Heaney, Irish question, art and politics, sectarian violence, bog body poems, "North"

ANOTACE

Cílem této bakalářské práce je najít souvislosti mezi konfliktem v Severním Irsku (nazývaném též „Troubles“) a básněmi Seamuse Heaneyho, věnovanými mumifikovaným tělům z bažin. V teoretické části se autorka zaměřuje na problematiku anglo-irských vztahů a snaží se dohledat její příčinu. Dále popisuje klíčové události v době konfliktu a v biografické části se soustředí na životní okamžiky, které ovlivnily Heaneyho osobnost a jeho tvorbu. Kromě toho se autorka zabývá otázkou vztahu umění a politiky na základě polemik literárních kritiků a filosofů. Praktická část představuje interpretace vybraných básní ze sbírky *Sever*, soustředí se na téma násilí a jeho oběti a na hledání spojitostí mezi minulostí a přítomností.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Seamus Heaney, Irská problematika, umění a politika, komunitní násilí, básně o tělech z bažin, "Sever"

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1. Introduction

In 2013, the world lost one of the most inspiring and interesting poets of the 20th century, Seamus Heaney. It is not without reason that he is believed to be one of the greatest poets since Yeats. His poetry is fraught not only with symbols and parallels with the past but also with exquisitely chosen words and images. However intriguing the poems might be in respect of form, it is the political and historical context that will be explored in greater detail in this thesis. His mastery of expression resides in his non-violent incorporation of the then current political situation together with the poetical depiction of bog lands and the dead bodies that were found in them. Glob's archaeological book *The Bog People* served him as an inexhaustible source of inspiration and it will be given attention in the theoretical part.

Seamus Heaney was born in Northern Ireland, namely in county Derry, which along with Belfast, was the main scene of the Northern Ireland conflict. The desire for independence and autonomy accompanied the Irish nation for centuries. It escalated during the first half of the 20th century and as a result of Irish defiance towards the British Union, the new free Republic of Ireland was constituted. However, the northern part of Ireland, mostly Protestant, still belonged to the United Kingdom. This fact was really hard on the republicans from Northern Ireland, whose aim was always the unification of the Irish island.

The theoretical part of the thesis will concentrate on the life of Seamus Heaney and it will try to specify the moments that shaped his personality and influenced the themes of his output. In addition, the roots of the Anglo-Irish problematic relations will be discussed and the development of the political situation in Northern Ireland in the second half of the 20th century will be briefly outlined. In particular, the harsh period is called "the Troubles", during which many innocent people died and which casted a shadow over the history of the United Kingdom. The conflict sharpened between two political groups that had diverse objectives: the republicans and the unionists, with the former pushing for the British withdrawal from Northern Ireland, the latter wanting to remain under British rule.

The poetic community was of huge importance at that time. There was a shared artistic obligation to comment on the events. For instance, Michael Longley expresses fears that the Troubles are endless through the poem “The War Poets”:

It was rushes of air that took the breath away
As though curtains were drawn suddenly aside
And darkness streamed into the dormitory
Where everybody talked about the war ending
And always it would be the last week of the war.

(Troubles Archive)

However, the literary critic Edna Longley noticed, in some of the poets, excessive engagement in political matters and a manifestation of empathy with one community. She advocated that poetry should not deal with politics to a large extent. In particular, she criticised Heaney for twisting the facts and juxtaposing myths in favour of his Catholic community. Heaney was not the only poet whose work is permeated with personal ideology and therefore the question of mixing political matters with art should be given attention. It will be discussed on the basis of critical essays written by Irish literary critics and philosophers who contributed to journals such as *The Crane Bag* or *The Irish Times*.

The aim of the practical part is to find connections between the poems and the political situation. Was it Seamus Heaney’s intention to emphasize the political context in the poems or was he focused more on the poetical form and imagery? Was he rather, using Longley’s appellation referring to “Exposure”, an “inner emigré” or, referring to “Punishment”, “artful voyeur”? The answers will be sought in bog poems from the collection *North*, namely “Come to the Bower“, “Bog Queen“, “The Grauballe Man“, “Punishment“, “Strange Fruit“ and “Kinship“. The selection is based on Neil Corcoran’s perception of the mythologizing of the North that interconnects the chosen poems (97). It will also offer a detailed close reading of the bog poems, since they were published at the same time as Northern Ireland was disturbed by political unrest and civil riots. Moreover, the analyses will be supplemented with the comments of literary critics, such as Blake Morrison, Neil Corcoran et al.

2. The theoretical part

The theoretical part focuses on three substantial spheres that are essential to comprehend Seamus Heaney's *North*. In the first section, historical roots of the Anglo-Irish relations will be delineated and then the reader will be introduced to the bleak period of the Troubles in Northern Ireland in which the population of Ulster was divided into two feuding political groups. The next section is dedicated to Seamus Heaney himself and it attempts to outline the turning points in his life leading to the formation of such a great poet. It essays to find the political, historical, literary and biographical influences that moulded his personality and therefore his works. The ubiquitous vacillation between art and politics, which was incessantly dealt with by the Ulster poets as well as by the literary critics, will be analysed in the third section. The analysis will be mostly based on the essays of Seamus Heaney, a literary critic Edna Longley and a professor of philosophy, Richard Kearney.

2.1. The Irish Question

2.1.1. The roots of the conflict

The relations between the Irish and the English have always been problematic and it was caused by many different factors. The roots of the conflict are to be found in 1066 when the Normans conquered England. Had the Normans completed the conquest and extended it to the whole Irish island, there would probably be no cleavage of cultures since the people of both lands would have been unified under one rule from the beginning. However, the English monarchy was capable of occupying just a small area of Ireland – the Pale, around the Dublin area, which resulted in a territorial dispute waged against the indigenous Celtic tribes which was fraught with atrocities. According to Goldwin Smith, after the Reformation, the Pale became Protestant and the Celts, as if by design, became even more Catholic. Hence the war was not only for the land but also for religious intolerance which established even greater barrier between the enemies (Smith 840). Consequently, the island constituted two different cultures that spoke different languages, professed opposing faiths and differed in political and social origins.

So far, the history of Ireland had been bloodstained and it was about to continue. As the whole of Europe was disturbed by religious wars between Catholics and Protestants,

Catholic Ireland became a threat to the English Crown, and therefore it was necessary to intervene for the sake of English sovereignty. The task was accomplished during the reign of Elizabeth I who completed the conquest of Ireland, leaving it in a devastated and desolate state (Brooks 405). The English and Scottish colonisation, combined with the suppression of local landowners led to the Irish Uprising of 1641 – the great rebellion that grew into an eleven-year war, which was subdued by Oliver Cromwell who then inflicted even greater terror on Irish Catholics and unified Ireland politically with England. Lecky observes: “in very few histories do we find so little national unity or continuous progress, or such long spaces which are almost wholly occupied by perplexed, petty internal broils, often stained by atrocious crimes, but turning on no large issue and leading to no clear or stable results“ as we find in the history of England (11).

Under the leadership of the deposed King James II, the Irish once again attempted to banish the English settlers but without success and James was famously defeated by William of Orange at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. During the Restoration, in spite of her dependence on England, Ireland became a separate state with her own Parliament, unfortunately with a majority of Protestant MPs and strictly controlled by the British Government. According to Brooks, Dublin was near to equal London city and Ireland attained peace; yet at the cost of repression and penal enactments against Catholics. Influenced by the spirit of the French Revolution, the Irish peasantry initiated an atrocious civil war that issued in the 1801 Act of Union that merged Great Britain and Ireland again, which was a step more or less welcomed by all sides since it put an end to the murderous struggle (Brooks 407-412). Having failed to be successful in numerous agrarian rebellions, rural Ireland became “a rabbit-warren of paupers and beggars” (Russell 34). Owing to frequent potato crop failures and a massive one in 1846-47, the Irish suffered either from famine or disease and a great number of people emigrated to America, thus the population significantly diminished. Russell adds that there has never been another record in Irish chronicles of such human misery (42).

Discontented Catholics and nationalists began to campaign for Home Rule, requesting the independence of Ireland. It was proposed three times in the British Parliament and was one of the most urgent political issues of the Victorian period; however, either the House of Commons or the House of Lords voted against the Home

Rule Bill and the last attempt was intermitted because of World War I (Lennox 788-802). According to Brendan O'Brien, the sea change came with the Easter Rising in 1916, when the separatists of the Irish Republican Brotherhood and militant republicans intervened and fought against the British presence. They were not widely backed and failed to reach their goals. Nevertheless, due to their exemplary punishment by execution, a wave of indignation increased and a republican political party, Sinn Féin ('Ourselves Alone'), won the election in 1918. After having established a separatist Parliament - Dáil Éireann, the Republic of Ireland was proclaimed thanks to the 1922 Anglo-Irish Treaty, which separated 26 Irish counties from British rule and established the Irish Free State, but did not include the six counties of Northern Ireland, which had a Protestant majority. The exclusion of the northern counties led to a short civil war (1922-23) between the nationalists who supported the treaty and those who opposed it. By 1949, Ireland finally formally became an independent republic (Brendan O'Brien 10-11).

Percy Allum believes that the autonomous Irish Republic and the 1922 Treaty did not provide a solution to the Irish Question. The problem of the clash of nationalities still remained and moved its epicentre to Northern Ireland. For more than forty years, the politicians assigned little importance to "the Ulster question" - six of the nine counties of the ancient province of Ulster constitute the area of Northern Ireland and the name Ulster is preferred by many Unionists as it makes it seem more distinct from Ireland – and it regained public interest after the eruption of violence in 1968 (Allum 6). The bleak period of Ulster's awakening is called the Troubles. The contemporary situation in the North is peaceful but the consequences of the Troubles might be still resonating nowadays.

2.1.2. Unionists and Republicans in Northern Ireland

The average Northern Ireland citizen is born either Orange or Green. His whole personality is conditioned by myth and he is bred to live the sort of life that will reinforce and protect the myth for transmission to future generations. Moreover, these myths are used daily to justify distrust and resentment of the other side. (Murphy 188)

Northern Ireland was and still is divided into two main parties: the Unionists and the Republicans, the Orange and the Green, the Protestants and the Catholics, the Loyalists and the Nationalists. No matter what we call the 'poles', the Ulster population has always been polarized. The majority of the Northern Ireland population were Protestants and save for minor exceptions they supported British rule. On the other hand, the Republicans, who were mostly Catholics, supported Irish unification. They are also called the Nationalists because their goal was to unite the Irish nation as opposed to the Unionists who wanted to remain the part of the United Kingdom. In general, the Catholic faith cemented believers against the British hegemony and vice versa, the members of the English Protestant church endorsed the British government control over Northern Ireland.

