



PAST MASTER: CZESLAW MILOSZ AND HIS IMPACT ON SEAMUS HEANEY'S POETRY

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PAST MASTER: CZESŁAW MIŁOSZ AND HIS IMPACT ON THE POETRY OF SEAMUS HEANEY

One of the strangest regularities to be taken into account by a historian of literature and art is the affinity binding people who live at the same time in countries distant from one another (Czeslaw Milosz, *The Witness of Poetry*)¹

I

One of the most enduring of Seamus Heaney's many literary exemplars over the last thirty years has been the Polish-Lithuanian poet, Czesław Miłosz (1911-2004), who rose to international prominence in 1980 when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. The Swedish Academy's official citation lay great stress on the metaphysical and ethical dimensions of Miłosz's corpora, referring to the 'uncompromising', 'unerring perspicacity' manifested in his texts, which embody a lifetime's resistance to the forces of 'evil and havoc',² and, they might have added, 'death and nothingness'.³ Though it in no way explains the scale of his artistic achievement, Miłosz's early and repeated exposure to political turbulence and to acts of appalling cruelty clearly left its impress on his moral imagination and vision. Violence loomed over much of his childhood, as his family were caught up successively in the events of the First World War, the Russian Revolution, and the Russian-Polish war. In his late twenties and thirties he witnessed the carnage of the Second World War, and then, with the 'peace', the assimilation of Poland, the Baltic States and most of the rest of Eastern Europe into the Soviet bloc, with the complicity of the British and American Governments.

Following the war Miłosz worked in the Polish diplomatic service, and was given postings first in Washington and subsequently in Paris. In the late 1940s, as the Cold War intensified, Poland's Soviet-installed communist regime lurched increasingly in a Stalinist direction. In order to ensure 'Poland's reliability in the looming international conflict',⁴ the Polish-born Soviet marshal, Konstantin Rokossovsky, was appointed Minister of Defence in November 1949; five years earlier he had been the very commander who had delayed the Soviet advance on Warsaw, thereby enabling the Nazis to crush the Warsaw Rising and

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3 subsequently raze the city to the ground.⁵ Since the Catholic Church constituted a major
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5 challenge to their authority and ideology, the communist government introduced a range of
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7 measures designed to destroy its influence, by imprisoning over five hundred clergy, amongst
8
9 them Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, the Primate of Poland, and by confiscating Church lands.⁶
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11 A purge from public positions of individuals with middle-class origins or with relatives in the
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13 West was initiated, which extended also to anyone who had seen service in the Allied forces
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15 or with the underground Armia Krajowa, which had been loyal to the London-based Polish
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17 Government-in-exile during the war.⁷ Pressures were exerted on those engaged in education,
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19 journalism and the arts. In 1950 members of the Polish Writers' Union were informed of an
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21 edict from the Politburo which required that all future literary works subscribe to the
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23 principles of 'socialist realism'.⁸
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30 The accelerating pace of repression must have appalled Miłosz, as may well have
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32 been noted. In December 1950, during a return visit to Poland, his passport was confiscated
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34 by the authorities, thereby effectively trapping him in his adopted land. Only after appeals to
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36 President Bierut from the Foreign Minister's wife was his passport restored, enabling Miłosz
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38 to return to France, where on 1 February 1951 he formally requested political asylum.
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42 For much of the next three decades Miłosz wrestled with exile. The period in France
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44 was extremely difficult as initially his wife and child were unable to join him and he lacked
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46 'the resilience necessary to oppose the corroding effects of isolation'.⁹ To the humiliation of
47
48 being dependent on others and having so little money, was added hostility from some in the
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50 Polish émigré community, who considered him politically suspect as he had been employed
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52 by the Communists. One of the few French intellectuals to offer friendship and support was
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54 Albert Camus; according to one Camus' biographers, others on the left regarded Miłosz as
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56 'something of a leper or a sinner against "the future"',¹⁰ since in texts like *The Captive Mind*
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58 he punctured naive visions of what Socialist Revolution might bring. Meanwhile back in
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3 Poland the Bierut regime co-ordinated attacks on him, using former colleagues and fellow
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Poland the Bierut regime co-ordinated attacks on him, using former colleagues and fellow
writers as their mouthpieces.¹¹ In 1960 he was appointed to a lectureship in America in the
Department of Slavic Languages at the University of California, Berkeley. There too, before
he was granted US citizenship in 1970, there were periods of frustration: 'I have no right to
have any opinions on politics in this country', he wrote in a letter to Thomas Merton in early
1962, 'as I am not even a resident but a guest'.¹² Later in their correspondence, however, he
alludes to the sympathy he feels for the civil rights movement and his hostility towards the
war in Vietnam.¹³ Nevertheless, gradually, despite an abiding feeling of being 'out of place'¹⁴
in France and America, he found in each a circle of writers and admirers, whose friendship
sustained him personally and artistically, and so aided a life dedicated to 'a continuous chase
after answers'.¹⁵

Since his was such a protracted, anguished encounter with history, it is hardly
surprising that Miłosz should often return in his writings to the horrors humankind inflicts on
its own across the centuries. Crucial to any understanding of Miłosz's work, also however,
and certainly to his appeal for Heaney, is his complex relationship to Catholicism. This is the
source for the deeply spiritual strain within his work, its recurring allusions to concepts,
images, forms and figures from Judaeo-Christian tradition, its preoccupation with suffering
and its meanings. Miłosz counters in his writings the dominant rational, scientific orthodoxy,
that human beings are solely products of blind historical forces and ideological conditioning,
by re-asserting their status as beings possessed with a 'soul' and the potential for free will.¹⁶

His sense of the individual as a site of Manichean contradiction, as a being capable of
transcendence, but equally prone to utter indifference to 'the Good',¹⁷ can be glimpsed in his
1959 parable-poem, 'The Master'. Set in an indeterminate period of history, it is voiced by a
composer, who represents the archetypal artist. Its opening stanzas convey the transfigurative
power of music, and its radical effects on all levels of the social hierarchy, from the Prince to

1
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3 ordinary 'men and women'. Aptly the choir who perform his choral mass is named after St
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5
6 Cecilia, the patron saint of music:

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8 They say that my music is angelic.
9 That when the Prince listens to it
10 His face, hidden from sight, *turns* gentle.
11 With a beggar he would share power.
12 A fan of a lady-in-waiting *is immobile*...

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14
15 Everyone has heard in the cathedral my Missa Solemnis.
16 I *changed* the throats of girls from the Saint Cecilia choir
17 Into an instrument that *raises* us
18 Above what we are. I know how *to free*
19 Men and women from remembrances of their long lives
20 *So they stand* in the smoke of the nave
21 *Restored* (my italics)¹⁸

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23
24 An immediate source of uncertainty for the reader is how to respond to this maestro. Is he
25
26 justifiably proud of real achievements, or is he arrogantly over-stating his abilities? In a trope
27
28 common in Romantic poetry, he pitches art's sublime, miraculous capacity to suspend time,
29
30 and the artist's compulsion to impose form and structure, against the material world and its
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32 mutability. Whereas the people diminish to mere sound and then disappear - note the Eliot-
33
34 like use of the 'steps' metonym¹⁹ - flute and violin as a result of the aural effects they generate
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37 endure, and so his will is done:
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41 Over there a swallow
42 Will *pass away* and *return*, *changed* in its slanting flight.
43 Steps will be heard at the well but of other people.
44 The ploughs will *erase* a forest. The flute and the violin
45 Will always work *as I have ordered them* (my italics)

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48 Though confident of his ability to orchestrate the future, he is at a loss when it comes
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50 to controlling perceptions in the present. Audiences lack any conception of the price an artist
51
52 pays for their creative gift, he complains. Some imagine that the achievement has its origin in
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54 an act of divine grace ('pierced by a ray', like St Theresa of Avila), others, with more
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56 primitive imaginations, that it is the result of a compact made with the devil. The final stanzas
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3 intimate, rather, that his art emerges from a very human darkness, out of unspecified guilts
4
5 and betrayals. A dream provides the first discomposing glimpse into his psyche:
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8 It comes back in the middle of the night. Who are those
9 holding torches,
10 So that what is long past occurs in full light?
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12 The torch-bearers here recall those sent to the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest Christ. His
13 projection of himself into that narrative conveys not only the scale of his ego, but also a deep
14 vulnerability, and his fears of exposure. A far less dramatic scene from his waking life
15 follows, a poignant moment of 'Regret, to no end'. Watching the elderly bless themselves as
16 they file into church, the speaker brings to mind an absence, an unidentified 'she' who may
17 well be his mother.²⁰ Both in the original Polish (*'Zdaję mi się, że mogłaby być jedną z nich'*)
18 and in translation, loss is voiced in the simplest of utterances:
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29 When old and white-haired under their laced shawls
30 They dip their fingers in a basin at the entrance
31 *It seems to me she might have been one of them* (my italics)
32
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34 That conditional 'might have been' gives way to the present continuous in the very next line, a
35 line which makes present the landscape of Miłosz's childhood home: 'The same firs/ Rustle
36 and with a shallow wave sheens the lake'. In order to evoke the onomatopoeia in the Polish
37 original (*'szumia'* is rendered by the English 'rustle'), Miłosz transfers the rippling sound from
38 the trees to the water, hence the alliteration in '*shallow*' and '*sheens*'.
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46 The deployment of those surface metaphors anticipate the poem's parting warning to
47 superficial readers:
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50 A language of angels! Before you mention Grace
51 Mind that you do not deceive yourself and others.
52 What comes from my evil - that only is true.
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55 Like his predecessor in Yeats's 'The Circus Animals' Desertion', Miłosz's narrator locates the
56 sources of his 'masterful images' in 'the foul rag and bone shop of the heart'.²¹
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Though vast in their temporal, spiritual, intellectual and spatial reach, Miłosz's poems maintain attachments to the local and individual, often in the form of elegies for lost family and friends and the places they shared, but also in lyric epiphanies which, in Heaney's words, make 'time stand still'.²² His ultimate goal, according to Stanislaw Barańczak, was to create an Art that would attest to and celebrate a world 'Incorrigibly plural'²³ in its forms, features, peoples and perspectives, one in which the poet's own 'individual voice' would be subsumed into 'an all-encompassing polyphony'.²⁴

II

A decade or so before the laureateship was conferred on Miłosz, Seamus Heaney had become familiar with his name as a translator and editor, when Penguin Books brought out *Zbigniew Herbert: Selected Poems* (1968) and *Post-War Polish Poetry* (1970). While the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact forces in August 1968²⁵ was perhaps a background factor, his initial, quickening interest in Eastern European poetry in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s can be attributed largely to his friendships with Ted Hughes and Daniel Weissbort. *Modern Poetry in Translation*, the journal they founded in 1965 and co-edited, played a major role in promoting the work of Herbert, Miłosz, Popa, Holub and Pilinszky, its contribution complementing that of Al Alvarez²⁶ and the Modern European Poets series editors at Penguin. Though Heaney might not have seen the first issue of *MPT*, in which Miłosz is described as 'one of the most influential of modern Polish poets',²⁷ almost certainly he would have read the Spring 1975 issue, which lauded the 'remarkable... range of expression' and 'breadth of experience' in Miłosz's work, and his generosity as an advocate of the poetry of others.²⁸

It was only after the Nobel announcement, that translations of much of Miłosz's poetry and prose to date suddenly became available, with the result that he quickly gained a massive stature worldwide. Within a four-year period, while working on the poems that

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3 formed *Station Island*, Heaney grew increasingly cognizant of the quality, range and depth of
4
5 Milosz's writing, and came to regard him as 'a sage and acknowledged master',²⁹ the
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7 embodiment of artistic insight and moral integrity. He acquired the Ecco Press edition of
8
9
10 *Selected Poems* and read translations of *The Issa Valley*, *Native Realm* and *The Captive Mind*.
11
12 In 1982, he attended some of Miłosz's Charles Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard, which were
13
14 published the following year as *The Witness of Poetry*. It was not until the Summer of 1983,
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16 while teaching creative writing in Belmont, California, that Heaney met the poet for the first
17
18 time in the company of the Polish poet's translators, Robert Hass and Robert Pinsky.
19
20 Subsequently, Heaney composed a 'transmogrified account' (*Stepping Stones*, 262) of this
21
22 encounter in his own poem entitled 'The Master', which depicts core elements of Miłosz's
23
24 character in a setting redolent of Yeats. It is worth noting also that in the *Inferno*, Dante
25
26 repeatedly addresses Virgil as 'maestro'.
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32 The experience of reading the 1980 Nobel Lecture was pivotal for Heaney.
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34 Questioned by Dennis O'Driscoll, he recalled not only the journal in which he encountered
35
36 the laureate's address (*The New York Review of Books*), but also where he read it - the library
37
38 at Carysfort College, Dublin (*Stepping Stones*, 301). Understandably what he does not
39
40 remember is the precise issue of the *NYRB*, which turns out to have been the edition of 5
41
42 March 1981. This date is highly significant, since the international community's - and
43
44 Heaney's - acknowledgement of the scale of Miłosz's literary achievement coincided with a
45
46 period of intense political upheaval in Ireland and Poland, which, in the latter case, would
47
48 trigger the collapse of the Soviet Union and its post-war domination of large areas of central
49
50 and eastern Europe.
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55 The depth, intensity and continuity of Heaney's engagement with Czesław
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57 Miłosz's and, one should add, Zbigniew Herbert's poetry springs directly from its
58
59 inherent and enduring power, beauty and truth. What undoubtedly quickened his
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3 admiration and aspiration to emulate them was the integrity and artistic skill with
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6 which they responded to the unfolding crisis in Poland from summer 1980 onwards.
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Ever since the papal election of October 1978 when Krakow's charismatic
archbishop, Karol Wojtyła, was given the highest position of authority in the Catholic
Church, their 'homeland'³⁰ had been the subject of massive media coverage worldwide.
In Poland itself, John Paul II's accession transformed the political situation, and gave
considerable impetus to groups and institutions opposed to the Soviet-imposed, post-
war status quo. Amongst the many Poles inspired and emboldened by John Paul II's
triumphal visit home in June 1979. was a former shipyard worker in Gdansk, Lech
Walesa, who had been arrested several times in the late 1970s, once for 'distributing
clandestine copies of *The Captive Mind*,³¹ Miłosz's exposé of Stalinist ideology.

When in July 1980, because of the parlous state of Poland's economy, the
communist government increased food prices and pegged wages, civil unrest spread
throughout the country. In mid-August, the sacking of Anna Walentynowicz, a popular
trade union activist prompted major strikes all along Poland's Baltic coast. Such was
'maturity and self-discipline'³² of the strikers, their leaders' quality, and their extensive
popular support, the government were compelled to concede to their demands, which
included legal recognition of independent, self-governing trade unions, a thing unheard
of in the Soviet bloc. When, in September, Solidarity (*Solidarność*) was officially
registered as one of these unions, within the space of fifteen months, it gained ten
million members.

Amongst the first tasks the union set itself was the construction of a monument
to commemorate the seventy-five people killed during strikes in Gdansk ten years
earlier. In a sign of the esteem in which Miłosz was held, lines from his poem, 'You Who
Wronged', were inscribed on the monument's plinth.³³ Less than a year after its

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3 unveiling, General Jaruzelski, the Polish Premier, introduced martial law in an attempt
4 to crush Solidarity and stave off a possible Soviet invasion. Despite the internment of its
5 leaders, including its president Lech Walesa, the union continued functioning
6 underground and to resist. With Susan Sontag's support and that of fellow exiles
7 (Joseph Brodsky, Stanisław Barańczak, Tomas Venclova), Miłosz immediately formed a
8 committee to agitate on Solidarity's behalf in the States, which called for a boycott of all
9 'transactions, economic and other'³⁴ of Poland, until all internees were freed.

10
11 Throughout Europe and America, coverage of the crisis was intense. In all
12 martial law claimed ninety-plus victims, amongst the most mourned the pro-Solidarity
13 priest, Father Jerzy Popieluszko, murdered by Polish secret police on 19 October 1984.
14 It would be surprising if in witnessing this turn of events Heaney had not experienced *déjà*
15 *vu*, since he would undoubtedly have recognised similarities between Poland and Northern
16 Ireland when it came to the fate of those aspiring to justice and civil rights by non-violent
17 means.

