Heaney is a poet who can see the extraordinary in the ordinary. This is obvious to those who appreciate ‘The Forge’, ‘Bogland’, ‘The Harvest Bow’ and ’Mossbawn’.

In ‘Mossbawn’ an ordinary place holds beautiful love. The pump is ‘helmeted’ and protects all who dwell there. The water of life is ‘honeyed’, an image of sweetness and healing powers. There is no hurrying in the world of his childhood, the bucket is ‘slung’ and at ease in this world. Heaney uses a simile to compare the sun to a griddle of bread, it is nourishing and life giving. Each afternoon is ‘long’ and he wants the everyday of his childhood to live in his memory. Heaney makes the past present with the use of ‘So.’ We can imagine Heaney’s Aunt Mary full of energy and working before us as ‘her hands scuffled over the bakeboard.’ He personifies the stove and ‘its plaque of heat’ is a wave of love enveloping all who live in the house. Aunt Mary’s love is timeless, ‘a goose’s wing.’ He doesn’t glamourise her, she stands before us ‘broad-lapped,/ with whitened nails/ and measling shins.’ The memory is so strong that ‘here is a space again.’ The strength of this ordinary woman’s love make the two clocks of past and present merge. The poem ends on a beautiful simile, ‘here is love/like a tinsmith’s scoop/ sunk past its gleam/ in the meal-bin.’ In the everyday humdrum of life love and beauty is found.

The world of Heaney’s childhood provides us with more wonder in ‘The Forge.’ The ‘door into the dark’ of the familiar forge holds mystery. In the outside world there is ‘rusting’ and decay but inside the workshop of the common blacksmith there is energy in the assonance of the ‘anvil’s short-pitched ring,’ His work is ‘unpredictable’ and produces a wonderous ‘fantail of sparks’ that lights the fire of imagination in the young Heaney. Heaney’s use of onomatopoeia in ‘hiss’ opens the reader’s mind to the marvels of the ‘run of the mill.’ The anvil is ‘an altar’ where the ‘rusting’ iron can be transformed into works of art. The simile he uses shows us its magical powers, it is ‘Horned as a unicorn.’ It is ‘immoveable’ and gives roots to Heaney’s adult life. The regular blacksmith is shown to be a craftsman who ‘expends himself in shape and music.’ He is not impressed by the ‘flashing’ materialistic modern world, he doesn’t conform to the ‘rows.’ He has taught Heaney to recognise what is ‘real iron’, what is worthy and important in the world. He has stoked the flames and has work[ed] the bellows’ of the young Heaney imagination. In the mundane Heaney has discovered what is important and also magical.

Heaney’s watchful eye is also present in ‘Bogland.’ The Irish landscape is not on a par with the vast Amercian landscape, ‘We have no prairies/ To slice a big sun at evening.’ It is a landscape that folds you between its gentle hills ‘Everywhere the eye concedes to / Encroaching horizon.’ A small mountain lake is transformed by Heaney ‘into the cyclops’ eye.’ The bogland is not the stuff of movies of the priaries but it does constantly change and reveal new secrets to those who watch everyday. It ‘keeps crusting/ Between the sights of the sun.’ From the ordinary bogs the legendary Great Irish Elk raises its head, it is ‘astounding.’ Treasures like butter from over a ‘hundred years’ are discovered. People who dig in this landscape are ‘pioneers’ who can discover more about history and themselves as they delve further into the bog. The water may seep into the bogs of the midlands from the Atlantic. Heaney sees the possibilities as endless ‘The wet centre is bottomless.’

Heaney also sees wonder in the everyday ‘Harvest Bow.’ The Harvest Vow is a metaphor for the love his father brought into Heaney’s life. Its ‘mellowed silence’ speaks to Heaney. The love he feels for his father ‘does not rust.’ Heaney’s use of internal rhyme and repetition lets the love of the bow speak to Heaney, it ‘brightens as it tightens twist by twist’. The common, even ‘throwaway’ bow is transformed into a ‘corona’ of light. Heaney sees the artistry of his father’s ‘aged hands’, they have a ‘gift’. When he holds the bow he can read it ‘like braille,/Gleaning the unsaid off the palpable.’ He can read love from the bow and it reassures and comforts him. It allows him to make the past present when he looks through its golden loops. This memory is a ‘big lift’. His father’s generation were ‘tongue-tied’ but his love speaks through the craft of the bow. This ‘frail device’ teaches him ‘The end of art is peace.’ He and the reader find contentment. The simile of the bow compared to a snare lets us visualise the great ‘warm’ love held in the little harvest bow.

Heaney truly sees the extraordinary in the ordinary. From the little harvest bow, the common bogland and forge and the everyday act of making bread he gleans love and life lessons that will never leave the reader’s mind.