When we look back at British history, much conflict has been a matter of religion, particularly the rivalry between Protestants and Catholics. However, there were also other catalysts than religious ones that contributed to the course of events in the North of Ireland in the second half of the 20th century. More or less it went hand in hand with national consciousness. As Brendan O'Brien remarks: "It was 'theirs' and 'ours', 'them' and 'us', British and Irish, nationalist and Unionist. What was never going to vanish was the nationality question. This was more than economics or human rights" (31). Nevertheless, not all the Catholics during the Troubles were radical and fought for separation from the Union Jack. Many more of them wanted "at least a full and equal expression of their Irishness" despite being a part of United Kingdom (Brendan O'Brien 31). It was mainly Irish pride and self-esteem that triggered the paramilitary actions. On the whole, the Troubles were not just a conflict of different religious communities but they were also rooted in an unsolved question of territory and national identity, which was shaped during the turbulent history of the endless endeavour to become independent.

The politicization of Northern Irish terrain triggered the conflict of interests of the two opposing sides and shaped national culture and history. Moreover, as Eugene O'Brien remarks, "it permeates every area of Northern Irish life" (5). The problem of sectarian partition is expressed in 'Whatever You Say Say Nothing', in *North*:

Smoke-signals are loud-mouthed compared with us:
Manoeuvrings to find out name and school,

Subtle discrimination by addresses
With hardly an exception to the rule

That Norman, Ken and Sidney signalled Prod
And Seamus (call me Sean) was sure-fire Pape. (54-55)

It shows how Protestants and Catholics are distinguished from one another. The politico-religious identity is determined by “name and school” (Catholic or Protestant teaching), “addresses” (Catholic or Protestant areas) or by a first name that signifies group membership either to the “Prods” or to the “Papes”, with ‘Prod’ being a derogatory name for Protestants (*Urban Dictionary*) and a ‘Pape’ being pope-supporting Catholic.

2.2. The Troubles

2.2.1. Key events

The Troubles erupted by force of several circumstances that made the life of the Catholic and Republican part of the society uncomfortable. One of the central problems was high unemployment which, according to Brendan O’Brien, affected mostly the Catholics (30). The sentiment of discrimination of the minority community rapidly intensified given the fact that the Northern Irish Parliament, also known as Stormont, was largely dominated by the Ulster Unionist Party, which was also in charge of the police and the Special Constabulary, called the B-Specials. (Brendan O’Brien 20)

Martin Melaugh remarks that it was the Civil Rights Campaign which endeavoured to point out the inequalities suffered by the Catholics. They sent official letters to the British Parliament in order to right the situation and they also wrote pamphlets dealing with the injustices felt by the Catholic minority. The deepening public discontent led to public demonstrations arranged by the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA). Although the first demonstrations were peaceful, the Loyalists came under the conviction that the Republicans fought more for political changes rather than social changes. This fear resulted a ban of the demonstration that was to take place in March 1968 in Derry. Nonetheless, according to Melaugh, “when 400 people taking part tried to proceed in defiance of the ban, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) used batons to break up the march” (“The Civil Rights Campaign - Summary of Main Events”).

As a response to the Derry demonstration, the Nationalists were exasperated, understandably. The next rally numbered even more than 10 000 participants. Melaugh notes that it was the “further conflict in 1969” that “led to the British government taking the decision to deploy troops on the streets of Northern Ireland”, which met with discontent from the Republican side and the demonstrations continued (“The Civil Rights Campaign - Summary of Main Events”). Subsequently, the conflict between the Catholics and the Protestants intensified. The British Government, having been prompted by the Ulster Unionist Government, decided to take precautionary measures and adopted a new policy of internment without trial in order to provide a safer environment for the citizens. From 1971 to 1975, the people who were “suspected of being members of illegal paramilitary groups” could be “arrested or detained without trial” (Melaugh, “Internment - Summary of Main Events”). Despite the seeming “security benefits, the social and political reaction it created far outweighed this” (Bew and Gillespie 37). Furthermore, Melaugh states the number of 1874 arrested Catholics and Republicans as opposed to the number of 107 arrested Protestants and Loyalists (“Internment - Summary of Main Events”).

As a result of the adoption of the policy of internment, the situation rather sharpened and even more people became involved, even though previously they had not been so much concerned. The establishment of internment without trial was just another impetus for increasing the number of street affrays and the level of the Irish Republican Army’s (IRA) violence. According to Bew and Gillespie, Northern Ireland “sat on the brink of civil war” and people were forced to leave their homes if situated in an area of Belfast or Derry that was occupied by other community than theirs. Brendan O’Brien points out that “Belfast had more than a dozen walls or ‘peace lines’, separating the communities” (32).

The series of protests against internment escalated on 30 January 1972 when a civil rights rally took place in Derry. Some people of the crowd of ten thousand went adrift and especially the youths in the first lines began to fight with the soldiers. Consequently, the Parachute Regiment took a disproportionate action and killed thirteen and wounded seventeen of the protesters. The events, also referred to as ‘Bloody Sunday’, were publicly and internationally denounced, especially in Ireland. In the words of Bew and Gillespie: “the reaction in the Republic of Ireland was hostile” and “created a wave of anger

that swept through the Catholic community” (45). Irish poet Thomas Kinsella commented on the events in the poem *Butcher's Dozen*:

I went with Anger at my heel
Through Bogside of the bitter zeal
- Jesus pity! - on a day
Of cold and drizzle and decay.
A month had passed. Yet there remained
A murder smell that stung and stained. (*Cain*)

The remaining “murder smell” imprinted on people’s minds. As a consequence, more people disagreed with the encroachments of Great Britain on the issues of Northern Ireland and therefore endorsed the IRA and the Republicans.

Another turning point in the course of the Troubles was a hunger strike of the IRA prisoners in 1981. They lost the status of Republican ‘political’ prisoners and called for its “reintroduction” (Melaugh, “Internment - Summary of Main Events”). According to Brendan O’Brien, Bobby Sands, who was the first IRA prisoner that rejected food, was elected to the United Kingdom Parliament along with other two protesters who were elected to the Dublin Parliament (123). The hunger-strikers’ objectives were not met and ten people died altogether. The suffering of prisoners and the unyieldingness of the British authorities had a far-reaching impact on the general perception of the situation in Northern Ireland. As a consequence, Sinn Féin and the IRA again achieved an upsurge of support from the Catholic community. “The hunger strikes transformed the political character of the Northern Ireland problem” because “republican prisoners appeared in the unwonted role of being prepared to accept suffering for their cause rather than simply inflicting suffering on its behalf” (Bew and Gillespie 158). The suffering of Northern Ireland might be understood as being deeply rooted in Irish history when we take into consideration the unremitting religious persecution of the Catholics, the massacres by Oliver Cromwell or the great potato famine. Thus this peaceful way of attempting to achieve their goals was highly effective and moreover gained a lot of sympathy from abroad.

In 1985 The Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed and it affirmed that “any change in the status of Northern Ireland would only come about with the consent of majority of the people of Northern Ireland” (Bew and Gillespie 189). The goal of the Agreement was to reconcile the two communities and sustain peace in the country. It also guaranteed equality for the interests of the nationalist community in terms of voting and jobs without discrimination. According to Brendan O’Brien, the Unionists regarded the signing as a treacherous move from Great Britain whereas the nationalists welcomed it (24-25).

It has taken years and countless numbers of political talks to restore peace and resolve the conflict in Northern Ireland. The first step that contributed to peace and stability in the country was “the announcement of the IRA cessation of military action in 1994” (Melaugh, “The Irish Peace Process – Summary”). Before this, civilians had felt daily fear of unpredictable paramilitary punishment actions, Catholic and Protestant alike, such as beatings and shootings in public places with the intention to intimidate and defeat the community with contrary political stances. The IRA cease-fire was followed by the loyalist paramilitary organisation’s (Combined Loyalist Military Command) ceasefire, which led to political pronouncements ensuring both parties that “the democratically expressed wishes of the greater number of people in Northern Ireland will be respected and upheld” (Bew and Gillespie 298). Another piece to the jigsaw puzzle of the peace process was the Belfast Agreement that assured for Sinn Féin and the Unionists executive power in Northern Ireland and the “devolution of powers” from the British Parliament to Stormont in Belfast (Melaugh, “The Irish Peace Process – Summary”). It should be noted that establishing peace after a civil war is a long process, especially within a country with a strong national consciousness and pride felt on both sides of the conflict. Therefore, after 22 years of the peace process, we can still encounter reports in the media concerning sectarian violence in Northern Ireland.

2.2.2. Public punishments

The IRA’s militant actions were not only led against the Loyalists and British soldiers, but also against the Catholic community itself if a member of it behaved treasonably in the eyes of the IRA. The punishment was commonly carried out in public in order to humiliate the wrongdoer in front of the Catholic ‘tribe’. It also affected the on-lookers in that they were intimidated, hence less likely to offend against the community.

The most frequent type of punishing was tarring and feathering, performed by IRA members on republican civilians who were not loyal in their eyes. The IRA understood many deeds as treachery, for instance a refusal to store ammunition at home or having relationships with British soldiers (McDonald).

Although the main purpose of these public humiliations was to carry out justice, it also sowed fear among people, since the actions were really brutal. McDonald states a number of 100 fatalities. Even though people may have not approved of the violence, they would pass by without saying a word or without interfering. The fear was rooted to such an extent that the IRA members would beat and punish the victims in their homes in front of their relatives. It was the IRA who fought for freedom; however, the republicans were not free, not even in their areas, because of the IRA's control.

2.3. Seamus Heaney

Seamus Heaney was born on the 13th of April 1939, as the eldest of nine children (Parker 1). To be precise, he was born at Mossbawn farm in County Derry in Northern Ireland. His birthplace is important to know for two reasons; first, Derry together with Belfast was a central scene of the Troubles, second, one of his poems is named after the Mossbawn farm: *Mossbawn: Two Poems in Dedication for Mary Heaney*. He was brought up in a Catholic nationalist family whereas there was an ascendancy of Protestants and Unionist families in Northern Ireland at that time (Parker 2).

During his lifetime, Heaney received several awards, for example the Somerset Maugham Award or the Cholmondeley Award (Willhardt and Parker 139), and in 1995, he was awarded the revered Nobel Prize for Literature "for works of lyrical beauty and ethical depth, which exalt everyday miracles and the living past" as reported by the official website of the prize Nobelprize.org. Moreover, he was offered the laureateship of the United Kingdom which he refused for political reasons, writing an open letter to the Queen in which he frankly admitted that the Irish patriots had never pledged to her (O'Driscoll 399). He was undoubtedly the most talented and highly regarded Irish poet of the second half of the 20th century.