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38
39 The opening remark in Miłosz's Nobel Lecture about his presence in Stockholm being
40 a sign of life's 'God-given, marvellously complex unpredictability' would have had
41 considerable resonance for the younger poet.³⁵ Coming himself from 'a small country',³⁶
42 Heaney shared Miłosz's pride in his origins on the margins of Europe, a region the latter had
43 earlier described as 'situated beyond the compass of maps... where time flowed more slowly
44 than elsewhere' (*Native Realm*, 7). The terrain of their childhoods retains in the imaginations
45 of both poets an idyllic, Wordsworthian quality; at one point in the Nobel speech Miłosz
46 capitalises and personifies 'Nature', asserting that 'the landscapes and perhaps the spirits of his
47 homeland 'have never abandoned me' (*NL*, 11). Hearing Miłosz rhapsodise about the 'fertile
48 area' where he grew up, beside a tributary of the Neman, surrounded by 'an abundance'

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(*Native Realm*, 15) of lakes, hills and forests, would have put Heaney in mind of his own upbringing in Mossbawn, 'his Eden'³⁷ beside the Moyola.

The Derry poet would have warmed to Miłosz's emphasis on the verifying role played by family, Catholicism, 'parochial attachments and loyalties' (*NL*, 11) in shaping personal and poetic identity. In both men's minds, everyday objects, if infused with familial and ancestral associations, assume the status of sacred relics. In *Native Realm* Miłosz speaks of inherited items, like clothing, furniture, 'the handwriting on yellowed documents', as possessing a kind of afterlife. In poem two of his celebrated sequence, 'The World', for example, the narrator focuses on the handle of a gate, 'worn smooth over time, / Polished by the touch of many hands'.³⁸ Such quotidian objects enable the writer to keep a grip on the past, and thus a means to stabilise the self. In an essay from the mid-1980s, written in the wake of his mother's death, Heaney makes an identical point, referring to the 'ghost-life that hovers over some of the furniture of our lives', providing 'a point of entry into a common emotional ground of memory and belonging'.³⁹

As for any child, what enlarged Miłosz's and Heaney's ordinary sense of the world - education - also entailed a loss, a kind of exile, before they knew 'the term'.⁴⁰ Success in their entrance exams saw them both borne away to highly-regulated, male-only, highly-prized institutions, located in cities where religious divisions ran deep. Whereas in the Nobel Lecture Miłosz alludes positively to the cultural diversity of his homeland, 'where various languages and religions *cohabited* for centuries' (my italics), in *Native Realm* he depicts the ominous separation of Wilno's two most populous communities. Like their 'ghettoised',⁴¹ discriminating counterparts in Belfast and Derry, Wilno's Catholics and the Jews 'lived within the same walls', and yet might as well have occupied 'separate planets':

Contact was limited to everyday business matters; at home different customs were observed, different newspapers were read... Everyone in Wilno went to his 'own' school. Only at university did we gather in the same lecture halls, and even there student organisations were divided into

1
2
3 Polish, Jewish, Lithuanian and Byelorussian (*Native Realm*, 92).

4
5 At Queen's University in the late 1950s, student groups were often similarly divided along
6
7 religious lines. Like his contemporaries who were studying literature, Heaney drew his
8
9 friends from 'all sides', but remained conscious of the 'blatant' and 'noxious' discrimination
10
11 that surrounded them (*Stepping Stones*, 43). In contrast to Miłosz, whose university
12
13 experiences in the early 1930s bred a deep antipathy to Polish nationalism and, before long,
14
15 nationalism of every other brand, Heaney remained strongly attached to the nationalist vision
16
17 of a united Ireland. Interviewed by the *Chicago Literary Review* in early March 1981, he
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19 explains that though he shares 'the cultural and political base of the Provos' vision',⁴² he
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21 rejects the means that they deploy. Commitment to nationalist ideals did not blind him to the
22
23 excesses to which nationalist rhetoric leads, and he shared wholly Miłosz's feelings of
24
25 repulsion at those who sought to impose 'linguistic, cultural, religious' and 'racial unity'
26
27 (*Native Realm*, 95) on heterogeneous cultures by means of the bomb and the bullet.
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34 Characteristically, in retracing stages in his own extended evolution as an artist,
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36 Miłosz establishes general truths about how writers achieve distinctiveness of utterance,
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38 though he does not minimise their difficulties in freeing themselves from anxieties of
39
40 influence.⁴³ Miłosz begins his reflections on the poet's ambivalent relationships with literary
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42 ancestors and contemporaries with what seems at first an uncontentious assertion that 'Every
43
44 poet depends upon generations who wrote in his native tongue'. While this sense of a shared
45
46 language and legacy may initially enabling be for the apprentice writer, in time a compulsion
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48 to break with inherited styles and forms sets in, with the realisation that 'those old means of
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50 expression are not adequate to his own experience' (*NL*, 11). In the quest for other, more
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52 current sources of verification and direction, the writer may lapse unconsciously into
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54 dependency on their contemporaries, which may also diminish their work's individuality:
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Alas, it is enough for him to publish his first volume of poems to find himself trapped. For hardly has the print dried, when that work, which seemed to him

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3 the most personal, appears to be enmeshed in the style of another. The only way
4 to counter an obscure remorse is to continue searching and to publish a new
5 book, but then everything repeats itself, so there is no end to that chase (*NL*, 11)
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7

8 Since the escalation of violence in the North in 1969, Heaney had been engaged in an
9
10 intensive 'search for images and symbols adequate to our predicament'.⁴⁴ An important
11
12 element in his decisions in 1972 to leave Belfast for Glanmore and in 1979 Dublin for
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14 Harvard was a recognition that the growth of a poet required 'a constant escape forward',⁴⁵
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16 periods of relative solitude, free from continual local scrutiny and demand. Though attuning
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18 itself to works from an increasingly diverse and international range of artists, past and
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20 contemporary, Heaney's poetry never became merely 'an echo of someone else's music',⁴⁶ but,
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22 like Miłosz's, continued to grow in resonance.⁴⁷
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27 An interesting point of comparison between the two poets emerges when one
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29 considers their relationship to the medium in which they worked. Since his forebears had
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31 been using Polish as their first language since the sixteenth century, Miłosz defines himself
32
33 confidently as 'a Polish, not a Lithuanian poet' (*NL*, 11). Throughout his childhood years and
34
35 during his twenties and thirties, he was regularly crossing borders and becoming adept in
36
37 other tongues, yet from the moment he chose exile in France and then America, issues around
38
39 language and identity became deeply problematic. Attempting to mitigate the disorientating
40
41 effects of operating in a foreign language during his working, 'external' hours, he conducted
42
43 his inner, creative and domestic life in Polish. In an interview from 1980, he explains that he
44
45 adopted this strategy of linguistic bifurcation as a means of stabilising the self, believing that
46
47 managing 'two personalities in one'⁴⁸ might be preferable to having his identity fundamentally
48
49 altered by the acquired language. Unlike many other migrants, Miłosz consciously sought to
50
51 preserve a strong, foreign inflection in 'his' English, in order to accentuate his distinctness.
52
53 Rather than killing his creativity as he initially feared it might,⁴⁹ Miłosz's immersion in
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55 English proved salutary in the long-term, as he later observed:
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3 A writer living among people who speak a language different from his own
4 discovers after a while that he senses his native language in a new manner. It is
5 not true that a long stay abroad leads to withering of styles ...What is true,
6 however, is that new aspects and tonalities of the native tongue are discovered,
7 for they stand out against the background of the language spoken in the new
8 milieu.⁵⁰
9

10
11 Irena Grudzinska-Gross argues convincingly that his re-evaluation of the impact of English
12 may have resulted from his intensive work as a translator of others' and his own poems.
13

14 Translation, she suggests, 'enriched' the scope of his poetry enormously, opening him up to
15 'new models and traditions',⁵¹ as it would equally do for Heaney.
16

17
18 In *Native Realm*, Milosz invokes the image of whirling particles in a kaleidoscope to
19 evoke his inchoate feelings in his youth, whose origins he could clearly not define at the time.
20
21 Amongst the many sources for this inner turmoil was 'an overabundance of impressions', an
22 awareness that the cultural space he occupied lay somewhere between 'contradictory
23 traditions', that the land he was born into 'belonged' to another country.⁵² That sense of being
24 in-between cultures was one which Heaney knew all about, particularly once he became
25 conscious of the presence of a tongue which might have an equal claim to his loyalty.
26
27 Brought up in an English-speaking household, his first extended encounters with the Irish
28 language began at St Columb's, where it was treated more as a 'heritage' subject, rather than
29 explored for its 'counter-cultural implications' (*Stepping Stones* 314). When in 1969 Thomas
30 Kinsella published his acclaimed translation of the *Tain Bo Cuailnge*, Heaney was quick to
31 recognise the political and cultural ramifications of the endeavour.⁵³ Unconvinced of the
32 feasibility of the lost linguistic legacy ever being restored, Heaney adopted a position taken
33 by John Montague in 'A Primal Gaeltacht' (1970) and *The Rough Field* (1972), that much
34 might be gained from tapping back into Gaelic tradition as a means of asserting cultural
35 difference, if not resistance. By getting into contact with 'whatever of it is still alive in our
36 own area',⁵⁴ such as place-names, local dialect words, songs and poems, Montague argued the
37 poet might keep faith with pre-colonial, cultural ancestors, and so gain 'fortification' and
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3 'enrichment'.⁵⁵ Elegiac, Gaelic-inflected lyrics like 'Anahorish', 'Broagh' and 'The Backward
4 Look' from *Wintering Out*, like his early efforts at Glanmore to render the medieval Irish
5 epic, *Buile Suibhne*, into English, exemplify Heaney's increasingly politicised take on the
6 language question between 1970-72.
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13 When, in the mid-1970s, protesting republican paramilitary prisoners in Long Kesh
14 started *en masse* to study Irish, debate in Northern Ireland around language and identity rose
15 in the cultural-political agenda, and retained a significance throughout the period of the
16 Hunger Strikes and on until the mid-1980s.⁵⁶ 'Learning and speaking the Irish language'
17 became 'a political and subversive pursuit', providing 'a means through which to
18 communicate to comrades' and 'to exclude enemies'.⁵⁷ Interestingly, it was at this very
19 juncture, with the North accelerating towards another phase of acute political crisis, that
20 Heaney resumed work on the Sweeney poem, and, in April 1981, began a translation of 'Fill
21 Aris' ('Return Again'), a popular poem by a modern master of Irish, the late Sean O Riordain.
22 Its speaker urges his listeners to decolonise their minds and discard the alien literary legacy:
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36 Close your mind to all that happened
37 Since the battle of Kinsale was fought
38 . . . Unshackle your mind
39 Of its civil English tackling,
40 Shelley, Keats and Shakespeare...
41 Wash your mind and wash your tongue
42 That was spangled in a syntax
43 Putting you out of step with yourself.⁵⁸
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47 Commenting on O Riordain's stance two years later in his *Among Schoolchildren* lecture,
48 Heaney confesses that while responsive to the 'curve of feeling' and 'inner division' in 'Fill
49 Aris', he rejected wholly its monoculturalist polemic. Initially, in a calmly insistent tone, he
50 asserts that it would be 'impossible' for him 'to ditch' his English *poetic* masters, or accept that
51 their tongue or the forms they used were foreign. The idea that almost four centuries of
52 colonial history, post-Kinsale, might simply be wiped from the Irish cultural memory is
53 similarly given short shrift, on grounds that Miłosz would have fully endorsed, that it is that
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3 very 'history that has made us all what we are'.⁵⁹ The paragraph that follows, however,
4
5 exhibits a marked shift into a higher rhetorical register, as Heaney widens his critique and
6
7 offers a part-defiant, part-defensive justification of his conduct to date: '*I do not yield to the*
8
9 notion that my identity is disabled and falsified and *somehow slightly traitorous* if I conduct
10
11 my casual and imaginative transactions in *the speech I was born to*' (my emphases).⁶⁰
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13

14
15 Subsequently, Heaney makes a connection between O'Riordain's advocacy of exclusivity in
16
17 cultural self-definition and the coercive practices of republican and loyalist ideologues.
18
19

20 What Heaney most prized in Milosz was the exemplary manner in which he acquitted
21
22 himself as an artist in the face of contradictory imperatives. For Milosz, the poet's vocation
23
24 demands solitariness, contemplation, and dedication to the *haeccitas* and *esse* of the created
25
26 world. Circumstances occur, however, when History breaks in on the poet's meditations,
27
28 compelling him or her to make some form of intervention in the public domain, to
29
30 demonstrate political and moral 'solidarity' (*NL*, 11).⁶¹ *Native Realm* provides instances of the
31
32 extent of Milosz's own culturo-political activism during the war years, his involvement in
33
34 clandestine literary activities, including the editing of an anti-Nazi anthology, *Invincible*
35
36 *Song*, and his translation of Jacques Maritain's attack on Vichy rule, *A Travers le Désastre*
37
38 (236-7). He contrasts his own war-work with that of an enterprising former fellow student,
39
40 W, who shipped weapons to the partisans and saved many Jewish lives by supplying them
41
42 with false documents (238-240).
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48 'All art proves to be nothing compared with action' (*NL*, 12), Milosz asserts, reflecting
49
50 particularly on that savage period in human history when the Nazi and Stalinist regimes were
51
52 carrying out their genocidal crimes. In such circumstances, the artist is silenced or struggles
53
54 to 'embrace reality'. To create an aesthetically effective response to such times of bloody
55
56 crisis requires, in his view, objectivity and distance. And yet to display these very qualities
57
58 can expose the artist to charges of 'moral treason' (*NL*, 12). This was the very accusation
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1
2
3 levelled at Heaney by Sinn Fein in 1979. En route to or from Belfast, one of their spokesmen,
4
5 Danny Morrison, entered the train carriage Heaney was in and confronted him about his
6
7 failure to condemn the treatment of republican prisoners in Long Kesh. Heaney's reply was
8
9 that if he wrote something it would not be at someone else's bidding, and that he was already
10
11 engaged on his own 'campaign'.⁶² He recalled this incident in his interview with the *Chicago*
12
13 *Literary Review*, just three days after the *NYRB* publication of Miłosz's Nobel Lecture.⁶³
14
15 Earlier in that same interview, after commending Robert Lowell's conduct in the political
16
17 sphere, Heaney argues that poets should always avoid aligning themselves with one single
18
19 political position, since 'The artist, once he surrenders his authority to a doctrine or a side or
20
21 to propaganda, has lost something he can never regain'.⁶⁴
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27 For Miłosz, the Nobel Award and Lecture provided him with a unique platform from
28
29 which to voice matters of intense personal and global concern, to say 'something which was
30
31 on my heart and speak not only of my own problems, but the problems of other peoples and
32
33 countries'.⁶⁵ A source of great alarm to him was the degree of ignorance about the recent
34
35 history he regularly encountered, especially among 'the young generations ', a group whom he
36
37 refers to twice (*NL*, 12,14). With a passionate urgency, and with them particularly in mind, he
38
39 addresses the crucial importance of historical memory and historical truth for humanity's
40
41 future. The fact that by 1980 over one hundred books existed which dismissed the Holocaust
42
43 as pure fiction and a product of 'Jewish propaganda' (*NL*, 12) he condemns as 'an insanity'.
44
45 He then proceeds to make a controversial, but timely observation about what he views as a
46
47 worrying example of historical elision and linguistic slippage, when he voices his anxiety
48
49 about the exclusive application of the term 'Holocaust' to the Jewish victims of Nazism; it is
50
51 'as if among the victims there were not also millions of Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, and
52
53 prisoners of other nationalities' (*NL*, 12). To illustrate further the gaps in historical memory
54
55 within the world community, Miłosz draws attention to a date - 23 August 1939 - which he
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1
2
3 feels, ought to be 'invoked every year as a day of mourning' (*NL*, 12). That was the day on
4
5 which Hitler and Stalin's foreign ministers, von Ribbentrop and Molotov, signed the German-
6
7 Soviet non-aggression pact which led directly to the outbreak of World War II, With the
8
9 stroke of a pen, the nations of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were consigned to an
10
11 ignominious subjection, and their peoples' rights to self-determination cancelled for the next
12
13 forty-plus years. This state of affairs, Milosz points out, was in direct contravention of
14
15 undertakings made by the Americans and the British in the Atlantic Charter (August 1941).
16
17 In this document Roosevelt and Churchill had declared that there should be 'no territorial
18
19 changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned' and
20
21 that 'sovereign rights and self-government' should be 'restored to those who have been
22
23 forcibly deprived of them'.⁶⁶
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29
30 One of many individual crimes committed as a result of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact
31
32 was a massacre of over 4,000 unarmed Polish officers in the Katyn Forest in April 1940,
33
34 carried out on Stalin's orders. Amongst the victims who 'now repose in a mass grave', Milosz
35
36 informs his audience, were two of his friends and fellow poets, Wladyslaw Sebyla and Lech
37
38 Piwowar. This moment in the lecture illustrates something Heaney admires in Miłosz, the
39
40 skilful way he unites 'personal' witness to 'historical theme'.⁶⁷ Conscious too how 'history is
41
42 built out of individual lives',⁶⁸ Heaney after *North* (1975) addresses the continuing violence
43
44 in Northern Ireland primarily by means of elegies, depicting, often in graphic detail, the
45
46 personal characters, circumstances and fates of victims, sometimes naming them, but
47
48 sometimes not.⁶⁹ In adopting this means of allowing the dead 'to return for a brief moment
49
50 among the living',⁷⁰ Heaney was following in the steps also of another great master, who
51
52 features twice in the *New York Review of Books*' publication of Milosz's Nobel Lecture, first
53
54 in a reference to him as 'the patron saint of all poets in exile' (*NL*,12), secondly in the form of
55
56 a Gustav Dore print, 'Dante in a Dusky Wood', two pages later: Dante. Though it would be
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1
2
3 Dante's presence that would pervade Heaney's next volume, *Station Island* (1984), the high
4 esteem in which he now held the Polish poet is also evident. Over the course of the next three
5
6 decades, Miłosz grew to be a constant literary and ethical point of reference in Heaney's
7
8 writings, fulfilling the verifying role Simone Weil and Oscar Miłosz performed for him as
9
10 sources of spiritual insights and as custodians of 'true values' (*NL*, 15).
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15 IV

