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Key words: the bog, sacrificial rituals, humanity during millennia, sense and sensuality of nature, importance of the past, the idea of a shared humanity of belonging, and the role of the artist in responding to these, revelation, recognition, discovery, excavation, connection, congruence.

A Congruence of Lives

This article explores the idea of ritual and custom with reference to the sense in which excavations from bogs in Denmark prompted Seamus Heaney, a Nobel laureate poet from Northern Ireland, to respond to the evidence of sacrificial rites and customary punishments which they revealed in Iron Age Denmark. Furthermore Heaney's poetry draws parallels with similar punishments and human sacrifices pertinent to contemporary Northern Ireland and its troubles, and, in doing so, re-imagines the concepts of loyalty, sacrifice and belonging. A selection of Heaney's 'bog poems' were re-enacted through drama, music and speech in a place of great historic and legendary significance in Northern Ireland, and so, in an important sense, interesting connections and unusual relationships were made between one place and another, one era and another and one civilisation and another. As such, a kind of common humanity emerges in Heaney's poetry – a humanity which spans time, place and context, which challenges too narrow a concept of belonging and which invites us to think about the transformative potential of ritual and sacrifice.