2.3.1. The poet's formation

Since early childhood, Catholicism undoubtedly impinged on the formation of Heaney's personality. He attended a primary school that was frequented by both Catholic and Protestant children. With some exaggeration, we can assume that this experience of non-sectarian schooling taught him acceptance of religious differences and introduced to him the possibility of the coexistence of the two sub-cultures. However, according to Michael Parker, the education was biased at that time and promoted British superiority, for instance by teaching only English history and literature. Therefore, it could be argued that the schooling system must have engraved in Heaney feelings of being part of an inferior culture but on the other hand, Parker believes that it also "honed his sense of identity, and provided him with sustenance from two rich traditions" (10).

Then he became a student of St Columb's College, which was a secondary Catholic boarding school where he was introduced to the catechism and his religious knowledge gradually widened. Given that it was a Catholic school, it secured no Protestant partiality in education. At that time, he lived an intense spiritual life: "a Latin Mass every morning; aware, from the missal, of the feast day and order of the feast; going to confession and communion; alert to the economy of indulgences" (O'Driscoll 38). However great an education it might have been for him, Heaney suffered from homesickness to such an extent that he later transformed the feelings into some verses in "The Ministry of Fear" in *North* (Parker 12):

In the first week
I was so homesick I couldn't even eat
The biscuits left to sweeten my exile.
I threw them over the fence one night
In September 1951. (7-11)

Thanks to the Northern Ireland Education Act in 1947 that followed the Butler Education Act in England and Wales, Seamus Heaney, who came from a working-class family, was granted a state bursary to the Queen's University in Belfast (Clark 37). Thus he could afford to study English and English literature. He himself affirms that in the interview with Dennis O'Driscoll: "Without the scholarship system inaugurated

at that time, I don't think I'd ever have got to university" (30). Furthermore, one of his lecturers was the famous British poet and critic Philip Hobsbaum, who influenced him considerably. According to Quinn, Hobsbaum organized informal sessions in his house for poets and critics, where they enthusiastically read, discussed and criticized English poetry. Besides Seamus Heaney himself, other poets who attended these meetings were Michael Longley, Derek Mahon along with the critics Edna Longley, Michael Ellen and many more. Consequently, they formed a group dubbed 'The Belfast Group', inspired by 'The Group' in London, under the patronage of Philip Hobsbaum who provided them with an originative and inspiring background. The poetic and linguistic form of Heaney's poems was shaped thanks to Hobsbaum's influential guidance (Quinn 131).

Given that Hobsbaum was affected by the poetic style and technique of The Movement, some of his students adopted to some extent the poetic form and the themes typical of the poetry of The Movement, whose most famous poet was Philip Larkin. As stated in *The Ulster Renaissance*, Hobsbaum felt that "poems should be a reflection of the world in which they were made" and he "shared a commitment to ordinariness, a predisposition to formalism, and a distrust of Modernism" (Clark 51). In his first poems, Heaney casually described everyday events and human encounters with nature, using a simple uncomplicated language. As in the poem "Death of a Naturalist", in which he depicts his fear of frogs straightforwardly.

Then one hot day when fields were rank
With cowdung in the grass the angry frogs
Invaded the flax-dam; I ducked through hedges
To a coarse croaking that I had not heard
Before. The air was thick with a bass chorus.

(Heaney, *Death of a Naturalist* 5)

Unlike his peers in "The Belfast Group", he was commended by Hobsbaum for his practical unvarnished style. According to Clark: "Hobsbaum—influenced himself by the Movement's anti-Modernist, provincially minded rhetoric — encouraged his 'empirical' style, and praised those poets who practised it well" (64). Therefore, Hobsbaum's mentoring contributed greatly to the formation of Heaney's poetic ego.

2.3.2. The themes

The theme of nature is ubiquitous throughout his work, it is vital namely in the collection *Wintering Out* and *North*, where he puts in juxtaposition the Danish Jutland with his homeland. It was the calm and raw nature that surrounded him from an early age that had a huge impact on his perception of life as well as on his early production. In an interview with Eleanor Wachtel, Seamus Heaney answers the question: “How important is that physical environment when you look back on your childhood?” with these words: “For me it was all-important. When I think back, it’s sensation, really, rather than intellection that returns to me. A feel for places. I mean, the body stores so much. (...) What is stored bodily is very important for memory, and I think that other bodily sensations later on can bring it all back” (268).

From the beginning, Heaney was fundamentally preoccupied with childhood and the wild raw nature that he knew from his homeland. Later, he gradually abandoned the sole theme of the mundane, nevertheless, his fascination with the hidden mysteries of the Earth did not cease but took a new direction in the collection *North* and he began to dwell on history, myth and politics. After 1969, which was the year when the Troubles broke out, the subject of poetry progressed from being a search for verbal delight to being a quest for images denoting the Northern experience. From now on, Heaney’s production took a more momentous direction in terms of nationality, personal identity and politics. Like many of his contemporaries, for instance David Jones and John Montague, he started to dwell on the historical and cultural context related to personal life, creating long epic poems (Corcoran 96). Corcoran notes that the aim of epic poetry is to “attempt some kind of synthesizing historical myth, a form in which the confusions of the present may be articulated and understood with what will seem a more than merely individual authority” (96). The myth of *North* is created not only on the basis of the Northern ground and Danish bogs but also on bodies and objects unearthed from it. Furthermore, Heaney draws inspiration from Greek mythology, for example in “Hercules and Antaeus”.

The bog poems do not primarily address the predicament in Northern Ireland although Heaney introduced the poems at public readings with commentaries on the political situation (O’Driscoll 159). Therefore, it is less his individual ideological standpoint than an attempt to engender historical and political consciousness. *North* did not

manifest Heaney's active political statement but general political ideas that are expressed through images and metaphors inspired by the bogland. In the interview with O'Driscoll he said that "there's a difference between being alert to the situation and addressing it" (159). To be more specific, the poet embodies a kind of a 'voyeur' that contemplates the victims of the conflict between the two 'tribes'. He holds the function of a tribal poet, who does not attempt to assess the character of the tribal punishments or the violent behaviour of the tribe. His role of a tribal poet and the certain taciturnity and aloofness expressed in the poems will be discussed further in the practical part.

2.3.3. The Bog People

One day in 1950, dead bodies were found in bogs in Denmark. They were perfectly preserved thanks to their immersion in the bogs and the tanning action of the water. They attracted the attention of a prominent archaeologist, Peter Vilhelm Glob, who investigated the fates of the Iron Age people murdered and thrown into the bogs. Mostly, they were throttled, naked and with the throats cut. He found out that many of them were victims of ritual killings and sacrifices to a female fertility goddess. The detailed observation and findings are depicted in the book *The Bog People* that was published in 1970.

Seamus Heaney was captivated by this archaeological study and it served him as a source of inspiration for the bog poems. He noted in the interview with O'Driscoll that "opening P.V. Glob's book *The Bog People* was like opening a gate, the same as when he wrote 'Bogland'" (157). Two poems, "The Tollund Man" and "The Grauballe Man", are named after the men, who were sacrificed to an Iron Age pagan tradition and whose dead bodies were thrown into a bog. The traditional rite was based on a conviction that a marriage of a fertility goddess and a man, holding the function of a bridegroom, would provide fruitful crops and would ensure fertile land for the next season. Glob calls the ritual a "sacred spring wedding" which symbolizes a "union of sky and earth" (162).

Moreover, Glob describes an interesting preserved body of a young girl that was found in Windeby. Unlike the foregoing bodies, this one was killed in a different way. Glob describes the girl as lying naked with her hair shaved off, suggesting that she was punished for adultery. This kind of transgression was punished by public humiliation and expulsion from the community. The demeaning punishment was most frequently shaving the hair of the adulterous woman in front of her relatives (Glob 153). Heaney drew

an analogy between the Windeby girl and tarred and feathered girls from Northern Ireland in “Punishment”.

In 1977 in an interview with Brian Donnelly, Seamus Heaney explains why he used the bog bodies and Jutland as a ground of analogies: “it was in these victims made strangely beautiful by the process of lying in bogs that somehow I felt I could make offerings or images that were emblems” (quoted in Corcoran 96). In other words, the photographs of the dead bodies reminded him of the brutalities perpetrated during the political and religious struggles between Ireland and England. It is by means of words and language that the fates of the bodies are remembered. Composing verses in awe of the victims from the remote past is an easier task for Heaney than to seek words for the imminent horrors from the present. After all, it is *The Bog People* that served him as a primary source of what he calls “images and symbols adequate to our predicament” (Heaney, *Preoccupations* 56) hence it is debatable that the book would have captivated him if there had been peace in Northern Ireland (Vendler 44).

2.4. Art and politics

The definition of art offered by the Cambridge Dictionary runs as follows: “an activity through which people express particular ideas”. It does not specify what the ideas should relate to, in other words, it does not say which human scope of interest it should concern. The purpose of art is giving shape to the artists’ thoughts, beliefs and imagination; therefore it is a looking glass into a human soul. Moreover, it is believed that an artwork should beautify and improve the world we live in, so do politics ideally. Unlike the men of art, politicians deal with the real world. Francis Stuart thinks that if “politics is the technique of preserving the coherence and welfare of the community and art the individual perception, then it is not difficult to forecast a confrontation between the two” (72).

Politicians who are bound to the present should be wary of the artistic world, particularly the literary world, since they realize that literature is timeless. The novelists and the poets do not only live in their imaginative realms, they also make references to the outer world by means of the parables, myths or metaphors which linger in people’s minds and that is a menace posed by art to politics. Stuart believes that writers do not aim to undermine the political system, if they help to achieve a change in prevailing political

conditions; it is just a side benefit of their writing (73). However, if the writers become moralists, they may lose their artistic insight and imagination out of which the art is created.

Art and the artistic movements have always reacted to the changes in society and therefore to political and historical events. Be it an explicit or implicit reaction, the art incorporated the artist's stances whether they were indifferent, neutral or attitudinal. For instance, the romantics responded to the disillusion that originated from the results of the French Revolution in 1789. The period of the Napoleonic wars led to directing the artist's attention to the themes of nature and the inner self. Moreover, the revolutionary poets led an inward struggle with the clash of political ideas they supported. On the one hand, they pertained to the British nation; on the other hand, they identified themselves with the French revolutionists and their aims for liberty and a new arrangement of society. They found a certain refuge and reconciliation in poems. We can observe a certain resemblance in the romantic poets to Northern Irish poets of the second half of the 20th century.

The opinions on the incorporation of artists' political viewpoints and affiliations into their work diverge. The artists themselves are not unanimous concerning the relationship of literature and politics and the role of a writer. In the second half of the 20th century, many essays were written about this ambiguous relationship, as a response to the newly published poems of Northern Irish poets. The Ulster poetic community began to feel the inevitable necessity to reflect the intractable situation in Northern Ireland when the Troubles broke out. It seems as if the horrors stimulated poetic production as Seamus Deane observes: "the roots of poetry and of violence grow in the same soil" (*Seamus Heaney* 70). Contradictory views on the relationship of poetry and politics were, among others, introduced by the Irish literary critic Edna Longley in *Poetry and Politics in Northern Ireland* and the Irish philosopher Richard Kearney in *Beyond Art and Politics*.