16
17 Heaney's encounter with Miłosz's writings occurred at a critical turning-point in
18 his literary career, and, most significantly, as we shall see, during a political crisis in
19 Northern Ireland of comparable severity to that which followed Bloody Sunday. The
20 critical acclaim *Field Work* (1979) garnered greatly enhanced his reputation, and
21
22 created a surge in book sales and invitations to read, significantly in America.⁷¹ A sign of
23
24 this growing esteem was his appointment as a visiting lecturer at Harvard in the Spring
25
26 semester of 1979. His success led to an offer in September 1980 of a longer contract,
27
28 working for one semester each year for the next five years.⁷² In November, in order to
29
30 take up the Harvard post, Heaney took the momentous decision to quit his Head of
31
32 English post at Carysfort College, Dublin. Writing to Michael Longley in February 1981,
33
34 he explained that the Harvard move was prompted by a desire for more creative time
35
36 and freedom. He confessed to a fear that he might be settling 'too firmly or comfortably'
37
38 into a routine in Dublin, and so in order to re-energise himself creatively and avoid
39
40 'atrophying', he felt it was crucial to put himself again 'at risk'.⁷³
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51 Greater international recognition brought with it greater expectations, as he
52 would soon discover when the burgeoning conflict within Northern Ireland's prison system
53 came to head. The seeds of the crisis dated back to March 1976 which saw a significant
54 change in British Government's penal policy. Keen to counter perceptions of republicans as
55
56 prisoners-of-war and/ or anti-colonial freedom-fighters, the authorities determined to treat all
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3 paramilitary prisoners as ordinary criminals. 'Special category' status was withdrawn and
4 regulations introduced that all prisoners should wear prison clothing. In response republican
5 prisoners in the H-blocks at Long Kesh/ the Maze began their 'blanket protest', which then
6 segued into the 'dirty' protest and, ultimately, the Hunger Strikes of October-December 1980
7 and March-October 1981.⁷⁴

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15 Miłosz's Nobel Lecture, with its meditations on the poet's political and ethical
16 responsibilities, appeared in print five days into the second wave of hunger strikes. In
17 his definitive analysis of the strikes, Padraig O'Malley⁷⁵ informs us that this particular
18 form of protest 'fuses elements of the legal code of ancient Ireland, of the self-denial that is
19 the central characteristic of Irish Catholicism, and of the propensity for endurance and
20 sacrifice that is the hallmark of militant Irish nationalism'.⁷⁶ Attempting to force concessions
21 from the prison authorities, including the freedom to wear their own clothes,⁷⁷ on 1
22 March 1981, the Provisional IRA's Commanding Officer in Long Kesh, Bobby Sands,
23 refused prison food. Like the penitents in *Station Island*, carrying out their fast and religious
24 exercises on Lough Derg, Sands was fully aware of the performative, sacrificial nature of his
25 act. Unlike theirs, his motives were political: 'I am a casualty of a perennial war that is being
26 fought between the oppressed Irish people and an alien, unwanted regime that refuses to
27 withdraw from our land'.⁷⁸

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Questioned about the latest hunger strike on 8 March 1981, Heaney expressed sympathy for H-Block prisoners and mentions that, because of the 'undoubted maltreatment that takes place there',⁷⁹ he had half-considered dedicating 'Ugolino', *Field Work's* closing poem, to them. These remarks, however, are framed by criticisms of their 'exploitation' as 'propaganda material'⁸⁰ by the Provisional IRA. No-one in those early stages could have anticipated the outcome, intensity and impact of the struggle about to be acted out. To maximise its dramatic impact, the cast of ten selected to take part did not begin their strike

1
2
3 simultaneously. After a two-week interval, Sands was joined by another prisoner, Francis
4
5 Hughes, and then, a week later, on 22 March, by two others. The fact that Hughes' parents
6
7 were neighbours of the Heaneys in Bellaghy, placed him in a 'bewildering' dilemma, as years
8
9 later he confided to Dennis O'Driscoll:

12
13 Francis Hughes was a neighbour's child, yes, but he was also a hit-man and
14 his Protestant neighbours would have considered him involved in something like
15 a war of genocide against them rather than a war of liberation. At that stage the IRA's
16 self-image as liberators didn't work much magic with me. But neither did the too-
17 brutal simplicity of Margaret Thatcher's 'A crime is a crime is a crime...'. My own
18 mantra in those days was the remark by Miłosz that I quote in 'Away From it All':
19 'I was stretched between contemplation of a motionless point and the command to
20 participate actively in history'.⁸¹

23
24 What transformed the protest and ensured that it gained international coverage, was
25
26 Sands' decision to stand as a parliamentary candidate in the Fermanagh/ South Tyrone by-
27
28 election, and his subsequent victory in the poll on 9 April,⁸² Neither the election result, nor
29
30 Sands' declining health, nor mounting international criticism, affected the British Prime
31
32 Minister's resolve to make no concessions. Her Secretary of State, Humphrey Atkins,
33
34 commented that 'If Mr Sands persists in his wish to commit suicide, that is his choice'.⁸³
35
36 Sands remained equally unwavering, and sixty-six days into his strike, on 5 May, he died.
37
38 His funeral was attended by an estimated 100,000 people from the nationalist community,
39
40 many to express a collective solidarity in the face of what they regarded as British
41
42 intransigence.

45
46
47 One by one, between 12 May and 20 August 1981, nine other hunger-strikers died.⁸⁴
48
49 Attempts by nationalist politicians in the North, ministers and senior Catholic churchmen in
50
51 the Republic to broker a compromise that might end the crisis, were to no avail.⁸⁵ Following
52
53 the strikers' deaths the upturn in violence everyone had predicted did occur, though not on
54
55 the scale that many feared. In the period between Sands' death and that of the tenth hunger
56
57 striker, fifty-two people were killed. It was not until 3 October that the fatal campaign was
58
59 formally ended after strikers' families announced their determination to intervene. Three days
60

1
2
3 later, James Prior, recently appointed as Northern Ireland Secretary, granted many of the
4
5 inmates' original demands, allowing prisoners to wear their own clothes, restoring remission,
6
7 visits and the right to free association.
8
9

10
11 Published three years after these events, Heaney's *Station Island* contains only one
12
13 overt reference to the fast; section IX of the title sequence includes a fourteen-line 'speech'
14
15 by a hunger-striker. There are, however, countless allusions throughout the collection to
16
17 prisons, cells, compounds, policemen, punishment, informers, betrayals, and acts of
18
19 violence.⁸⁶ Undoubtedly, the anguish, guilt and anger generated by the strikes lies behind the
20
21 rigorous, sustained self-appraisal at the heart of one of his most lyrically intense and
22
23 accomplished volumes.
24
25

26
27 Miłosz's presence can be clearly discerned in the collection. The imaginative energy
28
29 in many of its poems arises from the 'contradictory awarenesses'⁸⁷ they articulate and
30
31 dramatise, as Heaney attempts to extricate himself from the nets of political and religious
32
33 obligation - like Joyce's Stephen Dedalus - while at the same time sensing that the 'integrity'
34
35 his art might depend on remaining 'faithful to the collective historical experience'.⁸⁸ These
36
37 strains surface as early as the fourth poem in the collection, 'Away from it All', which depicts
38
39 a convivial late night supper. A heated debate develops, during which the poet is forced to
40
41 scrutinise his conduct. Towards the close, Heaney employs a quotation from Miłosz's
42
43 recently re-published *Native Realm*, the one quoted above. Since it sheds light on shared
44
45 anxieties about poetry, language, ethics and politics, it is useful to consider the passage that
46
47 precedes the lines Heaney cites:
48
49
50
51

52
53 My reasoning went like this: thought and word should not submit to the
54
55 pressure of matter since, incapable of competing with it, they would have to
56
57 transform themselves into deed, which would mean overreaching their lawful
58
59 limits. On the other hand I quite justifiably feared dematerialization, the
60
delusiveness of words and thoughts. This could only be prevented by keeping a
firm hold on tangible things undergoing constant change; that is, control over the
motor that moves them in a society – namely, politics... *I was stretched,
therefore, between two poles: the contemplation of a motionless point and the*

1
2
3 *command to participate actively in history; in other words between*
4 *transcendence and becoming. (Native Realm, 124-5)*
5
6

7 When a different speaker in the poem asks for a definition of that ambiguous adverb,
8
9 'actively', an action is the narrator's response. The turning of his attention to 'light at the rim
10 of the sea' might be viewed as an evasion, or a conscious embrace of the sublime
11
12 transcendent.
13
14

15
16 Miłosz's second, more extended appearance comes in the collection's final sequence,
17
18 'Sweeney Redivivus', where he appears as 'The Master'; in form he resembles the exiled King
19
20 Sweeney, being part-human, part-bird.⁸⁹ In contrast to Miłosz's monologue, voiced by the
21
22 master himself, the narrative viewpoint in Heaney's lyric is that of an awed, self-effacing
23
24 acolyte; it is worth noting that throughout the *Inferno*, Dante addresses his guide, Virgil, as
25
26 'maestro'. Underneath its uncanny, gothic façade lies an accurate portrayal of key facets of
27
28
29
30
31 Miłosz's history and personality:

32
33 He dwelt in himself
34 like a rook in an unroofed tower.
35

36
37 To get close I had to maintain
38 a climb up deserted ramparts
39 and not flinch, not raise an eye
40 to search for an eye on the watch
41 from his coign of seclusion.
42

43
44 Each character blocked on the parchment secure
45 in its volume and measure.
46 Each maxim given its space.
47

48
49 Like quarrymen's hammers and wedges proofed
50 by intransigent service.
51 Like coping stones where you rest
52 in the balm of the wellspring.
53

54
55 How flimsy I felt climbing down
56 the unrailed stairs on the wall,
57 hearing the purpose and venture
58 in a wingflap above me.
59
60

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3 The poet's solitariness is established from the outset, though the use of the preposition
4 'in' rather than 'by' conveys his self-sufficiency, and hints at his considerable inner resources.
5
6 The three references to military architecture in lines 2, 4 and 7, carry a range of connotations.
7
8 The tower is a symbol of strength and endurance, as it was for Yeats,⁹⁰ a fitting emblem for
9
10 the poet himself.⁹¹ The fact that it is 'unroofed' suggests its exposure to the elements, and alludes
11
12 perhaps to the 'disintegration'⁹² of European civilisation in World War II, the subject of
13
14 Milosz's fifth Norton Lecture. The fact that the tower's ramparts are 'deserted' might imply
15
16 that its owner is unconcerned about possible attack, though from his 'coign of vantage'⁹³ he
17
18 maintains a wary eye. That focus on watchfulness takes us back to the opening simile
19
20 comparing the master to a rook, a *rara avis* endowed with panoramic vision. The bird motif
21
22 features in Miłosz's own depiction of the poet as seer, 'the one who flies above the earth and
23
24 looks it *from* above but at the same time sees every detail' (*NL*, 11), but also linked, of course,
25
26 to Heaney's Sweeney persona.
27
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34 The accumulation of self-reflexive references in the middle stanza points to the
35
36 poem's subject being a literary master, one whose compositions are both *writerly* ('his book of
37
38 withholding') and accessible since they draw on Christian humanist tradition ('the old rules/
39
40 we all had inscribed on our slates'). Like the master depicted in Miłosz's masked self-portrait,
41
42 Heaney's text-maker is utterly in command of his instruments, words. But if uplift is the
43
44 dominant quality associated with the former's creation, then weightiness and solidity are the
45
46 hallmarks of the latter's 'blocked', 'secure' artefacts:
47
48
49
50

51 Towards the close seemingly contrary attributes of the art and artist are juxtaposed; on
52
53 the one hand there is rugged strength and unyielding commitment, on the other, in the image
54
55 of a stone seat beside 'the balm of wellspring', a sense of originary serenity and refreshment.
56
57 So overwhelming is the encounter that the narrator, as he descends the tower's 'unrailed
58
59 stairs', is left feeling tremulous and fragile. The distance between the two is underscored in
60

1
2
3 the final lines which stress the master's resolve and enterprise, his 'wingflap' a sign of his
4
5 immediate departure on a new imaginative flight.
6
7
8
9

10
11 V

12 'Je ne cherche pas chez vous un maître, mais quelqu'un qui rende mon
13 existence un peu légitime' (Czesław Miłosz to Albert Camus)⁹⁴
14
15

16
17 Intuitively, then, from his earliest readings of the work, Heaney sensed Miłosz's
18 potential as a verifying, validating presence as his own artistic journey entered a new phase .
19
20 Within a recent, valuable analysis of his broader relationship with Polish poetry, Jerzy
21 Jarniewicz argues that Heaney detected in Miłosz's work a paradigm he might emulate, the
22 possibility of a 'creative project that would encapsulate collective history in one's
23 biography without transcending the individual'.⁹⁵ This idea is supported by observations
24 made by Heaney in his first Oxford lecture, where he refers to how 'in emergent cultures the
25 struggle of an individual consciousness towards affirmation...may be analogous, if not co-
26 terminous with a collective straining towards self-definition';⁹⁶ he was thinking here not just
27 about Irish poetry since the late nineteenth century, but also, one suspects, the radically-
28 shifting worlds Miłosz, Joseph Brodsky, Derek Walcott and Les Murray all experienced as
29 they came to maturity.
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46 Perhaps Miłosz's most lasting influence in Heaney's work can be seen in the
47 weight and attention it gives to memory. Now past the age when Miłosz received the
48 Nobel Prize, Heaney similarly seems to feel that 'everyone who survives in his memory
49 has a claim on his pen'.⁹⁷ Thus, in his latest volume, commingling with glimpses of intimate
50 family history, there are lyrics like 'Poem IX' in the 'Route 110' sequence which, like Miłosz's
51 remembrance of Wladyslaw Sebyla and Lech Piwowar in his Nobel Lecture, names two
52 victims of past violence and present injustice, John Lavery and Louis O'Neill. Whereas these
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3 civilian casualties of the Troubles go largely unremembered, the fallen paramilitaries
4 responsible for so many deaths are beneficiaries of yearly memorialisation, 'full
5 honours', and plots which separate them from the 'ordinary' dead.⁹⁸ Heaney continues
6 to follow the moral injunctions he places in Miłosz's mouth in the revised 1990 version
7 of 'The Master', '*Tell the truth. Do not be afraid*'.⁹⁹
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15 When invited by RTE in 1999 to contribute to a radio series in which 'prominent Irish
16 people talked about the public figure who has had a major influence on their lives',¹⁰⁰ Heaney
17 bestowed on Miłosz a new soubriquet. Though he had not chosen by the programme's title, *A*
18 *Giant at my Shoulder*, is indicative their changing relationship. Firmly fixed as one of his
19 most important 'approval-granting father-figures',¹⁰¹ Heaney regarded him still with awe,
20 though the pair had become closer over the years. What he continued to prize in this poet
21 whom he described as 'my hero amongst the living',¹⁰² is reflected in a commencement
22 address given at Colgate University in May 1994. For Heaney Miłosz's life and work
23 was the embodiment of a
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37 loyalty to the ancient dream that human beings are on earth to transcend
38 their worst selves, to create civilisation, to build the new Jerusalem in spite of
39 all... [His poems] fortify something in what might be called our spiritual
40 immunity system'.¹⁰³
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44

45 NOTES

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48 ¹ Czesław Miłosz, *The Witness of Poetry; The Charles Norton Eliot Lectures 1981-82* (Cambridge: Harvard
49 UP, 1983), p.10.