Edna Longley assumes that "poetry and politics, like church and state, should be separated" (185). A question suggests itself: concerning the history of the United Kingdom, was the church and state ever separated? The divergence of the political stances coincides with the difference in religious beliefs to a large extent. We might argue that

church and state, while having different means of influence at their disposal, should cooperate. The same can be applied to poetry and politics in general. Richard Kearney affirms that by claiming: “Art without politics is superhuman. Politics without art is subhuman. Either without the other is inhuman” (10). Therefore the poets felt obligated to react and respond to events. Nevertheless, the core of the problem, which Edna Longley outlines, lies in her observing the tendencies of Northern Irish poets to become limited by their political viewpoints at the expense of their boundless imagination. In other words, Edna Longley supposes that “ideologies confiscate the poet’s special passport to *terra incognita*” (185). Optimally, the poet should be deprived of his biased ideological luggage at the check-in heading to Longley’s *terra incognita* (Eugene O’Brien 2). However, in the essay *Feeling into Words*, Heaney notes that he strived to find a poetic *terra*, in which it would be possible to stay faithful to the art of poetry while embracing the complexity of the political and religious struggle together with human reason (*Preoccupations* 56-57).

The danger of the disproportionate engagement of any writer in political issues might result in propagandistic and ideological art. Kearney mentions Eliot, Pound and Yeats who “flirted with a fascist movement as political equivalent to his political creed” (9). A relatively similar viewpoint is expressed by Conor Cruise O’Brien who calls “the area where literature and politics overlap an unhealthy intersection, because, suffused with romanticism, it breeds bad politics – Fascism and Nationalism” (quoted in Edna Longley 185). Especially, the Northern Irish republican poets are prone to extreme ideologies, because of their unremitting search for the Irishness under the Protestant British rule. To avoid this “unhealthy intersection”, a writer should maintain an emotional detachment and stay neutral.

After presenting Edna Longley’s and Conor Cruise O’Brien’s arguments, it seems that the mutual relationship between genuine art and politics is rather unconceivable. However, Richard Kearney proposes antithetic sentiments in his article *Beyond Art and Politics*. The opening lines read: “Politics is far too grave a matter for the politician. Art is far too potent a medium for the artist. Beyond this entrenchment is a place where the two can meet” (1). The writers speak to the audience through their work and therefore have a great power to influence them. Art can serve as a medium which tends to unify the society and helps to overcome past wrongs. A very similar idea is brought in by Steven

Matthews: “if art does not offer a poultice to society, yet it might in its wholeness suggest other ways of being which will later come to redress the wrongs which society inflicts on the individual, or which one nation inflicts on another” (164).

Politics is considered to be reasonable in contrast to art that is dominated by imagination and inward feelings. Moreover, politics is concerned with everyday life, with the mundane reality and is hampered by the real world whereas poetry floats in a remote world, brought forth by the means of language. Kearney believes that these two realms should intersect up to a point. To attain a ‘healthy intersection’ it is “necessary for art to abdicate its throne of proud and unprincipled autonomy and to become conversant with the everyday affairs of man – the political” (11). Again, Edna Longley contradicts, since she is convinced that the ‘didactic’ role that is foisted on a poet deprives him of fantasy. She states that “discourse abolishes any boundary between poetry and prose, poetry and politics, in the same spirit as comrade abolishes class-distinctions”, adding that “the only casualty is imagination” (Edna Longley 185).

In *The Ulster Renaissance*, Heather Clark concerns herself with, among other issues, the position of a poet during the Troubles and ruminates on how the Belfast poets perceived their influential role in public affairs. Clark points out that, after 1969, “the Belfast poets increasingly saw art as an inclusive and cooperative venture, alternative to sectarianism with the potential to circumvent politics while educating the public” (10). She also suggests that the poets should neither give preference to one political group nor express radical opinions. On the contrary, the poetry could hold up a mirror to society and in a way it had a power to mitigate the tension through reminding people of the mundane normal things. At a time when people were forced to take one side of the conflict, it was highly important for intellectual and artistic authorities to uphold non-sectarian and non-violent standpoints, because “it was not the politicians who would bring about peace, but the artists, the Arts Council, the museums, and the universities working together” (Clark 10). Therefore, Clark’s words support the ideas of Matthews about overcoming the wrongs by means of art.

The difficult balancing on the edge between poetry and politics is also discussed and negotiated in Seamus Heaney’s essay *Place and Displacement*. He regards poetry as a means of distancing the poet’s real insolvable conflict to a symbolic level, where

it might find resolution and reconciliation. As an example, he presents Wordsworth, who found himself in conflict when England declared war upon France, since he was a great supporter of the French Revolution and its appeal for liberty, equality and brotherhood. Wordsworth's *Prelude* that opens with: "I felt the ravage of this most unnatural strife" is a poem in which he proposes a solution to the beginning war and in Heaney's words: "the poem is diagnostic, therapeutic and didactic all at once" (Heaney, *Place and Displacement* 159), which contradicts Edna Longley's feelings about didactic role of poetry. Moreover, he compares the situation of a poet with the healing of Jung's patients. Jung's remedy lies in "outgrowing" the predicament "by developing a new level of consciousness" (Heaney, *Place and Displacement* 158).

Heaney thinks that a similar inner conflict of political ideas, which was experienced by the Romanticists, is inflicted on the Northern Irish poets. On the one hand, they share the culture and history of their motherland, Ireland, and in that sense, they are all patriotic. On the other hand, it is the different political beliefs that drive a wedge between them. "Each person in Ulster lives first in the Ulster of the actual present, and then in one or other Ulster of the mind" (Heaney, *Place and Displacement* 159). Therefore, it must have been very difficult for the Belfast poets to cope with it and to eschew partiality. Heaney finds himself in agreement with Edna Longley and Clark in that it is not a poet's role to handle the political problems and articulate a clear standpoint. However, he and his poet's generation felt certain responsibility to react and to contribute to a public discussion. He notes that "the writers did not feel the need to address themselves to the specific questions of politics because they assumed that the subtleties and tolerances of their art were precisely what they had to contribute to the coarseness and intolerances of the public life" (Heaney, *Place and Displacement* 159). The only side the poets should take was the detached third side of peace, tranquillity and tolerance.

3. Practical part

The theme of the practical part is based on selected poems from *North*, namely the bog poems. What will be offered is a detailed close reading with a focus on the interconnection with the Troubles and the Irish Question. Moreover, each chapter will be also provided with a collation of critical readings of individual poems.

3.1. North

The primary political focus of *North* is Northern Ireland in crisis after 1969 and it embraces Heaney's insight and an inner exposure since it develops personal and intimate feelings. It is for the political dimensions that Seamus Heaney is either acclaimed or criticized. Notwithstanding the critical reception, the collection *North*, whose publication dates back to 1975, is an inherent part of many anthologies. One of the first critics who expressed doubts about the collection was a Northern Irish poet and novelist, Ciaran Carson, pointing at the aestheticization of politics and glorification of violence. Carson pronounces critical ideas on *North* in his review "Escaped from the Massacre?" which was published in 1975 in the prestigious poetry magazine *The Honest Ulsterman*. He concludes the review by noting: "Everyone was anxious that *North* should be a great book; when it turned out that it wasn't, it was treated as one anyway" (271).

The division of *North* into two parts reflects the dualistic content, which Parker believes to be "an attempt to impose order on the tensions and paradoxes that beset his [Heaney's] imagination" (126). Poems of Part I refer back to the past, exploring the time of the last 2000 years. It deals with a concept of suffering by creating a historical myth closely connected to bogland. The poems are interrelated by motives of waiting and rising and symbols of death and rebirth. For instance, "Antaeus" waits lying "on the ground" for "my [his] elevation, my [his] fall" (20), Gunnar "lay[s] beautiful inside his burial mound/ though dead by violence" (70-72) in "Funeral Rites" and the "Bog Queen" also "lay[s] waiting" (1) for a rise "from the dark" (53). It is a couple in "Bone Dreams" who "end up/ cradling each other" (65-66), the "unswaddled hair" (3) of the head in "Strange Fruit" and "The Grauballe Man" who is "bruised like a forceps baby" (36) that elicit a comparison of Northern Ireland to a child torn out of its womb.

In the next section, Heaney pursues his Catholic past and creates a personal myth; therefore, Part II is more responsive to the present Northern Ireland rather than to its history and it proves to be more rational. Carson observes that “there is more humanity and honesty in this section than in the acres of bogland in Part I” (271). There is “Whatever You Say Say Nothing”, where Heaney depicts the power of journalists: “media-men and stringers sniff and point” (5), the imminent death: “Men die at hand. In blasted street and home” (25) and what an Irishmen living in Ulster undergoes: “Competence with pain/ Coherent miseries, a bite and sup” (86-87). Then in the “Freedman”, young Heaney who was “subjugated yearly under arches” (1) and who “would kneel to be impressed by ashes” (6) becomes conscious of “census-taking eyes” (11) of the “groomed optimi” (10), realizing that the Catholic ‘tribe’ is partially responsible for the repression during the Troubles. The superiority of Protestants at school is recounted in “The Ministry of Fear”, written in blank verse, in which the Catholic kids feel “Inferiority/ Complexes, stuff that dreams were made on” (34-35). Heaney expresses an aversion to anti-Catholic gatherings and parades in “Orange Drums”. Moreover, Seamus Heaney became an “inner émigré” (31) who “escaped from the massacre” (33) in “Exposure”, the final poem of *North*, which was written after he moved to the Irish Republic (Vendler 87). Observing the Troubles aloofly, he ruminates on his new position, which is “neither internee nor informer” (30).

The dichotomous structure is not only manifested by the content but also by the form and language. Heaney told Seamus Deane: “the two halves of the book constitute two different types of utterance, each of which arose out of a necessity to shape and give palpable linguistic form to two kinds of urgency—one symbolic, one explicit” (“Unhappy and at Home” 66). In Part I, Heaney uses archaic words together with a serious deferential tone, whereas in Part II, the language is contemporary and the tone is more impudent and informal. The two parts complement each other as the feminine and masculine principle of Tao. Morrison believes that the binary structure expresses the idea of a dual character of poetry, which is either “the poetry of chance and trance as against the poetry of resistance and perseverance”, as well as the dual nature of poets, who “sense, surrender, dive, divine, receive and coax” or “command, plot, assert, strike, labour and force” (54).