50 ² Nobel Prize in Literature 1980, Press Release, Swedish Academy. Nobelprize.org. 26 Jan 2011
51 http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1980/press.html

52 ³ Seamus Heaney, 'In gratitude for all the gifts', *The Guardian*, Saturday 11 September 2004. In an
53 interview with Dennis Manning and Robert Hedin, in *The Southern Review* 21, January 1983, p.103,
54 Miłosz comments that 'every poetry is directed against death - against death of the individual, against
55 the power of death'.

56 ⁴ Norman Davies, *Rising '44: The Battle for Warsaw* (London: Macmillan, 2004) p.516.

57 ⁵ Miłosz gives an account of his memories of the Rising in *Native Realm*, pp.248-255, and refers to its
58 200,000 casualties and the city's annihilation in 'The Nobel Lecture', delivered 8 December 1980,
59 published in *New York Review of Books*, XVIII: 5 March 1981, p.14. (Future references to this lecture will
60 be denoted by the letters *NL* in the text).

⁶ In addition the regime banned religious parades, ordered the removal of religious symbols from
schools and other public buildings, and forced Catholic newspapers 'out of print'. In state-run

enterprises Sunday working was introduced, and activities organised to discourage young people from going to mass. See Mary Craig, *The Crystal Spirit: Lech Walesa And His Poland* (London: Coronet, 1986), p.87.

⁷ See Neal Ascherson, *The Polish August* (London: Penguin, 1981), pp.57-62.

⁸ Ascherson, p.59.

⁹ Czesław Miłosz, 'Notes on Exile', in *To Begin Where I am: Selected Essays*, ed. Bogdana Carpenter and Madeline Levine (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2001), p.15.

¹⁰ Herbert Lottman, *Albert Camus: A Biography* (London: Picador, 1981), p. 718, n.16.

¹¹ See Irena Grudzinska Gross, *Czesław Miłosz and Joseph Brodsky: Fellowship of Poets* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), pp.63-9.

¹² See *Striving Towards Being: The Letters of Thomas Merton and Czesław Miłosz*, ed. Robert Faggen, (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1997), p.139.

¹³ *ibid*, pp.164, 174.

¹⁴ The title of Edward Said's memoir, published in 1999.

¹⁵ *Striving Towards Being*, p.126.

¹⁶ In an interview with Ayyappa K. Paniker. 'Dialogue with Czesław Miłosz', in Czesław Miłosz: *Conversations* ed. Cynthia L. Haven (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), p.33, the poet avers that 'there is free will and there is no free will'. For a valuable recent discussion of Miłosz, Heaney and their relationship to Catholicism, see John F. Desmond, *Gravity and Grace: Seamus Heaney and the Force of Light* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009).

¹⁷ Czesław Miłosz, 'Speaking of a Mammal', in *To Begin Where I am*, p.216. Qtd in Desmond, p.6.

¹⁸ Czesław Miłosz, *Selected Poems* (New York: Ecco Press, 1982), p.115.

¹⁹ 'Footfalls echo in the memory': T.S.Eliot, 'Burnt Norton', from *Four Quartets*, in *The Collected Poems and Plays of T.S.Eliot* (London: Faber, 1969), p.171.

²⁰ Miłosz's mother died from typhus in 1945. In *Native Realm*, p.65. Miłosz pays tribute to his mother, as a woman of depth: 'Under the surface was stubbornness, gravity, and the strong conviction that suffering is sent by God and that it should be borne cheerfully'.

²¹ W.B.Yeats, *Yeats's Poems*, ed. A Norman Jeffares (London: Macmillan, 1996), p.472.

²² Seamus Heaney, *A Giant at My Shoulder*, RTE Radio, 25 August 1999.

²³ Louis MacNeice, *Selected Poems* (London: Faber, 1988), p.23.

²⁴ Stanisław Barańczak, 'Searching for the Real', in *Breathing Under Water and Other East European Essays* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990), p.177.

²⁵ The Warsaw Pact's invasion of Czechoslovakia on 21 August 1968 - like the suppression of Solidarity thirteen years later - generated massive outrage in the West. Alongside the closing paragraphs of 'Old Derry Walls' in *The Listener* of 24 October 1968, 523, where Heaney writes on the violent conclusion of the Civil Rights March earlier that month, is the beginning of an essay by Adam Roberts on the Czech media entitled 'The Face of Censorship'.

²⁶ A highly influential poetry critic on *The Observer*, and friend of Hughes and Plath, Alvarez was the author of *Under Pressure* (1965), a pioneering study of the position of writers in Eastern European writers.

²⁷ *Modern Poetry in Translation*, 1, (1965), 8.

²⁸ *Modern Poetry in Translation* 23-24 (Spring 1975), 11.

²⁹ Seamus Heaney, *A Giant at My Shoulder*, *op.cit.*

³⁰ Like Miłosz's Lithuania, Herbert's homeland in the Ukraine had been seized by the Soviet Union.

³¹ Mary Craig, p.181. Since his defection in 1951, all of Miłosz's books were banned in Poland.

³² Czesław Miłosz, 'Poet of Exile', *Los Angeles Times*, 12 October 1980, rptd in *Czesław Miłosz: Conversations*, p.5.

³³ In the Nobel Lecture, p.14, Miłosz refers to the poet's 'mandate' to speak for those made 'silent forever'.

³⁴ Joseph Brodsky, Czesław Miłosz, Susan Sontag, Stanisław Barańczak, Tomas Venclova, et al.

'The Polish Crisis: Three Statements', *New York Review of Books*, January 21, 1982.

<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1982/jan/21/the-polish-crisis-three-statements/>

³⁵ cf. Heaney's comments in 'Seamus Heaney: The Art of Poetry LXXV', an interview with Henri Cole, in *The Paris Review*, 144, Fall 1997: 'The fact of the matter is that the most unexpected and miraculous thing in my life was the arrival of poetry itself - as a vocation and an elevation almost' (p.92).

³⁶ 'The Nobel Lecture', 11.

³⁷ Marie Heaney, qtd in Robert McCrum's 'A Life of Rhyme', an interview with Heaney, *The Observer*, 19

July 2009. Mossbawn is her husband's Eden, she says, then adds, 'All he's ever wanted to do is go back'.

- 38 Czesław Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems 1931-2001* (London: Penguin, 2001), p.37.
- 39 Seamus Heaney, 'Place, Pastness, Poems', *Salmagundi* 68-69, Fall/ Winter 1985-86, p.30.
- 40 Seamus Heaney, 'Uncoupled', in *Human Chain* (London: Faber, 2010), p.11.
- 41 Seamus Heaney, in Maurice Fitzpatrick's *The Boys of St Columb's* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2010), p.58.
- 42 Seamus Heaney, *Chicago Literary Review*, 13 March 1981, 15.
- 43 Harold Bloom observes in *The Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1973), that 'Poetic Influence is gain and loss'. In exemplifying the loss, he subsequently maintains that when 'one poet influences another, or more precisely one poet's poems influence the poems of the other, through a generosity of spirit', this signifies weakness on the part of the writer influenced. He goes on to argue that fruitful exchanges can occur between 'two strong, authentic poets', but that generally the outcome of this dialogue is a 'misreading', 'distortion' and 'wilful' revision of 'the prior poet' (pp.29-30).
- 44 Seamus Heaney, 'Feeling into Words', in *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-78* (London: Faber, 1980), p.56.
- 45 Czesław Miłosz, 'The Nobel Lecture', p.11.
- 46 Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, qtd in Bloom, p.6.
- 47 William Logan, in 'Ply the Pen', *New York Times Sunday Book Review* of 24 September 2010, makes an unsubstantiated, inaccurate claim that few of Heaney's poems from 'the past 10 or 20 years' are likely 'to be remembered'.
- 48 Mona Simpson, 'A Talk with Czeslaw Milosz', in *Czeslaw Milosz: Conversations*, p.9.
- 49 At different times, Milosz compares exile with suicide and 'incurable illness'. See Grudzinska-Gross, pp.243, 244. In 'Poetry with a Foreign Accent', Chapter Eight of her book, she gives a very full and informative account of Milosz's changing attitude to his hosts' languages. See particularly pp.241-258.
- 50 Czesław Miłosz, 'Language', in *To Begin Where I am*, p.19.
- 51 Grudzinska-Gross, p.246.
- 52 *Native Realm*, p.67.
- 53 See my discussion of Kinsella's and Montague's influence on Heaney, in 'Gleanings, Leavings: Irish and American Influences on Seamus Heaney's *Wintering Out*', *New Hibernia Review*, 2:3, Autumn 1998, pp.26-35
- 54 John Montague, *The Figure in the Cave* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1989), p.45.
- 55 Seamus Heaney, *Among Schoolchildren: A John Malone Memorial Lecture*, 9 June 1983, p.12.
- 56 Richard English, *Armed Struggle: A History of the IRA* (London: Macmillan, 2003), pp.235-6.
- 57 Laurence McKeown, *Out of Time: Irish Republican Prisoners Long Kesh 1972-2000* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 2001), pp.68-9. Qtd in English.
- 58 *ibid*, p.12.
- 59 Seamus Heaney, *Among Schoolchildren: A John Malone Memorial Lecture* (Belfast: John Malone Memorial Committee, 1983), p.12
- 60 *ibid*.
- 61 Following events in Poland in August 1980 and the emergence of the Solidarity trade union, the term began to feature frequently in international political discourse.
- 62 What he precisely meant by his use of the word is a matter of speculation. Had the exchange occurred two years later, one might connect the term with the Field Day project with its stated aim of 'producing analyses of established opinions, myths and stereotypes which had become both a symptom and a cause of the current situation' (*Ireland's Field Day*, London: Hutchinson, 1985, p.viii).
- 63 *Chicago Literary Review*, 13 March 1981, p.15. The incident is cited also in 'The Flight Path' from *The Spirit Level* (London: Faber, 1995), where Heaney's narrator is asked, 'When, for fuck's sake, are you going to write/ Something for us?' (p.25), and also in *The Paris Review* interview (p.111), and *Stepping Stones* (pp. 257-8).
- 64 *Chicago Literary Review*, p.14.
- 65 'An Interview with Czeslaw Milosz', Paul, W. Rea, in *Salmagundi* 80, Fall 1988, rpted in *Czeslaw Milosz: Conversations*, p.92.
- 66 *Atlantic Charter*, 14 August 1941, <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/atlantic.asp>, accessed 22 February 2011.
- 67 Heaney, from an unpublished interview with Patrick Sheerin, 18 December 1985, in Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. MSS 960, Subseries 1:1.
- 68 Grudzinska-Gross, p.32.
- 69 Whereas 'The Strand at Lough Beg' and 'A Postcard from North Antrim' (*Field Work*, 1979, pp.17-18,

19-20) are respectively written 'In Memory of Colum McCartney' and 'In Memory of Sean Armstrong', Louis O'Neill's name does not appear in 'Casualty' (*Field Work*, pp.21-4) nor William Strathearn's in 'Station Island VII' (*Station Island*, 1984, pp.77-80).

⁷⁰ Czeslaw Milosz, *Milosz's ABC*, qtd in Grudzinska-Gross, p.62.

⁷¹ *Stepping Stones*, p.277.

⁷² In mid-September 1980, Heaney had received an enquiry from the Chair of English and American Language and Literature at Harvard as to whether he might be interested in an appointment for three-five years 'teaching one semester per year' (Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. MSS 960, Subseries 1.1, Box 2).

⁷³ **Heaney to Longley, February 1981 (Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, MSS 744 Box 15a).**

⁷⁴ For a detailed account of the republican paramilitaries H-Block campaigns, see Pdraig O'Malley, *Biting at the Grave: The Irish Hunger Strikes and the Politics of Despair* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1990).

⁷⁵ Co-founder of *Ploughshares* magazine along with his brother, Peter, Pdraig O'Malley is a leading academic at the University of Massachusetts, and an important contact of Heaney's during his years at Harvard.

⁷⁶ O'Malley, p.25.

⁷⁷ *English*, p.194.

⁷⁸ *The Diary of Bobby Sands*, qtd in *English*, p.198.

⁷⁹ Seamus Heaney, interviewed by Lisa Dickler, Jay McKenzie, and Molly McQuade, *Chicago Literary Review*, published 13 March 1981, 15.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Stepping Stones*, p.260.

⁸² In the longer term, Sands' success had a massive, transformative effect on republican strategy and the future of the province, since it demonstrated to Provisional Sinn Fein that they could advance their cause through the ballot box. It also shocked the Irish and UK governments into a change of direction, and was a factor in the negotiations that led to the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985. See Michael Parker, *Northern Irish Literature 1976-2006: The Imprint of History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), pp.46-52.

⁸³ Bew and Gillespie, pp.148-9. Mrs Thatcher took an identical line when she informed the Commons of the death of the member for Fermanagh/South Tyrone: 'He chose to take his own life. It was a choice his organisation did not allow to many of its victims' (qtd in McKittrick and McVea, p.144).

⁸⁴ Heaney attended the wake of the eighth hunger striker, Thomas McElwee, a cousin of Francis Hughes, and another neighbour. See *Stepping Stones*, pp.260-1.

⁸⁵ White, p.223. John Hume, for example, warned Margaret Thatcher of the grim consequences for constitutional nationalism in Ireland if the strike continued and that Irish-American money would again pour in to the IRA's coffers.

⁸⁶ See, for example, 'Away from it All', 'Chekhov on Sakhalin', 'Sandstone Keepsake', 'Granite Chip', 'An Ulster Twilight', 'The Loaning', 'Station Island' II, IV, VII, VIII, 'The First Flight' and 'The Old Icons'.

⁸⁷ Seamus Heaney, 'Pilgrim's Journey', *Poetry Book Society Bulletin* 123, Winter 1984. In *Native Realm*, p.90, Milosz observes that 'Contradictions can be fruitful' in facing up to 'controversy' in one's 'own soul'.

⁸⁸ Seamus Heaney, 'Envy and Identifications: Dante and the Modern Poet', *Irish University Review*, 15:1, Spring 1985, 6, 19.

⁸⁹ Colin Middleton's illustration of a bird complete with human hand in the Field Day Press edition of *Sweeney Astray* (1983), p.xi, underlines Sweeney's dual nature.

⁹⁰ Neil Corcoran, in his early study, *Seamus Heaney* (London: Faber 1986), p.174-5, understandably misidentified its subject as Yeats.

⁹¹ The tower image Heaney uses in 'The Master' may well be in part derived from his reading of *Native Realm*, where Milosz refers at one point to his 'inner castle, a castle of prayer' (p.280).

⁹² See, for example, 'Ruins and Poetry', in Milosz, *The Witness of Poetry*, pp.81-97. On p.81, he cites 'disintegration' as the defining word 'for what had happened'.

⁹³ Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, I, vi, l.7.

⁹⁴ Lettner from c. 24 October 1954, qtd in Olivier Todd, *Albert Camus: Une Vie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), p. 522.

⁹⁵ Jerzy Jarniewicz, 'Seamus Heaney and Post-War Polish Poets', in *Seamus Heaney: Poet, Critic, Translator* eds. Ashby Bland Crowder and Jason David Hall. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), p. 110.

⁹⁶ Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry* (London: Faber, 1995), p.

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⁹⁷ Bogdana Carpenter and Madeleine G. Levine, introduction to *To Begin Where I am*, p.ix.

⁹⁸ Seamus Heaney, Poem IX, 'Route 110', in *Human Chain* (London: Faber, 2010), p.56.

⁹⁹ This new line appears in the *New Selected Poems 1966-1987* (London: Faber, 1990), p.202.

¹⁰⁰ Seamus Heaney: *A Giant At My Shoulder*, broadcast on RTE Radio, 25 August 1999.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Sven Birkerts by the author, Boston, 15 October 2010.

¹⁰² Seamus Heaney Papers, 12 August 1997, (Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. MSS 960, Subseries 1.1, Box 49).

¹⁰³ Seamus Heaney Papers, 22 May 1994, (Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. MSS 960, Subseries 1.1, Box 18).

For Peer Review Only

PAST MASTER: CZESŁAW MIŁOSZ AND HIS IMPACT ON THE POETRY OF SEAMUS HEANEY

One of the strangest regularities to be taken into account by a historian of literature and art is the affinity binding people who live at the same time in countries distant from one another (Czesław Miłosz, *The Witness of Poetry*)¹

Deleted: Miłosz

I

One of the most enduring of Seamus Heaney's many literary exemplars over the last thirty years has been the Polish-Lithuanian poet, Czesław Miłosz (1911-2004), who rose to international prominence in 1980 when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. The Swedish Academy's official citation lays great stress on the metaphysical and ethical dimensions of Miłosz's corpus, referring to the 'uncompromising', 'unerring perspicacity' manifested in his texts, which embody a lifetime's resistance to the forces of 'evil and havoc',² and, they might have added, 'death and nothingness'.³ Though it in no way explains the scale of his artistic achievement, Miłosz's early and repeated exposure to political turbulence and to acts of appalling cruelty clearly left its impress on his moral imagination and vision. Violence loomed over much of his childhood, as his family were caught up successively in the events of the First World War, the Russian Revolution, and the Russian-Polish war. In his late twenties and thirties he witnessed the carnage of the Second World War, and then, with the 'peace', the assimilation of Poland, the Baltic States and most of the rest of Eastern Europe into the Soviet bloc, with the complicity of the British and American Governments.

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Following the war Miłosz worked in the Polish diplomatic service, and was given postings first in Washington and subsequently in Paris. In the late 1940s, as the Cold War intensified, Poland's Soviet-installed communist regime lurched increasingly in a Stalinist direction. In order to ensure 'Poland's reliability in the looming international conflict',⁴ the Polish-born Soviet marshal, Konstantin Rokossovsky, was appointed Minister of Defence in November 1949; five years earlier he had been the very commander who had delayed the Soviet advance on Warsaw, thereby enabling the Nazis to crush the Warsaw Rising and

1
2 subsequently raze the city to the ground.⁵ Since the Catholic Church constituted a major
3
4 challenge to their authority and ideology, the communist government introduced a range of
5
6 measures designed to destroy its influence, by imprisoning over five hundred clergy, amongst
7
8 them Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, the Primate of Poland, and by confiscating Church lands.⁶
9
10 A purge from public positions of individuals with middle-class origins or with relatives in the
11
12 West was initiated, which extended also to anyone who had seen service in the Allied forces
13
14 or with the underground Armia Krajowa, which had been loyal to the London-based Polish
15
16 Government-in-exile during the war.⁷ Pressures were exerted on those engaged in education,
17
18 journalism and the arts. In 1950 members of the Polish Writers' Union were informed of an
19
20 edict from the Politburo which required that all future literary works subscribe to the
21
22 principles of 'socialist realism'.⁸
23

24 The accelerating pace of repression must have appalled Miłosz, as may well have
25
26 been noted by his political masters. In December 1950, during a return visit to Poland, his
27
28 passport was confiscated by the authorities, thereby effectively trapping him in his adopted
29
30 land. Only after appeals to President Bierut from the Foreign Minister's wife was his
31
32 passport restored, enabling Miłosz to return to France, where on 1 February 1951 he formally
33
34 requested political asylum.

35 For much of the next three decades Miłosz wrestled with exile. The period in France
36
37 was extremely difficult as initially his wife and child were unable to join him and he lacked
38
39 'the resilience necessary to oppose the corroding effects of isolation'.⁹ To the humiliation of
40
41 being dependent on others and having so little money, was added hostility from some in the
42
43 Polish émigré community, who considered him politically suspect as he had been employed
44
45 by the Communists. One of the few French intellectuals to offer friendship and support was
46
47 Albert Camus; according to one of Camus' biographers, others on the left regarded Miłosz as
48
49 'something of a leper or a sinner against "the future"',¹⁰ since in texts like *The Captive Mind*
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1
2 he punctured naive visions of what Socialist Revolution might bring. Meanwhile back in
3
4 Poland the Bierut regime co-ordinated attacks on him, using former colleagues and fellow
5
6 writers as their mouthpieces.¹¹ In 1960 he was appointed to a lectureship in America in the
7
8 Department of Slavic Languages at the University of California, Berkeley. There too, before
9
10 he was granted US citizenship in 1970, there were periods of frustration: 'I have no right to
11
12 have any opinions on politics in this country', he wrote in a letter to Thomas Merton in early
13
14 1962, 'as I am not even a resident but a guest'.¹² Later in their correspondence, however, he
15
16 alludes to the sympathy he feels for the civil rights movement and his hostility towards the
17
18 war in Vietnam.¹³ Nevertheless, gradually, despite an abiding feeling of being 'out of place'¹⁴
19
20 in France and America, he found in each a circle of writers and admirers, whose friendship
21
22 sustained him personally and artistically, and so aided a life dedicated to 'a continuous chase
23
24 after answers'.¹⁵

25
26 Since his was such a protracted, anguished encounter with history, it is hardly
27
28 surprising that Miłosz should often return in his writings to the horrors humankind inflicts on
29
30 its own across the centuries. Crucial to any understanding of the poet's work, also however,
31
32 and certainly to his appeal for Heaney, is his complex relationship to Catholicism. This is the
33
34 source for the deeply spiritual strain within his work, its recurring allusions to concepts,
35
36 images, forms and figures from Judaeo-Christian tradition, its preoccupation with suffering
37
38 and its meanings. Miłosz counters in his writings the dominant rational, scientific orthodoxy,
39
40 that human beings are solely products of blind historical forces and ideological conditioning,
41
42 by re-asserting their status as beings possessed with a 'soul' and the potential for free will.¹⁶

43
44 His sense of the individual as a site of Manichean contradiction, as a being capable of
45
46 transcendence, but equally prone to utter indifference to 'the Good',¹⁷ can be glimpsed in his
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48 1959 parable-poem, 'Mistrz' ('The Master'), composed originally in Polish and translated into
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50 English by the author himself; it appeared in *Selected Poems* published by The Ecco Press in

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3 | 1980. Set in an indeterminate period of history, it is voiced by a composer, who represents
4 the archetypal artist. Its opening stanzas convey the transfigurative power of music, and its
5 radical effects on all levels of the social hierarchy, from the Prince to ordinary 'men and
6 women'. Aptly the choir who perform his choral mass is named after St Cecilia, the patron
7 saint of music:
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11
12 They say that my music is angelic.
13 That when the Prince listens to it
14 His face, hidden from sight, *turns* gentle.
15 With a beggar he would share power.
16 A fan of a lady-in-waiting *is immobile*...

17
18 Everyone has heard in the cathedral my Missa Solemnis.
19 I *changed* the throats of girls from the Saint Cecilia choir
20 Into an instrument that *raises* us
21 Above what we are. I know how *to free*
22 Men and women from remembrances of their long lives
23 So *they stand* in the smoke of the nave
24 Restored (my italics)¹⁸

25
26 An immediate source of uncertainty for the reader is how to respond to this maestro. Is he
27 justifiably proud of real achievements, or is he arrogantly over-stating his abilities? In a trope
28 common in Romantic poetry, he pitches art's sublime, miraculous capacity to suspend time,
29 and the artist's compulsion to impose form and structure, against the material world and its
30 mutability. Whereas the people diminish to mere sound and then disappear - note the Eliot-
31 like use of the 'steps' metonym¹⁹ - flute and violin as a result of the aural effects they generate
32 endure, and so his will is done:
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39
40 Over there a swallow
41 Will *pass away* and *return*, *changed* in its slanting flight.
42 Steps will be heard at the well but of other people.
43 The ploughs will *erase* a forest. The flute and the violin
44 Will always work *as I have ordered them* (my italics)

45
46 Though confident of his ability to orchestrate the future, he is at a loss when it comes
47 to controlling perceptions in the present. Audiences lack any conception of the price an artist
48 pays for their creative gift, he complains. Some imagine that the achievement has its origin in
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1
2 an act of divine grace ('pierced by a ray', like St Theresa of Avila), others, with more
3
4 primitive imaginations, that it is the result of a compact made with the devil. The final stanzas
5
6 intimate, rather, that his art emerges from a very human darkness, out of unspecified guilts
7
8 and betrayals. A dream provides the first disconcerting glimpse into his psyche:

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9
10 It comes back in the middle of the night. Who are those
11 holding torches,
12 So that what is long past occurs in full light?

13
14 The torch-bearers here recall those sent to the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest Christ. His
15
16 projection of himself into that narrative conveys not only the scale of his ego, but also a deep
17
18 vulnerability, and his fears of exposure. A far less dramatic scene from his waking life
19
20 follows, a poignant moment of 'Regret, to no end'. Watching the elderly bless themselves as
21
22 they file into church, the speaker brings to mind an absence, an unidentified 'she' who may
23
24 well be his mother.²⁰ Both in the original Polish ('*Zdaje mi się, że mogłaby być jedną z nich*')
25
26 and in translation, loss is voiced in the simplest of utterances:

27
28 When old and white-haired under their laced shawls
29 They dip their fingers in a basin at the entrance
30 *It seems to me she might have been one of them* (my italics)

31
32 That conditional 'might have been' gives way to the present continuous in the very next line, a
33
34 line which makes present the landscape of Miłosz's childhood home: 'The same firs/ Rustle
35
36 and with a shallow wave sheens the lake'. In order to evoke the onomatopoeia in the Polish
37
38 original ('*szumią*' is rendered by the English 'rustle'), Miłosz transfers the rippling sound from
39
40 the trees to the water, hence the alliteration in 'shallow' and 'sheens'.

41
42 The deployment of those surface metaphors anticipate the poem's parting warning to
43
44 superficial readers:

45
46 A language of angels! Before you mention Grace
47 Mind that you do not deceive yourself and others.
48 What comes from my evil - that only is true.

1
2 Like his predecessor in Yeats's 'The Circus Animals' Desertion', Miłosz's narrator locates the
3
4 sources of his 'masterful images' in 'the foul rag and bone shop of the heart'.²¹
5

6 Though vast in their temporal, spiritual, intellectual and spatial reach, Miłosz's poems
7
8 maintain attachments to the local and individual, often in the form of elegies for lost family
9
10 and friends and the places they shared, but also in lyric epiphanies which, in Heaney's words,
11
12 make 'time stand still'.²² His ultimate goal, according to Stanislaw Barańczak, was to create
13
14 an Art that would attest to and celebrate a world 'Incorrigibly plural'²³ in its forms, features,
15
16 peoples and perspectives, one in which the poet's own 'individual voice' would be subsumed
17
18 into 'an all-encompassing polyphony'.²⁴
19

20 II

21
22 A decade or so before the laureateship was conferred on Miłosz, Seamus Heaney had
23
24 become familiar with his name as a translator and editor, when Penguin Books brought out
25
26 *Zbigniew Herbert: Selected Poems* (1968) and *Post-War Polish Poetry* (1970). While the
27
28 invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact forces in August 1968²⁵ was perhaps a
29
30 background factor, his initial, quickening interest in Eastern European poetry in the late
31
32 1960s and throughout the 1970s can be attributed largely to his friendships with Ted Hughes
33
34 and Daniel Weissbort. *Modern Poetry in Translation*, the journal they founded in 1965 and
35
36 co-edited, played a major role in promoting the work of Herbert, Miłosz, Popa, Holub and
37
38 Pilinszky, its contribution complementing that of Al Alvarez²⁶ and the Modern European
39
40 Poets series editors at Penguin. Though Heaney might not have seen the first issue of *MPT*, in
41
42 which Miłosz is described as 'one of the most influential of modern Polish poets',²⁷ almost
43
44 certainly he would have read the Spring 1975 issue, which lauded the 'remarkable... range of
45
46 expression' and 'breadth of experience' in Miłosz's work, and his generosity as an advocate of
47
48 the poetry of others.²⁸
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It was only after the Nobel announcement, that translations of much of Miłosz's poetry and prose to date suddenly became available, with the result that he quickly gained a massive stature worldwide. Within a four-year period, while working on the poems that formed *Station Island*, Heaney grew increasingly cognizant of the quality, range and depth of Miłosz's writing, and came to regard him as 'a sage and acknowledged master',²⁹ the embodiment of artistic insight and moral integrity. He acquired the Ecco Press edition of *Selected Poems* and read translations of *The Issa Valley*, *Native Realm* and *The Captive Mind*. In 1982, he attended some of Miłosz's Charles Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard, which were published the following year as *The Witness of Poetry*. It was not until the Summer of 1983, while teaching creative writing in Belmont, California, that Heaney met the poet for the first time in the company of the Polish poet's translators, Robert Hass and Robert Pinsky. Subsequently, Heaney composed a 'transmogrified account' (*Stepping Stones*, 262) of this encounter in his own poem entitled 'The Master', which depicts core elements of Miłosz's character in a setting redolent of Yeats. It is worth noting also that in the *Inferno*, Dante repeatedly addresses Virgil as 'maestro'.

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The experience of reading the 1980 Nobel Lecture was pivotal for Heaney. Questioned by Dennis O'Driscoll, he recalled not only the journal in which he encountered the laureate's address (*The New York Review of Books*), but also where he read it - the library at Carysfort College, Dublin (*Stepping Stones*, 301). Understandably what he does not remember is the precise issue of the *NYRB*, which turns out to have been the edition of 5 March 1981. This date is highly significant, since the international community's - and Heaney's - acknowledgement of the scale of Miłosz's literary achievement coincided with a period of intense political upheaval in Ireland and Poland, which, in the latter case, would trigger the collapse of the Soviet Union and its post-war domination of large areas of central and eastern Europe.

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The depth, intensity and continuity of Heaney's engagement with Czesław Miłosz's and, one should add, Zbigniew Herbert's poetry springs directly from its inherent and enduring power, beauty and truth. What undoubtedly quickened his admiration and aspiration to emulate them was the integrity and artistic skill with which they responded to the unfolding crisis in Poland from summer 1980 onwards.

Ever since the papal election of October 1978 when Krakow's charismatic archbishop, Karol Wojtyła, was given the highest position of authority in the Catholic Church, their 'homeland'³⁰ had been the subject of massive media coverage worldwide. In Poland itself, John Paul II's accession transformed the political situation, and gave considerable impetus to groups and institutions opposed to the Soviet-imposed, post-war status quo. Amongst the many Poles inspired and emboldened by John Paul II's triumphal visit home in June 1979. was a former shipyard worker in Gdansk, Lech Walesa, who had been arrested several times in the late 1970s, once for 'distributing clandestine copies of *The Captive Mind*,³¹ Miłosz's exposé of Stalinist ideology.

When in July 1980, because of the parlous state of Poland's economy, the communist government increased food prices and pegged wages, civil unrest spread throughout the country. In mid-August, the sacking of Anna Walentynowicz, a popular trade union activist prompted major strikes all along Poland's Baltic coast. Such was 'maturity and self-discipline'³² of the strikers, their leaders' quality, and their extensive popular support, the government were compelled to concede to their demands, which included legal recognition of independent, self-governing trade unions, a thing unheard of in the Soviet bloc. When, in September, Solidarity (*Solidarność*) was officially registered as one of these unions, within the space of fifteen months, it gained ten million members.

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2 Amongst the first tasks the union set itself was the construction of a monument
3
4 to commemorate the seventy-five people killed during strikes in Gdansk ten years
5
6 earlier. In a sign of the esteem in which Miłosz was held, lines from his poem, 'You Who
7
8 Wronged', were inscribed on the monument's plinth.³³ Less than a year after its
9
10 unveiling, General Jaruzelski, the Polish Premier, introduced martial law in an attempt
11
12 to crush Solidarity and stave off a possible Soviet invasion. Despite the internment of its
13
14 leaders, including its president Lech Walesa, the union continued functioning
15
16 underground and to resist. With Susan Sontag's support and that of fellow exiles
17
18 (Joseph Brodsky, Stanisław Barańczak, Tomas Venclova), Miłosz immediately formed a
19
20 committee to agitate on Solidarity's behalf in the States, which called for a boycott of all
21
22 'transactions, economic and other'³⁴ of Poland, until all internees were freed.
23

24 Throughout Europe and America, coverage of the crisis was intense. In all
25
26 martial law claimed ninety-plus victims, amongst the most mourned the pro-Solidarity
27
28 priest, Father Jerzy Popiełuszko, murdered by Polish secret police on 19 October 1984.
29
30 It would be surprising if in witnessing this turn of events Heaney had not experienced *déjà*
31
32 *vu*, since he would undoubtedly have recognised similarities between Poland and Northern
33
34 Ireland when it came to the fate of those aspiring to justice and civil rights by non-violent
35
36 means.
37

38 III

39
40 The opening remark in Miłosz's Nobel Lecture about his presence in Stockholm being
41
42 a sign of life's 'God-given, marvellously complex unpredictability' would have had
43
44 considerable resonance for the younger poet.³⁵ Coming himself from 'a small country',³⁶
45
46 Heaney shared Miłosz's pride in his origins on the margins of Europe, a region the latter had
47
48 earlier described as 'situated beyond the compass of maps... where time flowed more slowly
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50 than elsewhere' (*Native Realm*, 7). The terrain of their childhoods retains in the imaginations
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of both poets an idyllic, Wordsworthian quality; at one point in the Nobel speech Miłosz capitalises and personifies 'Nature', asserting that 'the landscapes and perhaps the spirits of his homeland 'have never abandoned me' (*NL*, 11). Hearing Miłosz rhapsodise about the 'fertile area' where he grew up, beside a tributary of the Neman, surrounded by 'an abundance' (*Native Realm*, 15) of lakes, hills and forests, would have put Heaney in mind of his own upbringing in Mossbawn, 'his Eden'³⁷ beside the Moyola.