At the centre of Part I lies the sequence of the bog poems which follows thematically other bog poems from the collection *Wintering Out*, for example “The Tollund Man”, and from the collection *Door into the Dark*, for instance “Bogland”. What these poems share is the search of emblems and images in the bogs of Jutland and an exploration of the link between Ireland and Jutland. There are six bog poems in *North*, also called bog body poems, which are different from others since they elaborate on the paradigmatic relationship of the preserved bodies of victims, murdered because of the ancient traditions of their tribes, namely “Come to the Bower“, “Bog Queen“, “The Grauballe Man“, “Punishment“, “Strange Fruit“ and “Kinship“. Neil Corcoran selected them for their shared effort to express the difficulties of the present by means of “synthesizing historical myth” and for their common signs of ‘epic’ poetry (96).

3.2. Come to the Bower

The first poem of the sequence of the bog poems is “Come to the Bower“, which opens the theme of the Bog People, in particular of their women. Inspired by Glob’s account of preserved bodies emblazoned with myths and ritual deaths, Heaney introduces us to the dead body of a queen whose detailed description is given in the following poem. In “Come to the Bower“, the narrator gradually uncovers the body of the queen who is waiting for rebirth and “spring water” (15) that will “rise around her” (16). The motive of waiting is typical of Heaney’s representation of the queen and it repeats in “Bog Queen“ as well. For what is the queen waiting? It might be for an awakening kiss from the narrator who seduces her (Morrison 62).

According to Michael Parker, the title of the poem originates from a popular Republican song ‘Will you come to the bower’, which praises the beautiful territory of Ireland as well as its martyrs (134). The suffering for public interests or political and religious beliefs is strongly entrenched in the national spirit of the Irish. There are a number of Irish people who chose death rather than a renouncement of their Catholic faith, for instance Archbishop Oliver Plunkett (Corish 89). Another scourge the Irish suffered came with the dreadful rule of Oliver Cromwell and later, during the Troubles, several prisoners went on hunger strike to reach their goals. Heaney believes that the “tradition of Irish political martyrdom” becomes an “archetypal pattern” and he associates it with the sacrifices to the earth goddess Nerthus, which provides him

with great ground for creating a myth for Northern Ireland (Heaney, *Preoccupations* 57). The barbaric rite resided in a belief that the Mother Goddess needed “new bridegrooms each winter to bed with her in her sacred place, in the bog, to ensure the renewal and fertility of the territory in the spring” (Heaney, *Preoccupations* 57). In the poem, the sacred place is probably the “bower” and the act of sexual union with a bridegroom, in this case the narrator, who “unpins” the body (6), “withdraws gently” (9) and “unwraps skins” (10), comes when he reaches “the bullion of her Venus bone” (20). Edna Longley believes that the poem “signifies the poet’s imaginative intercourse with his country”, adding a rhetorical question: “Does the conceit do more than consummate itself?” (156).

The fascination of the narrator with the architecture of a preserved dead body combined with an erotic excitement that he gets from staring at a corpse, which is usually marked with signs of painful decease; lead the poems to teeter on the brink of scandal. Heaney juggles with pathological behaviour, operating “not only with voyeurism, but necrophilia” (Corcoran 112) or “neo-sadism” (Parker 134), when he writes about seducing the dead. Being aware of this sick attraction, a sense of guilt comes in one of the following poems. All in all, the artfulness of the bog poems chiefly lies in the sophisticated allegories that blend the sexual with the political.

3.3. Bog Queen

It is explicit from the title that “Bog Queen“ is about the “dark-bowered queen” (5) of “Come to the Bower“. Heaney was inspired by the first body taken from the bog in Ireland on the Moira estate in the late eighteenth century during the time of the English occupation (Vendler 45). The fact that the body was most probably a Danish Viking gave Heaney the opportunity to connect Ireland and Jutland again. The politico-historical moment of the discovery and its connexion with the ancient Vikings make great fodder for shaping a myth for Northern Ireland. It is no coincidence that the “Bog Queen“ is female and not a king since she presumably represents the personification of Ireland which was always addressed in feminine terms; namely Mother Ireland, Kathleen Ni Houlihan, the poor old woman and the Shan Van Vocht (Heaney, *Preoccupations* 57). Patricia Coughlan develops further the feminine aspect in her critical essay ‘*Bog Queens*’: *The Representation of Women in the poetry of John Montague and Seamus Heaney*. She asserts that the representation of feminine archetypes in Irish poetry “is merged

with the imagery of woman-as-land-and-national-spirit from the tradition of Irish nationalist political rhetoric” (186). Most often the territory of Ireland is figured either as a great nature goddess, also referred to as *magna mater* or as a fecund spouse. Moreover, Parker asserts that the sleeping queen in “Come to the Bower“ and “Bog Queen“ is an “incarnation of Nerthus, the earth goddess, to whom the Tollud Man was sacrificed” (135). The sleeping queen is clearly bound to nature as well as to its forces and processes; however, there is room for the reader’s imagination to explicate whose representation is the queen since we do not explicitly know her identity.

The very first line of the poem reads as “I lay waiting” and is repeated throughout. It is substantial for understanding the nature of the sleeping queen and the poem, which is actually her monologue. It implies that the queen is a kind of a predator that lurks for its prey. The time of her rising may have not come yet but we certainly gain the feeling that something weighty will happen when the queen ceases to wait; however, we do not know what. The act of waiting not only suggests patience and restraint but it also arouses suspense and anticipation. In a figurative sense, it might mean that Northern Ireland is still waiting for its opportunity to arise.

The following stanzas describe the queen’s progressive decay but also an unremitting resentment with an erotic shade. It appears as if the natural forces pervade the body, leaving irrecoverable traces of the organic processes. She says:

My body was braille
for the creeping influences:
dawn suns groped over my head
and cooled at my feet,

through my fabrics and skins
the seeps of winter
digested me. (5-11)

In the course of the time, her body was touched by nature like a tactile text is read by the blind. Another sensual image of touching is indicated when the body was consumed by the sun and affected by the destructive forces of winter. In the depiction of slow rotting,

we may notice some marks of life: “a jar of spawn/ fermenting underground/ dreams of Baltic amber” (14-21), creating a spark of hope. It brings us to another level of sensation since “the dreams” are less tangible than the preceding images. In spite of the decomposition of the physical body, we get an impression that the mind is still alive. Nevertheless, her fertility is diminished: “the vital hoard reducing/ in the crock of the pelvis” (23-24). It seems as if it is Ireland who speaks with England being the invader who wreaks havoc in the country like nature disrupting the body.

In the following stanzas, Heaney highlights the queen’s decline by letting her diadem, a sign of royalty and nobility, decay and the precious stones vanish like “the bearings of history” (28). Moreover, he compares her “sash” to a “black glacier” (29) and her bosom to “soft moraines” (33), suggesting not only the coalescence with nature but also her grandeur. The queen stands both for the land and for the spirit of Northern Ireland. Even though the bog queen continues to become a part of the earth, it will always be discernible and that might as well be Heaney’s feeling about the situation in the Northern Ireland, being a part of the United Kingdom, yet living as a separate organism.

As a whole, “Bog Queen” is not as expressive of Heaney’s political opinion as “Punishment”, nevertheless, we can observe allusions to the complicated relationship between Irishmen and Englishmen. The queen says that she “was barbered/ and stripped/ by a turf cutter’s spade” (42-44) who re-covered and re-buried her body again. According to the urban dictionary, a turf cutter signifies not only a peat cutter but also “someone of Irish descent” in colloquial language. Therefore, perhaps, it was Ireland herself who unsettled the queen and then “veiled her again/ and packed coomb softly” (45-46). However, the violent intervention comes at the close of the poem when “a peer’s wife bribed him”, implying that a wife of a noble English occupier bought the conscience of the turf cutter, who bereaved the queen of dignity and cut her hair. The act of severing hair is momentous for the queen’s rebirth since Heaney assimilates it to cutting the umbilical cord: “the plait of my hair,/ a slimy birth-cord/ of bog, has been cut/ and I rose from the dark” (50-53). The queen is resurrected and ready for vengeance. Christine Hoff Kraemer believes that it reflects Ireland’s revolutionary spirit and understands the last lines as a warning that Ireland will awake one day and revenge all the past wrongs committed during the English occupation. Moreover, she adds that just as the queen

is reborn, so “the archetypes of ancient Ireland are given disturbing new life in the Troubles of the twentieth century” (Kraemer).

What distinguishes the “Bog Queen“ from other bog poems is the voice in which it is written and Heaney’s identification with the speaker. It is interesting that he, as a male poet, employs a dead female figure to articulate his thoughts, especially when he is criticized for gender dualism. Patricia Coughlan, for instance, finds Heaney’s depiction of men and women dichotomic, in other words, she accuses him of portraying the representations of different sex roles as opposing or even contradictory: the female role as “a matter of waiting” and the male role as “wilful entering” (“The Whole Strange Growth’: Heaney, Orpheus and Women” 27). Furthermore, she also finds Heaney’s representation of different aspects of femininity dualistic, suggesting that he depicts women either as “awe-inspiring mother figures” or “benign fertile spouses” (Coughlan, “‘Bog Queens’: The Representation of Women in the poetry of John Montague and Seamus Heaney” 186). She adds that the poetic writing of “the great male ‘I’”, which was frequently associated with nationhood, is in “Irish cultural rhetoric closely interwoven with the powerful figure of the nation as feminine figure” (Coughlan, “The Whole Strange Growth’: Heaney, Orpheus and Women” 27).

Unlike Coughlan, Carlanda Green is more favourable to Heaney’s representation of female principles. She believes that Heaney associates the Irish with the feminine and the English with the masculine, the former being more passionate and mysterious, the latter being more reasonable and realistic (Green 151). We know that Heaney chose a feminine persona for the “Bog Queen“ because of the Irish mythology and the association with the fertility goddess Nerthus, nevertheless, Green offers another explanation, talking about gender principles: “her actions [the female’s] are often intuitive; she senses, feels things to a greater degree than man so that the felt experience is a commonplace with her. Because he often cannot understand how she knows what she knows, man, chiefly rational, finds her mysterious and often mistrusts her” (152). We can observe the conflict between the Irish and the British as a struggle of two principles, as Heaney and Green do. In *Feeling into Words*, Heaney remarks that the Troubles “can be viewed as a struggle between the cults and devotees of a god and a goddess”, imputing the country of Cromwell or William of Orange with disturbing the sovereignty of an “indigenous territorial numen” of Ireland (*Preoccupations* 57). Green summarizes

her thoughts by asserting that it is essential to trust in the union of the male and the female in order to overcome the distress of the Troubles (158).

3.4. The Grauballe Man

After introducing the sleeping queen to us, Seamus Heaney comes with a new male body, namely The Grauballe Man, which attracted his attention in the museum at Aarhus when he visited it in order to see the Tollund Man. He had already begun to write the poem in the museum since he scribbled down some notes and then merged them into one literary composition (O’Driscoll 159). In general, “The Grauballe Man“ differs from the preceding bog poems in that it depicts a victim of violence who is directly connected to the contemporary sectarian victims. Moreover, it delineates how art is connected to reality, in other words, it actually opens the theme of the relationship between art and brutal political reality. Helen Vendler admires the poem by finding it “the most beautiful ‘bog poem’, meditating on the relation between art and suffering” (44).