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The Derry poet would have warmed to Miłosz's emphasis on the verifying role played by family, Catholicism, 'parochial attachments and loyalties' (*NL*, 11) in shaping personal and poetic identity. In both men's minds, everyday objects, if infused with familial and ancestral associations, assume the status of sacred relics. In *Native Realm* Miłosz speaks of inherited items, like clothing, furniture, 'the handwriting on yellowed documents', as possessing a kind of afterlife. In poem two of his celebrated sequence, 'The World', for example, the narrator focuses on the handle of a gate, 'worn smooth over time, / Polished by the touch of many hands'.³⁸ Such quotidian objects enable the writer to keep a grip on the past, and thus a means to stabilise the self. In an essay from the mid-1980s, written in the wake of his mother's death, Heaney makes an identical point, referring to the 'ghost-life that hovers over some of the furniture of our lives', providing 'a point of entry into a common emotional ground of memory and belonging'.³⁹

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As for any child, what enlarged Miłosz's and Heaney's ordinary sense of the world - education - also entailed a loss, a kind of exile, before they knew 'the term'.⁴⁰ Success in their entrance exams saw them both borne away to highly-regulated, male-only, highly-prized institutions, located in cities where religious divisions ran deep. Whereas in the Nobel Lecture Miłosz alludes positively to the cultural diversity of his homeland, 'where various languages and religions *cohabited* for centuries' (my italics), in *Native Realm* he depicts the ominous separation of Wilno's two most populous communities. Like their 'ghettoised',⁴¹

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1
2 discriminating counterparts in Belfast and Derry, Wilno's Catholics and the Jews 'lived within
3
4 the same walls', and yet might as well have occupied 'separate planets':
5

6 Contact was limited to everyday business matters; at home different
7 customs were observed, different newspapers were read... Everyone in
8 Wilno went to his 'own' school. Only at university did we gather in the
9 same lecture halls, and even there student organisations were divided into
10 Polish, Jewish, Lithuanian and Byelorussian (*Native Realm*, 92).
11

12 At Queen's University in the late 1950s, student groups were often similarly divided along
13 religious lines. Like his contemporaries who were studying literature, Heaney drew his
14 friends from 'all sides', but remained conscious of the 'blatant' and 'noxious' discrimination
15 that surrounded them (*Stepping Stones*, 43). In contrast to Miłosz, whose university
16 experiences in the early 1930s bred a deep antipathy to Polish nationalism and, before long,
17 nationalism of every other brand, Heaney remained strongly attached to the nationalist vision
18 of a united Ireland. Interviewed by the *Chicago Literary Review* in early March 1981, he
19 explains that though he shares 'the cultural and political base of the Provos' vision',⁴² he
20 rejects the means that they deploy. Commitment to nationalist ideals did not blind him to the
21 excesses to which nationalist rhetoric leads, and he shared wholly Miłosz's feelings of
22 repulsion at those who sought to impose 'linguistic, cultural, religious' and 'racial unity'
23 (*Native Realm*, 95) on heterogeneous cultures by means of the bomb and the bullet.
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Deleted: Miłosz

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35 Characteristically, in retracing stages in his own extended evolution as an artist,
36 Miłosz establishes general truths about how writers achieve distinctiveness of utterance,
37 though he does not minimise their difficulties in freeing themselves from anxieties of
38 influence.⁴³ Miłosz begins his reflections on the poet's ambivalent relationships with literary
39 ancestors and contemporaries with what seems at first an uncontentious assertion that 'Every
40 poet depends upon generations who wrote in his native tongue'. While this sense of a shared
41 language and legacy may initially enabling be for the apprentice writer, in time a compulsion
42 to break with inherited styles and forms sets in, with the realisation that 'those old means of
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2 expression are not adequate to his own experience' (*NL*, 11). In the quest for other, more
3
4 current sources of verification and direction, the writer may lapse unconsciously into
5
6 dependency on their contemporaries, which may also diminish their work's individuality:
7

8 Alas, it is enough for him to publish his first volume of poems to find himself
9 trapped. For hardly has the print dried, when that work, which seemed to him
10 the most personal, appears to be enmeshed in the style of another. The only way
11 to counter an obscure remorse is to continue searching and to publish a new
12 book, but then everything repeats itself, so there is no end to that chase (*NL*, 11)
13

14 Since the escalation of violence in the North in 1969, Heaney had been engaged in an
15
16 intensive 'search for images and symbols adequate to our predicament'.⁴⁴ An important
17
18 element in his decisions in 1972 to leave Belfast for Glanmore and in 1979 Dublin for
19
20 Harvard was a recognition that the growth of a poet required 'a constant escape forward',⁴⁵
21
22 periods of relative solitude, free from continual local scrutiny and demand. Though attuning
23
24 itself to works from an increasingly diverse and international range of artists, past and
25
26 contemporary, Heaney's poetry never became merely 'an echo of someone else's music',⁴⁶ but,
27
28 like Miłosz's, continued to grow in resonance.⁴⁷
29

30 An interesting point of comparison between the two poets emerges when one
31
32 considers their relationship to the medium in which they worked. Since his forebears had
33
34 been using Polish as their first language since the sixteenth century, Miłosz defines himself
35
36 confidently as 'a Polish, not a Lithuanian poet' (*NL*, 11). Throughout his childhood years and
37
38 during his twenties and thirties, he was regularly crossing borders and becoming adept in
39
40 other tongues, yet from the moment he chose exile in France and then America, issues around
41
42 language and identity became deeply problematic. Attempting to mitigate the disorientating
43
44 effects of operating in a foreign language during his working, 'external' hours, he conducted
45
46 his inner, creative and domestic life in Polish. In an interview from 1980, he explains that he
47
48 adopted this strategy of linguistic bifurcation as a means of stabilising the self, believing that
49
50 managing 'two personalities in one'⁴⁸ might be preferable to having his identity fundamentally
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1
2 altered by the acquired language. Unlike many other migrants, Miłosz consciously sought to
3
4 preserve a strong, foreign inflection in 'his' English, in order to accentuate his distinctness.
5
6 Rather than killing his creativity as he initially feared it might,⁴⁹ Miłosz's immersion in
7
8 English proved salutary in the long-term, as he later observed:

10 A writer living among people who speak a language different from his own
11 discovers after a while that he senses his native language in a new manner. It is
12 not true that a long stay abroad leads to withering of styles ...What is true,
13 however, is that new aspects and tonalities of the native tongue are discovered,
14 for they stand out against the background of the language spoken in the new
15 milieu.⁵⁰

17 Irena Grudzinska-Gross argues convincingly that his re-evaluation of the impact of English
18 may have resulted from his intensive work as a translator of others' and his own poems.
19
20 Translation, she suggests, 'enriched' the scope of his poetry enormously, opening him up to
21
22 'new models and traditions',⁵¹ as it would equally do for Heaney.

24 In *Native Realm*, Miłosz invokes the image of whirling particles in a kaleidoscope to
25
26 evoke his inchoate feelings in his youth, whose origins he could clearly not define at the time.

Deleted: Miłosz

28 Amongst the many sources for this inner turmoil was 'an overabundance of impressions', an
29
30 awareness that the cultural space he occupied lay somewhere between 'contradictory
31
32 traditions', that the land he was born into 'belonged' to another country.⁵² That sense of being
33
34 in-between cultures was one which Heaney knew all about, particularly once he became
35
36 conscious of the presence of a tongue which might have an equal claim to his loyalty.

38 Brought up in an English-speaking household, his first extended encounters with the Irish
39
40 language began at St Columb's, where it was treated more as a 'heritage' subject, rather than
41
42 explored for its 'counter-cultural implications' (*Stepping Stones* 314). When in 1969 Thomas

44 Kinsella published his acclaimed translation of the *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, Heaney was quick to
45
46 recognise the political and cultural ramifications of the endeavour.⁵³ Unconvinced of the
47
48 feasibility of the lost linguistic legacy ever being restored, Heaney adopted a position taken
49
50 by John Montague in 'A Primal Gaeltacht' (1970) and *The Rough Field* (1972), that much

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1
2 might be gained from tapping back into Gaelic tradition as a means of asserting cultural
3
4 difference, if not resistance. By getting into contact with 'whatever of it is still alive in our
5
6 own area',⁵⁴ such as place-names, local dialect words, songs and poems, Montague argued the
7
8 poet might keep faith with pre-colonial, cultural ancestors, and so gain 'fortification' and
9
10 'enrichment'.⁵⁵ Elegiac, Gaelic-inflected lyrics like 'Anahorish', 'Broagh' and 'The Backward
11
12 Look' from *Wintering Out*, like his early efforts at Glanmore to render the medieval Irish
13
14 epic, *Buile Suibhne*, into English, exemplify Heaney's increasingly politicised take on the
15
16 language question between 1970-72.

17
18 When, in the mid-1970s, protesting republican paramilitary prisoners in Long Kesh
19
20 started *en masse* to study Irish, debate in Northern Ireland around language and identity rose
21
22 in the cultural-political agenda, and retained a significance throughout the period of the
23
24 Hunger Strikes and on until the mid-1980s.⁵⁶ 'Learning and speaking the Irish language'
25
26 became 'a political and subversive pursuit', providing 'a means through which to
27
28 communicate to comrades' and 'to exclude enemies'.⁵⁷ Interestingly, it was at this very
29
30 juncture, with the North accelerating towards another phase of acute political crisis, that
31
32 Heaney resumed work on the Sweeney poem, and, in April 1981, began a translation of 'Fill
33
34 Aris' ('Return Again'), a popular poem by a modern master of Irish, the late Seán Ó Ríordáin.
35
36 Its speaker urges his listeners to decolonise their minds and discard the alien literary legacy:

37
38 Close your mind to all that happened
39 Since the battle of Kinsale was fought
40 . . . Unshackle your mind
41 Of its civil English tackling,
42 Shelley, Keats and Shakespeare...
43 Wash your mind and wash your tongue
44 That was spancelled in a syntax
45 Putting you out of step with yourself.⁵⁸

46
47 Commenting on Ó Ríordáin's stance two years later in his *Among Schoolchildren* lecture,
48
49 Heaney confesses that while responsive to the 'curve of feeling' and 'inner division' in 'Fill
50
51 Aris', he rejected wholly its monoculturalist polemic. Initially, in a calmly insistent tone, he

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1 asserts that it would be 'impossible' for him 'to ditch' his English *poetic* masters, or accept that
 2 their tongue or the forms they used were foreign. The idea that almost four centuries of
 3 colonial history, post-Kinsale, might simply be wiped from the Irish cultural memory is
 4 similarly given short shrift, on grounds that Miłosz would have fully endorsed, that it is that
 5 very 'history that has made us all what we are'.⁵⁹ The paragraph that follows, however,
 6 exhibits a marked shift into a higher rhetorical register, as Heaney widens his critique and
 7 offers a part-defiant, part-defensive justification of his conduct to date: 'I do not yield to the
 8 notion that my identity is disabled and falsified and *somehow slightly traitorous* if I conduct
 9 my casual and imaginative transactions in *the speech I was born to*' (my emphases).⁶⁰

10 Subsequently, Heaney makes a connection between Ó Riordáin's advocacy of exclusivity in
 11 cultural self-definition and the coercive practices of republican and loyalist ideologues.

12 What Heaney most prized in Miłosz was the exemplary manner in which he acquitted
 13 himself as an artist in the face of contradictory imperatives. For Miłosz, the poet's vocation
 14 demands solitariness, contemplation, and dedication to the *haecceitas* and *esse* of the created
 15 world. Circumstances occur, however, when History breaks in on the poet's meditations,
 16 compelling him or her to make some form of intervention in the public domain, to
 17 demonstrate political and moral 'solidarity' (NL, 11).⁶¹ *Native Realm* provides instances of the
 18 extent of Miłosz's own culturo-political activism during the war years, his involvement in
 19 clandestine literary activities, including the editing of an anti-Nazi anthology, *Invincible*
 20 *Song*, and his translation of Jacques Maritain's attack on Vichy rule, *A Travers le Désastre*
 21 (236-7). He contrasts his own war-work with that of an enterprising former fellow student,
 22 W, who shipped weapons to the partisans and saved many Jewish lives by supplying them
 23 with false documents (238-240).

24 'All art proves to be nothing compared with action'(NL, 12), Miłosz asserts, reflecting
 25 particularly on that savage period in human history when the Nazi and Stalinist regimes were

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2 carrying out their genocidal crimes. In such circumstances, the artist is silenced or struggles
3
4 to 'embrace reality'. To create an aesthetically effective response to such times of bloody
5
6 crisis requires, in his view, objectivity and distance. And yet to display these very qualities
7
8 can expose the artist to charges of 'moral treason' (*NL*, 12). This was the very accusation
9
10 levelled at Heaney by Sinn Fein in 1979. En route to or from Belfast, one of their spokesmen,
11
12 Danny Morrison, entered the train carriage Heaney was in and confronted him about his
13
14 failure to condemn the treatment of republican prisoners in Long Kesh. Heaney's reply was
15
16 that if he wrote something it would not be at someone else's bidding, and that he was already
17
18 engaged on his own 'campaign'.⁶² He recalled this incident in his interview with the *Chicago*
19
20 *Literary Review*, just three days after the *NYRB* publication of Miłosz's Nobel Lecture.⁶³
21
22 Earlier in that same interview, after commending Robert Lowell's conduct in the political
23
24 sphere, Heaney argues that poets should always avoid aligning themselves with one single
25
26 political position, since 'The artist, once he surrenders his authority to a doctrine or a side or
27
28 to propaganda, has lost something he can never regain'.⁶⁴

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29
30 For Miłosz, the Nobel Award and Lecture provided a unique platform from which to
31
32 voice matters of intense personal and global concern, to say 'something which was on my
33
34 heart and speak not only of my own problems, but the problems of other peoples and
35
36 countries'.⁶⁵ A source of great alarm to him was the degree of ignorance about the recent
37
38 history he regularly encountered, especially among 'the young generations', a group whom he
39
40 refers to twice (*NL*, 12,14). With a passionate urgency, and with them particularly in mind, he
41
42 addresses the crucial importance of historical memory and historical truth for humanity's
43
44 future. The fact that by 1980 over one hundred books existed which dismissed the Holocaust
45
46 as pure fiction and a product of 'Jewish propaganda' (*NL*, 12) he condemns as 'an insanity'.
47
48 He then proceeds to make a controversial, but timely observation about what he views as a
49
50 worrying example of historical elision and linguistic slippage, when he voices his anxiety
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1
2 about the exclusive application of the term 'Holocaust' to the Jewish victims of Nazism; it is
3
4 'as if among the victims there were not also millions of Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, and
5
6 prisoners of other nationalities' (NL, 12). To illustrate further the gaps in historical memory
7
8 within the world community, Miłosz draws attention to a date - 23 August 1939 - which he
9
10 feels, ought to be 'invoked every year as a day of mourning' (NL, 12). That was the day on
11
12 which Hitler and Stalin's foreign ministers, von Ribbentrop and Molotov, signed the German-
13
14 Soviet non-aggression pact which led directly to the outbreak of World War II, With the
15
16 stroke of a pen, the nations of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were consigned to an
17
18 ignominious subjection, and their peoples' rights to self-determination cancelled for the next
19
20 forty-plus years. This state of affairs, Miłosz points out, was in direct contravention of
21
22 undertakings made by the Americans and the British in the Atlantic Charter (August 1941).
23
24 In this document Roosevelt and Churchill had declared that there should be 'no territorial
25
26 changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned' and
27
28 that 'sovereign rights and self-government' should be 'restored to those who have been
29
30 forcibly deprived of them'.⁶⁶