Whereas the bog queen’s body is depicted as being part of the land and having been subjected to natural processes, the body of the Grauballe Man is portrayed as more discernible from nature, yet being in union with the vegetative world, and his dreadful state as a result of an act of man:

As if he had been poured
in tar, he lies
on a pillow of turf
and seems to weep

the black river of himself.
The grain of his wrists
is like bog oak
the ball of his heel.

like a basalt egg. (1-9)

What we get from the opening strophes is the visual image of the body, being on one hand still and lying like a corpse in a coffin; on the other hand, we conclude from the act

of weeping that there is a hidden life. Later in the poem, his “head lifts” (17) and that is another sign of an action between the images of stillness. A succession of similes relating to the parts of the body continues throughout the poem and emphasizes Heaney’s fascination with the architecture of the preserved body.

All over the poem, Heaney skips from a dehumanised depiction to a comparison with organic objects. The juxtaposition of ‘corpse’ and ‘body’, both having certain nuances of meaning, and of his “vivid cast” is crucial to the idea of the poem since, in the words of Edna Longley, “it proclaims the victory of metaphor over actuality” (152):

Who will say ‘corpse’
to his vivid cast?
Who will say ‘body’
to his opaque repose? (25-28)

Although “his slashed throat/ that has tanned and toughened” (20-21) is a clear sign of death, he has a vivid complexion. What ensues is another succession of similes that compare the body to a “foetus’s” (31) and to a “bruised forceps baby” (36). The question poses itself: is a foetus a living human being? The author might play with the idea that the spirit of the body lives eternally, albeit dead.

Immortality is gained when real life is conveyed into art, whether it is into a photograph or into an artistic account: the narrator “saw his twisted face/ in a photograph” (32-33) and the image “perfected in my [his] memory” (38). The body is depicted as a piece of art and there are no signs of emotions or sympathy. Like the Romantic poets, Heaney searches for beauty in a dreadful and gloomy world. The beautiful can be seen in artful metaphors and similes that combine the noble with the mundane: “as a swan’s foot” (11), “hips are purse of a mussel” (14) and “glisten of mud” (16). The highlight of this dualistic relationship comes in the penultimate stanza where it is addressed explicitly:

hung in the scales
with beauty and atrocity:
with the Dying Gaul
too strictly compassed

on his shield,
with the actual weight
of each hooded victim,
slashed and dumped. (s 41-48)

The connection of “beauty and atrocity” (42) is what Vendler talks about and what can be likewise found in the image of the heroic Dying Gaul. According to Philip Kennicott, the sculpture of the Dying Gaul portrays the dying of a Gallic warrior who has been fatally wounded and whose face is distorted by pain as well like the Grauballe Man’s “twisted face” (32). It manifests how brutal reality can be aestheticsized and turned into art.

However, Heaney also defines the relation between myth and reality by emphasizing that murder happens in real life, not in art. At the end, after the long description of an aestheticsized dead body, he reminds us of “the actual weight” (46) of the cruel horrors. Corcoran believes that “rarely has the word ‘actual’ carried so much weight” and he adds that “the man’s ‘actual weight’ falls as a rebuke to Heaney’s own mythologizing tendency (115). The final lines belong either to the past victims or to the contemporary “slashed and dumped” (48) casualties of the Troubles. Parker concludes: “No-one in the North can or should escape the burden ‘of each hooded victim/ slashed and dumped’, and the evidence of his eyes” (136).

3.5. Punishment

As it was mentioned earlier, the poem “Punishment” describes a girl from the distant past who was punished for adultery. In particular, it was the Windeby girl from *The Bog People* who served Heaney as a model (Vendler 49). She was found with a rope around her neck suggesting that she was strangled to death (Glob 116). Fascinated by the preserved architecture of the exhumed body, Heaney depicts it in detail. What her lying dead body represents is a violent revenge. She became a victim of tribal

punishment since she broke rules of the tribe. Notwithstanding the fact that she was found guilty, we feel pity for her. The poem is generally about balancing on the edge between approving of the violent act and sympathising with the victim. The first lines read as follows:

I can feel the tug
of the halter at the nape
of her neck, the wind
on her naked front. (1-4)

It begins with a narrator staring at a naked body and describing the brutal act. The phrase “I can feel” implies that the narrator is compassionate and sympathizes with the victim. Moreover, the word “tug” has a different denotation than “pull” since it shows that the girl was pulled against her will. She struggled against her destiny, which is another thing that makes it easier for the reader to identify with her. The peak is her nakedness:

It blows her nipples
to amber beads,
it shakes the frail rigging
of her ribs. (5-8)

It is not only her nude body which proves her vulnerability but also the selection of words: “beads”, “shake” and “frail rigging”. The degree of compassion is gradually increasing with each verse. Perhaps, Heaney gave it an erotic air intentionally as gazing at a naked suffering body brings a special kind of pleasure to people. Susan Sontag notes: “it seems that the appetite for pictures showing bodies in pain is as keen, almost, as the desire for ones that show bodies naked” (33). The two appetites meet here.

The realistic as well as figurative description continues as the poem progresses, always putting emphasis on the girl’s youth, vulnerability and nakedness. Her “tar-black face” (27) refers to the tarring and feathering of girls who offended against the unwritten rules of their community by dating British soldiers. The IRA’s reprisal was also based on public humiliation like the punishment of the “Little adulteress” (23) in “Punishment”.

The next verses are of a religious character; in particular, they relate to the Bible. Perhaps, Heaney intended to highlight his Catholic identity by searching for allusions in the Holy Writ:

My poor scapegoat,
I almost love you
But would have cast, I know,
the stones of silence. (28-31)

Using the possessive “my” suggests feelings of sympathy and close attachment to the girl. The line “my poor scapegoat” is crucial for the understanding of the poem and of Heaney’s stance since scapegoats are usually innocent victims that are chosen to be sacrificed for the sake of the common good by taking on the blame and sins of others. We pity those chosen ones, however, we would presumably not oppose the injustice, nor does the narrator who “almost loves” (29) her yet he remains silent. The tarred and feathered girls were perceived as the scapegoats of the Catholic community. At least it might be Heaney’s explanation why the acts of the IRA were not attacked in response. What is interesting is the switching of tone when addressing the girl, on one hand reproachfully: “Little adulteress” and on the other hand compassionately: “My poor scapegoat”, which again brings up Catholic faith since it alludes to Jesus Christ and his sacrifice.

Moreover, there is an allusion to “casting stones” in the New Testament. An adulterous woman was condemned to death by stoning but was eventually saved by Jesus who said the famous phrase, which is found in John 8:7: "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her" (*New Jerusalem Bible*, Jn 8:7). The narrator concedes that he would just observe without stepping in and would let the girl die. He is not the perpetrator yet he assists them. After alluding to the Bible, the narrator reveals his role by conceding “I am the artful voyeur” (32). This assertion just emphasizes that the observation of a naked corpse brings him special pleasure. Moreover, it might manifest the narrator’s aloofness and passivity. There a room for speculation if the narrator embodies Heaney’s idea or not.

In particular, it is the bog poem “Punishment” that has been most opposed and anthologised at the same time. The reason for it might be Heaney’s approach to the sectarian violence which incites critical debate. Carson contested “Punishment“

for its glib comparison of Iron Age ritual killing and the IRA's punishments, suggesting that Heaney "seems to be offering his understanding of the situation almost as a consolation" (269). It looks as if he silently assents and justifies the violence perpetrated against women by implying that the tribal retributions are common and they have always happened. Morrison thinks in a similar way when he observes: "his allusions to former cultures amount to a sort of historical determinism" (quoted in Edna Longley 159). Moreover, in the final lines of the poem, the speaker finds the women guilty as does the tribe:

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. (37-44)

It is mainly for these last lines that Carson calls him "the laureate of violence" and "an apologist for the situation" (268). He feels that Heaney endeavours to give a poultice to the society by, in the words of Carson, "understanding the situation". So does Blake Morrison when he concludes: "precedent becomes, if not a justification, then at least an explanation" (68).

Moreover, Edna Longley comments on the final lines with a rhetorical question: "But can the poet run with the hare and hunt with the hounds?" (154). In other words, can he "connive" at brutal acts but sympathise with the victims? The answer is equivocal since some might think that conniving is contributing to wrongdoing by taciturnity and inaction. Yet it is the paradox of sympathising – one can feel sorry for the oppressed while tolerating the acts of the oppressor. It might have been Heaney's intention to display the feelings which sympathy itself allows. "Punishment" exposes something more profound than politics; it shows Heaney's inner ambivalence. It is an audacious piece

of self-dissection that Edna Longley calls the “most intense hovering over a brink” (154).

The oxymoron of “civilized outrage” (42) shows the two-facedness of the speaker. It might lead the critics to different emotional conclusions. For instance, Blake Morrison grasps the “civilized outrage” as “forced and artificial in comparison with his instinctive understanding of the laws and needs of the tribe” (64). One should think and behave for the sake of the tribe even if having doubts. Whereas Carson observes that it is like saying that “there never will be any political consequences of such acts; they have been removed to the realm of sex, death and inevitability” (270). The silence enables the perpetrators to continue doing harm and even to receive remission of sins. Nevertheless, eventually there is a shift from voyeurism to self-criticism of the attitude toward violence. Parker observes that the poem embraces “Heaney’s contradictory awarenesses” which makes it one of the “very major achievements of *North*” (137).

Apropos of the close of the poem, it “ends up speaking the language of the tribe, brutal though that language may be” (Morrison 68). At this point, the voice of the tribe is the loudest. Supposedly, Heaney did not really support the acts of bloodshed performed by the IRA, nor did he trifle with violence.

Seamus Heaney remarks that writing “Punishment“ was hard for the complexity of expression and meaning. He strived not only to satisfy the ambition of great syntax and sound but also to render feelings together with the motifs he worked with. What was supposedly the most difficult part for Heaney was the raw self-scrutiny and a sincere exposure towards the readers. The aim of his endeavour was to discover “how to take a stand between the tar-black face of the peat-bog girl and the tarred and feathered women in the reports” (O’Driscoll 159). Furthermore, he notes that the creation of “Punishment“ took a longer time in comparison with other bog poems.