31
32 One of many individual crimes committed as a result of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact
33
34 was a massacre of over 4,000 unarmed Polish officers in the Katyn Forest in April 1940,
35
36 carried out on Stalin's orders. Amongst the victims who 'now repose in a mass grave', Miłosz
37
38 informs his audience, were two of his friends and fellow poets, Wladyslaw Sebyla and Lech
39
40 Piwowar. This moment in the lecture illustrates something Heaney admires in Miłosz, the
41
42 skilful way he unites 'personal' witness to 'historical theme'.⁶⁷ Conscious too how 'history is
43
44 built out of individual lives',⁶⁸ Heaney after *North* (1975) addresses the continuing violence
45
46 in Northern Ireland primarily by means of elegies, depicting, often in graphic detail, the
47
48 personal characters, circumstances and fates of victims, sometimes naming them, but
49
50 sometimes not.⁶⁹ In adopting this means of allowing the dead 'to return for a brief moment

1 among the living',⁷⁰ Heaney was following in the steps also of another great master, who
 2
 3 features twice in the *New York Review of Books*' publication of Milosz's Nobel Lecture, first
 4
 5 in a reference to him as 'the patron saint of all poets in exile' (*NL*,12), secondly in the form of
 6
 7 a Gustav Doré print, 'Dante in a Dusky Wood', two pages later: Dante. Though it would be
 8
 9 Dante's presence that would pervade Heaney's next volume, *Station Island* (1984), the high
 10
 11 esteem in which he now held the Polish poet is also evident. Over the course of the next three
 12
 13 decades, Miłosz grew to be a constant literary and ethical point of reference in Heaney's
 14
 15 writings, fulfilling the verifying role Simone Weil and Oscar Milosz performed for him as
 16
 17 sources of spiritual insights and as custodians of 'true values' (*NL*, 15).
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19 IV

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 21
 22 Heaney's encounter with Miłosz's writings occurred at a critical turning-point in
 23
 24 his literary career, and, most significantly, as we shall see, during a political crisis in
 25
 26 Northern Ireland of comparable severity to that which followed Bloody Sunday. The
 27
 28 critical acclaim *Field Work* (1979) garnered greatly enhanced his reputation, and
 29
 30 created a surge in book sales and invitations to read, significantly in America.⁷¹ A sign of
 31
 32 this growing esteem was his appointment as a visiting lecturer at Harvard in the Spring
 33
 34 semester of 1979. His success led to an offer in September 1980 of a longer contract,
 35
 36 working for one semester each year for the next five years.⁷² In November, in order to
 37
 38 take up the Harvard post, Heaney took the momentous decision to quit his Head of
 39
 40 English post at Carysfort College, Dublin. Writing to Michael Longley in February 1981,
 41
 42 he explained that the Harvard move was prompted by a desire for more creative time
 43
 44 and freedom. He confessed to a fear that he might be settling 'too firmly or comfortably'
 45
 46 into a routine in Dublin, and so in order to re-energise himself creatively and avoid
 47
 48 'atrophying', he felt it was crucial to put himself again 'at risk'.⁷³
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Greater international recognition brought with it greater expectations, as he would soon discover when the burgeoning conflict within Northern Ireland's prison system came to head. The seeds of the crisis dated back to March 1976 which saw a significant change in British Government's penal policy. Keen to counter perceptions of republicans as prisoners-of-war and/ or anti-colonial freedom-fighters, the authorities determined to treat all paramilitary prisoners as ordinary criminals. 'Special category' status was withdrawn and regulations introduced that all prisoners should wear prison clothing. In response republican prisoners in the H-blocks at Long Kesh/ the Maze began their 'blanket protest', which then segued into the 'dirty' protest and, ultimately, the Hunger Strikes of October-December 1980 and March-October 1981.⁷⁴

Miłosz's Nobel Lecture, with its meditations on the poet's political and ethical responsibilities, appeared in print five days into the second wave of hunger strikes. In his definitive analysis of the strikes, Padraig O'Malley⁷⁵ informs us that this particular form of protest 'fuses elements of the legal code of ancient Ireland, of the self-denial that is the central characteristic of Irish Catholicism, and of the propensity for endurance and sacrifice that is the hallmark of militant Irish nationalism'.⁷⁶ Attempting to force concessions from the prison authorities, including the freedom to wear their own clothes,⁷⁷ on 1 March 1981, the Provisional IRA's Commanding Officer in Long Kesh, Bobby Sands, refused prison food. Like the penitents in *Station Island*, carrying out their fast and religious exercises on Lough Derg, Sands was fully aware of the performative, sacrificial nature of his act. Unlike theirs, his motives were political: 'I am a casualty of a perennial war that is being fought between the oppressed Irish people and an alien, unwanted regime that refuses to withdraw from our land'.⁷⁸

Questioned about the latest hunger strike on 8 March 1981, Heaney expressed sympathy for H-Block prisoners and mentions that, because of the 'undoubted maltreatment

1
2 that takes place there',⁷⁹ he had half-considered dedicating 'Ugolino', *Field Work's* closing
3 poem, to them. These remarks, however, are framed by criticisms of their 'exploitation' as
4 'propaganda material'⁸⁰ by the Provisional IRA. No-one in those early stages could have
5 anticipated the outcome, intensity and impact of the struggle about to be acted out. To
6 maximise its dramatic impact, the cast of ten selected to take part did not begin their strike
7 simultaneously. After a two-week interval, Sands was joined by another prisoner, Francis
8 Hughes, and then, a week later, on 22 March, by two others. The fact that Hughes' parents
9 were neighbours of the Heaneys in Bellaghy, placed him in a 'bewildering' dilemma, as years
10 later he confided to Dennis O'Driscoll:

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11
12 Francis Hughes was a neighbour's child, yes, but he was also a hit-man and
13 his Protestant neighbours would have considered him involved in something like
14 a war of genocide against them rather than a war of liberation. At that stage the IRA's
15 self-image as liberators didn't work much magic with me. But neither did the too-
16 brutal simplicity of Margaret Thatcher's 'A crime is a crime...'. My own
17 mantra in those days was the remark by Miłosz that I quote in 'Away From it All':
18 'I was stretched between contemplation of a motionless point and the command to
19 participate actively in history'.⁸¹

20
21 What transformed the protest and ensured that it gained international coverage, was
22 Sands' decision to stand as a parliamentary candidate in the Fermanagh/ South Tyrone by-
23 election, and his subsequent victory in the poll on 9 April,⁸² Neither the election result, nor
24 Sands' declining health, nor mounting international criticism, affected the British Prime
25 Minister's resolve to make no concessions. Her Secretary of State, Humphrey Atkins,
26 commented that 'If Mr Sands persists in his wish to commit suicide, that is his choice'.⁸³
27 Sands remained equally unwavering, and sixty-six days into his strike, on 5 May, he died.
28 His funeral was attended by an estimated 100,000 people from the nationalist community,
29 many to express a collective solidarity in the face of what they regarded as British
30 intransigence.

31
32 One by one, between 12 May and 20 August 1981, nine other hunger-strikers died.⁸⁴
33 Attempts by nationalist politicians in the North, ministers and senior Catholic churchmen in

1
2 the Republic to broker a compromise that might end the crisis, were to no avail.⁸⁵ Following
3
4 the strikers' deaths the upturn in violence everyone had predicted did occur, though not on
5
6 the scale that many feared. In the period between Sands' death and that of the tenth hunger
7
8 striker, fifty-two people were killed. It was not until 3 October that the fatal campaign was
9
10 formally ended after strikers' families announced their determination to intervene. Three days
11
12 later, James Prior, recently appointed as Northern Ireland Secretary, granted many of the
13
14 inmates' original demands, allowing prisoners to wear their own clothes, restoring remission,
15
16 visits and the right to free association.

17
18 Published three years after these events, Heaney's *Station Island* contains only one
19
20 overt reference to the fast; section IX of the title sequence includes a fourteen-line 'speech'
21
22 by a hunger-striker. There are, however, countless allusions throughout the collection to
23
24 prisons, cells, compounds, policemen, punishment, informers, betrayals, and acts of
25
26 violence.⁸⁶ Undoubtedly, the anguish, guilt and anger generated by the strikes lies behind the
27
28 rigorous, sustained self-appraisal at the heart of one of his most lyrically intense and
29
30 accomplished volumes.

31
32 Miłosz's presence can be clearly discerned in the collection. The imaginative energy
33
34 in many of its poems arises from the 'contradictory awarenesses'⁸⁷ they articulate and
35
36 dramatise, as Heaney attempts to extricate himself from the nets of political and religious
37
38 obligation - like Joyce's Stephen Dedalus - while at the same time sensing that the 'integrity'
39
40 his art might depend on remaining 'faithful to the collective historical experience'.⁸⁸ These
41
42 strains surface as early as the fourth poem in the collection, 'Away from it All', which depicts
43
44 a convivial late night supper. A heated debate develops, during which the poet is forced to
45
46 scrutinise his conduct. Towards the close, Heaney employs a quotation from Miłosz's
47
48 recently re-published *Native Realm*, the one quoted above. Since it sheds light on shared
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1
2 anxieties about poetry, language, ethics and politics, it is useful to consider the passage that
3
4 precedes the lines Heaney cites:

5
6 My reasoning went like this: thought and word should not submit to the
7 pressure of matter since, incapable of competing with it, they would have to
8 transform themselves into deed, which would mean overreaching their lawful
9 limits. On the other hand I quite justifiably feared dematerialization, the
10 delusiveness of words and thoughts. This could only be prevented by keeping a
11 firm hold on tangible things undergoing constant change; that is, control over the
12 motor that moves them in a society – namely, politics... *I was stretched,*
13 *therefore, between two poles: the contemplation of a motionless point and the*
14 *command to participate actively in history*; in other words between
15 transcendence and becoming. (*Native Realm*, 124-5)

16
17 When a different speaker in the poem asks for a definition of that ambiguous adverb,
18 'actively', an action is the narrator's response. The turning of his attention to 'light at the rim
19 of the sea' might be viewed as an evasion, or a conscious embrace of the sublime
20
21 transcendent.
22

23
24 Miłosz's second, more extended appearance comes in the collection's final sequence,
25 'Sweeney Redivivus', where he appears as 'The Master'; in form he resembles the exiled King
26
27 Sweeney, being part-human, part-bird.⁸⁹ In contrast to Miłosz's monologue, voiced by the
28
29 master himself, the narrative viewpoint in Heaney's lyric is that of an awed, self-effacing
30
31 acolyte; it is worth noting that throughout the *Inferno*, Dante addresses his guide, Virgil, as
32
33 'maestro'. Underneath its uncanny, gothic façade lies an accurate portrayal of key facets of
34

35
36 Miłosz's history and personality:

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37
38
39 He dwelt in himself
40 like a rook in an unroofed tower.

41
42 To get close I had to maintain
43 a climb up deserted ramparts
44 and not flinch, not raise an eye
45 to search for an eye on the watch
46 from his coign of seclusion.

47
48 Each character blocked on the parchment secure
49 in its volume and measure.
50 Each maxim given its space.

1
2 Like quarrymen's hammers and wedges proofed
3 by intransigent service.
4 Like coping stones where you rest
5 in the balm of the wellspring.
6

7 How flimsy I felt climbing down
8 the unrailed stairs on the wall,
9 hearing the purpose and venture
10 in a wingflap above me.
11

12 The poet's solitariness is established from the outset, though the use of the preposition
13 'in' rather than 'by' conveys his self-sufficiency, and hints at his considerable inner resources.
14 The three references to military architecture in lines 2, 4 and 7, carry a range of connotations.
15 The tower is a symbol of strength and endurance, as it was for Yeats,⁹⁰ a fitting emblem for
16 the poet himself.⁹¹ The fact that it is 'unroofed' suggests its exposure to the elements, and alludes
17 perhaps to the 'disintegration'⁹² of European civilisation in World War II, the subject of
18 Miłosz's fifth Norton Lecture. The fact that the tower's ramparts are 'deserted' might imply
19 that its owner is unconcerned about possible attack, though from his 'coign of vantage'⁹³ he
20 maintains a wary eye. That focus on watchfulness takes us back to the opening simile
21 comparing the master to a rook, a *rara avis* endowed with panoramic vision. The bird motif
22 features in Miłosz's own depiction of the poet as seer, 'the one who flies above the earth and
23 looks it *from* above but at the same time sees every detail' (*NL*, 11), but also linked, of course,
24 to Heaney's Sweeney persona.
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38 The accumulation of self-reflexive references in the middle stanza points to the
39 poem's subject being a literary master, one whose compositions are both *writerly* ('his book of
40 withholding') and accessible since they draw on Christian humanist tradition ('the old rules/
41 we all had inscribed on our slates'). Like the master depicted in Miłosz's masked self-portrait,
42 Heaney's text-maker is utterly in command of his instruments, words. But if uplift is the
43 dominant quality associated with the former's creation, then weightiness and solidity are the
44 hallmarks of the latter's 'blocked', 'secure' artefacts:
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Towards the close seemingly contrary attributes of the art and artist are juxtaposed; on the one hand there is rugged strength and unyielding commitment, on the other, in the image of a stone seat beside 'the balm of wellspring', a sense of ordinary serenity and refreshment. So overwhelming is the encounter that the narrator, as he descends the tower's 'unrailed stairs', is left feeling tremulous and fragile. The distance between the two is underscored in the final lines which stress the master's resolve and enterprise, his 'wingflap' a sign of his immediate departure on a new imaginative flight.

V

'Je ne cherche pas chez vous un maître, mais quelqu'un qui rende mon existence un peu légitime' (Czesław Miłosz to Albert Camus)⁹⁴

Intuitively, then, from his earliest readings of the work, Heaney sensed Miłosz's potential as a verifying, validating presence as his own artistic journey entered a new phase . Within a recent, valuable analysis of his broader relationship with Polish poetry, Jerzy Jarniewicz argues that Heaney detected in Miłosz's work a paradigm he might emulate, the possibility of a 'creative project that would encapsulate collective history in one's biography without transcending the individual'.⁹⁵ This idea is supported by observations made by Heaney in his first Oxford lecture, where he refers to how 'in emergent cultures the struggle of an individual consciousness towards affirmation...may be analogous, if not co-terminous with a collective straining towards self-definition';⁹⁶ he was thinking here not just about Irish poetry since the late nineteenth century, but also, one suspects, the radically-shifting worlds Miłosz, Joseph Brodsky, Derek Walcott and Les Murray all experienced as they came to maturity.

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Perhaps Miłosz's most lasting influence in Heaney's work can be seen in the weight and attention it gives to memory. Now past the age when Miłosz received the

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1
2 Nobel Prize, Heaney similarly seems to feel that 'everyone who survives in his memory
3
4 has a claim on his pen'.⁹⁷ Thus, in his latest volume, commingling with glimpses of intimate
5
6 family history, there are lyrics like 'Poem IX' in the 'Route 110' sequence which, like Miłosz's
7
8 remembrance of Wladyslaw Sebyla and Lech Piwowar in his Nobel Lecture, names two
9
10 victims of past violence and present injustice, John Lavery and Louis O'Neill. Whereas these
11
12 civilian casualties of the Troubles go largely unremembered, the fallen paramilitaries
13
14 responsible for so many deaths are beneficiaries of yearly memorialisation, 'full
15
16 honours', and plots which separate them from the 'ordinary' dead.⁹⁸ Heaney continues
17
18 to follow the moral injunctions he places in Miłosz's mouth in the revised 1990 version
19
20 of 'The Master', 'Tell the truth. Do not be afraid'.⁹⁹
21

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22
23 When invited by RTE in 1999 to contribute to a radio series in which 'prominent Irish
24
25 people talked about the public figure who has had a major influence on their lives',¹⁰⁰ Heaney
26
27 bestowed on Miłosz a new soubriquet. Though he had not chosen by the programme's title, *A*
28
29 *Giant at my Shoulder*, is indicative their changing relationship. Firmly fixed as one of his
30
31 most important 'approval-granting father-figures',¹⁰¹ Heaney regarded him still with awe,
32
33 though the pair had become closer over the years. What he continued to prize in this poet
34
35 whom he described as 'my hero amongst the living',¹⁰² is reflected in a commencement
36
37 address given at Colgate University in May 1994. For Heaney Miłosz's life and work
38
39 was the embodiment of a

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40
41 loyalty to the ancient dream that human beings are on earth to transcend
42
43 their worst selves, to create civilisation, to build the new Jerusalem in spite of
44
45 all... [His poems] fortify something in what might be called our spiritual
46
47 immunity system'.¹⁰³
48

49 NOTES

50 ¹ Czesław Miłosz, *The Witness of Poetry; The Charles Norton Eliot Lectures 1981-82* (Cambridge: Harvard
51 UP, 1983), p.10.