3.6. Strange Fruit

Another poem in the sequence of bog poems is “Strange Fruit“, in which Heaney probably describes a bodiless head that was found wrapped in sheepskin in Roum Fen in Himmerland in June 1942. Thanks to the artefacts and ancient clothing found nearby, Glob infers that the head had belonged to a woman’s body. Probably, the woman was decapitated and her head together with the artefacts were offered as a sacrifice (Glob 100). However, the narrator does not focus on the victim’s past life or fate. The title refers

to a sorrowful song of Billie Holliday, recalling the injustice towards the Afro-Americans in the southern United States, in which “innocent blacks, lynched by racist mobs and left to hang on trees, are referred to as “Strange Fruit”” (Parker 138). Heaney borrows the idea of the song, relating the decapitated head to the fruit.

“Strange Fruit” differs from the other bog poems not only because it is in sonnet form, but also in that it neither attempts to create a myth nor venerate the victim. Therefore, in this case, we cannot speak of Heaney as “artful voyeur”. In contrast to the “Little adulteress” of “Punishment”, the severed head is depicted as something terrible or even repulsive, using familiar associations with nature and an infant:

Here is the girl’s head, like an exhumed gourd.
Oval-faced, prune-skinned, prune-stones for teeth.
They unswaddled the wet fern of her hair
And made an exhibition of its coil,
Let the air at her leathery beauty.
Pash of tallow, perishable treasure:
Her broken nose is dark as a turf clod,
Her eyeholes blank as pools in the old workings.
Diodorus Siculus confessed
His gradual ease among the likes of this:
Murdered, forgotten, nameless, terrible
Beheaded girl, outstaring axe
And beatification, outstaring
What had begun to feel like reverence. (Heaney, *North* 32)

Through the words of Diodorus Siculus, the narrator admits that multiple barbarities and brutalities engender not only self-satisfaction but also complicity or at least indifference: “gradual ease among the likes” (10). Owing to the inaction of others and general tolerance of brutal acts, the victims are “murdered” and easily “forgotten” afterwards, they remain “nameless” and “terrible” as a consequence of the atrocities (11).

What had led Heaney to “beatification” (13) or “reverence” (14) for the victims before seems as if inverted towards an unsentimental account of cruelty. He told John

Haffenden in an interview: “[“Strange Fruit“] had ended at first with a kind of reverence, and the voice that came in when I revised was a rebuke to the literary quality of that reverent emotion” (Viewpoints 61). Heaney was aware of his inclination toward being obsessed with the past and making martyrs of the victims; therefore the last lines may serve as a sort of redemption for his ‘tribal’ spirit. Moreover, he does not offer any consolation or justification for the tribal violence perpetrated on the girl. Ciaran Carson appreciates it for its difference, honesty and for not posturing “its own understanding of death” as the previous poems do (269).

3.7. Kinship

The last poem of the bog series is a six-poem sequence “Kinship“, which elaborates on a linkage between the boggy landscape and the author’s feelings and origins, in other words, it symbolises Heaney’s “Kinship“ to the casualties of Jutland and the bog serves as a storehouse of memories. The poems complement one another: in the first section, the poet, standing in its midst, gives a detailed description of a bog together with the emotions that the view arouses, certainly it induces delight. Firstly, he makes a connection between the “strangled victim” (3) and the place of the “love-nest in the bracken” (4), repeating the word ‘love’ throughout the poem: “I love the turf-face” (13), “I love the spring” (17). Then he returns to his origins and memories of the bogs since he was closely connected to nature from childhood and speaks about the “incisions” (14) in the peat that remind us of the history of “cooped secrets/ of process and ritual” (15-16).

In the second section, Heaney turns from external depiction to the essence of the word bog, meditating on its linguistic, psychological and historical meaning. Corcoran finds the word bog a “derivation of a history and a psychology” (118). By his providing a number of meticulous synonyms, links and images drawn from Anglo-saxon kennings, the audience gets an insight into this living natural organism, the “ruminant ground” (33), through many perspectives. The word bog is borrowed from the Irish language and it originally means “a soft day” – wet day. In the area where Heaney grew up, they called the bog ‘the moss’, which derives from Norse origins, thus the name Mossbawn (Donoghue 190). Donoghue adds that Heaney “finds in the two words the record of invasion, colonisation, and shift of language in which the Irish word,

for once, has held its place” (190). The bog lays in the “outback of my [his] mind” (48); having a function of “Earth-pantry” (37), it is a “sword-swallower” (42) and a “casket” (43) that embraces history of Viking invaders and conceals “sabred fugitives” (40) and “votive goods” (39). Alluding to “Bog Queen“, Heaney calls the bog “insatiable bride”, which insinuates that the ground needs more victims to stay fertile or, in Morrison’s perception, the female bodies become “insatiable brides who lie in waiting for an awakening kiss” (62).

Section three thematically refers to Heaney’s earlier work of ‘Digging’ since it poetically compares digging with a sexual union of a “turf-spade” (49) and the ground, or more precisely the goddess Nerthus. It manifests Heaney’s strong bond with his homeland, it is:

...equable marriage between the geographical country and the country of the mind, whether that country of the mind takes its tone unconsciously from a shared oral inherited culture, or from a consciously savoured literary culture, or from both; it is this marriage that constitutes the sense of place in its richest possible manifestation. (Heaney, *Preoccupations* 132)

The act is expressed through anatomical analogies: “soft lips of the growth split” (54), “shaft wettish” (59), “I sank it upright” (60), “they have twinned” (63) and “the cloven oak-limb” (70) of the goddess. Unearthing the bog with a spade, the author denotes how profoundly he gets when pondering over historical, geographical and psychological interconnectedness of North and the land. According to Parker, what Heaney wants to highlight is the endeavour of Irish Catholics to revive national culture: transforming “a turf-spade overgrown with a green fog” into “obelisk” (140). Carson criticises Heaney for leaving his “sense of reality” expressed in the first part when exalting a spade. He feels that the second part “has degenerated into a messy historical and religious surmise” (268). The last lines not only constitute a link between the present moment and the myth but they also recall previous poems: “I stand at the edge of centuries/ facing a goddess” (71-72).

The first lines of section IV: “This centre holds/ and spreads” (73-74) allude to Yeats’s ‘The Second Coming’: “the centre cannot hold” (Ingelbien 169). In contrast to Yeats’s catastrophic vision of the world, Heaney’s bogs do not fall apart; Collins

understands it as a momentary suspension of “crisis of identity” (98). However, the transience and timeless flow of life is suggested immediately: “a bag of waters/ and a melting grave” (76-77). Like vowels and consonants alternate in the flow of speech, the “flowers and snow” (88) and “weathers/ and seasons” (89-90) take turns, thus constituting a year. Heaney compares the bog, in a figurative sense Ireland, with “the vowel of earth” (86), juxtaposing the Latin diction and the Anglo-Saxon diction. Donoghue considers it as contrasting of “Latin pleasure against Anglo-Saxon reality” (192). At the end the poet becomes what he is:

I grew out of all this
like a weeping willow
inclined to
the appetites of gravity. (93-96)

He grew up straddling two traditions and eventually accepted his inheritance. What we received before was a depiction of a fertile bog realm in spring when everything blossoms and in autumn when nature delivers its fruits – “heather unseeds” (83) and “brackens deposit/ their bronze” (84-85). It is a cycle of life in which the poet participates as well as in its common fate of “inclining to the appetites of gravity” (95-96), gravity might not only connote power or order but also mortality.

Section V refers thematically back to section III with its “turf-cart wheels” (98). According to Collins, it was written as a remembrance and homage to Heaney’s great-uncle Hughie Scullion (98). The “hand-carved felloes” (97) and “cupid’s bow” (101) reignite his love of the “deified man” (105), his uncle who drove the cart and supplied people with peat for their “hearths” (108). Young Heaney is proud of helping him and he feels confident in the role of a “squire” (112) who respects authorities. Corcoran observes that “the section written in the heraldic makes the turf-cutter a mythologized ‘god of the waggon’ and the boy Heaney his cup-bearer” (118). In the fifth paragraph, there is a shift in person from “I” to “we”, which may signify his growing up from a boy to a man who gains an equal respect as his beloved uncle does.

Having already delineated the solemn side of the bogs, he concludes in the sixth section with a more raw and dark reality, which was foreshadowed in the second poem: “Ground that will strip/ its dark side” (45-46). He addresses Tacitus, who is a great historian who recounted the sacrificial rituals to the cult of the goddess Nerthus (Collins 99), expecting comprehension since they are both witnesses of turbulent history fraught with brutality and violence. Moreover, it is also the bog, the ground that is soaked with blood and that buried the dead. Heaney gives an account of an infinite cycle of atrocities in the North of Europe, suggesting that no sacrifice “will suffice” (135), which might be an answer to Yeats’s question in “Easter 1916”: “O when may it suffice?” (Innes 74). Carson reaches a similar conclusion in his essay when he comments that “no-one really escapes from the massacre” (271):

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’
where nothing will suffice.
Read the inhumed faces

of casualty of victim;
report us fairly,
how we slaughter
for the common good

and shave the heads
of the notorious,

how the goddess swallows
our love and terror. (126-144)

The land is storage of memory and it reminds us of our sins against nature and humanity. In these final lines, Heaney alludes to the previous bog poems, retrieving the sacrifice of “The Grauballe Man“, the humiliated adulteress of “Punishment“ and the beheaded girl of “Strange Fruit“. Reopening the theme of tribal violence when men kill men for the sake of the “common good” (140) of the community, he brings forth the turbulent times of Ulster and he conjoins the past with the present again.

4. Conclusion

The aim of the thesis is to find connections between the bog body poems of Seamus Heaney and the historical context of the Troubles. The theoretical part delineates the roots of the Irish Question and gives a brief account of key events during the Troubles – a grim period of Ulster’s awakening. The English conquest of Ireland had begun after the Norman invasion and continued under the Tudor and Stuart dynasties. It led to massive bloodshed and a long-lasting warfare for territory and faith. Ireland became a land where the two opposing religions of Protestants and Catholics lived alongside one another, with the latter being strongly repressed. We could hardly find another nation in the history of Europe that has so persistently fought for separation and that has suffered as much as the Irish population, especially the Catholic community. Consequently, misery and affliction are deeply rooted in Irish identity, and together with the tireless efforts to become free, they shaped the national character. Despite countless political Irish rebellions, the British hegemony over Ireland lasted for seven centuries and half. The proclamation of the Irish Republic did not bring an ultimate solution to the Irish Question since the six counties of Northern Ireland stayed part of the United Kingdom and that is where the patriotic issue remained a problem. Ulster Republicans protested against British rule by means of a peaceful demonstration in 1968 that triggered another civil war full of sectarian and partisan violence which ended only after almost thirty years.