52 ² Nobel Prize in Literature 1980, Press Release, Swedish Academy. Nobelprize.org. 26 Jan 2011

http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1980/press.html

³ Seamus Heaney, 'In gratitude for all the gifts', *The Guardian*, Saturday 11 September 2004. In an interview with Dennis Manning and Robert Hedin, in *The Southern Review* 21, January 1983, p.103, Miłosz comments that 'every poetry is directed against death - against death of the individual, against the power of death'.

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⁴ Norman Davies, *Rising '44: The Battle for Warsaw* (London: Macmillan, 2004) p.516.

⁵ Miłosz gives an account of his memories of the Rising in *Native Realm*, pp.248-255, and refers to its 200,000 casualties and the city's annihilation in 'The Nobel Lecture', delivered 8 December 1980, published in *New York Review of Books*, XVIII: 5 March 1981, p.14. (Future references to this lecture will be denoted by the letters *NL* in the text).

⁶ In addition the regime banned religious parades, ordered the removal of religious symbols from schools and other public buildings, and forced Catholic newspapers 'out of print'. In state-run enterprises Sunday working was introduced, and activities organised to discourage young people from going to mass. See Mary Craig, *The Crystal Spirit: Lech Walesa And His Poland* (London: Coronet, 1986), p.87.

⁷ See Neal Ascherson, *The Polish August* (London: Penguin, 1981), pp.57-62.

⁸ Ascherson, p.59.

⁹ Czesław Miłosz, 'Notes on Exile', in *To Begin Where I am: Selected Essays*, ed. Bogdana Carpenter and Madeline Levine (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2001), p.15.

¹⁰ Herbert Lottman, *Albert Camus: A Biography* (London: Picador, 1981), p. 718, n.16.

¹¹ See Irena Grudzinska Gross, *Czesław Miłosz and Joseph Brodsky: Fellowship of Poets* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), pp.63-9.

¹² See *Striving Towards Being: The Letters of Thomas Merton and Czesław Miłosz*, ed. Robert Faggen, (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1997), p.139.

¹³ *ibid*, pp.164, 174.

¹⁴ The title of Edward Said's memoir, published in 1999.

¹⁵ *Striving Towards Being*, p.126.

¹⁶ In an interview with Ayyappa K. Paniker. 'Dialogue with Czesław Miłosz', in Czesław Miłosz: *Conversations* ed. Cynthia L. Haven (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), p.33, the poet avers that 'there is free will and there is no free will'. For a valuable recent discussion of Miłosz, Heaney and their relationship to Catholicism, see John F. Desmond, *Gravity and Grace: Seamus Heaney and the Force of Light* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009).

¹⁷ Czesław Miłosz, 'Speaking of a Mammal', in *To Begin Where I am*, p.216. Qtd in Desmond, p.6.

¹⁸ Czesław Miłosz, *Selected Poems* (New York: Ecco Press, 1980), p.115.

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¹⁹ 'Footfalls echo in the memory': T.S.Eliot, 'Burnt Norton', from *Four Quartets*, in *The Collected Poems and Plays of T.S.Eliot* (London: Faber, 1969), p.171.

²⁰ Miłosz's mother died from typhus in 1945. In *Native Realm*, p.65, Miłosz pays tribute to his mother, as a woman of depth: 'Under the surface was stubbornness, gravity, and the strong conviction that suffering is sent by God and that it should be borne cheerfully'.

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²¹ W.B.Yeats, *Yeats's Poems*, ed. A Norman Jeffares (London: Macmillan, 1996), p.472.

²² Seamus Heaney, *A Giant at My Shoulder*, RTE Radio, 25 August 1999.

²³ Louis MacNeice, *Selected Poems* (London: Faber, 1988), p.23.

²⁴ Stanislaw Barańczak, 'Searching for the Real', in *Breathing Under Water and Other East European Essays* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990), p.177.

²⁵ The Warsaw Pact's invasion of Czechoslovakia on 21 August 1968 - like the suppression of Solidarity thirteen years later - generated massive outrage in the West. Alongside the closing paragraphs of 'Old Derry Walls' in *The Listener* of 24 October 1968, 523, where Heaney writes on the violent conclusion of the Civil Rights March earlier that month, is the beginning of an essay by Adam Roberts on the Czech media entitled 'The Face of Censorship'.

²⁶ A highly influential poetry critic on *The Observer*, and friend of Hughes and Plath, Alvarez was the author of *Under Pressure* (1965), a pioneering study of the position of writers in Eastern European writers.

²⁷ *Modern Poetry in Translation*, 1, (1965), 8.

²⁸ *Modern Poetry in Translation* 23-24 (Spring 1975), 11.

²⁹ Seamus Heaney, *A Giant at My Shoulder*, op.cit.

³⁰ Like Miłosz's Lithuania, Herbert's homeland in the Ukraine had been seized by the Soviet Union.

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- 31 Mary Craig, p.181. Since his defection in 1951, all of Miłosz's books were banned in Poland.
- 32 Czesław Miłosz, 'Poet of Exile', *Los Angeles Times*, 12 October 1980, rptd in *Czesław Miłosz: Conversations*, p.5.
- 33 In the Nobel Lecture, p.14, Miłosz refers to the poet's 'mandate' to speak for those made 'silent forever'.
- 34 Joseph Brodsky, Czesław Miłosz, Susan Sontag, Stanisław Barańczak, Tomas Venclova, et al. 'The Polish Crisis: Three Statements', *New York Review of Books*, January 21, 1982. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1982/jan/21/the-polish-crisis-three-statements/>
- 35 cf. Heaney's comments in 'Seamus Heaney: The Art of Poetry LXXV', an interview with Henri Cole, in *The Paris Review*, 144, Fall 1997: 'The fact of the matter is that the most unexpected and miraculous thing in my life was the arrival of poetry itself - as a vocation and an elevation almost' (p.92).
- 36 'The Nobel Lecture', 11.
- 37 Marie Heaney, qtd in Robert McCrum's 'A Life of Rhyme', an interview with Heaney, *The Observer*, 19 July 2009. Mossbawn is her husband's Eden, she says, then adds, 'All he's ever wanted to do is go back'.
- 38 Czesław Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems 1931-2001* (London: Penguin, 2001), p.37.
- 39 Seamus Heaney, 'Place, Pastness, Poems', *Salmagundi* 68-69, Fall/Winter 1985-86, p.30.
- 40 Seamus Heaney, 'Uncoupled', in *Human Chain* (London: Faber, 2010), p.11.
- 41 Seamus Heaney, in Maurice Fitzpatrick's *The Boys of St Columb's* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2010), p.58.
- 42 Seamus Heaney, *Chicago Literary Review*, 13 March 1981, 15.
- 43 Harold Bloom observes in *The Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), that 'Poetic Influence is gain and loss'. In exemplifying the loss, he subsequently maintains that when 'one poet influences another, or more precisely one poet's poems influence the poems of the other, through a generosity of spirit', this signifies weakness on the part of the writer influenced. He goes on to argue that fruitful exchanges can occur between 'two strong, authentic poets', but that generally the outcome of this dialogue is a 'misreading', 'distortion' and 'wilful' revision of 'the prior poet' (pp.29-30).
- 44 Seamus Heaney, 'Feeling into Words', in *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-78* (London: Faber, 1980), p.56.
- 45 Czesław Miłosz, 'The Nobel Lecture', p.11.
- 46 Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, qtd in Bloom, p.6.
- 47 William Logan, in 'Ply the Pen', *New York Times Sunday Book Review* of 24 September 2010, makes an insubstantiated, inaccurate claim that few of Heaney's poems from 'the past 10 or 20 years' are likely 'to be remembered'.
- 48 Mona Simpson, 'A Talk with Czesław Miłosz', in *Czesław Miłosz: Conversations*, p.9.
- 49 At different times, Miłosz compares exile with suicide and 'incurable illness'. See Grudzinska-Gross, pp.243, 244. In 'Poetry with a Foreign Accent', Chapter Eight of her book, she gives a very full and informative account of Miłosz's changing attitude to his hosts' languages. See particularly pp.241-258.
- 50 Czesław Miłosz, 'Language', in *To Begin Where I am*, p.19.
- 51 Grudzinska-Gross, p.246.
- 52 *Native Realm*, p.67.
- 53 See my discussion of Kinsella's and Montague's influence on Heaney, in 'Gleanings, Leavings: Irish and American Influences on Seamus Heaney's *Wintering Out*', *New Hibernia Review*, 2:3, Autumn 1998, pp.26-35
- 54 John Montague, *The Figure in the Cave* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1989), p.45.
- 55 Seamus Heaney, *Among Schoolchildren: A John Malone Memorial Lecture*, 9 June 1983, p.12.
- 56 Richard English, *Armed Struggle: A History of the IRA* (London: Macmillan, 2003), pp.235-6.
- 57 Laurence McKeown, *Out of Time: Irish Republican Prisoners Long Kesh 1972-2000* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 2001), pp.68-9. Qtd in English.
- 58 *ibid.*, p.12.
- 59 Seamus Heaney, *Among Schoolchildren: A John Malone Memorial Lecture* (Belfast: John Malone Memorial Committee, 1983), p.12
- 60 *ibid.*
- 61 Following events in Poland in August 1980 and the emergence of the Solidarity trade union, the term began to feature frequently in international political discourse.
- 62 What he precisely meant by his use of the word is a matter of speculation. Had the exchange occurred two years later, one might connect the term with the Field Day project with its stated aim of 'producing analyses of established opinions, myths and stereotypes which had become both a symptom and a cause of the current situation' (*Ireland's Field Day*, London: Hutchinson, 1985, p.viii).

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⁶³ *Chicago Literary Review*, 13 March 1981, p.15. The incident is cited also in 'The Flight Path' from *The Spirit Level* (London: Faber, 1995), where Heaney's narrator is asked, 'When, for fuck's sake, are you going to write/ Something for us?' (p.25), and also in *The Paris Review* interview (p.111), and *Stepping Stones* (pp. 257-8).

⁶⁴ *Chicago Literary Review*, p.14.

⁶⁵ 'An Interview with Czesław Miłosz', Paul, W. Rea, in *Salmagundi* 80, Fall 1988, rpted in *Czesław Miłosz: Conversations*, p.92.

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⁶⁶ *Atlantic Charter*, 14 August 1941, <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/atlantic.asp>, accessed 22 February 2011.

⁶⁷ Heaney, from an unpublished interview with Patrick Sheerin, 18 December 1985, in Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. MSS 960, Subseries 1:1.

⁶⁸ Grudzinska-Gross, p.32.

⁶⁹ Whereas 'The Strand at Lough Beg' and 'A Postcard from North Antrim' (*Field Work*, 1979, pp.17-18, 19-20) are respectively written 'In Memory of Colum McCartney' and 'In Memory of Sean Armstrong', Louis O'Neill's name does not appear in 'Casualty' (*Field Work*, pp.21-4) nor William Strathearn's in 'Station Island VII' (*Station Island*, 1984, pp.77-80).

⁷⁰ Czesław Miłosz, *Miłosz's ABC*, qtd in Grudzinska-Gross, p.62.

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⁷¹ *Stepping Stones*, p.277.

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⁷² In mid-September 1980, Heaney had received an enquiry from the Chair of English and American Language and Literature at Harvard as to whether he might be interested in an appointment for three-five years 'teaching one semester per year' (Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. MSS 960, Subseries 1.1, Box 2).

⁷³ **Heaney to Longley, February 1981 (Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, MSS 744 Box 15a).**

⁷⁴ For a detailed account of the republican paramilitaries H-Block campaigns, see Padraig O'Malley, *Biting at the Grave: The Irish Hunger Strikes and the Politics of Despair* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1990).

⁷⁵ Co-founder of *Ploughshares* magazine along with his brother, Peter, Padraig O'Malley is a leading academic at the University of Massachusetts, and an important contact of Heaney's during his years at Harvard.

⁷⁶ O'Malley, p.25.

⁷⁷ English, p.194.

⁷⁸ *The Diary of Bobby Sands*, qtd in English, p.198.

⁷⁹ Seamus Heaney, interviewed by Lisa Dickler, Jay McKenzie, and Molly McQuade, *Chicago Literary Review*, published 13 March 1981, 15.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ *Stepping Stones*, p.260.

⁸² In the longer term, Sands' success had a massive, transformative effect on republican strategy and the future of the province, since it demonstrated to Provisional Sinn Fein that they could advance their cause through the ballot box. It also shocked the Irish and UK governments into a change of direction, and was a factor in the negotiations that led to the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985. See Michael Parker, *Northern Irish Literature 1976-2006: The Imprint of History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), pp.46-52.

⁸³ Bew and Gillespie, pp.148-9. Mrs Thatcher took an identical line when she informed the Commons of the death of the member for Fermanagh/South Tyrone: 'He chose to take his own life. It was a choice his organisation did not allow to many of its victims' (qtd in McKittrick and McVea, p.144).

⁸⁴ Heaney attended the wake of the eighth hunger striker, Thomas McElwee, a cousin of Francis Hughes, and another neighbour. See *Stepping Stones*, pp.260-1.

⁸⁵ White, p.223. John Hume, for example, warned Margaret Thatcher of the grim consequences for constitutional nationalism in Ireland if the strike continued and that Irish-American money would again pour in to the IRA's coffers.

⁸⁶ See, for example, 'Away from it All', 'Chekhov on Sakhalin', 'Sandstone Keepsake', 'Granite Chip', 'An Ulster Twilight', 'The Loaning', 'Station Island' II, IV, VII, VIII, 'The First Flight' and 'The Old Icons'.

⁸⁷ Seamus Heaney, 'Pilgrim's Journey', *Poetry Book Society Bulletin* 123, Winter 1984. In *Native Realm*, p.90, Miłosz observes that 'Contradictions can be fruitful' in facing up to 'controversy' in one's 'own soul'.

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⁸⁸ Seamus Heaney, 'Envy and Identifications: Dante and the Modern Poet', *Irish University Review*, 15:1, Spring 1985, 6, 19.

⁸⁹ Colin Middleton's illustration of a bird complete with human hand in the Field Day Press edition of *Sweeney Astray* (1983), p.xi, underlines Sweeney's dual nature.

⁹⁰ Neil Corcoran, in his early study, *Seamus Heaney* (London: Faber 1986), p.174-5, understandably misidentified its subject as Yeats.

⁹¹ The tower image Heaney uses in 'The Master' may well be in part derived from his reading of *Native Realm*, where Miłosz refers at one point to his 'inner castle, a castle of prayer' (p.280).

⁹² See, for example, 'Ruins and Poetry', in Miłosz, *The Witness of Poetry*, pp.81-97. On p.81, he cites 'disintegration' as the defining word 'for what had happened'.

⁹³ Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, I, vi, l.7.

⁹⁴ Lettler from c. 24 October 1954, qtd in Olivier Todd, *Albert Camus: Une Vie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), p. 522.

⁹⁵ Jerzy Jarniewicz, 'Seamus Heaney and Post-War Polish Poets', in *Seamus Heaney: Poet, Critic, Translator* eds. Ashby Bland Crowder and Jason David Hall. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), p. 110.

⁹⁶ Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry* (London: Faber, 1995), p.

⁹⁷ Bogdana Carpenter and Madeleine G. Levine, introduction to *To Begin Where I am*, p.ix.

⁹⁸ Seamus Heaney, Poem IX, 'Route 110', in *Human Chain* (London: Faber, 2010), p.56.

⁹⁹ This new line appears in the *New Selected Poems 1966-1987* (London: Faber, 1990), p.202.

¹⁰⁰ Seamus Heaney: *A Giant At My Shoulder*, broadcast on RTE Radio, 25 August 1999.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Sven Birkerts by the author, Boston, 15 October 2010.

¹⁰² *Seamus Heaney Papers, 12 August 1997, (Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. MSS 960, Subseries 1.1, Box 49).*

¹⁰³ *Seamus Heaney Papers, 22 May 1994, (Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. MSS 960, Subseries 1.1, Box 18).*

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