Furthermore, the theoretical part also provides basic biographical information about Seamus Heaney, which focuses on circumstances that formed him and his production. Especially the second part of *North* refers to Heaney’s upbringing and includes thoughts on the Catholic faith. His being inspired by Glob’s *The Bog People*, the collection mainly explores analogies between bogs in Denmark, dead preserved bodies, ancient violent rituals and the present Northern Ireland with its atrocities and victims. Heaney ponders the relation between art and suffering, emphasizing that actual death happens in real life and that art can depict this brutal reality, in particular in “The Grauballe Man“. The bogs gave him spiritual solace and he found political and historical tension in them. Moreover, he was criticised by his contemporaries for being ideologically preconceived and also for understanding or even supporting inter-sectarian violence. Therefore, one chapter of the theoretical part deals with the question of the intersection of art and politics and compares arguments of prominent literary critics, philosophers and poets. Although

North came under criticism, it is frequently anthologised; especially the poem “Punishment“, for the contradictory emotions which it arouses.

The practical part looks in greater depth at the central sequence of the bog poems in *North*. It offers a detailed close-reading of the selected poems and it explores Heaney’s insight into a universal image of violence. The meticulous expression and artfully chosen images are praised by the critics; however, what is the main focus of most critical essays and readings is the thematic content. It is very likely that Heaney wrote *North* for himself and for his reconciliation with the tribal spirit that acts for the good of the community. Being a witness of the past atrocities, the bog reminds us of our mortality. Heaney is aware of human incorrigibility in “Kinship“, where he highlights that no suffering will suffice. The death of the beheaded girl of “Strange Fruit” is not aesthetized at all; on the contrary, it emphasizes the hideousness of murder. The bog poems are interconnected by similar images and emblems which compare the dead bodies to fetuses that have been pulled out of a mother’s womb. The symbolic cut of the birth-cord in “Bog Queen“ represents the separation of Ireland from the United Kingdom. There are also motifs of waiting which might anticipate Ireland’s waiting for ascendance or even for revenge.

In “Punishment“, Heaney ruminates on the feeling of sympathy with the victims, though quietly approving of the atrocities perpetrated on them. Particularly, he refers to tarring and feathering carried out by the IRA. He calls himself an “artful voyeur” which is an apt appellation of his artistic role in all the bog poems since he finds certain pleasure in observing dead bodies lying in the bogs, contorted with pain, abounding with emblems for the Northern Ireland predicament. His role changed to an “inner émigré” when he moved to the South and left the turbulent homeland. Observing aloofly implies less an interventionist attitude than passive resistance to violence that is carried out for the common good.

North can be characterized as a quest for a myth that would not only express Heaney’s personal identity but also Irish national consciousness. What he contemplates is an alternation of brutal animal instincts and feelings of sympathy and compassion. Although Heaney is criticized by Ciaran Carson for beatifying violence and somewhat excusing tribal killings, he searches for an explanation of contemporary atrocities in the past, associating it with the Scandinavian and English invasions. He reacts

to the current political situation with the poems, the writing of which is a sort of a self-healing process. In Heaney's opinion, poetry serves as a medium which might mitigate real life conflicts and poets can contribute to public tolerance via their sensibility expressed in art. It is in the final stanza of "The Harvest Bow" that he suggests that "the end of art is peace" (25). *North* was published during the Troubles, a struggle of two opposing sides, with art and poetry being a notional third side by means of which public intolerance could turn into a peaceful discussion.

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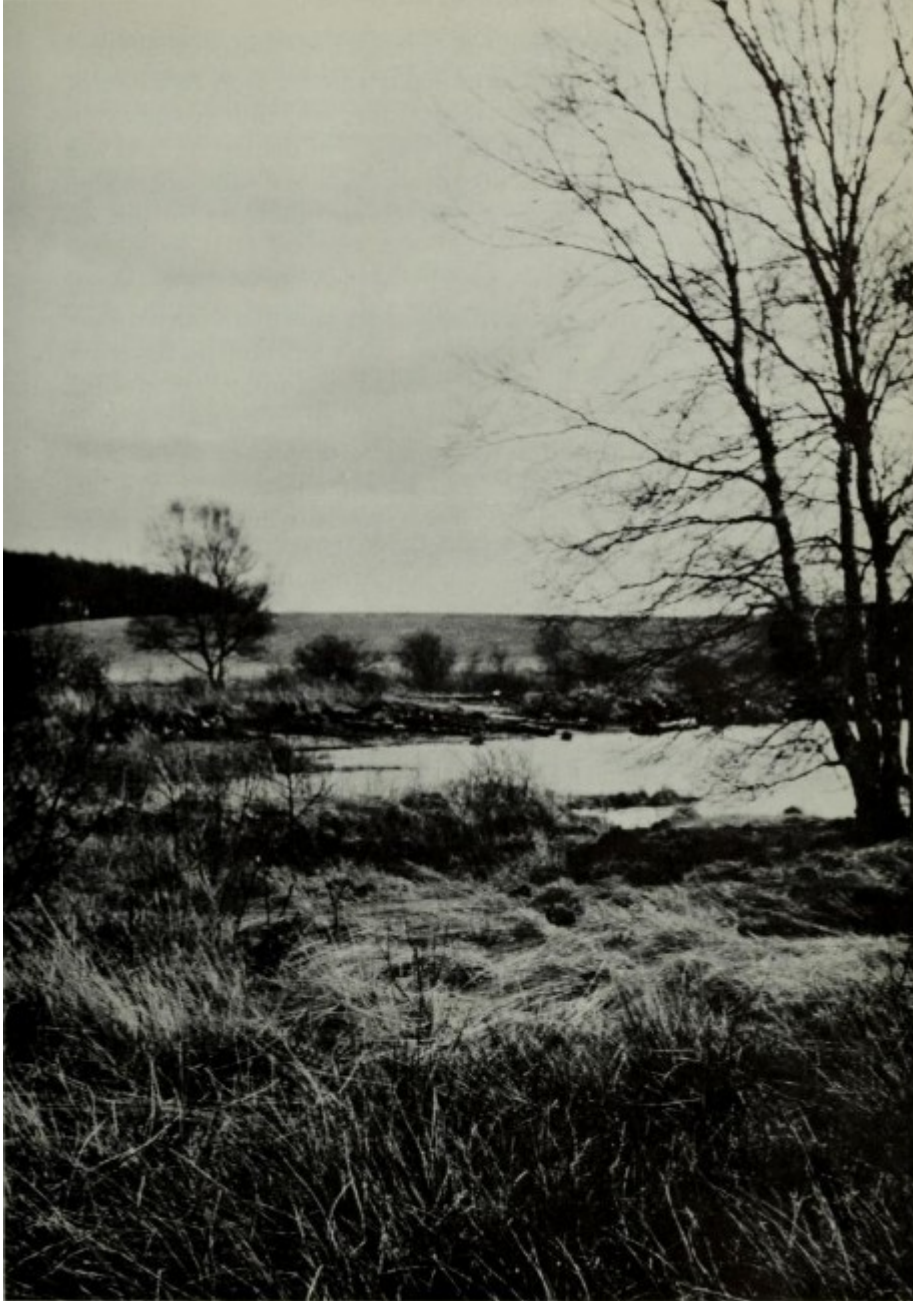
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6. Appendices

Photographs of the bogs and the bodies found in them follow:



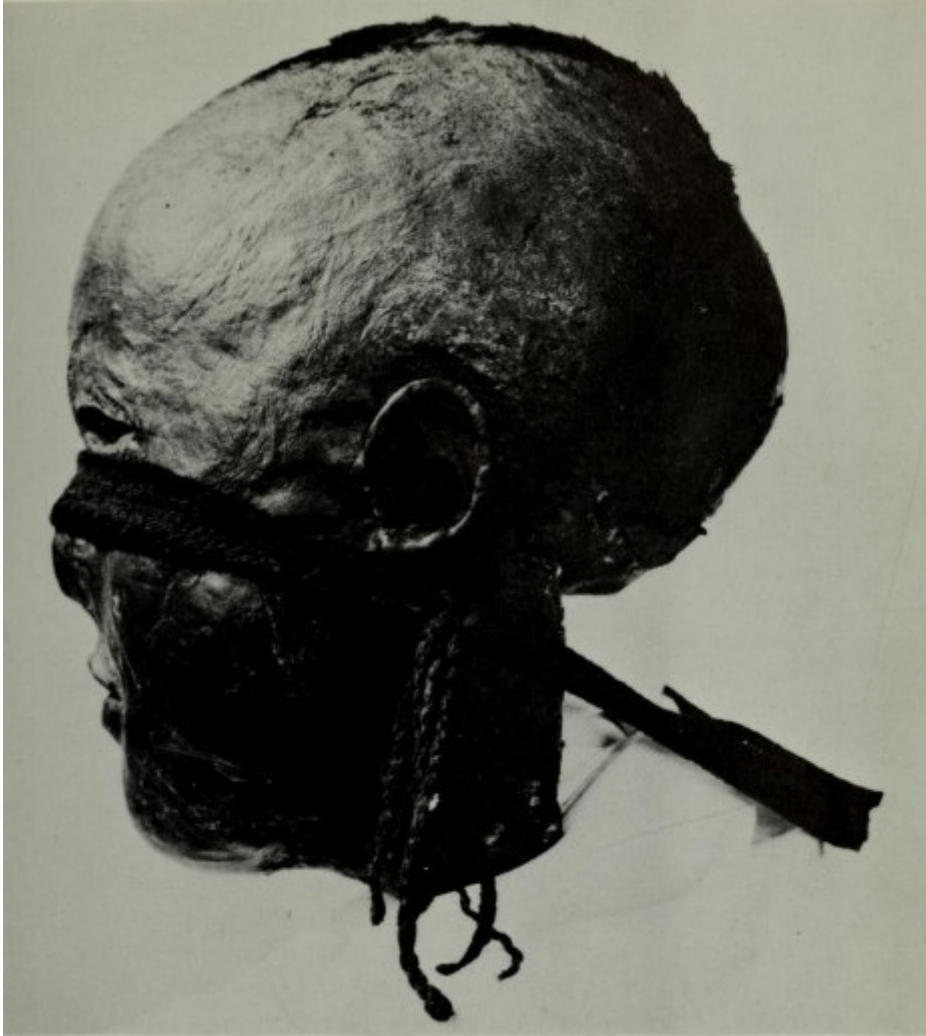
1 – “The bog in which the Grauballe Man was found” (Glob 43)



2 – “The first picture of the Grauballe Man” (Glob 38)



3 – “The young girl from the Windeby bog” (Glob 111)



4 – “The Windeby girl and the band with which she was blindfolded” (Glob 115)



5 – “The decapitated girl from Roum” (Glob 99)

7. List of appendices

- 1 – “The bog in which the Grauballe Man was found” (Glob 43)
- 2 – “The first picture of the Grauballe Man” (Glob 38)
- 3 – “The young girl from the Windeby bog” (Glob 111)
- 4 – “The Windeby girl and the band with which she was blindfolded” (Glob 115)
- 5 – “The decapitated girl from Roum” (Glob 99)

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